



TAKING THE HUMAN

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Prologue

Opening her own bottom for her owner was never an easy thing to do.

Bent over the side of a bed so tall, her toes just brushed the cold floor below, her fingers trembled as she spread her buttocks open for him. Long, painful training had ensured she always pulled them wide such that she felt her crease might split. Only then had she demonstrated the required level of compliance with his dictates.

It was made worse this time by the way her ass ached, the still visible marks from her punishment three days prior just beginning to fade from her skin, if not from her heated memory. He'd made her stand in front of the huge mirror afterward, the tears still drying on her face, forcing her to look at the swelling welts left behind, a testament to his handiwork with the hated cane.

In the glass, she'd watched his heavy cock rise as he'd ordered her to trace the deepening wheals with her fingertips, until he was hot and hard, jutting against her hip. It hadn't taken long before he'd made her kneel, her tongue lovingly paying homage to the congested veins along the shaft of that big penis.

He stood behind her now, looking down upon her prostrate form, drinking in her surrender as she knew was his way. Hers was but to be silent, and listen for his next order. Her well-flogged breasts throbbed below her as she waited obediently, the soft mounds pressed into the silky bed spread. The punishment was her penalty for refusing to be walked around his property attached to his new leather leash. She already wondered if the pain had been worth being spared that particular indignity.

When he'd finished painting the lines of flame upon her helpless flesh, her fresh tears dripping onto the slopes of her burning, heaving breasts, he'd told her eventually she'd come around to seeing things his way.

She knew he was right.

Now though, other things were required — and as in all else in his great house, she was required to submit to them. In this place, obedience was the only thing that mattered, the only thing that might keep her ass from getting even sorer as the day wore on.

“Your little plug — it looks so cute tucked in between those trembling cheeks of yours. Does it hurt still, girl?”

Swallowing hard, she knew an answer was expected. “No, sir.”

A huge palm caressed her bottom, squeezing her welted flesh, thick fingers exploring the presented cleft to press on the stout smooth steel spreading her anus uncomfortably wide. She couldn't help but tighten reflexively upon the hard plug, reawakening the slight tenderness in her well-stretched bottom hole.

A fingertip flicked her blatantly exposed, still-swollen clit. “Make sure none of that drips on the bed spread, slave. If I have to have the blankets laundered again, it's going to be worse for this big bottom of yours.”

He slapped her ass sharply, and she jerked, but thankfully managed to keep her buttocks spread wide for him.

Her well-used pussy still dripped with his semen, a rough fucking her reward for her standing obediently still as her breasts had bounced and wobbled under the fiery rain of the flogger's tails that morning. Her punished nipples still ached, their steel hardness not abating one bit, no matter how much the merciless leather implement punished them.

The bed dipped at her side as he sat down next to her. "Let's have it out then," he murmured, tapping the steel between her bottom cheeks. "Come... push it out."

She grunted, squeezing her eyes shut, the most mortifying part of the process upon her. She willed her bottom to open, to push out the intruder she'd become almost used to over the past two days.

"There you go," he said in a soft voice, patting her bottom again as she finally expelled the body warm steel, his fingertips tickling the edges of her labia as he held his palm open, waiting for her shaming offering. "That's a good girl. You're learning control now, aren't you?"

He pressed a gentle kiss to the crown of one of her buttocks, then her plug in hand, he stood up. Her stomach sank when she heard the unmistakable sound of something being lubricated. She craned her head around, looking at him over her shoulder, careful not to break position.

The sight of the gleaming steel of the heavy plug — an even bigger one this time, the next size up in the set — made her mouth go dry, her heart in her throat.

Oh no...

Blue eyes narrowing, his handsome smile faded instantly. "Face forward, bad girl. You know better."

She pressed her face into the covers, her cheeks burning hot against the cool fabric.

Already trembling as the cold gel was rubbed into her presented crease, his finger pressing more of it just inside her stretched opening, she yelped as the heavy, icy steel was presented to her anus.

"You know what I expect. Be a good girl now." It pressed forward, slowly, inexorably, a long gasp drawn from her as her flesh spread impossibly wide.

"Please... I can't..."

"Shh, you can do this. It's only a little larger. Just push out, let it in."

His hand gently stroked her quivering thighs, his palm easing up and down soothingly. "That's good... more. Good girl."

She whined as the widest part pressed her still wider, her bottom hole aching around the unforgiving steel.

"Almost there, sweet girl. One last push."

Her whole body shuddered as she exhaled a long breath, the widest part of the plug swallowed up by her body, the stretching of the tight muscle easing.

"There, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

Her breath was little more than quick panting.

"N-no, sir."

"I knew you could do it." His palm slapped her hip. "Now, you may let go of that cute little bottom and kneel down."

She slid to her knees, turning to press her back to the side of the bed as she knew he demanded.

"Present pretty."

Spreading her sore ass on her bare heels, she thrust her shoulders back, her hands laced behind her head, gaze upon his as she knew he liked.

He snapped the leash to the stout silver ring embedded at the front of her thick collar, his deep blue eyes sparkling, his grin bright.

"Ready for that stroll we talked about, my beautiful slave girl? Or do you have any other silly ideas about refusing me?"

With a hot blush, she shook her head. "No, sir."

Chapter 1

Lukanos never really understood what made human females cry. He understood his own visceral — and very physical — reaction to it even less.

Why did the tears streaming down her smooth cheeks make her even more beautiful?

It wasn't the first time he'd found her weeping, though it wasn't any easier to bear witness to it.

Being a member of a *Yaanfahr* Survey Team meant excitement, but it also sometimes meant witnessing the sadness and heartbreak that so often was part and parcel of the human condition.

His comm unit buzzed at the base of his throat and he clicked over, moving away from Alisse's house. Though such a gesture was completely unnecessary — his spoofing mechanism ensured he stayed invisible to human eyes — he felt a need to leave her alone with her pain.

"Report, Lieutenant," the voice of Captain Maerata rang in his ear.

