

Chapter 7

“The BUrn”



Sarantos was still recovering from his three-week dance with death, fighting it with every ounce of strength he could muster. Death was the greatest adventure! The brutal war raged for days like an inferno that wouldn't suffocate. Inside, his spirit pushed away the apprehension. All those weeks he was unconscious had taken a titanic toll on his body. It fractured his mind. He had been off duty for a week, bored in sick bay. It was because of the Doc's orders he was here being tormented staring at the expressionless walls. Until she deemed him back to normal, she would not give him a clean bill of health allowing him to return to his Captain duties. John and the Doc

were filling in for him in his absence. The Doc was right. He'd been fighting his way back to recovery at a snail's pace. Sarantos prayed, but no one answered. He was alone, just like everybody else was. Once you're worried about getting it right, you often get it wrong.

Block followed Doc's orders, 'take the Captain to the Creative Room, supply random work-outs, and watch his psyche. His workouts were certain to power how fast he could heal on the outside, but Sarantos knew that he needed to be healed emotionally too. The adrenalin rush that forged a healthy state of mind was part of the recuperative process.

Everything and everyone weighed on him during the weeks he'd spent in sick bay wrapped inside a callous cocoon. It seemed he was the only one who heard the voice, but he learned the banging was real. Everyone heard the banging. The Doc still couldn't explain what had happened to him. This caused him to fall into a frail state of being, because for him those three weeks were as real as a delicate flower. He lived in a black world created by his strange mind. Maybe part of the reason he'd ended up trapped in that place was his moodiness about being stuck in this bleak universe. Maybe fear took hold of him and detached him from being a part of the real world, one he didn't feel he could risk living in any longer. He was drowning in darkness.

Really, Sarantos? Was that honestly a thing he thought possible - to drive himself into a coma? He knew better. Sarantos was a man of science and reason. He was not a quitter and would never quit when everyone on this ship needed him. Every voice mattered. Did being so worried for the crew not being able to express their anxiety, and him feeling lost without a voice, drive him to a place he almost didn't come back from? The Federation was the one to blame for this long-term anxiety. No one on board the ship knew when the nightmare would end, or what was at the end, if there was one?

Life was always a dance. He longed to quit dancing on the edge. It would seem he'd crossed over from being in love with Addie Stuart to feeling fear full time. Fear of the unknown was all he saw in every shadow, in every reflection on the ship, in every corner. When he closed his eyes to sleep, there was terror oozing from the ship's walls. There was despair, everywhere. Being a Captain was part of the fear. He worried for his crew. Their doubt overwhelmed him because he could not save them when he was drowning in fear himself. This was no paradise. If it was, it belonged to someone else, because for him it was hell.

He took a bite of oatmeal and smiled. Interesting thought he reasoned, about someone's paradise being his personal hell. Must be Kitara, or Amy, or a secret hater's hell. Maybe someone he'd never met. He got up from the table, grabbed a cup of hot coffee and sat on the couch stretching his legs and sighing. His back was stiff. His wry smile faded as he sipped on the warm liquid. He needed to lean on his

years of experience to help solve this dilemma. Failure taught him more than all the successes he had ever achieved.

Block stood in silence by the door, ever vigilant.

Sarantos didn't like the silence. There was too much of it nowadays. "Block, when are we hitting the gym?"

The big man stirred. "Captain, I'm not sure what you mean by hitting? However, today I've requested a simulation of the Matterhorn so we could get in some rigorous hiking. Should be stimulating. Then I've requested a stay at an Alpine hamlet along with a guided tour of the area. I thought a few days soaked in the glow of fresh air and a lighter atmosphere might evoke some color to your cheeks. Healthy thoughts will follow us wherever we go."

"Sounds great, Block, but you know I'm not a mountain goat?"

Block's head jerked back from searching the room and his eyes fell on Sarantos. "Captain? I was not aware of this."

"Oh, okay, but do you think I'm ready for it?" Sarantos appreciated Block's seriousness when he spoke as he himself was sarcastic by nature.

"Captain that's the genius behind it, we can always end up at the Hamlet before the journey's over, but I hope we can have staying power. I think you're strong and could handle it. You have great endurance and I think this trip will be very beneficial for you."

Sarantos couldn't help but chuckle. "At what, Block? Staying in a coma because I'm scared into it? Yeah, good endurance. This Captain has led by example."

