

# PRIMAL

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# LOKI RENARD

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A DARK ALIEN ROMANCE

PRIMAL PLANET

BOOK 1

LOKI RENARD

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## PRELUDE - THE CAGE

I've made rather a large mistake.

There is nothing between me and my alien master - nothing but cool bars which hold me deeply captive and feel like an absolute perversion.

He smiles down at me, his alien eyes gleaming with wolfish excitement at my unclothed and unfair predicament. He has no real need of this cage. He is much larger than I am. He is much stronger than I am. Every inch of his massive frame ripples with muscle covered by gleaming fire-red scales. In his presence, I am made smaller and softer than I have ever been in my life.

"Let me out," I say, not knowing why I bother. He won't let me out. The entire purpose was to put me in and keep me in. This is another one of the twisted lessons in reluctant submission that he so enjoys teaching me.

"You are mine, and this is how I choose to keep you," he says. "You want to be a runaway? You want to be hard to catch, and even harder to keep? This is what happens. You end up confined."

I squirm back and forth, feeling frustrated and perhaps just a little ashamed. A woman of my stature should never be behind bars. She should certainly not be behind them without a stitch of modesty.

"You could at least let me put some clothes on."

His golden slitted eyes gleam with enjoyment, and the scaled skin around them creases with pleasure. He very much enjoys

when I make these little requests - though he rarely indulges them, because I rarely deserve indulging.

“I could. But I like keeping you nude. I like seeing your softness. Your curves. And I like knowing you have to stay here waiting for me to return and to renew our mate bond.”

“Mate bond this,” I say, lifting a middle finger in a universal gesture.

Maybe I can taunt him into opening the cage by annoying him.

“That’s not going to work, Suli,” he smirks. “I know your tricks now. You’ll stay there until I release you. Be good for me.”

I narrow my eyes at him.

“Never.”

# 1 CRASH BANG, THANK YOU MA'AM

**N**ot very long ago...

**S**ullivan

*“I’m gonna crash! I’m gonna crash! I’m gonna...”*

The sound of the crash drowns out my third loud prediction of crashing as I wrestle with the non-responsive controls of my shuttle as I leave orbit and crash through a brutally turbulent atmosphere. The outer shielding of the ship holds through the fiery bits, which is very good because it means I don’t burn up completely.

Unfortunately, that’s only the beginning of my problems.

Two minutes and twenty-two seconds later, I hit something hard. One of the hardest things you could ever hit, actually. A planet.

My commentary on the way down is muffled by the safety systems that deploy oxygenated foam all around me in a big ball. It takes so much of the impact that the fact I just fell through the atmosphere of an alien planet without any power other than gravity is barely more than an inconvenience to the structural integrity of my body.

I bounce. I bounce real high through the remnants of the wreckage of my shuttle, which disappears on impact. That’s kind of an illusion, of course. It’s really just that the fuselage

and general structures of my ship were never made to impact a planet.

“Weeeeeee!”

I can hear myself screaming again, which is nice. A crashing ship is so much louder than you expect. It sounds like your own skull being shaken to pieces. The function of this crash system throws me clear of the wreckage, which means I land on the edge of the crater left by my ship, the chemical residues of the emergency system that saved my life harmlessly evaporating into what appears to be a mercifully breathable atmosphere.

This planet is called Saurmos. I know that because I was glancing briefly at the map before my shuttle’s controls decided to go completely haywire. This is classed as a primitive planet. That doesn’t mean there’s no tech at all. It means the tech is somewhere between the wheel and interstellar travel, which, right now, is more tech than I have. What’s left of my ship looks like a crumpled, burned-up tin can at the bottom of a pretty big hole.

I stand up and brush myself off from where a little of the foam is sticking to my suit. Most of it has evaporated into the atmosphere already. You’d think being encased in highly flammable gas during a crash would lead to a serious case of bursting into flames yourself, but you’d be wrong because science. I don’t pretend to understand it, but I know that it works because I’m currently alive, rather than being a faint smear in some alien dirt.

I check my pulse. It’s barely elevated. That’s good. Means I’m probably not damaged. That seems like a miracle, but miracles happen all the time. They happen about the same amount as disasters do. It’s like I always say. If you want miracles, have your life be a total fucking mess. You can’t experience miracles when things are going well. You barely notice them when you’re happy and safe at home. You’ve got to get out in the universe and smash some ships into planets to really appreciate how often things actually go unexpectedly okay. Of course, you might also just straight up die, but that’s the risk I’ve decided to take.



The crater that used to be my ship continues to steam gently in the hole I made as I look around. I see the usual planet things. The area I've crashed in is relatively flat and covered in a lot of brownish-red grass, much of which is burning off around me in a sort of concentric pattern. In the distance, there's thick jungle-like undergrowth and overgrowth. A forest of some kind.

You don't see forests all that often anymore. Most planets remove them to allow more room for construction. Wood's an unsought after commodity in the universe now, which makes sense because you can't build ships with it, and that's what life is these days. Interstellar travel. If you're not moving, you're not living.

I know they do have some tech, though. I'm pretty sure I saw a string of satellites as I plummeted past them. I am starting to get that little tingly feeling on the back of my neck. I don't really feel fear, but I do get other indications when things are about to go wrong. There's something about this planet that makes me think I'm going to have a hard time here, and I have to pay attention to that feeling. That's the difference between surviving and not surviving.

I'm going to need to find a settlement of some kind. Not too far away, I can see something too uniformly shaped not to be a construction of some kind. That's also very good. Someone's built something, and that means there's shelter and probably infrastructure, and even more importantly: something to steal.

I check the contents of my crash suit real quick. I've got water purification tablets. I've got a retractable field knife. I've got a few tight rolls of hydratable meals. Enough to survive a good week without food foraged from the planet. I've also got the hitchhiker signal, which is solar powered. And I've got about fifty other little tricks that don't immediately relate to survival, but which will definitely potentially come in handy. This suit is covered in pockets, it's basically pockets all the way down.

This suit was designed by a fucking pirate god, created in the case that a mutiny of some kind happens and a pirate captain is set adrift. When I first bought it, I did so as a joke. My crew

laughed and laughed as I paraded it around. And now here I am. Adrift. Crashed. Alive.

This thing will keep me warm if I need to be warm, cool if I need to be cool, and worst case scenario I don't make it, decomposition will trigger an external casing to appear from head to toe. You'll end up looking like a person-sized opaque insect egg. That's why some of my ilk call these things coffin suits. But I'm a more positive thinker — and so far that's really paying off, because I am still breathing.