Though his comm unit was quite capable of transmitting unspoken thought, the Lieutenant spoke aloud, confident he was out of ear shot of Alisse's open kitchen window.

"Situation normal, Captain. Subject is"—the Lieutenant winced—"upset."

The Captain's sigh was plainly audible over the channel, but his voice held a welcome note of understanding. "You watch her too much, you know."

"What Command doesn't know, won't hurt them." The Lieutenant looked back at Alisse's compact two-bedroom bungalow. "I haven't exceeded parameters, nor violated The Directive."

"Not yet, anyway."

"Have reassignment orders come through yet?" Lukanos tried to keep the dread out of his voice. Like so many others before him, the prospect of leaving Terra — and a certain alluring human female — gnawed at him. Not for the first time, he fought against the sense of unfairness — and strange possessiveness — that rose within him at the thought of never seeing her again.

He knew it was stupid... but he'd be lying if he said he hadn't contemplated it.

Options.

It had been done before.

The image of Alisse's curvy, naked form, on her knees, gazing up at him, sprang unbidden into his mind. It should have disgusted him. The sudden tightness between his legs said otherwise.

You'll be cashiered — if you're lucky. You know the penalty for taking one of them.

"Maybe another week," Maerata said. "But you know it will be soon. I've proposed as many mission extensions as I dare, Lieutenant. It's time."

His Captain was well-aware of Lukanos'... distraction. Though he never missed an opportunity to admonish his subordinate for his fixation on the human female, Lukanos knew the Captain *had* done his best to have their time on Terra extended far past a typical Survey Team's term of duty.

There was a reason Command rotated Survey Team members from Earth assignment within two Terran years. It wasn't anything as concrete as danger, or the particular prestige of such a duty — Terra was little more than a backwater in the galactic scheme of things. The reason was a base emotion, one most *Yaanfahr* believed was but a vestigial urge, something they'd evolved beyond as an order eons ago.

Temptation.

And Lukanos knew intimately the power of such a thing, why they'd been warned. Knowing and doing were two different things though. He knew interference, fraternization, or even simply appearing before a human was strictly prohibited.

Now though? He understood quite well why he'd been sternly warned about duty on Terra. The beauty, the allure of them was something long whispered about in the academy, though never openly spoken of. The idea that anyone might actually find human females sexually attractive was an embarrassment at best, something never admitted to, and at worst, a taboo that might result in the early end to a career, a quick disciplinary hearing, and a long, lonely trip back to one's home system.

None of that was stopping him from seriously contemplating the unthinkable though.

What might happen, if he took Alisse for his own?

Chapter 2

The coffee burned her lips as she sipped it, the faded white fabric of the translucent curtains waving in the unusually warm evening breeze. With the heel of her hand she swiped away the sticky tracks of her tears. It was stupid — and futile — to cry about what could never be. About what she'd ensured *would* never be.

The first Valentine's Day since she'd left Phillip didn't make moving on any easier for her though.

She walked to the sink, and dumped the rest of the coffee down the drain. She stared out the window at the full moon, the breeze making her swollen eyes sting. The quiet nights were the double-edged sword of living so far outside the city. You weren't disturbed, but on nights like this one, being disturbed by someone, anyone, would be a blessing.

Solitude focused the mind — and deepened the sorrow.

"At least today's almost over, Alisse," she muttered as she padded out of the kitchen, flicking off the light and plunging the space into moonlit shadow.

Phillip Brandeis, head astronomer on the OLA project, was someone who should have been her perfect match. Handsome, brilliant, and charming, he was — but inside she'd known all along that those qualities weren't what she really needed. How long had she hidden that truth from even herself? Nobody knew, of course — there'd be scandal, gossip, a quiet closing of numerous doors in the scientific community if anyone ever discovered the shameful truth about Alisse.

Intellect and attractiveness should have made him ideal for her. Two scientists, two keen minds, both young, in the prime of life. Well, Phillip was young anyway; forty loomed much closer for Alisse than she wanted to think about.

Still, they had tried to make a go of it, and for a time, it had worked. Happiness, the possibility of something more, seemed within her grasp. But something was always missing, a piece that never quite fit right.

And that piece was Alisse, what she *really* needed.

For any other woman, Phillip's gentle, attentive lovemaking might have been the stuff of dreams — but not her dreams.

She'd admonished herself countless times as selfish, shallow, *horrible*. But the fact remained that he left her cold. Gentle and attentive weren't the constant stars in her fantasies.

Not by a long shot.

She slipped on the threadbare gown she still wore, the one that clung to her body in a way that made it impossible to ignore the curves and planes of her form. Though she didn't particularly like her body — her hips were a little too broad, thighs a trifle heavier than she'd have liked — the gown *did* make her feel, if only in her mind, sexy. Feminine.

Phillip always desired you, Alisse — gown or no. Yet you rejected him, the man who adored you.

She couldn't help but picture his deep brown eyes welling with tears, the snow falling in a swirling, chaotic storm all around them, as she'd broken it off. They'd been attending a conference at the Smithsonian in DC, and he'd suggested going over to the mall and walking up to the Lincoln memorial,

a snowy Washington something Phillip always found indescribably beautiful.

Right there alongside water as smooth as a mirror, she'd broken both their hearts. How the relief that it was over had flooded through her then, even as she'd wept at the bitter pain of it, even as Phillip had held her, despite her rejection. A gentleman to the last.

If only a gentleman had been what she'd wanted.

She slipped beneath the cool down of her comforter, the warmth of the night doing nothing to thaw the icy cold gripping her heart. The truth was, she still hated herself for it, no matter how necessary it might have been. It would never have worked between them, and despite the awful pain of crushing a man who deserved anything but, it was far better to close that door sooner rather than later, when the pain would have been infinitely worse.

For both of them.

She might never find what it was she needed — if it even existed. How could she? What she wanted... was wrong. It didn't make sense. Yet it haunted her darkest dreams, her most fevered fantasies. A fascination with the cosmos, with what made up the world around her, wasn't the only obsession Alisse Southwick harbored.

