



EXILE
OF THE
Mind
PART 2

IMMORTALS

Exile of the Mind 2

Exile of the Mind, Volume 2

M Wills

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EXILE OF THE MIND 2

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5

Elliot sat up in the small bed, transfixed by the images playing out on the vidscreen. A handful of servitors faced off against a small crowd of about twenty people. The shop behind them was ablaze, though the automatic systems had cut in and were dousing the fire with white foam. The small crowd shouted angrily at the servitor, and Elliot could make out that they were protesting against the Prime Minister while the servitors, in their dead voices, ordered them to disperse.

The small mob seemed to grow angrier and Elliot clutched the sheets to his chest as he watched the servitors suddenly jump towards the crowd, swinging their metal fists. The servitors were all shapes and sizes – men, women, young, old – and all had a blank-eyed stare as they used their mechanically enhanced bodies to bash the protestors. Elliot watched the servitor of an old woman punch one of the protestors with a metal fist and her enhanced strength. He recoiled in disgust as the protestor fell to the ground and the servitor dispassionately turned to another. That was someone's body, stolen by the state without consent and used to maintain Prime Minister Vaughn's grip on power.

"We have to help them," Elliot said, gripped suddenly by a visceral desire for justice.

He threw off the covers and stood, naked, before bending to find his clothes.

"Help them do what? Get arrested?" Simon replied.

Elliot looked up at him, his panties in hand. "The government stole those people's bodies. You think those servitors *want* to do that?"

"What are we going to do?" Simon shot back. "You can't run out there like that."

Elliot looked down at himself. At his breasts. The swell of his hips. The dark hair between his legs. His body was naked. Feminine. Gentle. No match for the rough and tumble outside.

"You used to care." Elliot said, though he knew deep down that Simon was right. What use would he be now?

"I *still* care. But if you stand up you get cut down. Besides, the UN is coming. They'll sort things out."

"Not unless the Prime Minister faces resistance from within, too."

“What kind of resistance is this?” Simon said, gesturing to the vidscreen.

The crowd was small and disjointed, and the servitors worked together to quickly dispatch them. After the first few went down the rest fled. Soon it was only the handful of servitors left, gazing blankly around them in front of the smoky remains of the mechanic’s shop while drones buzzed overhead, transmitting the action straight to the colony-wide vidfeeds.

By now Elliot was dressed and he stared angrily at Simon. “I’m leaving.”

He stormed to the door and Simon reached out to grab his arm. “It’s not safe out there yet. Stay with me.”

And though a part of Elliot ached to do so, he yanked his arm out of Simon’s light grip. “It’s not safe anywhere. And you won’t even save yourself.”

Elliot was aware of the dead-eyed stare of the servitors as he left Simon’s shop. But they didn’t stop him as he hurried to the massive public elevators. When the door closed and the elevators lurched upwards, Simon released a sobbing breath. Had Vaughn made *Elliot’s* body do that while his mind was in isolation? Using him against his fellow citizens? It was as bad as being put in someone else’s skin. A violation of bodily autonomy.

The corridors were quieter than usual as Elliot made his way back to his family’s quarters. When he entered, his father had the giant vidscreen on. Prime Minister Vaughn was speaking against the backdrop of his ship, the *Torino*, an ambassadorial planet hopper that had been luxuriously redecorated with gaudy gold trim and glittering gems and was now used as Vaughn’s private ship. It had been completely retooled—living quarters, med facility, food replicator—so that the Prime Minister could safely escape whenever he wanted. The money for the redecoration had come directly from the food funding for the lows and was the first event that had begun Elliot’s hatred of the government.

“These hoodlums will be punished,” Vaughn intoned with steely-eyed fury. “Anyone with the UN is a traitor to Salopia and will be treated with the harshest possible methods. I promised law and order and will do whatever is necessary to stop this enemy from within.”

“Goddamn traitors,” Richard agreed.

“How can you say that?” Elliot snapped from the doorway. His father turned to him in surprise. “Doesn’t it bother you that he’s breaking the

law?”

“He’s made us safer,” Richard retorted. “Your mother used to be afraid to go to the markets on her own. I used to find discarded needles outside our quarters every night. Prime Minister Vaughn has cleaned up the entire capitol.”

“At what cost?” Elliot spat. “We’ve lost our freedom of speech. Our freedom to assemble. Our freedom to control our own bodies. All so that the corridors can be a little bit cleaner.”

“You’d rather live in depravity as a man than as a woman in safety,” Richard scoffed.

It was clear Elliot would never get through to his dad. He turned on his heel and stamped back to his room, locking the door behind him. There was a SysMessage waiting for him from Simon, checking to make sure he made it home all right. Elliot’s only response was to leave the message on ‘read’.

Elliot’s mother and sister were no help. His mother kept trying to pretend everything was all right. The riots were contained to the lower levels so, to her, they were little more than an interesting news item she could gossip about. Elliot’s sister had no interest in politics, more caught up in the social world of her school. Elliot ignored her offer to braid his hair. He was tired of being treated like her own living doll.

And still each day he was forced to return to Simon’s shop and work in the office. He needed the credits and his dad forced him out of their quarters. All Elliot could do was avoid Simon’s entreaties, responding to his questions in monosyllables. The pity rolling off Diane was palpable, and Elliot found himself tensing whenever she was around.

Over the next several days there were more security servitors than usual roaming the lower levels. They patrolled in pairs, one with a modified gun arm, the other with metal fists. Graffiti appeared on the walls: *Down with Vaughn* and cartoonish images of his sneering face dripping with blood.

There was tension in the air, evident in the nervous glances whenever someone dropped off a skycar for repair—which happened with less frequency—or the silence in the corridors Elliot walked through. As the UNSF gunship *Hamlet* approached, things were becoming ever more fraught. Market traders were a little more guarded, a little less raucous than usual. People didn’t stay in groups to talk but hurried back to their quarters. Anyone walking alone – particularly a young man – was met with suspicion.

“What did I do?” Simon finally snapped one evening when Elliot was on his way out of the shop. “I’m trying to protect you and you treat me like an enemy.” He stood by one of the aircars, sleeveless white shirt clinging to his solid form.

Elliot hated that his body ached for Simon and tried to tamp down the desire. “No one can protect me as long as Vaughn is in power.”

“You’re impossible.”

“You’re deluded.”

Simon scoffed and returned to his work. Elliot gritted his teeth and marched off angrily to the elevator to go back up to his quarters. He was so caught up in his thoughts that he didn’t register the change in atmosphere at first. There were more people about and they all seemed to be heading in the same direction as Elliot. As he moved to the elevators, the corridor widened and grew taller to become something like a plaza. Banks of elevators going up and down. But tonight the plaza was filled with people.

An angry voice rose above the murmuring. Elliot’s pace slowed as people milled around, finally blocking his progress entirely. People were all looking towards a young man who stood on a broken skycar, flanked by some other youths bearing weapons. The young man on the skycar was angrily gesturing as he spoke.

“...not stand by as he takes our country from us. The Prime Minister uses the excuse of crime to punish us. To jail our brothers and sister. To steal our mother’s bodies. Isolate our minds.”

There was a chorus of agreement from all around Elliot. He, too, was swept up in the excitement. Finally, someone was *doing* something.

Bodies jostled Elliot for space as he watched the angry young man rail about spies among them. Someone pinched Elliot’s butt and he jumped, jerking his head to look behind him. One of the old men caught his eye, not in a leering way but in a shock of recognition. He turned to his companion and motioned to Elliot, mouthing the words “Isobel Clarke”. His companion narrowed his eyes and stared at Elliot.

“Her! She’s a spy! Vaughn released her to kill us!” His words were mostly drowned out by the crowd but a few people around him turned and saw Elliot.

As the crowd around him gradually noticed the commotion and turned, Elliot’s excitement mutated into fear. The crowd was too packed towards the elevators so he began moving back towards the row of mechanic’s

shops. More people had packed in since he'd arrived and he squeezed and shifted through the narrow gaps. His progress brought more eyes. More whispers. By the time he was free enough from the heaviest of the crowd to walk fast, there was a buzz of excitement behind him.

He glanced back. Saw someone pointing at him, and picked up his pace. A few of the crowd had split up and were following him now, including the young man who'd originally pointed Elliot out.

"Don't let her get away!" The man suddenly cried.

Elliot ran, pushing past the few people heading towards the crowd until he was out in the open air of the large corridor. He let his flats fling off so he could run faster, zigging and zagging down alleyways and streets he'd come to know. Still, the crowd pursued him, their angry cries growing louder as they bore down on him at every turn.

His breath heaved, legs growing weak. He'd not been exercising and this body wasn't made for running. His breasts hurt as they swung back and forth on his chest, feet aching as they pounded across the hard metal floors.

