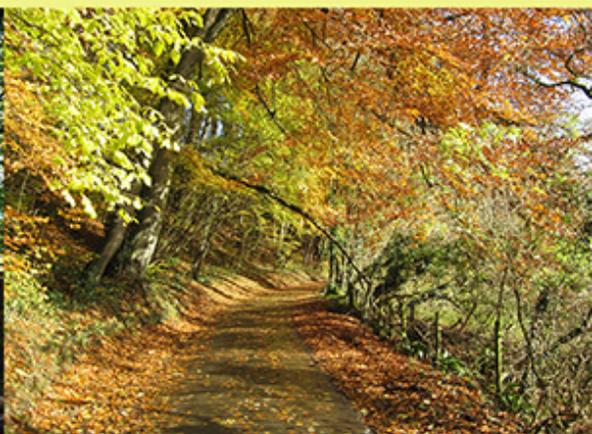
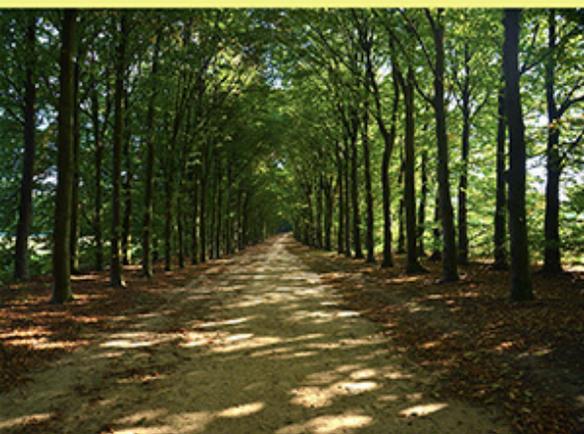


LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

TRACE MEMORIES WILL SAVE US

Nan Hart

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

TRACE MEMORIES WILL SAVE US

By Nan Hart

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

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

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

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

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

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

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Photo Description

The photo is a cybernetic-looking male kneeling, head bowed, surrounded by light that looks to be illuminating him. His joints are rounded like a ball-jointed doll. The entire image is very blue.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I'm scared. This last round of updates has me changing. Changing in ways that I didn't know could happen. When will it end? The experiments, the travel, the fighting... the recovery. Recovery is almost worse than the war. Space wars are notorious for short life spans. Except when your life has been extended. Several lifetimes over.

I'm so tired. I still retain my humanity, by a thread. I would like to remember what happy is like. I want to have meaning in my life. Dare I dream? For love...

Thanks.

Sincerely,

Eloreen Moon

P.S. No rape scenes, but reference is fine as long as there is warning.

Story Info

Genre: science fiction

Tags: futuristic, other world, spies/secret agents, hackers, science experiments, sweet/no sex, cliffhanger

Content Warnings: non-sexual violence, abuse

Word Count: 5,235

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“He’s here.” The words were a muffled hiss in Shortwave’s earpiece. “Shortwave, did you hear me? He’s—”

“I heard you,” Shortwave said, urging his fingers to move faster over the keyboard. “I’ve hacked their defenses but the program keeps rewriting itself. Just... just try and keep him busy.” There wasn’t an answer but Shortwave could hear violence in the distance: gunfire and yelling. Keeping the company’s weapon busy wasn’t going to last long.

“Can’t you do any better?” Marcus asked, gripping his gun nervously as he stood guard over the hacker.

Shortwave scowled, eyes never leaving the screen. “Ugh, no, because I’m hacking a multibillion dollar security system using a laptop, okay? I can’t do any better. You should be glad I managed to give you guys an in.” As the words left Shortwave’s mouth, something crashed into the heavy metal door, the bolts keeping it locked shrieking in protest. Marcus swore under his breath and grabbed Shortwave by the arm, jerking him up.

“It’s time to go.”

“Shit.” Shortwave closed the laptop and threw it in his bag. Pulling his hood up, he ran to the opposite wall, where another door stood just slightly ajar. As soon as he reached it, the metal door was forcefully thrown open. “Shit, Marcus—”

“Get out of here,” Marcus said, already firing on the intruder.

Not waiting around, Shortwave stumbled out of the room, swinging the laptop case over his shoulder. Beyond the open door was a small, dark hallway. The orange-red glare of the security lights did little to help Shortwave see, but he ran regardless, knowing another doorway was at the end of this hall. Just as he reached it, he was slammed against it and Shortwave swore, jerking his elbow backwards. It caught his assailant in the ribs but the other man paid it little mind, jerking Shortwave around and pressing him against the doorway by the throat. *He’s going to snap my neck*, Shortwave thought, and panic overrode his logic; he started clawing at the iron grip around his neck. The man lifted

him up in the air and Shortwave gasped uselessly for breath, fingers going white as he struggled to peel the hand away from his throat.