"This is stupid," she murmured, turning over, trying to ignore the rising heat between her thighs. How long had it been since she'd had an orgasm? The very fact that she had to ask that question illustrated what a disaster her sex life had become.

Just think about work. About the project.

That might suffice for a short time, but it wouldn't forever. Eventually, she would need to try again, attempt to put herself out there once more — before it was too late.

But who could possibly give her what she needed? Maybe the fantasy could never be made real?

Alisse dreaded the idea, but she knew inside that sometimes life frustrated, confounded — and simply didn't work out. Could she live the remainder of her years not fully living that part of life, that sexual journey that made the rest of it worth living?

Perhaps she was doomed to being on the outside looking in, so close, yet so far?

The fabric of her blanket brushed against her nipples, the sensitive tips as hard as steel now despite her melancholy.

She blew out a breath. "Are you serious? Horny? *Now?*"

Reaching for her nightstand, she bit down on her lip, frustrated, for the millionth time lamenting the utter lack of control over that one part of herself. She'd mastered everything else in life, so why did her desires and fantasies prove so stubbornly resistant to it?

Because you can't change what's a part of you, idiot. Maybe it's not you who's supposed to master it?

She opened the drawer and retrieved her e-reader. Perhaps just having a quick read would help. Maybe she'd even masturbate. Would an orgasm help banish the darkness, if only for a little while?

"At least I won't have to think about my train wreck sex life."

Swiping through the carousel on the reader, she found the latest obsession: a science fiction smut fest that had just the thing she kept coming back to over and over again: alpha males who saw nothing wrong with bending their women to their will — no matter what it took...

Commander Rill Faran strode through the dusty bazaar, the central market on Pseiti IV. It was one of his favorite haunts on the Graylan run, a three parsec nightmare of Colonial cruisers, hopelessly corrupt Gate control officers, and a veritable graveyard for freighter captains like him who thought they could slip one time too many past the ever-watching eye of the brutal internal security agency, the CSS.

"What about that one?" His ensign, Markov Corsun, normally a taciturn, icewater-in-the-veins pilot, always perked up when they made their regular refueling stop in the Pseiti system, the slave markets of Pseiti IV being some of the most popular — and infamous — in the entire galaxy. Though slavery was illegal — in theory — in the Colonies, the authorities, hopelessly addicted to the kickbacks from slavers and smugglers alike, turned a blind eye to most operations. It was only when a particular

market became just a little too obvious that the CSS would step in — and an instructive lesson meted out. Keeping one's head down was always a good idea when it came to CSS thuggery.

Rill stopped along the line of cages stretching along one wall of the flesh market, a most popular section of the Pseiti IV bazaar.

"The one with the dark hair?" Rill took a step closer, the filthy naked creature confined behind the steel bars peering up at them, her eyes wide with fright.

"Yes, good plump sex on that one," Markov said. "Should take the whip — and cock — well, I should think."

Rill grinned at his ensign. Markov rarely used vulgarities of any kind. The flesh pits of Pseiti IV brought something out within him, it seemed.

A stocky man dressed in brown sack cloth criss-crossed with decorative leather straps awaited their choice. The man's gaze darted to and fro in a way that made Rill uneasy. Typical slavers.

The Commander nodded to the waiting attendant. "Let's have that one out. I'd like a look at her."

In moments, she was standing between the three men, her petiteness emphasized by their comparative great height. Her luminescent eyes flicked from Markov then back to Rill, as if by keeping tabs on both, she could ensure her safety.

Rill touched her cheek and she jerked away, snarling in the distinctive high-pitched gibberish he'd only heard once before.

"Terran? I should have guessed." Rill shook his head, even as his cock began to rise. He'd never actually seen a Terran in the flesh, and though significantly smaller than his species, the Terran females were indeed as beautiful as the rumors said. They were exceedingly rare, even in the teeming central bazaar that prided itself on having just the thing to match any appetite.

"Price for her will go sky high as soon as she hits the block," Markov growled, stroking the growth of thick black beard at his chin. "I don't think most of the slime who crawl about here really understand what a Terran is."

"Or how valuable one of them can be to the right buyer," the attendant said, inclining his head with a wink. "She was brought to us not two weeks ago."

Rill frowned. "You let her get this dirty in two weeks?"

"She has had many... suitors in that time," the attendant quickly added. "But no buyers, as yet." Suitors.

Commander Rill grunted. A Terran with ripe, heavy breasts like hers would draw more than her fair share of "suitors" indeed. He doubted the bazaar would allow one of the punters to lay with her, but he could imagine many hands had fondled and weighed those buoyant globes, assessed them for softness, pliability. Her deep brown nipples were standing up nicely, perhaps out of fright, but the keenness he saw in her gaze made him suspect that wasn't all.

Markov dropped to a knee, taking a fistful of her hair, and wrenching her head back, until she was forced to gaze up at the sky. She moaned just a little as his gloved hand investigated between her lush thighs, splaying the sex open, exposing the bright pink of her core. He smacked her plump, shaven mound once, then again, and she jerked each time, her bright white teeth gritting.

"Why have you shaved her?" Markov asked. "I would have liked to have seen the pelt on this one. Should be nice and dark like her hair, I would think."

"Diseases, sir." The attendant cleared his throat. "We find that depilation is effective against lice and the like."

"You could try washing her once in a while too," Rill muttered, stroking the grime on her cheek with his thumb. "She looks like she's been rolling in muck."

"We bathe them once a month, sir, but it's been... dusty, of late."

Markov rose to his feet, using his grip on her hair to spin her around until her back faced them. Her bottom shuddered with the pair of hard blows Markov's palm laid down across each lush buttock, the SPLAT SPLAT sound echoing against the mud brick walls of the flesh market—

“What the hell was that?” Alisse hissed, her breath coming hard as she extracted her fingers from between her legs. Dropping the reader to the mattress, she quickly rose to her feet.

It had sounded like her front door had opened.

Calm down. It's probably the wind.

She needed to close the window anyway. It was a good excuse to check things out.

