

# XALAN CLAIMED

XALANITE MATES BOOK 1

USA TODAY BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

AJ MULLICAN

Xalan Claimed  
*Xalanite Mates Book 1*  
AJ Mullican



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This one's for all the women who thought they were done at forty-five. For  
the ones who thought they had peaked.

For the ones who want a stacked alien boyfriend built like a Rabbit ;)  
IYKYK

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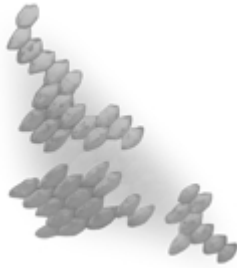
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# Chapter 1

## *Amber*



When I caught my ex-husband cheating on me with two women at once, I thought I'd seen it all.

I was about to learn how wrong I'd been.

I lost almost everything in the divorce. My car, my five-bedroom house in the suburbs, my last name, my Goddamn dignity. I went from Amber Evans, single woman-on-the-go, to Amber Last-Name-Redacted, bitter forty-something divorcee. I even lost my dog.

The one thing I didn't lose was our summer cabin on the lake. *That* he let me keep.

The rat bastard probably thought he'd gotten one over on me in that deal. After all, it's the place where I caught him, where I saw him fucking my best friend and her sister at the same time. Joke's on him, though; I scrubbed the entire place with bleach and moved my newly single self in without a moment's hesitation.

I had to admit, the alimony was decent. I could get by without having to supplement too much. I found a nice work from home job, something part time where I could set my own hours. It was a little boring, just some basic IT support that any idiot can do, but it paid the bills that were left each month after I'd spent my alimony. I was even able to afford to save up extra to add a few amenities to the cabin. Bookshelves for every available wall, and a hot tub for those achy muscles.

I had enough to get the best Battery-Operated Boyfriend money could buy. Between BOB and my whole-house library

of primo smut, I had plenty to keep me occupied. Paperbacks became my vice, and I stocked my shelves with every trope I could find, from friends to lovers to forced proximity to the weird and wild. I had tentacles sitting side-by-side on the same shelf as small-town sweetness, and the erotic chaos that resulted pleased my crow brain. All the pretties, all for me.

Life in the cabin was blissfully normal, if a little boring and lonely. Yeah, BOB got me through the long winter nights up there in northwestern New York, but he wasn't a real man, and even with the clit licker attachment I wasn't as satisfied as I'd like to be. Maybe that's why Ryan got bored with me and hooked up with Sarah and Melanie. He always said it was too much work to get me off, that it shouldn't take hours to get a woman to orgasm. He blamed me for our marital problems, especially the lack of satisfactory sex life. Typical male: If he can't do the job, then the job can't be done. In his little pea brain, it was as simple as that.

Fuck Ryan. BOB and I didn't need him, anyway.

The day everything changed, BOB died.

BOB and I coexisted beautifully for over a year before I wore out his motor. I gave him a proper sea burial in Lake Ontario in my Louis Vuitton shoebox, but that left me alone until his replacement got shipped.

Tying back my long, dark hair, I set about deep cleaning the cabin to distract myself from my frustrations while I was BOB-less. Next-day shipping wasn't fast enough for me, and I needed something to take my mind off things until BOB's successor arrived. I pulled up a 90s alternative playlist for a little nostalgia while I worked and blasted it through the whole-house speaker system. I started around noon and kept myself busy until the sun had gone down. After a few hours dancing to Nirvana and Soundgarden, the cabin sparkled.

Suddenly, a bright light flashed outside the large bay window on the lakefront side of the house, followed a half second later by a thundering crash and loud splashing. I moved to shield my eyes with a hand, but just as quickly as it came, the phenomenon disappeared. I blinked a few times to clear the



afterimage from my vision. Outside the window, steam rose from the lake. I couldn't quite see anything much else, and after a few minutes of waiting, my curiosity got the better of me. I grabbed an oversized cardigan and slid my arms inside the sleeves to ward off the early winter chill as I stepped outside.

It turned out I didn't really need the cardigan. Heat radiated off the water, and the lake sizzled. I caught what looked like bubbles disturbing the surface a few hundred feet out, well past my private deck.

I walked to the edge of the deck and peered over the railing at the lake. I couldn't see anything that would cause the steam and, well, the boiling lake. Maybe it had just been lightning after all ...

Water surged out of the lake, splashing over the rail and soaking me. I coughed and sputtered as lake water got in my mouth. When I raised my eyes, I was met with the strangest sight I'd ever seen. Standing on the other side of the rail, tall and dark and *freaking purple*, was a man.

Well ... kind of a man. Men don't have scales. They don't have yellow eyes.

They don't generally go swimming half naked in the winter.

A scream ripped from my throat, and I scuttled back, slipping on the wet deck and landing square on my tailbone. The weird purple man climbed over the railing and hopped down onto the deck, landing in a crouch. He blinked at me, and his head cocked to the side. He looked like a curious puppy.

A scaly purple puppy. With tight, wet pants. Form-fitting pants.

*"K'ah mlye han?"*

Were those words? His mouth opened and closed, sounds came out, but I had no idea what he might have been trying to say. I was too distracted by the strangeness of the whole thing, not to mention the bare, glistening pecs and abs he sported. This purple man was *built*, and for a moment I forgot that I missed BOB.

“*K’nah noye Q’on. K’ah mlye han?*” He tapped a muscular pec, then pointed at me.

What did he want? I trembled, though whether from fear or from getting drenched when he jumped out of the lake at me, I couldn’t tell. All I knew was I had come out here without any kind of protection, and now I was at the mercy of a huge man-fish with what looked to be a rather wide assortment of guns, knives, and other weapons strapped to his belt and legs—a whole damn arsenal, right there in front of me.

Just as I thought that, his hand reached for one of those weapons, and I realized I had to stop gaping and start *running*. I scrambled to my feet and rushed towards the cabin as he drew a nasty-looking device and aimed it at me.

My wet hands slipped on the handles of the French doors, and I felt a stinging pinch on the back of my neck as a loud *zap* echoed through the night.

Crap! I reached back with one hand to feel how bad the wound was, but my hair was so wet and the lighting so terrible on the deck that I couldn’t tell if I was bleeding. I jerked the door open and ran inside, hoping the purple man didn’t decide to chase me.

No such luck. I turned back for a split second, just long enough to see him chasing after me. He’d dropped the weapon, but he still had more hanging off of him. Not wanting to stick around to find out what each device did, I shot around the kitchen island, through the living room, and out the front door. If I could just get to my car, I might have a chance to get away.

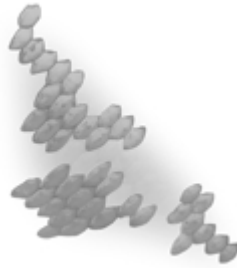
I slid two more times on the icy ground as I ran, bruising a knee and possibly twisting an ankle. When I got to my car, my heart sank in my chest as I realized I’d left it locked ... and the keys were in the house.

I whipped around and screamed again. The man was charging straight for me.

I was as good as dead.

## Chapter 2

### *Amber*



Covering my head with an arm, I crouched low, hoping to make myself a smaller target. The seconds ticked by as I waited for him to shoot me or grab me or whatever he was going to do with me. When nothing happened, I risked a peek.

The dripping wet man knelt next to me, his chiseled face twisted into a frown. He brushed wet purple hair out of his eyes and pointed to my ankle.

“You fell. You hurt?”

Did this motherfucker just speak English? Granted, it was broken English, but understandable nonetheless.

I recoiled, scooting closer to the car as though it would keep me safe from him. “Stay back! I—I’ll call the cops!”

A flash of confusion washed across his face before he broke out into a grin. “Brave woman.”

Was he condescending me? Rage warred with the fear inside me, and my dumb ass decided to go with anger. “Listen, asshole, you move one inch closer, and I’ll make you regret it.”

The grin widened, flashing iridescent white teeth and some fangs that should not have been as attractive as they were to me. “Feisty woman. I approve.” He reached behind his back, and for a split second, I worried he was going to pull a knife on me and slit my throat. Instead, he grabbed a small silver box that emitted a weird green light. “Do not concern. I fix.”

Fix? Fix what? I stared in awe as he gently took my ankle in one clawed hand and ran the box over the joint. A flash of pain made me jerk and cry out, but it was so brief that I felt silly for squealing. When he was done, I flexed my ankle and found it back to normal. No more pain.

The purple man set the box down and nodded. “Fix.” Again he tapped his chest. “I Q’on. I ... apology for fear. Nanites must enter brain stem for words.”

Nanites? Brain stem? What did he do to me?

Q’on—it was so strange, like I could hear the apostrophe when he said it—fished in his utility belt for a moment, digging into a small leather pouch, and pulled out a shiny hunk of metal. He held it out to me, but I was so stunned by what was happening that I just stared at the thing. “I pay. You take.”

Whatever shock I was in started wearing off, and I shook uncontrollably. Definitely not going to win me any bravery prizes with that. Rather than demonstrate just how jarring this whole experience was, I opted to nod at the metal chunk instead of pointing. “What is that thing? It’s not radioactive, is it?”

He threw his head back and laughed. “No danger. Is ... money? No better word.”

Against my better judgment, I took the cool rock. For as small as it was, it weighed heavy in my hand, and once I looked closer I realized it wasn’t just a shapeless piece but faceted like a gemstone. I watched in amazement as my reflection gaped back at me in the facets.

“What’s it made out of?”

His mouth twisted as he chewed his lip, an oddly human act that almost made me forget he was something other. “It is *krin*. You do not have word. Maybe not on this planet.”

This planet? What did that mean? “And what planet are you from?”

“Xalan. Many distance from this Earth. Many stars, many moons.”

That's it. I must have hit my head when I fell. There was no way I could be talking to an honest-to-God alien. Purple scales aside, he looked almost normal.

He looked ... kind of hot.

I peered through my lashes into his yellow eyes and shifted my weight. Crouching on the ground wasn't supremely comfortable, and the longer he knelt next to me, the more I realized he didn't plan on going anywhere. "What did you do to my head?"

He tapped the back of his neck. "Nanites. For words. No hurt, no fear. Just words."

"What the fuck are nanites?"

"Nanites. Machines. Small. Harmless." When I shot him a confused look, Q'on shook his head and scowled, a frightening expression when I was already scared. "Your syntax ... strange. Words jumbled. Many words with many meanings, some meanings with many words. Xalanite words not so ... vast. More direct. I ... am not using right words?"

I mean, I guessed he wasn't wrong. I just couldn't wrap my head around the idea that a purple man shot my brain stem full of tiny machines that handed him the entire English language all at once, though apparently the things didn't provide a user manual along with the translations. If I stopped a moment to calm down, his broken sentences made a semblance of sense, if a bit primitive.

He should consider himself fortunate that I wasn't multilingual. I couldn't imagine having to make sense of *two* new languages at once, and one of them being English? No, thank you.

"My language is kind of complex, yeah. It's hard for even native speakers to get it right. Hell, we can't even decide what's right between one region and another. Most don't bother trying."

Q'on nodded and sat back on his heels. I noticed that while some of him had dried off, one arm still glistened wet. That's when I realized he got hurt somehow in the lake. I felt kind of

shitty for making him chase after me when he was bleeding, especially after he did whatever he did to fix my twisted ankle. I had run from him screaming like a banshee, and he made sure I was okay before anything else.

I pointed at the dark blood oozing out of his arm. “You’re hurt. We should go inside and make sure it’s not too bad.”

Was I insane? Stranger danger, Amber! This guy could have been an alien serial killer for all I knew. Still ... guilt won out over practicality and safety. I couldn’t just let the guy bleed to death on my front lawn.

Like a true gentleman—something Ryan wouldn’t know a damn thing about—Q’on helped me to my feet. He waited for me to lead the way and stayed a respectable distance back as we walked inside. I didn’t know if it had something to do with his culture, or if it was a result of something the nanites told him, but I was grateful for his politeness. It made me feel better about the whole thing, though I tried to remind myself that Ted Bundy was a pretty suave dude from several accounts. Manners did not necessarily equate to safety. He could still decide to murder me.

I led him into the kitchen, where I felt better about my chances of cleaning up any spilled alien blood. I doubted my beige carpeted living room would fare well if he sat on the couch, and while the leather might be a bit easier to clean, tile and granite were definitely better for the occasion.

“Sit here.” I pointed to a barstool at the island counter. “I have a first aid kit. Let me get it and see what we can do.” A thought paused me halfway to the bathroom medicine cabinet, and I shouted back down the hallway. “Wait! Does your little glowing box thing fix cuts?”

When I turned around to get his answer, I damn near slammed into Q’on, who had followed me. “Jesus!” I put a hand over my heart and tried to stop myself from screaming again. “I thought I told you to sit down.”

He gave a brief glance back to the kitchen but didn’t explain why he came down the hall with me. “Laceration device missing. Lost in crash. You have?”

Laceration device? I *really* hoped he meant a healing machine like the one he used on me. Depending on the translation, “laceration device” could easily be interpreted as a thing to *make* lacerations. Knife. Sword. Scalpel. Rusty nail. I could think of a whole slew of things that could be described as laceration devices.

I decided to assume in his favor. “Uh, no. I don’t have any laceration devices. The first aid kit has gauze and tape, though, and stuff to clean the cut. Don’t want you getting some weird Earth infection that your race can’t fend off.”

After pausing for a second, Q’on finally nodded. “Gratitude.”

“Thanks. You mean thanks.”

“One means the other. There is difference?”

Oh, geez. This was going to be a long night. “I guess so? I mean, I suppose it could technically be correct to say ‘gratitude’ in this case, but usually when we’re expressing gratitude, we just say ‘thanks.’ Makes it simpler.” I got to the bathroom and grabbed my first aid kit, opening it up to see what I even had in there. “Let’s see, where’s the antiseptic?”

“Earthites make simple more complex.”

“Humans.” I corrected him without thinking, and when I turned back to him with a washcloth and antiseptic in hand, his confused expression made me realize my blunder. “Humans. My species doesn’t call itself Earthites. We call ourselves humans.”

“You are apex species?”

Apex? Oh, yeah. I guess he was right there. “Yes. That’s right.”

“Planet is Earth.”

“Yes.” I started cleaning the cut, which wasn’t as bad as it looked. Maybe the water made the blood run more, so it seemed like it was deeper. I didn’t know quite how scale wounds healed, but in my unprofessional opinion, he was going to be fine. He might scar, but if I was being honest with

myself, a cool scar across his bicep might actually be kind of hot.

“Planet is not Human?”

“What? No! A planet isn’t a person. Human is the people. Planet is the place.”

Q’on grunted. “On Xalan, planet is people. Xalanites apex species. We rule. We name.”

A little egotistical of them, but whatever. “Well, humans are weird.”

“Yes.”

I waited for him to elaborate, but he didn’t. That must have been it. Humans are weird. He didn’t even question the definition of weird. Just rolled with it.

Based on his one interaction with a human: me.

“So,” I said as I wrapped his arm with gauze, “you aren’t here to, like, take over the Earth, right?”

“No.” His eyes trailed my hands, watching my every move as I finished bandaging him up. “I am ... forbidden? Banned. No —*exiled* from Xalan. That one feels right.”

That made me pause. Should I still be scared of him?  
“Because you did something wrong?”

“Because I questioned the things they said were right.”

It was the first sentence he said that didn’t sound weird. I wondered if the nanites were responsible for that. “Go on.”

“Leaders ... corrupt. Sinister? Want bad things for us. I rebelled. Fought. Lost.” He shrugged his good shoulder and flexed the arm I just bandaged. “I like your touch. Your hands on my skin. Feels nice.”

His words made me uncomfortable. I mean, was he just saying that his arm didn’t hurt anymore, or was it something else?

Focus, Amber! I shook my head to clear it of those thoughts. The last thing I needed was to start an intergalactic incident because my hormones got the better of me. Clearly his nanites



were still glitching. “Your leaders kicked you out, then?”  
There we go. Nice change of subject—just what we needed.

“No kicking. Their words banished me.” He ambled out of the bathroom into my bedroom, and to my horror sat down cross-legged on my bed, tucking his muddy boots under him as he sat.

On my fresh, clean sheets.

I was about to exile him, too.

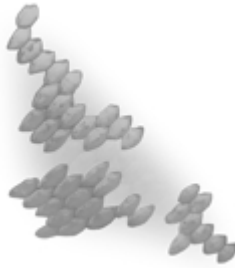
“You sit. I talk.”

Against my better judgment, I sat gingerly on the opposite side of the bed, making sure that no part of me touched him. I didn’t want him getting any bright ideas about us if the nanites told him what a bed was and what humans did in it besides sleep.

“I will tell you of my life on Xalan and talk of my exile.”

# Chapter 3

## *Q'on*



I liked this human. Her skin was soft, her body was pleasant to look at, and she was brave.

She was no Xalanite female, but I decided I would not fault her for this.

“Many solar rotations ago, I was born on Xalan. I grew up a warrior. Fought many battles, many wars. Won many battles, many wars. Then I applied to mate. To breed. Leaders said no. They control who breeds. Who mates. I wanted a female. She was beautiful. Healthy woman, many teats.” I paused and looked at the Earth woman. “You cover your teats. Is that because you only have two?”

She wrapped her garment around her chest and tugged it closed. Pity. “We don’t generally go around displaying our, uh, teats. We cover them. For modesty.”

“You are not ashamed of having so few teats, then?” I pondered this for a moment. “Good. They are worthy teats. I would enjoy them, even though there are only two.”

The woman made a strange sound in her throat, and her face changed color. More red. Not purple, like a face should be, but better than that pale, creamy white. “You, uh, were talking about this woman you liked. What happened?”

“Mili’ana. Yes. She ... expired. By leaders’ decree. They did not want me to mate with her, to breed her, so they ordered her execution. During the after-death, my grief, I learned that the leaders had her killed because *they* tried to mate her, and she refused. She wanted *me*, and that made them rage. Anger.” I

stopped. The words were right, but wrong. “Angry? So many forms to keep track of.”

“Yeah, angry is what you’re looking for.”

I nodded and looked down into my hands. “I held her when she expired. When she breathed her last. I was angry. More than the leaders. I fought. I attacked. I and many others who lost potential mates. We united. Almost won. But the leaders stopped us.”

Several time units passed before either of us spoke again.

“But you said they exiled you with words. How did they do that?”

“I perhaps spoke wrong? I fought with words. Leaders fought with words. They won.”

The woman’s over-eye hairs draw closer together, wrinkling her smooth brow. “Wait ... Did you fight them or just argue? There’s a difference.”

I felt my brow mimicking hers. “Argue is to fight, is it not?”

“Well, kind of ... but not really. I mean, a fight can be an argument, but it can also be a battle with swords or guns or fists. So, when you said you were a warrior, I assumed you meant you fought the leaders physically.”

“Oh. I spoke wrong, then.” This disappointed me. I wanted to converse well with the beautiful human. Show my prowess with her words. This would not do. I could not impress her with my knowledge of her speech if my speech was wrong. “I feel ... failure now. Apology for failure.”

She laid a soft hand on my arm. “Don’t say you’re a failure, Q’on. English is a shitty language to have to learn in any situation. Considering you’re learning without any context, you’re doing pretty well.”

Her words—and her touch—did something to my mate stick that few had. Certainly none since Mili’ana had caused my *n’ril* to rise like they did with this human woman. I wondered if a Xalanite could mate with a human. Perhaps breeding was not possible, but mating ... I would very much like that.

The human interrupted my thoughts with a sigh. “I should be the one apologizing. I mean, you’ve traveled who knows how far, and I didn’t even offer you anything to eat yet.” She looks up at me through her eye-hairs. “Would you like something to eat?”

My nanites showed me many possible meanings to her words. She likely meant food, sustenance, but I also saw that her words could be interpreted as a mating offer. Images and memories combined with meanings to show me a fascinating human mating act, one that looked quite enticing. I pictured my own head buried between her legs, and my *n’ril* rose even further. “You mean ... food?”

“Of course.”

A Xalanite curse slipped past my lips, and she cocked her head in confusion. “I don’t know that word.”

Forcing my *n’ril* to calm down, I spread my lips in what I had learned was a human sign of pleasure and affirmation—a smile. “You would not know that one. That was a Xalanite word.”

“Oh.” She stood, a fluid motion that spoke of her physical grace and prowess. “Come on. Let’s go back to the kitchen. I’ll fix you something.”

Kitchen. Food. Pity.

I followed her to the food room, happy to watch the swish of her hips as she walked in front of me. When we reached the kitchen, she opened a large metal box and bent over to look inside it. Again, a pleasing view.

“Do you prefer meat or veggies?”

I paused to allow the nanites to interpret the words. “Meat. Good for muscles.”

“Okay. I have some ribs I can cook up, but those take a while. Maybe just some quick burgers?”

“I do not know which part of the animal is a burger.”

The woman laughed as she pulled frozen meat out of the metal box. The meat was lumpy and packed into small, round discs.

“It’s a bunch of parts all mixed together. They’re good, though. I’ll get out my mini grill and start it.” She stood on her toes next to a ... cabinet? Yes. The stretch of her calves and back enticed me, but I did my best to keep my *n’ril* soft. I did not want to frighten her again. “Damnit! I can’t quite reach. Could you bring me the stepstool?”

She pointed at the assistive device she wanted, but I realized that I could reach this “mini grill” on my own. Stretching my arm over her head, I grabbed the device and pulled it out of the cabinet. “Here. I am more height.”

“Taller.” She corrected me without malice. “Sorry. I shouldn’t nitpick. You’re trying.”

“Nit ... pick ...” Several strange images accompanied the words, to include a bipedal animal plucking insects out of another’s hair. Then the true meaning came through, and I frowned. “You are not nit picking me. You are teaching me. Thanks.”

A smile stretched her lips. “You know, you’re not so scary. Kind of cute, actually. I can almost forget why I ran screaming at the sight of you.”

Compliments. Excellent. “Thanks again. You are ... not scary, either.”

“I can’t imagine you being scared of someone like me. You’ve literally fought in wars, while I’m just plain ol’ Amber. The most fighting I’ve ever done was in a courtroom, when my ex-husband tried to destroy me.”

I let her words simmer in my head until the nanites explained them. The delay between her speech and my understanding was frustrating. “Ex-husband? You can unmate someone here in this world?”

Amber’s next laugh was different than usual, and after a beat, a word came to me to describe it: bitter.

“I wish I could unmate him, as you say. Sadly, the few times we did mate can’t be taken back, though thankfully I never have to mate with the skeevy bastard again.” The device I’d gotten down for her beeped, and she placed two meat discs on

it and closed the lid. They sizzled upon touching the metal, and a pleasant aroma wafted to my nostrils. “He fucked my best friend and her sister while we were married. Right down the hall, in the same bedroom we were just in. I’ve gotten over it—mostly—but sometimes it still stings. I mean, marriage, at least for us humans, is supposed to be for the rest of our lives. It sucks when it ends.”

Rage built inside me when her meaning took hold. “He mated with others while mated to you? This is unacceptable. Xalanites mate for life. We do not mate with others. Our mates are precious. Honored. Cherished.”

“Yeah, well, Ryan didn’t get the memo.”

I slammed a fist down on the top of the kitchen surface. Counter. “Where is this Ryan? I wish to speak with him.”

Her hand rested on my chest, fingers splayed, and I stopped. “Look, Q’on, it’s been a couple of years. No use trying to defend my honor now, though I do appreciate the sentiment. Let’s just let it slide this time, okay?”

I growled low in my throat. “I will abide your wishes. No defending.”

Another beep sounded, and she took a silicone tool out of a jug filled with tools and used it to scrape the cooked meat discs off the metal plate. “There! Let me get some buns and condiments.”

“You wish to put the meat discs onto your buttocks?”

“*What?!*” She glared at me with wide eyes. “What the hell are you talking about?”

I frowned. “You said you were getting buns. That means buttocks, yes?”

Amber pinched the bridge of her slender nose. “No! I mean, sometimes it does, but no. I mean bread. We put our meat discs—our burgers—on bread. Then we add stuff for flavor.”

“The meat does not have flavor?”

“Well, it does, but ... Look, it’s complicated. Just try it.” She handed me a meat disc that she had placed between two pieces

of bread, with some strange, brightly colored sauces and some pickled vegetable discs underneath one of the bread pieces. An orange square of something was there as well, and I took the offering with care.

“What is on it?”

“Ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard, pickles, and cheese. It’s pretty basic, sorry. I have to go to the store here soon.”

The meanings of all the words took so long to process that she was halfway through her own burger before I understood it all. Nothing that would harm me, so I followed her lead and took a bite.

By the great gods of Xalan!

A moan of pleasure rumbled in my throat as I chewed the heavenly bite. An explosion of flavor erupted in my mouth, and before I knew it, I had eaten the entire burger. “More.”

Her dark eyes widened. “Jesus! You can sure put them away.” She prepared two more burgers, which I ate with gusto. When I was done, I released a mighty belch and sat on one of the tall, backless chairs around the counter in the middle of the kitchen.

“You are a good ... chef.”

Laughter bubbled out of her. I liked the sound. “I wouldn’t go so far as to call myself a chef. A decent cook maybe, but not a chef.”

I let the nanites translate the difference in my head. Both words meant one who cooks food, but one had a connotation of profession versus action. “I know both words now. I stand by what I said. You are a good chef. You prepare a good meal. Good food. You could serve this food in a dining establishment. Restaurant.”

One corner of her mouth turned up in a small smile. A grin. “Well, thanks. I appreciate it.”

A small spec of mustard clung to the corner of Amber’s mouth. I reached out and wiped it away with my thumb. “I like this look on you.”

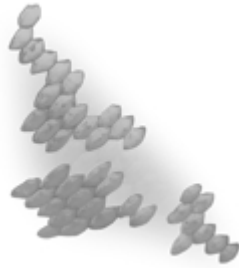
“The mustard?” Her cheeks flushed again, and she grabbed a paper cloth to wipe her mouth with.

“No. The smile. I shall have to do more things that give you this look.”



# Chapter 4

## *Amber*



I excused myself to wash up after our impromptu dinner, leaving Q'on in the living room with the TV remote to entertain him.

Between the sweaty day of cleaning and the sudden lake shower he gave me, I needed a *real* shower, with shampoo, soap, and filtered water. I stood in the stream for what felt like forever, letting the hot water wash over me and warm my chilled bones. I'd been so distracted by Q'on's presence in my house that I hadn't realized how cold I was after getting drenched.

Of course, with a half-naked man hanging out in the living room, maybe a hot shower wasn't what I needed. The longer I hung out with Q'on, the less preoccupied I was with his purple scales and the more I became aware of the bulge in his skintight pants.

What the hell was wrong with me? Not even twenty-four hours without BOB, and my hormones were in overdrive.

Remembering Q'on's comment about my "teats," I grabbed the bulkiest hoodie I owned and pulled it over my head before going back to the living room. There. Now I wouldn't be tempting him with the twins. I added a simple pair of black leggings—nothing too revealing, I hoped. They were comfortable, anyway, and I didn't own any sweatpants. A quick twist of my hair into a wet messy bun completed the look, and a glance in the mirror assured me that Q'on couldn't possibly get the wrong idea with this getup.

I wandered back into the living room to find Q'on guffawing on the couch, watching what appeared to be some war documentary. I raised a brow and sat on the other end of the plush sofa, not wanting to give the wrong impression by sitting too close. "What are you watching?"

He wiped a tear from his eye as the laughing fit ended. "Your human comedies are great. This one is about a tiny man who could not sell his art, so he started a conflict that killed hundreds of thousands."

I squinted at the screen. "Dude, is that Hitler? You're laughing at the *Holocaust*?"

He was laughing so hard he couldn't even answer me properly. "The tiny man—he is so *angry!*" I snatched the remote from Q'on and quickly changed the channel, landing on a quote-unquote reality game show.

"Here. Watch this instead. A human mating game. See, these women are all competing for this one guy's attention. He'll go on dates with all of them, and as the show goes on, he eliminates the ones he doesn't want to date."

"He eliminates them? It is a hunting game, then. A sport."

Oops. Bad choice of words. "He doesn't kill them. Just ... sends them home. The ones who stay get to try again next week. Once there's only one girl left, that's who he dates."

"Dates?"

Oh geez. The nanites must be slow. "Mates with."

He sat up and leaned forward, rapt. "This is a human mating tutorial?"

"Not quite. It's just a game. The whole thing is probably scripted, but it's not real, anyway. It's just for entertainment."

Q'on turned to me with one brow raised. The look was comical, but I bit my tongue to keep from laughing at him. "Humans mate for entertainment?"

"Well—sometimes? I mean, there's quite the porn industry, so I guess that's not totally untrue. But under normal circumstances, no. We don't date for entertainment. We do it

for companionship. Sometimes love, if you still believe in that.”

This time he frowned. “You do not believe in love?”

“Let’s just say I’ve been burned by it in the past. I’m skeptical at best when it comes to love.”

Q’on toyed with the fringe on a throw pillow as he processed my words. After a long pause, he looked back at me. I couldn’t quite place the expression on his face—something of a mix between pity and sadness, with a bit of determination thrown in. “Your word: love. It saddens me that you do not believe in it, now that I understand the meaning. I believe in love. I loved Mili’ana. We would have been good mates.” He held the pillow up as if it was a kid, almost cradling it. “We would have made good babies. Strong babies. We would have loved them.”

I thought about my own age and infertility. Ryan was partly to blame, but my body chemistry had something to do with it, too. Even if I wanted to play mating games with Q’on, there was no chance for the strong babies he was talking about. I was just about dried up. “Not everyone’s made for babies. Some people can’t. Humans, at least. I don’t know about Xalanites.”

He frowned. “Your voice is sad. Can you not have babies?”

Damnit! This was not the direction I wanted our conversation to go. “Look, let’s just find something else to watch. This talk of love and babies is depressing.”

I guess it was Q’on’s turn to steal the remote. “No. I want to watch the mating game.”

“Come on, man!” I sank back into the sofa and crossed my arms over my chest. “I’m not in the mood for this shit. Just forget I even landed on this channel.”

He turned away from me and set the remote out of my reach. “I wish to learn human mating. I wish to watch this.”

“You’re not going to learn anything real from this. I told you; it’s scripted. It’s all fake.”

If I hadn't known any better, I'd swear he was ignoring me. His jaw set, and he stared pointedly at the screen.

I sighed and stood up. Even though it was early, I wanted nothing more than to hit the sack—after changing the dirty sheets, of course. “Well, I'm going to bed. You can sleep on the couch here if you want to stay. I could get you a blanket.” I couldn't believe I was offering to let an alien crash on my couch. What was wrong with me?

Q'on echoed my sigh. “I should check on my ship. See what I can salvage.”

“Your ship is at the bottom of Lake Ontario! How are you going to check it out?”

He shrugged. “The water is not an obstacle for me. Xalan is ninety percent liquid. My people can breathe in it like air.”

“Oh. Well ... Good night, then, I guess. Lock up when you're done. You know how to lock the doors, right?” I shook my head. Of course he didn't. Doors on his planet probably locked themselves unless the right bioscan came into contact with them or something equally flashy. “C'mon, I'll show you.”

His hand landed on my arm, and I froze. He wasn't rough about it—his touch was gentle—but something about the way his fingers slid up my arm to curl around my bicep, the way his lips parted as he followed the trail of his hand with his eyes ...

“Yes?” I said, breathless.

“Do not concern yourself with locks,” he said, eyes still zeroed in on where his hand met my arm. “I will protect you. I am mighty. No one will harm you so long as I am near.”

Why did that start a freakin' flood in my underwear? “Um ... Okay.”

One fluid motion had him up and off the couch, standing almost right up against me. He looked down at me, and I realized I should have been scared. I should have been running, calling the cops, calling the Goddamn National Guard, *something*, but all I could do was stare back into those haunting yellow eyes.

Q'on tipped my chin back with a finger. "Do not stop believing in love, Amber of Earth."

He was so close I could feel his chest rumbling when he talked. So close ... all I would have to do is lean forward, just a bit ...

Just as quickly as he had stood, he turned and left. I watched the sway of his hips and ass as he walked out onto the deck. One quick leap, and he went under, presumably to go check out that spaceship of his.

I should really have locked that door behind him. Locked it and barricaded it with every piece of furniture that wasn't bolted down.

But I didn't. I even went after him and cracked it a bit, leaving it open so he could get in easier whenever he got back.

With that risky behavior accomplished, I turned and went back to my bedroom to change the sheets. I stripped the muddy cotton and tossed it in a hamper, then got out my high-thread-count satin sheets. Why did I get the fancy shit? I don't know. Maybe Amber of Earth was feeling hopeful.

Amber of Earth was definitely feeling *something*.

This was going to be tough to do without BOB. Ryan had a point, much as I hated to admit it. It damn near took an act of Congress to get me off. Without BOB and his trusty clit licker, I was going to be here all night rubbing to satisfy these urges I was having.

Better get started.