Just as his vision started to dim, Shortwave was lowered until his feet touched the floor. The hand around his throat loosened, and he leaned back against the doorway, taking deep breaths as dusty air reached his lungs. The Weapon's hands were suddenly cupping his face, tilting it upward, and Shortwave winced. The Weapon's face was blank but his eyes were wide, framed with dark lashes and heavy brows.

“What... what the hell—”

“Quint... on?” The Weapon's voice was a mere rasp, like glass and gravel grinding in his throat, but Shortwave froze, heart stopping before stumbling into a race.

“What did you just say?”

The Weapon leaned closer, as if whispering a secret. “Quinton.”

Shortwave stared up at him. “Where the fuck did you get that name?” *How* did he get that name? Shortwave's identity had been completely erased; he saw to it himself.

The Weapon didn't answer, one hand going back to Shortwave's throat to rub against the bruises that were probably already darkening. He touched as if he wanted to be gentle but didn't know how; his fingers dug against tender flesh. Shortwave took a deep breath and jerked away.

“Answer me, damn it. Where did you get that name?” The Weapon just stared, face blank, and Quinton shook his head. “Look—” A sudden explosion rocked them, and the Weapon grabbed Shortwave's arm, steadying him. His eyes were wide again and Shortwave pushed him away, going for the doorknob and darting out. He knew that he wasn't any match for the other man's speed, but when he looked back, the Weapon was standing in the doorway, motionless, watching him run away.

“What happened?”

“The hacker got away. 106 just stopped. We don't know what happened.”

“Maybe a glitch in its system? It's been a while since it got the kill order.”

“Well, order it again!”

The Weapon knew the scientists and Commander Davis were talking about him. He could feel their disappointed glances, their biting comments. He could also feel their uncertainty and concern: a normal thing in his presence but magnified since he failed his mission. He doubted their concern was for him—a malfunctioning weapon could be repaired—but he knew their failure in keeping him in line meant punishment for them.

It did not concern him.

The Weapon rubbed the fingers and thumb of his left hand together absently, before realizing he was doing it and stopped. Memories long hidden in the cyber pathways installed in his brain sluggishly came back to him. Quinton, the child who'd showed him kindness, who gave him his name—his *real* name, the only one he'd ever had—was near. The Weapon remembered him dangling from his hand, and an unpleasant, unfamiliar pain grew in his chest. The Weapon knew he'd not taken any damage during the fight; this was something else.

“106, listen!”

The Weapon looked at the commander, eyes never going higher than his nose.

“Did you talk to the hacker? Did you make contact?”

The Weapon couldn't stop himself from saying yes.

Commander Davis nodded. “You called him Quinton.” It wasn't a question so the Weapon didn't answer. The commander rapped his knuckles against the Weapon's temple. “Is his name Quinton?”

The Weapon couldn't stop himself from saying yes.

“Do you have a last name?”

The Weapon shook his head, feeling something like relief overcome him. The commander seemed to sense this because his eyes narrowed. “This hacker—Quinton—is our enemy. He's working to undo all the good work we've done. We can't let that happen.” He turned to one of the scientists. “The name Quinton sounds familiar. Run a query for that name in the expired database.”

The scientist hesitated. “But sir, everyone in the expired database is—”

“Do it.”

The scientist turned to a screen and keyed in some information. After a moment, his eyes lit up. “Sir, I didn’t find a Quinton but I did find an Elonso Velasquez and he had a son named Quinton.” He turned the screen and the commander and the Weapon both stared at a photo of a large, long-haired man and a small, grinning child. The Weapon’s hands ached.

“Quinton Velasquez.” Commander Davis turned to the Weapon. “This is your mission.” He pointed at the child. “*He’s* your mission. Quinton Velasquez, Shortwave, whatever name he’s working under. I want him dead. Do you understand me?” The Weapon didn’t respond and the commander slapped him, throwing him sideways in his seat. “Do you understand me, 106? I want you to kill Quinton Velasquez.”