Her heart rate picked up pace as she made her way down the hallway. Suddenly afraid to flick on the light — and silently admonishing herself for acting like a frightened child — she took a deep breath and turned the corner into the living room.

Nothing.

The front door appeared to be closed, just as she'd left it. The gray tile of the tiny foyer showed no strange footprints, no signs of forced entry.

She looked down, shaking her head. “You... are an idiot.”

“Why do you call yourself this?”

Alisse screamed, clapping a hand to her mouth as she spun toward the voice. Her heart jumped into her throat as she beheld the man standing in her kitchen. He was the biggest man she'd ever seen; based on her eight foot ceilings, he had to be over seven feet in height. The kitchen was still cloaked in deep shadow, the curtain at the window continuing to wave gently on the breeze.

Then he turned on the lights, and she took a stumbling step backward. He wore a white, form-fitting tunic with a high collar, the cut-out at the base of his throat exposing the tendons of the neck, the hollows of his collar bones.

The shoulders of the man seemed to go on forever, bespeaking immense strength — something the snug tunic did nothing to contradict. Heavily muscled, he appeared to be devoid of hair with the exception of thick, dark eyebrows. His eyes, slightly larger than one would have expected, were blessed with long lashes, a feature of strange — and not unappealing — softness that contrasted with the hard, super masculine face. The strong brows and heavy, square jaw appeared hewn from granite, the eyes peering out at her like twin pools of blue flames. They didn't quite glow, but seemed to gather and reflect every bit of available light. The tunic swept down, emphasizing the broad back, the narrowness of the hips. The clothing seemed to be one long garment, extending down the legs, ending just short of the tops of heavy shoes resembling stout boots the color of slate.

Alisse stared at him for a long moment, her higher reasoning apparently shutting down in her fright. Then she swallowed hard, holding her throat, unable to peel her eyes away from that brilliant gaze.

“Who... are you? What do you want?”

“I am called Lukanos.”

His voice was strange, very deep, with a timbre that seemed to vibrate in her chest, the sound of his words resembling two stereo channels that weren't completely in sync.

One thing was for sure — it wasn't a human voice. Not in the least.

“L... Lukanos?” Her mouth was so dry her lips threatened to stick together. She cleared her throat, willing her heart rate to slow down from scared shitless to merely frantic. “Why are you in my house?”

“I've been watching you, Alisse.”

“How the hell do you know my name?” Her voice squeaked on the last word, her pulse now pounding like a drum in her head. She was in trouble here. Her phone was on the far side of her bed. It was time to call 911. Like yesterday.

“Need to get my coat. Freezing in here with the window...” she said, as she took a step toward the hallway, wincing at the absurdity of her words. If she could get to her room, she'd have a chance. Lock the door, call the cops. Tell him to leave while he still had time.

You think your little bedroom door's going to stop a man as big as him?

“I do not think you want to do that, miss.”

He moved faster than she'd have ever believed possible, crossing the spacious kitchen in an instant,

looming even larger up close, towering over her. A hand the size of a dinner plate took hold of her forearm with a power that seemed to drain the strength from her limbs. A sharp point of heat flared at the base of her neck and she looked up into his face, her lips moving soundlessly, her vision already beginning to gray. She dropped to her knees then, his hand still gripping her.

The last thing she saw before the blackness swallowed everything up, were the fingers of his hand.

They were long, and thick, and veined.

And there were six of them.

Chapter 3

The Captain looked so enraged that, for a fleeting moment, Lukanos wondered if he might be shot. “What has gotten into that thick head of yours, soldier? Do you *realize* what you’ve done?” Captain Maerata paced in front of Alisse’s house, the sun just beginning to lighten the horizon. He hadn’t even finished his transmission informing Maerata of the new... situation, before the comm line was cut.

Maerata had appeared on site in less than ten minutes, his eyes blazing with fury.

“I didn’t harm her. Gave her a dose of Verilim when she tried to contact her authorities. Seemed prudent, all things considered.”

“You mean prudent considering you’d just violated the Directive — and probably scared her half to death in the process.”

Lukanos glanced down at the soft, unconscious bundle of loveliness cradled in his arm. “I believe I reduced the dose enough to account for her body mass. She might be a little groggy when she wakes up —”

“Command doesn’t issue us animal tranquilizers for use on *humans*, you dolt.”

Maerata pulled his helmet off with a hiss as the enhanced oxygen mixture escaped into the air. Maerata’s home planet had a two percent higher concentration of oxygen than that found on this world, so he preferred to replenish himself with his own supply of atmosphere from time to time. Like many Survey Team members, the Captain found prolonged continuous exposure to Terra’s slightly lower oxygen levels to be somewhat draining.

The Captain glared at him for over a minute, his jaw clenched tight, then finally he sighed. “I... should have known you’d try this. Stupid of me, really.”

“Come again, Captain?”

Of all the things he’d expected Maerata to say, that hadn’t been one of them.

“You’ve *always* been too interested in them, especially the females. Command has questioned more than once the reason why your survey routes have so often included these coordinates.”

“What did you tell them?”

Maerata slapped the helmet against his thigh. “Research facility.” He winced. “Not *technically* a lie, as she’s involved in their orbital interferometer project. Primitive though it is.”

Lukanos couldn’t help the grin spreading across his face. He’d suspected, of course; the Captain had done far more than seemed necessary to accommodate his lieutenant’s particular... preoccupation. He’d always wondered if his superior officer might harbor his own interest in the female of the human species.

Don’t push your luck.

“She’s... I couldn’t leave her, Captain. Not now.”

“And why not?”

They both knew the answer, of course. Human obsession was a known risk of survey duty on Terra. Just as they also were well aware that the Captain had been far too indulgent with his lieutenant’s fixation. The question in Lukanos’ mind though, was why.

“I suppose we’ve little choice. Damn you, this is going to get messy — and quickly.” Maerata fixed

him with a cold glare. “You’ll be lucky if they *only* discharge you. I hope you realize that.”

Lukanos straightened himself, lifting his chin. “I know the punishment. I will accept it.”