I set off for the building up the hill. It's interesting nobody has come out of it to see what the almighty crash that must have just made the ground shake was. In some parts of the universe, you'll draw a massive crowd that way. Other parts? The inhabitants of a planet won't notice if you crash a hundred ships into it. There are all kinds of species in existence, and they've all got their own sensitivities and sensibilities.

The closer I get to the building, I start to realize a few things. One, it's actually a lot further away than I thought, and it's playing incredibly loud music. That explains why nobody came rushing out to see what happened. For all I know it might have sounded like a dull thud to those inside, if they heard anything at all. I can feel the marrow pounding in my bones as the bass thrums.

If I had to guess time of day, which is always difficult on any planet, I'd say that it is about three o'clock in the afternoon. Pretty early for this kind of carrying on, unless it's a holiday. Or unless this is a very celebratory species. Or unless it's the sort of place where there's people who think really loud music is acceptable whenever, and the latter could be interesting.

Along the exterior of the building I can see a bunch of very large two-wheeled conveyances parked. They have big round rubber wheels, one in front of the other, and then a general sort of body with a seat for sitting on, and handlebars for steering. This is some very, very old tech. Ancient, really. No wonder Saurmos is classed as a primitive planet. These people are getting around like humans did all the way back in the late nineteenth century. We're talking tech literally thousands of years old. I wonder if it runs on the old oil-based tech too?

There's definitely a scent about the space, some of the bikes dripping a thick black viscous substance onto the ground beneath them.

Wow. This is like being on a field trip to the past. I wonder if this is actually some kind of old human colony, one of the ones that got forgotten about. I wouldn't be surprised. I'm on the very exterior final verge of the Settled Galactic Territories. Things get a little odd out here. There are planets that aren't even on the official register. Saurmos looked like a legacy entry, though I can't be sure because I didn't have a chance to research it before my shuttle turned toward it and smashed itself into it.

I'm over here sneering at these old tech bikes, I think they're called, but I bet these things don't throw their riders into solid objects unexpectedly. Maybe I shouldn't be so judgmental. Maybe I'm about to learn some wholesome lesson about the old ways being the best.

Having looked at the bikes, I turn my attention to the building itself. It's made of wood, which is also very interesting to see. Pretty wild to make an entire building out of an organic substance that's prone to catching fire and doesn't really have much in the way of actual strength. These people are going to be backward as hell, I bet. Their clothing is probably woven from natural fibers. Probably has to be washed using water.

I'm smirking to myself, though I shouldn't be. Because there's one thing about all this construction that's much more concerning than how backward it is: how large it is.

The building is made for creatures a lot bigger than I am. The door is almost twice my height. This is a real Gulliver moment, and I love it. There's nothing like exploring new worlds, discovering new species, finding out who and what is really out there. Sometimes I even introduce myself as an explorer to new people. Usually right before I rob them, because I'm actually a pirate.

There's a window I'd like to look in, but the lower part of the windowsill is quite a ways above my head. I reach up for the lower ledge and try jumping in the hopes I can grip the lower

ledge and pull myself up enough to look in. This is a bit of a futile exercise, because I'm pretty sure I don't have the upper body strength for that kind of pull-up. I used to. I used to be lithe and strong, and then I got good at my job and I got more than enough food and I got the body I have now. A body that bounces when I crash but doesn't want to be yanked up a vertical incline.

Turns out my inability to scramble up the side of the building is a bit of a lifesaver, because while I scramble at the ledge, the window explodes as a massive beast is thrown directly through it. Glass shatters, wood splinters, and muscle, scale, and bone comes hurtling through the air, accompanied by a snarling yell that sounds like something between an angry bear and a furious alligator.

The creature lands heavily in the dirt, creating a depression in the relatively soft ground. He lies there for a second, and I get to stare at him. He has to be three hundred pounds at least. Maybe four hundred. Hard to say with alien species. He is wearing a green and black checked shirt that has been tailored to allow for massive bony protrusions that rise from his back.

I get the hell out of the way, diving into a brushy bush at the corner of the building. I don't want to be seen. That would be stupid. Maybe not any more stupid than I have been these last few hours, but maybe the kind of stupid that would break my streak of survivor's luck.

The creature rises to big, clawed feet and turns toward the window it just exited. At first, he looked like a big scaled thing with a thick, long tail, complete with plates that sort of stick up from the top of it. What do they call those things... spikes? Back accoutrements? I don't know. He has a lot of them, though. I thought he was some kind of straight-up beast, but when he turns around to glare at the same window he just departed, I see that he has a face very similar to that of a human man. Not a nice man, but a recognizable one. He has a broad face with two eyes and a nose and a mouth. The mouth is twisted in anger and rage, and the eyes are narrowed with the same emotion. Fire and fury blaze in orange-hued eyes that sport vertical slits.

*Dangerous*, instincts notify me.

*Corduroy pants*, my fashion instincts scream.

Everything about this place screams human civilization sometime around 1990, if I had to name an ancient year. Except for the actual occupants, who look like... I want to say oversized lizards, but a different word is forcing itself through my brain. A word with more significance, a word humans have always found fascinating:

*Dinosaur.*

Scales run up his neck and around his chin. He has a horn of some kind rising from his skull too. Not quite like a unicorn, but not entirely unlike one, either. This guy looks like a badass, bad-guy, lumberjack fucking dinosaur.

Before he can say or do anything, another creature puts its head out the window. This one has iridescent blue scales and a thick shock of similarly colored hair. He's wearing a black leather jerkin and has bare arms, big, jacked, scaled arms. God. It's kind of hot. All of this is kind of hot.

"Get outta here, you filthy animal!" The guy who is still indoors shouts that at the guy who just found himself outdoors.

That's good news. They're speaking a simple, common galactic tongue, one of the five or so I'm fluent in. That's an excellent sign. Maybe the planet isn't as primitive as it seems. It has to be connected to trade routes for them to be speaking a recent language. I'm starting to think there could be a pretty easy way off this planet as long as I can avoid whatever drama is unfolding in front of me.

"I'll be waiting for you, Tor! You can hide inside your little bar now, but you'll have to come out sometime."

"Gar, if I have to send the boys out after you, you won't be going back to your poor mate. You'll be going into the ground."

"I'm not afraid of you!" Gar is not having these threats. They seem to be pissing him off more than anything. Every time he opens his mouth, I see large, flat teeth. Craning my head around to look at the blue dude inside, I see much sharper

teeth in his mouth. I'm watching prey defy a predator. I wonder if they're the same species. I wonder how they came to be at all. They all look like the results of an alternate timeline where dinosaurs didn't evolve before people, instead they evolved around the same time and fucked them.