I shimmied out of my leggings and pulled the hoodie over my head, discarding them both to the side to be dealt with later. I was on a mission.

Lying on the soft satin, I spread my legs and toyed with one breast while I ran my fingers through the coarse hair between my legs. Yeah, I could have waxed, but without anyone except BOB to care what was down there, why bother?

Q'on's assurance of my protection had been super-hot, and my crotch was already soaking wet. I slid my fingers through my

lips to moisten them before I started the assault on my clit. I was hornier than I had been since the divorce, and I wasn't in the mood to play nice with myself. My breath quickened, coming in short bursts as I rubbed myself, picturing Q'on's bare chest and tight abs the whole time.

Try as I might, though, I couldn't quite get just the angle I needed. I shifted and squirmed, but nothing seemed to get me over the hump—and hump I did, bed springs creaking all the while.

I gave up on my clit halfway through, opting instead to dip my fingers inside and pump them. That helped some, and I managed to edge myself just to the verge of oblivion before developing a nasty cramp in my arm. I grunted with frustration and shook the cramp out until it faded.

Why did BOB have to break *today* of all days?

A whimper slipped out of my lips as I struggled with my body, and I damn near jumped out of my skin when Q'on's voice answered.

“Are you hurt, Amber?”

I screamed and yanked the sheet over me, trying to cover my teats, my ass, and whatever else he had just walked in on. When I looked back at the door, he stood there backlit by the porch light streaming through the French doors in the other room—

—with his cock in hand, at full salute, jacking while he watched me.

“I did not mean to startle,” he said, his voice husky. My heart thumped against my ribs, and I swallowed hard.

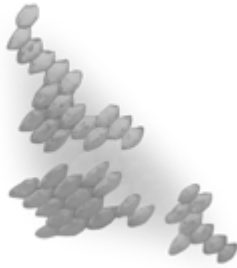
“H-how long have you been watching?”

Q'on took a step into the room, still stroking himself. “Long enough.” Another step, and he finally came enough into the light that I could see better. What I saw almost made me come right then and there, and despite my embarrassment, I was tempted to inch closer to get a better look.

Just above the base of his cock, right where BOB's special attachment would normally sit, was a small, writhing appendage that gave me all kinds of naughty ideas.

# Chapter 5

## *Q'on*



Marvelous. Simply marvelous.

I returned at the perfect moment, watching this perfect human specimen pleasure herself. It made my *n'ril* rise with desire, and I pleased myself as well while I watched. Amber moaned and mewled and bucked in her bed. The aroma coming off her was thick and heady, a wonderful perfume that only served to solidify my resolve to mate.

I'd tried to hold back. For a species that hides its women's teats, I did not think that overt sexual advances would be welcomed. All that changed, however, when I caught her in the act.

I had to have her. Right then, if possible.

After she covered herself, Amber pointed at my upper *n'ril* with a curious look on her face. "Is that—what is that?"

"Your males do not have this?" I tugged on the smaller *n'ril* with my free hand, and she groaned.

"No. We have, uh, devices with them though. Rabbits."

The word stopped me for a second, as I got multiple definitions from the nanites. The furry beast confused me, but once I received another image of a "Rabbit," a familiar one, I brightened. "Oh! Yes. I found a Rabbit in the lake. It was in a soggy box."

Amber was already flushed, but my mention of the submerged Rabbit brought a fresh flare of red to her body. My lower *n'ril* twitched at the sight. "Yeah, that ... It broke."



“My *n’ril* will not break,” I said, inching closer to the bed. “They are strong. Virile.”

I watched the rise and fall of her chest under the unfortunate sheet covering her. The rhythmic movement was hypnotic, drawing me closer like a magnet. I wanted to touch the ivory skin of her teats, to caress it, to comfort her. I wanted to explore her human body at my leisure.

I wanted to mate, to rut, but most importantly, I wanted to please her. That desire was strongest of all.

Finding another mate after losing Mili’ana was strange, no less so because she was human. There was no doubt in my mind that she *was* my mate, though, and a burning need to cherish and protect her rose inside me. *This one*, the mate bond screamed, *this one is yours. This one belongs to you, as you belong to this one.*

I arrived at the edge of her bed, well within reach for her. Her eyes followed my every move, and I took care not to startle her. Her breathing ragged, one of her delicate hands drifted down between her legs as I approached.

“No. That is not the word. I wish to please you.” I rested my knee on her mattress, letting my weight sink in slowly. “Your word is too crude, too selfish. I do not just wish to fuck you. I wish to please you, to satisfy you. If that means that we get to fuck, then all the better, but it is not as accurate.”

She leaned closer, though she had yet to remove the covering. “You don’t know what you’re asking. I—my body takes a long time to please. A *long* time. You’ll get bored long before I come.”

Frustration rose in me as I worked through yet another word with many meanings. I shook my head. “You misjudge me. I am not like your former mate. I will not tire of pleasing you. That is my only goal. If it takes a long time, then it takes a long time. Once I begin, I will not rest until you are spent.” I released my *n’ril* to stroke her hair instead. “To prove this, I will cease all self-pleasure until you are sated.”

Amber's throat moved as she swallowed, and the covering slipped, revealing a perfect teat.

"Do you wish me to stop?"

"No."

I brought the other knee onto the bed, straddling her. "How shall I please you first? I watched you please yourself in two places." I touched the cover over the apex of her legs, though I didn't apply enough pressure for her to feel it. "Here. You spent much time here. This is a pleasure zone for Xalanite women as well. Unlike your human males, I am built to pleasure this spot in many ways."

She released her grip on the cover, exposing her torso. I traced the swell of one teat—breast, my nanites corrected—with a fingertip. I enjoyed how her pink nipples hardened with her arousal. She arched her back, leaning into my touch. "Sometimes human men lick here." Her hand covered the one over her core, pushing it down onto her *kash*. "But I gotta warn you, your jaw might get tired."

A grin spread across my lips. "I am a Xalanite warrior. I have fought in battles that lasted weeks. It will take more than that to tire me." To emphasize my words, I pressed my fingers onto her *kash* and slowly started to rub it. Amber's legs drifted open, displacing the cover and exposing more of her body to my gaze, and her lids hooded her eyes as she moaned. "You wish me to lick here?"

"Yes ..." Her hips rose to meet my hand. "Please."

"Do not beg, Amber. You never have to beg from me."

Before she had a chance to open her sultry mouth again, I slid down between her smooth legs and inhaled her scent from the source. Dear Xalanite gods, she smelled amazing! My tongue flicked her *kash*, tasting her, and her body jerked. I stopped. "It hurts?"

"Nooooo ..." She dragged the word out as she laced her fingers in my hair and tugged me closer. "It feels so good ..."

Encouraged, I pressed on, starting with long, slow licks. Amber ground her hips against my face as I devoured her, and

my *n'ril* responded to even this simple act. I was not inside her, not properly mating her, but my body acted as though it was. Every moan, every twitch, every glorious sound or movement she made sent a fresh spark through me, and I found myself moaning along with her. She tasted heavenly, divine, a flavor I could live off of for eons. I could feast on her core and never want for anything else.

This was where I belonged. Not on Xalan, not drifting in space. Here, between Amber's thighs, drawing out the most luscious cries and whimpers.

Half a time unit in, I grabbed the round curve of her buttocks with both hands and growled as I held her closer. Amber shuddered, and her thighs clamped down harder on my head. Her vicelike grip only served to entice me more. Sliding one hand around to her front, I teased the dripping wet folds of her entrance with two fingers. She cried out, and when I plunged my fingers in—carefully, as the skin seemed delicate, and I did not wish to scratch her—she rewarded me with a scream. A splash of liquid coated my face, and she shook as though electrified.

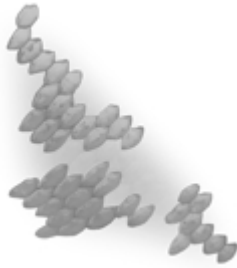
I stopped, concerned. “You have leaked. Did I damage you?”

“That,” she said between heaving huge gasps of air, “was an orgasm.”

I grinned when the nanites explained. “Excellent.” Raising to my knees, I crawled up her body to hover with my face over hers. Her dark, exotic eyes gazed into mine, pupils almost blown as I positioned my *n'ril* to pleasure her. “Would you like another?”

# Chapter 6

## *Amber*



Is he for real?

Another orgasm, hot on the heels of the most earth-shattering one I've ever had ... I was in heaven just thinking about it.

Not that I was confident he could do it. Sure, he was good with his tongue, but that didn't mean he knew how to use that python he was packing ... and it was even harder to get me off vaginally than by licking my clit.

BOB had an advantage: BOB vibrated.

I decided to mention this, and Q'on just laughed.

"Your human males do not vibrate? Pity." He lowered his hips until his cock rested between my legs, then started rocking it against my clit. I was so sensitive from the fresh orgasm that I gasped, and he rewarded me by becoming a living vibrator. His eyes glowed, and the next thing I knew I was gripping his hips with both hands, whimpering for him to just get inside me already.

I hated begging. I never begged. Why was I begging?

Q'on teased for several minutes before inching in. It took me a bit to adjust, and he patiently paused after each incremental push until I nodded for him to continue. By the time his vibrating cock was buried to the hilt, I squirmed uncontrollably. The scaled ridges of his monster dick rubbed inside me, and he made me even more crazy with tiny, feather-light kisses on my neck and chest. He must have gotten the idea from watching the dating game show, or maybe he

streamed some porn while I was jilling in the bedroom. Either way, he was a quick study.

I caught his jaw in my hand and redirected his mouth to mine, taking a more aggressive stance as I kissed him. I used every trick I had, revving him up with lips, tongue, and teeth. I thought I had the upper hand ...

... until he started using his Rabbit attachment.

Sweet baby Jesus, I was a goner. Much more of this and I was going to lose my ever-loving mind.

Q'on grinned against my lips and started to thrust with his hips. I did my best to meet him with some humping of my own, but I kept stumbling and stopping every time he hit a sensitive spot—which was quite often. I groaned and wrapped my legs around his waist, locking my ankles behind him.

Something about that was right, because his eyes crossed, and he picked up the pace. “You fit my *n'ril* so perfectly,” he moaned. “I never would have thought that another species could pleasure me so well.”

I hugged him closer. “I can't believe how good this feels. I thought you never had a chance to fuck the Xalanite girl. How is it that you're doing everything so *right*?”

He punctuated my words with a twisting thrust that made me cry out, never losing his rhythm despite my random decision to start a conversation mid-hump. “Your human men do not have these instincts?”

“Ryan sure as hell didn't.”

Q'on growled into my neck and nipped my jaw lightly with his teeth. His fingers curled around my neck, though he didn't apply enough pressure to hurt me. A warning. “I do not enjoy you saying his name while we mate. It is unpleasant and distracting.”

I grabbed his jaw and met his gaze. “Shut me up, then.”

He bared his teeth in a savage grin, and that's when I knew all bets were off. He covered my mouth with his in a forceful kiss that stole my breath. The humping escalated,

causing my bed to creak, and something changed with his dick.

Was it getting *bigger*?

“Q’on, what—”

“Hush. Relax. My knot will not harm you.”

His *what*? As an avid romance reader, I knew what a knot was, but—that couldn’t be possible. Knots were for locking the bodies together, for ensuring the woman got all the cum when the guy exploded. I was infertile, and too old to boot. Then when you added the fact that I was an entirely different species ... Surely Q’on didn’t plan on trying to impregnate me ...

The fullness increased until I was screaming with every move he made. He growled and grunted with each breath, and after a few minutes he started screaming too. He put his hands on my hips, spread his knees, and started going full-out. My breasts flopped so wildly I thought I was going to knock myself out with them. Between the knot and his clit-licking appendage, I couldn’t move without a shock of pleasure shooting through my whole body.

“Get ready, Amber.”

I had thought I was ready, but I guess I had no clue what ready was. Q’on dialed it up to eleven, and for a brief moment I worried my bed was going to collapse from the force of his fucking. My back arched, and I screamed so hard my voice broke as I came all over him again.

Just when I thought he was gonna dick me down so good I’d get flattened, he stilled. I trembled as he came with slow, even pulses. We lay like that for what felt like forever, locked together, with Q’on kissing and stroking me all over. It was probably twenty minutes at best, but my sense of time had been fucked clear out of me. Was it still today? Was it tomorrow? Did we leap, Ziggy? I didn’t even know.

Finally, Q’on’s knot shrunk back down, leaving me feeling oddly empty. I’d never been filled enough to miss it when the guy pulled out, but man, I missed this dick.

I waited for Q'on to go back to his ship again, or go lie down on the couch, or whatever alien men did after they railed their first Earth woman, but he didn't. Instead, he wrapped me up in the top sheets with him and snuggled close, resting his chin on my head. I settled in next to him, acutely aware of his cum dripping out of me.

So much for the clean sheets.

“So ...” I ran a finger over a scaled pec. “Exiled, you said? Is that, like, permanent?”

He hummed, and I swear that rumbling in his chest was almost enough to get me started again. “If it were not, I would still not go back.”

“Even if they caved and let you mate any Xalanite woman you wanted?”

Q'on tipped my chin up with a finger, and I saw confusion written on his face. “Why would I want a Xalanite woman? I have found my mate.”

“I thought they killed Mili'ana.”

He smiled and stroked my cheek. “I was not speaking of Mili'ana.”

Realization took longer than it should have. I blamed the ridiculous afterglow buzzing through my system for me being so damn thick. “Oh! You mean—”

A scaled hand rested over my thumping heart, and I felt a tickle between my legs as his cock pulsed. “Yes. You are my chosen, Amber. My *tyr'il*: the twin to my hearts. I am yours, and you are mine. I do not know how or why I was so fortunate to land near you, to have you be the first human I met, but I cannot deny that I am grateful now for my exile. I can now stay here without guilt; no obligations to my leaders, no concerns about returning.”

My alarm buzzed on the nightstand, and I jerked my eyes to see the early sunlight breaking on the other side of the curtains. Time for my daily Pilates before work, and sadly, time to get back to reality.

Q'on shot to his feet, fists clenched, and planted his fine, naked self between me and the blaring alarm clock. I grabbed his arm before he had a chance to attack the damn thing. "Relax! It's just my alarm. I guess I've gotta get ready for work."

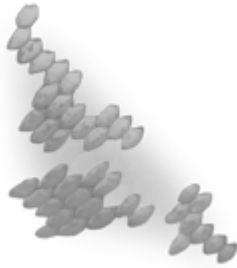
Work. That reminded me that this whole crazy night was, indeed, crazy, and that I now had a major issue on my hands.

I may work from home, and I may live out in the middle of nowhere, but how long could I hide a freakin' alien living in my house?



# Chapter 7

## *Amber*



I came down off the sex high with a quickness when the weight of reality sank in.

There was an alien in my house. A real, live alien.

A really fucking hot alien who knew how to use his dual dick.

I skipped Pilates that morning. Instead, I took another hot shower, scrubbing my still-sensitive pussy with the loofah until I was sure I'd gotten every inch clean. Not that being with Q'on made me feel *dirty*, but I reasoned that maybe if I was clean I'd be able to think better.

Maybe if I couldn't still smell him on me, I wouldn't be distracted.

A whole laundry list of things to do popped into my head, and I started making mental notes. Groceries: I'd have to have more food in the house. Clothes for Q'on, because it turned out he'd ripped those skintight pants off when he caught me masturbating. Then I realized I had no clue how to entertain an alien, shy of just fucking life away. That wouldn't last forever. He'd get tired of me eventually, despite his declarations of mating for life. Better find something for him to occupy himself with while I was at work. Stave off the boredom for as long as possible.

I dressed in loose pants and a tank top, adding a cardigan when I saw my nipples at full attention in the chilly house. Not that Q'on would mind if I walked around with them out in the open, but I hadn't been raised to bare my chest all day.

That, and I wasn't sure I could handle another long fuck like that on zero sleep. Best not to give him ideas.

Q'on sat on the couch flipping channels when I walked through to the kitchen to make coffee. He didn't seem to care that he was nude, but I still vowed to get him some clothes to wear. If he was going to live on this planet, even just in my house, he needed something to cover ... *those*.

Q'on also seemed to have found something to snack on. The sharp *crunch* of whatever he was eating made me feel snackish despite not being a breakfast person.

As I lifted the coffee cup to my lips for that first heavenly sip, a loud knocking at the door startled me. I dropped the cup, which crashed to the floor, and spun around. Panic churned my stomach, and just the thought of not getting to the door before Q'on was enough to get the bile rising to the back of my throat. I ignored the shattered cup in favor of haste.

When I entered the living room, Q'on was off the couch, his Buns of Steel bared and hands full with some of the more nasty-looking weapons from his discarded pants.

Oh, fuck.

"Someone is assaulting your home, Amber! Stay back—I'll protect you."

I pushed past the agitated alien and rushed to the door. "It's called knocking. People do it to announce their presence and see if the owner of the house is home. Just sit down. I'll handle this."

Q'on made a sexy-as-hell growling noise in his throat as he did what I asked. I suppressed a shudder and girded my loins, hoping that whoever was at the door would think I was just flushed from running to answer it.

Three men in dark suits stood on the porch. Dark suits, reflective sunglasses, fancy earbuds, the works. I'm pretty sure I saw a gun under the suitcoat of the one who had been knocking when he lowered his arm.

Feds. Shit.

“Can I help you?” I huffed and puffed a little from my sprint to the door, but I hoped they didn’t read that as guilt.

Fed Number One, the knocker, answered first. “Beg your pardon, ma’am, but we’re with the AARO, and we have some questions for you. I’m Agent Wilson, and these are Agents Smith and Harcourt. Could you tell us please, were you home last night between seventeen and eighteen hundred hours?” He reached out with a package in his hands. “Oh, and here; this was on your stoop when we got here.”

My eyes narrowed, and I grabbed my replacement BOB with one hand while keeping hold of the door with the other so they couldn’t see anything past me. “What’s the AARO?”

“The All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office. We’re with the Department of Defense.”

I was right—Feds. Still sounds sketchy as fuck, but who am I to say? “And what types of anomalies do you guys resolve?”

Agent Harcourt scoffed. “The kind that fall out of the sky and land in Lake Ontario.”

Crap! They were looking for Q’on and his ship. I scrambled for something to say to throw them off his trail. “Like a weather balloon or something? I haven’t seen any of those lately.”

Agent Wilson scowled. “Ma’am, we’re not here on a social call. Were you home last night between seventeen and eighteen hundred or not?”

Jokes weren’t appreciated. Noted. “I was home, yes, and I didn’t see anything fall into the lake besides dead leaves.” Wilson’s hand inched closer to where he kept his not-so-hidden weapon, and I adjusted my tone. “I promise, I saw nothing. It’s just me here, and I was cleaning house most of the day.”

“No unusual lights or sounds? Nothing at all out of the ordinary?”

I shook my head. “Nope. Perfectly normal night.”

Except for the hot alien sex.

Agent Wilson paused, but after a moment he tipped an invisible hat and smiled. “Well, then, apologies for disturbing you, ma’am. Have a pleasant day. Here’s my card in case you remember anything.”

I took the card and shut the door, leaning against the thick wood and listening for their car to leave.

I just lied to the feds. If they found out about Q’on, I was pretty sure I’d be in trouble. Legal trouble. I’d never been in worse legal trouble than a speeding ticket. What was I getting myself into?

Speaking of the devil, Q’on appeared as soon as the agents left. He sidled up close and stroked my cheek, and I tried to ignore the wave of desire that swam through me at his touch. “You did not tell them the truth.”

“No, of course not. I wouldn’t rat you out.” My words came out breathy as his hand drifted down to my neck.

Those strong scaled fingers curled around my throat, and he pressed his body into mine. A small part of my brain screamed at me to get scared, to panic, but a larger part of me wanted him to continue. My pussy clenched when he stroked my neck, and I let out a low whimper as his bulge rubbed my hip.

“You protected me.” He nuzzled his cheek to mine, and I’d almost swear he was purring. “No female has ever risked anything to protect me.”

“I—”

He cut me off with a kiss, and I found myself responding by leaning into it. He started to scoop me up, presumably to take me to the bedroom, but I came to my senses and scrambled away before he could get hold of me, panting. “Wait. We can’t. Not right now.”

“Why?” He took a step toward me, and I stepped back.

“Because I have to work. Your currency won’t help me pay my bills. I have to earn my own.” I ran a hand through my hair to smooth it down. “It’s pretty standard for us humans to need to work for a living. I’m lucky that I can work from home, but I still need to work.”

Q'on cocked his head and frowned. "Can I help you work?"

I thought about it, but there really wasn't anything about my job that an alien warrior could do without some serious training and backstory, and I just didn't have time for all that. "No, sorry. Is there anything besides war that you like to do? Maybe if you've got a hobby I can find a similar Earth activity for you."

A wicked grin spread his lips. "I like mating."

I groaned and pinched the bridge of my nose. "Something you can do *alone* while I work."

This time he actually spent a few moments in thought, and I hoped he'd come back with a workable hobby that I could scramble together before clocking in for the day.

"I wish to read those."

He pointed at the shelves of books behind me, and I cringed. There wasn't anything there that wasn't at least a little bit smutty—no fade to black in *my* house, thank you! The only problem was that meant he'd probably be ready for another go when I got done with work, and I wasn't sure if my poor pussy could take it. "You want to read some books? I mean, I can run to the store and grab some books if you give me maybe a genre to start with. Do you like science? History? Fiction?"

Q'on shook his head. "I wish to read those books. The ones you keep."

Great. How am I getting out of this one? "Will the nanites translate the written words, too?"

"Yes. All of your language is mine; the nanites just need time to give me the words. I might be slow to read them, but I very much wish to read these books. You have them in a place of honor in your home; this means they are special to you, so I wish to read them."

Even before Ryan, no human guy had ever bothered to show an interest in my preferred reading material. Ryan especially thought it was all trash, so to have a male now almost begging to read what I read was—weird. Kinda surreal.

I half expected him to burst out laughing as he revealed the joke he was playing on me.

“Oh. Okay. Well, have at it, then. There are tons to choose from.”

He walked up to the closest bookshelf and paused. “Which is your favorite?”

That stopped me. Was he for real? “Um. Hmm ... I mean, I like all of them, obviously, or I wouldn’t keep them. It kind of depends on my mood. Some of them I like to reread from time to time. Is that what you mean?”

“You enjoy reading the same story again?”

I shrugged. “Sometimes. It’s a little comforting to reread old favorites.” I reached around him and picked several of my go-to comfort reads. “Like these. I like all of these so much I often read them again and again.”

“Excellent!” He grabbed the books and took them back with him to the couch, hugging them to his chest.

I couldn’t help but smile as I watched him. The pure joy he radiated at being able to read the books I liked was so cute, and the sight of him inspecting the covers to pick his first one was equally adorable. I left him in the living room, happily selecting some reading material, and went back to the kitchen to clean up my shattered coffee mug and brew a new cup before starting my workday.

Tickets came in fast and heavy that morning, and by the time lunch came around I had a headache from dealing with the less-tech-savvy customers. One elderly woman didn’t know what a mouse was, and another customer yelled at me because his cat chewed through his Ethernet cable. After spending a solid two hours walking him through connecting to his wi-fi, I logged off my work portal and pushed back from my desk, exhausted already. I decided more coffee was in order, and I could stand to make a sandwich or two. In all the excitement of the morning, I’d forgotten to eat anything for breakfast.

Q'on was nose-deep in a super-steamy book when I walked through the living room on the way to the kitchen. Judging from the state of his cock—I *really* needed to run to the store to grab him some pants—he was enjoying what he read.

I leaned against the counter while the coffee brewed and looked out the window onto the lake. The water remained undisturbed, showing no signs of the events of the previous night. I breathed a sigh of relief, but almost choked on it when a boat appeared from around a bend of trees at the shoreline.

A boat with three men in dark suits on it, along with some dudes in SCUBA gear.

“Q'on?” I called out into the living room. “Um ... How secure is your ship?”

He appeared a few seconds later, book still in hand. “It is quite secure. I was able to activate the cloaking mechanisms and security systems when I went out there last night. Why do you ask?”

I pointed out the window. “Because the feds who were asking about the crash this morning are about to search the lake for it.”

This dude was unimpressed. He shrugged and flipped to the next page. “They will not find it.”

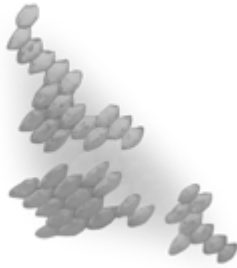
I grabbed the book and pulled it down, forcing him to look at me. “Do you know what my kind does to aliens? We're vicious. If they catch you, they'll dissect you while you're still awake just to find out how you work! You shouldn't just brush it off.”

He frowned at my interruption but dutifully put the book down. “I do not wish to alarm you, Amber. I have researched your human technology and scanned the surrounding area. They do not have anything that can penetrate my shields, nor anything that is capable of detecting the ship while it is cloaked. I am safe.”

My heart sank as the divers entered the water, and I hoped for his sake he was right.

# Chapter 8

## *Amber*



Against my better judgment, I left Q'on alone in the house after work while I ran to the store for provisions. He needed pants, and I needed more food in the house.

My pulse raced the whole time I was gone. Even though he promised not to go near any windows or open the door for anyone, I couldn't shake the feeling that something would happen to him without me there to run interference on the feds. I snatched piles of sweatpants and jeans without even looking at the tags, hoping something in there would fit his warrior physique. I even grabbed several packs of men's white undershirts, figuring my pussy would behave if he was covered. That little cunt wanted to just open up any time he was around, parading his nakedness, and I didn't need that distraction.

Next stop was the grocery section. I had no idea what Xalanites ate, but I figured since he loved the hamburgers yesterday and the sandwiches at lunch, meat was definitely on the menu. I also loaded up with a variety of snacks and veggies, making sure to grab more healthy options as I wasn't one hundred percent sure what a human carb-load diet would do to his body—or his health.

When I rounded the corner of the produce aisle, I let out a shriek as Agent Wilson stepped up to me. “Fancy meeting you here. I take it things are still going well at home, since you're out on your own for a shopping trip.”



I put a hand over my heart to try to ease the thundering inside. “Agent! You startled me. Yes, everything is fine at home. No problems.”

He nodded, and his eyes flicked down to look in my loaded cart. “Stocking up, I see. Lots of food there. Steak, even! Treating yourself tonight, huh?”

I swallowed hard. “I cook steak all the time. It’s good.”

“Doing some Christmas shopping as well? I see a lot of men’s clothing in your cart.”

“Yes. Christmas shopping. For my ... brother.”

His eyes narrowed, and he muttered a small “hm” as he nodded to himself. “Well, I’m afraid I have to go. Our motel has a kitchenette, but I still have to buy food to cook in it.” He chuckled like he’d just said something hilarious. “I can’t remember, did I give you my card in case you notice anything unusual?”

“You sure did.”

“Great! I’ll be in the area for a while. Maybe I’ll see you around.”

With that, he wandered off down the next aisle. I sped up my steps to the front, forgetting anything else I may have wanted to purchase.

The cashier’s eyes widened like saucers when I dumped all my things on the conveyor belt, but I tried not to react. Let them think what they want.

Forty minutes later, I pulled up to the house and started unloading the car. It was dark out, but the boat was nowhere to be seen. No floodlights, no swarms of agents combing the surrounding woods. I breathed a sigh of relief. Maybe I didn’t have to worry so much about my interaction with Agent Wilson in the store.

I almost jumped out of my skin when Q’on appeared next to the car.

“Jesus! I thought I asked you to stay inside!”

He started taking bags from me, loading up both arms with stuff. Typical male. Can't be bothered to make multiple trips. "You asked me to stay inside while you were gone. You are no longer gone."

Oh, great. He was going to kill me with semantics. "Okay, well, what if the feds were in the bushes or something? They could see you."

Q'on grabbed the handle of the last bag and started back to the house. "But they are not in the bushes."

I rolled my eyes and took my purse out of the car before locking it. I followed Q'on into the house and locked the door behind us, drawing the front curtains. When I turned back around, Q'on had pulled a pair of grey sweatpants out of one of the bags and was inspecting them. He seemed particularly fascinated with the drawstring.

This was going to be a long night.

After some brief instructions on wearing the pants, as well as a tutorial on the t-shirts, I left Q'on in the living room and lugged the groceries to the kitchen.

I was so preoccupied with putting away the perishables that I didn't hear Q'on sneak up behind me. His massive arms wrapped around my waist from behind, and he snuggled close. A fluttering began in my stomach, and I bit my lip to have something to focus on besides his bulge pressing into my ass.

"You are a good provider, Amber. It shames me that I cannot assist."

Damn. Didn't think of it like that. I bet on his planet the warriors brought home the proverbial bacon. "You just got here. Give yourself some time."

He stepped back, and I turned to look up at him. "I have provisions on my ship. They were not damaged in the crash. I would like to get them, to help stock your stores. The government men left hours ago. May I go outside?"

I chewed my lip as I debated the wisdom of letting my purple boyfriend go outside. Sure, it was dark, and I lived on a pretty isolated stretch of the lakeshore, but ... what if?

“Okay. But be careful. Don’t let anyone see you.”

Q’on’s face broke out in a wide grin, and he trotted out the back door.

That ass in those sweats! I fanned myself for a second before returning to putting the groceries away.

I don’t know what I expected when Q’on said he was retrieving provisions, but I sure as hell didn’t expect him to make multiple trips, carrying in metal box after metal box of stuff. He unpacked it all in the kitchen, following my lead and putting the cold goods in the fridge or freezer before pausing to figure out where the dry goods went.

When he was almost done, he took a small foil package back out of the cupboard—which was now stuffed to the gills—and handed it to me. “Here. It is called *yin*. We eat these to supplement our energy. Protein. They are ... snacks.”

The *yin* looked kind of like fried chicken bites, only bright green. I took a small piece, not wanting to offend him by declining. I mean, he was able to eat human food without problems, so theoretically this wouldn’t poison me. The meat, if that’s indeed what it was, had a crunchy exterior with a pleasant chew inside. It was surprisingly tasty. Like if shrimp and grilled chicken had a popcorn baby.

A little moan of satisfaction slipped out, and Q’on smiled. “You like it?”

“Yeah. It’s actually good. I’m almost afraid to ask what it’s made from.”

“*Hralla* meat cooked in *flam* oil.”

Nope. Not gonna ask him to elaborate.

I glanced down, and I really should not have. Those sweatpants ... I could see his, er, excitement over my approval of the *yin* in high def. Why did I buy him grey sweatpants? I should have known better. Averting my gaze, I decided a change of subject was in order. “So, Q’on, what do you want to do tonight after dinner? We could watch TV, or if you want to read more I can let you do that.”

He paused a moment, seemingly pondering his choices. “May we try some of the activities in your books?”

I pinched the bridge of my nose and groaned. “Please, dude, let my pussy have a breather after last night. I think it’s bruised.”

The look of abject terror on his face shocked me, and when he scooped me up into his arms and held me close, tears streaming from his eyes, I froze in a panic. “Q’on? What’s wrong?” Shit! What did I say to make him react like this?

He sniffled and nuzzled his wet cheek to mine. “I am shamed. I hurt you.”

Oh! Oops. “Oh, Q’on, I’m sorry. I was just exaggerating. I’m not hurt.” I turned and let my lips brush against his. He kissed me back, still sniffing, and he relaxed enough for me to pull back. “I’m okay, Q’on. Really. Calm down.”

A couple more sniffs, and he nods. “Apologies. I worry. You seem less ... sturdy than Xalanite females. I thought perhaps I was too rough.”

I swatted a tight pec and laughed. “I’m plenty sturdy!”

That got him grinning again. He growled and nipped the tip of my nose with those iridescent teeth. “Excellent. I plan on testing that later.”

He set me down, and I opened the fridge to get a couple of steaks out for dinner. “You’ll like these. Meat slabs. I’ll sear them up for us, and we can sit on the couch and eat while I tell you more about life on Earth. How does that sound?”

Q’on sidled up behind me and wrapped his arms around me while I cooked, resting his chin on my head. The fit was perfect. I’ve never been more comfortable while cuddling. It was almost enough to make me buy into Q’on’s mates-for-life philosophy.

When the steaks reached a nice medium rare, I plated them, tossed some premixed salad, and poured a couple glasses of wine. I didn’t know what alcohol would do to Q’on, but after the stress of the past twenty-four hours, I knew I, at least, needed a drink. I would have carried the plates, but my

alien lover insisted on doing it for me. He only let me handle the drinks when he realized he didn't have enough hands to get it all in one trip.

I sat with my legs tucked under me on the middle cushion, ensuring that Q'on would have to sit next to me. He settled in with his plate and watched me eat for a few minutes before digging in himself. It amazed me how well he handled the silverware, and I realized that was why he watched: so he could see how it was done.

We ate in silence, but as soon as we finished devouring everything, Q'on started in.

"I read seventeen books today. Some of them were easy enough to understand, but some of them confused me. How can so many humans be from this New York City, yet none of the people in one story know the others?"