“I don’t suppose I can convince you to take her back in that house and let me give her a temp block? It’ll wipe the last week or so of her long-term memory, but otherwise it won’t hurt her.”

“No, Captain. It’s too late for that.” Lukanos clutched her soft curves closer to him, his cock stirring at the way her flesh yielded to his, her plump lips yawning open, the pink of her tongue just barely visible as her head lolled gently upon his arm.

“That’s what I thought,” Maerata looked away, cursing under his breath. With a muted click, he put his helmet back on, stabbing a finger at his subordinate. “You leave me little choice then, Lieutenant. Our mission is over. You’ve got thirty minutes to make it back to the ship. We’re aborting, immediately.”

“I’m sorry, sir.”

He couldn’t help his sheepishness, the regret that he’d disobeyed his commanding officer. But for the lovely creature in his arms, he knew he’d do just about anything — regulations or not.

“You just get back to the ship,” Maerata barked, slapping the opaque black of his visor down over his face. “I’ve got to report this mess back to Command.”

* * *

The first thing she could remember was the deep, bone-vibrating hum. It was all around her, just below the level of audible, but felt nonetheless through every molecule of her body.

She opened her eyes, then snapped them shut with a yelp, the bright, white light stabbing deep into her skull. Slowly, she cracked open one lid, then the other, the blur slowly coming into focus. Her head pounded steadily, her thoughts sluggish, synapses firing at only half speed.

“Give it time to wear off,” a deep voice said, the pitch of it seeming to harmonize with the background hum. It was familiar, but she couldn’t quite place it. “Should be clear of it in a few minutes. Then we can get a proper look at you.”

What?

Her eyes began to water as she opened them fully, the intense light still uncomfortable, but bearable. She couldn’t make out much of her surroundings save she was reclined on some sort of bench or long seat. Eyes brimming now as they burned, she brought her hand to her face — but was pulled up short.

Oh shit.

Something was wrapped snugly around her wrist.

She tried the other, yanking hard when it too proved to be bound fast. Her vision came fully into focus then, and she saw him.

Again.

Christ, this cannot be happening.

The same man she’d seen in her kitchen, the same one who’d... done something to her. Knocked her out, somehow. What had he said his name was? He was standing over her once more. This time, rather than the tunic, he wore only white trousers of the same thin fabric, the leggings so tight upon him that they outlined every inch of the massively muscled thighs — and the bulge of genitals the size of which made her mouth go dry.

The man smiled at her then, his deep blue eyes sparkling in the bright light. He turned his head, addressing someone behind her field of vision. “See what I told you about her tears? Beautiful.”

He wasn’t alone.

She craned her head to the left, her heart seizing in her chest. There was another one. A man? No, that didn’t seem quite right. Then she remembered the hands. His arms were crossed, one hand stroking a prominent chin, and at that moment she remembered the last thing she’d seen before passing out.

Six fucking fingers!

Though he was dressed in the same full tunic like her night visitor had worn, this one was the color

of coal. This new “man” had the same hairless, über-masculine appearance, though he was slightly taller and somewhat less massively built than the shirtless man standing over her.

“I’m... not crying,” she tried to say, the words coming out as hoarse, indecipherable croaks.

“Probably a side effect from the tranquilizer, Lukanos,” Maerata scowled. “Used too much on her, damn you.”

Lukanos! That’s the name!

“T-tranquilizer? Where am I?”

What the hell is going on?

The man in black sighed loudly, then began speaking to his partner in a language she’d never heard before, the words seeming to be all short, sharp consonants and largely bereft of vowels. Lukanos glanced at her, then put his hand to the base of his own throat, speaking to the other in increasingly animated words using the same strange language.

Disoriented, she closed her eyes, trying to block out the words, the tongue they spoke sounding disturbingly... alien.

“You are all right, Alisse?”

Her eyes snapped open again, not expecting the sudden return to English. “I—I don’t know.”

“Can you stand?”

“Hard to stand when I’m tied to... whatever the hell this is.” She looked down at her bound wrists. “Is this... necessary?”

I think you have a helluva lot bigger problems than being bound to this couch, lady.

“Let’s have her up and see if she can walk,” the man in black said.

The straps around her wrists unlocked, falling away, and Lukanos knelt down next to her, picking her up with a ridiculous ease that bespoke tremendous strength.

The vibration coursed through her body as her toes touched the cool metal of the floor. “Where — where are we?”

She certainly was nowhere near home. She was certain of it, even though she had no real way of knowing.

“How do you feel now?” Lukanos’ expressive eyes sparkled as he looked down upon her.

Her head swam a little, but she gave him a tiny nod, the shakiness fading by the second.

“It’s wearing off,” the man in black muttered. “She’s stronger than she looks.”

“They *all* are, Captain. I’ve tried to tell you this before. We underestimate the humans.” Lukanos glanced at her. “I admire them.”

“What you admire are the *females*, Lieutenant. You forget who your partner’s been for the past two Terrans.”

Alisse swallowed hard. She wasn’t so sure what she’d just heard boded well for her. At all.

“Hard not to like that particular part of humanity.” Lukanos touched her shoulder, the huge hand wrapping softly around her.

“You admire it too much, Lieutenant — and as a result, you’ve made a terrible mess. For both of us.”

Lukanos stiffened, his hand dropping away. “I don’t care. I’ll take whatever punishment I deserve. It’s worth it, to have her.”

The man in black made a disgusted sound, waving a hand at his colleague and turning away.

“Please,” Alisse said. “Who are you? What’s going on here? I don’t — what is this place?” She scanned the expansive room around her, the walls appearing to be made of a featureless metallic substance, the edges at floor and ceiling rounded rather than right angles.

“Where you are, human, is nowhere, really.” The man in black spread his huge hand against the wall, then drew it down sharply. The walls immediately darkened, then faded away entirely, Alisse clapping her hand to her mouth as she let out a hoarse shout of surprise. She spun around, looking up, down. In every direction, she saw more than she’d ever have thought possible.

Stars. Billions of them.