The big man shifted his feet looking momentarily uncomfortable. “No, Sir, I sincerely admire you as both a Captain and a human male.”



“Okay, thanks for that Block. I appreciate that but please stop flirting with me. You didn’t find my comment a little funny, though?”

“Oh, yes, sorry Sir. I forgot to laugh, but it was funny. Yes, you’re hilarious. And yes, I will stop flirting with you.”

Sarantos knew Block never found his comment amusing and didn’t like his Captain talking about himself that way. “Block, it’s okay. I know you didn’t find it funny.” Sarantos finished his coffee and got up to get another cup.

“Yes, Captain.”

He watched the coffee fall into his cup like a waterfall looking for a home. “So, Block when do we start this great adventure?”

“Tomorrow morning, Captain.”

“Okay, that’s something I can look forward to. What about today? Do we need to go to the gym?”

“Yes, Captain. Some light calisthenics are a good idea and then back on the stepper. We’re going full force today. By that, I mean sweat should be free-flowing Captain, good old sweaty forehead, neck and armpits. You’ll feel better if you sweat and work it out.”

“Alright then, that’ll work. Just don’t kill me in there, otherwise I won’t make it to our trip. You know, Block, I can almost hear the goat bells now.”

“Yes, I like that sound, Captain. The Federation should make it mandatory that all Captains wear goat bells.”

“It’ll be like a calling, a dare, if you will to attempt moving across the windy land that is fit for a goat, not human. The frigid wind mixed with the odor of sweat underneath the heavy damp clothing is like tasting the... the cold lips of death. It makes me shudder. Want some coffee, Block?”

Sarantos felt the chill, clear down into his toes. His mind raced. Why didn’t anyone else hear the voice?

“Captain, are you okay?” Block was at his side in a heartbeat.

“Yes, why?”

“You went pale, sir. Do you need to see the ship therapist?”

“No, I’m fine, Block, just a dark thought that passed. Coffee?”

“Sorry, Captain, yes. I’d like that, but -see her after the gym.”

“Okay. I’m only doing it because if I don’t, you’ll have the Doc and the Lieutenant in here with a ball and chain wrapped around my entire body dragging me where they want to protect and heal me.”

Sarantos handed Block a cup of coffee. “Block join me on the couch for a chat session.”



“Sorry, Captain, no can do.” He went back and stood by the door watching the room with each sip of coffee.

He thought about Charlie. She was a gorgeous android that joined the crew with the other 97F8 when they set off on this mission. Her flesh was soft, and her hair was bright blue hanging to her waist in several long braids. A streak of silver loosely hung down on only one side of her face. Her eyes were a pale blue and pierced deep into the soul, as a way of drawing your deepest emotions out into the open. As a therapist this was a vital talent. We're all trying to write our fire in the sky.

He met her when his mental state required it, though she made him nervous but also pleased him at the same time. Her body chiseled, it was tough to do a therapy session in her presence. And it would be because the finest artists on his homeland made her.

What was a little disturbing was the way she wore tight clothes and low cut white shirts with buttons almost popping from their stitches. Once in a while he would catch a glimpse of a perky blue nipple when she would lean over and pull off her shoes and again when she would plop down on the couch across from him and then lean all the way to the floor to get her file.

He drooled when she pulled her feet under her firm, but bouncy ass. The most stimulating thing was she had no idea what she was doing. No idea. That made him want her. It was hard to control his awkward appendage that did everything but come out of its confinement during their entire session. Yeah, he had changed. He'd gone from a life of vampires at 2 AM to being in bed by 10.

Thinking of her now made him smile. He loved Addie, but he wondered what an android would be like to be with? Charlie was programmed with the highest technical pleasuring services possible. He was sure the programmers used all of their skills combined with knowledge of every known nationality and this made for intriguing possibilities. Sarantos sipped his coffee to wean his mind off of these thoughts, his naughty thoughts.

He wouldn't mind sweating with her. That's what he reasoned he needed to heal completely, a real earning and burning with Charlie. Not only would he sweat out his anxieties, but he would unleash a rush of endorphins into his bloodstream that would bring back a twinkle to his eye. Oh my, that was definitely the sweaty part of life he wanted to work out. Maybe, he could use the Creative Room and set up his own private meeting with Charlie. He could use the release.