I shrugged. "It's a massive city. There are millions of people living there, and even more commute to work there from the surrounding towns and cities."

His eyes grew wide. "Millions? In one city?"

"Sure. Well, there's these different boroughs inside the city, but ... You know what? It doesn't matter. These stories are all fiction, anyway. Written by different authors, so of course the characters don't know each other."

"Do the authors know each other?"

"Maybe? I'm sure some of them do."

He seemed to ponder this for a moment. "Are all of the cities in these stories real places?"

"Nah. Some are completely made up." I picked up a book from his stack on the coffee table. "See this one? Small-town romance. I don't think this is set in a real place. I mean, some authors use real places, like New York, but some just make up towns or cities to suit their purposes. Basically, don't necessarily believe everything you read. A lot of this is total B.S."

"B.S.?"

“Bullshit. So ... let me see ... Essentially, it’s crap. Fated mates, mate bonds, all that shit. None of it’s real. I don’t think I have any nonfiction in this house.”

That brought a scowl to Q’on’s chiseled face, though why was beyond me. “What?”

“I know the meanings of shit and crap ... I do not think a mate bond is equivalent to waste matter. A mate bond is a beautiful thing, a *real* thing that we have. My *n’ril* respond to you like no other female, even Mili’ana. You are the mate to my soul, my heart-twin. I believe that fate, for lack of a better term from the nanites, drew my ship to your location. We are destined to be together, Amber. Mates for life.”

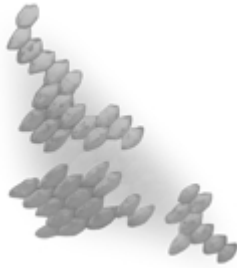
I gazed at my wine glass, watching the red liquid swirl inside. “I don’t know that I believe in mates for life. My ex-husband was supposed to be mated to me for life. ‘Till death do us part,’ we said. That didn’t happen.”

Strong hands cradled my chin, turning me to look into Q’on’s eyes. He stroked my jaw with a gentle touch, his eyes never leaving mine. “We are one, Amber. You and I are joined in a way that cannot be broken. Nothing will ever separate us, not truly.

“I, Q’on of Xalan, claim you, Amber of Earth, as my mate.”

# Chapter 9

## *Q'on*



I do not understand human females. When I claimed Amber, I expected her to be joyful. Instead, sorrow and doubt clouded her features.

No matter. I will spend the rest of my long life convincing her of my faithfulness, if need be.

That night, Amber requested that I sleep in the living room. She claimed exhaustion, but I suspected there was something more to it. Her mood had gone somber since the discussion after our dinner, and she grew quiet and introspective.

I blamed her filthy ex. His betrayal soured her for future relationships, making my courtship that much harder. She refused to acknowledge our union, despite our clear connection. Our bodies fit like two pieces of a *b'rin*, but she rejected this fact.

The couch held much less comfort than Amber's bed and was much colder without her warmth. Despite my sturdy Xalanite body, no number of blankets could suffice.

Unable to sleep in the chill, I opted to stay up reading. I scoured her shelves for the most-read books, the ones well-worn and showing their use, much like the selection she had given me the day before. It was my hope that in these I could discover the secret to wooing her.

I noticed a common thread in her books: they all featured romantic connections on both a spiritual and physical level. Clearly, some part of her wanted this type of connection, else why would she hoard books with this theme? Thanks to the

nanites, I was able to read another dozen books during the night. I considered these educational tools, manuals for mating. Each book provided a different look into what Amber liked, what she enjoyed. I learned phrases that were intended to excite, positions for mating, even dynamics that she preferred.

Come the morning, I felt myself ready.

Amber emerged from her room minutes after her alarm blared at dawn, wearing nothing but a chest covering. A shirt. The shirt covered her plump buttocks and her sex, much to my dismay, but the deep V-shape in the front allowed me a glimpse of her rounded breasts. A tradeoff, I suppose.

As she strode to the kitchen to make the bitter brew she so enjoyed, I prepared to make my move. I walked up behind her, grabbed her by the ass, and growled into her ear:

“Who’s a good little slut for Daddy?”

Amber froze, and I waited for my reward.

She turned slowly, taking my arm by the wrist and removing my hand. Her eyes bore into mine, and she said ...

“What the ever-loving *fuck* do you think you’re doing?”

I blinked, confused. “I believe it is called ‘Daddy Dom.’”

She groaned and went back to her coffee. “It’s too early for this shit, Q’on.”

I didn’t understand. I did everything like her favorite books portrayed. Why was she not responding in kind?

“Where did you even pick up on Daddy Dom?” she asked, taking a sip.

I pointed to the new stack of finished books on the coffee table. “I read it.”

She followed my arm and groaned again. “Jesus Christ. I can’t leave you alone for a minute, can I?” Her hand rose to her temple, rubbing it. “Why were you reading up on Daddy Dom kink, Q’on?”



“I wished to please you. Those books were your most used. I thought that meant you liked them, and the contents within.”

“Well, yeah, I like them. That doesn’t mean I want you to do exactly what’s in those books. You’re your own person, Q’on. Do your own thing. You don’t have to mimic the books I read.”

I frowned. “But you rejected me last night. I did my own thing, and you did not want me to come to bed with you. I thought perhaps if I emulated the alpha males in these books you would be more receptive to accepting me in your bed.”

Amber sighed and set her cup down. She stepped closer and wrapped her arms around my waist. I returned the hug in kind, though it did nothing to alleviate my confusion.

“You’re a doll, you know that?”

“I am an effigy?”

She giggled. “How do the nanites manage to find the most awkward words for things? No, not an effigy. You’re a sweetheart. Somehow, even when I’m being a bitch, you’re still zeroed in on making me happy. That’s more than any human man has ever done for me.”

“But it is not enough.”

“I didn’t say that!” She stepped back, taking my face in her hands. “You’ve gotta give me time, okay? I’m not used to being doted on. I’m not used to mating, and I’m sure as hell not used to being claimed. Humans don’t really do that.”

It was my turn to caress her face. “Well, you are going to have to get used to it. Xalanites claim. We dote on our females.”

Finally, I coaxed a smile from her. “Yeah, I guess I’m gonna have to get used to it.”

This brightened my mood. “Does this mean I can stay?”

She reached up and kissed my cheek. “Of course, you can stay. I wouldn’t leave you to the AARO. No one’s going to dissect you on my watch.”

I wished to mate then, but before I could initiate, Amber finished her coffee and excused herself to get ready for the day. Having nothing else to do, I went back to the couch to start another book. I tore through book after book in search of the key to Amber's love. Surely I had missed something because her words did not match her preferences. These men doted on their females, and they claimed them. Especially the wolveren men. They claimed their females with bites. I quite liked the notion of biting Amber to claim her—not to harm, of course. Apparently, there was a trick to biting to mark but not to harm.

When Amber came back through the living room on her break, I questioned her about the men who became wolves. I asked how common that was, and if it was her preference to mate with a man who can change into an animal. It was beyond my ability, but knowing what she liked was crucial, regardless of whether or not it was something I could give her.

“Oh, those are paranormal romances, hon. They're not real. No human men can turn into wolves.”

That was something of a relief. “More fiction, then?”

“Yeah. Listen, you don't have to keep bingeing those books. I promise, after work I'll go over what I might like or want. Just watch some TV or something until I'm done. Okay?”

I nodded, though it disappointed me to wait.

Using the remote controller, I scrolled through her television until I found a mating show. It took some figuring to decode her password for the special mating channel, but once I found it I contented myself with watching the humans mate. For hours on end, I studied the mating practices outlined in this channel, paying close attention to the wide variety of acts and making mental notes as to which ones I wished to attempt.

I was so caught up in the show that I failed to notice when Amber came back into the room at the end of her workday. It was only the not-so-subtle clearing of her throat that drew my attention from the device in front of me.

By the Xalan Gods! She stood there in a short, figure-hugging lower covering and an upper covering—shirt—that displayed her breasts gloriously beneath the thin fabric. Her eyes were painted with shadows around them, and her lips were painted a deep red. She looked like the females on the mating shows. My jaw dropped, and I subsequently dropped the remote control as well.

“Do you like the outfit?” She closed one eye. Winked.

I grabbed my lower *n’ril* through my pants and nodded. “Very much so.”

Amber sauntered over and sat next to me. I was very excited for the chance to try Daddy Dom again.

“I see you’ve found the porn channels. Heard it, actually. Had to close my door to keep the customers from hearing it. Hacked my account, huh?”

“Yes.”

She slid onto my lap, straddling me. My lower *n’ril* hardened at this, and I stroked faster. Watching the humans mate did not excite me like Amber did. I could watch them mate all day and not be this aroused.

“If you wanted porn,” she whispered, grinding her hips against me, “you could have asked.”

“You were not this ... eager last night, or this morning. You did not want to mate then. What changed?” I hated to ask because she might change her mind again, but I would much rather know she was truly willing.

She pressed her forehead to mine and covered my pumping hand with hers. “Listening to that through the door got me hot.” She kissed me, pressing her tongue into my mouth.

I moaned as she ground into my *n’ril*. This abrupt turnaround startled me, but I did not question it further. Amber’s arousal was strong, strong enough to scent on her, and she kissed and rubbed me the whole time.

*This* was the kind of mate I expected. Passionate. Willing. I lifted her up and lowered her onto the cushions of the couch,

gaining control, and laid on top of her, kissing her neck.

“More,” she said, her voice thick with desire.

I let my hand wander, gliding down her throat, over the hills of her breasts, across her flat stomach, down to the waist of the lower covering—skirt. She parted her legs, and I slid the bottom of the skirt up to her belly, exposing her core.

She was not wearing undergarments.

I rubbed my thumb against her *kash*, delighting in the way she squirmed. When her squeals and cries grew louder, I decided to try making a mating mark like the wolverine men in her novels. With the utmost care, I nibbled on her collarbone first, to accustom her to the sensation of my teeth on her skin. Rather than protest, she arched into me and moaned, burying her fingers in my hair and holding me to her. Good.

I applied more pressure slowly, in increments, alternating bites with licking and sucking on her skin. This in combination with my hand on her *kash* seemed to excite her faster than before. Just as she started screaming, I bit down harder, stopping shy of breaking the skin. She shuddered and came, spasming as she held me to her.

“Holy fuck! That was amazing!” She panted and licked her lips. “I’m gonna have the biggest hickey after that.”

When the nanites translated “hickey,” I grinned at her. “Indeed. I have marked you. Claimed you.”

She giggled. “What is it with you and claiming? You’re like Marvin the Martian.”

Another pause as the nanites worked to explain. “Have you met this Martian before?”

“No! It’s a cartoon character. Always claiming planets in the name of Mars.” She sat up, pushing her hair out of her eyes. “But never mind that; now it’s my turn to claim you.”

Was she going to mark me?

Amber put a slender hand on my chest. “Lie down. On your back.” Her tone was strong, commanding, and I instantly complied. She slid her hands inside the waist of my leg

coverings and pushed them down, freeing my *n'ril*. Bit by bit, she backed up until her face hovered over my throbbing groin. She looked me in the eye and ran her tongue over my lower *n'ril* in a long, languid stroke.

I'd read about these! The humans in her books called it a blowjob. Xalanites did not have such a mating practice. I struggled to rein in my excitement. From what I'd read, these blowjobs could last quite a while if done right, and I did not desire it to end early.

Amber lowered her mouth over my *n'r*—my cock, wrapping her luscious lips around it. My hips tried to rise to meet her, but she held me down with a firm grip, stronger than I anticipated, and I battled with my instincts. Every muscle, every nerve wanted to bury myself in her throat, but I held back. Amber knew more about this practice than I did; it would behoove me to follow her lead.

When Amber applied strong yet gentle suction, I gasped. My eyes rolled back in my head, and my breathing grew raspy. I placed a hand on her head, not to guide it, but to stroke her silky hair as she began to bob.

This was second only to being inside her proper, and I decided to request this more often, if it was something Amber liked to do. She moaned and hummed into me, vibrating my shaft, and thick streams of hot saliva ran down my cock. From time to time, while still latched onto me, she raised her eyes to gaze into mine as she sucked, a vision that I wished to imprint upon my brain for future use when I was alone.

Not that I ever wanted to be alone again now that I'd met Amber. Months of interstellar travel with no one to keep me company had soured me to any potential benefits to solitude. I wanted to spend all my future days with Amber at my side.

As she took me farther into her throat, my orgasm came barreling to the surface. I struggled to hold it back, to make this last, but when she swallowed me all the way down to my upper *n'ril*, it was too much. I let out a shout as my cock shot warm strings of seed into her throat. Amber moaned again and swallowed faster, trying to catch it all. A little stream trailed

out of her mouth, and when I finished, she pulled back and licked the excess off my shaft.

I laid my head on the arm of the couch, panting. That was almost too much.

“Can your Xalanite women do that?”

My words took some time coming; I was dumbstruck. “I do not believe our women desire to do that. I am surprised you desired to. It did not seem to stimulate any of your erogenous zones.”

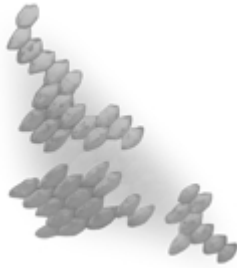
Amber giggled and crawled forward, straddling my lap again. “In human women, the brain is an erogenous zone, too. Let me tell you, seeing the look on your face while I was sucking you off did *plenty* to stimulate my brain.”

She lowered herself onto my cock, and once again the human female’s ability to self-lubricate fascinated me.

“Now,” she said as she started to bob up and down, “my turn.”

# Chapter 10

## *Amber*



Holy shit! Why in the hell did I shut him out last night? I would have been okay if he hadn't been blasting porn all day while I worked. Something about hearing all those moans and screams just got me hornier than I could handle.

Being on top of a Xalanite man was *amazing*. I had total control over the sex, and I could grind my clit against his—what did he call it?—upper *n'ril* with wild abandon.

This position seemed to work for Q'on, too. He grunted and groaned and shouted and growled and held onto my hips like he was the one riding a bucking bronco. He also started muttering sweet nothings, and from the sound of it he didn't even realize he was saying anything.

“You're so perfect, Amber, such a perfect mate for me.”

“Dear Xalanite Gods, I could live and die in your pussy.”

“I'm never leaving. Never going back.”

He even started rambling in the Xalanite tongue, and I hoped it was nice, whatever he was saying.

It was all quite flattering, if a bit intimidating. “Perfect” was a lot to live up to. Ryan had called me “perfect” once upon a time, too, and look how that turned out.

Q'on's knot made another appearance as he neared climax, and I found a delightful new sensation in the way it rubbed my insides while I rode him. It felt even better than when he was pounding into me from above, and the relative ease with which I could get off with him was a pleasant surprise. With Ryan,

I'd be doing this all for his pleasure, not enjoying myself, but with Q'on I was all-in.

After he came and his knot went back down, Q'on pulled me down onto his chest to cuddle. He stroked my hair and back, giving me soft kisses wherever he could reach. I ran my hands over his scaled chest, watching the light ripple on the purple scales as he breathed.

He really was a unique kind of beautiful. Sure, his eyes were yellow, his skin was purple, and his neck had gills, but overall, it was like staring at an artist's rendition of a merman with legs.

Legs, and a bonus clit-licker attachment built in.

Sadly, we couldn't stay like that forever. I had to make dinner still, and I was sure Q'on would appreciate something to eat after all that ... activity.

I pushed up off his chest and brushed my hair out of my eyes. "Want some dinner?"

He reached up and helped me get my hair smoothed down, tucking a lock behind my ear for me. "Though I am hungry, I'd rather stay with you a bit longer. I enjoy your touch."

"I enjoy your touch, too, but we can't live off of that. We need to eat. Come on. I'll fix us something."

Q'on followed me to the kitchen, and while I started the oven, he nudged past me and began grabbing some of the stuff he stored in the fridge and pantry from his ship. Everything he pulled out was vibrantly colored, like there's no such thing as pale or muted in his world. Xalan must be a beautiful planet, full of rich colors, and I commented as much.

"Does Earth not have colors? I have seen so much grey and white I feared it might not."

"It's because it's winter in this part of the world. Snow is usually white, or grey if it's dirty, and all the living stuff kind of dies off or fades until spring comes along and warms everything up. Our planet has seasons. Cycles of weather. Does Xalan not have seasons?"



He stopped for a moment as if debating his answer. “No. Our climate is quite temperate. We do not have extremes on my planet. Everything that lives stays alive throughout the planetary cycle. No death or fading. It saddens me that your planet must experience these periods of death. Do you not get sad seeing things die every year?”

I took a small piece of bright blue vegetable that he was cutting and nibbled on it. The fibrous legume had a mild sweetness to it, though still with a salty kick. It was an interesting combination of flavors.

Q'on cast me a sideways glance and raised a scaled brow. “You eat *mish* raw on this planet?”

I stopped myself before I took another bite. “This isn't supposed to be eaten raw? Is it gonna make me sick or something?” My eyes grew wide, and I started wiping my tongue with a paper towel. “Oh, God, did I just poison myself?”

When he started laughing at me, it took me a second to realize Q'on had just made a joke.

“*Mish* doesn't have to be cooked, does it?”

“No, it does not. But your expression ...” He burst into another round of laughter, then went back to chopping the *mish*. “I shall have to jest more often. It is fun.”

I tried to scowl but couldn't manage it for long. I had to give him credit; he was trying to fit in. To adapt. I shouldn't get mad at him for that.

I *could*, however, plan revenge.

It was nice having someone else cook dinner for once. I gave occasional instructions on where I kept certain kitchen utensils or how to wash the dirty ones, but for the most part, Q'on did all the work. The orange-hued meat smelled amazing in the oven, and the strange, colorful spices he seasoned it with only added to the mouthwatering scent. Though I had been skittish when I first tried the fried *yin* he gave me, I was more comfortable experimenting with the Xalanite foods after a couple days of watching Q'on eat Earth food. If he can eat our

food and not get sick, chances are good that I'm okay to eat his food.

With the roasted ... whatever, Q'on served a salad of *mish* and other vegetables, all cut and tossed and coated with a savory sauce. Finally, to top it all off and wash it down, he opened a container of something that smelled alcoholic, with faint fruity notes. He explained that they have a drink similar to wine on his planet, called *gribbal*, and to be careful with it as it might be stronger than what I'm used to.

The *gribbal* paired well with the other foods, tasting closest to a sangria, if I were to compare it to an Earth drink. A little bit sweeter, though, almost like a kids' drink, and I realized halfway through my second glass that Q'on wasn't lying about it being strong. My vision blurred, and the coordination required to cut the meat to eat it grew more difficult to maintain. Q'on ended up helping me cut the last few bites, something that should have embarrassed me but only made me more turned on by him. Ryan would have been disgusted at my drunken state.

He also would have tried to take advantage, but so far none of that from Q'on. If anything, my alien boyfriend worked hard *not* to come on too strong while I was inebriated. His careful placement of his hands any time he touched me indicated that he wasn't trying to cop a quick feel while I was toasted.

After dinner, Q'on asked me about the movie channel on my streaming list. It wasn't porn, more of an action-adventure channel, and something I watched when I was in the mood for man-chest and explosions. I explained action movies to him, and he expressed interest in watching one.

We put on a good spy thriller, one with lots of stunt scenes and intrigue, and cuddled together to watch it. Q'on watched intently, only asking a few questions. He seemed most interested in the physical "prowess" of the actors, and I had to explain stuntmen and guide wires and harnesses a few times before he understood.

"That seems like cheating," he commented as the main character executed a flawless jump from one rooftop to

another. “We do not have this type of entertainment on Xalan. Any of our programs that involve physical activity depict the actual Xalanites who perform the actions. We do not have this concept of stunts or trick cameras.”

“Well, here our models and actors are kind of—how should I put it?—high value, I guess. Some of them even have insurance policies on their most popular body parts, in case of some kind of debilitating or scarring injury. They’re seen as valued for how much money they can bring a studio per film, so the studio execs don’t want to risk them getting hurt or killed. They pay the stunt people less, and stunt people are less known by the public. Nobody believes it’s actually the actor doing the stunts, we just ... I don’t know. We just watch for fun.”

“And you pay money to see these stunts even knowing that those who perform them get less credit?”

Ouch. He’s got a point. “Well, I think they’re unionized, so they have good benefits.”

“Unionized?”

Oh, crap. Nanites must be backlogged with all this new information. “They, uh, form unions of workers who have people to negotiate their terms of service. They all agree on the best benefits for the stuntmen, and then the negotiators work to get those benefits. I guess it’s a favorable arrangement because I don’t see many strikes on the news.”

“They hit people when the arrangements aren’t favorable?”

I pinched the bridge of my nose in frustration. I was going to have a bruise there if this kept up. “No, not that kind of strike. Different meaning. It’s when the union workers stop working to get leverage for negotiations. If they feel like their arrangement isn’t fair, they halt all work until the negotiations go in their favor again.”

“Hm. Strange concept. On Xalan, our leaders determine terms of service for the different working castes. We do not have unions.”

“Yeah, well, leave it to humans to complicate things.”

On the screen, the actor drove a luxury car between two speeding semis, and the conversation turned to stunt driving and trick shots. Since Q'on was so interested, I paused the movie and searched the menu for the bonus behind-the-scenes footage, which explained it all much better than I could.

We were just about to restart the movie itself when the doorbell rang.

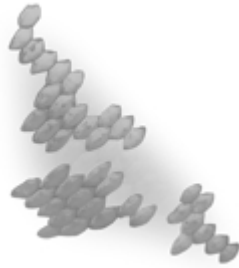
I wondered who could be coming up here this late in the winter. I had no deliveries planned for the day, and I rarely had visitors. I made sure Q'on was safely hidden back in the bedroom before opening it to see who was there.

My jaw dropped, and my fingers clenched the door frame so tightly I worried I'd break a nail when I saw who was there. "You ...!"

Ryan slapped a fake grin on his bastard face. "Hey, baby. Thought I'd come pay my ex-wife a visit."

# Chapter 11

## *Q'on*



I did not recognize the voice of the male at Amber's door, but from the tone of her response, it was not someone she desired to see.

Then the male used the words "ex-wife," and rage filled me as realization hit.

This was the male who hurt Amber. Who made her doubt love and mating.

"I think you should leave," she said in a brisque voice. "I don't need any visitors."

The male was not deterred by her words. "You're dressed for company. That fine, short skirt and that thin blouse. I can see your fucking tits right through it. You got a man over, Amber?"

"No ..." Hesitation filled her voice, and the door creaked as it was pushed further open. I crept down the hall to get a better view and saw Amber rush to prevent the male from opening the door all the way. She gripped it tightly and gritted her teeth. "Ryan, I said you should leave."

The male's tone changed, and Amber's white-knuckled grip on the door got tighter.

"Just because you won this place in the divorce doesn't mean I don't get to come visit from time to time. I miss our old house. The old us. Just let me in if you don't have a boytoy hidden away in there. Prove to me that you're still washed up and alone." He laughed, a cruel sound, and the door creaked again.

“Ryan, please leave. There’s no reason for you to be here right now. Besides, I think you’re drunk.”

A man’s hand appeared through the open door, taking Amber’s collar and jerking it to the side, exposing the bite mark I gave her. “You smell a few sheets to the wind yourself, baby. And what’s this? Got yourself a hickey. Fresh one.” The hand clenched around the fabric, pulling it tight across her throat. “Lie to me again and tell me you don’t have a man here.”

That was too much. No one should lay a hand on a woman, not even in anger. Before I realized what I was doing, I shot to the front foyer, reaching past the door and grabbing the man’s wrist. I clamped down so tightly with my fingers that I heard and felt bones crunch beneath them. Ryan screamed and let go of Amber.

“Q’on, no!”

Amber’s shout came too late. I was already in the throes of the *p’nal bin kur*, the killing frenzy that my people’s warriors were most feared for. This pathetic excuse for a human had made a move in anger against my mate, and I would not stand for it. One of us would not be leaving this place alive.

Ripping the door from Amber’s hand, I yanked it open and hauled Ryan into the foyer. I tossed his writhing form onto the floor and put a booted foot to his throat. “This is the fool who left you? Who hurt your heart?”

“Fucking psycho freak! Who the fuck paints their skin purple?” Ryan rolled around beneath my boot, grasping his shattered wrist with his other hand, whining and crying like a weakling. I noticed that he dropped a large blade when I threw him. He reached for the knife, but it had fallen well away from him, beyond the stretch of his arm.

“It is not paint, *psycho freak*.” I spat in his face, and Ryan flinched as my blue-tinged saliva hit him.

“Q’on!” Amber grabbed my arm. “If you hurt him, the feds will lock you up for sure!”

I squatted down, my weight pressing into his throat. “These feds of yours will have to find me first. They’ll have to find

what's left of *him*. If I put this *yif's* body in my ship, they will never find it."

Ryan tried to pry my boot off of him. I let up the pressure a bit, and the fool kept talking. "You talk a big game when you got the jump on a guy. Try talking smack when I'm not hurt, asswipe."

I looked into his bloodshot eyes and grinned. "Don't worry. Your wrist will not hurt anymore when you are dead."

"Q'on, stop it!" Amber's cry fell on near-deaf ears, as the *p'nal bin kur* knew neither reason nor mercy.

"If you hadn't gotten the jump on me, you'd be toast. Weak-ass punk little bitch." Her ex coughed and wheezed under my bootheel. "I bet that dirty whore has you pussy whipped. Is that it? She's letting you ride that nasty cunt, and you think she's something special now. Well, she's not. She's nothing but a filthy slut." He tried to push me off with his good hand.

The nanites had seen those words in Amber's books. They had taught me the meaning of those words, and I knew enough to know that Ryan was not intending them as flirtatious. He meant them to harm, to cut as deep as the knife he brought to the door.

A cruel smile twisted my lips. "You think I am weak enough to fall slave to a woman's sex?" I eased off Ryan's throat and stepped back, keeping myself between him and Amber. "Fine. Test your theory. I will allow you one strike against me. One. Anything beyond that, I will answer without hesitation."

Ryan rose to his feet, gasping for air. "You fucking broke my wrist, asshat. That's not exactly a fair fight, even if you don't fight back with the first punch."

I shrugged and waved a hand in dismissal. "You have another."

His pink human face turned bright red, a vibrant color I associated more with the radiant hues of Xalan than the dull, muted Earth tones. I didn't know humans could achieve such coloring.

I stood patiently while Ryan wavered on his feet. Cradling his broken right wrist to his chest, he reared back with his left and swung with all his might, his beefy fist colliding with my jaw.

I didn't budge.

Ryan scowled and reared back again, readying for another strike.

But I had only allowed him *one* unanswered blow. I caught his hand before it could hit me and twisted, delighting in the sound of muscle and tendon ripping. Amber shrieked, and Ryan screamed and fell to his knees.

Right where he belonged.

"It would appear that *you* are the weak one, human." I clenched my fist around his until the bones snapped in my grip. He screamed again, then began to sob.

Pathetic.

"Truly sad," I said, releasing his hand and walking around him in a slow, easy circle. To the untrained eye, it may seem that I'd let my guard down, but I was ready should he strike out again. I may have taken out both his upper limbs, but he still had two working appendages. "You could not satisfy Amber during your mating to her, and now your hands are ruined. I very much doubt you could satisfy her now without them."

He flinched when I took a step closer. Coward.

Without taking my eyes off him, I asked Amber to get my belt from my Xalan trousers. I had restraints in one of the many pockets and pouches on it, so even though the pants had been ruined when I'd ripped them off in my haste to mate with her, I hadn't discarded them.

She gave me the pants with a shaking hand. She seemed traumatized by this whole event, which I noticed even through the red haze of the *p'nal bin kur*. I would have to comfort her later, when Ryan was no longer a threat. For the time being, though, I busied myself with binding her ex's legs and useless arms together, leaving him immobile.



Amber relaxed against the wall, her chest heaving. Her color was almost back to its normal deliciously dark yet creamy color when a voice from outside drew all the color from her skin.

“Ryan? Ryan, dude, hurry up and get back in the car! We’ve gotta get the fuck out of here.”

Amber froze. “That’s Evan. His buddy. Shit, he came here with someone else ...”

She didn’t need to explain the danger of this new complication to me. Ryan arriving alone meant less to cover up; Ryan arriving with a “buddy” meant a potential witness. I gritted my teeth and tried to think of a solution. This Evan was not likely to leave without Ryan. I had seen “buddy cop” films while perusing Amber’s entertainment device, and buddies are apparently similar to Xalan *mii-faal* partners: insufferably inseparable.

I had a *mii-faal* on Xalan. Our partnership dissolved when he took the side of the leaders over my own.

“I could take them both to my ship,” I offered to Amber. “I have a small cell in there. They would not be able to escape and alert the authorities.”

Amber knelt down and reached a shaking hand towards her prone ex-husband. “Q’on, we can’t just kidnap him. That’ll make things worse! If they both go missing ... This is such a fucking shitshow. I have my ex trussed up and bleeding in my foyer, and his best friend is outside waiting for him.” She stopped short of touching the struggling man, almost like there was a force field around him. “I don’t know what to do ...”

“Ryan? You’d better not be fucking that bitch in there! We gotta go!”

“Wait,” I said, narrowing my eyes. “Why is this buddy so eager to leave?”

“Huh?” Amber blinked through her tears. “What does that have to do with anything?”

An idea came to me, and I squatted to retrieve the head covering and thick, bulky top clothing from Ryan. He

screamed again as I unbound his arms long enough to tug the sleeves off them. I put the head covering—hat—on my own head, pulling the brim low over my eyes and face, and shoved my arms into the jacket. “This Evan sounds concerned. Frightened. Like they were here to do something wrong, and they could get caught. Combined this with the fact that Ryan brought a knife to your door, and I do not believe anyone else knows they came here.”

“Q’on, what are you talking about?”

I stood and started out the door. “They were here with ill intent. You might still be in danger. Stay here.” Before Amber could stop me, I ventured out into the snow.

The cold didn’t bother me, but I hunched my shoulders and put my purple hands in the pockets of the jacket. In the dim backlight of the porch lantern, Ryan’s buddy Evan would not be able to tell I was different. He would think Ryan was on his way back to the vehicle.

Packed snow crunched beneath my boots as I strode to the waiting vehicle. A middle-aged human man stood by the driver’s side door, his lined, bearded face a mask of concern, then relief. “Jesus, Ryan, I thought you were gonna chicken out. Did you do it?”

“Do what?” I mumbled, trying my best to imitate Ryan’s whiny voice.

Evan rolled his eyes at me. “Kill the bitch. Did you kill your fucking whore ex-wife?”

I stopped short, and my hands clenched into fists inside the pockets. “He was here to kill her? Why would he kill her?”

“Dude, why are you even asking that? It was your idea, fuckface.”

Ryan was here to kill her. My Amber. My mate.

And this other human was a willing accomplice.

My rage resurfaced in a matter of seconds, and I realized what I had to do. If this buddy of Ryan’s was indeed complicit in the plot to kill Amber, he couldn’t be allowed to leave.

I was a warrior of Xalan. I couldn't let this go unpunished.

Step by step, I stalked towards the car. Seemingly oblivious to my murderous anger, Evan slid into the driver's seat and gunned the running engine. He leaned out the window and beat his hand on the door. "C'mon! Let's go! We can't be here when the cops show up."

I reached the front bumper of the car and stopped, leaning forward and gripping the metal frame underneath. Evan pounded on the steering wheel and gestured to the passenger side. "Get *in!*"

I shook my head. The hat fell to the snow at my feet. Evan screamed as he finally saw my alien face, and the engine revved again.

It's hard to make the car go when its wheels are off the ground, though. I learned this from watching action films on Amber's television.

With little effort on my part, I lifted the front of the car. I hefted until it rested on its rear bumper, Evan screaming all the while. I let him hover, waited to see if he'd jump out, waited to see how much of a coward this man was. My answer came moments later, when his whimper followed the sound of liquid trickling—and the sharp, unmistakable odor of urine.

I held the car upright for a moment, then gave a slight nudge. It toppled over backwards, landing hard on the hood. The car rocked for a moment before it stilled, but to my disappointment, hardly any damage occurred. Pity.

Evan scrambled out the open window moments later ... into my waiting hands.

"W-w-what the f-fuck are you?" he stammered.

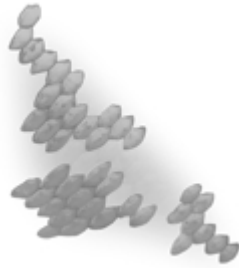
I held him by the throat and brought his face to mine. I bared my teeth and growled.

"I am your end."

His eyes rolled back into his head, and the stench of feces signaled the emptying of his bowels as he passed out.

# Chapter 12

## *Amber*



Shock is a funny thing.