Elliot ran until he found himself back at Simon's garage. The front doors had been sealed shut for the night and Elliot banged on it futilely. His breath came in ragged gasps. Sharp pain spiked up and down his sides. The noise of the crowd grew louder and Elliot ducked down a nearby alley. He banged on the side door leading in to the office, desperately hoping someone would answer him. It hurt to draw breath. He had nothing left. He pounded on the door with the last of his strength, crying out for Simon.

The noise of the crowd grew louder. Someone shouted, "She went that way!"

Elliot leaned against the door, his body spent, aching and wrecked. Tears slid down his face and he sobbed for Simon. As the excited crowd grew louder, seemingly just around the corner, the door slid open and Elliot spilled into Simon's arms. Elliot had no strength left and Simon dragged him back into the shop, slamming the button to slide the door shut, before Elliot slumped into him and brought them both to the ground.

They sat on the floor, Simon wrapping his body around Elliot from behind, Elliot's hands on Simon's brawny arms, clutching him for comfort. They both remained in absolute silence, breaths held, as the noise of the mob outside grew louder and then passed them by. Gradually the sound receded until it was just the two of them, alone on the floor of the office.

Elliot released a hitching breath, on the verge of tears. He sat between Simon's legs, Simon's chest pressed against his back so he could feel the rise and fall of each breath, Simon still firmly hugging him in his solid arms.

"Are you okay?" Simon began, "I—"

Elliot shut him up with a kiss, half turning in his arms to press their mouths together. Elliot was desperate for Simon's taste, for his touch. Simon's breath was hot in Elliot's mouth, his body baking at Elliot's touch.

"I'm sorry," Elliot said between kisses.

Elliot turned all the way around and straddled Simon, pushing him down gently until he lay on his back on the floor. Elliot leaned over him, his silky brunette hair cascading down over Simon's head to create a tunnel through which Simon stared up at him with a startled grin. Elliot kissed him again, pressing his feminine body against his friend, running his hands through Simon's hair, which was thick and coarse. Elliot welcomed the spicy masculine taste of Simon as their lips parted and their tongues met.

Elliot dragged his groin up and down Simon's form, feeling his friend grow hard beneath him. Elliot was gasping now, heat coiling deep within him. Simon gripped his hips as they made out, desperate and needy, relief and desire flooding Elliot. He grabbed his top and yanked it off over his head, then quickly unsnapped his bra and wiggled out of it. He sat atop Simon and Simon reached for him, taking each gentle breast in his calloused hands, surprisingly gentle as he stroked Elliot's tits, gazing with wide eyes at Elliot's chest. Elliot released a hissing breath as Simon's fingers lightly pinched his nipple.

Simon raised himself up and slipped one of Elliot's nipples into his mouth. His hot breath made it spike up into desire and sent delicious shivers through Elliot's body. Elliot gazed down at his friend as Simon greedily grabbed and sucked his breasts, moving back and forth between each one, fingers grasping, desperate for Elliot's skin. Elliot's body burned at the touch, the heat concentrating between his legs. He felt himself unfolding, the ache growing into a need. A need to be filled.

Elliot yanked open Elliot's pants and grabbed his cock. It was hot and hard and stood proud beneath his fingers as he freed it. Shifting, Elliot positioned himself atop the head. Simon's eyes went wide as Elliot slowly lowered himself. Elliot threw his head back as he was filled, inch by

glorious inch, sighing as he welcomed Simon's hard cock into his wet pussy until they were completely together.

Elliot brushed his hair out of his face and rocked back and forth on Elliot's length. Simon gripped Elliot's hips and thrust up gently, urging a soft moan from Elliot's lips.

"Play with your tits," Simon hissed, eyes wide with want.

Elliot obliged, reaching up to grab his ripe breasts in each hand, splaying out his fingers to grab as much as he could. He squeezed them against his chest and they ballooned out. His fingers continued working his tits as he rocked on Simon's cock, each forward thrust burying the cockhead so deep inside it made Elliot's toes curl with pleasure.

"Oh, fuck, Simon," Elliot hissed, head rolling to one side, moaning as he rocked atop his friend.

Simon thrust up inside him, meeting the rhythm of each forward grind from Elliot. The head of Simon's cock bumped up against the dimpled nub of Elliot's inner pleasure and he moaned and shivered. His cunt stretched around his friend's cock, gripping the shaft tight as the warmth filled him. Elliot moved faster, his body taut with need, grinding back and forth on his friend as he played with his tits. The feel of the female body beneath his fingers, the rock of his hips, the fullness of his friend inside him, were perfect. Elliot moved faster, following rhythm of his body up, up, until he came.

He cried out, mouth agape, head thrown back as he quivered around Simon's dick, cunt clenching tight, body exploding with pleasure. He paused as the orgasm became too much, his body too wonderfully sensitive, head swimming with delight. After a few seconds he became aware of his body again. Aware of the hunger still inside him and he resumed rocking, faster this time.

He leaned both hands on Simon's chest, gritting his teeth as he grinded hard on his cock.

"Fuck me. Fuck me. Fuck me," he begged, voice dripping with lust.

Simon's jaw clenched, his hands tightening around Elliot's slender waist as he thrust up. Elliot felt him lose control, felt the cock throb inside him even before Elliot grunted. Simon gasped as the rich heat of his friend's cum throbbed inside him, filling him and sending over the edge into another orgasm. His pussy clutched at Simon's shaft, milking it for each drop of

cum that seared Elliot's belly, both of them gripping each other, moving as one while Simon emptied himself into his Elliot's rich wet heat.

When Elliot finished he slumped on top of Simon, their chests pressed together. Elliot felt Simon's heart beating as Simon gently stroked him, fingers gliding down the curve of his back, just down to his ass, then back up. Simon's hot breath was in his ear and Elliot lay there for a few beats, his body sated.

They dressed in silence, shooting shy glances at each other and giggling. At last, Simon ran his hand through his hair. "I'm sorry, too." He laughed.

Elliot shrugged, not wanting to name what hung between them, afraid its fragility would see it dissipate.

"I...I should go," Elliot said.

Before Elliot felt safe to go home he had Simon check the vidfeeds. The mob had moved up a few levels and servitors were on their way. Simon accompanied him through the eerily quiet lower levels and saw him into a skycar, which took him back up to the mids, avoiding the riot altogether.

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The vidfeeds tracked the progress of the *Hamlet*, counting down the time until it would be in orbit. Mere weeks away. Small riots and sabotage became a regular occurrence, even as many people tried to go about their daily lives. Servitors and actual human military became a common sight throughout the colony. The Prime Minister imposed a curfew and bragged about the number of people he was arresting, promising to fast track their mind isolation so he could throw their bodies back out onto the streets as part of his servitor army. A few of the other families along Elliot's corridor disappeared in the middle of the night. Some perhaps to the isolation chambers, others perhaps taking advantage of their connections to board the increasingly expensive offworld transports.

Elliot wanted to be swept up in the romance of fighting for revolution, but the events of the previous riot haunted him. How quickly they'd turned on him. It wasn't safe out there. Not in Isobel's body. The normality of his new feminine form that had just begun to settle on him like a warm cloak was ripped to shreds. He once again begrudged his appearance. Hated seeing his soft face in the mirror, feeling his body move, hips sway, breasts bounce.

Elliot's father grew more militaristic. His mother retreated into her fantasy of everything being okay. His sister was the only one who was worried and so Elliot let her dress him and do his makeup and his hair so she could forget about everything else for the moment. Elliot refused to look at himself when she was done, but Simon seemed to appreciate it. Simon was Elliot's only comfort.

Simon found excuses to come into the office more often. Neither of them spoke about their feelings but it was evident in every sly glance, every accidental touch. Elliot's body was humming for Simon, leaving him distracted and absent-minded. On the few occasions when Simon's parents were away and the shop was empty, they had furtive, desperate sex, Elliot clinging to Simon as their bodies sang in rhythm with each other.

"Am I intimidating?" Elliot asked after one such session, tucking his hair back into a bun in a motion that had become practiced.

"No. Why?" Simon grinned, pulling his pants back up.

"So why don't you want to tell your parents about us?"

“There’s no us. It’s just a bit of fun. Right?”

“Right,” Elliot agreed after a moment’s hesitation, though Simon blushed and didn’t meet his eye.

The *Hamlet* was seven days away when Elliot’s new routine was shattered. He was on his way to Simon’s garage in the morning, in the elevator with three other people dressed in drab grey worker’s uniforms. He barely registered them, so caught up in thoughts of Simon.

The elevator lurched downwards and after a second or two one of the workers pulled out a small tool and began quickly unscrewing the panel beneath the buttons.

“Uh,” Elliot said. He glanced at the other two men behind him, wondering if they were going to do anything about this.

The face of the man behind him was strangely smooth, almost plastic. And he was staring at Elliot with dead eyes. Elliot gulped and stepped away. By now, the man at the panel had opened it and he flicked some switches, making the elevator grind to a halt. Elliot steadied himself on the wall and backed into a corner as the three workers rounded on him. His heart thumped in his chest. Had they recognized this body? He was helpless here.

