

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



NY TIMES and USA TODAY  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LAURANN  
DOHNER

*NEW  
SPECIES*

TRUE

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## **True**

*Laurann Dohner*

*Book 11 in the New Species series. It is advisable to read the books in order to get the most enjoyment from the series.*

Jeanie loves a New Species and is willing to pay for that love with pain, tears and heartbreak. She'll do anything to keep 710 alive but she never wants him to know how she suffered for him. He is the reason for her mission in life—freeing others like him.

True has a new life working with the NSO to rescue his people. A good life, until he encounters a dying woman—the female who betrayed him. True should feel gratified that she's finally going to pay for her crimes, but she claims to be a victim too. He is still irresistibly drawn to the pretty little human who touched his heart and made him want her. When he clasps her hand to offer comfort, his instincts kick in and True will fight everyone to protect her.

*A Romantica® **paranormal erotic romance** from Ellora's Cave*

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*TRUE*

**Laurann Dohner**

## *Dedication*

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Mr. Laurann—I couldn't do what I do without you. You still open my doors, you always make me laugh, support me in everything, and I'm completely in love with you. Thank you for the best twenty-four years of my life.

I'd also like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has fallen in love with *New Species*. You've made my dreams come true by finally being able to share them with the world.

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**Prologue**  
*New Mexico*  
*Drackwood Research facility*

Jeanie smothered a cry of distress and fought back tears. It was horrific to watch the man so obsessed over being tortured. It would only get both of them killed if she followed her gut instinct and rush outside to come to his aid.

“I knew you liked that one too much,” a chillingly familiar voice snickered from the doorway of the lab office.

Jeanie felt all the blood drain from her face as she turned, horrified that he’d managed to ease open her door without making a sound. Dean Polanitis headed the entire facility. At forty-five he was young for the job but what he lacked in age, he made up for in viciousness. He wasn’t tall at five foot eight but he was still extremely intimidating from years of military training and lifting weights. His body was muscled, dense and physically fit. His normally dull green eyes were unusually intense and his thin lips were twisted into a rare smile that left Jeanie feeling icy cold inside.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she lied.

He pointed to a spot on the large shelves that took up one wall. “I installed a hidden camera in the office to monitor your every movement for the past week after I noticed your interest in that test subject. I’ve gotten reports that you’ve attempted to shield him from being roughed up by the guards. That was the tipoff. Then, after reviewing the tapes from his cell, I realized that he looks at you the same way.” He closed the door behind him. “Did you really think it wouldn’t draw suspicion from me? I don’t miss anything that goes on inside my house. I know you care about him. You stop working every time he is out there and I know body language.” His gaze darted down the length of her body before returning to her face. “You’re easy to read when you don’t know you’re under surveillance.”

She shook her head. “He’s just another number,” she mumbled, praying he’d believe the lie. A chill ran down her spine at the way he’d stated the facility was his house. It was a hellish place no one should want to claim but it only strengthened her belief in the pure evilness of her boss. “I’m just a nice person. Excuse me for having a smidgen of compassion. That’s probably what the guards reported if I said or did anything to prevent them from being abusive. Some of those jerks can be pretty malicious just for the fun of it.”

Her boss’s eyebrows arched. “Really? That’s all it is? What about your reactions to seeing 71 bloodied to test the healing properties of the new drugs?”

“I don’t like watching any of them suffer. I do have a heart. That’s all. I hate to see anyone in pain but I understand how important the research is. I was told he’s in a trial for medical advancements that could stimulate the body’s triggers to mend open wounds faster.” She glanced back at the window. The man she loved attempted to protect himself against eight vicious, armed men intent on causing serious harm while he was leashed by chains they held. He was strong enough to knock them off balance to prevent some blows from landing but not all of them. Blood ran from wounds on his arm and chest. One of the guards hit him with a whip and she faced her boss quickly, before her knees buckled. “It’s brutal and I’m not into that kind of shit. Sue me.”

Dean Polanitis chuckled cruelly. "Money isn't what I want from you." His smile died. "I'm going to give the kill order on 710 today. We want to see how well the animals are able to hunt down prey and your number out there is bleeding pretty good. We'll drug a few of the males, get them nice and crazy for a fight and send them out to track him. They'll be so mindless they won't even notice he's one of their own. He won't be too fast on his feet once my boys out there are done beating him down."

Her heart nearly stopped. "He's in excellent physical condition and smart. It would be a waste of resources to kill him. But it's your call." She managed to keep her voice steady somehow. Inside she whimpered, *No!*

He took a step in her direction, blocking the door and any chance of escape. "You're good, Jeanie"

"That's 'Ms. Shiver' to you, thank you very much." She tried to keep her voice firm. Weakness would be perceived as a flaw by a slimeball like Polanitis and that would make her a victim in his eyes. It'd be a mistake she couldn't afford to make if she wasn't able to bluff her way out of the situation. Employees had disappeared, never to be heard from again. Christie had gone missing just weeks after Jeanie had started working there. The woman was most certainly dead. They hadn't been friends, actually Jeanie had detested the other lab technician, but it made her realize just how dangerous working for Drackwood Research could be. She didn't want to die too. "I'm here to do a job and I'm paid well. I never forget that."

He moved even closer. "Jeanie, you and I are going to make a deal." He gripped her elbow in a bruising hold.

She gasped, trying to get away, but his fingers only tightened. Terror instantly flooded her. Dean Polanitis was in charge and he ruled the employees with fear. No one would dare stop him from killing her if he decided she wasn't trustworthy anymore. He could call it a training exercise and that would be the end of her.

*Does he suspect I'm trying to get this place shut down? Does he know I've smuggled out evidence?* Paranoia had made her take a lot of precautions and she was pretty sure she hadn't messed up. She couldn't help the men and women trapped inside the facility if she died. They'd never have a chance at freedom.

"You care about that *thing*," Polanitis grunted. "You can't even fuck him because you never have the opportunity to be alone but you want to." His harsh gaze raked down her body and then back to her face. He shoved her closer to the phone at the end of her desk and lifted the receiver. "I am going to call Security and tell them to kill him, Jeanie."

He had to be lying. The subjects were worth a lot of money and that was the bottom line to the company they worked for. It would cost him his job. Even Polanitis had to answer to someone. She forced herself to relax.

"Okay."

Polanitis lowered his chin to study her features more closely. "You think you're fooling me? You should see how pale you've become." He turned his head and punched the number zero then four on the phone. He held the receiver between them so they were both able to hear.

"This is Mickie at Security."

"It's Polanitis. I want number 710 immediately pulled from his current drug trials. We'll use him in an exercise tonight as a runner to test that new mind-altering drug. It should be amusing to watch him being hunted to death. One of the doctors has been riding my ass to hand over a subject for the test. Take 710 to the exterior compound and secure him in a holding cell there."

“Yes sir,” Mickie snapped.