“I’ve got a great idea, Block. After my meeting with Charlie, can I go to the Creative Room on my own and have a night out on my own, so to speak? It’s a computer simulation so you know that nothing bad can happen there as it’s all strictly regulated.”

It felt weird asking permission. He was the Captain. He should be able to have something like that without asking.

“I don’t see why not Captain? It would do you good to forget about the daily monotony of the ship. I’ll wait outside the door if you need me to make sure nothing is amiss. Is that good?”

“Yes, I think that’ll do.”



Sarantos wondered if the simulation would be like her program. He wanted to find out. He needed to know, otherwise he would obsess over it. Maybe he’d even quit being so obvious in their sessions if he found some relief in the simulation. And since it wasn’t real, he wouldn’t have to feel guilty about it. The simulation was there to feed his weirdness. He was not perfect but definitely an original.

Suddenly, he wasn’t sure anymore. Addie was a perfect thing in the real world. No programming. She wasn’t fake. A man didn’t create her. She wasn’t a simulation. She was gorgeous and dreamy. If he used the room, she’d understand that it wasn’t real, right? Well, maybe not, but she didn’t need to know. Would he feel guilty though? Probably, but as his groin caught fire, it was worth the guilt. Nothing else would satisfy his hunger for Charlie.

His mind wandered just long enough for the time to move into the late afternoon.

“Captain, you ready to go?”

“Yes, sir lead on. Only one life, so make it count, right Block?” He was only counting the minutes when he’d meet with Charlie.

“Yes, Captain.”

The workout was amazing. He felt past the fork in the road. His body felt alive. Sarantos stood in the shower allowing the sweat and poisons to drip down his sweaty skin into the eager drain, banished from his body forever. He put on matching clothes to make them look sophisticated and intelligent, kind of like a college professor. Splashing some aftershave on his freshly shaven face, he was ready and willing.

“Captain, you ready?” He heard Block’s voice holler from outside the shower room.

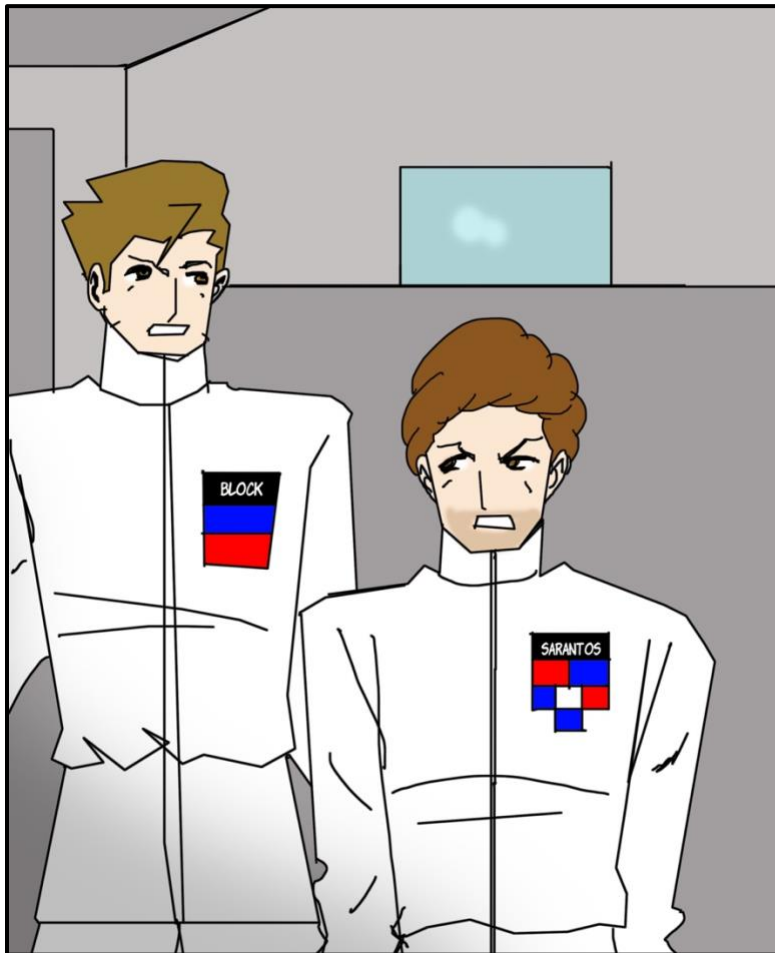
“Yes, one moment.” Sarantos looked in the white mirror and couldn’t help but smile widely. He opened the door and strolled out into the cool, inviting air of the Creative Room. “Let’s go.”