“Elliot,” the man with the plastic face said. “We don’t have much time.” The man tapped something behind his ear and the fake plastic face flickered and disappeared, revealing the face of Patrick, Simon’s one-time friend and fellow instigator.

“Patrick?” Elliot asked, bewildered.

“You were right all along, Elliot,” Patrick said. “I should have listened to you earlier but I was dumb and scared. It’s not too late for you to help the cause.”

“You want my help?”

The other worker began prizing open the elevator doors. The worker at the panel broke in quickly, “One minute until the alarm is tripped.”

Patrick nodded at him and spoke rapidly to Elliot. “Your body is proof of Vaughn’s cruelty. We need a symbol to wake up the mids and the uppers. Right now it’s just us lowers that are rebelling. They can ignore that. But they won’t be able to ignore you. They’ve been watching your face on the vidfeeds for weeks. If you come out and tell everyone what Vaughn has done it will stir them up. We can hack into the vidfeeds and spread the message.”

“And then what? The UN will be here soon.”

“Then we fight from within. Vaughn can hold out inside the Salopian bubble for months as long as he has the support of the people. Maybe years. We’re going to destabilize his regime from the inside. Are you in?”

“I- I don’t know.”

The elevator doors were now open enough for a body to slide through. They were between floors, facing the entrance to a large ventilation shaft which one of Patrick’s friends had decoupled from the wall. The man by the panel had reattached the panel so it appeared as if it had never been opened.

“Do you still believe in the cause?”

Elliot hesitated. He still hated Vaughn. But he wanted Simon more. He was comfortable now. Safe. All the things he’d fought for. Why upend it all? The old Elliot was gone. He was a hybrid now. Some strange mix of himself and Isobel.

“Twenty seconds,” the man by the panel called out, looking down at the screen he wore on his forearm.

“I do but...I’m scared.”

Patrick placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. “We’re all scared. Now’s the time to be brave.”

The other two workers had slid through the doors and were crouched in the large ventilation shaft.

“We need you. Lockesburg needs you. If you change your mind, come to the bar on level 85 and ask for me.”

Patrick crawled into the vent and turned back to Elliot. “Be brave.”

The elevator doors groaned shut and the elevator lurched back into motion. When the doors opened up on the lower levels, two servitors were waiting. They scanned the elevator wordlessly and allowed Elliot to walk past them.

Elliot was trembling when he finally reached Simon’s garage. Simon quickly came around the skycar he was working on and slipped an arm easily around Elliot’s waist.

“Are you okay? You look so pale.”

Elliot nodded and hugged Simon, burying his face in Simon’s shirt and inhaling the masculine woody scent of him.

“They want me to help get rid of Vaughn,” Elliot said.

“Shh, not out here,” Simon said, ushering Elliot deeper into the recesses of the shop. When they were in the back corner he slipped his arm up

against the small of Elliot's back and asked, "Who wants you to help?"

"Some old friends of mine. They say their organizing the resistance and want me to help. They want me to record a message telling everyone what Vaughn has done."

"That's a good way to get your mind permanently deleted."

"I know. But...I can't keep living like this. In secret. I have to fight. What do I do?" He looked up at Simon with glassy eyes.

Simon took one of Elliot's hands and kissed his knuckles gently. "I..." he gulped, looked away, then looked Elliot deep in the eyes. "Keep your head down. Stay with me. This will pass."

Elliot sniffed. Tucked a loose strand of hair out of his eyes and gazed deeply into Simon's eyes.

"What if it doesn't?" He whispered. "What if Vaughn wins?"

"At least we'll still have each other."

Simon kissed him then. Slowly, deeply. Elliot melted into Simon's body, pressing his hands against Simon's cheeks to pull him close, wanting only Simon's warm hands on him, Simon's solid body crushed against his own fragile one. They peeled away when Diane and Robert hurried in, Robert slamming the button to drop the shutters on the garage.

"Quickly, get to the back," Robert urged.

Diane swept them both past the back office just as an explosion outside made the floor rock.

"What's going on?" Simon asked. In the chaos he'd taken Elliot's hand.

"An army of servitors is heading our way," Robert said as he tossed aside old parts from the center of the room. "They've locked down the capital building and they're clearing everyone out of these levels."

Something slammed against the shutters out the front of the shop.

"But we didn't have anything to do with it this time!" Simon said.

Robert didn't pause in his shunting stuff to the side. "It doesn't matter. We're lows so that makes us complicit. Help me move this junk."

With Simon's help, the two pushed a heavy engine block to the side, scraping it against the floor. More things slammed into the shutters. Glancing back into the garage, Elliot saw a claw punch through one of the shutters, retract, and then punch through again, ripping a bigger hole.

There was a pause and then someone peered through the hole. Asher. He grinned when he saw Elliot, then turned and shouted, "I got some rebels in here."

Robert threw the last of the junk aside, revealing a hatch set into the floor. It hissed as he pulled it open and they were met with a blast of warm air.

“This connects to the maintenance access,” Robert said, tossing a backpack and a headlamp to Simon. “It goes all the way down to the eighties. We’ll split up.”

Elliot looked at the sturdy backpack in Simon’s hands with alarm. “How long have you been planning this?”

“Ever since we were banished from the mids for thought crimes,” Robert said, tossing Simon a headlamp. “Come on, we haven’t much time.”

As if to punctuate this point, there was another blow on the doors of the shop, accompanied by the screech of ripping metal.

Simon went first, dropping down into the crawlspace. Elliot followed him, with Robert and Diane right behind. There was a metallic clunk and then a hiss as Robert sealed the hatch.

Elliot crawled through the small access corridor, following the glow of Simon’s headlamp. Behind him, Robert’s headlamp cast sharp shadows on the dusty metal. When they reached a junction, Simon and Elliot headed left while the others headed right. The shaft angled down, eventually ending at a loose grate that Simon kicked off, leading to a maintenance tunnel.

This tunnel was just tall enough for them to stand up. Wires of various sizes and colors were set against the wall and stretched out down the tunnel in both directions. The darkness was punctuated by blinking diodes from pieces of electrical equipment, and filled with the soft whirr of electric motors and fans.

Simon hastily reattached the grate. “This way,” he said, his voice echoing slightly as he started off down the darkened corridor.

“What about your parents?” Elliot said, following behind.

“They’ll be fine. They’ve got friends in the lows.”

Robert’s words back up at the shop had stuck with Elliot, and he had to ask. “Your father said you were banished from the mids for thought crimes. What happened?”

“I resisted, is what happened,” Simon said.

“You resisted?”

As Simon talked, they continued down the maintenance tunnel, occasionally ducking under a conduit that crossed their path. At each junction point Simon turned confidently left or right, seemingly at random.

“Shortly after they captured you we held another rally demanding your release,” Simon said without looking back at Elliot. “It was the first time Vaughn ever used a servitor for security. A group of them came at us as we stood in front of the capitol doors. We foolishly thought Vaughn wouldn’t use violence against peaceful protestors. The servitors bashed people. Arrested them. I escaped and then Vaughn set about tracking down everyone involved so my family and I fled to the lows. Vaughn had less control there and we thought we were safe.”

“And that’s why you’re so reluctant to fight him now.”

They continued on and up ahead Elliot could see a faint light from the room straight ahead.

“I thought we could just hold on to the little scraps we had left. And it was fine. It wasn’t a lot but it was enough, even though there was always the fear Vaughn would come after us.”

Simon trailed off and Elliot continued for him. “And then I came in and made everything worse.”

“No,” Simon shook his head, sending the light skittering across the walls. He turned to Elliot and flipped the lamp up onto the top of his head so that the light diffused across the ceiling, bathing both of them in its soft reflected glow. “You made everything better.”

Elliot looked at Simon’s big brown eyes, brows creased with worry. Elliot opened his mouth a few times to say something. His heart fluttered in his chest. But he pulled away. Didn’t he want this? Hadn’t his body been crying out for it? A tiny part of his mind still clung to the hope that this body was temporary. And giving in to Simon meant giving in to Vaughn changing him forever.

Elliot looked down and chewed his lip. “Simon I...”

“It’s okay,” Simon shook his head. “Forget it. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

Simon turned and Elliot put his hand on his shoulder to stop him but Simon shrugged it off. Sighing, Simon flicked his headlamp back down, picking up the pace towards the brightly lit room at the end of the corridor. “Come on, let’s get us out of here,” Simon murmured.

“Out of here?”

Passing through the doorway, Elliot found they were in a vast circular room. The sheer amount of electronic equipment made the air warm and dry. A thicket of wires ran across the walls and the low-slung ceiling. A

metal grated walkway was slightly suspended above the mass of equipment and wiring on the floor. It led to a maintenance elevator and they picked their way across to the doors. Simon pressed the button and a few seconds later the doors rumbled back into the wall. Elliot followed Simon inside and Simon pressed the button for level 150. The elevator juddered upwards.