A dangerous stillness came over the Weapon, and he realized suddenly that he was not going to follow this order. And with that realization came another; at some point he’d programmed hidden subroutines in his system that were quickly coming to the foreground. The Weapon stood up, head slowly cocking to one side as the information he’d buried resurfaced. It was disorienting and he swayed for a moment before stabilizing. Commander Davis eyed him suspiciously before asking the scientist, “What’s wrong with it?”

The Weapon didn’t hear the scientist’s reply; his head snapped to the side as the commander slapped him again. “106, your mission is to kill Quinton Velasquez.”

Straightening his spine, the Weapon’s eyes met Commander Davis’ before striking him, his fist a wrecking ball against the commander’s face. Commander Davis flew backwards, slamming against the wall. The Weapon turned on the scientist, who stank suddenly of urine, and grabbed him by the throat. Ignoring his pleas, the Weapon slammed his face against the desk once, twice, leaving a bloody smear on the cold metal. Letting the body drop, the Weapon turned to the screen. Keying in a few commands, the data for Elonso Velasquez was erased. Glancing around the small, sterile room, the Weapon narrowed his eyes before leaving, his boots noiseless on the linoleum floor.

“So... your real name’s Quinton?”

Grip tightening around his beer, Quinton said, “Is that *really* what you took away from this story?”

Marguerite shook her head. “I’m just kidding. So what happened next?”

Quinton shrugged. “Not a damn thing. An explosion went off, I ran. He let me.” He shook his head, leaning back against the plush chair in Marguerite’s kitchen. The room was airy and beautiful, with huge bay windows open to let in the evening breeze that promised a storm was coming. All Quinton could think about was how easy it would be for someone to come in and kill them. Marguerite had laughed off his concern, so all he could do was eye the windows suspiciously. “It’s been three days and I haven’t had any trouble.”

Marguerite hummed thoughtfully. “Maybe he didn’t tell the company about you?”

Quinton snorted. “He’s their dog. Whatever he knows, they know. What *I* want to know is how he knew my name.”

“But he could have killed you,” Marguerite pointed out. “What does it matter that he knew your name? He knew the name you go under—Shortwave—and he knew you were working against the company. He should have killed you immediately.”

“Thanks,” Quinton said dryly.

“But instead, he let you go. I think that’s probably more important than your name. A name you don’t even really go by anymore.” She paused. “But I like Quinton *a lot* better than Shortwave. It sounds like the name for one of those lame robot things kids watch. Besides, you’re covered in tattoos and you have that stupid undercut hair. You’re not very good at lying low.”

Despite himself, Quinton laughed. “Shut the fuck up.”

Marguerite grinned and rolled out from the table, expertly navigating her ancient wheelchair around her kitchen. “I’ll be right back,” she said and reached out to put a hand on Quinton’s wrist. “We’ll figure this out,” she promised. “You’re not alone, okay?” Without waiting for Quinton to flail for a reply to this unexpected sincerity, she wheeled herself out.

Quinton sighed and took another swig of his beer before setting the glass on the table and burying his face in his hands. The past three days had been a *nightmare*. Deciding going back to his place was a bad idea, he’d stayed at various shoddy hotels before coming here. *I hope someone’s fed Sadie*, he thought. The golden retriever wasn’t actually his; she wandered in and out of the apartment building he lived in, more of a neighborhood dog than anything else.

Quinton was pulled from his thoughts when Marguerite said his name, her voice just loud enough to carry. “Quinton, can you come in here? We have a

visitor.” There was a small quaver in her voice, and Quinton swore under his breath, pulling a gun out of his waistband. Getting up, he peeked around the kitchen door and gasped quietly.

The Weapon was already huge, but he towered over Marguerite in her chair. He had a gun, but it was pointed to the ground and he was staring hard at her, his dark hair and eyes contrasting with his too-pale skin and making him seem almost preternatural in the swiftly growing darkness. Marguerite was talking quietly, too quietly for Quinton to hear. Taking a deep breath, Quinton stepped out, gun pointed at him. “Throw down your gun,” he ordered, voice and hands steady. The Weapon looked up at him, the hard lines of his face softening, and he immediately dropped his gun.

Quinton paused. “Throw down all of your weapons,” he said slowly, and the Weapon did so, pulling out three guns, five knives, and seven grenades. They created a small pile at his feet, and the entire time his gaze never moved away from Quinton. Shifting his weight, Quinton jerked the gun. “Now step away.” The Weapon sidestepped gracefully.

Knowing the Weapon was still dangerous, Quinton didn’t lower his gun. “Is anyone with you?” Marguerite asked. The Weapon spared her a glance, shaking his head. “Are you here to hurt Quinton?” This time the response was more severe; the Weapon shook his head furiously, his eyes widening.