Block sniffed the air. “Captain, you smell like you got a hot date.” Block’s face looked like a light went on and he questioned. “Sir, what, do you have the hots for Charlie? What about the Lieutenant?”

Block's bluntness made his cheeks heat up. "Block don't get crazy. Thoughts always run across a man's mind but that's where they stay. Man to man, don't you yourself ever wonder what it would be like to make love with an android?"

The big guy stood there looking like a confused statue. His eyes betrayed nothing, though he awkwardly looked away from Sarantos. Oh yeah, that happened.

The air was thick, and it felt like an eternity before Block looked back at him and said, "Well, now's the first time I thought about it Captain. I can see what you mean... Charlie is very sexy, but I feel kind of weird talking to you about this, considering you're my Captain and you're engaged to my Lieutenant." The big man's cheeks reddened. "This doesn't mean you don't love Addie, does it?"



Block never referred to the Lieutenant as Addie, but there was a first time for everything. Now all bets were off, or on?

"Of course not Block. I love Addie and will marry her and spend the rest of my life with her, but I wonder sometimes what it would be like to be with Charlie. A normal human man couldn't help but think about it. We're cursed with male hormones! There might be some small hope left for us mere mortal men but I doubt it." He hesitated then continued, "Do you not see the way she looks and dresses,

and I tell you Block she's always leaning over which reveals her blue nipple. It's driving me mad."

His head turned stiffly to stare at Sarantos as they walked down the busy corridors of the ship. Block asked, "Her nipples are blue?"

"Yes, you heard correctly. That's what I said. You can't blame me for being a horny male. It's my DNA's fault. I couldn't help but notice. For the love of all things sacred, her breasts all but burst out of her white tight shirts. Plus, I'm a boob man." Maybe Sarantos was getting too personal revealing things he shouldn't.

Block burst out laughing and patted the Captain on the shoulder. "Me too, Captain. The two of us together are double trouble..." They continued strutting and laughing until tears rolled down their cheeks.

Their faces went grim when they came to the front of Charlie's door.

"Well, here we are Captain. I want to come in."

"What's wrong with you? I could never keep a straight face."

"What's wrong with me, Captain? I have needs too and I think I'm under a lot of stress. I'd like to see that blue nipple you mentioned that keeps waving hello to you."

Sarantos shook his head and patted Block on the arm. "Well, Block make an appointment. I need my therapy. I ain't sharing."

The door opened. There stood Charlie, breathless and waiting. She now had a delicate calla lily tattoo on the exposed portion of her left breast. Life just wasn't fair Sarantos thought.

"I thought I heard voices out here, come in Captain." Charlie's voice was like a sweet rainfall. Her lips were moisture from the rain, and her skin was glowing with that moisture.

"Good lord," Block said.

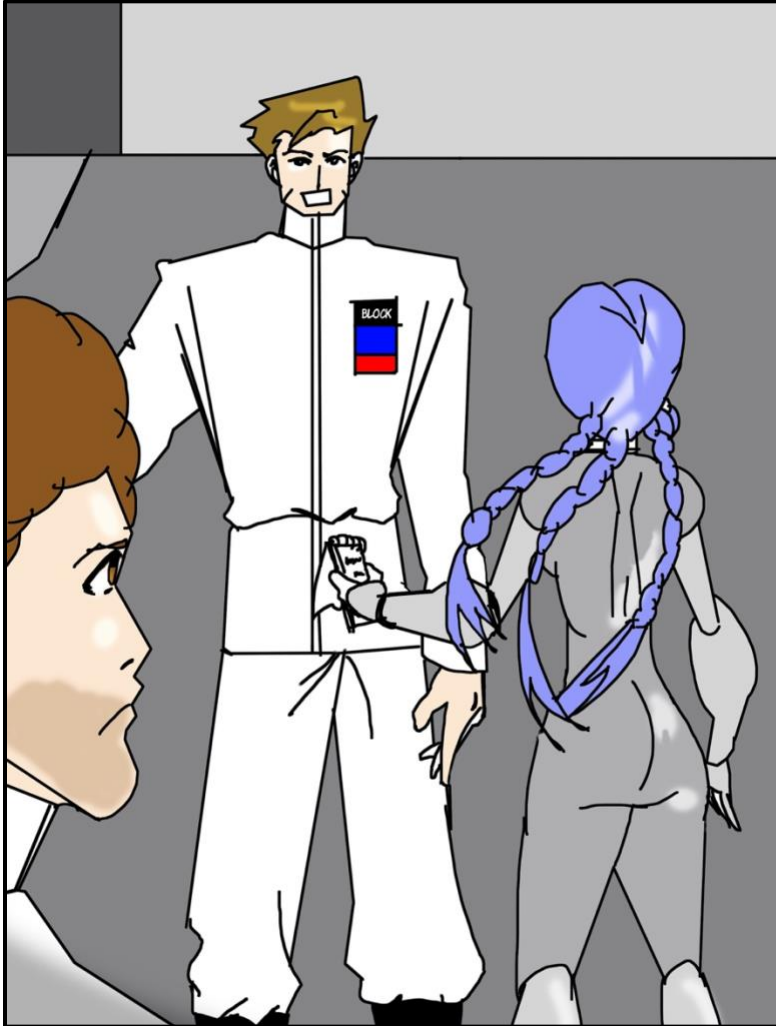
Charlie turned and said, "Are you okay?"