One minute my ex was practically choking me, and the next, he was hogtied on my floor. My alien boyfriend wore his hat and jacket out to his buddy's car, which he then upended with said buddy still in it. Then, before I had time to process what Q'on said about the knife that Ryan dropped and "ill intent," he returned from outside and dumped Evan's bound, unconscious body at my feet.

"This piece of *skruut* said that the one called Ryan planned to kill you."

"H-he what?"

Q'on took my hands in his and gave them a light squeeze. I looked down at our joined hands and marveled at how gentle he was. Just moments ago, he was crushing Ryan's bones with them, yet I somehow knew he would never hurt me with them. "You are safe. I will imprison them on my ship until we can agree on what to do with them. I do not think they deserve to go free, but I realize now that I was too rash. I should have included you in the decision-making."

I blinked at Q'on, confused. I was still stuck a few chapters back in this crazy book, and I couldn't seem to catch up to the same page Q'on was on. "Ryan wanted me dead?"

"Yes. But as I said, you are safe."

Turning back to the still-open door, I saw the car lying on its roof, my brain slow to accept that Q'on did that with his bare

hands despite having witnessed it for myself. “What are we going to do with their car?”

It’s really stupid stuff that you focus on when you’re in shock.

“I can move it. Dump it in the lake, or wherever you’d prefer.”

Evan groaned at my feet, telling me he was alive. I looked down at him, stunned.

“What are we going to do with him?” God, I was like a broken record.

Q’on shrugged his broad shoulders. “We could imprison them on my ship, or we could kill them. I am fine with either, but your opinion is valid. I would like to know your preference.”

My preference? My preference would have been to call the cops before even the idea of murder was on the table, but Q’on had to go and bring that up as an option, and while the idea frightened me, getting caught with a beaten ex, his traumatized friend, and an alien living in my house scared me, too.

Jesus! What the fuck was I thinking? Was I really about to condone the execution of two morons just because they were morons?

I took a deep breath to center myself. I needed to think.

According to Q’on, Ryan wanted me dead. The knife still lying on my floor seemed to indicate that, but did Evan want me dead, too, or was he just playing along with Ryan’s twisted game? He was apparently willing to be the getaway driver, but that wouldn’t be enough to warrant the death penalty in our Earth legal system.

My eyes widened at the thought, and my head whipped around to face Q’on.

“Shit, Q’on, they could take you away for this!”

He cocked his head at me. “Why?”

“Because you assaulted and kidnapped two humans!”

Q’on frowned. “I do not understand. In your authority dramas on the television—procedurals—acting in defense of another is acceptable.”

When did he find time to watch cop dramas? He was streaming porn all damn day! “That’s incredibly difficult to prove in real life, Q’on.” I groaned. “Fuck. If the cops find them, we’re screwed. They’ll say we planted the knife, because that’s literally the only evidence we have that he was here to hurt me.”

“Not true. We have his buddy.” Q’on nudged Evan’s side with the toe of his boot. Evan grunted, but he didn’t wake up.

“He’ll just lie and say we made it all up.” I leaned against the wall and put my hands over my face. “Fuck. We’re in such deep shit right now.”

Hands grabbed my arms, and I jumped and shrieked until I realized it was Q’on, not Evan, who held me. “Jesus! What are you doing, Q’on? We’ve got two prisoners in my house and no alibi for either of us. This isn’t the time to get handsy.”

He didn’t let go. “Tell me what to do.” His voice was soft, almost meek. Not like him. He pressed his forehead to mine and closed his eyes.

“What?”

“Tell me what to do, and I’ll do it. Whatever you want.”

What was I supposed to say to that? Nothing would undo this; the best we could hope for would be that no one knew they’d be here. That they’d just go missing, and no one would investigate the house.

We couldn’t keep them in the house, but we also probably shouldn’t dump them in Q’on’s ship, with no food or water or ... Jesus, was I even considering that?

“I don’t know what to do. God help me, I don’t know ...”

While I contemplated my future in prison, Evan groaned again and rolled over on the floor. He ended up nose-to-nose with Ryan’s mangled wrist. I watched in a strange kind of detachment as he started to thrash and scream, trying to work his way free of the ropes Q’on had bound him in. I knew I should have felt bad, felt guilty, but all I could make myself feel was disdain. Disgust. He had driven Ryan out here to kill

me—*knew* that Ryan wanted me dead—and he'd gone along with it anyway.

Maybe Q'on had a point. Maybe Ryan and Evan deserved what they got. Maybe they deserved imprisonment on Q'on's ship, at least until we figured out what to do with them.

“Q'on?”

He turned back from Evan's gyrating form on the floor. “Yes, Amber?”

“Can you take them to the shed out back?”

“Yes. Anything for you, Amber.”

I looked up into his yellow eyes. “We'll lock them in there. Let them keep each other company.”

It was cold of me, but I saw no other choice. I still couldn't bear the thought of Q'on being captured and taken by the AARO to have God-knows-what kind of experiments done on him. Did he really deserve that when all he'd done was try to keep me safe?

Q'on took my hands and kissed them, then turned to Evan, who was still screaming bloody murder on the floor. It was a good thing my closest neighbor was clear on the other side of the lake; I'd hate to have to deal with someone overhearing that ruckus on top of everything else. The last thing we needed was a witness. *Another* witness.

As my alien lover hefted a body over each shoulder and strode out into the snowy night, I worried for his safety more than anything. What if one of the AARO agents was hiding out there, waiting for evidence of an alien? He'd be walking right into it.

Then again, if they were hiding outside, we'd already be doomed. No one would miss Q'on tossing a car on its roof with his bare hands, or him tying up Evan and dragging him back to the cabin. I'd just have to trust that nobody saw anything. That was the only way I'd stay sane.

While Q'on took care of the two troublemakers—and Evan's car—I grabbed a towel from the linen closet and wrapped it

around the knife Ryan had dropped, careful not to touch the handle. I noticed a large spot of pooled blood where Ryan's bones had broken through the skin when Q'on snapped them. He was probably at risk of a dangerous infection out there in the shed, but it was the only place I could think of to stash him for the time being. I went to the kitchen for some cleaning supplies and set to work.

I was still kneeling on the floor, scrubbing my knuckles raw, when Q'on reappeared.

"What are you doing, Amber? I should be doing that. It is my responsibility."

I paused mid-scrub, amazed that he'd even consider cleaning this up himself. I guess I was so accustomed to the human convention of "the woman does the cleaning" that I didn't think he'd bother with this. "You'd do that? Clean all this?"

He knelt next to me and took the scrub brush from my hands. "I should be doing that. You should never have to get on your knees to clean up my mess."

The sweetness was too much. I burst into tears, and Q'on scooped me into his arms.

"What if they come and find something we missed? They've got ways to find even the smallest traces of blood ... We'll never get it completely clean ..."

I sobbed into his shoulder as he stroked my hair and made soft *shushing* noises. "It will be all right, Amber. I will get it clean. No one will ever find a trace of Ryan's blood in your home. You have my word."

"How—?"

He held up a small, metal box and grinned. "Nanites do more than translate. We have them for this purpose. For cleaning." He opened the box, and a small blob of what looked like molten metal oozed out onto the floor. I watched with amazement as the blob expanded over the bloody spot left by Ryan, completely covering it. Then, after a brief buzzing sound, the blob slithered back into the box—leaving the floor



completely spotless. I think it even got out the wine stain I left there a few years ago.

“D-did it get everything?” I asked, still somewhat in shock. “I mean, if they do forensic testing, will they find anything?”

“Nothing. The nanites, for lack of a better term, ate all the organic material on the surface of your floor. There is nothing left to find.”

“What if they get ahold of your box there?”

Q’on shrugged. “The nanites ate it. There is no evidence left.”

No wonder he wasn’t freaking out about the blood. He had a solution the whole time. I stopped to think about our options. “Q’on, do you still have the device that healed my ankle the other night?”

He nodded. “Yes. Were you injured?”

“No! But maybe ... I dunno, maybe we should fix Ryan’s hands. If we get caught, they’ll go easier on us—on *you*—if he’s not harmed.”

Q’on paused as if pondering the thought. “I do not like the idea of rewarding him for bad behavior. He tried to hurt you. He should not get healed simply to lessen the risk to me.”

“Please, Q’on? For me? It would make me feel better if he wasn’t risking a nasty infection out there in the shed. It’s bad enough that it’s winter; we should really bring them some blankets anyway.”

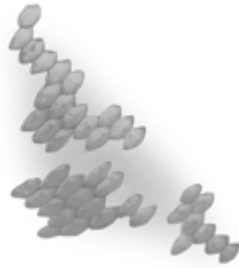
With an annoyed grunt, Q’on rose and left to take care of Ryan’s injuries. I noted that he dutifully even found and brought blankets with him, so I wouldn’t have to later. It wasn’t much, but it might be enough to keep the AARO or other authorities from shooting Q’on on sight.

*Might* be enough.

We weren’t out of the danger zone yet.

# Chapter 13

## *Q'on*



I frightened Amber. I acted without thinking, and I gave her reason to fear me, to fear for her own safety around me.

I fear I did irreparable damage to our burgeoning relationship. I may have destroyed our mate bond before it had a chance to set in her human heart.

Once the mess in the foyer was dealt with, Amber went back to the living room and poured herself another glass of *gribbal*, downing it in one fell swoop. I opened my mouth to caution her against drinking so much so fast, but she held up a hand to stop me.

“I don’t want to hear it. I’ve had one hell of a night, and I need this.”

I shrank back in shame. I did this. I caused her distress.

Amber poured yet another drink, though this time she paused before partaking. She swirled the liquid in her glass, watching as if entranced by it.

“I’m going to bed—alone. I need some time to think.”

Ruined things for the second night in a row. What a way to start a mating. I got as comfortable as I could on the couch and debated my options. Watching human mating shows got Amber aroused before, but I doubted that would work again. Reading her favorite literature to learn about what she likes in a male was a failure as well. Perhaps I was wrong about the mate bond, or perhaps humans could not experience it the way we Xalanites do.

Perhaps it was a one-sided bond.

That thought hurt my blood organs. I did not want to be alone, not after so long drifting in space. I did not want to be without Amber.

I drifted into a fitful slumber, disturbed by sleep-thoughts of blood and knives. Dozens of Ryans faced off against me, too many to fight, and they stabbed into my body again and again as I tried to keep them from entering the cabin, from getting to Amber.

One of these ghostly hands felt more real than the others, and I reached for it, hoping to break Ryan's wrist again, to hurt him like he was hurting me.

My fingers met with soft, smooth skin, and I froze.

"Q'on? Are you all right? It looked like you were having a bad dream."

There, wrapped in a plush garment with an equally plush belt, stood Amber, her hair askew from slumber. Her eyes were red-rimmed, her lids swollen, but still she wore an expression I've come to associate with human concern. Not concern for my hand on her arm, but concern for me, for what I was experiencing.

I blinked in confusion. "Did my sleep-thoughts cause me to wake you?" Sometimes I shout when my sleep-thoughts—no, *dreams*—are bad.

She shook her head. "No. I couldn't sleep. I was scared. I started thinking about what might happen if some of Ryan and Evan's friends came looking for them. They could bring guns, or they could go totally nuts and set the cabin on fire with us inside. I just can't sleep with that kind of stuff on my mind."

I sat up, and Amber sat next to me, her curvy hip resting against my own. She leaned her head on my shoulder, and we sat quietly together for several spaces of Earth time. Words like "cuddle" and "snuggle" came to my mind, brought forth by the nanites' translations. Signs of affection, though not always of desire. Given the tenuous nature of our interactions this past evening, I would not push things by trying to mate.

Amber shivered, and she drew her garment closer around her. I offered her the use of my blanket, but instead she got up and lit a fire in the fireplace. “There. Now we can both get warm.”

“I do not need the fire to warm me. I am from Xalan, a planet of mostly water. Though the climate is quite temperate, being submerged at great depths can rob the body of warmth. We are designed to acclimate to extreme temperatures. If you are cold, I will not suffer for lack of a blanket.” I flexed my arm and let the firelight glint off my iridescent purple scales. “There is an extra layer underneath my skin that I do not believe you humans have. It insulates against extremes.”

“Oh.” Her face fell, and she tucked her legs underneath her. “And here I thought I was being all caring and wifey.”

The nanites took a moment to give me the meaning of the second term, and when they did I felt a surge of relief. She wished to be like a mate to me. That meant the damage I did to our relationship by injuring her former mate was not permanent. She still cared for me, despite her earlier anger.

“Well,” I said as I wrapped the blanket around her shoulders, “I appreciate you being wifey, so long as I can be husbandy as well.”

Amber giggled. “It doesn’t quite work as well the other way around, but I get your point. I’ll let you be husbandy if that’s what you want. I could use a husband who wants to act like one, rather than a cheating drunk.”

The reference to her ex hung heavy in the air between us, and a surge of regret flowed through me. Normally, I did not regret my actions. I did what I thought was right, what the situation called for, but I caused Amber undue strife with that action. Shame heated me more than the flames from the fireplace ever could.

“I am sorry, Amber. I did not intend to make your life worse when I attacked Ryan. I shall try to think of how I can make amends, but I don’t know that I can.”

She took my hand in hers, stroking my scales. “Unless you have a device on your ship that can wipe both their memories,

you can't really make amends. Not one hundred percent. But that's okay. I thought a lot about it while I was trying to sleep, and I realized that, scared as that made me, I've never felt safer than I do with you right now." She smiled at me. "You were only trying to protect me. That doesn't make what you did *right* by any means, but it makes it ... understandable."

"I shall try to do right in the future."

"Just do what you do, Q'on. Right or wrong, be yourself. That's all I have any right to ask."

From abject terror the moment we first met to this new understanding and acceptance, in only a matter of Earth days ... perhaps I was not wrong about the mate bond after all.

Amber rested her head against me and nuzzled close. I put my arms around her and held her to my chest. Her breathing evened out, and she finally fell into slumber. I was done sleeping for the night; I wanted nothing more to do with dreams. Instead, I watched her serene face as she slept. I hoped her dreams were pleasant.

The hour was nearly three when I heard a rustling outside that did not sound familiar. The lynx that hunted at night in the woods around Amber's home was too clever to be so noisy, and the sound was not loud enough to be something larger such as another predator or a moose. I disentangled myself from Amber to creep to the window and peer out into the night. My eyes adapted well to most low light conditions, even near-blackness, and the shape of a man took form in the bushes outside.

The agent known as Wilson stared back at me, his face poorly hidden by the leafless branches. He lifted a device to his face and pressed a button. A soft click sounded in the night, accompanied by a brilliant flash. I blinked to clear my eyes of the afterimage, but by the time my sight returned fully, he was gone.

For a moment, I was torn. Would it be better to stay with Amber and continue to keep her safe, or should I investigate this potential threat?

Curiosity won out over caution, and I opened the back door with as much stealth as I could muster. Listening intently, I crept around the house, peering into every bush and copse of trees in search of the government man. Sadly, the only traces I found were footprints in the snow leading to a set of tire tracks. Whatever Agent Wilson came for, he left without feeling the need to discuss it with Amber. Rude.

I returned to Amber's side and wrapped the blanket around the both of us. She shivered in her sleep, and I realized that my scales were probably chilly from being outside.

With the threat gone for the moment and Amber safely sleeping, I managed some comfortable dozing myself before dawn broke. Amber stirred, waking me, and smiled up at me.

"Guess what?" she asked.

"How am I to guess?"

She giggled. "No, silly. You're supposed to say 'What?' when I ask that."

"Oh. What?"

She grinned and placed a hand on my thigh. "It's Saturday. I don't work today or tomorrow. You've got me all to yourself."

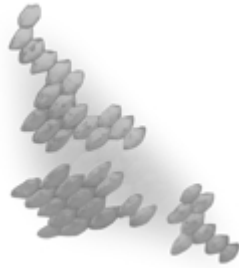
I raised my brows. "Does that mean—?"

Amber nodded and pulled the belt of her robe loose. "Yep. We'll fool around a bit, feed the prisoners, then have a nice, warm breakfast before I figure out something for us to do besides each other."

"Excellent."

# Chapter 14

## *Amber*



I had to think of something for Q'on and me to do to pass the time. Sex could only occupy us for so long, and if I wanted a real relationship with him, I needed to find something other than that for entertainment.

If the weather wasn't so fucking cold, I'd take him on a secluded hiking trail. *He* might manage to tolerate that, but *I* would freeze my pretty little ass off. Maybe in the spring, after the snow melts.

Most of the traditional date activities were out. A purple-scaled man at a fancy restaurant? Or even in a movie theater—people would freak!

I brainstormed all morning while Q'on graciously fed Ryan and Evan out in the shed. I was willing to take on that responsibility, but Q'on didn't trust either of them not to try to attack me in the process. Since he was more than capable of defending himself if one of them escaped their bonds, I didn't argue.

But how was I supposed to entertain a freaking alien warrior? He probably spent his time doing drills or practicing battle tactics back home.

Then it hit me: I could replicate that—kind of. I mean, the video game industry had created a healthy variety of battle combat games. Surely something in those would not only entertain him but also hopefully be a pleasant reminder of home. I figured as long as I didn't pick a game where you shoot enemy aliens, it would be a fun time for both of us.

There were just two problems with this idea. One: I didn't own a game system. Ryan took that in the divorce. And two: I'd have to leave Q'on here by himself to go out and buy one.

I debated my options the whole time Q'on was feeding our prisoners. When he got back, I'd finally made up my mind to go into town and get a game console as a present for him. I didn't like the idea of leaving him alone, but the notion of bringing him with me to potentially be seen was equally unappealing. My car didn't have tinted windows, and even if we put him in Ryan's hat and coat, someone was going to notice the fact that his face was purple.

After some discussion explaining why he couldn't come along to the store, Q'on settled down on the couch with a book, sulking, while I finished getting dressed and grabbed my keys.

Traffic wasn't too bad heading into town, but once I got to Rochester proper things ground to a halt. I guess everyone was out doing their Christmas shopping, which didn't bode well for me finding what I was looking for. Every wife and mother out there was going to be on the hunt for the same console. When I reached the third electronics store with no luck, I finally got frustrated enough to grab last year's model and a handful of war games for it. A poufy-haired Karen bitched at me for snatching the last one, but I ignored her hate. She should've gotten up earlier or had more coffee. When it came to Christmas shopping, only the fit survived.

On the way home, I thought I caught a sleek black SUV a few car lengths back, changing lanes whenever I did. I worried that the AARO was on my tail, but either I was just being paranoid, or I lost it, because by the time I got away from Rochester traffic, it disappeared.

Maybe it was just a coincidence.

When I got home, Q'on watched with keen interest as I opened the boxes and started getting everything set up. He read the descriptions of the games as I worked, and by the time I was done, he had picked one out to try.

"This one," he said, handing me the box for *Olympus Fallen*.  
"I wish to fight your gods."



“They’re not our gods anymore, not really. But they were for a time.”

His brows knit together in confusion as I put the disc in the console. “Your gods changed? On Xalan, our gods have been the same for millennia. For as long as we have existed, so have they. I cannot imagine our gods changing over time.”

I shrugged and sat back on the couch with my controller as I gave him the other one. “Humans are fickle beings. We don’t much stick to any one thing for terribly long. Even Christianity has changed over the years. If you landed a thousand or even a few hundred years ago, you might find very different values, and you would encounter a different interpretation of who and what God is. But enough of that. Let’s just play.”

I was a bit rusty after the divorce, but I quickly picked back up on the nuances of the controller and breezed through the gameplay tutorials with my character.

Q’on, on the other hand, was a bit slower to understand.

“How is it that pressing this X makes the person on the screen punch? Would it not be better training to use my muscles to punch instead of pressing buttons?”

“Well, they have games that are kind of like that, but they’re not as cool as this one. I thought you might like the graphics and the story better with this system. That, and most of the motion-activated games were out of stock. This is kind of a crazy time of year for shopping.”

“Why is the time insane?”

I ignored his misunderstanding of my phrasing. “Christmas. It’s the biggest holiday of the year for us. People all over the world, Christian or not, buy gifts for their friends and family. Then they exchange the gifts on a certain day. It’s supposedly the day of Christ’s birth, but there’s a lot of heated debate over when that really happened. Anyway, people go out to the stores in droves to get the best gifts.”

Q’on frowned. “I do not have a gift for you. Can I go to the store next time you go to acquire one?”

I patted his knee with my hand before going back to killing the gorgon I was battling in the game. “Don’t worry about it. Christmas has sucked for me ever since Ryan cheated on me and we got divorced. I don’t hold much stock in sappy holiday feelings anymore.”

“Sappy?”

“Wholesome. Lovey-dovey. Sweet.”

“Those sound like good words. Positive emotions, positive feelings. Why would you say them with such contempt?”

I huffed out a sigh and left the dead gorgon to go rescue Q’on’s character, who had aggroed three monsters at once. “Look, I know the bitter divorcee is a terrible cliché, but it is what it is. Ryan hurt me, and it’s going to take time to get over that, even with you here now.”

He grunted and waved the controller around, as though that would move his character better. “Ryan cannot hurt you anymore. He is bound in the shed.”

“Emotional wounds take longer to heal than physical ones. He might not be able to do any more physical harm, but the mental damage he already did is still there.”

Despite my aid, Q’on’s character died as the monsters focused on him. He growled and tossed the controller on the floor with such force that it busted open. I winced at the thought of going back out in the holiday crowds to get a replacement, then thought better of it and decided Primo shipping would have to do. He would just have to wait a day to play more. His own fault, really, for throwing a temper tantrum.

“Q’on, that was the only spare controller that came with the game. Now only one of us can play at a time. I bought this so we could have something to do together.”

He crossed his arms over his chest and pouted. “It is a stupid game. I don’t see how I am supposed to hone my battle skills by pressing buttons. This does nothing to improve a man’s prowess. Is this how your ex practices his battle skills? If that’s the case, I see now why it was so easy to overpower him.”

“He was easy to overpower because he was drunk and angry. If he had been sober—a rare occurrence, but if—you might have had a real fight on your hands.”

Okay, so that was a lie. Q'on had a good fifty, sixty pounds of solid muscle on Ryan, and he had the benefit of being raised in a society where physical “prowess” was still a practiced art. Ryan couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag. He'd only ever been in bar brawls and fistfights, no real combat experience to speak of. He hadn't even joined the military after high school. A loser through and through, there's no way he could pose a serious threat to Q'on.

Q'on paused as if to ponder my words. “Okay. He is sober now. I can go fight him on even ground.”

He stood up off the couch, and I jumped to stop him. “Q'on, no! Don't let him free just to beat him up again!”

For a brief second, I worried he wouldn't listen. He was halfway to the back door when he stopped in his tracks, his shoulders drooping. “Fine. I won't fight him, but only because you ask me not to.” He turned back to me, his yellow eyes glowing. “His safety is by your grace.”

I didn't miss the unspoken threat there. If I gave him even an inch of leeway in this, he'd stomp Ryan into the pavement without a second thought. It should have concerned me, but instead I felt safer than I ever had. If Ryan somehow got free, I knew Q'on would take care of him before he had a chance to lay so much as a finger on me. It was a comforting thought.

“C'mon. Let's play a different game. Maybe *Olympus Fallen* just isn't the game for you.”

Q'on scowled, but he came back to the couch and picked up my controller. “You cannot play now. I have damaged the other set of buttons.”

I shrugged and swapped out the discs. “It's okay. Probably better this way. I'll just kind of coach you from the sidelines. How does that sound? That way I'm not getting in your way, and you're free to explore the game on your own without comparing your gameplay to mine.”

“You don’t mind? You said you wanted something for us to do together.”

“Yeah, but it’ll be fine. I’ll order another one to come in tomorrow.”

We took turns with the remaining controller for a couple of hours, then had lunch. Q’on wanted to cook me something else from his planet, but I wasn’t feeling quite that adventurous. I vetoed his offer and just made us some sandwiches with cold cuts from the fridge. Q’on ate three on his own, and I had one. At this rate, I was going to need to make another grocery trip soon. I guess Xalanites required more calories than humans. He was patient enough to wait until I made a meal to eat, but he devoured tons of food at a time. I wondered if he was getting hungry in between meals.

“You’re getting enough food here, right? You’d tell me if you were hungry ...”

Q’on wiped some mayo off his chin with a napkin and let out a loud belch. “Yes. I am quite sated with the meals you provide.”

I raised a suspicious brow and frowned. “You’re just being polite, aren’t you?”

That brought out a grin. “I have food from my ship to eat when you are between meals. I will not starve.”

I remembered the *yin* he let me taste. “More snacks?”

“Yes. Snacks.”

Since he wasn’t complaining, I decided to drop the subject. As long as he knew he could come to me if he needed more food, I was okay with it, though I suspected he would still snack when I wasn’t looking to supplement what I fed him.

I realized how rusty I was at this girlfriend stuff, and it saddened me a bit. I should have known how to entertain a man with other activities than TV and sex, and I should have made sure he was well-fed and taken care of. Was this maybe part of why Ryan cheated? Did I just suck as a mate in general? Q’on wasn’t complaining, but that didn’t mean I wasn’t doing something fundamentally wrong.

My doubts nagged at me through the afternoon and into dinner. I became quiet and withdrawn, and it took Q'on cornering me in the kitchen afterwards to get me to admit what was wrong.

"You are not yourself," he said as he stood with his arms on either side of me, his palms pressed into the countertop. We were so close that I couldn't breathe without my chest brushing against his. My heart thumped beneath my ribcage, and a heady rush ran through me. I had to remind myself that I was trying to think up ways to interact besides fucking, but his strange musky scent filled my nostrils and weakened my resolve.

"I'm fine," I lied.

Q'on scowled. "You are not. Something troubles you." He brushed a lock of hair behind my ear and leaned in even closer. "Tell me. I am your mate. Your troubles are mine."

With much reluctance, I laid it all out, admitting my failings as a girlfriend to this alien Adonis. I paused when done, waiting for the inevitable shoe to drop.

I don't know what I expected his reaction to be, but pure, unbridled passion wasn't it.

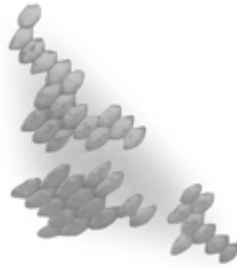
He lifted me onto the counter in one smooth motion, stepping between my legs and pressing his hips to mine. His hard cock rubbed my clit as he bent to kiss me. Those firm scaled lips devoured me with fervor, and a low rumbling began in his chest, almost like the purr of a cat.

"You have no failings as a mate, my love," he whispered against my lips. He pushed my robe off my shoulders, exposing my breasts. "You are perfection embodied, and if anyone has failed here, it is me. I have failed to show you how much I love you, how my body and soul crave your presence and your touch more with every passing second, regardless of what human activities we do."

I opened my mouth to respond, but he filled it with his tongue before I could get a word out.

# Chapter 15

## *Q'on*



How could Amber think I no longer craved her? How could she waste time fretting about entertaining me?

I vowed to show her my dedication more often. Starting right then and there, in her kitchen, with her round ass planted on the counter in front of me. The humans' housing design proved perfect for my purposes, as the height of the countertop left her in just the right position for my ready cock.

She had taken off most of her garments when she returned from the store, opting for the plush robe to keep her warm, but to my frustration her undergarment remained in my way. I pushed the satin fabric aside and slid into her warm, inviting pussy. She gasped, and she contracted around me. I struggled to keep my wits about me. This woman was my everything, and everything she did drove me wild. I wanted to fill her with such pleasure that she never doubted her worth to me again.

After the first few hasty thrusts, I pulled Amber farther forward on the counter to prevent crushing my balls as we fucked. That was one disadvantage to the position, but the advantages won out, and I kept pounding her in that spot.

Amber clung to me with her arms and legs, and the squeeze on my waist was delightful. I gripped her buttocks and slammed into her faster, my cock vibrating and my upper *n'ril* teasing her *kash*. She moaned and screamed, throwing her head back in passion. I reveled in the sounds. It pleased me to know she was enjoying this.

I brushed my lips against her exposed neck, delivering light kisses in contrast to my heavy fucking. She shuddered and held my head to her. “More,” she whispered, her voice husky with desire.

Far be it from me to say “no” to that! I kissed my way up her neck, nibbling on the delicate skin. When I made my way to her luscious mouth, she began to tremble in my arms.

The fire of a thousand Xalanite suns burned in my veins. I buried myself in her heat again and again, delighting in the varied sensations. The sight of her dark eyes rolled back in ecstasy. The sound of my dick sliding through her wet folds. The scent of her sex. The taste of her tongue. Every single sensory input served to drive me further into the mating rut, and when my knot swelled and locked us together, Amber sighed and clenched around it. Her walls gripped me tight, and I found myself grunting in time with each push, desperate to bring her to release before I came inside her.

“Come for me, Amber. Come all over this countertop. All over me. Coat me in yourself.”

From moaning to screaming to shouting to screeching, her voice echoed through the kitchen. I added some shouts of my own to the melody, ending in a long, drawn-out roar that seemed to send a shiver down Amber’s spine. She spasmed as though electrified, just like our first time together, and a gush of warm fluid sprayed me. I stilled with my cock buried deep inside, and I shook as it pumped her full of my cum.

“Oh, my *God*, Q’on, that was amazing!” Her voice trembled as she spoke. She tried to disentangle herself from me, but I held her in place.

“I’m not done yet,” I said, my hands firm on her hips.

“Wha—”

I dropped to my knees and slung her legs over my shoulders. “We have had dinner, but I’ve not yet had dessert.”

“Dessert?”

“It is customary for humans to have a sweet treat after a meal, correct?”

“Well, yes, but—”

“Then I am having mine now.”

Before she could protest further, I dove in, devouring her like a man starved. I licked her sopping wet cunt until she screamed my name, tasting my own release on my tongue as I reached in as far as I could. Creamy white cum dripped from her, and I lapped it all up. When she buried her hands in my hair and clenched her thighs around my head, I knew she was close. I sucked on her *kash* and shoved two fingers into her, curling my digits to hit the mound inside that I knew would drive her crazy.

That did it. She seized again, coming all over my face. I loved the taste, the feel of it, the exuberant joy in her sigh as she came down from the high of the orgasm. I loved everything about this woman, and if it took hour after hour of this to prove it to her, I would gladly oblige.

As I rose to stand again, Amber put her hands on my chest and held me back. “No more. Please. My poor pussy can’t take another round!”

She was begging ... for me to stop? “You do not like it?”

“I didn’t say that,” she said, and her tone seemed strange. The nanites scrambled to explain the emotion I was hearing in her voice. They finally settled on the term “exasperated.” Amber rested her cheek against my chest and slid her arms behind me, wrapping me in a hug. “I love you, Q’on, and I love what you do for me, but sometimes I need a rest. I don’t know about Xalanite women, but I can only handle so much at once. As it is, I might have trouble walking to the bathroom right now.”

Did I damage her? “Are you all right?”

She put a hand on my cheek and smiled. “I’m fine. It’s just—you wore me out. My legs are like freakin’ Jell-o. I just know I’m going to stumble when I get down, if I can even stand.”

“Do you need assistance?”

“Actually, that would be nice. Just make sure I don’t faceplant on the way to the toilet, okay?”



“Face ... plant?” She has no plants in the house to put her face in ...

“Fall. Make sure I don’t fall down.”

I aided her off the counter, and true to her word, she seemed to be experiencing difficulties with her lower extremities. They wobbled and shook, and she had to lean on me as we walked down the hall to keep upright. It was a most unusual sight, one that filled me with concern, but she merely laughed at the situation.

“I promise, Q’on, you didn’t hurt me. It’s ... it’s hard to explain. Just know that if a human woman has this much trouble walking after sex, you did something very, very right.”

She shut me out of the bathroom while she used the toilet, though I stayed close by in case she needed me. When she finished, she seemed steadier on her feet, though she still wavered slightly.

“Whew! Okay, I think I can walk a little easier now. Let’s go sit down on the couch and watch something. Or you can play a game, either one.”

I scowled at the thought of fussing with the simulations again. “I do not want to play those games right now. They are irritating.”

“Okay, then. Pick a genre. What do you want to watch?”

After some thought, I opted for something that shouldn’t cause added arousal, given Amber’s continued muscle weakness. I did not wish to goad her into more if she wasn’t physically ready for it. So, instead of something with a romantic plot, I opted for a television series that boasted comedic value. Surely that wouldn’t lead to anything.

Amber laughed more than I at the show, though I admit that most of the humor was foreign to me. Why was it considered funny that the male walked into an open cabinet door? Amber tried to explain the value of physical comedy to me, but I still didn’t understand.

Even more frustrating than not getting the jokes was the fact that the television laughed right along with Amber. Even the

device knew when something was funny! I began to regret my choice.

Several episodes in, Amber's laughter slowed, and she turned off the television. "You're not getting into this, are you?"

I sighed and shrugged. "I suppose after some more time on your planet, I'll understand better. That is probably all I need. I just don't understand why some of these things are considered humorous, or how the television knows when to laugh, yet I do not."