Her heart pounded as her boss jerked her around to face the window. A new security team walked outside. They spoke to some of the men attacking 710 and the beating stopped. The second team grabbed the chains that were secured to 710’s wrists and ankles, using the six-foot length to keep him between them and stay out of his reach. They dragged him away from the building. The only thing located in that direction was a concrete structure where she’d heard they had cremated some bodies when their drug experiments had killed the subjects. It was also rumored they did top-secret testing there, which she couldn’t get anyone to talk about. The few employees who knew what went down on the roof there had dubbed it “hell”.

“Watch him for the last time,” Polanitis whispered next to her ear. “Want to wave goodbye? Obviously that’s right. He can’t see you behind the tinted glass.”

He really planned to kill 710. Panic and horror battled inside her. Anger won as seconds ticked by. Polanitis had a god complex and his cruelty made her want to claw his eyes out.

She spun, glaring up at him. “You’re a son of a bitch. Why are you doing this? You don’t need to have a test subject murdered. You could just as easily have them hunt an animal if you need to see their skills as trackers. It’s not cost effective to waste a prime subject. It’s just malicious.”

He pushed his chest against hers. Jeanie backed up but the desk prevented her from breaking the contact when he leaned forward to trap her against the unforgiving wood. His gaze narrowed and locked with hers.

“710 is an animal. This has nothing to do with how good their senses are. The new drug we’re going to dose him with will hopefully make him homicidal to his own kind. We need a defense against those bastards’ crazy supporters who are putting everyone here in jeopardy with their rants about the animals deserving human rights. We’ve all had to look over our shoulders since Mercile went down. They refuse to have this place shut down the same way they were. It’s brilliant to turn them on each other. They can waste all their resources fighting each other instead of trying to prevent us from finishing our work. Imagine dosing one of these animals up and dropping it off at Homeland. They’d welcome it right through the gates, never suspecting they’re about to die.”

She was horrified. It was a brilliant plan in a sick, twisted way if the drug worked. They planned to use the captured Species to kill the free ones. The NSO arrested people like Polanitis when they were discovered. Her goal was to help them do that. She shuddered. *I need to warn them!*

“I want something from you and you want 710 to live. I think we can compromise.”

A sick feeling settled in her stomach. “On what?”

“Let’s not play games. You try to hide it but you’re too soft. I knew it the moment I met you.” His tone became harsh. “I’ll keep him from even getting hurt, for as long as you do what I say. He lives if you play ball.”

“What do you want me to do?” She had no idea why he’d blackmail her. She didn’t have any money or a high-priority job that denied his access to any information she could obtain. She collected samples from the subjects and took them to the lab. Her clearance didn’t even allow her to know what they tested for or why, or the results.

He backed up, his gaze shrewd as he assessed her body. “You’re in good health, young and not married. I checked your file and you live alone.”

She didn’t like him scrutinizing her personal life or her body but he’d taken a specific interest in her. “So?”

“We weren’t able to gain access to many of the females after Mercile came under fire. The few who were able to transport before they were hit just aren’t enough for what we need to do our work.”

*This conversation isn’t going anywhere good.* Her heart raced, terrified he’d suggest the article she’d read about in the news. Mercile was rumored to have forced the New Species to undergo breeding experiments. Of course, if it were with 710, it wouldn’t be a nightmare for her. He wouldn’t be abused anymore if he was paired up with her and she’d get to spend more time with him. The whole concept of having sex with him wasn’t unpleasant but the conditions would be wretched. They’d be watched on monitors, doctors digging into every aspect of what happened between them.

Polanitis cleared his throat. “There is a drug we’re working on for an outside party and we need an employee to get involved with the project.”

Part of her was disappointed. “What kind of drug?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Jeanie didn’t agree. “What outside party?”

“That’s none of your business. All you need to know is someone is paying us a lot of money to specifically modify a drug Mercile Industries invented for use on the male test subjects. Now they want a version of it that targets regular women. We can’t be sure it will work without a live trial.”

She tried to make sense of his words. “Someone hired Drackwood to alter a drug for use on humans? One that was specifically designed only to be used on New Species? Which drug? I thought all the research done on them was to benefit humans.” *That’s the stupid reason they always give to explain the horrible shit they do to those poor people.* It didn’t make sense.

“Never call them that.” He gripped her arms and shook her. “They are test subjects. Don’t let me ever hear you utter those words again. They are lab animals and nothing more.”

Fear silenced her objections about how he viewed the New Species. The only drugs they were testing on New Species were for advanced healing from traumatic injuries but a few of the doctors had some projects she didn’t have access to. Those were the ones that frightened her the most. They couldn’t be good if they were that highly classified.

“You just volunteered to be our trial subject.”

She shook her head, horrified. “No.”

“I’m not asking.” He gave her another brutal shake. “I will keep your favorite pet alive if you comply.” His features hardened as his lips twisted into an ugly sneer. “Not that you have a choice. It’s just that we discussed what would happen if you disappeared. The last thing we need is a police investigation.”

Bile rose as the implications sank in. “What do you mean by that?”

“It means we have to allow you to go home so your neighbors don’t report you missing. You will show up at work every day and never tell anyone what is being done to you.” He released her arms and grabbed her throat, leaning in enough to glare into her eyes. “You can be killed at any time. Remember that. You run, you will be found.” He spun her around until she was forced to stare out the window. “And he’ll die. I’ll personally gut the son of a bitch and make it as painful as possible. He will suffer for hours before his death.”

The door to her office opened and for a split second, Jeanie had hope that she’d be saved. Dr. Braslow entered, closing the door behind him. His gloved hand rose, the syringe gripped between fingers and thumb easy to spot.

“Did she agree?”

“I didn’t ask,” Polanitis snorted. “Give her the shot.”

Jeanie wanted to scream but the grip on her throat tightened until she couldn’t breathe. Her boss abruptly shoved her down, his weight coming over her back until she was crushed between him and the desk.

“What if she goes to the police?” Dr. Brask’s voice lowered. “I thought you were going to pay her extra or something to let us test these new batches.”

“We don’t have the budget for that bullshit. Just hike up her skirt and jab her in the ass with the needle already. The bitch wouldn’t dare be stupid enough to betray me.” He eased up enough for her to suck in much-needed air. “Would you, Shiver? Tell him you know it would be the last thing you ever did.”

“Please,” she begged, terrified of what they were about to do to her.

“Shut up,” Polanitis ordered, squeezing her throat again. “She is your new test subject.”

Jeanie struggled, panicked that she couldn’t breathe or get the heavy weight off her back. Her skirt was shoved up and pain stabbed through her left upper butt cheek as the needle found its mark. Polanitis released her afterward and backed away.

She sucked in air and spun, shoving her skirt down. She glanced at both men, seeing they were putting as much room between her and them as the small office allowed. That was fine with her.