“Why are we going up?” Elliot asked. “I thought we were going to hide in the lows.”

Simon set his backpack down and unzipped it to pull out the black and gold long-sleeve top of a midlevel official. “No. You’re going to get out of here. Leave the colony before you get killed.”

“I can’t leave!”

Simon rounded on him. “You can’t stay! Remember the mob that attacked you? As long as you’re here, you’re in danger.” Simon grabbed a second long-sleeve top and tossed it to Elliot. “Put this on. They’ll be looking for lows up here.”

Simon pulled his grey worker uniform off and dumped it on the floor, followed by the undershirt. As he stepped into the new uniform Elliot’s eyes were drawn to the way the muscles in Simon’s arms stood out. He forced himself to look away, cursing the needs of this new body as he slid his own uniform on.

“This is my home. I’m not just going to let Vaughn destroy it. I’ve already lost my body,” Elliot countered.

“I need to know you’re safe,” Simon said, zipping up the official uniform. “Everyone recognizes you. You can’t hide anywhere except offworld. When it’s all over you can come back.”

“I’m staying here. I’ve got nothing left to lose,” Elliot insisted.

“Well *I* do,” Simon shot back angrily.

“I know. You could lose your body, too. That’s why—”

“No! I could lose *you*.” Simon shouted. And then, seemingly surprised by his own outburst, repeated more softly. “I could lose you. Even if you don’t care about me.”

Elliot’s heart swelled and he took Simon’s hand, running his soft fingers across Simon’s calloused ones. “I don’t know what I want or who I am,” Elliot said softly. “*I do* care about you but...is that me or is that Isobel?”

“If it was Isobel you’d be thinking of murdering me,” Simon said, forcing a grin.

The elevator slowed as it reached level 150.

“So we’ll go,” Elliot said. “And maybe I can sort myself out as we travel. Or murder you. Who knows?” Elliot grinned, relieved at putting off a decision that seemed so momentous.

The elevator doors squealed open to reveal the inside of a maintenance shed. Vats of liquid and electronic detritus lined the shelves along the wall. Across from them a set of double doors opened at the push of button and led out onto the bustling spaceport. The port was located on the edge of the building, right up against the bubble that held back Salopia’s atmosphere. A huge circle etched into the dome – a smaller bubble sticking off from the main one – was the shuttle airlock. Two aged, hulking shuttles sat on the platform, which would extend out into the airlock before it was pressurized and they could lift off.

The walkways were utter chaos, people with their families and their belongings jostling each other and clambering to get on to the last shuttles out before the UN arrived. A few suited guards in silver held the line, just barely managing to suppress the crowds, which seemed on the edge of riot.

“Stay close,” Simon said, taking Elliot’s hand before beginning to push through the crowd.

Elliot had no idea how Simon planned to get them access, and he never got the chance to find out. No sooner had they pushed through the outer edge of the crowd than a deafening explosion shook the floor. People screamed as sparks and flames erupted from the shuttle platform. Simon pulled Elliot back to the edge of a wall as the crowd began stampeding away to whatever exit they could find and smoke choked Elliot’s lungs.

The grinding screech of twisting metal filled the air as the platform holding the shuttles tilted slowly, slowly, picking up speed until, with a wrenching final screech it plummeted out of sight, taking the two shuttles with it. Simon gaped in open-mouthed astonishment before choking on the plume of ash.

Half blind with smoke, Elliot gripped Simon’s hand and pulled him back towards the maintenance building. They stumbled inside the elevator and Elliot jammed the button to go down – anywhere but here – as Simon bent to his knees, coughing, eyes watering furiously. Elliot patted his back as Simon slowly recovered. Elliot’s mouth tasted like smoke and there was an electric chemical smell in his nose.

“What the hell happened?” Simon asked once he’d regained his breath.

“Someone bombed the spaceport.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know. Can we get to another port?”

Simon shook his head. “Dad said Lockesburg’s on lockdown. No transport to other buildings. We’re stuck here. Best thing to do is go as low as possible.”

“The bottoms are full of servitors and Vaughn controls them all.”

“Well, do you know of any other ways of here?” Simon said, exasperated.

Elliot was about to respond in the negative but then a thought hit him. “Actually, I do. But you’re not gonna like it.”

7

When the elevator doors opened onto floor 85, Elliot and Simon were faced with an unruly group of youths pointing guns at them. The leader – a gruff-looking man with greying stubble and a scar down one eye – frowned at them.

“Who are you?” The man growled.

“We’re here to help,” Elliot said, raising his hands.

The man spat and then looked at them. “How do I know you’re not Vaughn’s spies?” He glared at Elliot, his gaze travelling up and down Elliot’s body in a way that made Elliot deeply uncomfortable.

“Maybe we better splice ‘em just to make sure,” one of the group said, his finger too jittery on the trigger for Elliot’s liking.

“Phen?” Simon asked.

The man with the scar jerked his gaze to Simon. “The hell are you?”

“I’m Simon. Robert Aldridge’s son. I fixed up your skycar. The ’33 Io9.”

Phen lowered his laser. “Simon? Shit, son, you almost got spliced. What are you doing here?”

He motioned to the others to lower their guns and they did so reluctantly.

“Servitors cleared out our level,” Simon said.

Phen nodded. “We heard. We were just about to lock these elevators.”

“We need to get to the bar,” Elliot broke on.

“You need a drink, sweetie?” Phen asked condescendingly.

“No, I need to meet someone.”

Simon took Elliot’s hand. “I’m trying to get her out of here.”

“Hell, ain’t no way out of here. Haven’t you heard? We’re on lockdown. May as well drink your cares away. Come on.”

Phen led them through the dingy corridors to the bar as the others set to work locking the elevator. As they walked, Phen filled them in.

“Some rebel group bombed the ports so there’s no way in or out without cutting through the dome. Because of those damn fools, Vaughn had all the excuse he needed to declare martial law.”

“*You* didn’t bomb the ports?” Elliot asked.

“Hell no. Why would we want to stop people from leaving? Anyway, here you are.”

They’d arrived at the entrance to the bar – a metal door with fake wood laminate and neon signage. Phen knocked on the door in a special rhythm and after a few seconds it slid open. Elliot and Simon stepped into the gloom. It took a moment for Elliot’s eyes to adjust and then he saw that the floor had been cleared except for several tables that were been pushed together in the center of the room. The flickering light of a muted monitor hung on a side wall showed a vidfeed of the crippled spaceport as captions warning of martial law sped by the bottom of the screen.

A group of people were hunched over the tables in the center of the room, arguing among themselves. A huge, intimidating bouncer loomed in front of Elliot and Simon.

“What do you want?” he snarled.

“We’re looking for Patrick,” Elliot said, squeezing Simon’s hand and hoping desperately that the offer was still good.

One of the men at the table jerked his head around. “Elliot!” Patrick cried.

Patrick broke off from the group and approached Elliot and Simon. Beneath a heavy armored vest he still wore his navy blue academic’s uniform, though it was tattered. He gave Elliot a hearty handshake, his fingers dwarfing Elliot’s small hand. Then he turned to Simon.

“Who’s this?” Patrick asked.

“This is Simon. He’s a...a friend. He lost a lot from Vaughn and wants to help.”

“We’ll need all the help we can get,” Patrick said, shaking Simon’s hand.

“I want to get her out of here. Somewhere safe,” Simon said, re-taking Elliot’s hand.

“The Lockesburg port’s been destroyed and the whole building is on lockdown. There’s nowhere safe.”

“Actually,” Elliot countered. “There’s one ship that still has exit access. The *Torino*.”

The *Torino*. Vaughn’s private ship. It was kept behind the capitol and had its own private launch pad.

Patrick looked at Elliot for a beat and then a wide smile stretched across his face. “Yes,” he laughed. “Oh, yes, that’s good. Come on.” He took Elliot

by the shoulder and ushered him to the group of people by the table. Simon followed behind.

A digital representation of Lockesburg floated in the middle of the table and the men and women around it were arguing over where to attack first, rotating the model back and forth as they made their points.

“Everyone,” Patrick thundered, commanding their attention. “This is Elliot.”

The group looked at him. Some eyed him with suspicion. One gasped. A few drew back.

“She’s that murderer,” a woman said, and the group broke out in an argument.

“Whoa. Whoa. Hold on,” Patrick finally got them to settle down as Elliot stood meekly behind him. “This isn’t Isobel anymore. She’s one of my friends, Elliot.” Patrick stood aside and ushered Elliot forward. He looked up at the angry faces glaring down at him.

Patrick continued, “This is what Vaughn has done. Elliot’s mind was put in isolation. While his mind was exiled, his body was stolen and killed, so they put him back into the body of a murderer. It’s a deliberate provocation by Vaughn. He wants everyone to know that if you go up against him your identity will be shredded, your body destroyed, and you’ll be given someone else’s life. Maybe even someone you know. Elliot’s with us now because he has the most to lose.”