Amber's eyes widened, then she covered her mouth to stifle a giggle. "It's not the TV laughing, Q'on. It's called canned laughter. They record this stuff in a studio with an audience, and they've got people with signs that tell the audience members when to laugh or whatever. It's all staged. That, or they record the laughter ahead of time and just play it back when something happens that's supposed to be funny."

"Oh." My face fell, and I knew that if I were human, I'd be pink with shame. Blushing.

As though she sensed my distress, Amber wrapped her arms around me in a hug and held me close. "It's okay, Q'on. There's a ton of cultural differences between our species. This is all new to you, and I guess I kind of forget to explain the stuff that might not make sense to you. Just let me know when something confuses or frustrates you, and I'll do my best to help you make sense of it."

"I am sorry, Amber. I will strive to understand better. I don't want you to think that I can't learn."

"Don't stress yourself out over it. We've got all the time in the world. Well, not literally, but we've got time. You'll catch on, and eventually I'll learn more Xalanite customs. It'll even out."

I glanced at the clock on the end table. "Speaking of customs, you usually are in bed much earlier than this. Am I keeping you up?"

Amber shook her head. "No. I stay up late sometimes on the weekend."

“Weekend?”

“Yeah. A typical human work week is Monday through Friday, so since Saturday and Sunday are off days for most, we call it a weekend. Nothing’s really ending except arbitrary counting of days, but it helps us keep a rhythm.”

“Are you tired, though? I can let you get some sleep. I will stay out here again if you wish.”

She frowned. “I’m sorry, Q’on. I shouldn’t have locked you out the past couple of nights. I know it’s sending mixed signals to you. I just don’t know how to act with a man in the house again. I haven’t dated since the divorce, so I’m used to sleeping alone.”

“You seemed angry.”

“Well, you annoyed me, yeah, but I wasn’t angry. Irritated, maybe, and a bit confused about how I was feeling. But not angry.”

“Does that mean I can join you tonight?”

She paused in thought. “Actually, I’d feel better if you did. Just in case Ryan or Evan break free.” Amber sighed. “We’re going to have to figure out what to do with them soon. Someone’s going to notice them missing, and even though they’re scumbags, they kind of don’t deserve to be locked up in the shed all winter.”

I growled low in my throat and clenched my hands into fists. “They wanted you dead. I do not see why we cannot give them the fate they sought for you.”

“That’s not how we do things on this planet, Q’on. At least, not in this country. They’ve got rights, and I’m probably already in big trouble for what little we’ve already done to them.”

I did not like the idea of Amber being in trouble with the authorities for the likes of her ex and his buddy. “Shall I release them?”

“No, not just yet. We’ll feed them again, give them some more blankets maybe ... keep them from freezing to death

overnight. But just let me think it over a little longer. I have to have a plausible story to tell the cops when they go running to rat us out.”

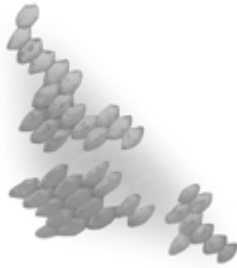
I accompanied Amber to the shed to feed and swaddle the captives. Though we had already covered them in blankets, they shivered and shook, and the shed was so cold that their filth froze to them in the chill air. Amber instructed me in turning on a small device that she called a “space heater,” though it would never suffice to warm someone in the void of space. I set the device well out of reach of the two men, and once they were fed and warm enough, we locked the shed behind us and went to Amber’s bedroom.

Amber saved the good blankets for us. They were much lusher and softer than the ones we bundled the two men in, and I fell into a comfortable sleep with her in my arms. So comfortable, in fact, that I did not hear the vehicles approach.

I did not wake until the government agents broke into the house and surrounded us.

# Chapter 16

## *Amber*



I awoke to a loud crash, which was followed by a cacophony of overlapping shouts, stomping feet, and strange, unfamiliar clicks.

I opened my eyes to find a group of men in suits and tactical gear standing around my bedroom, their various types of guns all trained on Q'on. I suspect the clicking I heard was the sound of safeties being released.

Q'on stiffened, and for a terrifying moment I worried he was going to attack these men. Thankfully, though, he didn't rise up and strike, leaving the armed agents no reason to fire.

"Amber, I feel apologies are in order," he said, not even bothering to whisper.

"What happened?" I ask, my eyes glued to the muzzle of a gun being held by Agent Wilson.

"The government man who came to your door the other day was in the bushes outside. I hesitated before giving chase, and he got away."

Agent Wilson. He must have gotten some proof of Q'on's existence to be able to bring a whole squad of agents here to capture him. I held the blankets up to my chin with a shaking hand, afraid to move.

"Please don't take him," I muttered, my voice trembling as much as the rest of me. "I need him. Don't take him away from me, please."

Agent Wilson scoffed. “You seriously think we’re not taking you, too? You’re contaminated; we’ll have to quarantine you.”

His words didn’t make any sense until I took note of the fact that all the men surrounding us wore gloves and masks. No full biohazard suits, but still overkill in my opinion. “Are you crazy?” I asked as the armed men moved closer. “He’s not infected with anything. He’s harmless!”

Some of the men tensed as I shouted, and if it wasn’t for Q’on putting a hand on mine to calm me, I might have jumped up to defend him.

“No, Amber. Keep still. They have weapons.”

“But—”

“I don’t want you hurt.”

And *I* didn’t want Q’on hurt, but he didn’t seem to care about that. I think the only reason he wasn’t striking out at the gunmen right then was that I might have gotten caught in the crossfire. It killed me that he got captured because of me.

Agent Wilson’s men cuffed Q’on and me with our hands behind our backs, and they led us outside to separate waiting windowless vans. I couldn’t even watch as they drove Q’on away; as soon as I was loaded up, they slammed the door shut tight, blocking out all light and preventing me from seeing where the other vehicle was headed. Would we be brought to the same location, or would they keep us separated? I hated not knowing.

The van bounced along the roads leading out of the lakefront area. I fought to stay upright on the narrow bench, a difficult feat with my hands bound behind me. My tits bounced uncomfortably with the movement of the van. I wasn’t given a chance to change clothes or pack a bag or anything. Not even a second to grab a bra. The agent sitting across from me in the van kept his mouth shut and his eyes straight ahead, so I didn’t feel comfortable asking for a jacket or something to cover myself. The heater in the van seemed busted, or maybe they just didn’t give a shit if I was freezing in my satin pajamas.

The irony of being ripped from the cabin just a day after Ryan tried to kill me for it was not lost on me. If he had just waited, he would have found it vacant, ripe for the taking. Cordoned off, most likely, but vacant.

My blood chilled as I remembered that Ryan and Evan were still in the shed. If the government agents found them ...

No. I couldn't panic. That wouldn't help at all.

Since my hands were cuffed behind me, I couldn't see my watch to tell how long we'd been on the road. I guesstimated about two hours, but who knows? They could've driven me in circles for most of that time and I'd never have known. All I did know was that when the van finally stopped, I had a mighty need to pee. I mentioned this to the agent in the back with me, but he just grunted and said, "Hold it, slut."

Okay, no sympathy from that one. And I was *really* getting tired of being called a slut.

Outside the van, I heard the muffled sounds of tires squealing, doors slamming, and men shouting. The faint clink of metal on metal echoed the noise my cuffs made when I moved, and I held out a dim hope that what I heard was Q'on being taken inside. We may be separated for now, but if they took us to the same place it meant I might see him again.

I made a move to get up from my bench seat to get out, but the agent shot out of his seat and jammed a hand into my shoulder, shoving me back down.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" he shouted.

"Jesus Christ! I was just trying to stretch a bit." I jerked my shoulder out of his grip. "We've stopped, so why can't I get out yet?"

Some shouting erupted outside, and I heard an odd buzzing, followed by what sounded like Q'on grunting in pain.

"What's happening?"

The agent snorted out a dry laugh. "He's getting what he deserves, that's what's happening. Fucking aliens thinking they can just come and take over."

Even if I couldn't stop what was happening to Q'on outside, my need to protect him surged to the surface, and I stood as best as I could in the cramped van. "Listen, buddy, his ship crashed here. He wasn't trying to take over; he was just looking for a place to land and settle. He didn't want to conquer anything."

"Except maybe that sweet human pussy of yours," the agent snapped, gesturing at my nightclothes. "From the way you're dressed, looks like he's already claimed his territory there."

If my hands hadn't been cuffed behind me, I would have smacked him for that. As it was, I spat right on his mask.

The agent freaked. He scrambled to wipe my spit with his gloved hand, sputtering and coughing like I'd hit him square on the mouth with the loogie. "Fucking bitch! Who knows what kind of crazy alien viruses you're carrying right now!"

That made me laugh. I jerked my chin at the agent's mask. "You think your superiors care about whether or not you catch some 'crazy alien virus'? Look at what they sent you out in! Where's your biohazard suit? Your rebreather? All you've got is the bare minimum to stave off a mild cold. If I really were carrying some dangerous virus, you'd be ill prepared like this."

The way his eyes popped open as he realized the truth of what I was saying was almost satisfying enough to make up for his disgusting bigotry. Almost.

More scuffling and shouting outside had me turning my head towards the noise. It sounded like they were moving right past the van I was in. I leaned my shoulder against the wall of the van and shouted Q'on's name as loud as I could.

"*Amber!*" His reply came in the form of a desperate roar, and tears came to my eyes at the heartache in his voice. The sounds of struggle increased until a sick, wet crack resounded outside, and Q'on fell silent. The agents outside with him burst into raucous laughter, and I froze. Did they kill him?

"Q'on? *Q'on!*" My voice broke as I screamed his name. My agent grabbed me by the hair and yanked me back from the



side of the van. “Let go of me, you handsy creep!”

“Believe me, bitch, it wasn’t by choice. You’ve already contaminated me, so I might as well be the one to handle you until we get to the quarantine area.” He snorted and chuckled. “Just wait. The showers are brutally scalding. At least we’ll give you the decency of giving you some real clothes when you’re clean. Parading around in those skimpy PJs. Disgusting.”

“Fuck off, asshole. You guys didn’t give me any time to get dressed. Come busting into a woman’s bedroom in the middle of the night, and you expect her to be fully dressed for a fucking road trip?”

The agent smacked me, and I bit my tongue to keep from further lashing out. It wouldn’t do me any good, and I risked slipping and revealing Ryan and Evan’s location if I talked too much. No, better to just clam up. Zip it.

The quarantine process was as humiliating as I anticipated. To my delight, however, I got to see the look on the asshole agent’s face when he saw that the scientists and other agents at the compound were given biohazard suits. *They* got to stay clothed through the process, but like me, the agent who had ridden in the van had to strip down and go through the blistering-hot shower, too. I made a point of catching his eye through the plastic sheeting between our individual showers. When I was sure I had his attention, I glanced down at his dangling cock, raised a criticizing brow, and smirked. He covered his dick with his hands, but the way he turned beet red was enough for me.

Let him think he’s inferior to the alien he hates. He wouldn’t be wrong.

As promised, I received fresh clothing after I was hosed down. It was basically drab green scrubs and baggy gripper socks, but something was better than nothing. I allowed the armed agents to lead me down a long hallway to a thick metal door. The door creaked open, and I gasped with relief as I saw Q’on inside, encased in a plexiglass cage but alive. He rushed to the side closest to me and placed his palms on the clear wall, and I

wished I could run to him. A sharp jab in my back reminded me of the guns trained on me, though, so I stayed put.

The agents ushered me into an adjoining cage, and just before they locked me in, one of them spoke.

“You’ll get two meals a day. Water six times a day. Enough to survive on, that’s it. That cot in the corner is your bed. Toilet’s in the other corner. You shouldn’t need anything else.” He shut the thick plexiglass door and locked it, then paused as if debating something. Finally, he added, “Labs will be drawn at three a.m., whether you’re awake or not.”

With that, they left. Q’on and I were alone, separated by a transparent wall but together again. I placed my palms on the wall over his, and tears slipped down my cheeks.

Q’on’s forehead oozed blood from a deep gash. They hadn’t even bothered to bandage it.

“I am sorry, Amber. I failed to stay out of sight.”

“It’s not your fault, Q’on. They should’ve minded their own damn business.”

“Did they hurt you?”

Despite his own injury, Q’on asked about me first. His gorgeous yellow eyes were filled with concern, and he ran his fingers over the glass separating him from touching me, right where the tears continued streaming down my face.

“I’m okay.” I forced a small smile of reassurance. “Not a scratch on me.”

He cocked his head to the side and frowned. “You are crying.”

Poor guy. He did his best to understand us humans, and I’m sure my reaction to seeing him alive wasn’t helping him with that. “They’re tears of relief. I’m just so happy you’re still alive. I was worried I’d never see you alive again, or that if I did, you’d be hooked up to all kinds of tubes and machines.”

“I think they tried that,” he said, pointing at the crook of his elbow. “Their needles could not penetrate my scales, and they could not find a way underneath that gave access to what they

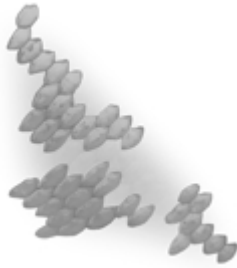
were looking for. The man with the needles said many ... How do you call them? Colorful words.”

I couldn't help but chuckle at that. All their preparation for alien species, and they hadn't planned on one they couldn't experiment on right away. It gave me hope that Q'on at least had a few days' reprieve from the torture while they brainstormed ways to get under his skin.

The problem with that was that it only gave us a few days to find a way out of here.

# Chapter 17

*Q'on*



Despite my objections, Amber slept on the floor next to the wall separating us. She stole the thin blanket from the crude bed in the corner and wrapped herself in it, dozing propped up against the clear material. I wished she would get some proper rest, but she insisted on being as close to me as possible.

I sat on the floor next to her, my body just on the other side of the wall, but I did not sleep. How could I when they would be coming to take Amber's blood for tests? I knew I couldn't protect her from my prison, but I still wanted to be awake when they came.

I did not like the clothes given by the government men. They were stiff and coarse, and the socks were ridiculous. What was the purpose of the texture on the tops and bottoms of them?

Amber was given the same clothing, it seemed, down to the feet. I disliked that even more than my own discomfort. A part of me understood my own mistreatment from these men, but why make her uncomfortable? She was human, one of their own; she deserved nice things. Warm clothes. Soft blankets. Not these thin, coarse things.

Seeing her shiver in her sleep agonized me. I wanted to wrap her in my arms and protect her from the chill in the room. My extra layers would surely help more than the meager blanket the agents provided.

Two gunmen and a woman in a white lab coat arrived in the middle of the night, bringing with them a metal tray loaded with equipment. Amber stirred and groaned as they flipped a

switch near the door, turning on the lights. She cursed and rubbed her eyes. “It must be three o’clock,” she muttered as the guards opened the door to her cell and escorted the woman in.

The guards sneered at Amber with scorn in their beady human eyes, but the woman maintained an air of detached indifference. She cleaned the crook of Amber’s arm and slid a needle into the vein there. Red blood pumped into a vial on the other end of the needle. The woman changed out the vial several times—too many times, in my opinion. Why did they need so much blood?

I sat patiently waiting for my turn with a needle—perhaps they had found stronger ones—but instead the woman merely swabbed the inside of my cheek when she came to my cell. Amber kept her palm to the glass, which had a calming effect on me. I dared not strike at the armed men or the scientist while Amber was there.

I took a small measure of satisfaction at the guards’ reflexive steps back when I opened my mouth and exposed my fangs. It was almost enough to make me laugh.

Poor Amber did not sleep again after that. She sat quietly rubbing the bandage they had put over her needle wound, and I wondered what was troubling her. After some hours, I asked if she was okay.

“I’m fine. Just wondering what tests they’re going to run on that blood.”

“What can they test with it?”

“Just about everything. They can do genetic testing. Check my general health.” She sighed and let go of her arm. “They can check to see if I’m pregnant.”

A Xalanite and a human ... was it even possible? “And my cheek skin?”

She shrugged. “There’s less they can do with that. They probably will run DNA tests. Maybe test for alien viruses. I don’t know much about that stuff, though. Mostly I’m just guessing.”

“Do you think I have any of these viruses they’re looking for?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t gotten sick yet, but I suppose it’s possible. It’s a valid concern, honestly, because any illnesses you carry, even ones that are dormant in your system, could be devastating to us. Think about it: Anything you might have in you is completely foreign to us. Our immune systems wouldn’t have had a chance to develop defenses against it.”

This thought sobered me. It didn’t seem to bother Amber, but I realized that simply by being around her I could have exposed her to something dangerous. I had not considered that before. “Do you think I have made you sick?”

She smiled, but the expression did not reach her eyes. “Maybe? Like I said, I haven’t gotten sick yet. Maybe we got lucky, or maybe whatever you have in you takes time to incubate.”

I stroked my side of the glass, across from where her cheek rested. “Does it worry you?”

Amber shook her head. “Not really. If I get sick, then my body will either fight off the infection or not, just like with human illnesses. We had a pandemic here a few years ago, and I got pretty sick then. My body had never experienced that particular virus before, but I fought it off. If you’re carrying something that infects me, then I guess I’ll just do the same thing.”

“I have put you at risk.”

“No more than I’ve put *you* at risk. Look at it this way: I could easily be carrying human viruses that you’re susceptible to. It works both ways.”

I had not considered that, either. “Oh.”

She splayed her fingers on the glass. “It’ll be okay, Q’on. Sick or not, we’ll figure something out.”

I tried to take comfort in her confidence, but something was still bothering her. It may not be alien viruses, but something. “Amber?”

“Yeah?”

“If strange illnesses are not concerning you, what is?”

Her other hand came to rest on her belly. “What if I’m pregnant, Q’on? What will we do?”

It seemed an odd thing to worry about. New life was a gift. “We will escape this place and raise it together.”

A tear ran down her cheek. “I’m old, Q’on. Human women tend to have complications when they carry a child this late in life. Did you know we consider women over thirty-five to be geriatric in terms of pregnancy? I’m ten years past that. Something could happen to me or to the baby, and it wouldn’t be anyone’s fault. It would just be a factor of my age.”

More than anything, I wished I could hold her. She was distraught, worried, and I could do nothing but sit on the other side of the glass wall and be useless. As a warrior, I was not accustomed to inaction. “What can I do?”

“Huh?”

I put both hands on the plexiglass and rested my forehead against it, looking her in the eye. “If there is anything I can do to make it easier for you, I will. I will carry things for you. I will provide for you. I will contact any remaining allies I may have on Xalan and get medicines for you. Supplies. Anything.”

Amber smiled and pressed her hands and head to the glass as well, sniffing as more tears flowed free. “That’s sweet, Q’on, but we don’t even know yet if I’m pregnant. They might not even be able to tell this early. I might be getting worried for nothing. I might not even be—Well, now’s not the time to stress about it, I guess.”

I paused to consider this. “Either way, I will take care of you. You are my *tyr’il*. My mate.”

We sat like that in silence for several moments before the peace was broken by the arrival of Agent Wilson. He stood there in one of the strange yellow outfits that covered his entire body, leaving no room for air. I worried that meant they

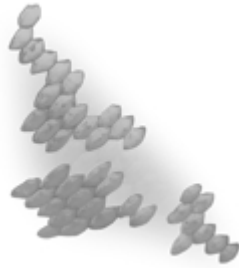
had found some illness in my cheek skin. Was Amber going to get sick?

“So,” he said, drawing out the word, “when were you two going to tell me about the hostages in your shed?”



# Chapter 18

## *Amber*



Shit. They found Ryan and Evan.

I knew they would eventually, but I'd been hoping to have more of a chance to come clean on my own beforehand. With the way we were dragged from the house and then dumped alone in these cells, though, there weren't many opportunities to tell the agents that I had my ex tied up out back.

"I did it!" I blurted out, just as Q'on said, "Amber is not to blame."

Oops. We didn't think to get our stories straight ahead of time.

I rushed to come up with a plausible excuse that didn't involve Q'on breaking my ex's bones, hoping that the nanites would slow Q'on down enough that I'd have time to confess sole responsibility for whatever Ryan claimed we did before he jumped on the grenade for me.

"It was all me. All Q'on did was give me the restraints to use on Ryan and Evan. I did it. All of it. Ryan assaulted me, and I had no choice."

Agent Wilson crossed his arms over his chest. "He assaulted you, huh? That's not what he says."

"Of course not! He's gonna lie his fucking ass off to keep from getting in trouble."

"He brought a knife to Amber's home," Q'on interjected. "He grabbed her with intent to harm. That warranted us diffusing the threat."

I appreciated Q'on standing up for me, but he wasn't exactly helping. Agent Wilson wasn't going to believe a word he said, no matter what the evidence—which I had unfortunately hidden—might have shown.

Agent Wilson strolled up to the wall on Q'on's side of the room, his gait a little too calm. "And how, exactly, did you diffuse this threat?"

"I did it!" I said again, hurrying to speak up before Q'on confessed. "I broke Ryan's wrist."

Agent Wilson raised a dubious brow. "Really?"

It was my turn to cross my arms over my chest. "Yep. Freak accident. Q'on actually healed him, so when you think about it, we left him better off than he wanted to leave us. His buddy Evan even told Q'on that they had come to kill me, so it was really self-defense."

The agent's lip curled up in a sneer. "You think we believe that bullshit? Your ex-husband already told us his side of the story, and it's a lot more believable than your little fairy tale."

My eyes narrowed. "What do you mean? What fucking lies has he been feeding you?"

"No lies, ma'am. Just the gruesome facts. Did you really think that using alien technology to heal the damage your brute here did would somehow undo the fact that he savagely beat your ex? Or the fact that he nearly killed Ryan's friend when he upended the car he was in." The wicked grin he flashed showed even from behind his clear plastic biohazard mask, reaching his beady eyes, which glinted with exuberance. "I can't wait until the tests are done. As soon as the nerds have gotten all the information they can out of that thing, I'll be free to do whatever I want to him. I can't decide which would be better: torture first, or flat-out extermination of this threat to Earth."

"Q'on is not a threat to anyone!" I pounded my fists on the plexiglass wall, wishing I could be smacking Agent Wilson's thick head. "He only wants to protect me. If Ryan hadn't attacked me, he wouldn't have laid a finger on him."

The agent's eyes crinkled in mock humor as his brows shot up. "I thought he *didn't* lay a finger on him. Didn't you say he only gave you the restraints?"

Crap. He made me so angry that I forgot what lies I'd told him. I couldn't even see straight, let alone remember what fragments of truth I'd given and what I'd fudged in my account of what happened.

"That's what I meant. He put on the restraints."

"So, he participated in kidnapping and unlawful imprisonment?"

"I didn't say that. You're twisting my words."

Agent Wilson made a show of inspecting his fingernails, though his hands were gloved. "And I suppose you had no idea that your ex and his friend were hypothermic by the time we found them? The heater you'd so kindly provided for them stopped working, and the temperature dropped during the night. We have them in our infirmary now, with warming blankets piled on them. They might survive, despite your best efforts."

Shit. I hadn't considered what would happen if the heater broke. It was an old one, one I'd been meaning to get rid of—that's why it was in the shed in the first place—but it never occurred to me that it might shut off. I despised Ryan, but I didn't want him dead. Not that the AARO would believe that if I said it. No, I was looking at hard time, and so was Q'on ... if he lived through their experiments.

Then something Agent Wilson said sank in: Ryan and Evan were in *their* infirmary. Here. That meant they weren't brought to a regular hospital with normal cops. They weren't getting the ordinary authorities involved yet, which might have been a good thing. I didn't know anything about the AARO, but maybe they had limitations to their scope. Usually, covert government agencies ran amok in the movies, taking liberties that the police couldn't. If these agents were keeping my ex as segregated as me and Q'on, there was a chance that what they were doing was against the rules. Could Q'on and I use that against them?

I didn't get much chance to think about it before the woman in the lab coat was back with her guards. She took more blood from me, without any explanation, and pulled some hair from Q'on's head after taking another cheek skin sample. I had no idea what the tests were for, and it bothered me that she wouldn't say.

This went on for several days. Agent Wilson would come in and harass us, and periodically the scientist or doctor, whatever, came in for more tissue samples. They fed us a couple times a day, as promised, and allowed us a couple hours' sleep at a time. It became almost routine, and I noticed that between visits Q'on had become quiet and withdrawn. He still stayed as close to me as the plexiglass wall would allow, but he all but stopped talking. I worried that something was wrong, though every time I asked he just grunted and shrugged, his eyes locked on the door to our cell.

On the fourth day of this tortuous monotony—or at least, I guessed it was the fourth day, as I'd lost all sense of time when my smartwatch battery ran out—Q'on's demeanor changed. Instead of sitting in silence, he began to pace, his every muscle coiled in preparation for ... what? Did I miss something?

Apparently, I did miss something, because right as Q'on geared himself up, Agent Wilson appeared with the scientist.

Occasionally he was the only guard who accompanied her, and this seemed to be one of those times. I guess since Q'on wasn't fighting the sample collection, they weren't too concerned with his threat level. One lone agent was enough, I suppose, when Q'on behaved himself.

Except that day, Q'on wasn't behaving himself. His yellow eyes followed the duo's every move, from the door to my cell to his, and the whole time he looked like a wild animal waiting to strike. It was sexy as hell, though admittedly a bit terrifying. I simultaneously wanted to jump his bones and cower away from him.

Agent Wilson seemed oblivious. He even whistled a little tune as he unlocked the door to Q'on's side of the room.

I don't think he ever saw it coming.

Hell, it was over so fast *I* almost didn't see what happened.

Q'on struck with lightning quickness, efficient, with deadly accuracy. Agent Wilson dropped like a brick, and the scientist didn't even have time to scream before Q'on caught her in a weird headlock. Within seconds she passed out, and he lowered her to the floor. He swiped Agent Wilson's passkey and left the two of them in a tangled heap as he hurried to my door to open it.

I surged into his arms the second he had the door open, and he held me close for a few moments. A few days without his touch was too much, and it felt so good to be wrapped up in him again that it almost ached.

Q'on kissed me so deeply I thought he'd steal my breath, but he backed away just as abruptly.

"No time. They patrol every few minutes. We have to run."

Run? I was half starved and sleep-deprived, and he expected me to run? "Q'on, I—"

He left me no room for argument. When I didn't immediately agree to book it, he scooped me into his arms and carried me down the maze of hallways. His gripper-socked feet pounded on the concrete floors. The sound echoed in the empty halls, and I worried we'd draw unwanted attention with it.

To this day I still don't know how Q'on did it, but he found the exit in less than two minutes. We exploded out the door at full force—

—Straight into a blizzard.

The sudden shock of freezing air took my breath away, and I gasped and wheezed in an attempt to force my lungs to function again. My body shivered violently, and I curled closer to Q'on's chest, hoping to siphon some of his warmth.

Muffled shouts pierced the gale-force winds, but I couldn't see anyone or anything in the whiteout conditions. I didn't know what capabilities Q'on's eyes had in this environment, but given that he said that Xalan is a temperate planet, he probably wasn't accustomed to weather like this, extra layers or no. He might have been just as blind as I was, or he might have had

some special Xalanite trait that allowed him to see thermal images. Kind of like *Predator*, or at least that's what my mind came up with as he ran through what I assumed was a parking area or maybe a courtyard, dodging unseen obstacles. Were we even heading for a gate?

My question got an answer when he paused just long enough to vault into the air, grabbing what sounded like a chain-link fence one-handed. He started to climb, and if I had learned anything from watching movies and TV, there would be barbed wire at the top.

"Q'on!" I shouted over the wind. "These fences are usually topped with razor wire. I don't know about your scales, but it's going to rip my skin apart!"

He stopped. Froze mid-climb. Just hanging from the fence, probably twenty feet up. I wondered if we'd just lost, if my revelation would stop him from getting us out of here. I also wondered if my shivering would cause him to lose his grip and drop us both to the ground.

I shouldn't have worried. After a few seconds, Q'on nodded and shifted his grip on me, telling me to climb onto his back and hold on.

I didn't know what I was holding on for until he got to the top of the fence, where there was indeed some nasty-looking razor wire waiting for us. Q'on actually *grabbed the wire with his bare hands and yanked it clean off the fence!* I yelped and ducked as he manually twisted the wire and bent it until we had a clearing of about three feet to crawl through. I plastered myself to his back as best as I could, hoping I made myself small enough to pass under the wire without getting snagged on the blades.

By this time, sirens blared, audible even over the roar of the wind. Either Agent Wilson had woken up, or the patrolling guards had found him and the scientist where we'd left them. Either way, the jig was up, and we had to hurry. The storm would grant us some cover, but I wasn't going to survive for long out in this. My lungs burned with the effort it took to gasp in a few gulps of the frigid air, and I started to lose

feeling in my extremities. My grip on Q'on's back was tenuous at best as he scrambled over the top of the fence and dropped to the ground beneath.

Through some miracle—or maybe it was his alien physique—he landed on his feet in the snow. The sudden jarring stop almost made me fall off, but he managed to get me back into his arms in seconds, hugging me close as he started running again.

My face hurt. My feet and hands hurt. Everything pretty much hurt. We were in the middle of who-knows-where, smack dab in the middle of a blizzard, with no way of knowing where or when we'd find safe shelter. I wracked my brain, trying to think of where we could be given how long we'd been in the vans before arriving here. There were several mountain ranges near Lake Ontario. We could be in the Catskills or Adirondacks. Did they have things like caves out here? And if they did have caves, would they be safe for us? It was hibernating season. Did we run the risk of waking up an angry bear?

While I pondered if I'd make it through the storm, Q'on pressed on. He navigated the snow-covered woods like a pro, never once tripping on a hidden branch or root. It was nothing short of miraculous, though if he didn't find a cave or some other shelter soon, it would be a rather sad miracle.

“Q-q'on ...” My teeth chattered so hard I struggled to get his name out. “W-we've gotta g-get out of this storm. It's k-k-killing me.”

He skidded to a halt, eyes wide, and scanned the area. I don't know what he could have been looking for; the weather provided nothing in the way of visibility. Total whiteout conditions.

Before I could ask him what he was doing, he made an abrupt turn and started running again. We crashed through several yards of dead underbrush before the gusting winds suddenly stopped, and the white was replaced with pitch blackness. The howling of the wind still assaulted my burning ears, but

wherever we were, it prevented the blasts of chill air from hitting me.

Q'on kept going for so long I wondered if the cave had an end. On and on he pushed, and while it felt marginally better to be out of the direct wind, the still air inside the cave wasn't much warmer. I'd need a fire at minimum, and warmer clothing, but I had no idea where he might find something like that for me. It's not like the AARO left us with anything handy like a lighter or even something as primitive as flint and steel. Nope. Unless Q'on had some magic alien ability to light a fire out of thin air, I was a goner.

We rounded a corner in the dark, and the sounds from outside virtually vanished. Q'on set me down against a frigid rock wall, and the next thing I knew he was wrapping me in his scrubs. He even pulled his gripper socks over my hands. It felt silly wearing socks on my hands, but anything was better than frostbite. I worried a bit for his safety without anything more than his scales to protect him from the elements, but the thin, starchy fabric still held some of his warmth, for which I was grateful.

"What do you need?" he asked as he held me close, rubbing my arms.

"Fire. Clothing. Blankets. Anything to get me warm again. I can't survive in these temps."

He stroked my hair and nuzzled my cheek with his. "You humans have evolved strangely. How is it that you haven't developed natural protection from your planet's elements?"

I let out a dry chuckle, still shivering violently despite being out of the direct wind and snow. "We're stubborn and egotistical. We adapt our environments to suit us instead of the other way around."

"That is poor planning. It would be more efficient to adapt yourself to a multitude of environments. Less work."

It took me a solid minute to realize Q'on had just made a joke. I might've laughed, but I couldn't stop shaking enough to manage it.



“Where can I find your clothing and blankets?”

Though it was a perfectly logical question, I thought it kind of ludicrous for him to ask that. How was I to know where to find that stuff out in the middle of nowhere? But then again, how was Q'on to know? He knew less about the area than I did, though admittedly my geography knowledge was limited as well. Without a map or an internet connection, I was just as clueless as my alien visitor.

“I don't know. I have no clue where we are, other than a vague notion that there are mountains around the lake. I don't know where the nearest town is or even if anyone lives out here for us to steal some stuff from.”

Q'on fell silent for several minutes. “Fine. I can provide fire. Will you be okay for a few time units while I find something to burn?”

Wait, he *can* start a fire in here? “I guess. Just be quick, please.”

He nodded and kissed me, then disappeared into the black void of the cave. I wrapped my arms around myself and rubbed them, trying to work some sensation back into my body besides the *deadly chill*.

The echoing clatter of sticks landing on the ground signaled Q'on's return to the cave. I hadn't heard him approach in his bare feet, but if I was being honest with myself, I was starting to have trouble staying conscious. Suddenly the notion of curling into a ball and sleeping all winter seemed like a grand idea despite the nagging feeling that I wouldn't wake back up if I tried it.

“Amber?”

“Hm?”