This is far from the weirdest kind of alien I've ever seen. Life is weird. The universe is basically a random animal generator with only so many ideas to start with. I've seen sentient slugs with faces that look a lot like people faces too. They go everywhere and have a horrid fear of salt. In comparison, the saurians seem pretty reasonably constructed.

"You should be. Go home."

Gar huffs and puffs for a bit, but then seems to decide to take the other saurian's advice and lumbers toward a bike. I watch him as he starts it. The technology doesn't seem difficult to master. Just need to turn a key and wrench a grip on the handlebars, and the machine throbs to life with a roar that seems very disproportionately loud for its size. A cloud of gray-blue smoke chokes out of a pipe toward the end of the bike and after a bit of awkward wheeling around, keeping his tail carefully out of the way of the wheels by wrapping it around his waist, he is gone.

I watch him disappear in a cloud of rage. All I can think about is how much fun that looks. The last thing I had that went as fast as that on land was, well, I guess the shuttle. But it didn't go that fast for that long, and it did end up much more compact in the impact. So.

It's no doubt dangerous to go inside this place. It's clearly occupied by very large saurian aliens, all of whom subscribe to an outlaw vibe. But I don't really have much in the way of choice. I don't see any other buildings around this area, and I need help. Or at least directions. Cowering in the bushes is only going to get me so far. It is definitely not going to get me off this planet.

Pushing the front door open takes all of my strength, but I manage to shove it around on its hinges enough to get inside. I step inside the bar, finding a haze of smoke floating about two

feet above my head. For a moment, I go unnoticed, as all the patrons look at the place they'd expect someone's face to be. It takes a minute for them to collectively direct their gazes downward and see me standing there.

“Is that a fucking human?”

“It's a human. Not currently fucking, though,” another voice chimes in.

“We could change that,” someone in the back says, grossly making it less than three seconds until the first threat of violence. This is why I always ran an all-female crew. This bar stinks of male. If there's a single female in here, I'd be shocked. It has that stench of unwashed pits, groins, and semen dried on unlaundered clothes that presents itself almost universally in places like this.

I ignore their various comments and instead cut straight to the chase.

“I'm looking for a ride to the nearest ship dock.”

Apparently that's a hilarious statement, because every saurian in the place starts laughing. Yes, there's some mocking laughter, but there's also some deep belly laughs too. I smile along with them.

“No ship docks? No rides? What's the deal?”

“You're in Thorn's territory, meat.” A male with a relatively unthreatening demeanor tells me. He looks like he might be older than most of the others. He's wearing a heavy, faded blue shirt and pants that cover him almost like a decent set of human clothing would cover a human. His beard, because yes, he has a beard, has a good amount of gray in it, and his eyes seem to twinkle as he calls me meat. Man, I must be hungry for some wholesome interactions, because this ain't it, and yet I really want it to be.

“What does that mean?”

“It means you won't be leaving without his say so. And more likely, you won't be leaving at all, tasty little talking morsel like you. You're an appetizer.”

I am, certainly, a small person made of meat surrounded by carnivores. Though their faces are rather human in aspect, their eyes, and more importantly, their teeth, indicate carnivorous feeding patterns. When they speak, sharp canines and even sharper front teeth flash in front of my eyes. There are baskets of food at every table, and most of them drip with that red substance that they always tell you isn't blood when you buy meat, but really looks a lot like blood.

Logic dictates that if they were going to eat me alive, they probably would already have done so. That means they're fucking with me. That makes sense too. The only thing a predator likes more than hunting is toying with its prey.

"Alright, where's Thorn then, if I need to speak to him?"

Another round of laughter goes around the bar, more intense than the last time.

"Meat doesn't get to see Thorn — unless it is on a plate."

I give a little shrug. "Alright. Well, thanks for your help."

More laughs, but less amused this time. More predatory.

I turn to leave, but my way is blocked. Even without making aggressive moves toward me, they are clearly trying to intimidate me. Walls of scaled flesh, fangs, and claws, thick tails that whip behind them, showing their excitement. If I didn't know better, I'd say I was about to be torn apart.

That's what they want me to think. They want me to freak out. Want me to panic. Want me to react to them. But I can't, see? I can't because there's a little chip lodged deep in my brain that activates whenever I might feel fear and neutralizes it. I quite literally cannot be scared.

There're a few side effects. I'm also not great at feeling guilt anymore, which helps in my chosen profession. And a couple other things. They're not important. Not compared to the edge I have in places and times like these from being able to be truly calm.

I shrug and sit down in the nearest empty chair. I'd like to sling myself into it casually, but it is is very large and built to support the weight of one of these monsters, so there's sort of



a skip and a jump required to get my butt onto the seat. Also, the arm rests are high enough to be incredibly awkward, so I can't rest my arm on them, though I try for a moment, so there's a small period of time in which I am trying to rest my arm in such a fashion that it is over my head. It's awkward, basically. Kind of the opposite of what I was going for.

More toothy smirking follows this action on my part. They clearly don't know quite what to do with me. They know what I am. They speak the same language I do. There's probably pictures of creatures like me in the textbooks they give their scaly little offspring. Now, does that mean any of them has ever actually met a human? Unlikely. There's no alliance treaty or trade pact that technically allows cross border visitation between humans and saurian species, mostly out of fear on the part of humans that we might end up eaten and farmed, or farmed and eaten. Regardless of the order of affairs, it's not a great situation for us.

Now I know, logically, and overtly, that the odds of me walking out of this place alive are vanishingly low. I'm like a chocolate marshmallow who just rolled into the middle of a birthday party screaming *eat me, eat me!* But I've gotten out of worse situations than this before, and I have more than a few tricks up my sleeve — and down my pants. The first one of these creatures who wants to touch me is going to regret it.

"The first one of you to touch me is going to cry," I tell them. "Just so you know."

They look at one another, snarling as they get a little more excited. There's only one of me, and there's a whole lot of them. They can't share me. There's not even enough to take a little nibble of me each, and they all want a great big bite.

"Do you want to be fucked first or eaten first?"

I'm surprised any of them are trying to intimidate me verbally when they have so much physical threat to bring to bear, but I suppose terrible males of all species like to run the gamut of abusive techniques. Maybe they like the taste of fear. They're going to be disappointed if that's the case.

“If you can work out a way to fuck me after you’ve eaten me, be my guest. Idiot.”

Some of the saurians enjoy that quip. The laughter becomes a little mocking in nature, which makes the purple and green behemoth with the swept back fringe of bone on the back of his head angrier and angrier.