Some of the group appeared to soften at Patrick’s words. He leaned forward and added with a grin, “And Elliot’s got an excellent idea. We’re going to steal Vaughn’s ship right out from under his nose. It’s a symbol of Vaughn’s power and his corruption. And who better to be onboard than Elliot? Someone Vaughn has tried to grind down to dust.”

The group erupted into talk. Some thought it was a good idea. Others weren’t so sure.

“We don’t have a lot of people. We need to be working on sabotage, not taking on Vaughn,” one insisted to some agreement.

“This will get more people on our side,” Patrick insisted. “People are scared because they think Vaughn is invincible with his armored troops and his servitors. Once they see he’s a paper tiger they’ll rally to us.”

“How would we even get into the capital floors?” A woman argued. “They’re heavily guarded, and their guards are *trained*.”

“We’ll need a distraction,” Patrick agreed.

“Like what?” Someone asked.

“Hey,” a rough voice called out from near the wall. “What about this?”

He nodded to the large vidscreen beside him. It was a live feed of a view from one of the satellites orbiting Triton. The soft glow of the planet took up the bottom third of the screen, while the top was filled with the imposing visage of the warship *Hamlet*. It was a long, silvery ship bristling with guns.

The feed cut out suddenly, switching to a closeup of a slim woman with silver hair and a lined face. “This message is for Prime Minister Vaughn. I am UN Delta Zone Security General Chelanda Carver. With the authority vested in me by the United Nations, I hereby request your immediate surrender into our care. The colony will be administered by the UN governing body until such time as free and fair elections can be held. Surrender yourself peacefully so the colony may thrive..”

The feed cut back to the satellite view. As Elliot watched, two missiles darted from the defensive satellites ringing Salopia and rocketed towards the gunship. The *Hamlet* took out one with a hail of laser fire but the other exploded against one of the aft corners. A warning shot gone wrong or a deliberate provocation?

“This is it!” Patrick shouted with glee. “We’ll slip into Vaughn’s capital rooms while his troops prepare for the UN attack. They’ll never see us coming.”

Patrick began ordering the others around and there was a flurry of activity as they sought to gather weapons and contact their peers on the other floors. Simon and Elliot stood aside as the group zoomed in on the floating diagram to determine the best way into the capitol floors. Patrick had one of his aides offer Elliot and Simon some privacy in one of the backrooms while the rest prepared.

“We’ll get you when we’re ready to move out,” Patrick said.

They were led to a store room. Beer kegs and bottles of wine lined one wall. Two molded plastic chairs sat next to a small round table in the corner. When the door slid shut, it blocked out the noise from the preparations next door, leaving Elliot and Simon alone.

“Where do we go once we have Vaughn’s ship?” Elliot wondered aloud. “Maybe Io. I’ve always wanted to live in a sky city.”

Simon took a seat with a sigh and ran his hands through his short hair. Elliot sat sideways on Simon’s lap, one arm resting across Simon’s

shoulders as he gently stroked Simon's scratchy stubbled face. Simon's hand came up to rest on the small of Elliot's back, fingers splaying, the warmth penetrating deep into Elliot's body. It was a natural, comfortable position sitting on Simon's lap, clinging to him, smelling his masculine scent. Definitely a trait of Isobel's, which Elliot was gradually learning to stop struggling against.

"Enceladeus is also nice this time of year," Elliot continued. "Every time of year, really. Surrounded by ocean. It's a new frontier. We could start over."

Simon took Elliot's hand in his own and looked up at him.

"I can't go," Simon said.

"What do you mean?"

"I can't let Vaughn win. I'm here. I'm strong. I'm going to fight."

"Simon, no," Elliot pleaded, his eyes brimming with tears. "Then I'm staying with you."

"We've been through this. Those guys out there only accept you because Patrick backs you. What about everyone else who doesn't know Patrick? How are they going to react when they see you? They'll have guns and they'll be scared. They won't listen to you." Simon squeezed Elliot's hand. "I need you to be safe. For me."

Elliot knew Simon was right but the thought of parting with him made Elliot heavy with sadness. "Simon," he said. "I don't..." Even still, Elliot couldn't bring himself to tell Simon how he felt, afraid acknowledging it would mean the end of himself and the complete sublimation of his personality to Isobel. So Elliot kissed him instead, and the words hung unsaid in the air as their warm lips parted and they clung to each other.

Elliot pressed his hand against Simon's solid chest as they kissed. Simon's spicy masculine scent invaded his mouth and Elliot breathed him in, desperate for every inch of him. He slid his hands through Simon's hair, following the contours of his cheeks and chin and nose with his slender fingers as they kissed. Elliot's core ached for Simon.

He shifted on Simon's lap, felt the growing bulge beneath his padded ass. A hunger built within Elliot's core. He wanted to give himself to Simon in a way he'd never done before. Show him the true depths of his feelings. That he would do *anything* for Simon. Anything except say the words.

Elliot breathed in deeply, inhaling Simon's scent as their tongues met. Elliot nibbled on Simon's lip and then dragged his hands down Simon's

front as he knelt in front of Simon. With nimble fingers, Elliot unzipped Simon's pants and reached in for his manhood. His dainty fingers found Simon's hardness and he gently exposed it. His breath caught in his throat as the shaft rose to full height in his hand, so close to his tiny nose. Isobel's desire urged him onwards and he brought his lips closer to the head until he could stick out his tongue and lick it.

The head of Simon's cock was warm and salty on Elliot's tongue. Desire built inside him and he teased the head of Simon's dick with slow, loving licks before dragging his tongue down the underside of Simon's shaft and then back up. Simon gazed down at him, awestruck, as Elliot locked eyes and swallowed his cock, plump lips opening to welcome in the hard-soft head, filling his mouth with Simon's musky heat.

Elliot dragged his lips down, down Simon's cock, opening his mouth wide to take him all in. Simon swept Elliot's hair aside and groaned as Elliot's nose was buried in his pubic hair and Elliot held him entirely within his warm wet mouth. Elliot sucked gently, his tongue undulating against Simon's shaft, mouth full of cock, the electric scent filling his nose and shooting right down to his core. He rose and fell onto Simon's cock once more, slowly, savoring the taste of Simon. Elliot moaned as he took Simon in once again, his body roiling with delight, luxuriating in the power he commanded with his perfect lips.

Simon thrust up slowly, his hand grasping Elliot's head harder. Elliot followed the rhythm of Simon's hips, dragging his mouth down, down the shaft, filling himself, and then pulling up, leaving Simon's cock slick with the saliva that dripped down Elliot's chin. The taste was divine. The heat perfect in his mouth as Isobel's pleasure exploded within him. His body had little gag reflex, and he was able to hold Simon entirely within him. Elliot moved faster, swirling his head as he swallowed, plump lips following the rigid shaft down and up, down and up.

"Fuck," Simon moaned, gripping the chair with one hand to steady himself.

Elliot tempted his lover with his tongue, gazing up in delight at Simon's face, memorizing every detail. He moaned as he sucked, tongue dancing across Simon's cock. Faster, faster, until he felt it throb between his lips.

Simon groaned, his entire body going rigid, and then the cock between Elliot's lips pulsed as Simon exploded into his mouth with a strangled cry. Elliot drove his lips down as hot cum pumped into his mouth, keeping

himself locked around his lover's shaft as he nosily swallowed every drop, Isobel's delight now his own. It burned down his throat, creamy and salty, joining the heat already there. He gulped it down until Simon's cock slowed and then stilled. Only when Elliot's belly was full did he drag his lips off with a wet pop, then circled his tongue seductively around his lips to mop up the last salty, errant drops.

“Something for you to remember me by,” Elliot smiled shyly as he rose.

Simon grabbed him and pulled him back down onto his lap. “I could never forget you.”

8

By the time Patrick retrieved them, Simon was fully clothed and Elliot had taken a seat in the other chair, legs crossed instinctively like a woman. Patrick handed Simon and Elliot each a gun and a holster, along with a flak jacket.

“You ever used one of these before?” Patrick asked.

Elliot shook his head.

“It’s easy. Just point the hollow end at the bad guy and pull the trigger. Shoots a solid metal slug that will penetrate anything living.”

As they strapped the guns to themselves and tightened the flak jackets, Patrick explained the plan. The UN would probably attempt to take out Vaughn without getting stuck into a wider colony war. They’d send their guardians down to the council using the spaceport entrance that had been sabotaged. The lack of a landing pad would make their entry harder.

“Which is probably why it was Vaughn that sabotaged it,” Elliot cut in.

“No doubt,” Simon added. “And then blamed it on us as an excuse to crack down early. But the UN arrived sooner than he expected.”