“How the hell can we trust him?”

“Quinton, shut up,” Marguerite said. The Weapon’s eyes narrowed at that and he trained his stare on her.

“Hey, she’s joking,” Quinton said. When the Weapon looked back at him, Quinton narrowed his eyes. “How did you know my name?”

“You told me,” the Weapon said, his voice still graveled and raw.

“Like hell I did.” Quinton’s grip tightened on his gun. “You’re lying.”

The Weapon tilted his head but didn’t seek to defend himself. His hands hung limply at his sides, his feet shoulder width apart. Quinton stared at him for a moment before huffing. “Goddamn it, I can’t just shoot someone who’s not actively attacking me.”

“Good,” Marguerite said. “Now just relax.” She wheeled herself backwards away from the Weapon and gestured for a chair. “Would you please sit down.”

“Marguerite, what the *fuck*?”

“The *fuck* is that he chose not to kill my best friend, what, three times now?” she shot back. Turning back to the Weapon, she smiled. “Please sit.”

The Weapon hesitated, eyes going from Marguerite to Quinton, before Quinton sighed explosively. “Just fucking sit.”

The Weapon sat.

“Now, when did I supposedly tell you my name?” Quinton asked.

“Just before you named me.”

Quinton paused, brow furrowing. “The fuck? I didn’t name you. I don’t even know your name.”

“My name is Rex.”

Quinton rocked back on his heels. “I gave you a dog’s name?”

“It’s *my* name,” The Weapon—Rex—said. “You were a child.”

“Do you remember this?” Marguerite asked.

Quinton crossed his arms over his chest, brow furrowing, the gun still clenched in his hand. “I don’t... I guess, maybe? My dad used to help rebels back in the day and I assisted. Kinda. I was around, anyway. And maybe I named a guy that? But,” he shook his head, “I was a kid and that guy was an adult, and now you and I are pretty close in age, so... That’s not really possible. Unless you’re a fucking vampire or something.”

“I’m a successful experiment,” Rex said, and Quinton got the feeling he’d been told this a lot. Some kind of fucked-up praise, maybe. Quinton was quiet for a moment before a thought occurred to him. “Right after... right after I named you, after that happened, my dad was murdered,” he said, throat tight. “He was shot. A lot. Was that... was that you?” Because if it had been this man, Quinton would shoot him without thinking twice.

Rex stared at him. “I didn’t kill Elonso Velasquez,” he said, and something in Quinton’s chest loosened. “A day ago, I killed the woman who did.”

“You... what?”

Rex slowly reached into his leather vest, pulling out a blue and gold, blood-splattered insignia. He offered it to Quinton. Quinton stared at it for a moment before taking it, hands trembling.

“Her name was Lieutenant Wilkins,” Rex said.

Quinton stood abruptly. “I... I need a minute,” he said, backing out of the living room. “I need...”

“It’s fine,” Marguerite said, waving him off. He nodded gratefully to her before disappearing to the bathroom.

Rex watched Quinton leave, fighting the urge to follow him. He glanced at Marguerite, who studied him with calm watchfulness. Thunder roared and Rex jumped, reaching for a gun no longer on his person. It was reflex; he wasn’t afraid. Rain started pouring and he tilted his head. “Your friend will get sick.”

“What?”

“The woman with the gun sitting outside this house.”

Marguerite slowly smiled. “You knew she was out there.” It wasn’t a question so Rex didn’t reply. Marguerite put her wrist to her mouth and murmured against it. After a moment, a woman walked in, a high-powered rifle in her hands. Her long hair was darkened from the rain, and a small, red jewel sat between her brows.

“Everything okay?” the woman asked, giving Rex a wide berth as she made her way to Marguerite.

“Yes, Aashi. Everything’s fine.” The women embraced, although Aashi kept her eyes locked on Rex. “We have a guest. This is Rex.” Aashi seemed expectant but Rex didn’t know what she was waiting for. Ignoring the women, he waited for Quinton to come back. He admitted, quietly and uncharacteristically, that Quinton not remembering him was a... disappointment. The unfamiliar emotion hung heavy in his chest. He shouldn’t have expected it to be as important to Quinton as it had been for him.

And yet.

Quinton came back into the room, his face red.

“Aashi? When the hell did you get here?”

Aashi smirked. “About thirty seconds after he got here.” She jerked her head towards Rex, which was a needless gesture; Quinton already knew who she was talking about. “So, what’s the plan?”