He lunges for me, arms outstretched, fingers replete with claws that extend as he throws himself at me. There’s a brief moment in which everything slows down. Time becomes a thick trickle of actions coming one after the other, freeze frame to freeze frame. I don’t have to react yet. I have plenty of time. As he hurls himself across the bar, and the other saurians start to move as well in a big tableau of vicious, hungry muscle, I slide my hand down my hip to my thigh. It’s a very small movement, and that’s why I don’t need much time to make it.

The universe is full of amazing things. But it is also full of terrible things. One of them occupies a particular slot in my suit near my hip. It’s technically a fish, but it’s a very dry, very flat little fish, so dry and flat and small that one can carry it around like a credit card. Some people say it’s an incredible source of protein. But it’s much more than that. So much more.

I chose this seat because the table next to it has a lot of half-finished drinks on it. I slip the card out of my pocket and drop it into the nearest tankard. The Chaos Fish prefers water, but it’ll work in any kind of liquid.

There is a sound that I can only describe as pure hydration and chemical reaction. The tankard shatters, the table it was on breaks. I scramble away as the Chaos Fish emerges from its dormant state in an instant. I don’t want to be between pure anarchy and its prey.

The Chaos Fish expands to over one thousand times its initial size in an instant and starts chomping with piranha-sharp teeth. Chaos Fish don’t really care what they’re biting. They’re just basically angry. Furious, really. See, the Chaos Fish is born with a deep and abiding sense that something is very wrong

and very unfair about life in general, and it seeks to undo that wrong by biting the hell out of it.

I don't think anybody in this bar has ever met a Chaos Fish before. They're making its acquaintance real fucking well now, though. They're learning all about the feeding habits of the creature firsthand.

The Chaos Fish isn't a fish at all. It's more like a leviathan water bear. Some people don't know what a water bear looks like. Let's just say it's a beastly, sickly, slate-gray looking thing, with gills and tentacles, and a big round mouth right in the middle of its seemingly eyeless face. It's somewhat cute at certain angles, though it's currently screaming loudly with a round mouth full of teeth, teeth that don't go up and down and aren't attached to gums and jaws. Instead, they emerge from practically every single surface of the interior of its mouth.

They have very stubby little legs with quite cute heinous claws attached, which means they don't move super fast in terms of running. But this is an enclosed space full of targets, one in particular who has made the terminal mistake of rushing me, and now, the Chaos Fish.

The beast scream-roars, tentacles extending toward the aggressive saurian who now seems to be charging toward the Chaos Fish itself. He doesn't have enough time to change direction. He was inches away from grabbing me, and now he's less than an inch away from the fish's mouth.

What happens next is surprisingly squishy and disturbing, and involves the predator becoming prey in the messiest of ways. The fish's mouth isn't quite big enough to fit him in whole, so it sort of bites him up and pushes bits in with bloodied tentacles. I get a very impromptu lesson in saurian internal anatomy as I cower under a nearby fallen table.

To say that the rest of the bar's patrons are startled by the appearance of the Chaos Fish and the piece by piece disappearance of their erstwhile companion is an understatement. I don't think anybody here is used to being afraid, which I can understand. They're getting a solid dose of

it now though, all together, all at once. Very bonding, I imagine.

The Chaos Fish smells fresh food in the aftermath of its snack, and boy, it is hungry. Being dehydrated and shrunk down to the size of a cracker for god knows how long has really worked up its appetite.

The saurians start leaping out windows and pouring out doors. The Chaos Fish, sensing its prey fleeing, takes immediate action. It tries to get out of the windows but finds itself to be several times too large to fit through. This doesn't bother it, because it neither understands nor begins to care. It simply goes all the way through, crashing through the wood wall as if it isn't there in slow, lumbering, terrifying pursuit of its prey.

"I have more of those," I inform those who have not fled the bar in horror. "So I think you should all leave me alone."

This gets rid of the stragglers and leaves me in command of what's left of the place. This means I've taken care of the immediate needs of food, water, and shelter. I'm doing pretty damn good right about now.

I get up, go behind the bar, and start looking for snacks. They've got to have something besides bloody meat here. There's got to be some kind of local bread or... here we go. I find a whole box of packet foods that when opened reveal what look to me a lot like potato chips. It's possible they'll be toxic for someone with my physiology, so I am careful, putting one to the tip of my tongue first to check.

"Mmm. Salt and vinegar. Perfect."

## 2 ALPHA'S CLAIM

**T**horn  
“Alpha Thorn?”

“Yes, Sona?”

My faithful servant appears on the rooftop behind me with an ever-so-gentle reproachful expression on his face. You might think he doesn't approve of me, and you could be right. I have been Alpha of the Primal Wilds for approximately one year, and the very roof where we now stand still bears stains from the blood of the previous alpha.

Saurian society does not tolerate weakness. I have earned my place here, and well he knows it. Though he may respect me, I can be almost entirely certain he does not yet like me. Yet he requires my favor to ensure his survival. It is a dynamic of almost constant, inescapably polite tension.

Grave City is at my feet, a thriving saurian metropolis of a million souls. I like to stand up here to get a sense of the place, and all those who live in it. I'll never know them all individually, but I'm responsible for the wellbeing of all of them.

So far, it has been a lot of paperwork and meetings. All the things a creature of my temperament finds almost unbearable. I fought my way through the ranks to become alpha. Now the fights are over. The position is settled. All I have to do is the job — at least until a challenger appears.

The challengers have been quiet of late, though, and I am bored. Whatever Sona wants on this sunny afternoon is

probably another matter of bureaucracy.

“One of your alarms has been ringing for several minutes, sir. I believe it indicates some unrest somewhere in the territory. Whatever it means, it has become quite intolerable, as the constant...”

An alert! That means something serious, like a territory incursion, a violent event, or the rising of a challenger for the position of alpha. I feel my body charging with excitement at the prospect of action for the first time in many weeks.

Sure enough, my office is alive with the siren call of distress. I take note of the location, then rush for the garage, where my faithful steed is waiting patiently. Practically every saurian male with any self respect whatsoever rides a motorbike. Raw power between the thighs, nothing between oneself and the world at large. My bike is a custom-made beast, not subject to the regulations on others. It gleams in black and silver with the exception of the cover plates which protect the engine, made in the image of my own scale markings so that when I ride it, it looks like it feels — part of me.

“Are you going to deactivate...”

The last words I hear from my major-domo, before the rumble of the engine becomes the only thing I can hear, are slightly mournful. He’ll work out how to turn the alarms off at some point, I’m sure. In the meantime, I have trouble to stop, trouble more significant than the sensibilities of my stuffy butler.

Idling through the city agitates my bike. I can feel it pulling against my restraint, wanting open roads and desiring speed. The dash, located between the handlebars, is a screen which usually displays things like speed, fuel levels, that sort of thing. Right now it is displaying a map of my territory, along with alerts.