She'd seen the galactic star field as viewed from Earth, of course. She'd even finagled a trip to Cero Paranal in Chile to get the best view of the southern sky. She still remembered the first time she laid eyes on the hauntingly beautiful Southern Cross.

That was *nothing* though. Her colleagues back home would be shitting themselves at the view she had now.

Except... these weren't the same stars. There were far too many, in every direction she looked. The constellations were all wrong too. No, they weren't just wrong — they were *gone*. In their place a sea of stars as foreign to her as a person seeing the sky for the very first time.

"I don't... I don't understand."

Yes, you do. It means it's all true.

"Not really nowhere, precisely," the man in black said, looking back at both of them. "Rather, *en route* as some of your species like to say. We transited the Sol gate just before you woke up. We should be arriving at the rendezvous in moments, actually."

"Rendezvous?" Darkness flitted across Lukanos' pure blue eyes for a moment, gone as fast as it appeared. "We're not transferring to base?"

"We've been ordered to divert to Command One."

Lukanos quirked a dark eyebrow. "Command One?"

The man in black turned back to them, a sweep of his hand making the dazzling star field fade away to featureless metallic white walls once more. "You didn't think your defiance of our laws — and our sacred oath — was going to go unnoticed, did you?"

Lukanos tensed ever so slightly. "It would have — if you hadn't *reported* it to Command."

A hint of extreme weariness snuck into the Captain's otherwise cool gaze. "You know I had no choice."

They stared each other down for a moment, Alisse suddenly sure that despite their utter lack of speech, something was passing between the two giant men, their jaws tight, eyes glinting.

"What's happening?" Though it felt absurd, the urge to draw closer to the massive, musclebound Lukanos was overwhelming. He was the one thing remotely familiar in this crazy situation. As if sensing her need, his huge arm slipped around her waist, the palm spreading proprietorially upon her hip, pulling her against his side. His flesh felt as hard and immovable as a great tree, and if only for a moment, she found solace in that fleeting sense of protection.

Yes, protectiveness... from the man who kidnapped you.

She'd have to mull that over some other time though. Something was about to happen, and instinctively, she knew it posed possible danger.

He smiled down at her, a fondness in his gaze that both made her shiver and elicited a strange stirring deep in her belly.

Oh no...

Suddenly, she realized both of the hulking males were staring at her.

"Get her strapped back in, Lieutenant. We're docking with Command 1 in ten minutes."

"Why, Captain? We haven't even inspected her yet..."

"Admiral Kosha wants to see her." Maerata scowled at his lieutenant. "And figure out what in space to do with a certain Directive-violating soldier."

Chapter 4

Admiral Kosha paced before them, both Lukanos and the Captain standing at attention. It was usually an auspicious event to meet a fleet command officer in person, but Lukanos knew this moment was anything but auspicious. This was potentially disastrous.

Older than both of them, with shoulders no longer quite so broad, eyes a trifle less bright, Kosha was still a powerful man. And he had the ability to open innumerable doors — or crush a career with a single order.

Behind the pacing senior officer, Alisse looked on from her perch, bound fast, her knees drawn up in a feeble, instinctive gesture of self-protection, the robe she wore riding up to expose the paleness of her lower legs. Her eyes were wide as she studied each man, following the Admiral's every movement. If anything, she was even more alluring in her fear. She was a smart one, for a human, and that intellect only fired Lukanos' desire higher. He'd read some of the accounts written by other Yaanfahrs who'd clandestinely taken humans, and the pleasure to be had in taming those keen minds, those strong wills, was almost as sweet as their enjoyment of the lush, soft curves so admired in human females. Alisse was blessed with more than her share of curves, her physical beauty holding a power to him he couldn't quite understand. Perhaps it was the difference in their species, that otherness that attracted him?

Perhaps you're just depraved.

Depravity wasn't unknown in Yaanfahrs society, and it was accepted as a natural variation, but that didn't keep it from being largely suppressed, especially in the military corps.

Alisse struggled briefly in the restraints holding her firm to the grav couch. Lukanos had much better — and more elaborate — restraints at home. And he intended for her to experience every one.

First, he had to *get* her home.

Kosha stopped before them, crossing his hands behind his back, his dark, heavy fleet officer's coat so long it brushed against the floor at his feet. He fixed them both in turn with gray, flinty eyes.

"I hand pick all of the Survey Teams. I've been doing it for more than fifty cycles, and I've usually made sound choices."

Lukanos opened his mouth, but the Admiral gave him a sharp shake of his head, silencing him.

"This isn't the first time this has happened, and sadly, it's unlikely to be the last. But that doesn't absolve you in the least for paying for what you've done. The Directive is there for a reason, Lieutenant. It's not a guideline. And you have no *right* to deviate from it." Kosha shifted his gaze to the Captain, the sharp glint in his eyes softening somewhat. "You've commanded well, Captain Maerata. A more exemplary field officer, I've never encountered. I'm less surprised that our head strong lieutenant has overstepped his bounds than I am learning he's done it while a member of one of *your* teams."

"Yes, sir," the Captain murmured.

"It's done though, and all I'm left with is deciding what in *space* to do with the two of you." Kosha fixed Lukanos with a look that made his blood run cold. "Admirals made of sterner stuff than me have been known to flush insubordinate soldiers straight out of an airlock."

Kosha stared at him for what seemed an eternity, Lukanos' heart beating like a drum in his chest, his

mouth suddenly dry. Termination was something he'd never seriously considered, though technically, for violations of the Directive, Command held the literal power of life and death.

Finally, Kosha sighed, spinning on his heel with a shake of his head. He walked slowly toward Alisse, her face paling as she looked up at him.

"She seems to know when to stay silent, at least. Some of their species can't seem to ever stop talking." Kosha's gaze coursed over her bound form. Was there a faint interest there? "Might as well get her up and out of those restraints."

Relieved to be freed from standing at attention, Lukanos rushed to the task, freeing her and pulling her to her feet to stand before the Admiral. Lukanos clasped his hands down upon her delicate shoulders, loving the play of smooth, trembling muscles under his fingers. He stroked the line of her collar bone with a thumb as she peered up at Kosha.