The capitol center was guarded by servitors and staffed by mids and uppers, but maintained by the lowers. From them, Patrick had key card access to the ventilation and maintenance room in the middle of the capitol. Patrick, Simon and Elliot would sneak in through the backup ventilation shaft on one of the upper quarters and drop down into an empty store room. A large group of rebels would stage a false attack from the capitol steps, drawing the guards out, at which point Elliot, Simon, and Patrick would proceed up through the capitol levels to Vaughn’s private landing bay. They would steal his ship, broadcast their victory, and put Elliot on board to fly him away to safety.

The rebels streamed out the door, groups splitting off to go up through maintenance shafts, elevator chutes and mechanical rooms where they would meet up with others before all congregating on the capitol level in the 300s. Patrick led Simon and Elliot back to the maintenance lift. The lift had been deliberately jammed on the lows to prevent servitors from coming in, so they had to climb up the cavernous elevator shaft twenty levels to the market floor. It was hard work, especially with the heavy jacket, and they stopped every once in a while to rest. Elliot hooked his arm through the

rungs of the ladder and tried not to look down at the darkened void beneath them.

When they got to the market floor, Patrick cracked open the panel by the door and consulted the screen he wore on a band around his forearm. After a few seconds, he extended a wire from the monitor, connecting it to the wires in the door panel. Pressing some buttons on his forearm device made the door slide open a crack. It was unusually quiet outside in the stalls. Red warning lights flashed on and off while an electronic voice mechanically repeated, "Return to your quarters."

They snuck through the empty stalls, snaking across to the maintenance shaft that connected the mids to the uppers. Halfway across the floor Patrick suddenly stopped.

"Security," he said, motioning for them to take cover in a nearby stall.

They ducked into the darkened exterior and Elliot hid behind a crate, his ear to the floor. Beneath the heavy curtain of the stall he could see the market floor. A few seconds later a trio of heavy boots stomped across his view, accompanied by hooting laughter.

When they faded out of earshot, Elliot sat up. Patrick crept out from behind a cabinet and peered out after the group.

"Those weren't servitors," Elliot said. "Who were they?"

Patrick, still peering out of the curtain to make sure the way was clear, said, "Ordinary citizens who threw in with Vaughn. Anyone who wanted even a little bit of power now has their chance. He's been deputizing squads across the colony to maintain order. Based on how quickly he got this all set up, he's been preparing for a while."

They snuck through the rest of the market unmolested and scrambled into the maintenance shed. Patrick again hacked the elevator and they waited for it to reach their floor. Elliot felt sure the security would hear the rumbling of the elevator and come running, but the doors slid open and the trio hurried in without incident.

They maneuvered their way up the building like this, sneaking across floors to get to the next maintenance elevator, which Patrick would hack. Vaughn had long ago modified the building, with no single shaft leading all the way up the full length of the building as a security precaution. As they rose higher, the security patrols increased until they came to a warren of corridors where they watched from a hidden vantage point in the elevator shaft as servitors swept past.

“What now?” Elliot whispered.

“There may be a way through the vents. Just give me a second.”

But before he could fiddle with the device on his forearm there was a low rumbling sound and the floor shook. The servitors, as one, turned and hurried to the end of the hall.

“Now’s our chance,” Patrick said, climbing onto the floor.

Elliot and Simon hurried after him. As they passed the first corridor, the wall at the end exploded. Elliot was thrown back and skittered across the floor to bump up against the far wall, the wind knocked out of him. His ears rang and his vision swam. Pushing himself up to his feet, he swayed and clutched the wall for support, looking around frantically for Simon. The lights had gone out and the emergency lights were just clicking on, bathing everything in a soft white haze. A fierce wind had kicked up, a freezing vacuum reaching to pull him down the corridor they’d just passed.

Simon was beside him then, wrapping him up. “We have to go!”

Patrick was on his feet already and he urged them along. As Elliot passed the corridor he was nearly pulled off his feet and he grabbed onto Simon. Glancing down the passage, he found that the building simply ended about twenty feet down. Glowing red metal stuck out at crazy angles above the long void. The rest of the floor, and the ones above and below, had been completely obliterated. Already, the systems were kicking in to seal off the building.

“Was that you?” Elliot yelled over the howling wind, as he and Simon caught up with Patrick.

Patrick shook his head. “There’s a lot of people who are using the chaos to settle scores. Maybe even Vaughn himself. Come on!”

They made it to the next elevator shaft and ducked in. The door closed behind them and the pressure equalized. Elliot realized he was shaking and Simon took his hand, giving it a warm squeeze.

After a few more floors without incident, they reached the level just below the capitol. Patrick consulted the device on his forearm.

“Good. Only a few groups ran into trouble. Let’s keep going.”

The elevator door opened onto a gleaming white corridor. Numbered doors were set into the walls on either side. The upper quarters. Elliot had never been here before and was astonished at the cleanliness. He was sure his own mids had never looked like this. No one was around and they hurried down the corridor, Patrick soon stopping at a door. He pulled a

keycard out of a pocket and slid it into the slot by the door. The light turned green and the door slid aside.

The quarters they entered seemed to be under construction. Even in its deconstructed state Elliot saw that it was more opulent than anything he'd ever been in. The rooms were huge and spacious, the main room branching out into separate quarters, each with their own individual living and bedroom space. Wires snaked across the floors and tools sat unused here and there. Some of the walls were unfinished, little more than support beams. Ceiling panels had been pulled down, revealing the climate control system. It was partially dismantled and the air was thin.

Patrick grabbed a few crates and stood them up beneath a partially dismantled ventilation shaft.

“This will get us all the way into the capitol.”

He hoisted Elliot up and Elliot scrambled to gain purchase on the rivets and joins enough to climb up to where the shaft leveled out. Patrick and Simon joined him and they began crawling. The shaft zigged and zagged upwards. Occasionally they would have to climb some more, Patrick directing from behind Elliot on which way to turn.

Finally, they reached a grate and Elliot peered down into a dimly lit room full of equipment and boxes of supplies.

“This is it,” Patrick affirmed.

He levered the grate off and dropped down into the supply room. Elliot went last and Simon helped him down, catching him gently in his strong hands while Elliot draped himself on Simon's shoulders. They gazed at each other for a beat, noses almost touching. Simon's brown eyes were wide with want and Elliot's body echoed with need so badly it was almost dizzying.

“It's clear,” Patrick said, breaking up their reverie. He was peeking out the door and down the hall.

Elliot reluctantly parted from Simon and they hovered around Patrick as Patrick touched some buttons on his forearm screen. A hazy 3D holographic map of the capitol floors sprang into view. Patrick pinched and spun the image with his fingers, zeroing in on a red dot.

“This is us,” he said, then selected the landing pad of the *Torino*, three floors up. “This is where we need to be.”

The *Torino* sat on the launch pad near the edge of the bubble. The 3D map plotted a red-dotted path between the two points. Suddenly, the building shuddered and an alarm buzzed to life.

“That’s our distraction,” Patrick said, drawing his laser. “Stay close.”

They snuck out into the bright capitol hallways. With the lockdown, there were no staff around. The building had an air of desolation and the rooms they passed were still set up as if the people would be back at any moment. Patrick led them through the building and then up a flight of maintenance stairs. This level was more opulent, with faux-marble floors and concealed lighting.

“The ship is one level up,” Patrick said, leading them to a wide junction.

Patrick poked his head around a corner and quickly pulled back.

“Servitors guarding the main stairwell. Three of them.”

“Is there another way?” Simon asked.

Patrick shook his head. “We have to cross this corridor.”

Patrick unstrapped the device from his forearm and slipped it off his arm. He handed it to Elliot, the 3D map still hovering above. It was heavy and warm in Elliot’s hands.

“You two get to the ship. I’ll distract them. Remember, once you get on board, lock it up and grab the comms. There should be a way to do a mass comms override.”

“I’ll figure it out,” Simon affirmed.

“You two run across first. I’ll cover you.”

It was a large junction with no cover. Elliot’s palms grew clammy at the thought of crossing that gap.

“Ready?” Simon said.

Elliot took a breath. “Ready.”

Simon took Elliot’s hand and they dashed out from behind the wall, charging across the corridor. Out of the corner of his eyes, Elliot saw the three armed servitors. Their left arms ended in gun barrels, which they raised in unison at Elliot and Simon.

“Stop!” one called out in its eerie robotic voice.

There was the sizzling crack of a gun from behind them as Patrick opened fire, spraying superheated metal slugs in an arc down the hallway. The servitors ducked aside and focused their return fire on Patrick as Simon and Elliot reached the relative safety of the other side. Elliot looked back once at Patrick ducking back behind the corner as slugs slammed into the wall behind him. Patrick waved them on before firing another burst of shots.

Elliot and Simon followed the map through the warren of offices and meeting rooms. These were carpeted and with expensive furnishings. Obviously designed to impress VIPs as opposed to the workers in the floor below. Another maintenance ladder led up and when they opened the door at the top they were in the huge expanse of the landing bay.