Most of my realm is displayed in green, which means everything is nicely under control. But there’s a big red flashing light at one corner of the screen, all the way over at the edge, out past the point where I can expect civilization to hold.

The Ground Bar is a watering hole on the outskirts of my territory patronized by outlaws and ruffians. The sort of saurians who only listen to someone like me when I am at my absolute worst. I have a soft spot for the place. It's where I met my first challenger. Where I started my ascent to alpha as a young, untested whelp. It's also the first place I ever got my ass handed to me.

Places like the Ground Bar are allowed to exist because they are the places real saurians are made. The city is a softer place. More refined. Full of technology that makes life easier. Nothing is easy out at the Ground Bar. I am thrilled to be called back there, if I am honest. I anticipate a real battle on my hands. I could call for reinforcements, of course. I have my soldiers and my advisors, my pack of brave, bold saurians who could crush a rebellion within minutes. But something is telling me I want to handle this by myself. Ego? Maybe.

I head out from the paved streets and brightly lit buildings at speed and hit the wild roads. The bike bounces and slides in unpredictable ways, but I hold onto it, keeping everything straight and steady.

“Almost there,” I tell myself. “Almost there.”



“**B**y the primal...”

I cut the bike's engine and stare at the damage that has been wreaked at my destination. I've seen this place after riots, fires, and full-blown battles. It has never looked as ruined as it does right now. There is a large hole in the wall where it looks like something very large and sharp has passed through at speed. There are remnants of speeders and bikes in the rubble, twisted metal and oil spilling out everywhere. I go through the front door, which has been torn off its hinges.

I don't know what I'm expecting to find inside. Nothing, probably. Looks like everybody ran from something bigger than I've seen in a long time. I leave my sidearm in its holster, but my hand is not far from it.

I thought I was used to chaos out here, but this is another level. What kind of troublesome beast has rampaged through here? I don't have enough firepower for something that can make that kind of hole in a wall. This looks like one of the primal ones came through the wall.

Getting off the bike, I walk inside with the intention of looking for survivors. The place has an eerie feel, almost abandoned. But I can hear a sound of some kind. A light humming, though it is too soft and melodious to belong to any of the rough males that usually patronize this corner of my world. I feel a cold trickle of anticipation running down my spine. Something is wrong here. Something is very, very wrong.

I step through the hole in the wall. The first thing I see is a young human woman is sitting on the bar, swinging her legs a little in what I guess must be a self-soothing motion. She has curling blonde hair and wide green eyes.

I've never seen a human this close before. I'm surprised how small she is. She can't be more than six feet tall. She might even be slightly shorter than that. She's curvy and she looks soft, even at a distance. She is wearing a dirty white suit that covers her from her neck to her ankles, with big boots that make a rubbery 'thunk' sound against the broken bar every time she kicks her legs. A dozen opened and now empty packets of bar snacks are strewn around her. It looks like she was hungry.

"Hello," she says.

"Hello," I reply. "What happened here?"

"Oh," she says. "A lot of assholes. Everywhere. All at once."

Looking around, I can see that the bar was packed recently. In the back, the cooktops are still steaming away, smoke rising from the grills. I pick my way around the bar, going past the human who does not move an inch, and turn them off before the rest of the place is burned down.

As I walk past her, I pick up her scent. Slightly floral, light, like wild berries, mixed with a new form of pheromones I am not familiar with. I scent arousal. She is absolutely dripping



with it. But she does not look like she is attempting to mate. She is simply sitting there, baring short blunt teeth in a smug smile. She seems relaxed, but her eyes never leave me, and the subtle movements of her body mirror mine. She is alert like prey, but she is without a single hint of fear. I do not taste the scent of it anywhere about her.

“Alright,” I say. “I know one little human didn’t cause all this chaos.”

“I did, actually,” she says, opening a fresh packet of snacks.

“Mhm. And how did you get here? I wasn’t notified of any alien species in my territory. It’s not safe for a human to be wandering the world. You could be hurt.”

“Someone could be hurt,” she agrees with what I can only describe as an impish grin. She is very, very happy with and proud of herself, whatever she has done. It is quite interesting to be able to read the emotions of an entirely new creature almost immediately upon meeting it, but apparently humans emote so effectively even a dull brute like me can understand.

*Sullivan*

Something tells me this is Thorn.

I am looking at a truly monstrous alien. He has long dark hair and a beard, very dark brows quirked harshly over golden eyes, with two narrowed, vertical slits both focused on me. He is wearing what looks to me like the skin of his enemies as pants. The pattern and hue of the leather does not match that of his upper body, which is red and golden.

He is larger than almost all of the other saurian aliens, and he is already much smarter than they were. He’s asking questions, for starters. Questions are the domain of smart people and things. He has an air of responsibility about him. He looks dominant, but not aggressive like the others. He also looks faintly confused at my presence here, which makes sense.

“I crashed my ship into your planet,” I explain. “I came here to ask if there was a port somewhere around the place, but the

people here tried to eat me instead. So I dealt with the situation, and they decided to make a swift exit.”

“What caused the hole in the wall?”

“Chaos Fish.”

The look he gives me tells me he doesn’t know what a Chaos Fish is. That’s fine. If he doesn’t tread carefully, he’ll soon find out.

“Sounds like a translation error,” he says. “Or a strange local dialect. It sounded like you said Chaos Fish.”

“I did say Chaos Fish.”

“Alright.” He puts his hands on his hips and looks at me quite sternly. “Where did the Chaos Fish come from?”

I grin as I answer that question in a way I know he won’t enjoy, softening my tone to a gentle explanatory one more appropriate for a bedtime story. “Well, when a Chaos Fish mummy and daddy love one another very much...”

“You are flippant,” he interrupts. “You are calm. You are dangerous.”

He makes those assessments very quickly and quietly to himself more than to me. I enjoy his opinion. He seems to understand me quickly, and unlike the idiots who first met me here, he is not trying to intimidate me. He has more confidence in his sheer existence to do that, I imagine.

“I’m just a lost little human trying to find her way home, sir,” I say. The tactics I used with the idiots are not the same as the ones I’m going to use on this guy. This guy wants to be respected. I can see that in every line of his bearing. He’s used to everyone reacting to him like he’s a saurian god. So my little respectful act should get him right where I want him.

“Where is the crash site of your ship?”

“About twenty minutes walk that way,” I say, pointing in the direction I came from. “Big, steaming crater. You won’t be able to miss it.”