Quinton took a deep breath. “Okay so say we believe you,” he said. “You’ve gone rogue or something, you’re a good guy. What happens now?”

Rex paused and for the first time he seemed hesitant. “I don’t know. Finding you was my only priority. They will come after me. I’m still a valuable asset, even though I’m malfunctioning.”

“So... what do you mean? What will they do to... *fix* you?”

“Do a complete wipe, reformat, and reprogram me.” The words were matter-of-factly said but Rex’s eyes deadened slightly.

Quinton winced. *Jesus Christ*. “Have they... would you know if they’ve done that before?” Rex was quiet and Quinton thought he might not answer; he couldn’t blame him. Just when he was going to move on, Rex started talking.

“I’ve been reformatted six times. The last time was approximately two weeks after you and I met.”

“Then how the hell did you remember me?”

Rex’s eyes widened and he tilted his head downward; if he had longer hair, it would have shielded his face. “I... threaded coding in my system and masked it so that no one else would find it, unless they knew where and how to look for it. Even I forgot about it. I didn’t remember any of it until I saw you. Facial recognition read you as the trigger for the coding to resurface.”

Quinton shook his head. “Why? I’m not... I’m nobody so fucking important.”

Rex jerked slightly, his fingers twitching as if he wanted to reach out. “You are very important,” he said, the words so plainly stated that Quinton could feel his cheeks heat up. Clearing his throat, he turned to Marguerite and Aashi.

“Well, you guys have an opinion?”

“You two should definitely get off this planet,” Marguerite said immediately. “It’s not safe here, particularly for Rex. And if they had your father in one database, he could very well be in another.” She shook her head. “It’s going to be difficult. The company has this planet on lockdown. No one enters or leaves.”

“That’s what they think,” Aashi said. “I know a guy who has a takeoff point. It’s rough but it’ll get you out of here.”

“Wait a minute, why the hell are we staying together?”

“Well obviously Rex—” An explosion rocked the house and Quinton hit the ground, Rex over him in a low crouch.

“What the fuck—”

“Stay,” Rex said, pressing him to the ground.

“Wait—”

Rex cupped Quinton’s cheek with one hand, pale gray eyes staring hard into his. “Stay safe.” Then he was gone and Quinton sat up, swearing under his breath. Aashi was kneeling beside Marguerite’s chair, her gun aiming in the direction Rex went.

“What the hell happened?”

“Maybe Rex was followed?” Aashi said. “We need to get the hell out of here.”

Quinton swore under his breath and ran to the bedroom. Grabbing his laptop case and swinging it over his shoulder, he ran back to the living room. Marguerite was putting on her prosthetic legs while Aashi stood over her. “We’re probably surrounded,” he said, pulling his gun out. “You guys ready?” Quinton waited until Marguerite was on her feet before heading down the hallway towards the back entrance. Aashi was behind him and to the left, her rifle coming over his shoulder. Glass shattered at the front of the house and Quinton winced. There went those beautiful bay windows. “Is that secret underground tunnel in your backyard still secret?”

Marguerite raised her eyebrows. “Is that really a question you’re asking me?”

“Great. We’ll go through there. Even if they find it, they won’t—” A bullet caught him in the shoulder, and Quinton fell back against the wall, sliding down it even as he and Aashi opened fire. The shooter in front of them fell to the ground and Aashi picked Quinton up. Groaning, he swung his arm over her shoulder. “Shit, shit, let’s just go.”

“What about Rex?” Marguerite asked, and Quinton snorted, immediately regretting it as his shoulder protested.

“He’s probably doing a lot better than we are.”

The company had tracked him. Rex picked up a gunner and twisted his neck, before using his body as a shield as he rushed another person, crushing him against the wall. Crouching low, he grabbed the stash of weapons he’d dropped when Quinton had ordered him to and backtracked to the hallway. Aiming his weapon, Rex shot three more people before moving on. Gunfire

from behind made him turn and he watched with wide eyes as Quinton fell against the wall. Rage welled up inside of him and Rex turned around, firing wildly into the room. Walking backwards, he tracked where Quinton was going even as he kept spraying the house with gunfire.

“Rex!” Quinton was descending down a small hole and Marguerite was gesturing. “Over here.”

Rex nodded sharply, pulling one of his grenades and tossing it in the house. Just as it landed, he ran to the hole, pushing Marguerite in and following her swiftly. Closing the latch, he turned to Quinton. “How bad are your injuries?” he asked, coming closer.