“What did you give me?” She stared at Dr. Brask. “What was that?”

He smiled. “It should immediately take effect.”

“What should? What did you give me?” Her voice rose in panic.

Jeanie cried out when a jolt of sharp pain stabbed from her head to her toes, comparable to the tingling she’d accidentally touched a damaged cord plugged into an electrical outlet. Her knees buckled and she hit the floor. Her stomach churned, her head began to throb as signs of an impending migraine began and she broke out in a sweat. It felt as though someone had poured gasoline over her skin and lit a match. She writhed on the thin carpet, curled into a ball, suffering a strong burning sensation over every inch of her body.

“That’s not good.” Dr. Brask sighed. “We’ll wait until the drug leaves her system and lower the dosage next time. That wasn’t the response I wanted.”

“She’s all yours.” Dean Polanitis chuckled. “Bring a gurney and we’ll transfer her to your lab for the day so you can monitor the results.”

Jeanie prayed to pass out. The sheer agony she suffered was worse than anything she could have imagined would be possible. She forgot about the two men in the room, lost in the pain as her skin felt as if it were blistering and boiling from her body.

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710 paced his cell, worried because something different had happened. He wasn’t sure what was going on but it couldn’t be good. He’d been fighting the guards to prevent them from permanently maiming him when everything had just ceased. Different guards had arrived and led him toward the outer building.

He knew what that meant since guards taunted him from time to time with what went on at that location, assuring him it would mean the termination of his life. The march there had abruptly ended.

too, when one of the males had flipped open and spoken into his ringing device. They'd returned him to his cell, informing him that he'd be participating in a new drug trial to increase intelligence. *Do they just want to frighten me? Make me think I would die?* The mind games the humans played pissed him off.

The cell door beeped, indicating someone would enter. He turned his head to watch the human who controlled the facility step inside his living space. Polanitis was a monster with dead-looking eyes and a mean disposition. The male smiled as he walked closer but came to a halt on the other side of the line marking the safe area beyond the reach of his chains. The male crossed his arms over his chest.

"I wanted to share something with you, 710. I notice everything, you know. I see the way you stare at Technician Shiver. She's a hot little thing, isn't she?"

710 tensed but kept his emotions hidden. The small brunette always held his attention. Her touch was gentle every time she drew blood and she peered at him intently with big brown eyes, as if he were a real person. She was the only technician who had ever shown him any kindness.

Polanitis looked smug. "She makes your dick hard, doesn't she? We're working on a new formula of the breeding drug to fit our current needs. Once it's perfected, I'm willing to send her in to you for breeding experiments if you are a good boy." He smiled. "You'll get to fuck her."

710 stopped breathing, trapping the air inside his lungs. He knew what the breeding drug did to males. It caused excruciating pain and an overriding desire to mount a female. He'd been dosed with it once when he'd been much younger. The nightmares continued to bother him, of the time his mind had fractured under the pain. He didn't know if he'd hurt anyone while under the influence of the drug since he'd retained no memory of his actions but it was possible he'd harmed a female.

"Technician Shiver is currently working with Dr. Brask to perfect the formula so it doesn't create such violent and painful side effects. I know you'd like to mount that hot little body. We feel certain that you wouldn't hurt her since you're damn near tame when she's around."

Rage filled 710 as he averted his gaze from Polanitis. His stomach heaved and the food they recently fed him threatened to come up when he realized she must have purposely set out to gain his attraction, hoping he wouldn't harm her under any circumstance. It had worked. A sense of betrayal burned inside his chest, despite knowing it wasn't a reasonable emotion. She was human after all, his enemy. He should have known better than to think she'd be different.

"It shouldn't be too long before they find the right dosage and I'll personally escort her into your cell. In exchange, you're going to stop attacking the guards." Dean Polanitis narrowed his gaze, his tone revealing his anger. "Do you understand what I'm saying? I lost two good men I trusted thanks to your last outburst. It's not easy to find replacements. You are going to do everything I say."

710 met the monster's stare, wishing his chains allowed him to cross the room and rip out his own throat. He'd wanted to kill the male before but now it had become an absolute need. "I won't mount that female."

Polanitis' expression wasn't a pleased one anymore. "Sure you would. Here's the deal. You stop hurting my security teams and I'll send her in here to you. We'll loosen those chains enough that you can reach her once you have her alone. Wouldn't you like that?"

A growl tore from 710. The breeding drug would drive him insane and an image popped into his head of Technician Shiver as a bloody corpse on the floor of his cell. He'd attack if she was sent to him after he was dosed. As much as he hated what she'd done, she didn't deserve a brutal death. "I'll kill her."

“I don’t believe that.”

The smugness on the human’s face infuriated 710 enough to bluff. “Send her in. I’m an animal who kills. I can go without eating for a while when you punish me for her death.”

“You’d really kill her?”

“Yes. She is one of you and I would enjoy taking revenge against all here.”

Polanitis swore viciously. “I misjudged you. You’re going to do what I want or die. Stop attacking my men and don’t cause any more injuries when they move you to one of the labs to perform tests in a new trial. You will also answer every one of the questions they ask you. You’re worthless otherwise and that means you serve no purpose. That means I get to kill you.”

It was 710’s turn to smile. “You’ll eventually do that anyway.”

The male’s neck and face turned red. “I hate you fucking animals. You’re going to behave like a well-trained dog. Do you understand me? If the doctor in charge of this project asks you anything, you tell him whatever he wants to know. You’re going to stop hurting my guys, too, or I’ll bring one of your women in here and punish her every time you defy me. I’ll bend her over that table in the corner so you have to watch me hurt her and afterward I’ll call in some of the guards to take a turn. Would you care about that?”

710 growled in anger, understanding the threat. “Don’t hurt the female.”

The smug expression returned to Polanitis’ face. “Stop breaking my men’s arms, or worse, damaging them. We have results we need to send in to my bosses but you’re causing me headaches. It’s a major security risk when I have to hire unknowns to replace them and we have to pay out hush money to their families. I’ll have to kill every damn animal in here if it looks like one of them might get busted. Am I making myself clear? You’ll be responsible for the deaths of every damn one of your kind. The only reason you’re still breathing is because you’re leverage for something I want.”

“Yes,” 710 snarled, not sure what “busted” or “leverage” meant but he got the context of the threat.

“Then we have a deal?”

It went against everything he believed in to willingly agree to do anything the humans demanded. He had no other options though. The threat wasn’t an empty one. He refused to be responsible for the female being harmed. “Yes.”

Polanitis stomped to the door. “Good.”

710 said nothing. The door locked and he walked to his mat on the floor. He sat and closed his eyes. Pain hit. Technician Shiver had found a soft spot in his heart but no longer. He had cared for the female, yet she didn’t deserve anything but his disgust and contempt.