*T horn*

There is something about this human. Something besides the simple fact that she is female and smells fertile. There is a dancing intellect behind her eyes. Every word is calculated, every expression carefully schooled. She's trying to manipulate me because she thinks I am of limited intelligence. I can imagine that her interactions with the patrons of this establishment created that impression. I decide not to correct her misapprehension. If she thinks I am a big stupid lizard man, that works for me.

"You will need to come with me if we are going to find you a ship off-planet," I say. "The ports are not located anywhere near here. I can give you escort."

She cocks her head to the side and looks at me in a way that suggests she is trying to work out whether or not she can trust me.

"You're a lot more reasonable than the guys here suggested you'd be. I hope you're not trying to lure me into some kind of trap so you can eat me. I'm not as helpless as I look."

"Evidently."

"I want a ship to get off the planet. I mean, I don't need a whole ship for myself, of course. It's not like I'm some kind of pirate..." she laughs at what must, for some reason, be a joke to her. "Could you possibly escort me to the nearest port? I'd be ever so grateful."

She asks for what I have already offered. I wonder if that's some kind of conversational gambit, or just a personal oddity. Regardless, I am definitely taking this human with me. Not to a port, but certainly to my home. As alpha, I have a very large compound in the city, large enough and secure enough to keep her contained. This human strikes me as someone who needs to be behind walls, if not bars. My instincts are telling me to keep her. Cage her. Tame her.

"This is not a safe place," I tell her. "You'd best come with me. The port is in the city. We'll need to perform a few formalities first, however. There's documentation around

crashes and things. We can't just have aliens landing all over the place."

"Yeah. I crashed. It was an accident." Her words could be terse and impatient, but she grins when she says them. Almost like she's proud of herself.

I don't believe a word that comes out of her mouth. She doesn't look like she has a scratch on her. She doesn't look like she's had a bump, let alone a crash. But the truth will come later, when I have her safely contained.

"Are you hungry?" I ask the question. "Bar snacks don't go that far, do they?"

"Do you have anything besides bloodied meat?"

"I have access to every kind of food on this planet. You'll be well fed. But for now, let's get you out of this dive. Come on."

I crook my finger at her.

There's a moment where she hesitates, then shrugs for a second, then pushes off the counter. She's so small, definitely no more than five foot eight standing straight upright. She walks over to me with a casual saunter, her chin held at a cocky angle, her eyes not leaving mine. I am not used to prey making this kind of eye contact with me — and she is prey.

Prey that doesn't know it is prey.

The closer she gets, the smaller and more delicate she seems compared to me. She's barely a snack. I break eye-contact with her, looking around at the damage done to this place. The hole in the wall is letting in an increasingly cool breeze as evening starts to close in thick and fast. There are all kinds of perimeters to keep the primal ones out of civilized areas, but I can see those sparking in the gathering dark. A lot of infrastructure damage has been done.

As my eyes leave her, I feel a small hand sneak into my pocket. She is trying to steal from me, even as I offer her a lifeline. I cannot believe her audacity, or her nerve. This creature is a fraction of my size, and unprotected by so much as a single scale and yet she chooses this moment to attempt to take advantage of my kindness?

I snatch her wrist and swing her around in front of me, where I am greeted with a broad and entirely unrepentant grin. She seems amused by being caught.

“Oops.”

I have never allowed any creature in my territory to step out of line around me. Ever. This little human will be no exception.

“If you were saurian, I would beat you,” I tell her. “You would be stripped and thrashed to my satisfaction.

“I’m not saurian, though, am I? I’m a human, and we don’t know better.”

“You will,” I snarl. “You’ll learn your lesson. It’s one you should have learned as a hatchling.”

“Aw, come on,” she smiles up at me. “I didn’t take anything. I don’t think I could take anything from you. You’re so big, and strong, and...”

I snatch her other wrist up, seeing her hand creep toward her pocket. I don’t know what she has in there, but I don’t think I want her getting to it. There’s something devious about this creature. Something incredibly untrustworthy. Something very.... alluring.

She is clearly destructive, dangerous, and by her own reckless admission, probably a pirate. Ordinarily I would have no interest in an impertinent meat-based creature with little in the way of conscience, but there is something about this one that draws my interest.

She has the nerve to steal from me, for starters. Most of my own kind cower before me, but when I look into her eyes, I don’t see fear, and when I draw a deep breath in, I don’t smell fear. I do see and scent other things though, excitement, anticipation, and *arousal*. This pretty, curvy, soft, delicate creature with the flashing eyes is hot for me in the most primal of ways.

Her femininity calls me. It has been too long since I was in the presence of a female I had any kind of interest in. Even with her standing before me fully dressed, I am aware of the lubrication between her thighs. She is emitting so many signs

of need that merely by holding her I can sense that wetness, that human answer to all things carnal.

I feel my cock rising in answer to her call. She may not know it, but every curve of her body, and every little breath she takes is calling to me. The pout of her lips, the coquettish set of her expression, the utter rebellion in her gaze, it all makes me want to mate her.

I think I will punish her. I think she might enjoy it.

“Take the suit off,” I order in a low growl.

“Why?”

Not a refusal. A question.

“Take it off so I can fuck you, unless you want me to fuck you through it.”

Her eyes widen. Her pulse quickens. There’s still no fear in her, though. Her scent is becoming more and more complex, more needy, more curious, more wanting.

I stand back, arms folded across my chest. I know what an imposing sight I am. You do not become alpha of a saurian territory the size of mine without being able to intimidate most living creatures. I wait for her to do as she is told.

She puts her fingers to the fastening of her suit, smiling at me as she hesitates.

“You know, this is the only thing keeping me alive,” she says. “Without this... I’d be nothing more than an entree for a creature like you, wouldn’t I?”

“You’re nothing more than an entree with it on.”

“What if I didn’t take it all the way off? What if I just...” She turns around, and I see a thick, shapely rear displayed. The lines of the suit curve around her ass in a particularly significant sort of way, and she reaches back to show me how the rear of the suit opens, that panel slipping down with the aid of a zipping fastener.

She displays herself for me, showing me pale, round cheeks and an even softer pouch surrounded by golden hair. Her

eagerness to be mated feels like a ruse of some kind, but at the same time, it also feels like she needs to be claimed. A female in proper heat will do anything to have a good hard cock inside her. That is true for animals of all species and kinds, and it seems humans are no exception.

I let out a low growl and run the flat of my palm over her exposed skin. I half expect her to come to her senses at my touch, but instead she gives a little moan and leans back, pushing her soft rear into my hand, and letting the furred parts of her sex brush against me. There is a warm trail of something wet left against my hand when I pull it away.

She is ready. More than ready. She is absolutely desperate. Someone has neglected this human in the matter of her mating needs most terribly. At this point, fucking her would be a kindness. And I do like to be kind.