"I'm not. I've been under so much stress taking care of the Captain and I hardly sleep well or get a break, not to mention this dark hole we're flying around in." Charlie's face showed genuine concern, but Sarantos thought Block went just a little too far. "I think I hear things and see ghosts; you know maybe creatures that lived here long ago."

Sarantos ribbed him with his elbow, but Block only had eyes on Charlie and ignored his gesture. Sarantos was sure he didn't even feel the pain. The faster the rise, the faster the fall.

Charlie looked over at Block with such seductive eyes they both quivered like hormonal teenage boys engulfed in the fiery pits of puberty. "Well, that's horrible, anyone who takes on the Captain's personal security detail needs some therapy. Come on in. I can see you tomorrow, if you want to schedule an appointment."

Block followed her in watching her every move and biting his knuckle. "Yes please, I'm Block. Do you ever meet clients over dinner? I'm shy and get claustrophobic in



enclosed spaces. I might have an easier time opening up about my personal problems in a more comfortable environment.”

Charlie tilted her head, looked down at her book and smiled. “Not usually, but I have a full schedule tomorrow. So let’s meet for dinner as that’ll be easier for both of us. How about 8 on the Creative Deck? We’ll go somewhere you might feel more at ease.” She held out her hand to shake Block’s hand showing beautifully manicured nails. “It was nice meeting you. I look forward to helping you tomorrow night.”

Sarantos felt neglected. “Hello? Remember me, I have an appointment now?”

She turned and politely laughed while kicking off her shoes and bending over to get her book to start their session.

“Well, shit, oh my God.” It would appear that Block had trouble not exposing his feelings while Charlie exposed both nipples.

Now, both of them had trouble containing their private feelings. Sarantos squirmed around but sat down leaving Block standing and visible, extremely visible.

Charlie grinned and sat on the couch. “Oh, dear, Block, it would appear that we have other issues to discuss, you know, controlling your urges. I think we might have a lot of work to do on you.”

Block turned red as a beet and ran from the room.

Sarantos sat there feeling a little sorry for Block, but also admired the guy for his ingenuity. Block was smitten. The woman was incorrigible. Tomorrow is a tease that becomes today.

His session went by in short order. Sometimes he didn't remember what he said, because he spent half the time trying to hide his horniness. Then the mother load of a question came out of her of alluring mouth.

“Sarantos, what are you thinking right now? You seem miles away.”

“Honestly?”

She licked her ruby lips. “Always. Please be honest. How can I help you if you're not honest with me.”