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## Chapter One

*South Dakota, the following year*

*Cornas Research facility*

Jeanie had been given orders to call in sick to work but hadn't done it. She jogged to another door, peered up at the small video monitor to see what was on the other side of the thick metal and used the stun gun on the electronic lock. The clicking sound it made was louder than she'd like as volts of electricity hit the reading device. The smell of frying wires was faint and almost instant. She turned off the stun gun and waited a few seconds to make sure the lights on the lock remained off. It didn't power back up.

She glanced at her watch, seeing there was only five minutes left. Time was running out. She hurried down the hallway and fried another sensor reader. She was terrified about being caught but she didn't give a damn what they did to her. She had to protect the men and women locked inside those rooms.

Her stun gun shorted out the readers to prevent Security from entering the cells. She'd already disabled the building's main computer. Another employee might punch in codes to send gas throughout the cells but the command wouldn't make it to the main computer. It was offline for good thanks to a pot of hot coffee she'd poured inside the tower housing it. Sparks had shot out of it, there were some loud popping noises, and she'd feared it might catch fire. It had shut down and refused power on again when she'd tried, just to make sure it wasn't a temporary breakdown. The thing was toast.

An alarm blared from speakers located near the elevator. Red emergency lights flashed as the scream of it rose in pitch. *Damn.* She glanced at her watch. The attack had started two minutes earlier and she still had one more floor to go. She zapped another sensor reader, spun and darted back to the elevator to call it to her floor. Her hand shook as she swiped her employee badge to gain access and shoved the stun gun deep inside her lab coat pocket.

Two security guards were already inside the lift when it opened. They looked pissed off and worried—desperate. She stepped inside the confined space with them.

"We're going down," one of them stated. "What are you doing? You know protocol. You're supposed to hit the emergency exits, head to the tunnels."

She shook her head. "I have to destroy blood samples in a storage room first. Dr. Meckler was extremely clear about making sure it was my duty to do that if those alarms ever went off. What's going on?"

"We're being breached," the second one grunted. "I hate fucking cops. Get it done fast while we can. Kill the experiments. The backup system failed so we have to shoot them one by one. Hit those hidden stairs afterward. Don't get caught. You know it's a death sentence."

She nodded but inwardly cursed. The elevator dinged open on the bottom floor. One of the guards hit the button to keep them open, a feature they used often to move drugged test subjects on gurneys. He glanced at the other man.

"It will warn us if someone calls the damn thing to another floor. I plan to use the hidden stairwell."

and be gone before the cops find us.”

The second man glanced at the fake wall near the end of the hall. All the employees knew where the emergency exits were. The stairwells would lead to an old, unused sewer system that dumped out somewhere far from the building.

She turned. “Let me help. Give me a gun. The ones down here are the most dangerous and they’ve seen most employees’ faces. They could identify all of us.”

One of the guards hesitated.

“There are fifteen of them down here. The door keypads are all slow to open,” Jeanie lied. “Come on. How long will it take for the cops to override the elevator keycard locks? We can’t let these test subjects live. Do you want your face splashed across the evening news until all your family and friends know you worked here? We’ll be screwed seven ways to Sunday with every police enforcement agency hunting for us too. There’s no point in escaping if we’re going to get caught in the long run.”

The guard on her left passed over one of his handguns. “Take head shots.”

“I know the drill.” Her stomach still turned, remembering the lecture from the person who trained her on the most effective way to murder an innocent human being, as if they were moths or other creatures that were mere annoyances. “Use two shots to make sure they die.”

“We don’t have time for that shit or enough spare clips. Just don’t miss what you aim at.”

The guards moved in front of her. One of them pulled his keycard out and buzzed it through the sensor reader. The door beeped and the man reached for the door handle. He intended to kill all the test subjects. He lifted his gun to shoot the helpless woman chained against the far wall.

Bile rose in Jeanie’s throat as she raised her weapon. Not firing wasn’t an option. He was going to murder someone she considered a friend. He never even glanced back at her. She gripped the metal with both hands to steady her aim and pulled the trigger. She cried out in horror as blood and gore splattered the doorframe. Killing someone was ten times worse than anything she’d ever imagined. Distress almost paralyzed her but movement in the corner of her vision drew her attention. The second guard spun around, his gaze dropping to his fallen coworker.

He paled, his eyes opening wide as he jerked his chin up. Pure rage twisted his features as they stared at each other. He uttered a word she couldn’t understand in her emotionally overwhelmed state. He raised his arm. He was going to shoot her.

She aimed the gun but her hands shook worse than before and she missed his head when she fired but the bullet struck his shoulder. He fell back with a shout of pain and landed on his ass. The wall behind him slammed into kept him sitting upright though. The look on his face promised death as he lifted his bleeding arm to shoot at her again. She fired twice. One bullet tore into his throat and the other one appeared to hit his heart.

The deafening sounds ceased but Jeanie’s ears rang. The alarms were still going off. Blood spilled down the man’s chest, his eyes remained open, but he didn’t blink. His focus wasn’t on her anymore despite the eerie stare. She knew without needing to check for a pulse that he no longer had one.

She swayed on her feet, not sure if she was going to puke or faint. Both seemed options as the reality of what she’d done hit home. Numbness settled into her mind. *Probably shock*, she rationalized. She lowered her arms but managed to keep hold of the gun despite the urge to toss it away.

Pure agony shot through her midsection at the movement. She looked down. Her white coat had

turned red just above her hip and it spread lower as she watched. It took a few seconds for it to sink that she'd been shot. The guard had managed to hit her in the side before she'd killed him. She released the gun with one hand and flattened her palm over the wound. The pain grew worse but she needed to apply pressure.

Spots danced before her eyes and she leaned to the side. Her shoulder hit the wall, keeping her upright. She blinked a few times but it didn't change the view of her blood dripping on the tile floor near her feet. The sirens blaring from the speakers reminded her that more guards could arrive at any time. The company employed dozens of them on the day shift.

The elevator doors behind her closed. She turned. It meant someone had called for it from another floor. It could be help but it would probably be more security guards coming to kill the test subjects. She would take the police time to hack into the security systems since she'd been unable to steal another employee's badge to slip to her contact. The theft would have been immediately noticed and the code changed, making it useless.

She forced herself to move despite the racking pain. She reached the first body. The dead guard kept the door to the room open. She reached down and grabbed him. He wasn't a large man but his deadweight was difficult to drag. She managed to pull him far enough that he no longer blocked the doorway.

Her gaze focused on the woman chained to the wall. She appeared shocked as her dark gaze locked on Jeanie.

"It's okay, 433." Jeanie groaned, gripping her side.

"You killed them," she whispered.

Jeanie nodded. "Help is coming. I have to lock your door again and disable the sensor to make sure our security people can't kill you before the police are able to get down here. Don't be afraid of the strangers when they come. They are going to set you free."