I pick her up and put her over the bar, keeping her in place with one big hand splayed across the back of her suit.

“Stay there for me,” I growl. “Stay there and part your thighs and show me what a good little human is like when she is properly fucked.”

I free my cock from my pants, feeling the scaled length pulse in my hand as I fist it and look down at her soft, tender body. It seems improbable, if not impossible to fit this heavy, thick length inside her. The human was built to be fucked by human men. Her soft lips were made to spread around a fleshy cock, not my scaled and punishing member.

But mad carnal instinct has me in its grasp. I can smell her need, and I love the way she is undulating her hips in front of me, silently begging me to take her. Most mating rituals have more in the way of foreplay. There is seduction. There is tenderness. In this instance, the foreplay was the cocky and absolutely shameless destruction of my territory. She has done everything to deserve punishment, and she will get it.

I let the head of my red and gold cock run along the slit of her sex, finding that wetness and softness, making it spread slowly at first, testing her, finding the deeper entrance to her body.

Sweet, soft human lips part for me, spreading their wetness on the scaled end of my cock. She was not made for this kind of mating, but she will take it. She spreads herself for me with surprising submission and perhaps even obedience, anticipation and hesitation written on her face in equal measure.

I begin to sink inside her, but something stops me. Something not quite a proper barrier. Something holding me back.

“What is this...”

She looks over her shoulder, big, wide green eyes sparking with an emotion I cannot quite place.

“I’m a virgin,” she says. “It’s my hymen. It’s a little bit of skin that breaks away the first time you have sex.”

“You have never been mated before?”

“No.”

I hesitate briefly, but the quivering of her ripe sex around my cock drives me onward. She deserves this handling, and she offered herself. This destructive little human virgin is going to learn a lesson today.

“You have taken something from me. I will now take something from you. You are about to lose your innocence, little human. You are going to give whatever passes for purity to me and become my personal fuck toy for as long as it amuses me to fill you with my seed.”

*Sullivan*

I’ve done some wild fucking things in my time, but this is the wildest by a really long way.

It might seem crazy that an outlaw of my experience has kept herself virginal, but it was never anything I wanted to trade or give away before. The men you meet on an ongoing crime spree aren’t usually the kind you want inside you. They’re usually the type to leave something behind that will stick around.



I always looked at losing my virginity the same way I looked at losing my life. It was probably going to happen when I least expected it, and against my will. This is the former, but it isn't the latter. The second I laid eyes on Thorn, I felt a charge of pure sexual energy rush through me. There's just something about this guy. Something about the way he holds all however fucking many feet of muscular saurian mass when he moves. Something about the way he speaks, in a low rumble with just a hint of a sibilant hiss. He is sex on two thick, scaled legs. He is the embodiment of dominant energy. The way he took easy control of the situation and of me without so much as raising his voice makes me want this.

Or maybe I'm just the kind of reckless woman that decides she's going to lose her V-card one day for just any reason whatsoever. There's nobody here to judge me except the alpha, and right now he doesn't seem to be spending a lot of energy on judgement.

He cups my ass in those big hands of his, spreading my cheeks wide. He uses his knee to part my thighs wider too. He wants me open to him. I feel cool air on my pussy, and I feel my own moisture starting to trickle down the inside of my thighs.

I want this alien. I want to feel him inside me. My body is on fire with arousal and need. That's a side-effect of the little helper I have inside my skull. Sometimes when I should be really, really scared, instead I get really, really turned on. At times like this, all my fear is turned to potent, intense arousal. The more danger I am in, the more excited I am, and the more I enjoy myself.

The fact I've never fucked before is because most of the time when I'm in this state, someone is trying to kill me, not fuck me. The massive alien manipulates me between two big hands, holding me up off the floor, with my upper body on the countertop, my toes nowhere near solid ground as he pulls me back against his cock.

I learned long ago that there are surprisingly few limits to what people can do. Humans aren't one of the biggest aliens. They're not one of the strongest. We're not even one of the smartest. But we stack talents like no other. We're a little bit of

everything. A little bit strong, a little bit smart, a little bit dangerous, a little bit twisted, and hell, let's be real. A lot fucked up.

This is probably supposed to be some kind of punishment. He probably wants to dominate and subjugate me. He probably thinks he's proving a point. But he's not proving anything besides the fact that I haven't been fucked before and I'm finally willing to get laid.

“What are you waiting for?” I throw the question over my shoulder as I squirm eagerly. “I thought you were going to take something. Take it, then!”

I bet he doesn't fuck me. I bet he decides I'm too eager and does something else instead. That would be a pity, but I'd keep whatever value there is in so-called purity for a little while longer.

## **T** *horn*

She wants my cock, but I can already tell by how tight the entrance of her sex is that she is not ready for it. I find myself wondering if she wants sex, or if she just wants pain. There's something twisted about this human female, something even wilder than the local forest primal — and she's a beast older than time itself who follows nothing but pure, base instinct.

Whether she wants pain or not, I know she needs punishment. Surrounded by the remnants of one of my territory's oldest watering holes, I decide to slow down just a little. Long enough to give her what she truly deserves.

“Feisty little human brat,” I growl, pinning her in place and swatting her cheeks with the palm of my hand. I need to be careful not to hurt her, but this part of her body is very padded. When my palm meets it with a swift slap rather than a hard blow, I see her cheeks bounce and almost immediately turn pink.

She lets out a sound that is not a wail of despair or pain, but instead a giggle of amusement. Does she find this funny? Does

she feel no pain as well as no obvious fear? I doubt it. Such a creature would present never-ending danger to itself.

“You are in my territory now,” I tell her, swatting her again, watching that delicious bounce and lovely pink hue deepening. “And you will obey me in all things. You will make amends for the damage you have done here. You will...”

“Oh my god, shut up,” she laughs again.

I am not getting through to this obstinate creature. But that does not mean I intend to give up. She will submit to me before I fuck her. She will beg for my cock through tears of contrition. My hand is not the only thing that can be used. I happen to have on my person a saurian switch. This is a leathery piece of a native species of cane, about a foot and a half long. I carry it more as a symbol of my station than anything. I very rarely have any reason to correct someone tender enough to be affected by its bite. It is made to be felt through a saurian’s rough scales. This human will certainly feel it on her soft, bare flesh.

Pulling it from the snug little holster at my side, I cut the air with it, making the switch sing. If she knows what is coming from the sound, she does not react. She stays where she is, unable to get up, unable to directly defy me, trapped in place, waiting for a kind of treatment she has clearly needed and deserved for a very long time.