This section of the building seemed open to the atmosphere inside the bubble, but was protected by its own internal bubble that was clear enough to be invisible and let in the gauzy glow of Salopia's atmosphere. The huge expanse of space and wide plaza-like appearance made it the perfect place for Vaughn's speeches and the display of his forces. A wide, red-carpeted staircase ran up from the floor to the landing bay, where the *Torino* sat, gleaming in the lights.

Elliot and Simon paused, holding hands. "Do you know how to pilot that thing?" Elliot asked.

"I can pilot anything," Simon smirked.

There was a slick slurping sound and Simon's smile turned to a grimace. He grunted, suddenly slumping sideways, clutching for Elliot before tumbling to the ground holding his side. Blood gushed from beneath his fingers and Elliot stooped to help him. A shadow fell over Elliot and he spun around to find Asher standing there, a servitor at his side. The blade protruding from Asher's arm was fully extended and dripped red with Simon's blood. Asher wore a captain's red and black top, unzipped to leave his scarred chest exposed. A small hand gun was in a holster around his waist.

"Asher," Simon moaned.

"That's right," Asher laughed, pushing Elliot aside before kicking Simon in the side.

Simon howled and Asher laughed again. Elliot scrambled to his feet but before he could do anything the servitor was next to him, gun barrel pressed against Elliot's jaw. Elliot dropped Patrick's arm monitor with a clang.

"How did you find us?" Simon groaned.

Asher laughed. "I'm a low. Because of that, people trust that I'm anti-Vaughn and tell me things. Like attack plans. Distraction plans. Escape plans." Asher punctuated each of this with another kick at Simon. Simon curled into a ball to protect himself as Elliot stifled a gasp.

"You spent all this time fighting Vaughn," Asher said, peering down at Simon. "When there's much more reward in joining him. I'm a captain

now!”

“And what happens when the UN comes? You’ll be arrested,” Simon managed, his breath ragged, blood dripping from his lips.

“No,” Asher shrugged, “I’ll just change sides. Slip away. Means I better take what’s mine while I have the chance.” Asher turned to Elliot. “Now. We have some unfinished business.”

“Leave her alone,” Simon groaned, struggling to sit up.

“Keep your gun trained on him,” Asher told the servitor. “He can watch me fuck his girlfriend before he dies.”

The pressure disappeared from Elliot’s jaw as the servitor stood over Simon and trained his gun on Simon’s forehead.

Asher grabbed Elliot by the arm and pulled him close, holding the knife up to Elliot’s face. Streaks of Simon’s blood ran down the gleaming blade. Elliot felt Asher’s hand on his ass, fingers digging into the sensitive skin. Elliot was forced up against the smooth captain’s uniform Asher wore. He kneaded the expensive fabric, stroking it gently. Isobel’s instincts took over, forcing the fear from his mind and Elliot leaned into it.

“Mmm, a captain,” he whispered.

“What’s that?” Asher growled.

Elliot looked up into Asher’s scarred face. “I’ve never been with someone of any rank before. I’ve had boys. But what I really *need* is a man.”

Elliot stuck out his tongue and licked Asher’s long blade, closing his eyes to savor the iron taste of Simon’s blood as the smell filled his nostrils. Elliot opened his eyes wide and gazed up at Asher.

“And what about your boyfriend here?” Asher said.

Elliot leaned against Asher, his hand sliding past the uniform to the scarred chest as he looked down at Simon and shrugged. “The only thing I’ve wanted is a powerful man. Let him watch what a real man can do.”

Elliot’s motions were instinctual, one hand gliding up Asher’s back to his bony head as the other followed the line of his chest up to the shoulder. Elliot brought their lips together, ignoring Simon’s gasp as Asher’s rancid breath nearly choked him. Still, he forced himself to kiss the man, his nose pressed against Asher’s scarred cheek.

The hand on Elliot’s ass grabbed harder, and Asher chuckled into Elliot’s mouth. As they kissed, Elliot dragged his hand down Asher’s shoulder, to the wrist that still held the blade close to Elliot’s cheek. Elliot

ran on Isobel's instincts now as he grinded his body against Asher, undulating against his thighs, letting his breasts brush against Asher's chest. He knew how seductive his body could be. Elliot pulled back, mouth open, white teeth glittering.

"I've always wanted to fuck a captain," Elliot moaned softly.

Asher grinned and kissed him again. Elliot's hand trailed up the back of Asher's hand, gently wrapping around it until he held Asher's hand in his own, the silvery blade poking out of the underside of Asher's wrist cold against Elliot's cheek. Elliot's other hand slid down Asher's back, down to his hips, gripping and squeezing as he continued undulating against him, feeling Asher growing hard beneath his pants.

"Oh, Asher," Elliot moaned between kisses.

Asher dragged his body against Elliot, awash in need and desperation. Elliot gently guided Asher's blade away from his cheek, so that the blade sat between them, resting on Asher's chest, the glittering metal point aimed up towards their lips. His kisses grew deeper as he tightened his grip around Asher's hand, feeling Asher give in to his desire, to his body. Elliot pulled away.

"Will you be gentle?" Elliot asked, batting his soft eyes.

"No," Asher grinned.

"Neither will I," Elliot whispered, lips quirking into a half smile.

Elliot tightened his grip on Asher's blade hand and jammed it up in to Asher's neck. The blade slid cleanly through his jugular. Slice here. Cut there. Elliot's other hand was already unholstering the gun and he turned and shot the servitor between the eyes as Asher staggered back, gurgling. His eyes were wide, blood spilling from his neck where the blade remained jammed deep inside even as he tried to jerk it free with his other hand. He fell to his knees, dead before he hit the floor.

Elliot ran to Simon and helped him sit up before throwing his arms around him and covering his face with kisses.

"Simon, Simon, Simon," Elliot cried, stroking Simon's face. "I need you. I...I love you."

They kissed, Simon's hand coming up to splay against Elliot's soft face. Their breath mingled and Simon began to straddle Simon when he groaned and pulled back. Blood still streamed from the deep gash in his abdomen.

"We've got to get you fixed up," Elliot said, eyes darting around the huge open space for anything that could help. Vaughn's golden ship sat at

the top of the stairwell. “The *Torino*. It’s got a med bay. Come on.”

Elliot helped Simon to his feet and they staggered to the stairs, Elliot cradling Patrick’s heavy metallic armband under one hand as Simon leaned heavily on him. Another explosion rocked the building as they reached the stairs, almost sending Simon to the floor in his weakened state. They crawled up the stairs at a glacial pace, Simon straining at each step, leaning heavily on Elliot. His face was ashen by the time they reached the top and a trail of dark red blood had soaked into the carpeted stairs. The ramp of the ship yawned before them and Simon gripped the struts to pull himself up, Elliot staggering under his weight.

They made it to the med bay, where Simon collapsed onto the nearest operating table, his breathing shallow. Elliot fiddled with the automatic systems, hoping they could at least stabilize Simon. The medical systems whirred, mechanical arms studded with needles and scalpels and cameras dropping down to prod and explore Simon’s side. Simon grabbed Elliot’s arm.

“You have to...get out of here. Unlock the ship...control room outside,” Simon said through gritted teeth before falling back with a groan, his eyes closed.

“Simon? Simon?” Elliot said, patting Simon’s cheek. No response.

The med bay system began its work and Elliot hoped it wasn’t too late. Another explosion thundered from outside, rocking the ship.

“Don’t die on me,” Elliot kissed Simon again.

Elliot ran back down the ship’s ramp. There was a control room nearby, a reinforced metal structure with triple plated windows. He made a step towards it but froze at the sound of a familiar, booming voice.

“Elliot!”

Elliot turned to find Vaughn striding up the stairs. But what made Elliot gasp was the servitor following behind. His head was shaved on each side, the rest of his white-blond hair slicked back over his head. Tattoos snaked down his neck and he wore a faux-leather jacket and pants, both black and grey with orange trim. He’d been minimally modified, only his left arm replaced with a metallic robot hand. But otherwise...it was still Elliot. His body was alive!

“You’re much more trouble than I thought,” Vaughn growled as he reached the top of the stairs.

Elliot glanced back and forth between Vaughn and his former body, now a mindless servitor. But if it was alive that meant there was a chance that Elliot could return to it. Hope battled with despair inside him.

“My...my body,” Elliot gulped, taking a step back and clutching Patrick’s armband as Vaughn came towards him.

Vaughn stopped and grinned. “Yes. You like it? He’s one of my personal bodyguards. You won’t believe the things I’ve made him do. The people I’ve made him kill. The humiliations I’ve put him through.”

“They said my body died,” Elliot said, stepping back and trying to put the ship’s ramp between himself and Vaughn.

“I lied,” Vaughn shrugged, his voice growing louder. “But you only have yourself to blame. You started all this, Elliot,” Vaughn said. “Started the ‘resistance’. So I made an example out of you and kept your body around as my personal plaything. And now...because of you I’ve lost everything!” Vaughn ended with a shout, still advancing on Elliot.