She pulled the door closed and it beeped when the lock reengaged. Jeanie yanked her stun gun out of her pocket and zapped the sensor reader that could unlock it again. The smell of burning wires and the lights on it going out assured her it was fried. She had to step over the guard's body to reach the next cell. The room spun as dizziness hit her. She turned her head, staring up at the elevator display seeing that the lift was on the way back down.

She moved faster, feeling sick, as though she would pass out. She realized that she'd never succeeded in taking out all the readers before the elevator opened again. It could be the police but she wasn't willing to risk the lives of the men and women trapped inside those rooms if it wasn't. She glanced down at all the blood staining her coat and pants. It would be a miracle if she didn't collapse before she reached the next cell.

"Shit." Desperation drove her to think of a solution. Her gaze drifted from the elevator display to the metal electrical boxes on the wall next to it. Both had locks on them to prevent anyone from tampering with the breakers inside but the covers weren't bulletproof. At least she hoped not.

Her legs gave out and she slid to the floor next to the body of the second guard she'd killed. Another gun still rested inside one of the two shoulder holsters he sported. The guards always carried a few weapons. She released the one she'd used, not sure if it even had any bullets left. The stun gun slipped from her fingers into her pocket and she tugged at his gun. It slid from the holster and she forced her legs to move, getting to her knees.

Her vision blurred and lightheadedness struck. She swallowed hard and used both hands to lift the

heavy weight of the handgun to take aim. The sound was loud as she kept firing but bullets to through the metal and the lights flickered. She paused, holding her breath, until total darkness surrounded her. The emergency lights clicked on, dimly illuminating the hallway, but one glance at the nearest cell with an undamaged reader showed it was inactive.

“Thank god,” she breathed, realizing the doors would remain locked during a power failure. She hadn’t been sure if the safeguards on the doors were a part of the emergency backup system or not until then.

She crouched until she sat on her heels, keeping upright. She lowered the gun to her lap as she stared at the elevator that wasn’t affected by the localized power loss. It would open at any second and she’d face whoever was on the way down. The guards would kill her once they realized what she’d done. The cops would arrest her until they figured out who she was. She prayed for the latter.

The elevator doors opened and bright lights blinded her.

“Drop the gun,” a man yelled.

She couldn’t see their faces but didn’t have the strength to fight anyway. The gun slipped from her fingers. The lights came closer and pain exploded into the side of her face. The force sent her flying backward. She hit the floor hard and a moan tore from her lips.

Someone gripped her roughly by her arm and rolled her onto her stomach. Her cheek was pressed painfully against the floor as someone grabbed a fistful of her hair and her arms were jerked behind her back by someone else. The agony from the bullet wound made her scream. A boot planted hard on her ass, grinding her hips against the floor.

“Secure that bitch,” a stranger demanded.

Pain lanced through her. Whoever had her hair fisted in his hand was crushing her face against the unforgiving tile. The boot on her ass held her down so forcefully that she wondered if her hipbone would break from the pressure. The handcuffs being placed on her wrists were tightened to an excruciating point. Hot tears rolled down her cheeks. She would have screamed again but the pain became too intense. She had a hard time even breathing.

“Someone shot out the electrical box on this floor,” a man stated.

“The dumb bitch probably thought she’d kill the power to the elevator. Let’s get these doors open. I have a feeling we have live ones, guys. Let’s rescue them. We need to move fast. We don’t want this place to end up like what happened at that testing facility in Michigan last year. It could be wired to explode.”

Jeanie focused on one word. *Rescue*. They weren’t guards who worked at the facility. The men holding her down were cops. The fact that they hadn’t shot her already was secondary proof of their identity. She managed to suck in more air, breathing a sigh of relief. *They won’t kill me*.

Loud pops sounded. Some smoke filled the area but it wasn’t suffocating, more of a slight taste in her mouth and an acrid smell. She just lay there, hoping for respite. Her eyes closed—keeping them open seemed impossible. The boot on her ass shifted a little but it didn’t ease up on the weight holding her down.

“We’re here to save you,” a soothing male voice stated. “We work for people just like you who have been freed from these testing facilities. We’re going to take you out of here to your own kind.”

“Hello,” a deeper voice said. His tone was quieter but it carried. “I’m like you. See? We’ve come to rescue you. You are free now. These humans with us are good ones who work with our kind. We’ll take you to a safe place. We need to get you out of here. No one is ever going to chain you up again.”

She listened, hearing the same speech multiple times while they cleared cells of the test subjects down the hall. All fifteen of them on that floor had survived. She hoped the ones a floor above had been equally as lucky and that no one had managed to break through their cell doors. The cops were using some form of small explosive devices, something the facility guards didn't have access to.

"Wait," a soft, feminine voice protested. "Get off her. Tech Shiver?"

A gentle hand brushed hair away from Jeanie's cheek. She forced her eyes open. It was difficult to even focus, the pain and coldness that racked her body growing worse. A pair of familiar dark eyes stared back at her and she tried to smile at 433. The other woman had dropped to her hands and knees next to Jeanie, so close to the floor that their faces were inches apart.

Jeanie opened her mouth to assure her everything was going to be fine, wanting 433 to know that she could trust her rescuers, but nothing came out. She couldn't speak. Her throat was too dry and exhaustion had taken hold. 433 brushed her thumb along her cheekbone, growled, before jerking her head up. The sound deepened into a threatening one.

"She helped us. Get off her!"

"She's not your concern." The man spoke softly but his tone was firm. "Please back away from the prisoner."

The thumb left Jeanie's face and 433 rose to her feet, snarling. "Get off her! She killed them and she saved me. I smell her blood and she's hurt. She needs a doctor."

"Forget it. Let the bitch die," the same man stated.

433 stepped closer and Jeanie couldn't move her head enough to see what was going on but the weight on her ass was suddenly gone. A man grunted.

Another growl sounded, far deeper in pitch. "What is going on?" The angry voice belonged to the man who'd given the speech over and over to the men and women they'd been rescuing, claiming to be one of them.

"She saved my life. That guard on the floor came in to kill me but she shot him first. She said he was coming and she had to disable the locks on the doors to protect us. She was hurt but you mustn't have hurt her more. She is always kind to our people. She stopped a guard from mounting me last month." 433 sounded pissed and frantic. "Make them help her, please. She's hurt. Smell her blood."

"Do as she says," the deep voice commanded. "Get help for the human female. We'll sort this out later."

"She's an employee here." Someone yanked on her coat. "Here's her card with her picture. She's one of them," a man declared. "Technician Jeanie Shiver."

A deep snarl sounded and the rough grips securing her hands and hair were gone. Someone else grabbed her arms and she groaned when she was gently rolled onto her side. Pain made her cry out. She closed her eyes and felt blackness taking her. *I'm dying.*

"Look at me," a deep voice snarled.

Jeanie forced her eyes open again. More flashlights had been added until the hallway was now well lit. 710 glared down at her. His dark gaze swirled with fury but she saw recognition there. He remembered her.