"A well-formed specimen, if nothing else," the Admiral murmured, before clicking on his interpreter unit to ensure Alisse understood what was about to be said. He returned his attention to Lukanos.

"Lieutenant, you've got two choices." Kosha nodded toward Alisse. "You can keep your little toy here and retire immediately from Survey Team service. Your file will be placed in administrative review — and you can be sure said review will recommend you be cashiered. You'll be lucky to get out of it with half of your post-discharge stipend, so if you choose that option, I hope you've invested your savings well. You'll need it."

"Yes, sir. I... thought that might happen."

Lukanos had invested every credit of his pay since day one. Maybe deep down, he'd always known he'd try this eventually, but somehow he knew he'd need that nest egg. Fortunately, he'd done well, and in concert with the value of his modest inherited land holdings, his savings ensured he could live quite comfortably for the rest of his life — even if the Administrative Review decided to dock his entire post-discharge pay.

"Alternatively, we try to clean up this total wreck of a situation." Kosha began to pace again. "You take her back to Terra — supervised by Captain Maerata, of course. Your position will be placed in Administrative Review, and because I do think you are a generally capable soldier, I *may* be able to see to it that you're subject to mere demotion — and prompt reassignment. Oh, and she would have to have her mind wiped."

"Oh my God, no!" Alisse struggled against Lukanos' grip, and he squeezed her harder, murmuring to her to try to calm down, that things were as they should be. Thankfully, she went quiet, though he could feel the tension in her muscles coming off of her in veritable waves.

"She'll need to be trained out of that, if you keep her," Kosha said with a mild look of distaste.

"I assure you, she would be, sir." Lukanos' cock was already stirring at the appealing prospect of taking her over his knee and testing some of the many implements he'd collected over many cycles. She'd learn — and quickly — that obedience and compliance were much preferable to scorching hot buttocks. Corporal punishment was not only commonly used with taken humans — he'd reread those accounts more times than he cared to admit — but it was expected. The same way an owner might discipline a misbehaving pet. Moreover, unique to the human females, a few of them actually seemed to grow to respond to it, even become aroused by discipline. The phenomenon was well-documented, though admittedly quite rare. There was some argument over whether this was an induced response, or if this was part of some innate variation in some human females. Regardless, he found it fascinating.

Kosha continued. "Now, if you're wiped, human, it's not a full wipe. We're not a cruel species, unlike your own. You'd lose perhaps a week of long-term memory, and retain zero recall of anything that's happened here. Perhaps a mild headache for a day or two, and life would go on as it had before. You would never see any of us again, nor have any memory of ever having encountered our kind in the first place."

"Please, what... who are you?" Her voice was strong, though it did betray a slight tremble. Admirable strength, indeed. "Your kind?"

Kosha looked from Maerata then back to Lukanos. “You’ve not told her yet? Smart of you, but she should know.” He flicked his gaze back down to Alisse. “We are called the Yaanfah, and the two you encountered are surveyors we send to worlds that need to be monitored until they’re ready for the next steps in their evolution.”

“N-next steps? What—?”

“It is a complicated tale, but there is a larger community of civilizations in our galaxy, and the men like the lieutenant and his captain are sent out to promising civilizations not yet ready to join that community. It has been this way for millions of your Terran years. Sadly, most civilizations eventually destroy themselves — and Terra shows troubling signs that it may follow a similar course, with your species’ mystifying tendency to fight and kill over simple parcels of land, or even worse, their particular interpretation of a deity. Most troubling indeed.”

“Oh my... oh my God,” Alisse hissed, sagging in Lukanos’ grip. “The Fermi paradox — my God — that means it’s... zoo. It’s the *zoo hypothesis*?”

Lukanos nodded. “Your great scientist, Fermi. He accomplished much with such a primitive brain.”

Her eyes darted back and forth, her nostrils flaring. “This... is this real? This can’t be real.”

“I assure you, human, this is quite real. I understand it’s difficult for a barbaric species to understand, but Terra is an inconsequential world, though a beautiful one. Your species is a mere speck in the Grand Diaspora, the community of civilizations peopling our galaxy. The sooner you accept this, the sooner you will reach a new state of enlightenment, as much as you’re capable of perceiving, that is.”

“I’m a... scientist. I can accept this. It’s... it’s just a shock, that’s all.” Her voice cracked on the last word, and she quickly cleared her throat. “Uh, sir.”

Yes, there might be more to the gorgeous Alisse Southwick than even Lukanos suspected. His cock was at full mast now, and he was careful to hold her far enough away to prevent it from jutting against her. There would be time enough for that at home.

“So, which is it, Lieutenant?” The Admiral scowled. “Be quick before I change my mind.”

“I’m ready to accept the consequences, Admiral. I want her. I choose to keep her.”

The Admiral grunted. “Just one more thing then, my over eager Lieutenant. She must be fully informed of what remaining with us would actually mean for her — and for you. We are not barbarians here, and if she does not agree with what will be done with her, then she *must* be taken back to Terra — regardless of your wishes.” His intent gaze moved from Lukanos down to Alisse. “So, the decision to stay... must be hers.”

* * *

Alisse was fairly certain her jaw had actually hit the deck at the Admiral’s pronouncement. Could he be serious about that?

Why are you already equivocating?

It was because she was seriously considering staying. After Phillip, she had nobody left, really. Both her parents were long dead, and she had no siblings. What friends she had were all through her job, and really more acquaintances than anything else. No, an absent Alisse was highly unlikely to be missed by much of anyone.

If she stayed though, she’d be able to learn more about the universe than all of humankind that came before her. It was a scientist’s dream. That they were aliens was obvious now. They were on some sort of transport ship. If this was a hoax, then it was the hoax of the century — and who would have any reason to want to fool her in this way?

No, this was real. And everything humans had ever known would have to be reevaluated.