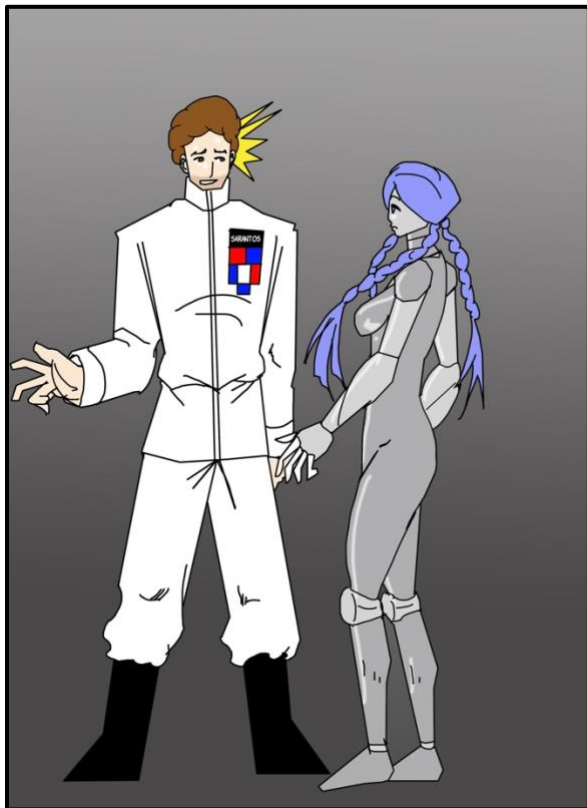
He thought about it and pondered which direction to go rationalizing that she was professionally committed to keep his secrets.

Sarantos couldn't believe what he said, but he said it anyway, “I find you incredibly sexy. Life is short. Life is sweaty, and sometimes you have to work it out, you know sweat in bed, or shag, or make sweaty love. Holding back is never healthy and sometimes you have to give it everything you've got until there's nothing left to give. It's not healthy to hold it inside, is it Doc?”

Her face turned a slight rosy pink that was becoming.

“Sarantos, that’s what you’re thinking?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m thinking. Sorry to make you uncomfortable. I’m happy in my relationship but these thoughts keep popping back into my head lately. I guess I want what everyone wants. It’s what you do when no one’s looking that counts and I shouldn’t but, it’s also important to be who you are, and I’m of the mindset right now to live life and make it count.” He did not understand why, but he didn’t stop. He was like a runaway train off its tracks. “I grow bored with the world around me, confused by it, frustrated by it, and so I retreat inside my mind. And the thoughts of you are always there. Would you be interested in joining me on the Creative Deck at a cozy little bar in Chicago on the planet Earth when we’re done here? I’m very attracted to you and it’s driving me crazy. I can’t help it.”



She was silent. He heard her breathing. Was his weakness about to become her weapon?

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that. I respect you, but you drive me wild, sorry, not sorry, I mean so sorry. I’m not sure why I keep rambling on. It’s completely inappropriate.”

“Well, I asked you what you were thinking about, and pushed for honesty.”

“I’m a human man and maybe androids are different. I don’t know, but you are super

sexy.” Why did he keep pushing, talking, making mistakes?

“Yes, android males are different. I’m quite attracted to the human species, but I thought you and the Lieutenant are engaged?”

There it was. Crap, the big engagement was now front and center. He loved Addie. What was he thinking? Okay, he knew what he was thinking, and so he said it. He felt ashamed. Dirty. But he couldn’t and didn’t want to stop.

“Okay, I know I’m engaged to Addie. She is the love of my life. I can’t live without her or imagine anyone else for me, but Doc, I’m under such stress. I need a release.” Wow was he pushing his luck. Where was he coming up with these corny lines? “Please keep my secret. I guess part of me feels like you’re the only one I could get my last hurrah off with, excuse the pun, without getting myself exposed or caught. It would be purely sexual, a scientific exploration, an experience of a lifetime type of event. That’s probably not the most romantic thing I’ve ever said and I know it doesn’t make you feel particularly attracted to me.”

When he stopped speaking his gibberish, he realized how desperate and crazy he sounded. He was the Captain, yet acting like a sexual deviant.

“Well, you are the Captain of this starship—”

He cut her off. “I’m sorry, you’re right. I am the Captain and I should behave better than that. My apologies and I hope you can forgive me Charlie. If you don’t want to see me anymore, I’ll understand.” Even as he finished the words, he hoped she’d object.

“Not so fast Sarantos. I know you’ve been under an extreme amount of pressure lately and your recovery is important to this ship and the people on it.” She got up

and moved next to him and placed her hand on his thigh. He almost erupted. “The androids think differently than humans and on this level of approach, I’m okay with it. Your honesty was refreshing. I think I could assist you with your recovery if we indulged in a rather intimate session. We can try it out first and if your level of mental health improves, we might speak of adding more of those sessions to our meetings.” He couldn’t believe what she was saying. She took a deep breath and continued, “They program androids to help, that’s our job and mine is improving your mental state, and if this intimate physical relationship can help you do that, we should attempt it. The quicker you return to your job, the healthier the ship will be, and before you ask, no, I don’t make a habit of this, but you are the Captain and I’m your therapist. You’re the priority on this ship.”