She studied him. He was tanner than he had ever been and his blond hair had grown longer. He wore all-black clothing and his vest had white NSO lettering, which stood for New Special Operations Organization. She'd been given proof that 710 had survived the rescue assault she'd helped set up on

the testing facility but had never thought she'd get to see him in person again.

"Shiver," he rasped, his voice sounding harsh but gentle at the same time.

She blinked at him, holding his gaze, running her tongue over her dry lips. She tried to speak but nothing came out. His nose flared as he inhaled and a scary growl tore from his parted lips as he looked at someone behind her.

"Your men shot her?"

"She was that way when we found her. There were two dead security officers also shot." The man who spoke sighed. "It looked as though they turned on each other."

"Get help for her now," 710 snarled. "She's dying."

"Okay. Medic, come to the subbasement, lowest floor. We have a critically injured."

Another man snorted. "Let the bitch die. They obviously shot each other to avoid being caught questioning. It will save us from having to kill her later."

710 obviously disagreed. "Get those handcuffs off."

Jeanie moaned as someone touched her and pain shot up her shoulder and down her injured side as the metal was removed from her wrists. It hurt to move but she wanted to touch 710 just once more. She knew she wasn't going to survive, despite medical intervention. One glance at the pool of blood she lay in was enough to convince her of that grim fact.

She reached out and covered his hand with hers where it rested on the floor as he crouched over her. His face was only inches from hers. She curled her fingers around the back of his fist. He felt really warm, where she was so cold. She clung to him as tightly as possible.

He glanced down at the contact but didn't jerk away from her touch. She was afraid he might. Blood soaked her hand, staining his as well. She half expected him to get pissed. She just longed to touch him. She was scared to die alone.

He lifted his gaze to hers. He turned his hand under her palm and tightly clasped her fingers. Gratitude filled her that he'd care enough to attempt to give her some comfort. She licked her lips again, desperate to get words out.

"I tried to save them all. Did they make it? Did they all survive?"

He blinked. "They made it. No Species died."

Tears blinded her but she blinked them back, desperate to keep him in focus. She'd succeeded in saving all the men and women trapped inside the building. It had come at a high price but she had known the risks when she'd driven to work that morning. So many of them—all those lives were more important than hers. She closed her eyes and a sense of peace came, blocking out some of the pain.

"Shiver?" He growled her name. "Open your eyes."

The demand was one she couldn't resist as she peered at him again. He'd inched closer until his warm breath fanned her lips. Breathing took effort as she struggled to make her lungs keep functioning. Blood loss and her body going into shock were taking their toll. She hoped she smiled when she tried, wanting to convey to him that it was okay.

"Don't die," he rasped. "Hang on." He glanced away. "Faster!" His tone deepened. "Get over here."

"Move!" a man yelled and something heavy clattered to the floor behind her. The coat she wore was jerked hard, fabric tore and she couldn't prevent the whimper when gloved hands explored her now-exposed side.

"You will be fine," 710 said, drawing her attention. "Just stay with me." He nearly crushed her hand.

smaller hand with his, as if he could force the issue by clinging to her tighter.

“Shit,” the medic cursed.

“Fix her,” 710 snarled.

“It’s bad,” the medic answered. “Jed, get your ass over here. Open the kit and start an IV.”

Her mouth opened. She didn’t have the energy to tell 710 any of the things she always wanted say if they’d ever been alone without the risk of being overheard by Dean Polanitis or the people who’d worked for him. It was important that 710 understood how he’d changed her life and made her realize her purpose was to save his kind. He was the motivation that had given her the courage to conquer her fears. Not a day had passed since she’d laid eyes on him that he hadn’t filled her thoughts or haunted her dreams.

“Shiver,” he said a little louder, “stay with me.”

Blackness claimed her.

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## Chapter Two

Tim Oberto shot his team an infuriated look. “You damn near allowed her to die.”

Trey Roberts, his second-in-command, cleared his throat. “Sir, how was the team supposed to know it would upset a rescued female that much? The woman in question was an employee. How many New Species have been murdered at their hands? I’m sorry the New Species female was that distressed but employees of those hellholes aren’t our priority. We immediately got that woman medical help once the situation exploded. She’s going to make it.”

“She almost didn’t!” Tim yelled. “I know it’s your job to stand up for the teams but we both know they fucked up. Justice is going to be up my ass because we upset one of their females. She attacked one of our men, trying to defend that employee. Did she ask for help for the injured woman, or not before she threw him into a wall to get his boot off the employee’s ass?”

“She did,” a team member admitted. “But hell, the bitch had a gun when we reached that floor. She sat there facing us with a weapon and it’s lucky we didn’t just open fire and blow her head off. I would have taken the shot if she’d been a man.”

The doors opened and Tim flinched as Justice North and a dozen large New Species males stomped into the room. Tim recognized how angry Justice was by the narrowing of his catlike eyes and the fact that his lips were parted enough to reveal his sharp canines. Tim waited as Justice stalked closer.

“What is your directive?” Justice snarled.

Tim straightened his shoulders and met Justice North’s heated stare. “To assist in the rescue of all New Species.”

Justice nodded. “You’re our team. The government assigned you to assist us but you answer to the NSO first and foremost, Tim,” Justice growled. “That means all New Species. When a female Species demanded medical attention for a human, she should have been given what she wanted. First contact is very important. She thinks your team is just as bad as the humans who kept her captive. Is it true that the human had already been shot when your men roughed her up and handcuffed her, almost allowing her to bleed out on the floor?”

Tim flinched as his gaze shifted to Trey. “Is it?”

Trey sighed, addressing Justice. “I was a floor above them but I have spoken to that team leader. She appears so, sir. She was suffering from a gunshot wound and holding a weapon in her lap. Two security guards were dead on the floor next to her. The team assumed they’d turned on each other to prevent us from gaining any information if they were arrested.”

“The Species female,” Justice snarled, “said the human was beaten by the team. She swears that the human’s face was bleeding and bruised only after they arrived. Is that true? Did someone hit the human?”

Trey cleared his throat. “I questioned them about everything that happened. One of the men smacked her with the butt of his assault rifle to knock her down. Her face got bruised then or from when they secured her on the floor.”

Another growl sounded and one of the New Species males stepped forward. True was a big son of a bitch—six foot six, wide shouldered and broad chested. His dense biceps stretched the black shirt

sleeves to their limit. Shiny blond hair fell to his shoulders and his dark-brown eyes narrowed with anger as they fixed on Trey. Tim tensed, hoping a fight wouldn't break out since he was aware the particular New Species, whom they'd rescued on a previous mission, was still learning to control his temper. The day had already been a total clusterfuck and he didn't want it to worsen.

"She's a small human who was already bleeding. There was no cause for your team to rough her up or use handcuffs. A small child could have dealt with her in that condition. She was helpless."