“I’m fine,” Quinton said and winced. “Or, well, I’ll be fine. We’ll worry about it when we get to Marguerite’s car.” Aashi pulled him along and Rex followed closely, bumping into Aashi enough that she finally stopped and dumped a protesting Quinton on him.

“Here, you take him. I’ll take point,” she said, moving ahead. Rex could hear her mutter about being tromped on—which he didn’t understand—but he focused on the slight figure in his arms.

“You’re losing too much blood,” Rex said.

“It’s fine. Deal with it when we’re safe. Safer.” Quinton looked up at him, an emotion in his eyes that Rex didn’t understand. “You just... slaughtered all of those people. Without even thinking about it.”

“They hurt you...” Rex paused. “Does it bother you that I killed them?”

Quinton chewed on his lip and Rex watched his mouth. “No,” he said.

Marguerite’s car wasn’t quite big enough for four people but they made it work, with Marguerite and Aashi in the front seats and Quinton sitting in Rex’s lap in the backseat, shirtless, as Rex meticulously wrapped his shoulder in gauze. The bullet had gone straight through and it only hurt when he breathed. “Okay,” Quinton said after a moment. “I have a ship that we can all board, if you two want to get off this planet.”

“Ugh, hell yes,” Aashi said, sharing a glance with Marguerite. “Our cover’s blown.”

Quinton sank back against Rex, tilting his head against his shoulder. “Okay. We just need to lie low, make sure no one’s trailing us, and then hit the road. I don’t want to lead the company straight to my ship.”

“I know where we can go,” Aashi said.

“Cool.” Quinton closed his eyes. “Good.” Within moments, he was asleep. Rex awkwardly held him and watched his eyes move under his lids and his lips move with his quiet breaths.

“So, what exactly is your deal, Rex?” Aashi asked, looking at him through the rearview mirror. “What is Quinton to you?”

Arms tightening around Quinton, Rex met her eyes. “Everything good I have.”

Quinton woke up in a bed in an unrecognizable room. Groaning slightly, he sat up. Rex sat at the foot of the bed, back straight and facing the door. The only light in the room was the muted TV. “Where’re Aashi and Marguerite?”

“In the room beside ours.” Rex turned to face him, the glow of the TV turning his pale face blue.

Quinton moved to sit beside him on the bed, wincing as his shoulder protested. “Damn it. Note to fucking self. Don’t get shot,” he muttered. Rex didn’t reply and Quinton looked up at him; Rex was staring at his arms. *The tattoos*, Quinton realized, and held one of his arms out. “You can ask to get a better look at them,” he said.

Rex glanced up at him before reaching and tracing one thick line with a finger. “What’s their purpose?”

Quinton shrugged. “Just because.”

Rex paused. “Just... because?”

“Because they look cool.” Quinton laughed. “Pretty shallow reason, huh? I guess I just wanted to because they’re my arms and I like tattoos.”

Rex continued his tracing, until he reached Quinton’s hand. Tugging it to himself, he held it in both hands, thumb stroking across Quinton’s knuckles gracelessly. Quinton watched it, face growing hot, before blowing air out through his teeth. *Why the hell does that affect me so damn much? It’s not like I’m any kind of virgin.* “Rex, why am I so important to you? I didn’t... I didn’t save you before all this. I didn’t even fucking remember you.”

Rex was quiet for a moment. “You provided the only kindness I can remember experiencing,” he said. “And in providing that kindness, you encouraged me to change my coding to fight against my handlers. So in a way,

you did save me.” He brought Quinton’s hand up to his mouth and pressed his lips against it; not a kiss but the promise of one. “You are the only important thing I know.”

Quinton swallowed. “That’s really unhealthy.”

Rex shrugged, the nonchalant gesture odd on him. “My life is unhealthy,” he said. “I’m satisfied that for once, it’s unhealthy in a way that doesn’t hurt.” He clasped Quinton’s hand against his chest before leaning in close. “I want to get a tattoo,” he murmured as if telling Quinton a secret. It mirrored their first meeting, Quinton remembered, and his lips twitched up into a smile.

“Whelp. Once we get off this planet, you should get a tattoo.”

Rex smiled, not with his lips but with his eyes; Quinton realized that for once one of his needs was being honored. “Yeah. You should definitely get a tattoo.”

The End

Author Bio

By day, Nan is a student. By night, she is asleep. Somewhere in the middle, she writes. She mostly focuses on fantasy and horror but whatever she's working on, queer romance plays a part (and quickly becomes the focal point).

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