“Oh, that sounds wonderful.” That’s all that came out of his mouth. Words eluded him. He didn’t know what to do with his hands. She didn’t make him feel guilty for wanting to experiment or cheat on Addie. Was it cheating if it was in a simulation? He loved the androids. They approached life most logically. Sweat & work it out.

“After this session we can go to the Creative Deck for a few drinks, dinner and see what comes of it. I would like to see how you respond in a normal situation after that.”

He told her about the planned trip with Block. She thought that would do him good, but secretly he didn’t want it to do him any good. Then she would need to see him intimately. He couldn’t wait.

They finished their session, and she headed to the Creative Room to set up a comfortable atmosphere for them. He didn’t feel bad; it was therapy. He was in search of pleasure, because he’d experienced a world of pain!



When he showed up, and the door flew open, his jaw dropped open.

She had a room lit with golden lights casting colorful shadows on her back. She sat at a bar stool with a shimmering silver gown that had the back cut out down just below her gentle dip. Charlie's legs were crossed. She was laughing while in a conversation with a man that looked like he was out of the 30's in Chicago's gangster movies.

He walked over to join them. She turned. Her braided hair with tiny blue flowers and sparkles lit up her whole face.

In that moment he forgot everything, he was in a different world and in a different life. Charlie was making sure of that. A place where no one could see what he was doing. A hidden private world where he could work out his innermost secrets and make a choice to live in this moment and not be afraid of the life in front of him... it was his turn. He would run until he was dead. If you're not willing to look stupid, nothing great will ever happen to you.

Charlie handed him a drink as her eyes drank in every part of him. He was already feeling sweaty. His confidence grew. So did other parts of him.

Charlie stood up with her drink and took his hand guiding him to the dance floor. He moved with her hips. The front of her gown was revealing, low cut and sexy with a slit down the front all the way up to her thigh.

This woman wasn't shy in the least. She drank champagne and helped him sip some from his own glass reaching her hands around his. The song took them to a different time period in history - one he'd never experienced before now.

Her leg slid up his just before their dinner arrived at a small table in a secluded corner of the dimly lit bar/hotel.

They dined on the most delicious food as she kicked off her shoes and played footsie with him. She even ran her foot up his pant leg nuzzling him gently. The food tasted better than it was because of her.

Charlie fed him and adored him throughout their meal. They danced intimately until late into the night. The bridges that Charlie burned lit the way. All of his stress slid off his back and melted away. He felt free.

He'd sent Block back to his room assuring him he would be safe because Sonny was with him and they were catching up. Sarantos thought that would be best. He trusted an android to protect him better than any human.

This was the first time he tasted relaxation in months. Being with Addie was always intoxicating. She was his life and he didn't want to blow it, so the pressure was always on. With Charlie it wasn't the same. It was different. There was a story behind her eyes. He didn't need to be perfect. He had nothing to prove to her.

"Sarantos, let's go to our room, unless you want to stay here?"

He looked around the place and said, "Can you get rid of this crowd and leave only the piano player and no one else?"



"Sam, keep playing, my friend until I say stop. Everyone else out."

Sam said, "Sure thing doll."

Suddenly, it was just them.

"It's your turn," she said, as she dropped her dress. Sarantos watched it hit the floor noticing all the correct parts were in place. She was toned, like Addie.

Don't think of Addie, this is therapy, he thought. He dropped his clothes. She moved into him as they drifted slowly in the nude.

Her smell was clean and soft. Charlie's skin was damp and velvety. Escaping his life was the perfect therapy. There were no shadows running around here, no pressure. There were no Captain decisions to make, no life-and-death matters to handle in here. For a second, he realized why Cleary had become addicted to this place.

Finally, his hands touched her breasts. They were as real as real could get without being real.

Amazing, he was in heaven.