A sharp *crack* of two rocks smacking together startled me out of a near doze, and a small flame flared to life in front of me.

Hot damn! I found myself the alien equivalent of an Eagle Scout or Army Ranger. Nice.

After tending the fire to a comfortable blaze, Q'on squeezed in between me and the rock wall and enveloped me in a warm embrace. Despite being exposed to the elements, he radiated heat, and between his body and the fire, I managed to relax my spasming muscles. I sighed with relief as the icy burn turned to electric tingling, which eventually faded to blissful comfort.

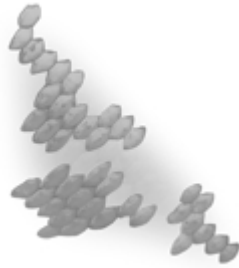
We sat together in silence like that for hours. It was almost idyllic, romantic, even, if I didn't think about how we were stranded in a cave in the middle of nowhere, on the run from government agents, with no food, supplies, or escape plan.

The likelihood of us being found by the AARO in here was slim, but I wasn't stupid enough to believe that was all blessing. Sooner or later, we'd have to leave the shelter of the cave and find civilization.

It was that or starvation.

# Chapter 19

## *Q'on*



Earth winters were brutal. My Xalanite survival training may have been the only thing that kept us alive that first night in the cave. Amber's fragile human body was ill-equipped to endure the elements of her home planet, and her species' ignorance of basic wilderness skills almost made me laugh.

Almost. I couldn't laugh while Amber lay near death, but the ridiculousness of it all still amused me.

I asked her what game might live in these woods that I could hunt for food, and her lack of knowledge of even something that simple was disheartening. Not that I couldn't manage to track and kill something without her help, but knowing what I was hunting for made the hunt easier.

Amber's abdomen made an odd sound in her sleep. I'd heard the sound before, near mealtimes, and I debated going hunting while she slept. I didn't want to leave her alone for long, though, and certainly not while she was unconscious. Humans were entirely too fragile and vulnerable in their sleeping state to be left alone in the wild.

Since I could not leave her yet, I decided to focus on locating my ship by accessing my neural navigation implants. The government facility had been rife with electronic interference while we were captive, and the storm had provided some challenges as well, but now that the wind had died down, I was better able to get a signal. Once I had my bearings, I realized we were hundreds of Earth miles away from Amber's

lakeside home—too far to travel on foot in these weather conditions.

That left few options. I hadn't had time to make any repairs on my ship, so there was no way I could remotely summon it to our location. That would be suicide, anyway, as even cloaked it might draw the attention of the government agents, who were likely scouring the woods for us. I could hide the ship's appearance, but the engine noise would be a dead giveaway to anyone in the area.

After some testing and diagnostic scans through my implanted interface, I did manage to activate the communications systems. Though I was forbidden from ever contacting the Xalanite Elders, I still had friends on Xalan, people who might be able to get us aid. I sent an encoded distress signal to my closest ally, hoping it reached them before Amber froze or starved to death.

With that done, there was nothing else to do but wait. Once Amber woke, I would be able to hunt for food.

She stirred after a few hours of dozing, and I checked her vital signs with a quick, unobtrusive scan. Without anything to compare it to besides her scans at home, I was guessing, but she seemed stable. Body temp had risen to normal levels for her, and her golden skin regained its color. Good. I had not liked the bluish-purple tint to her plump lips earlier. A good color for a Xalanite, maybe, but it did not suit humans.

“Good morning. How are you feeling?”

Her mouth stretched wide, and she inhaled a huge gulp of air. The nanites explained the act to me: a yawn.

“Better. A little hungry, though. I wish I knew if any of the plants around here were poisonous, or where the best place to find meat would be.”

I debated telling her about my thermal imaging implants but decided against it. Too much explanation required when expedience would serve us better. “I will worry about food. You stay here by the fire and keep warm.”

She tilted her head and squinted at me. “Are you seriously going out in the snow buck-ass naked to hunt for food?”

“Will you starve if I don’t?”

“Well, yeah.”

I smiled. “Then yes. I am seriously going out in the snow buck-ass naked to hunt for food.”

Amber giggled, and I felt a little better. She had been so frightened and withdrawn during the storm that I worried. For her to relax enough to laugh was a good sign. I stood as much as I could in the cramped cave and started towards the outside.

“Wait! Do you even have a knife or anything to hunt with? How are you going to kill whatever you catch?”

I looked back and grinned. “I have two hands. That will suffice.”

I exited the cave to a world of blinding white. Gone were the clouds and windswept walls of snow; in their place lay mile after mile of pristine bleached landscape dotted with skeletal trees reaching for the bright blue expanse above. I squinted against the glare of the Earth’s solar star reflecting off the unbroken snowbanks, searching for signs of recent animal activity. The snow should make it easy enough to track movements of the ground animals, though I wouldn’t likely be able to hunt down the aerial fowl.

A few minutes into the hunt, I came across the tracks of a large animal having passed through the frozen woods. Careful study of the broken snow revealed signs of a large hooved beast traveling on four legs. Judging by the patterns, it looked to be about fifty Xalanite *jiik* in weight, which translated to roughly one hundred and five Earth pounds. Plenty of meat for both myself and Amber, provided I could find, catch, and kill it.

I followed the tracks for half an Earth mile before I spotted my prey in the distance. The creature had a smooth coat of light brown fur, slender though muscular legs, a long neck, two leaf-shaped ears, and large, dark eyes. A short, white-tufted tail adorned its buttocks, and after a brief moment of observation, my nanites gave it a name: deer.

Amber had served me a few different animals in her home, but never deer. Bovine meat was most common, followed by farm-raised fowl. I briefly wondered if this deer was edible. Why would Amber not have it at home if it was a beast so readily available nearby? It seemed that the animal would provide a decent amount of meat once butchered and prepared for consumption, so I would think the humans would take advantage of that.

No matter. I had precious few options, and since I had yet to encounter a wild cow to slaughter, this deer would have to suffice.

Its ears swiveled and rotated towards me as I crept closer, so I took greater care in the placement of my steps to lessen the noise. I ducked behind a leafless tree as the deer turned to investigate my footsteps. It chewed on some snow-buried plant material for a few moments, then went back to its foraging, seemingly unconcerned. Good. I had not startled it. I was not sure I could have caught it had it opted to run. I was fast, but those legs could have propelled it much faster than mine if it exerted itself. Stealth and surprise would be my best bet against this beast if I were to catch and kill it without the aid of projectile weapons.

Despite the softness of the white fluff surrounding me, the snow was surprisingly loud. With each step it crunched beneath my feet, and I cringed at the sound. Crouching low, I maneuvered closer to my target, weaving between the trees and bushes to remain as hidden as possible. This method proved achingly slow, and I worried I would not return to Amber fast enough at this rate.

I was just a scant few yards away when fortune smiled on me.

I spied the predator before the deer seemed to notice it, stalking from across the clearing where the deer fed. The much smaller animal had a thicker coat than the deer, a longer tail, and an elongated snout lined with vicious teeth. I recognized it as a hunter from its front-facing eyes and coiled stance, its every muscle poised for attack.

The deer almost spotted the predator—a wolf, my nanites explained—too late. The wolf pounced, but the deer bounded off before it could land a bite, jumping away from the snarling canine ...

... directly into my path.

I certainly could not have caught the deer on foot. Its speed and dexterity were sure signs that I would have failed had I attacked it alone. If the wolf had not scared it towards me, I might have gone back to Amber empty-handed. Thanks to my fellow hunter, however, I was able to surge forward and meet the deer mid-leap, catching its head and using my weight and momentum to twist its neck, breaking its spine in one swift motion. The beast fell limp, and I roared my success into the chill air. The wolf growled at me but did not challenge my right to the kill. It turned on its heel and trotted off, defeated.

Victorious, I lifted the deer onto my shoulders and headed back to the cave to present my mate with the bounty. The thrill of the hunt, the excitement of the kill, was enough to make my *n'ril* swell with pride—and desire. On Xalan, it was common to engage in mating practices after a successful hunt or battle. I tried to contain my delight, for I knew Amber needed this food to regain her strength first. My *n'ril* would have to wait until she had fed.

I returned to the cave to find Amber huddled in front of the fading fire, her arms crossed over her chest, a slight shiver to her slender frame. My happiness at providing a meal for her vanished as I saw how close I had come to being gone too long. I hurriedly set down the deer carcass and rushed to stoke the flames.

“I am sorry, Amber! I had thought the fire would last longer than that.” I averted my eyes, fearful of what I’d see in her expression when I looked. Surely, she must hate me for being so foolish.

“It’s okay,” she said through chattering teeth. She scooted closer and leaned against me. I pulled her to my chest, hoping to transfer some of my warmth to her. After a brief rest, her shiver subsided, and she relaxed in my arms. “I can’t believe

you caught a fucking deer. I was thinking maybe you'd find, like, a rabbit or a squirrel or something, but a whole deer? How are we going to cook this? It's huge!"

I shrugged and nuzzled her cheek with mine. "I will figure something out. The important thing is that you will not starve."

She stared quietly at the crackling flames for a moment. "Did you see any sign of the AARO? Any men in the woods, any helicopters overhead?"

I had to give the nanites time to translate the new, unfamiliar word. "No. No flying rotary machines. No men. Just the deer and a wolf."

"A wolf? You weren't hurt, were you?"

I brushed off her unnecessary concern with a wave of my hand. "I am fine. It did not even get close to me. Now, let me figure out how to cook this beast for you. The easiest thing would be to remove a leg and roast it on the fire, but I have no means to remove the skin or butcher it properly."

Amber's stomach made that sound again. "Honestly, at this point I don't even care if it's still got the fur on it. Just rip one off and cook it. I'll pick around the skin." She grinned. "It'll be kind of like eating a turkey leg at the Renn Faire."

More time passed while I let the nanites explain. It was frustrating, because once I had the context, her joke was amusing. By the time I figured it out, however, it was too late to laugh.

While the first leg cooked on the fire, Amber and I sat together against the cave wall, sharing each other's warmth. She tried to offer to return the stiff clothing I had wrapped her in, but I refused. I would rather risk my own wellbeing if it meant she was warmer. Besides, what concern did I have with nudity? There was no one around to see me besides Amber, and she was already familiar with my body. If anything, I *wanted* her to see me naked. I wanted her to be proud of my hunting prowess, to desire to mate once she'd been fed. I had



discovered that humans relied heavily on visual stimulation, so the more of me she saw, the better.

We shared the leg, taking turns biting into the juicy meat. Since my scales protected my fingers, I pulled the hot skin off the still-steaming meat so Amber would not burn her hands on it. Amber ate several bites before declaring herself sated, though I still hungered. I ate my fill, finishing off the leg, leaving only bones.

“Wow! Q’on, why didn’t you say you were really hungry, too?”

“Your hunger was more important. I did not want you to worry about me when you were suffering.”

She cupped my face in her hands. “Hey, we’re a team. If one of us is suffering, then we’re going to both suffer. That’s part of being a couple. Part of being mates, as you call it.” Amber shifted until she was straddling my bare lap. I bit my lip to try to control my *n’ril* as her face became flushed and her lids hooded her dark eyes. “Speaking of mating ... Now that I’m warm and fed, I think it’s time to focus on other needs.”

Her lips met mine with near crushing force, emphasizing her desires. Her needs, as she put it. I held her to me and returned the kiss in kind, sliding my tongue into her mouth and delighting in her taste. Amber’s slender fingers wrapped around my lower *n’ril* as we kissed, slowly stroking it, and I slid my own hand under her shirt to caress her glorious breasts. She sighed into me, melting beneath my touch.

I wished to mate as we had our first night together, but I knew the hard stone floor of the cave would damage her delicate body. Rather than risk harming her, I held her hips firm against mine, keeping her on top of me. My skin was tough; I could handle it.

She started to pull away, and I frowned, confused. “You do not wish to mate?”

Amber giggled. “I have to get out of these pants, silly. They’re kind of in the way.”

I stroked the fabric between her legs, applying pressure to her *kash* through the thin material. She gasped and ground her hips into my hand.

“Do not leave me for that,” I said, before catching her mouth with mine and drawing her back to me. While we kissed, I gripped the fabric with both hands and ripped it at the seam, exposing her beautiful wet pussy. I wasted no time before delving in with my fingers, stroking and probing and coaxing the most melodious sounds from her. She seemed to enjoy the manual pleasure almost as much as pleasure from my *n’ril*, and I lavished it on her until she shuddered and screamed. Her entire body shook as her walls pulsed around my fingers, and the hand around my *n’ril* quickened its pace.

“I want to ride you,” she whispered with a husky voice. “I want to grind you until you knot, then ride your knot until you come so hard that it drips out of me.”

Her words spurred me on, and I shifted my position until my *n’ril* sat poised at her entrance. She lowered herself seductively, in achingly slow increments. I devoured every inch of her I could reach with my mouth, licking and nibbling and sucking her lips, her neck, her collarbone ... no exposed part of her was safe from me, and I removed her shirt in short order to gain access to those full, rounded teats as well.

Amber arched her back and held me to her chest as she rode my *n’ril* like a bitch in heat. I focused on each nipple in turn, moving my mouth back and forth while she bounced on my lap. My knot swelled, locking us together, and I rubbed her *kash* with my upper *n’ril* while my lower *n’ril* began to vibrate inside her. Her screams reached a fever pitch, and she panted for air. The sounds she made drove me wild. I gripped her hips and bucked, regaining control despite my lower position. Amber seemed to approve of the change, as indicated by the sharp intake of breath and the satisfied sigh she gave before I once again brought her to a screaming release. Her sweet-smelling juices sprayed my lap, but I didn’t stop. I continued to ram into her, all the while touching and stroking her most sensitive parts.

Her legs quivered. She gripped my hair in her fists and dove with her mouth, her tongue assaulting me as she screamed into me. Her beautiful voice broke as she shattered for a third time, and finally my lower *n'ril* pulsed and filled her to overflowing as my own orgasm radiated through me, consuming me and reducing my world and my awareness to the point where our bodies joined. I held her to me as the tingles faded, reaching between us to collect our combined fluids. I brought my fingers to our mouths, allowing us to share the unique flavors. My salty melded with her sweet in a delectable mix, and we both licked my fingers dry.

Satisfaction warmed me to my core, and I wrapped my arms around Amber to keep her warm as well. She wiggled and shifted until she was no longer speared by my *n'ril*, resting her head on my shoulder. I stroked her long, dark hair, enjoying what the nanites informed me was called an afterglow. It was a perfect moment, broken only by a frustrated groan from Amber.

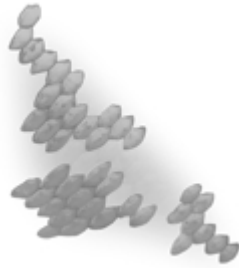
“It’s still freezing outside, isn’t it? I bet there’s waist-high snow out there after that storm.”

I nodded, still transfixed by watching the shimmer of the firelight reflected in her silky locks. I didn’t quite understand why it mattered how much snow was outside the cave until she pulled herself upright and sighed.

“Fuck. I’ve gotta pee.”

# Chapter 20

## *Amber*



After the fastest whizz I've ever taken, I rushed back into the cave and huddled up next to Q'on, shivering so violently that I thought my teeth would crack from chattering. He helped out by rubbing my arms, the friction adding to the fire's warmth.

We had to get out of here. We could only survive so long on deer meat, and even with the fire burning and us sharing body heat, I worried that one or both of us would catch our death of cold. Q'on kept trying to reassure me that his physiology would prevent him from getting frostbite or hypothermia, but it did nothing to assuage my fears that we would die out here. We had no spare clothing, no means of transportation to get home, and no way of calling for help. Besides, who would we call? I couldn't exactly report our kidnapping to the authorities, because the AARO was a government agency; they *were* the authorities.

Q'on seemed unfazed by it all. His only concern was keeping me safe and alive, and I didn't know how to explain to him that I couldn't live forever like this. On top of it all, I found myself falling into a rapid depression.

Even if the AARO didn't cordon off my home, it was likely I could never go back there. They'd be watching for us to return, so it just wasn't safe. I'd been gone so many days that I'd probably been fired for absenteeism, and the bills were probably starting to pile up. Eventually the electricity would be cut off. All our food would spoil, and after enough missed mortgage payments, the cabin would probably be seized by the bank. My life as I knew it was over.

What were we going to do? Q'on was, to my knowledge, the first alien visitor on Earth. There was absolutely no precedent for him, no protocols in place for his protection. He couldn't exactly go to the local consulate in New York and demand asylum. He couldn't claim diplomatic immunity, because our two species hadn't developed diplomatic relations. Would my government even be open to negotiations for his safety? What could Q'on offer them in exchange for his freedom?

Time was even more nebulous in the cave than it had been in the AARO facility. I had no idea how long we sat there, stoking the flames. Night and day blended together in the dark recesses of the cave, only distinguishable when one or both of us ventured outside to take care of our bodies' baser needs. I drifted in and out of consciousness, exhausted on a level I'd never felt before.

I woke from a light slumber to a strange beeping sound. At first, I thought Agent Wilson and his goons had found us, but I soon realized the noise was coming from Q'on. I nudged him awake with my elbow.

"Q'on? Baby, you're beeping. Please tell me you don't have some kind of self-destruct wired into you ..."

He grunted and stretched, then shook his head with a yawn. "No. It is an incoming message."

Message? Wait, he had a means of communicating with the outside this whole time? I was almost mad, but then I remembered that he didn't have any connections here on Earth besides me. If he called anyone, he must have phoned home like the old movie. That brought up a whole new bundle of worries as I remembered that he'd been exiled from his home planet after a falling out with his leaders. Who would come to his aid after that?

I wanted to ask, but his eyes unfocused, and he went into some kind of trance. I waved my hand in front of his face, but his yellow eyes remained unblinking and distant.

"Q'on? Earth to Q'on! Baby, talk to me. What's going on?"

The seconds dragged into minutes, and I briefly wondered if he'd had a stroke. Tears welled up in my own eyes at the thought of being stranded out here alone with him stuck comatose like this, but before the first drop could roll down my cheek, he blinked slowly and smiled.

“We can leave. Come.”

“What? Where the fuck are we going to go? It's freezing out there!”

He stood in one fluid motion and took my hand, pulling me to my feet. “Much has changed. My friends are nearby. They brought a ship and provisions.”

“Q'on—” Before I could protest further, he started out of the cave with me in tow. I was grateful for the pants he loaned me, especially since he'd ripped my original scrub pants when we fucked in the cave. I didn't exactly want to meet these friends of his with the crotch torn out of my pants, despite the knowledge that Xalanite women apparently didn't cover their multitude of “teats,” as Q'on said. My heart fluttered nervously in my chest as we made our way to the opening of the cave. What would his friends think of me, a boring human woman with only two tits?

When we emerged into the snow, the sun nearly blinded me. It glinted off the unbroken expanse of white, and I squinted against the glare. Q'on kept tugging me right into the waist-high snowbanks, and I gasped and shrieked as I stumbled into the frozen fluff. He turned back to see what was wrong.

“Are you all right?”

“I-it's fucking *cold!*” I stuttered through my shivering. “Can't your friend come to us? I don't know if I can trudge through this stuff.”

Q'on frowned. “I am afraid not. His ship is too big to navigate through the trees, so he had to find a nearby clearing. It is not far. Come. He has fresh clothing for us, and food that is better than roasted deer meat.”

I groaned and soldiered on, scurrying to keep up with Q'on as he plowed through the snow. He seemed to have found a fresh

supply of boundless energy, but I was still sluggish from the cold and exhaustion. Onward we pushed through snowbank after snowbank, with me tripping every few yards on a branch or root. How Q'on dodged them I never knew, but at least I managed to avoid falling on my face.

To Q'on's credit, the ship really wasn't very far away. I think if I'd had to walk much more, though, I would have turned back to the relative safety of the cave. Instead, we broke through the trees to a clearing about the size of a football field, filled from end to end with the sleek metal vehicle.

I don't know quite what I expected. Having never seen Q'on's ship, I didn't know what a Xalanite ship looked like. Massive in size with clean, seamless lines, the huge machine hummed loudly as it hovered in midair, the only thing connecting it to the ground being a small staircase that seemed to have lowered from the belly of the ship itself. The bright, blinking lights of the sci-fi TV and movies I'd grown up watching were nowhere to be seen, and its shape was more akin to a giant, flattened bullet than a saucer or the like. I couldn't differentiate any windows in the hull, and I wondered how they navigated through space without them. Was there some kind of sensor system that warned them of debris or asteroids? Those were concerns with interstellar travel, weren't they?

Standing underneath the expanse of the hovering ship were more purple-scaled men. They dressed in similar weapon-loaded clothing to what Q'on had been wearing when he crashed behind my house, though none of them had any weapons in hand. About four aliens stood waiting for us, all tall and built and *fit*. If I were the polyamorous type, I might have gotten some naughty ideas, but I didn't think my poor pussy could take five of him. One alien boyfriend was more than enough for me, thank you.

Too bad my best friend had chosen to cut me off after she slept with Ryan and broke up our marriage. She might have enjoyed this scene.

I scooted closer to Q'on and nudged his side. "Will the nanites you shot into me translate for them, too? I don't want to

accidentally start an intergalactic incident by saying something that's rude in your language.”

He smiled wide, his bright white teeth and fangs reflecting the sunlight like a corny toothpaste commercial. I half expected to see him hold up a tube with the brand name on prominent display.

“You will be fine. Our nanites are connected; it's how I contacted them.”

“I thought you were exiled,” I whispered as we got closer. “Are these guys on the side of your leaders, or are they part of some rebel splinter cell?”

I could almost see the nanites scrambling to translate my jargon. Finally, Q'on threw his head back in laughter. He hugged me with one arm and made a grand gesture towards his friends with the other. “They are part of the faction that overthrew our former leaders. My exile is no longer in effect, though I have no desire to go back.”

I cast him a sideways glance. “Really? Even though our government is apparently staffed by kidnapping jackasses? You could go home, Q'on. Back to your planet.”

He shrugged. “I have a home here with you. We just have to get it back from your authorities.”

It was my turn to laugh. “And how exactly do you plan on doing that? They're basically a covert agency with little to no regulatory oversight in place. I highly doubt we could just stroll into a courthouse or police station and demand they give us my house back.”

Q'on just grinned. “That is already being taken care of.”

I doubted that, but I kept my mouth shut. How could four newcomers to the planet be at work smoothing things over with my government when even Q'on and I still had misunderstandings over the most basic things? I tried my best to show him how things are here, but he still got confused or misread things I said or things he saw in books and TV. The thought of *four times* the chance to mix things up just made



me cringe. Maybe I wouldn't be the one starting an intergalactic incident.

As we neared the group of Xalanites, I noticed them frowning and pointing at me. I figured it might be because I'd gone days without a shower thanks first to the AARO then to our current predicament. I must've looked terrible.

When we stopped in front of them, though, the tallest Xalanite turned to Q'on and said, "Your mate is damaged. Do you require a med pack?"

Damaged? I hadn't gotten hurt since we escaped the AARO facility. What was he talking about? I turned and followed his pointing finger to see a trail of blood in the snow behind me. I wasn't due for a visit from Aunt Flo for another week by my account, but the stress of the kidnapping followed by the brief stint of wilderness life must have triggered it early.

Part of me expected it. I mean, I was getting up there in age, and my periods weren't exactly super reliable anymore. It made sense that I'd start sooner than normal.

Another part—a much larger one—fought against the creeping sense of devastation that threatened to ruin my mood. I was about to be rescued; I shouldn't have been lamenting the loss of something that was never guaranteed in the first place.

I shouldn't have been upset. I should have known.

I wasn't pregnant. A small part of me had held out hope that maybe Q'on's sperm was different, that maybe it would do the trick. Now, though, I realized how foolish that was. Dreams like that are for those lucky bastards who have functioning plumbing. Mine was faulty, and not even a virile male like Q'on could fix it.

My hands shot to my crotch to cover the embarrassing red stain. I didn't know if Xalanite women had periods or not, but no matter how natural it was for humans, humiliation took center stage. This was not the kind of first impression I'd wanted to make with Q'on's friends.

Q'on took me by the shoulders and looked into my eyes, his gaze searching. "Amber? Are you all right? Do you require a

doctor?”

A flush hit my cheeks as I scanned the area for something to staunch the flow. I don't know what I expected to find. It's not like we were going to find a convenience store or gas station out here. Unless Xalanites kept pads or tampons or the alien equivalent in their ships, I was screwed.

“No, Q'on, it's fine. I'm not hurt. This is normal for us. For human women, that is. We go through this generally once a month if we're not pregnant. Totally natural. Just ... messy.”

He cocked his head to the side and frowned. “It is natural to bleed?”

Oh, dear God, someone shoot me now. “Yes. Well, this type of bleeding is natural, anyway.” I launched into a brief explanation of what went on for Earth females every month, and if I hadn't been freaking out, I might have chuckled at the expressions that crossed the Xalanites' faces. Rapt attention followed by sheer horror followed by a weird kind of respect. It would have been hilarious if not for the fact that I was still standing in the freezing snow, bleeding like a stuck pig.

The taller male raised his brows and nodded, like he was confirming something to himself. “Earth women are truly strong, to lose so much blood every lunar cycle and survive.”

The heat of my flush spread to my neck and chest, and I shrugged. “It's not normally all that much blood, really. It's—complicated. But I do need something to, um, stop it. Something to, uh, either plug it up or catch what's coming out. I don't suppose you guys have anything like that on your ship? I'd hate to ruin any clothing you give me to wear.”

The aliens conferred in their tongue, and I wished the nanites translated things both ways. It felt weird to be standing there listening to the foreign words fly back and forth, not understanding a single thing they said.

Finally, Q'on broke off from the group and took me to the side. He leaned close and whispered in my ear. “Can you still ... I mean, will we have to wait until the bleeding stops?”

Oh, geez. This horndog was worried about whether or not he could get any action for the next week. Meanwhile, I was *still* bleeding in the freezing snow. “No reason to wait, except for the mess. Most human males avoid sex during this time. There’s not a medical reason not to, they just don’t care for it. Some women aren’t particularly in the mood during their cycle, either.”

He grinned. “Good.” Q’on turned back to his friends and rattled off something in Xalanite. They all nodded, and two of them went back inside the ship.

“What’s going on? Do you dudes have supplies that will work, or do I just have to walk around with bloody pants until we can get to a place with more humans around?”

“Hunir thinks he has a solution,” Q’on said. “We do not have these pads or tampons you speak of, but he is a Xalanite medic, and he believes he can halt the flow for you. Something that will stop this ‘period’ so you can carry on without more blood loss.”

“Carry on without more blood loss” made it sound so damned dramatic, and I wasn’t too keen on a minor surgical procedure out here in the middle of nowhere. If that was all they had, though, I figured I’d give it a shot. Anything to get the focus off my womb and back on getting Q’on and me home and away from the AARO and Agent Wilson. Besides, if I remembered correctly, there was a similar procedure available here on Earth. More permanent, maybe, but similar. It tended to make the woman sterile, but since I was already screwed in that department, it couldn’t hurt anything.

Thankfully, Hunir invited me onto their ship for the procedure. I breathed a sigh of relief as I stepped inside, grateful to be out of the cold.

The inside of the ship was just as sleek and impressive as the outside, with glass panels and displays inlaid right into the metal walls. Everything was seamless. It reminded me of sci-fi television shows, with little glowing lights everywhere that I assumed were buttons for controlling the ship’s various functions. I couldn’t make sense of the symbols on the

screens, which must have been Xalanite words. Since I didn't know what the buttons did, I kept my hands in the pockets of my scrub pants. The last thing I wanted to do was activate some kind of weapons array or self-destruct sequence.

"Come," Hunir said. "Sit." He gestured to a reclined chair with a built-in pillow on one end. I sat gingerly on the edge, half expecting it to be hard and uncomfortable, but the seat was surprisingly soft. Some sort of gel cushion that sank in and cradled my ass, shaping itself to my body.

Q'on stood next to the chair and held my hand as Hunir set up a tray of instruments. I had no idea what any of them did, and some looked a little terrifying. Thankfully, though, there didn't seem to be any knives or scalpels among them.

I laid back on the chair and rested my head on the pillow. I wasn't normally squeamish when it came to medical stuff, but for some reason I couldn't bring myself to watch. I squeezed my eyes shut and tightened my grip on Q'on's hand as Hunir started. Instruments clinked on the tray, and I waited for Hunir to instruct me to take my bloody pants off. Something cool and smooth touched my belly, startling me, and I gasped at the sudden chill.

"Relax," Hunir said. "It is done."

Wait, what? That was it? "What's done?" I asked.

"You are healed. You will not bleed again this lunar cycle."

That was deceptively simple. And what did he mean by "healed"? Was he just talking about the current mess, or did he do something to repair my faulty plumbing? "Hunir, when you say healed, do you mean you fixed everything?"

He raised a questioning brow at me. "I am not sure I understand."

My eyes darted back and forth between him and Q'on. "Am I still—I mean, am I still sterile, or did you fix that?"

A shadow crossed his scaled features, and I knew the answer before he said anything. Q'on squeezed my hand and helped me sit back up. Though I had long ago given up on the thought of kids, the brief spark of hope made the crushing realization

that much harder to accept. I fought back tears as Hunir handed me a fresh set of clothes to change into.

Q'on rubbed my back while Hunir left us alone so I could get dressed. Without a word about my disappointment, he helped me into the tight Xalanite garb, which fit well enough everywhere except the chest area. The shirt seemed to have been cut for a male body, and I was annoyed that they didn't have anything that would let the twins breathe until I remembered that Xalanite women had extra boobs, so a woman's shirt wouldn't have fit right, either. My borrowed shirt had a deep V-cut neckline, and my tits seemed on the verge of popping out every time I moved. This was probably the best they could do given my anatomical differences to their species.

Once I finished getting dressed, Hunir returned with a set of clothes for Q'on. I'd gotten so accustomed to him being naked that I almost forgot he needed something to wear, too. The fabric hugged his narrow hips and broad shoulders, reminding me how hot he looked emerging from the lake outside my cabin after his crash.

Q'on pulled me into a tight hug and rested his chin on my head. I sank into his embrace, my body trembling as I held back a new onslaught of tears.

"I'm sorry, Q'on," I said, though I wasn't quite sure what I was apologizing for. For being broken, I guess. For not being an ideal mate. I hadn't really fully admitted my sterility before, so I wouldn't have blamed him if he changed his mind about being with me. He seemed young and fit; he deserved a woman who could bear his kids.

He'd make a great dad.

"You have nothing to apologize for, Amber." He kissed my forehead. "I should apologize for not having the technology to repair you. You seem sad that Hunir could not make you fertile."

"It's not your fault the Xalanites don't have anything for my broken ass." I let out a dry bark of laughter. "I guess you're gonna have to go find another *tyr'il*, huh?"

Q'on pulled back and frowned down at me. "What are you talking about?"

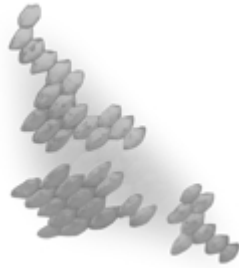
"C'mon. You're young. In your physical prime. You need a woman who can give you kids."

He shook his head and stroked my cheek. "I need *you*."

That seemed to settle the matter. Q'on made no more mention of my infertility, and I kept quiet about the notion of him finding a new mate. Hunir may not have been able to heal what was broken with my body, but that day something inside me felt whole for the first time in a long, long time.

# Chapter 21

## *Q'on*



The first thing I had to do after Amber's procedure was mend her wounded heart. The fact that she thought I'd ever leave her over something so trivial bothered me.

I had to fix that. To show her that my love in no way hinged on her ability—or lack thereof—to bear children.

“Hunir, is there a spare room on the ship? Quarters where we may retire?”

He cocked his head and nodded. “Of course. Do you wish to rest before we return to Xalan?”

“I wish to spend time with my *tyr'il*.” I gazed at Amber, who blushed bright red.

Hunir grinned, and he led us down a corridor to the housing area of the ship. He pressed a series of buttons on the console next to the entrance to one of the rooms, and the door slid open with a quiet *hiss*. “Your quarters for the duration,” he said with a wink before disappearing down another corridor.

Once inside, I programmed a locking code into the console on the inner wall and locked the door. I didn't want anyone interrupting our time together.

My *n'ril* strained against the fabric of my pants as I turned and watched Amber take in the room. Her mouth gaped open in wonder as she stood in the center and surveyed her surroundings.

I almost wished I could see the ship through her eyes. To me, it was just normal Xalanite tech and décor, all smooth curves

and calming lights. I'd noticed that human design favored more angles, harsher lighting; perhaps that was the draw for her, then. The more organic lines of Xalanite architecture and the muted illumination may have been more attractive to her eye.

"It's gorgeous," she said in a hushed whisper.

I caressed her cheek and tilted her face up so I could look into her dark eyes. "Not as gorgeous as you, my love."