Elliot ducked beneath one of the legs of the shuttle as Vaughn closed in. “I think it’s only fair that you end it.” Vaughn turned to the Elliot servitor. “Kill him.”

Elliot’s former body ducked beneath the ship towards Elliot as Vaughn turned for the control room. Elliot retreated but the servitor was fast, dodging and weaving around the legs of the ship and the electronic struts holding it to the landing bay. Finally, Elliot turned and ran, coming back out from under the ship on the other side. He *couldn’t* kill his body. He didn’t want to hurt it. He wanted back inside it.

Elliot darted around frantically for any sort of weapon as the servitor closed in, weaving to match him. Elliot was on the edge of the stairs, about to run down when he felt hands grab the back of his top and fling him down to the ground. Elliot rolled onto his back as the servitor knelt and raised his fist to pummel Elliot. For a second the world stood still as Elliot watched his former features, blank but handsome, turned into a mindless machine. He needed his body alive but first he needed to survive.

Elliot lashed out with the metal armband, smashing it across his former features. There was a sickening crack as his former nose broke and the servitor fell back, picking himself up almost immediately just on the edge of the first step. Elliot struggled to his feet and the Elliot servitor grabbed him from behind and spun him around, swinging his fist at Elliot’s pretty face. Elliot ducked but took a glancing blow to his temple that brought stars to

his vision. He lashed out again with the armband but the servitor dodged and slammed a fist into Elliot's midsection.

The air whooshed out of Elliot's lungs and he fell to the floor, battling for breath as his vision went grey. The clunk of the shuttle locks being released came from behind him as the servitor loomed over him. Elliot rolled onto his back and lashed out with his foot, kicking the servitor as hard as he could in the shin. The servitor's foot flew back and he staggered on the other foot. Losing his balance, he began to fall forward onto Elliot, fist raised for a punishing blow. Elliot's new body didn't stand a chance against his old one in a close quarters fight. On instinct, Elliot reared both his legs back and kicked the servitor in the chest as hard as he could. The impact jolted Elliot's teeth but sent the servitor flying backwards and down the stairs.

Elliot's former body landed on its neck with a sickening crunch, bouncing down the rest of the stairs, arms and legs flying in a tangle until it landed in a crumpled heap at the bottom of the staircase, neck bent at an unnatural angle. Elliot stood on weak legs and gazed down at his old self. The arms and legs quivered as the servitor tried to complete Vaughn's commands with its broken body before it gave up and lay still. Dead for real this time.

Before Elliot could even mourn the loss of himself for the second time, an explosion ripped open the main doors to the landing bay at the bottom of the stairs. Helmeted UN guardians flooded into the room, guns raised up towards the ship where Elliot stood. They wore the dark metal hoods and heavy armor of commandos, their faces obscured by red visors.

Someone grabbed him from behind, arm tight against his neck, nearly choking him as something cold pressed against his temple.

"Stay right there or I'll fucking kill her!" Vaughn shouted.

Elliot cried out before his breath was choked back. He could smell Vaughn's cloying perfume as his rough hands gripped him tighter. Elliot struggled to breath as Vaughn dragged him backwards to the shuttle ramp. The guardians advanced cautiously up the stairs, guns drawn.

"Release the civilian," one said, "And we can work on a plea deal."

Vaughn laughed mirthlessly. "You think I trust a word you say? This was *my* planet and you took it from me!"

Vaughn was nearly hysterical. It was all Elliot could do to remain conscious as Vaughn dragged him backwards, step by step up the ramp into

the *Torino*.

The guardians paused, guns still drawn.

“There is still a chance for mercy,” the leader said.

“Here’s my deal. You let me go and I won’t throw her out the airlock.”

Vaughn snarled.

Elliot was yanked backwards up the ramp, struggling in Vaughn’s arms. He would *not* be stuck in this body with Vaughn. Alone on a shuttle. The thought disgusted him but he was powerless.

“I’ll take her and start my own planet. We’ll—”

There was a meaty thud and suddenly Vaughn’s grip went slack. Elliot twisted out of his grip with a gasp and turned in time to see Vaughn crumple to the ground. Behind him, Simon leaned against the wall, one hand holding his still-bleeding abdomen, the other holding a thick wrench. He gasped with pain and Elliot ran to him, easing him down to rest on the floor, his head in Elliot’s lap. The guardians swarmed around Vaughn’s body.

Elliot stroked Simon’s hair, slick with sweat. “My body...” Elliot sniffed. “It was alive. The whole time. I could have had it this whole time.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” Simon whispered, reaching for Elliot. But then...we would never have each other.”

Elliot bent and kissed him then as tears streamed down his face. Tears for his old life and his new, filled with more love for Simon than he ever thought possible.

9

Simon and Elliot walked hand in hand down the corridor of the lows. Most of the battle scars had been repaired, only a few dents or scorch marks evidence that the colony had been at war. It was worse on the upper levels, were some floors needed to be rebuilt from scratch.

They passed a few UN guardians, their presence welcome but unneeded on this level. Even in their heavy armor the UN guardians were more human than the servitors had ever been. The servitor program itself had been abolished, those in mind isolation returned to their former bodies wherever possible. Though there were still some minds whose bodies were no longer functional and there was talk about what to do with them.

Because of that, Elliot had become much discussed, as experts debated the merits of placing someone's mind in another person's body. Elliot was interviewed and tested and poked and prodded. Isobel's body became the public face of the ex-servitor program, a reminder of the past and hope for the future.

People glanced at them as they walked the corridors together. Elliot didn't mind anymore. The glances were curiosity rather than hatred.

They met Simon's parents leaving the garage and said goodnight before making their way up to the bedroom above the garage. They'd removed the junk and organized the space to make it their own. Elliot didn't feel fully comfortable in his family's quarters. That was where the old Elliot lived. This new Elliot needed a new space. A space all her own.

When the door closed behind them, they tumbled into each other's arms.

"Oh, Ella," Simon moaned, using Elliot's new name as he kissed her cheek and nibbled her neck.

Ella reached behind Simon and scrabbled for his top, yanking it off over his head before kissing her way across his chest. He was solid and masculine and the scent of him was divine. He wrapped her up in his solid arms and she breathed in his warmth, his spicy masculine scent. Her hands traced his muscles, fingers splayed to grab every inch, greedy for him.

Simon did the same to her, pulling her top off before clasping her breasts. He kissed her as his hands gently stroked each tit, fingers playing delightfully across Ella's warm skin. She moaned into his mouth as he

tweaked her nipple, stroking it into sharp arousal. Bending his head, he sucked on her, hot wet breath surrounding her sensitive peaks as she sighed and ran her fingers through his hair.

She unbuttoned his pants and slipped them off, letting his manhood jump to attention between them before shucking off her own pants. He feasted on her body, delighting in every inch of her curves, lips sucking on her tits, hands following her up and down, breasts, back, belly, butt, before lifting her and dropping her into bed as she giggled and clung to him.

His cock was trapped between them and she reached for it, stroking the solid heat she'd come to know so well, to *crave*. Her body called out for it, heat concentrating in her core, moisture gathering between her legs. She dragged herself on him, legs clasped around his back. The head of his cock slid up to her budding clit and she moaned. Pleasure made her shiver. She clutched him and he feasted on her tits, fast and greedy for her body, pinching almost painfully. It was the *need* that made her burn. He needed her like nothing else and she welcomed him inside.

He slipped into her wet heat, cock filling her slowly. She growled and scraped at his back, urging him in deeper, delighting in each inch as his cock spread her slick cunt apart. Finally, he was lodged deep inside and she had the wonderful fullness, of knowing she held him entirely inside him. They kissed as he moved slowly, in and out, luxuriating in each sopping inch of her.

His breath came faster. Her legs clutched him, fingers digging into his back. Her moans grew louder, cries rising in pitch. She threw her head back into the pillow and clutched herself as he lay above her and thrust into her with wild grunts. He drove in deep and she took him all, urging him faster, harder, until with a wild growl he came. Wet heat filled her and sent her over the edge. Her body climaxed as he throbbed inside her. Pleasure boiled up from her core, making her vision white. She clutched at him, never wanting him to leave, wanting him to fill her, to drive deep, deep inside and stay there forever. Each beautiful pulse made her ache with pleasure.

When he finished he dropped heavily on her, kissing her nose, her cheeks, her eyelids. When he rolled off her she felt the familiar ache of emptiness, and rolled over to reach for him, to kiss him, to hold his body close. Ella needed Simon. She belonged with him. For the first time since waking up in this body, Ella had found the place where she belonged.

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About the Author

There's something alluring about body swaps, sexual and freeing at the same time. I love to explore all sides of the phenomenon: the kinky, the dirty, the loving, the degrading, the amazing. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

I also do commissions! For more stories and my commission rates and contact info visit my website bodyswapstories.com.

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