"I wouldn't have done it but I wasn't there to control the situation," Trey muttered. "I did buy their asses."

Tim inched closer to get between them. Those were his teams so it was his mess. "I understand you're upset, True."

"Upset?" True snarled. "No one should abuse a female—human or Species. This is why I protest being forced to stay in the rear when the team enters a situation. I wouldn't have allowed that happen but she was already down when the team allowed me out of the elevator. I didn't realize she was injured. The stench from the blood of the dead guards and the explosives used to open the doors masked her scent."

One of Tim's men snorted. "She works for Mercile or whatever company name they are using now. Who cares? How many of your kind has she helped kill? No disrespect, sir."

True snapped his head in the direction of Chris, the team member who'd spoken. "We don't abuse females. I don't care if they work for our enemy. She's a helpless creature."

"She works for a company that is an offshoot from Mercile," Tim reminded everyone, sending Chris a dirty look to silence the idiot. The guy was new, had a bad attitude, but he'd deal with him later. He focused on the New Species again. "Her welfare wasn't our priority. *That* would be saving the New Species. I'm sorry your female got upset, Justice. The truth remains the same, though. The woman your female was upset about wasn't some innocent victim we attacked. She worked for Cornas, which we all know is Mercile with a new name, and she's as guilty as hell under New Species law. The badge clipped to her coat had her name and picture on it. Not to mention, she was found only a few feet from the doors where your people were caged, on the same floor where over a dozen of your kind were being held. That woman is either going to spend the rest of her life in prison or she's going to get the death penalty. They will decide her fate at Fuller, once she's transferred there."

True growled. "She won't be killed by us."

Justice calmed. "We don't condone anyone killing females, Tim, though sometimes it can't be avoided when they are among the crueler doctors whom we're certain killed our kind or if we had no choice because they opened fire on us. Our female said the human saved her from a rape last month and again from a guard putting a bullet into her right before the task force rescued them. Someone disabled the locks on those cell doors by frying the circuits with a stun gun. She had one of those in her pocket when they stripped her bare in Medical and our female said the human claimed she was disabling the locks to keep them safe. None of our people died because those guards couldn't gain access into their cells."

True nodded. "We discovered bullet scars on some of the doors. The idiots built those rooms to keep our kind prisoner but they made them break-in proof as well. The guards would have gone in and shoot our people dead if those locks hadn't been destroyed. Whoever disabled them saved lives."

Tim ignored the throbbing at his temple, a sign of an oncoming monster headache. His team had made a few mistakes but they were somewhat justified. "Someone poured coffee into their mainframes."

computer. We pulled the woman's prints off the coffeepot handle inside the computer room. Why did she do that if she's so saintly? The data couldn't be restored. It fried the damn thing. She covered Mercile's ass when she did that. There are no records, no real proof that the testing facility belonged to them. They leased the building under a shell company and we are hitting a dead end on tracing the money that funded it. Those files were our only hope of cementing proof directly back to Mercile."

Justice frowned. "I don't know why she did it." He turned and stared at the team's medic. "What's the human's current condition?"

"I just spoke to the older Dr. Harris. She'll live. It was touch and go for a while but they stopped the bleeding. I heard she was given blood and New Species healing drugs. The injuries caused to her face aren't life threatening. She's bruised up but it's mostly just painful."

Justice faced Tim. "Interrogate her but do it with respect. She obviously saved some of our people. Keep that in mind. Find out why she did all of it and what she was protecting Mercile from on those computers. Offer her a deal if that's what it takes to get more proof against those bastards for the one."

True moved closer. "I want to be there."

Justice studied him. "Why?"

"She worked in New Mexico last year."

Justice appeared surprised by that news. "You knew her?"

True nodded. "She was kind."

Justice frowned. "Were there experiments between the two of you?"

"No." True scowled. "I've never mounted her if that's what you're asking."

Justice seemed to accept that. "How was she kind?"

"She didn't treat us as if we were animals. She sneaked in candy and pain medication to our injured. She seemed to care about us."

Justice cocked his head, the frown returning. "You cared about her?"

"I never attempted to attack her when I could have but I then learned she was working with the doctors on a drug development."

"How did you learn that?"

True hesitated. "Polanitis believed I cared about her since she'd shown kindness and tried to secure my agreement to willingly mount her, promising it would mean she'd survive. He informed me they were working on a new breeding drug."

"Shit," Tiger cursed. "You probably would have killed her if you had agreed."

"You said you didn't mount her? There's no shame in admitting it if you did." Justice studied him. He didn't seem angry, more curious than anything.

"No. I told Polanitis I'd kill her if she was sent to my cell. I never mounted that female. He wanted my word to stop attacking the guards after that and to comply with the doctors in charge of testing another drug on me by answering their questions. It was something they were working on to improve intelligence or memory." He shifted his stance, appearing uncomfortable. "I didn't agree to his terms until he threatened to have the guards rape a Species female in front of me to get my compliance." His voice deepened into a snarl. "I agreed to protect her from harm. I didn't inflict injury on humans when I could have but I wasn't meek either."

"Why did he believe you would be able to fuck that woman while drugged and not kill her?" Tim

was curious too.

True glanced at him, his cheeks a little red. "I had a fondness for her but that changed once I realized she'd probably been nice to gain my trust. I believe he thought I might fight my instincts while drugged. I never saw her again after Polanitis' visit or I might have done some harm in retaliation of her deception." His jaw clenched. "I wouldn't have killed Shiver though. It was just a threat I made to keep her out of my cell. She didn't deserve to die. She might have been kind just to trick me but she did help some of our people at Drackwood."

Justice curled his lip in disgust. "I really hate that son of a bitch, Polanitis. I remember him from last year."

"Polanitis offered up human females for mounting to reward Species for good behavior?" Bra growled. "I never heard about that before now."

Justice motioned the other Species to silence. "Did he offer other human females to you?"

"No," True snarled. "I've never mounted that human or any other, for that matter."

Justice nodded. "You may be at the interrogation of this female since you once knew her. It might be an advantage." He turned to Tim. "True is in charge. He's to take over if he thinks it's too intense."

Tim wasn't happy but those were orders, not a request. "Fine. When should we start?"

Justice hesitated. "We'll keep her drugged until she's better and only wake her when she's strong enough to withstand interrogation."

"Sounds good." Tim hated to wait that long but Justice had spoken. It would be a waste of his breath to argue.

\* \* \* \* \*

True entered Medical and walked down the hallway to the patient rooms. The Species man guarding the door glanced up at him from where he sat before dropping his gaze to reading an ebook on his electronic device. "No change," he muttered.

"Thanks, Jericho."

The male grunted.