Her smile radiated with love and appreciation, emphasizing my point. When she turned towards me and wrapped her arms around my waist, I took full advantage, holding her to me and dipping my head for a kiss. Our tongues collided, sliding over each other in a seductive dance. I slid a hand inside the opening of her shirt and maneuvered the tight fabric off her shoulder, releasing one delicious breast. Amber moaned and buried her hands in my hair as I moved to suck on the pert pink nipple. I circled it with my tongue, nibbling gently. She gasped and gripped my hair tighter, and my *n'ril* twitched as I freed the other breast to give it due attention.

"Q'on ..." Her voice came out low, husky, a sign I'd come to associate with arousal. "Baby, before we go any further, is there a shower in here?"

"You wish to stop?"

She giggled. "I wish to wash off the filth of living in a cave for a few days. Neither one of us has bathed since the quarantine shower at the AARO compound, and I'd kind of like to get clean."

I growled and lifted her by the hips. She shrieked, wrapping her legs around my waist to hold on. "You will just be dirty again when I fill you with my cum, but if you wish to get clean first, then we will get clean first."

Her eyes glinted with mischief. "We could get clean and dirty at the same time, you know."

Ah, yes! Like the human mating shows. Many of those programs took place in a shower, and it looked quite enjoyable.



I carried Amber to the lavatory door and pressed the button to open it. When it slid aside, she peered in. “Is it, like, an ionic bath kind of thing? Or sonic? They always have cool stuff like that in the movies.”

Her question confused me. “It is water, like yours.”

She hopped down onto the grated floor and inspected the walls more closely. “Where does it come out? I don’t see a spout.”

I shrugged and pointed to the ceiling as I stepped in with her and closed the door. “There is no spout. See the holes up there? The whole top is the spout. The water comes out like your rainfall.” I busied myself with removing my clothes, eager to begin.

Amber finished the undressing that I’d started, and when she finally stood gloriously naked before me, she held the garments and looked around. “Uh ... Babe, you shut the door too early. We’re gonna get these wet. There’s nowhere to put them.”

I took the clothing from her and tossed it in the corner with my own garb. “Then they’ll get wet. There are more garments in the room for when we are done.”

She opened her mouth to protest, but I stopped her with another kiss. I didn’t want to waste any more time.

I needed her. Not in a few minutes. Not even in a few seconds. I needed her right then, needed to be inside her. To mate with her, to join our bodies, to satisfy my constant craving for her touch.

I blindly slapped the control panel inside the shower, and a torrent of warm water fell down on us. Amber shrieked in shock, but after the initial surprise, she relaxed into me, into the kiss. I think she expected the water to come out cold, like her shower, but we Xalanites kept our water heated constantly in the reservoir to prevent such a jarring experience.

Once she adjusted to the water beating down, I lifted her again, delighting in the feel of her legs around me as I pressed her back to the smooth wall. I shuddered as I slid inside her, so happy to finally be where I belonged.

Amber sighed and moaned as I started to thrust, my upper *n'ril* teasing her clit all the while. Her walls clenched around me, and my knot swelled in record time. We locked in place, and I began to rut with all my strength. The grated floor provided adequate traction, preventing me from slipping and hurting her, and I braced a hand against the wall to keep myself from slamming her into it too forcefully.

“Oh, God ... Q'on, your fucking knot ... It feels *amazing*, but I'm surprised it's here. I mean—”

“No words,” I said, my voice gruff. “Just mate.”

I realized after I said it that the word had connotations of breeding in her language, which had not been my intent. I was trying to erase those thoughts from her mind, to show her that breeding didn't matter to me. I pressed my forehead to hers and nipped her bottom lip. “Fuck. Just fuck me.”

If she noticed my slip-up in language, she didn't say. She was too busy screaming.

Since I hadn't been paying attention when I started the shower's spray, I failed to realize that I'd hit the auto-wash control. Sudsy water suddenly rained down on us, and holes opened up in the shower walls to create a counter-spray. I sputtered as the cleanser got in my mouth, but I refused to stop. I wouldn't stop until she came all over me, until I came inside her, until I filled her to overflowing and could watch my seed rinse down the grate in the floor with the rest of the water.

Amber grabbed my hair with both hands and began to massage my scalp while we fucked. The suds built up, and something about the simple act made the whole experience even more erotic. I hadn't known that my scalp could be an erogenous zone, but then I supposed anywhere Amber touched me could become one. I reciprocated with my free hand, washing her long, silky strands as I pounded into her.

Her voice broke, and her walls spasmed around me. I found it a bit disappointing that I couldn't feel her release coat me with the shower going full blast. Pity.

I didn't stop. I couldn't stop. My whole life revolved around her pussy, around the feel of my cock inside it. My world was Amber, and everything else faded into oblivion while we were joined.

"Q'on ... Baby, please ..."

I groaned and picked up the pace. "I've changed my mind. I like it when you beg."

"Baby, stop ... Please ..."

Her eyes rolled back in her head, and I grew worried.

I slowed, just a fraction. "Am I hurting you?"

"No ... Just the opposite ..."

She shuddered and gripped my shoulders so tightly that I almost felt her fingernails through my scales. "It's too much. It feels *too* good ..."

A grin spread my lips, and I sped back up. Amber's cries grew louder, rising above the hiss of the cascading water. I bent to suck her rounded tit and gripped her ass. With each thrust of my hips forward, I pulled her to me. We collided again and again, and I felt a tightness in my seed-sac that indicated imminent release. I shouted as I came, my *n'ril* pulsing inside her, shooting hot cum into her.

I stilled and panted to catch my breath. With Amber pressed against the wall, I rested my head between her breasts and stroked her hips to soothe her post-climax tremors.

"Oh, God, Q'on, how do you make me come so easily? It's, like, perfect every time."

Pride swelled within me as I felt my knot fade and my cock begin to soften. I had pleased her. She called it "perfect."

While I rested, Amber ran her fingers through my wet hair and kissed the top of my head. Once again an acute awareness of the sensitivity of my scalp sent a tingle through my body, and I almost started again. I knew Amber's nerve endings must have been on fire, though, and I didn't want her to beg me to *stop* again. She could beg me to continue fucking her all she wanted, but I didn't like her asking me to stop, even if it had been because the sensations were overwhelming her.

The auto-wash ended, and a light, warm breeze replaced the water in the shower, drying us. No awkward terrycloth to bother with or to hang up afterwards. It seemed silly that humans dried themselves then dried the drying implements to prevent mildew. Xalanite tech was more efficient than that.

When we were finally dry, I reached over and pressed the button for the door. Still sheathed inside Amber, I carried her to the bed. I pulled out of her and laid her on the smooth *hinga* sheets, a Xalanite fabric even softer than human silk. Crawling in next to her, I put my head on her shoulder and ran my fingers over her taut belly. She took my hand in hers and moved it to her chest.

“I’m sorry,” she said, confusing me.

“Why are you apologizing?” I asked. “You have done nothing wrong.”

She sighed. “I should have told you sooner. That I can’t have kids. I just—I didn’t know it would ever get this far, and once I started to fall for you, I didn’t know how to tell you. It’s a big deal for some guys, and that scared me, but I shouldn’t have assumed you’d be like that. I shouldn’t have kept it from you.”

I propped myself up on an elbow to look down at her. “Again, I say you have done nothing wrong.”

“But—”

A finger to her lips hushed her. “No. Enough of that. You are not damaged. You are not broken or any such thing. You are Amber, and you are my mate. The rest doesn’t matter, so stop concerning yourself with it.”

She smiled up at me, a soft pink blush coloring her cheeks.

“Now,” I grinned and slid my hand down between her thighs, “we have roughly one Earth hour before Hunir returns to gather us for mealtime.”

“Q’on! We just got clean.” Amber giggled as she spread her legs for me.

My fingers slid inside her lips, diving right into my cum. I moved them around, watching her expressions change as I

found all the right places to touch. “We will take another shower, then,” I replied, pumping my fingers while rubbing her *kash* with my thumb. She squirmed and held my wrist, though whether she was trying to stop me or help me I couldn’t tell. She started to grind against my hand, so I took that as a sign to continue until she came with a strangled cry.

I lowered myself between her legs and cleaned her with long, languid strokes of my tongue. She tasted divine, especially the parts that mixed with my dripping seed, and I hungrily lapped it all up. Her hands fisted in my hair, locking my head in place, and she ground her hips against my mouth as I feasted. When she came yet again, I drank from the fountain like a man trapped in an Earth desert. Finally, she released me, and I crawled back up to lie beside her, drawing her into my arms.

“Did you enjoy that?” I asked as I rubbed her back.

“Hell, yeah!”

“But no children can come of that, right?”

“Huh?” She frowned at me. “Of course not. What does that have to do with anything?”

I smiled and kissed her. “I enjoyed it as well, as I do every time we are together. It doesn’t matter to me if our mating—our fucking—can bring a child to bear or not. Do you understand?”

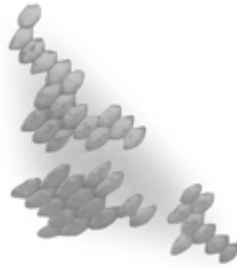
“Yeah, I guess so.” She blushed again.

“Good. Then that’s the last of that.”

We rested briefly before cleaning up again, both the bed and ourselves. I refrained from instigating more lovemaking, but even though we’d washed away the scent of each other, dressed in fresh clothing, and put the dirty linens in the chute for the laundry, Hunir gave us a knowing look when he came to collect us for dinner.

# Chapter 22

## *Q'on*



It was a shame the AARO held Ryan safe in their compound. After learning Amber's fears of losing me over something so silly as the functionality of her womb, it didn't take much deduction to realize that Ryan had probably caused at least some of that anxiety. It was the only explanation for why she would ever get the idea that I might leave her. Knowing this, I regretted letting the yif live. He had caused Amber nothing but strife and heartache, and he didn't deserve the mercy I'd given him.

Amber had changed after our talk on the ship, though, and the confidence she radiated warmed my hearts. Perhaps Ryan was not worth the bother after all.

Hunir, J'meer, and the others wished to head back to Xalan as soon as Amber and I were rescued, but I could see the hesitation in her eyes when they broached the subject over dinner. It was understandable; humans had barely started venturing out into their own solar system. The idea of traversing across galaxies might be intimidating for Amber, especially given that only a select few humans had ever traveled past the Earth's atmosphere. Space travel was all but unheard of on her planet, a dangerous endeavor sometimes fraught with peril and mishap.

I suppose when I consider that she's seen multiple Earth ships' explosive failures televised on her entertainment device, I should be grateful she took the risk of even setting foot on our vessel.

Amber's entire life had been spent on this planet. She hadn't had the opportunity to explore the stars, to visit new worlds. Her life was rooted here. Combine that with the slightly volatile political situation on Xalan, and our future was steeped in uncertainty. The elders who had exiled me were no longer in power, that much was true, but over the course of dinner J'meer launched into an explanation of the warring factions fighting for power and control, and with each story Amber paled a little more.

After we supped, Hunir led Amber and me back to our quarters while we debated our next course of action.

The door slid shut behind Hunir after he left, and Amber sank into a large chair with a sigh. She rubbed her forehead, a human gesture that I'd come to associate with frustration and overwhelm. J'meer and the others had imparted much information since rescuing us, and I was certain she required time to process all of it, to weigh her options. Not wanting to add to her stress, I sat across from her in silence, waiting for her to initiate conversation when she was ready.

She lowered her hand and again heaved a heavy sigh. When she raised her eyes to meet my gaze, a steely determination presented itself, surprising me.

"These ships are safe, right? I mean, yours crashed, but you survived almost completely unscathed."

I nodded. "Yes. Our ships are designed for maximum safety and survivability. My crash was due in large part to the lack of navigational data about your planet. I did not have adequate information to plot a proper landing course, so I aimed for a large body of water."

Amber nodded, absently twirling a lock of hair in her fingers. "And Xalan is mostly water, right? So, if something went wrong, a crash landing there would be somewhat safe?"

"We would not crash on Xalan. Our planetary maps are quite detailed."

"Just for the sake of playing Devil's advocate, though, a crash landing on Xalan would be pretty survivable? Even for, say, a

weak human?”

I frowned, confused. “Why do you ask about a crash? Amber, I would never risk your safety like that. If travel to Xalan were not safe, I wouldn’t even consider it. I would stay here with you and face your authorities by your side. But we don’t *have* to deal with your Earth authorities if you do not wish to. We could go to Xalan. Build a home there.” I paused to consider my words. “I think you would like Xalan. It is similar to your rainforests. Very beautiful.”

She smiled, a radiant expression that warmed me and gave me hope. “I don’t doubt that. If Xalan is even half as amazing as you say, I’m sure I’d love it. I’d miss my family and friends, sure, but if I’m being honest with myself, a lot of them took Ryan’s side in the divorce. It’s just ... Space travel. Fucking interstellar travel. I just can’t wrap my head around it.”

I took her hands in mine and gently stroked the soft skin. “It is safe. Safer than what you humans consider space travel. We have had generations to improve on our designs, to learn from our early mistakes. There has not been an explosion in hundreds of your years.”

I had intended my words to be comforting, but Amber paled when I mentioned explosions. “But there *have* been explosions?”

“Not in hundreds of years.”

She let out a dry chuckle. “So you’re due for one, then, huh?”

Her attempt at humor took a moment to sink in. Amber’s nerves seemed in control of her, and I struggled to find something to say that would ease them.

“Amber, I would never risk your life like that. If I didn’t have complete and total faith in our Xalanite technology, I would not even consider taking you to my home world.” It saddened my hearts that she still did not fully trust my words, despite my repeated reassurance.

Finally, after many more questions on her part, Amber squared her shoulders and set her jaw. “Okay.”

“Okay?”



She nodded. “Yeah. We’ll go to Xalan. *But—*” she raised a hand to halt me before I ran to tell the others “—I have some stipulations. Some conditions before we leave.”

I raised a brow, my curiosity piqued.

“First off, I want these nanites reversed or reprogrammed or whatever so I can understand the Xalanite language. It’s not fair to me that I don’t know what you guys are talking about unless you speak English. Not only unfair, but it’s also really rude.”

She wants to learn our language? I’d have to discuss it with Hunir and the others, but I suppose it could be done. I hadn’t considered that she might want to learn how to communicate with us in our own tongue. It made me happy that she wanted to immerse herself in our world to that degree. I would have been content to translate for her once we got there, but this was admittedly more efficient.

She held up two fingers. “Number two: I want some of my own stuff. Books and clothes from the cabin. It was nice of you guys to loan me these, but they’re not cut for someone with my build, and I can barely breathe in this shirt. So, I’d like to pack my clothes. I’d like some books to take with me. Can we go back there before we leave and do that?”

Another reasonable request. I nodded my agreement.

“Lastly—and I can’t believe I’m saying this—we really should bust Ryan and Evan out of that compound.”

My jaw dropped. “What?”

“Think about it: It’s our fault they’re stuck there. If we hadn’t taken them hostage and held them in the shed, the AARO wouldn’t have brought them in. Agent Wilson acted like they were being treated well, but I’d bet anything they’re victims of unauthorized testing, just like we were. The two of them are jerks and assholes, but we shouldn’t leave them like that.”

“You ... want to rescue those *yifs*?”

“Yeah. I mean, we’ll dump them off on the side of the road somewhere after, make them hitchhike their happy asses home, but we should at least get them out of there.”

Almost every instinct I had screamed at me to let them rot in the compound, but one part of me, a much stronger part, wanted to please Amber. If freeing them would make her happy, then I would help get them out.

On one condition, though.

“Fine. I will take J’meer, Liffal, and Gi’kar, and we will rescue the *yifs*. You will stay here with Hunir until we return.”

“But—”

I held up a hand to stop her. “No. You will not risk yourself for them. I will not allow it. You will stay on the ship with Hunir.”

Amber scowled and crossed her arms over her chest in defiant protest, but I would not budge on the matter. She was staying safely on the ship, or the two would remain with the AARO until they rotted in custody.

The rescue operation, such that it was, began after sundown. Since my kind are darker in color, it made more sense to infiltrate under cover of darkness rather than march into the compound while the sun blazed overhead.

We armed ourselves with nonlethal weaponry upon Amber’s request. Darts that would incapacitate but not poison, electroshock units that would scramble the nervous system but not interrupt the heartbeat or brain function, and various types of restraints accompanied us on our mission, each approved by Amber after a brief demonstration onboard the ship. Despite all she had been through, she seemed strangely averse to harming other humans. Admirable, I supposed, though pointless. I doubted any of these humans would grant her the same courtesy.

Gi’kar set the ship to stealth mode and programmed it to hover just outside the compound. We watched through the viewscreens as the guards stationed outside scrambled to find the source of the sudden gale force winds tearing through the area. When sufficient chaos had broken their lines of defense, the four of us exited the ship and slipped onto the grounds of the compound.

The razor wire proved no threat to us as we scaled the fence. I silently thanked the Xalanite gods for our thick skin that protected us. Within seconds we were inside, darting from shadow to shadow as we did our best to dodge guards and avoid detection. I'd promised Amber that we would only attack if spotted, that we wouldn't harm any humans unless they took the first hostile actions, so it was in our best interest to remain hidden for as long as possible.

According to our thermal scans of the buildings in the compound, we wagered that Amber's ex and his friend were being held in a building to the east of center. It was easy enough to surmise from the readings; two spots radiated heat more than any other place in the facility, a testament to their weak nerves and fear response.

Taking out the guards as we were discovered proved tedious and time-consuming. We managed to silence most of them before they could raise a proper alarm, but just before we entered the building where Ryan and Evan were held, one guard dodged Liffal's stunning shot and pressed a button, after which a blaring siren began to resound throughout the facility grounds.

More guards streamed out from the surrounding buildings, and we ducked behind some stacked crates. Bright lights flared to life as the guards searched, both handheld and mounted high on poles at regular intervals around the perimeter.

I cursed under my breath in both the Xalanite and English tongues. We had not anticipated drawing this much attention to ourselves. Our plan had been to slip in, grab the *yifs*, and slip back out. Now we had sirens and lights and more guards to deal with. Ryan was proving more trouble than he was worth, and I wondered how upset Amber would be if he became "accidentally" damaged during the rescue.

J'meer tapped my shoulder and gestured, using Xalanite military hand signals to communicate silently.

*Smoke bomb. We set it off, then run. Grab humans.*

I responded with some gestures of my own as I peered around the corner of the stack of crates.

*And on the return trip? The smoke will disperse before we can get out.*

He shrugged. *Then we set off another. It's no bother to us, but they won't be able to see or breathe properly, given their weak human anatomy.*

J'meer made it sound so simple, but I suspected we would encounter more interference than he was accounting for. His bravery was admirable, yes, but something nagged at the back of my mind as we prepared a smoke bomb. I turned back to our target building and activated the nanotech implants that allowed me to see thermal variances.

When we'd scanned the building from the ship, only Ryan, Evan, and a handful of guards had been present. Now? Now no fewer than fifteen guards lined the room, all with their weapons aimed at the sole point of entry.

*More guards inside. Greater than a dozen. We should plan on resistance upon entry. Flash or smoke for them?*

J'meer paused to consider. *Do they have night vision devices on their heads? The ones you mentioned seeing used in entertainment programs on this planet?*

I looked again and detected a faint electronic signal emanating from the heads of the guards. A quick scan of the signals around the room indicated all other electronics were turned off, meaning they hoped to ambush us in the dark. *I believe so. Flash, then.*

*Yes. So, smoke, in, flash, grab, smoke, out, ship. Easy.*

I wished I had J'meer's confidence.

I used to have that kind of confidence in battle. Things changed, though, when I had something to lose. Someone to lose. I couldn't bear the thought of leaving Amber alone, so failure brought an increased risk that gave me great discomfort. What would she do without me? I had ruined her life here on Earth; with our capture by the AARO, she had likely lost her job, and her home was compromised. I had to stay alive, to survive this attack on the compound, for Amber's sake.

The humans' spotlights glared and reflected off the gasses we released with the bomb, making it difficult for even us Xalanites to see in the resulting chaos. Still, we easily maneuvered around the stumbling human guards, and J'meer broke down the locked steel door. Gi'kar tossed the flash grenade in, and we poured through the door as soon as the humans began to shout in pain as they were blinded.

I found it strange that Ryan and Evan were bound in the room. Hadn't Agent Wilson claimed his men were taking care of them? Why would they be in handcuffs?

J'meer and Liffal each grabbed a hostage while Gi'kar and I covered their retreat. We threw another smoke bomb and headed for the fence. Our boots pounded on the pavement, audible even over the shouts of the guards. Would we make it back to the ship?

The sirens stopped suddenly, the blaring silence almost louder than the noise. We kept running until Agent Wilson's voice boomed out across the compound.

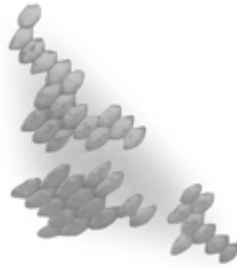
"Don't think for a second that we won't spray the whole area with bullets. You might have human hostages, but they're worthless to us."

We four froze, barely two feet from our climb to victory.

"That's right, alien freaks. One more step from any of you, and we'll open fire."

# Chapter 23

## *Amber*



“One more step from any of you, and we’ll open fire.”

A chill ran through me as I listened to Agent Wilson’s voice pump through the ship on the Xalanites’ communication device. I had no doubts that he was serious, that he would carry out his threat if Q’on and his friends made another move. My concern was that they would move anyway, and he’d open fire.

“Q’on, please, do what he says!”

I wrung my hands, trembling, as I waited for a response. The seconds ticked by in utter silence. Neither side seemed willing to budge, and I prayed that Q’on and the others had heard me.

I prayed that they’d listen.

Finally, after what felt like the longest pause of my life, Q’on’s voice came through the speakers.

*“It would seem you have us at your mercy, Agent. What do you want from us?”*

I heaved a sigh of relief and dropped to my knees. He heard me. He listened.

A low chuckle from the AARO agent sent another chill through me. I’d always thought he was creepy, but this was a whole other level of disturbing. It was like he got some sick pleasure out of catching the Xalanites, something bordering on perversion. This sicko got off on the power trip from it all.

*“Your unconditional surrender, for one thing. The location of any allies you might have hidden around here. And a direct line of communication to your superiors.”*

Q'on's superiors? Since he'd been exiled, he didn't really have any superiors. The old leaders who kicked him off-planet had been unseated, and things hadn't settled enough on Xalan for a new leader to emerge. Agent Wilson had no way of knowing this, of course, making Q'on's next move tricky. If he admitted to the current political situation on Xalan, Agent Wilson might get ideas about taking over. If he lied about who his superiors were, the agent might sense that he wasn't being truthful, and he might order his men to fire.

It was a total shitshow.

“This doesn't bode well for relations between our people,” Hunir said, shaking his head. He stood beside me, watching the vital signs of the Xalanites on a display panel. They didn't have video surveillance with them, so he monitored the scene this way.

I whirled around and stood, poking him in the chest with a finger. “Are you seriously worrying about politics at a time like this? He's going to take them apart bit by bit just to figure out how you guys work! We should be focusing on getting them out of there, not how we're going to patch things up between our species.”

He blinked slowly at me, totally unfazed. “Would the one not serve the other?”

“What are you talking about?”

Hunir shrugged. “If our species' relations were doing well, your leaders would not allow this agent to harm Xalanites, correct?”

I froze mid-comeback as realization hit. “That's actually brilliant!” I leaned in to the comm panel and spoke into it like an intercom mic, forgetting that I didn't need to do that. “Q'on, baby, promise me you'll behave until I can get you out of there. No fighting back, no name calling, just toe the line and do what they say. Can you do that?”

“You call him a child?”

Waving at Hunir to be quiet, I waited with bated breath for Q'on to respond. I couldn't explain what I had in mind because I had no idea how long it would take me to accomplish my little half-baked rescue plan. He just had to trust me.

When Q'on's voice echoed again, calm and even, I finally allowed myself to breathe.

*“We will comply. It will take some time to arrange to meet your demands, but we will not fight back.”*

“Thank you, Q'on. We've gotta go for a bit, but we'll be back for you guys. Just hang in there.” Turning back to Hunir, I pointed at the navigation controls. “Sorry, dude, but you just volunteered yourself to be a diplomat. We're going to have to leave for a while. If I give you directions, can you fly us where I need us to go?”

He nodded, and I rushed to give him instructions. We had one stop to make before we went to our final destination. I needed a smartphone and wi-fi access, so we had to find a small, out-of-the-way town where he could drop me off at a store. Once I had those things, we'd be set.

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To my dismay, the range of the Xalanites' comms was limited inside Earth's atmosphere. Hunir explained that there was too much interference from our “primitive human devices” for them to maintain the signal more than a few dozen miles away. The only reason Q'on's signal had made it to his friends on Xalan seemed to be that their signals were designed to travel faster in open space, away from anything that could jam them. We couldn't listen in to what was happening at the AARO facility once we left the area. My nerves tied themselves up in knots while Hunir flew us to my goal:

The Capitol.

Yep. My dumb ass decided we were flying straight to the President. No wasting time with middlemen or lower-ranked politicians. Can't go to the governor with this pardon; we had



to go to the top. Here in the good ol' U. S. of A., that meant the White House.

Through some random stroke of luck—whether that luck was good or bad remained to be seen—the internet informed me of a press conference being held by the President that very afternoon. Later than I was hoping for, but if fate was on our side, there would be congressmen, delegates, and press arriving throughout the morning in preparation. All we had to do was get their attention.

What better way to get the attention of the public than dropping a spaceship on the White House lawn?

Risky? Oh, hell, yes. It was risky as fuck, but it was the only plan I had. Odds were about even that we'd be shot on sight versus welcomed as envoys of Xalan, but what choice was there? We had to do something big to pull this off, something public. The AARO had less of a chance of pulling some sneaky clandestine bullshit if we popped out of the ship in broad daylight.

Before we landed, while we still orbited above the White House, I instructed Hunir on making himself look as harmless as possible. He removed all his weapons, and I even made him take off the medical devices he carried as a Xalanite field medic. We couldn't risk the humans assuming one of those was a weapon as well, so off they went. No sharp objects, no electronics, nothing suspicious. Just basic clothes and shoes. Simple. Non-threatening.

I hoped that my arriving with him would help. I mean, if he's got a willing human companion, he can't be all bad, right? I even bought some normal clothes while I was picking up the phone, so I didn't show up in Xalanite garb. The more human I seemed, the better. If I'd been wearing alien clothing, they might assume I'm a sympathizer or hypnotized or some other crazy shit.

The whole time we spent on this nutty plan, I fretted. What if we were too late already? What if they had started to autopsy Q'on while we were trying to save him? I didn't know how long Agent Wilson would hold off in the hopes of speaking

with the Xalanite leaders. That dangling carrot might not distract him for long. And once I allowed myself to think about it, I realized he only needed *one* live Xalanite hostage to bargain with. The AARO had four bargaining chips. Three spares. We were playing Russian Roulette with Q'on's life, and it terrified me.

My palms sweat as Hunir navigated the ship into position to land. Since it had more control and maneuverability than a human space shuttle, we planned on dropping straight out of orbit and onto the lawn. Bold, dramatic, and totally unmistakable. No one was going to say this was CGI or faked, especially not with all the press cameras I saw below us.

Well, okay, there might be some conspiracy nuts who will say it's faked. But the majority will see it on live stream and realize shit's going down.

First, the tiny little dots of people below us scattered beneath the shadow of the ship. Then, the Xalanite comm system picked up on the screams and shouts as we neared the ground. I hoped we weren't giving any senior citizen visitors of the White House a coronary event with our surprise arrival. Finally, the military and Secret Service swarmed out of the building, creating a protective ring around the landing zone. They aimed a variety of weapons at the ship, but I'd already instructed Hunir to exit with his palms pressed to the back of his head. He didn't like the idea of starting our negotiations with a surrendering pose, but I warned him that tough as his scales may be, our projectiles could probably tear right through them.

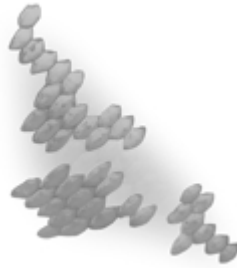
The exit ramp on the bottom of the ship hissed open once we landed, and I took a deep, shuddering breath to try to calm myself. It was wholly unsuccessful, but then again there probably wasn't much that would help in this situation.

Safeties clicked off by the dozens as we stepped down the ramp. One soldier in a fancy uniform loaded with awards and medals took charge, shouting orders at the other soldiers—and at us. Hands on your head, get on your knees, *et cetera*. I nodded to Hunir, and we complied. Best not to aggravate the general.

Not if we wanted to free Q'on.

# Chapter 24

## *Amber*



It hadn't been my goal when I woke up in the cave yesterday to find myself staring down the barrel of a large automatic rifle today, but I think I handled it well. I didn't piss myself, and I didn't start crying.

The many-times-decorated soldier stood behind the first ring of armed men and scowled at us. "What brings you here? What's your mission? Why did you take this woman hostage?"

I wanted to answer, but I had to let Hunir speak. He wasn't going to have a willing human friend to be his social buffer every time he dealt with my species, so I couldn't let myself become a crutch for him. To his credit, he kept calm and answered carefully.

"I came to rescue my fellow Xalanite, who was captured by your authorities after he crashed here some Earth days ago. My mission is to secure his release, as well as my other friends who were subsequently captured with him. The woman is not my hostage, but my friend's mate. She told me that your leader—your President—lived in the large white building here, and that he might be able to negotiate the release of my friends."

I had to give it to the general; he had a good poker face. I couldn't tell what he was thinking about Hunir's answer, but to my relief he gave no orders to open fire—yet.

"I have above-top-secret clearance, and I haven't heard anything about aliens being held in any military base."

Carefully clearing my throat, I waited for his gaze to shift to me before I spoke. "If I may, sir, they're not in an official

military installation. It's a place in upstate New York, in the Adirondacks, and I think it's run by the AARO. They've got some soldiers as guards, but I'd wager they've been borrowed. Other than that, I mostly only saw agents in suits and scientists in lab coats there. Not an upper rank in sight." His eyes narrowed, and I added a respectful "Sir" to my speech.

"The AARO doesn't have that kind of authority," he said, his voice gruff.

"Well, sir, with all due respect, I don't know how much of what they were doing there was on the up-and-up. I was brought there with Q'on after they broke into my house. Lots of blood draws for tests, prison-like facilities, no phone calls allowed ... They even took my ex-husband and his friend hostage as well, and Q'on and the other Xalanites were captured trying to get them out of there." I held my tongue about me holding Ryan and Evan hostage first. The less negative information I gave him about me and Q'on, the better.

Without taking his eyes off us, the general pulled out a phone, tapped the screen, and held it to his ear. Even just a few yards away from him, I couldn't hear what he muttered into the device. Well, "muttered" wasn't quite the word for it. "Growled" might be better. His whole attitude was growly, like we'd ruined his day by making him work. I caught snippets of words, like "Adirondacks" and "fucking find out," but not enough to know what he was doing.

The general's eyes flicked to the ship and back to where we knelt. "How many others are on board?"

Hunir answered. "No one. Four of us came to rescue Q'on. He and the other three are captives of your AARO now."

"And she's this Q'on's girlfriend, you say?"

I nodded, and after a brief pause, so did Hunir. I think the nanites took a second to translate "girlfriend" for him.

Seconds ticked by as the general contemplated what we told him. I had no idea what he was thinking, and it unnerved me that he hadn't told his men to stand down yet. Dozens of guns

aimed at me tended to cause moderate to severe anxiety. The whole time, he listened to that phone, waiting for whoever sat at the other end to tell him something.

Finally, after an eternity and a half, the general nodded, lowered the phone, and gave a command for the soldiers to lower their weapons. Not quite the same as standing down, as I understood it anyway, but I decided to take what I could get. I heaved a sigh of relief but otherwise made no movements. I didn't want to activate any itchy trigger fingers. My hands stayed linked behind my head, and I kept on my knees.

Our interrogator took a few steps forward, stepping between his men to stand in front of us, and came to a stop in front of Hunir. He kept his hands clasped behind his back in a seemingly relaxed pose, still holding the phone, but I suspected he would give the command to attack if anything startled him.

“Let me get this straight: This Q'on of yours crashed here, he started dating the young lady, then the AARO kidnapped the two of them. They escaped and called you, and then Q'on and your friends were captured again when they tried to rescue her ex-husband.” He shook his head. “Am I leaving anything out in this crazy story?”

That seemed to be oversimplifying things, but I shook my head in response. Better not to argue semantics when lives were on the line.

The general eyed me for a second, then turned his gaze back to Hunir. “Well?”

What the actual fuck? Was he seriously ignoring me?

Hunir followed my lead, shaking his head as well. “Though some details have been left out, your account of things is more or less correct.”

“More or less?”