But there was one more thing, of more concern to her than any other consideration — and that was what was to become of her if she agreed to stay. It was clear she’d be some sort of second class citizen at best, maybe even a captive of sorts. Could she go along with that in exchange for the chance to learn so

much?

You'd be learning about more than the stars, idiot. Stop kidding yourself. You've seen the way they look at you — the way Lukanos looks at you. You heard his words. You would be his. Are you prepared to explore that too?

A stirring deep in her belly seemed to provide a confirmation of her answer, even if she didn't have the strength yet to speak the words. She glanced up at Lukanos, who still gazed at the hulking Admiral. The man had shown nothing but kindness to her, his muscled, masculine frame seemingly as capable of gentleness as it was aggression. What did it mean that she'd like to see both? To experience both?

This isn't one of your smut books. This is real, not a fantasy.

And now she had the chance to live out that fantasy — if she had the courage, that is.

"I'll — I'll stay. If it gives me the chance to learn, and experience. I'll stay."

Her heart was galloping now, a rushing sound growing louder and louder in her ears. She knew the import of uttering those words. What if there was no going back?

The Admiral's lips tightened. "You are a lesser being, and you must be fully informed of the consequences of your decision. You will not be one of us — you will be the possession of the Lieutenant. Maybe you will be a pet? Or a slave? Or even just a — what's the word — a toy? For his amusement. It will be entirely up to him. Do you still wish to stay?"

"Yes." The word fell from her lips, almost of its own accord, Lukanos making a surprised — and approving — sound behind her. His hands stroked her shoulders, leaving gooseflesh in their wake. The stirring in her belly came on stronger then and she bit her lip, even as a frantic voice way down inside was sounding the alarm. Desperately trying to talk reason into her.

Her stone hard nipples, and the rising heat between her thighs seemed to provide the answers to such an entreaty.

What's happening to you?

The Admiral stared at her for a long moment, the intensity of his gaze making her look away, unable to bear it.

"Then it is done," he said. "Lieutenant, she's yours. Let's see what my probably misguided indulgence has won you."

Uh oh.

"Sir?" Lukanos pulled her in close in a seemingly automatic protective gesture.

"Go on, stand out"—the Admiral quirked an eyebrow—"what do you call it?"

"She's called Alisse, Sir."

"Well then, Alisse, come closer."

Lukanos let her go, his huge hand at the small of her back as he murmured to her. "It's all right. He's just looking."

Feeling as if she were going to the gallows, she took two small steps, finding herself gawking up at the stern Admiral.

"Lower your eyes, human. Shoulders back, stand up straight. You'll learn that, I suppose."

"Among other things," Lukanos said behind her, the men chuckling.

She obeyed, feeling the heat bloom at her cheeks. It was a surreal experience standing in nothing but her threadbare robe on the deck of an alien vessel, being looked over like some prize at an auction.

Count yourself lucky that that's not exactly what this is.

Of course, that was a lie too; there'd been more than a few auction scenes in her favorite novels, and they never failed to fill her with a dark, twisted arousal, which shamed as much as it excited.

"Rather large breasts on this one," the Admiral rumbled above her. "I see why she caught your attention. Turn around now."

Alisse closed her eyes against the embarrassment as she complied, knowing how little the sheer garment hid from view.

"Well, a backside seemingly made for those hands, I think. Eh, Lieutenant?"

“Yes, sir,” Lukanos said, his voice growing thick.

The Admiral squatted down, drawing close. “I suspect you’re going to become well-acquainted with those hands, should you go through with this, human.”

She shuddered, biting down a retort, wishing she could cover her hard nipples — and knowing instinctively that such a thing would get her in trouble.

Relief flooded through her when the Admiral stood once more. She chanced a look at him, unsure whether she was still supposed to keep her eyes down.

“I will refer your file for Administrative Review, Lieutenant. As I said, you will almost certainly be cashiered... *if* the knowledge of her abduction were to be entered into the official record.”

“Could you, sir?” Lukanos’ voice held a curious note of hope.

The Admiral fixed his glare upon the lieutenant. “I’ll make this offer one time. You keep a low profile — a *very* low profile — with your new toy here, and I’ll see to it that this doesn’t make it onto the official record.”

“Thank you, sir!” Lukanos was beaming, his eyes a bright blue she’d never seen on him before. Did their color change with their emotions?

“Don’t thank me,” the Admiral said, heading for the door. “Thank your Captain. He’s the one who talked me into it.”

Maerata slowly turned his head toward Lukanos, but said nothing, his lips a thin line, eyes hooded, unreadable.

“Captain, I—”

“Before I go, there’s one more thing you should know, Lieutenant. She’ll need to be registered and inspected — no exceptions. And she will be your *sole* responsibility.”

“Yes, Admiral, of course.” Lukanos squeezed her shoulder, pulling her close once more.

“Do you intend to mate with her?” A vaguely distasteful look crossed the Admiral’s craggy, expressive features. “I know that’s... sometimes done.”

“Yes, sir.”

Alisse’s stomach dropped to the floor, even as her womb clenched tightly.

Oh... my God.

“Then you know she’ll have to go through the Induction eventually. Think about if you’re really ready for that. Just because she’s part of an inferior, barbaric species don’t think for one moment that that fact absolves you from the Induction requirement. As I said, eventually.”

She hadn’t a clue what they were referring to, but her mind was already running wild with it.

Alisse, you’re in way over your head here.

So why didn’t her body get with the program? Despite the almost certain prospect that she’d be used sexually by the hulking Lukanos, she could already feel a mortifying trickle of moisture threatening to drip down her inner thigh.

“I’ll ask you one last time, human.” A smile played at the Admiral’s lips, as if he finally had her where he wanted her. “Do you still wish to stay?”

No! It’s... too much.

“Yes... sir.”

The Admiral’s eyes flashed, then he glanced at the Captain. “Maerata, you’re with me. We’ve got much else to discuss.”

The Captain looked back over his shoulder at the two of them, before disappearing though the doorway, the Admiral at his side.

She was finally alone, with the man who would own her.

END SAMPLE