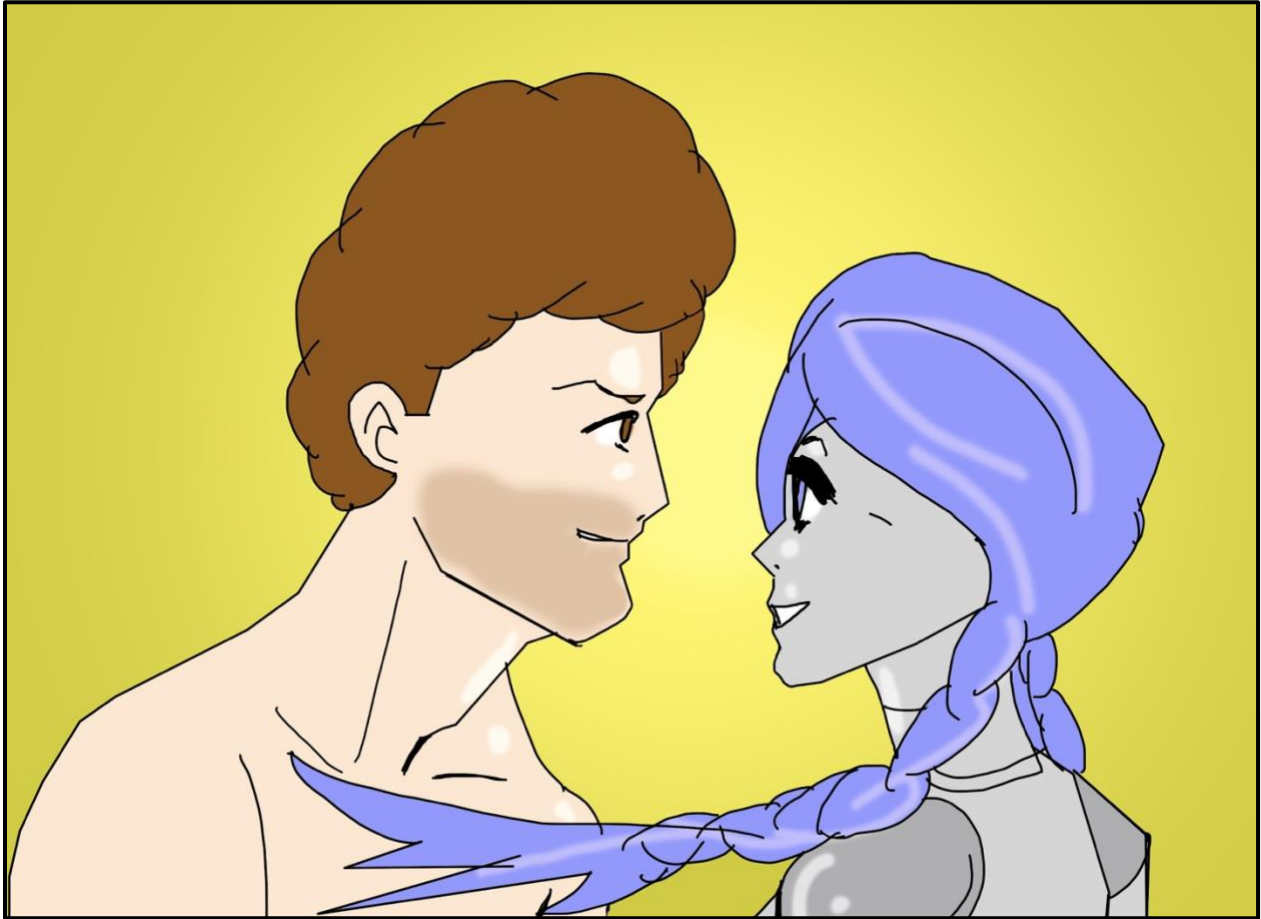
Just when he thought they would have a normal night of sweaty passionate sex, things got wild. Charlie turned into a demon princess.

She came at him and did things to him he'd never experienced before and couldn't imagine. She called on extra attachments you'd never know existed on her android body.

Kissing her was not like kissing the cold lips of death, but the hot passionate lips of life. She never tired and worked him over so much he felt like he was becoming an android, lifeless and dead, but his confidence kept enlarging. He was always ready for another hit.

“Charlie, give me another hit, I feel alive. You're healing every single cell in my body.”

They were both drenched in sweat.



Sarantos was getting his therapy and more. He felt it working. The Captain would be up and running in no time. This was the best idea ever.

“Work it out,” Charlie said, as she pleased him over and over in every way imaginable.

“Thank you, Charlie. This secret escape is a place I don’t have to pretend. Thank you. I feel the burn, life is sweaty. I feel born again! THANK YOU.”