The hemming and hawing and back and forth drove me nuts. The AARO could be conducting who knows what kinds of gruesome tests on Q'on and his friends. Couldn't the general

see that? Tears streamed down my face, and I hiccupped as I tried to hold back the sobs that threatened.

*That* got the general's attention. He stopped ignoring me and knelt next to me, creating wrinkles in his sharply pressed suit. "Are you all right, miss? Have the aliens done anything to hurt you?"

"No!" The word came out more forcefully than I intended, and I cleared my throat before continuing. "Please, sir, we have to hurry. If we don't get the AARO to let Q'on and the others go, they'll kill them. Agent Wilson wants to know how the Xalanites work, and he'll rip them apart to get the answers." I shook from head to toe as the sobs finally burst forth, and the waterworks picked up.

I twitched when the general patted my shoulder, afraid he was going to hurt me.

"It's okay, miss. We're already working on it."

"W-what?"

He chuckled, and I wanted to deck him for it. "The AARO operates under the Department of Defense. I've already got word on the way to the Director of Defense, and she's been listening in to our conversation this whole time." He tapped the phone in his hand. "Your friends will be okay. If they're not, this Agent Wilson will have to answer for it."

"How do you know they won't just let him experiment on the Xalanites?"

"Because," he looked from me to Hunir while pointing at the news cameras around us, "she's been watching, too, and if she's seeing what I'm seeing, she's seen how this one defers to you. He clearly hasn't hurt you, and he listens to what you say. So far, we've not seen or heard anything to indicate that the Xalanites are going to harm you, or anyone else for that matter."

"S-so Q'on's gonna be okay?" I couldn't stop the trembling, and the lingering snuffles from crying kept me from putting on the brave front I so desperately wanted to. All I could think

about was Q'on's safety. If this Director of Defense didn't act fast ...

The general checked his phone's screen. "She's coming out of the White House any second. There's a plane ready to take her to the compound you mentioned, but—" he looked up at the Xalanite ship "—I reckon that could get her there faster?"

I liked the idea of getting to Q'on and the others faster, but one thing gave me pause. "Um, sir, there are weapons onboard. They're locked up, but this isn't a diplomatic vessel. It's for rescue."

There. Truth told. They couldn't say I didn't alert them to the presence of the weaponry on the ship.

He typed on his phone and waited for a response. "The Director thanks you for your honesty about the weapons onboard. She wants to know if there's anything else she should be aware of before she boards."

Okay, so this is a thing now. "Um ... I don't think so. Everything else is pretty standard. Med bay, control room, personal quarters. That kind of thing."

"Good." More typing, then after a brief pause, he pocketed the phone. "She's on the way now."

Sure enough, a tall woman in military dress uniform strode across the lawn, surrounded by armed soldiers. She carried herself with an authoritative air, and I wagered she had earned it. Any woman who could make it that far in our society's military must've worked hard to get there. I wondered if the AARO assignment was a punitive thing or whether she'd requested it. After all, UFO study had, until Q'on arrived, been considered a load of crap by most of the civilian populace—myself included.

I stayed put when she walked up to us, as no one had given Hunir and me permission to stand. She eyed us with a steely grey glare, but after a brief nod from her, the general told us we could be "at ease."

Shaking my arms to work some of the feeling back into them, I stood on equally shaky legs. I tried to keep myself in shape,



but I was not built for kneeling this long.

Hunir stood in one fluid motion, and I felt a pang of jealousy.

“Miss ... I’m sorry, but the general neglected to get your name.” The Director’s voice was smooth and clear, perhaps projected a little too loudly, but that could have been a result of having to shout orders over the years. She looked a bit older than me, with the beginnings of wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and between her brows and wisps of grey threaded through her light brown hair. Somehow, it made me feel guilty for dyeing my own hair, and I vowed to let the grey come in naturally once I got to Xalan.

“Amber, sir. Ma’am.” I left off my last name. I hated being reminded of my marriage to Ryan, and who had the time these days to bother with the legal hassle of changing their name?

“Miss Amber, then. Tell me, is the general’s assumption correct? Can this vessel get us to the compound faster than one of our own jets?”

I glanced at Hunir, who nodded affirmation. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Good. Then I must ask if your friend here would allow me onboard.” She turned to Hunir. “I apologize, good sir, but the general also neglected to get your name.”

He grinned, baring his fangs, and I cringed a little. “I am called Hunir, ma’am.” He followed my lead with the “ma’am” bit, I guess, because I certainly didn’t teach him that earlier. How was I to know the person in charge would be a woman? I guess I was just as chauvinistic as the rest of our crummy society.

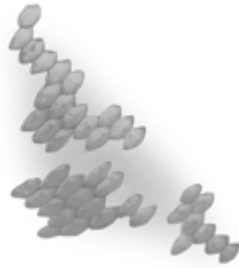
“Welcome to Earth, Hunir. I regret that your first visit has been so ... chaotic.”

That sugar-coated it a bit too much in my opinion, but I kept my mouth shut about it. Better not to piss off the tall, scary lady who held my boyfriend’s fate in the palm of her hand.

The Director took a few steps towards the ramp, then turned back to Hunir and me. “Well? Shall we?”

# Chapter 25

*Q'on*



**D**arkness never bothered me. We Xalanites could see in near-black with no problem. It was almost amusing that the humans assumed they could frighten us by turning out the lights.

The solitude, though ... that bothered me.

They separated me from my kinsmen. They even separated me from Amber's ex and his friend. This prison, unlike the one they held me in the first time, did not have an adjoining cell. No one sat on the other side of the wall to keep me company. No glass to see who even was on the other side; just four small concrete walls with a steel door on one side. A commode in the corner, and a bare cot opposite the door.

I'd thought I had adapted to loneliness during my time traveling through space for my exile, but my time with Amber had filled me with such unabating joy that this seemed extra cruel. No company, no other being to pass the time with. Just myself and my thoughts, and those thoughts turned ever to Amber and how she might be faring.

Was she all right? I had no worries that Hunir would do her harm, but what of this plan she had to free us? Would that put her in danger? Not knowing if she was safe or not ate at me, consuming my existence.

I had to get out of here. I had to get free, to get the others free, so Amber would not risk herself for our sakes. My own safety didn't matter, only Amber's.

Studying the walls of my prison did nothing to provide answers. Solid concrete, a good Earth foot thick, with some

kind of devices wired into them to provide electronic interference. I couldn't get a message out to Hunir if I tried. Even messaging between cells proved impossible. I couldn't contact the others, couldn't ask if they were okay.

The humans finally found a way to gain access to my blood this time. They brought something called a "power tool" and drilled into my scales. It hurt, but I tolerated it well enough. I wasn't about to give them the satisfaction of hearing me cry out in pain.

I never heard the others screaming, so I didn't know if they'd also been subjected to the drill. The scientists that came to my cell remained silent, as did Agent Wilson, despite his usual chattiness. It was as though they thought to deny us any accidental slippage of information, but what could we do with intel given our situation? We were as helpless as infants here.

As my worry for Amber grew, I resolved to escape. No matter what it took, I would attack the next human who came through the door and make a run for it. Even if their projectiles could penetrate my scales, could it really be any worse than the drill?

I waited hours for the lock to click, positioned to pounce the second the door opened.

The human on the other side gave a shout when I launched at her, but she was faster than I anticipated. Before I knew what happened, she had me pressed against the wall, my drilled arm twisted behind my back. I tried to break free, but her grip proved too strong.

"Q'on!"

For a moment, I thought myself delusional. Was that Amber's voice? It couldn't be ...

Soft hands ran over the holes in my scales, and I shook as Amber's scent reached my nostrils.

She really was here.

"Oh, Q'on ... What did they do to you?"

"This is the infamous Q'on?" the tall woman asked. She let me go and patted my shoulder. "Sorry, sir. I didn't realize who you

were. Acted on instinct.”

Once she freed me, I keyed into the situation around me and realized the compound was in chaos. Soldiers aimed guns at each other, scientists cowered from other soldiers, and a highly decorated man held Agent Wilson by the throat. He seemed oddly well dressed for the occasion, as did the woman who had opened my door, and I wondered what called for the theatrics.

Amber threw herself at me, wrapping her arms around my neck. I held her close, reveling in the feel of her against me.

“I can’t believe they fucking did this to your arm. It’s barbaric!”

“Are those drill marks, Director?” the man holding Wilson asked. When she nodded affirmation after inspecting my arm, the man gripped Agent Wilson’s neck even tighter. “What the fuck kind of operation are you running out here? We aren’t maniacs; we don’t whip out the Black and Decker when our needles can’t do the job.”

The Director waved a hand at the man holding Wilson. “Calm down, General. He’ll answer to me—and to a Congressional committee—in due time. Just hold him steady for now. We can’t have him running off into the woods. And have someone check on the ex-husband and his buddy. We can’t have it getting out that the AARO was holding humans hostage, too, for Christ’s sake.”

I gazed down at my *tyr’il* as two soldiers trotted off to follow the Director’s order. “Amber, what happened? How did you get here so fast?”

She leaned back to look up into my eyes, grinning mischievously. “Hunir drove us in the ship, but we stopped at the Capitol and grabbed some help first. Q’on, meet Director of Defense Ann Hall, and over there is General Fisher. Army. We met them at the White House when we were trying to get the President to let you guys go. Turned out no one in the upper ranks had a clue you were being held here! Agent Wilson had gone rogue, and he hid the intel from everyone. If

we hadn't gone to the White House, Director Hall might still not know you even existed."

That scrawny little *yif* acted without orders? He kidnapped me, kidnapped *Amber*, without any word of it to his superiors?

I didn't realize I had started growling until Director Hall's eyes widened, and Amber smacked my chest. "Q'on, stop it! It's over now. She's going to rip him so wide open that no one ever dreams of pulling this crap again."

"What of future Xalanite visitors?" I ask. "What will happen to them?"

Amber frowned. "Are any Xalanites really going to want to come here after this mess? I mean, Earth has nothing to offer Xalan in terms of trade or ... well, anything. You guys have way more advanced tech than we do. It makes no sense for any of you to come back here."

Hunir cleared his throat. "We might wish to travel here. I believe you call it a vacation. And eventually, your species will reach the stars beyond this system. We should consider alliances should that happen."

She put her hands on her hips. "Why would anyone want to come here from Xalan? It's like someone from Paris wanting to visit Alabama."

The Director snickered. I did not understand the comment to get the gist of the humor.

"It is new. Different." Gi'kar stood after Hunir finished mending his drilled scales. "I can imagine many Xalanites will want to come here in the near future. There are exotic plants, humans to meet, and this strange white substance you call 'snow.' This is all exciting to me as a Xalanite. We've not met a species so close to our own yet. A planet so close to our own."

Director Hall squared her shoulders and extended a hand to Hunir. "Well, sir, if we can start over, I'd be glad to open talks between our species. Perhaps you'd like to be an advocate for the Xalanites here on Earth?"

Hunir held up both palms in mock surrender. “Oh, no! I couldn’t. I am a healer, not a diplomat. I only took on that role to assist Amber in getting help for my friends.”

She turned to me. “Q’on? What about you? You know Earth better than any of your friends. You could help us mend the fences, so to speak.”

“While that would be nice, Director, I am afraid I cannot. Amber has expressed a desire to come live with me on Xalan, and I would not deny her the chance. If I stayed here, she would not get to see my home planet or meet my other friends.”

The Director tapped her lip with a fingertip. “Hm. A compromise, then? You two could be our voice on Xalan, and someone else could take point as the Xalanite representative here.”

Amber looked up at me and stroked my cheek. “What do you think, Q’on?”

“She would have to pay us for the work. In *krin*. Dollars do not spend on Xalan. I cannot provide for you if she pays in human money.”

Director Hall chuckled at my attempt at human humor. “I don’t know what the hell *krin* is, but I think we can set up an exchange rate that would work for everyone. If you two agree to be our envoys, I would make sure you are fully compensated for the work you do. The last thing we need is to be accused of forcing you into indentured servitude after your release.” She winked at me and Amber. “So, do we have a deal?”

I looked from Amber to the Director’s hand and back, making sure I saw agreement in Amber’s eyes before I shook it. I understood that to be a semi-binding agreement in human terms. Amber nodded, though, and put her hand on top of mine. The three of us stood there for a few moments before the Director released my hand with a satisfied grin.

“Great! Now that it’s settled, would you allow me to arrange some accommodation for your friends? Amber, your house

should have been vacated by now, but I can't guarantee all your belongings will still be there. Unfortunately, Agent Wilson had access for too long; there's no telling what they stole, and I don't know if I'll be able to recover everything for you." She pulled a phone out of her pocket and tapped at the screen. "The Hilton in Rochester seems to have some good rooms open. That's the closest city to your place, correct, Amber?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. It's a bit of a drive, but it's close enough, I suppose."

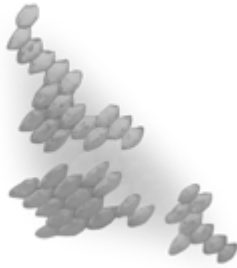
"Good. I'll get your friends set up there, but ..." she glanced at the ship, which took up most of the courtyard in the compound "... perhaps we could drive them there? I don't know if the world is ready for another show like you put on at the White House today."

We nodded in unison, and the Director strode off to talk to the others, presumably to inform them of the arrangements she made. I didn't have the heart to tell the Director that our people would likely be more comfortable staying on the ship; besides, if Hunir and the others wanted to experience human life, then staying at a hotel might be a nice escape for them.

As Amber and I waited for the car Director Hall had arranged to take us to Amber's cabin, we sat hip to hip, our hands laced together. I vowed then never to let anything come between us again.

# Chapter 26

## *Amber*



My joy at being reunited with Q'on evaporated when we got back to the cabin.

The fuckers at the AARO—Agent Wilson's goons, anyway—had ransacked the place.

Nothing was left untouched. My bookshelves had all been toppled, my clothes strewn about, the pantry raided of both Earth and Xalan food. A large part of me hoped that the bastards choked on Q'on's *yin* snacks.

When Director Hall saw the mess, she turned red and started shouting orders to the handful of soldiers who'd accompanied us. Within minutes, they had the place at least somewhat straightened up, and while they cleaned the mess, she herself ordered us a pricey meal for delivery, plus at least two weeks' worth of high-end groceries. I don't know how long she expected us to stay before we left for Xalan, but it was a nice gesture all the same.

I checked the bedroom and found my computer trashed. She offered to order me a new one sent next-day shipping, but I turned her down. What did it matter? I'd already checked my email when I bought the burner phone before Hunir and I landed at the White House, and sure enough, I'd been fired when I didn't show up to work for several days.

Not that it mattered. I would have quit anyway, but this kind of stung. I mean, it wasn't my fault I got kidnapped and then stranded in the Adirondacks during a snowstorm.



Oh, well. Better not to think about that. Onward and upward, or whatever.

Once my house no longer looked like a warzone, Director Hall offered to have her driver take us into town to visit the other Xalanites at the Hilton. We'd just finished the surf 'n' turf she had ordered us, and I think Q'on was just as stuffed as I was. He patted his flat abs and groaned in the best way when he was done. Like, "I wished Director Hall would just leave so I could jump him" kind of groan.

We turned down her offer, but she still hung around for a good half hour longer than I would have liked. I finally had my boyfriend back, in my house, and all I wanted to do was spend my last few hours on Earth showing him how much I'd missed him.

She finally left about eight, though when I saw what she left on our front lawn, I let out a groan of my own.

She left guards. Lots of them.

I rested my forehead against the front door and sighed. Q'on came up behind me and rubbed my back. "Is something wrong?"

"There are half a dozen armed men guarding the place. How are we supposed to get any private time with them out there?" I gestured in the direction of the bedroom. "I wanted to have some fun, but there's no way they won't know what we're doing."

"So?" Q'on shrugged, and his lips spread in a devious grin. "Let them hear."

"Q'on!" I shrieked and giggled as he picked me up by the waist and damn near threw me on his shoulder. "We'll never hear the end of this, you know!"

"I don't care. I was without my mate for far too long." He carried me back to the bedroom, stroking my ass the whole way. His fingers slipped between my legs—or maybe it wasn't a slip—and I moaned as he fingered the crotch of my leggings.

Since he had me facing his back, I couldn't reach his *n'ril* to return the favor, so I opted to stroke whatever I could reach.

His back, his waist, his hips ... By the time he tossed me on the bed, I saw that he was at full salute with both *n'ril*. I licked my lips, eager to get started, and we both hurried to get undressed.

Q'on won that race, as he simply ripped out of his Xalanite garb. His cock bobbed as he crawled between my legs, grabbed my hips, and began to feast. I'd gotten my arms trapped in my shirt when I lifted it over my head, and he had me so distracted I couldn't focus to get it off. Instead, I just leaned back and let him go to town on my pussy and clit. He licked and nibbled and fingered me to the edge of oblivion, then sucked my clit until I came with a scream.

I barely had time to work my way free of the shirt before he crawled the rest of the way up and speared me in one forceful thrust. My back arched as I gasped in shock, and before I knew it, Q'on was testing the structural integrity of my bed frame with all his might.

With my legs wrapped around his waist, I did my best to keep up. Our hips pounded in sync with each other, and his upper *n'ril* rubbed my clit until waves of pleasure flowed through me.

When I came a second time, he didn't stop.

Instead, he flipped me over and reentered, letting that sexy upper *n'ril* of his lick my ass. I did *not* know that was something I was into until he started, and oh, my God, was it amazing. He reached around and started fingering my clit, and that was the end of that. I came so hard my eyes crossed, and I saw stars.

His knot chose to make an appearance just then, swelling inside my sensitive cunt, and I almost started crying with how good it felt. I whimpered and whined and, fuck, I almost begged him to stop again. I knew that bothered him, though, so I stopped short before I hurt his feelings again.

Q'on came with a massive, earth-shattering roar, and I hoped the guards outside took it in context and didn't charge in to rescue me.

My legs shook as he pulled out, and I struggled to stay upright. My sheets once again had been ruined. Between my own cum and Q'on's dripping out of me, they were toast. Not that I minded; it was kinda hot.

He picked me up and set me on the floor, wrapping an arm around my waist when it became clear I was not ready to walk yet. After drawing me a bath and helping me into the tub, he set to work stripping the bed and putting on a clean set of sheets. He struggled with the fitted sheet, and I giggled a bit as I watched him try to figure out which side was up.

“Need help, babe?” I teased from the tub.

“No. I am a Xalanite warrior; this fabric will not defeat me.”

For a split second, I thought I'd insulted him. Then I caught his grin as he turned and wrestled with the sheet some more. Finally, after about twenty minutes, he got it on properly.

Q'on opted for a solo shower as I continued to soak. Once my wobbly muscles firmed up, I climbed out of the tub andtoweled off before heading for the bed again—this time to sleep. I was exhausted from the past day's events, and I needed some solid rest. I hadn't slept the whole time Q'on and the others were held at the compound.

He burrowed under the covers next to me when he was done, and his warmth soothed me. Before I knew it, it was morning ...

... and he was ready for more.

By the time we emerged from the bedroom, Director Hall had let herself in. She waited on my couch in a pristine fitted business suit, far different from the uniform she'd worn the day before. A small grin twisted her lips when we came out for breakfast, and I knew she'd been there long enough to overhear our extracurricular activities.

Served her right. She should've waited outside instead of making herself at home.

“So, I came here to bring your contracts. We've worked out a payment arrangement, thanks to your friends and their input.” She tapped a manicured nail on a stack of files sitting on my

coffee table. “Annual salary, not hourly, and paid in Xalanite funds. Gi’kar was most helpful in setting up contact with the current leaders of your planet—apparently that’s been sorted for the time being—and they agreed to what I am told is a considerable amount for your people. More than you’d make as a member of the military, Q’on, though they do extend an offer to let you rejoin if that’s your choice instead. I suspect you might have a reason or two to take a less hazardous position now.”

Q’on bent and picked up the top file, opening it and scanning the document. I peered over his shoulder, but I suspected his nanites helped him understand the legalese better than I could as a native speaker. From what I could gather, they offered us the equivalent of well over a hundred thousand dollars a year, plus living expenses and a travel stipend, whatever that was for.

“Where will we be going with this job? Is that travel account necessary?” I glanced over at Director Hall, who shrugged and gestured vaguely.

“Trust me, as an emissary, you’ll need it. Even though Xalan has only one government at the moment, there are several regions that have their own mini-governments, similar to our states or counties, and you’ll need to advocate for Earth in those places, too. We’ve arranged for your main housing to be in the capitol, with a suite of rooms in every major city across the planet, both above ground and underwater.” She grinned again. “The Xalanite scientists are chomping at the bit to find a way to let you breathe in those cities, Amber. I suspect you’ll find yourself the subject of a lot of curiosity when you get there. A woman with only two breasts, who only breathes surface air? You’re going to be the talk of the town for a while.”

I wish she hadn’t brought up that point. Nerves took hold, and I put my hand over my empty stomach, which churned at the thought of all that attention. “I need coffee,” I said, hoping the bitter drink would settle my tummy.

Looking up from the file, Q’on frowned. “Are you all right?”

“It’s just a lot to think about on an empty stomach, and with zero caffeine in my system. I hope your Xalanite scientists can synthesize something similar.” I chuckled to take the edge off my words, but then I started to wonder how I’d fare without coffee. Or chocolate. I mean, Xalan had meats and veggies, so I knew I wouldn’t starve, but ...

“We will bring as much coffee as you need.” He said it with such seriousness that I felt bad giggling at it, but then he cracked a smile, and I knew he was teasing me. His delivery was so dry sometimes I didn’t realize he was making a joke.

Once I had a couple cups of java in me, we looked over the documents again. Everything seemed to be in order. They’d thought of just about every contingency, including a completely unnecessary maternity clause in my Xalanite health plan. I didn’t mention that to them, but I did catch Q’on’s tiny scowl when he read it. I patted his hand and met his gaze, shaking my head to indicate that it wasn’t worth it to argue that point in the deal.

It only took two hours to read it all and sign our lives away. Two hours to seal my fate, though if I was being honest with myself, it was what I wanted anyway. So I had to do some work while I was there ... so what? Work was a part of life. No avoiding it, not even by vacating the planet.

“When do we leave?” I asked, taking Q’on’s hand and threading my fingers through his.

“We can arrange for the Xalanite ship to leave today, if that’s your wish,” Director Hall said, “but you might consider staying a couple of weeks. I could have some human diplomats give you a crash course in politics and negotiations.”

“No, thanks,” I said. “I just want to get home. With Q’on.”

He smiled at me and kissed me, seemingly with zero care that Director Hall watched us. His tongue invaded my willing mouth, and we made out until she cleared her throat to regain our attention.

“Tonight it is, then. I’ll go make the necessary calls.” With that she left, after placing all the documents neatly in her briefcase.

I saw her to the door, with Q’on close behind me. As soon as I shut the oak slab and turned the lock, he descended on me with hands and lips and even teeth. I laid my palms on the door to steady myself as his hand slid between my legs. Q’on rubbed my clit until my legs shook and my breath came in short, heated pants.

“So, we have many hours until we depart, yes?” he murmured into my ear.

“Q’on, we have to pack ...”

“And we will,” he said, nipping at my earlobe, “but not until I’m done.”

That man made me come no less than three times before we even got to the bedroom. I screamed, I shouted, I moaned, I cursed, and most of all, I sent up a silent prayer thanking the Xalanite gods for his existence, for bringing him into my life.

Our “packing” ended up consisting of throwing a few outfits and some books into a suitcase just minutes before Director Hall returned with a car to take us to the ship. She and her driver cast twin knowing glances at us as we climbed into the black SUV, and it wasn’t until we had been on the road for an hour that I noticed how messy my hair was, how my shirt was misbuttoned, and how Q’on’s fly was down. Oops.

To her credit, Director Hall was professional enough *not* to ask questions. Instead, she filled the time with a detailed briefing of what to expect workwise once we got to Xalan. It seemed like a simple enough job, but I figured with so much at stake she wanted to be sure we understood the assignment.

Hunir waited for us at the base of the ramp into the ship. He took my bag with a smile, and Q’on helped me up the ramp. The Director stayed on the ground, waving at us as the ramp closed and the ship rose off the ground.

My stomach knotted up as the ground faded from sight on the viewscreens, but the nerves vanished once we exited the atmosphere and entered proper space.

The view couldn't be described, not by English words. Even some of the Xalanite words that Hunir uploaded into my new nanites fell short of describing the sheer beauty before us.

Humankind was missing out on some spectacular imagery by limiting who got to go into space. Sure, we had video and photographs from space missions, but it just wasn't enough. I stared at the screen for a solid hour before Q'on nudged me to come to the dining room with the others.

"We will be Xalan bound for days. You will have plenty of opportunities to see the stars. Come. Eat."

"Are the stars this beautiful on Xalan, Q'on?"

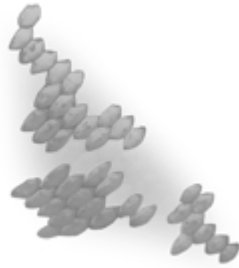
He took my hand as we walked down the corridor. "Even more so, yet they still pale in comparison to your beauty."

I giggled and elbowed his side. "You don't have to win me over with fancy words anymore, you know. I'm already yours. Now and forever, Q'on. And if you Xalanites have a wedding ceremony, I'd really like to go through it with you."

His brows shot up, and he grinned. "Was that a proposal?"

# Chapter 27

## *Q'on*



The fact that my mate proposed to me on our way to Xalan warmed my hearts, but even more amazing was that she said it in Xalanite. I don't think she even realized she had slipped into my language. Thanks to Hunir's knowledge of the Earth tongue, the translation reversal worked seamlessly in Amber's mind.

When she realized she was speaking a different language, she lit up with joy. I contented myself with staring at her as she conversed with my kinsmen in our native tongue, ignoring my food in favor of not missing a second of Amber.

Halfway through the meal she caught me staring at her, and a gorgeous pink blush crept to her cheeks. I didn't think I could ever tire of the amazing way humans changed colors with their changing emotions. We Xalanites tended to remain the same color no matter what our mood. This was much better, in my opinion.

The other Xalanites turned to me as well, curious as to what might cause Amber to flush, and I took that moment of attention to go to one knee at Amber's side. I took her hand in mine, and her face reddened even more.

"Amber of Earth, it is my wish to make you my wife. To mate with you and only you from now until my dying day. Would you do me the honor of joining me in a *lip'nish* ceremony on Xalan?"

Tears streamed down her face, and for a moment my hearts broke. Did she not want to marry me? It had sounded like that



was her wish in the hallway just moments ago ... Had she changed her mind?

“Oh, Q'on! Of course, I will!” She threw herself at me, almost knocking me over as she wrapped her arms around my neck.

My friends cheered, and J'meer honored us with the Xalanite tradition of pouring spiced *gribbal* over the two of us to bless the coming union. As he was the closest one to a priest here on the ship, I took great pride in his blessing. Amber, however, didn't understand the tradition, so we had to explain it before she strangled J'meer.

The pending nuptials proved cause enough for celebration, and Hunir surprised me by warming up some *b'raal* cakes that he had in the ship's galley. I hadn't known, but it apparently was a common practice to keep the sweets on hand, meant to bring luck to a voyage.

Perhaps someone had hidden some *b'raal* on my ship before I left Xalan. My journey proved lucky in the end, after all.

After dinner, Amber and I went back to our temporary quarters on the ship to retire for the night. I surprised Amber by raising the panel that had hidden the large window from sight her first time here. We sat together in bed, watching the stars fly past as the ship flew towards Xalan. I held her close while I pointed out stars and constellations that she was unfamiliar with due to her Earth vantage point. She was the first human to see some of these stars, and certainly the first to see them from this angle.

She fell asleep in my arms with a smile on her face. I pulled the covers up and laid her down to sleep more comfortably before allowing myself to get situated for bed. Her silky dark hair cascaded down, falling across her eyes, and I took great joy in the feel of it on my fingers as I brushed it away.

I wanted to mate that night, to seal our bond, but she slept so peacefully that I couldn't bear to disturb her. Besides, we'd have plenty of time for mating on Xalan.

I woke hours later with her lips on my cock, one slender hand around my upper *n'ril*, and the other stroking my seed-sack.

When she released the suction to speak, I let out a whimper of disappointment.

“Morning, baby. I’m glad you’re awake; this is way more fun when you can take part, too.”

She took my cock back into her mouth with a sultry wink, and I moaned. The combined stimulation from her hands and her mouth was almost too much, and I shuddered as I came down her throat.

Amber licked her lips and wiped the corners of her mouth. “Mm, Q’on, that’s delicious.”

If I hadn’t already been hard again, that would have done it. “Amber, my love, if you wake me like that every day, I shall never want for anything else.”

“I mean, I could’ve woken you up by riding that hard *n’ril* of yours, but I thought this might be a gentler way to rise and shine.” She winked again and crawled up the bed to kiss me, stopping with her dripping pussy hovering over my cock.

I groaned against her mouth and lifted my hips, but she continued to tease me by moving out of reach. With one hand buried in her hair, I used the other to grab her hip and hold her in place. “Mine,” I growled as I thrust again, this time finding my goal. Amber gasped, and her pussy clenched around me.

After some study of the human mating shows back on Earth, I knew that I was not limited to lying there in this position. While Amber bounced on my cock, I thrust back into her. Her cries of “Oh, God!” and “Yes, Q’on, yes!” told me I was doing well, so I kept up the pace.

My cock knotted inside her, and I moaned as our bodies linked. She was so perfect, we fit so well, that I almost wished we never had to leave this bed.

Before she came, I gripped her hips and rolled her onto her back. I could apply more force from this angle, and it took the pressure of performance off Amber, though she continued to meet me pump for pump as I slammed into her. Tears formed at the corners of her eyes, and I would have been concerned

had I not learned that humans could cry for joyous reasons as well as sad ones. I bent to kiss her, to taste myself on her tongue while we fucked.

She came apart so fucking beautifully. Her eyes rolled back in her head, her plump lips parted, and her back arched, pushing her full breasts into me. I stared down at her as she shattered around me, trying to burn the sight into my memory.

Finally, once I was certain she had been sated, I allowed myself to come as well. I bit into her tender skin, marking her once again as I stilled inside her.

“Holy fuck, Q’on!” She panted and licked her lips while I waited for my knot to recede.

“I am not a priest,” I said, “but I thank you for the compliment.”

Amber cast a sideways glance at me. “Are you making a joke?”

I grinned and rolled onto my back at her side, drawing her close. The stars from outside reflected in her dark eyes, and I contented myself with watching them there while she stared past me out the window.

“I can’t believe this is my life now,” she murmured. “Engaged to an alien, moving to another planet, an official envoy of Earth ... It’s all so surreal.”

“I am glad it makes you happy.” I stroked her hair and kissed the top of her head.

She snuggled closer with a sigh. “It really does. I’m excited to see Xalan, to finally see everything you told me about, but at the same time it’s a little terrifying. What if the other Xalanites don’t like me? Or what if they don’t accept me as a diplomat? Unless you go back to work in the military, we won’t have a source of income otherwise.”

“The Xalan population would be fools not to accept you.”

“It’s still a possibility, though. Your friends took to me well enough, but not everyone will. It’s not going to be all sunshine and rainbows.”

My brows knit together as I tried to make sense of the phrase. “But Xalan has much sunshine. Many rainbows.”

She sighed. “It means that not everything is going to be easy for us.”

I shrugged and hugged her tighter. “We will have each other. That’s enough.”

We spent the rest of the voyage much the same, enjoying what time we had alone but also spending time with my friends. Amber listened with rapt attention as we each regaled her with tales of life on Xalan, and her eyes widened with wonder when Hunir showed her a recording of the planet from a flight he had taken over the surface. Tears came to my eyes as I saw the brilliant colors of home.

Home. Better yet, home with Amber.

I did not know what the future held, but what I did know was that whatever came to be, we would face it together. Me and my mate. My *tyr’il*.

The End

## About the Author

AJ Mullican is an independent author of multiple genres. She first published in 2015 with the psychosexual supernatural thriller *Whispers of Death*, and her catalog has continued to grow as the years progress.

AJ's next writing venture took her into a dystopian future in *Abnormal*. With two novels and two novellas published in this world—and more to come—the Abnormalverse is a rich world of class wars, genetic Gifts, and overcoming terrible odds.

In 2020, AJ threw herself into paranormal romance, creating the world of *Nowhere*, North Carolina, “where the ley lines are plentiful, and the happenings are weird.” She has since branched off into contemporary romance, sci-fi/alien romance, fantasy romance, and horror. AJ's romantic works can contain a variety of relationship dynamics to include LGBT and poly relationships.

When not writing, AJ can be found fencing with live (though blunted) steel swords and participating in historical recreation, pre-1600AD. Embroidery is her other passion, and she is nearly entirely self-taught from Pinterest tutorials. She lives in southern Arizona with her husband and three cats, Rory, River, and Missy.

Find more of AJ's works, as well as information on her series, standalones, and anthologies, at: [ajmullican.com](http://ajmullican.com)