True stopped next to the bed and his hands fisted as he studied the dark bruise and cut on the female's cheek. It was healing, the yellowish color appearing better than when it had been a blood fresh wound. Her skin was too pale for his liking. He glanced at the monitor, seeing that her heartbeat was steady. She'd survive but it had been close.

Footsteps sounded behind him and he turned, forcing himself to relax into a more approachable stance. Paul smiled when he entered the room and rounded the bed with a new bag of fluids.

"She's doing great, True. I was really worried when Dr. Harris pumped her full of your healing drug but she took it like a champ. I was sure it would kill her."

"Why was she given them if it was dangerous?"

The male switched out the bags, checked the tube that ran to her arm and held his stare. "Man, I'm shocked she was still alive when they brought her in. She should have been taken to the closest trauma center but for some reason the task force team decided to fly her here instead. The fact that the medic kept her breathing that long was lucky as shit. Giving her the drug was the only thing Harris could think to do. It speeds up the healing process and she was a mess. It boiled down to having nothing to lose since she was so critical."

The male checked her arm where the needle had been inserted. “It’s a good thing she’s got a sour heart. That shit is way strong for humans. I doubt he would have risked it if she’d been older. It’s like shooting massive amounts of straight adrenaline into us.”

That unsettled True. He hadn’t been allowed to travel in the helicopter with Shiver when they airlifted her. He’d been assigned to handle the newly freed Species. Protocol dictated he stay with them during their transfer to Reservation. He’d taken a helicopter to Homeland as soon as he’d measured they were settled. It had been hellish hours until he’d discovered if the female was alive. His attention returned to her. Shiver appeared very frail and small on the big hospital bed designed for use by his kind.

“Harris is keeping her so drugged that she isn’t going to wake up if that’s what you were hoping for. It’s better to keep her knocked out since we have no idea how she’ll react emotionally when she comes around. As I said, this shit is hard on humans. We want to keep her heart rate as slow as possible so heavy sedation helps with that.”

“How can she eat?” He clenched his teeth. She was already too small.

“No worries there. We’ll make sure she gets what she needs to get well. Food is not the most important thing for her right now. She’s been through the wringer.” He stepped away from the bed. “Is the rumor true that she’ll be transferred to Fuller when she’s stable?”

The idea didn’t sit well with him. “I’m not certain.”

“I just hope they have a good medical staff.” Paul circled the bed and lifted the sheet. He removed the bandage, revealing her wound.

True bit back a growl at seeing her pale stomach and the angry red wound on her side. There were ugly bruises on each of her hipbones. The gown shielded her from her ribs up but if the nurse tugged the sheet any lower her sex would be exposed since it was obvious she was naked from the waist down. The protective urge that struck was strong, goading him to shove the nurse away, but he resisted. Her modesty was covered. He’d put a stop to it though if the nurse dared lower that she another few inches.

“I will apply a fresh bandage but Harris is really curious as to how the drug will work on us. He needs to see this first. Damn. That shit is amazing. Look at that.” Paul pointed to the staples. “I think I can remove those. The skin seems to have already fused. It’s only been about twelve hours but you swear this happened at least a couple of weeks ago, judging by how rapidly it’s healing. I think the drug is working faster on her than it does on you guys. I’m going to call in Harris. He might want to lower the dose. This is so exciting to be able to finally test it on humans at full dosage. Nobody wanted to do that before.”

True covered her stomach with the sheet after the nurse laid gauze over her incision and left the room to seek out the doctor. It angered him that they were viewing Shiver as an experiment. He hesitated, straining for any sound of approaching steps, before carefully taking her delicate hand in his. It was totally lifeless but warm. He was gentle as he caressed her fingers, memories of finding her bloody and dying on the floor prevalent in his thoughts.

There had been times since he’d gained his freedom when he’d considered how he’d react when Tech Shiver was located and arrested. The sense of betrayal he’d once felt had remained. She might not have been his female but her reasons for being kind to him had been suspicious after learning she worked closely with Polanitis. Had it all been an act to get him to care about her so she could be safely mounted by a Species? He wanted answers.

He placed her hand back on the bed and stepped away. The anger he had thought he'd feel at seeing her again didn't surface. It would have been easy to pretend he just wanted to question her if she survived but he prided himself on being brutally honest. True just wanted her to open her eyes and live well. He'd cared about Shiver too much and her death would cause him pain.

She probably would be sent to Fuller Prison. There was no denying that she worked for the enemy. The humans who ran the place would put her in a cage and justice would be served. She would learn confinement, hopelessness of ever gaining freedom, and suffer for her crimes against Species.

A memory from the past formed inside his mind...

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Shiver stepped inside his cell with a smile on her heart-shaped face, glanced at the camera before coming inside, schooling her features. The kit in her hand indicated why she'd come. They took many vials of blood after forcing drugs into his body.

"Hi," she whispered. "I'm sorry about this." Shiver placed the kit on the table and his chair activated, pulling him tight against the wall. She wasn't the one to do it so that meant a guard outside the door watched their movements. "I'll make it quick."

She donned gloves as she uncapped a needle and inched closer with the syringe. A small alcohol packet was held between her fingers as she invaded his space. Her head didn't even reach the top of his shoulder when she stopped mere inches away. She used her teeth to rip the tip off one finger of the glove, then also tore open the packet and swabbed his arm near his inner elbow. She lifted her head and studied his face, paying careful attention to his jaw.

"I'm so sorry. Are you okay?"

She referred to the bruising there. He didn't answer, rarely did.

Her warm fingers gripped his arm so gently he almost missed the soft way she stroked his skin with that single bare fingertip. She had told him once that tearing away the latex made it easier to feel his veins but they were very prominent. Sometimes he pretended it might be possible that she just wanted to be able to touch him, skin to skin. Her body blocked the camera so he was the only one aware of her actions. The needle was inserted into his arm so carefully that he barely felt it. Other times she just stabbed him roughly, seeming to enjoy inflicting pain.

"I brought you pain pills. They are safe to take," she whispered. She released his arm and reached down the front of her shirt. He couldn't look away as the neck of it dipped lower to reveal her creamy white skin and the top curve of her breasts as she removed something hidden there. She reached down and slid a small plastic packet against his palm. He closed his fingers around the object.

She withdrew the needle and capped it, shoving it inside her front pocket. She pressed a small gauze square to the puncture site. Shiver glanced up then, holding his gaze.

"Those pills are mine—from a dental appointment. I smuggled them in. Just take one at a time with some water, two if you are really sore. They'll help take away some of the discomfort." Her gaze drifted to his swollen jaw again then to his bruised ribs. Tears surfaced in her eyes but she blinked them back. "Don't give up, 710. I promise this won't last forever. Just keep calm and don't cause fights."

Her meaning was confusing. He always healed. The pain would fade until the guards inflicted more damage. Nothing in his life changed, especially the suffering the guards routinely inflicted upon him. He glanced down his body to study his chest, certain he'd experienced worse bruising than the damage

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