“Let’s see if you laugh now, little human,” I growl, before swinging the switch down across her cheeks, finding the very center of her pertly exposed rounds.

SNAP!

“Ow!”

I see a very satisfying pink line appear immediately, along with an even more satisfying gasp of pain.

“So you are capable of feeling something,” I say. “Perhaps if you had tried the path of contrition before this moment, you might not now be suffering as you are.”

I repeat the treatment, laying another line underneath the first. Every fibre of my being wants to fuck this human, but I have

to have her in the right mental position first. I will not wrestle with a smirking, smug, resistant mate. I will force her submission, make her find the part of herself that is soft, and willing, and ready to give into the bond of mating.

“Monster!” she curses.

“Yes. Of course. But more than a monster, I am alpha. I am master. I am the one who is always obeyed.”

I punctuate each of these revelations with another one of those harsh swishes. I am barely putting any strength into this. The implement does most of the work, creating raised red lines across the entirety of her cheeks from top to bottom, all the way down to the tops of her thighs. Once begun, the punishment has its own momentum. She soaks it up the same way a desert soaks up rain, complaining at first, but then beginning to gasp and cry out and moan. I notice that none of this is doing anything to make her arousal abate. If anything, the tender flesh between her thighs that I already felt squirming on the head of my cock is now even more engorged and puffy, gleaming with wet human need. I was right to follow my instinct.

Putting the lash down before I start drawing blood, I flip her over on the countertop and spread her legs wide, inspecting the fresh, soft territory I am about to claim. She looks up at me with those big, round eyes, with just a hint of gleaming moisture absolutely radiating desire. Her face is flushed, and her hips are still performing that repetitive gyration, lifting her sex to me over and over in a constant invitation.

I take that invitation gladly, surging into her with a single powerful thrust. That little part of her that put up some resistance to begin with breaks away in an instant. I see a slight wince, but nothing more as her mouth falls open in an expression of erotic shock.

“You’ve been a very bad girl,” I growl as I slide my cock back out of her. It emerges gleaming, my scales catching the light in a new way as she coats me with her need. She feels incredible. She feels like she was made for me, like her body was created as a hot, tight, wet, and yielding vessel for my desire.

I thrust and thrust again, drawing her back on my cock every time, using her, claiming her. Punishing her. Giving her everything she deserves and taking every bit of her. This is mating like no other. This is an intense, primal, immediate bond forged in flesh.

I have fucked many females before this moment and never felt this level of connection before. The way I feel while joined with this human who I do not know is transcendent. There are stars fusing somewhere inside the pair of us. Destiny is being realized.

I look down at the human woman writhing on my saurian rod, making sounds of pure ecstasy as her greedy hips buck and search for even more sensation.

Does she feel it? Does she understand what this means?

*Sullivan*

My ass is sore, my head is spinning, and I am feeling the closest thing to shame I have felt in a long time. The big, clawed hands gripping my hips and keeping me in place for this punishment fucking are impossible to escape even if I wanted to — and yet I find myself eagerly surrendering to this overwhelming sexual contest. He is driving me mad. He is filling me with so much energy and so much pleasure it feels like my brain can barely function through it.

“You’re mine,” he growls down at me. “My mate. My owned little human thing. You belong to me now.”

He doesn’t even know my name, but with every snarled declaration of possession, I feel the passion overtaking me even more, running through my body, erasing all other feelings, all other thoughts. Everything in the universe disappears besides him.

He makes it metaphysical, and then he makes it very physical again.

“Little pink bud,” he rumbles, the pad of his thumb extending from his grip to brush over my clit, which has been betrayed

by my lips and now stands proud, a small, but ever-so-sensitive little nub vulnerable to his attentions.

My hips try to buck in response, but there is no escape. I have to take his fucking, and I have to take his teasing, and I have to experience the orgasm that is fast rising through my body, being ripped from the grip of every single one of my reluctant nerves. I don't want to —

I am coming. Hard. I am writhing and I am begging and pleasure is flooding my body, overwhelming every bit of my... oh my god. Oh my fucking god. Something else is happening too. Another feeling. A dark sensation of dread is rising through me, mixing with the pleasure so much that at first I don't know what the hell is happening. It has been far too long since I felt this sensation. It makes my fingers and toes tingle, makes my breath come shorter and faster, narrows my vision and makes me hyper-aware of every bit of my body.

Fear.

I cannot be afraid.

And yet I am.

I am terrified, and yet I am caught in the flow of intense pleasure that must be overloading my mind and somehow interfering with the function of the implant. Fear makes the hotness hotter. Fear makes the pleasure more pleasurable. Fear makes me scream out, grabbing this massive alien beast as if my very life and sanity depended on it.

I need him. I need him to finish this incredible, terrible, perfect experience. I am on a roller-coaster, shrieking and wailing and grinding my soaked pussy on his massive alien cock, my lips distended around his glistening wet scales

“Yes,” he snarls down at me. “Take this, human. Take this cock of mine deep inside you. You thought you could steal from me? Nobody steals from me. Nobody crosses me. I am the alpha of this territory. I am the law. I am life and I am death and you are a trespasser who has earned my ire.”

I don't know if he means his words to be so unspeakably arousing, but with every threat I feel the little thrills spiking

through my body, making the intensity and proximity of orgasm spike too.

I come on his cock with a force like I never knew was possible. I feel him deep inside me, the head of his alien rod pulsing as his seed enters my body, his essence flooding me, causing all manner of reactions deep inside my pussy. I can feel the chemistry of our bonding, his fluids meeting mine. I look up and see that my hands are gripping his scaled arms as if my life itself depends on him. I look up into his eyes and I see no mercy there. I see perfect possession. He is looking at me as if he owns me, every bit of me, as if some unspoken, biological contract has been signed in his seed.

The orgasm wanes, as does that strange tinge of fear that came with it. I am covered in sweat. My limbs are trembling. My breath is coming in short little gasps that slowly start to draw deeper and come slower as the absolute cacophony of sensation starts to abate.

He pulls free of me, and I feel my lips gripping every sliding inch of him as he takes his leave of my body, somehow taking something of me with him. He slumps down against the side of the bar, taking me with him. I am pulled against his chest in an unexpected embrace, though I think it is more of a possessive clench. He looks tired. His eyes are half-closed, the thick, long mane of his hair spread out half on the floor, half-over his muscular shoulder. His chest rises and falls slowly.

I lie there with him, recovering from what I could not begin to call lovemaking. That was not lovemaking. That was rutting. That was mating. That was claiming. I think I will feel him inside me for a very, very long time. Maybe forever.

It is tempting to fall asleep with him. I could curl up beside his big frame and be soft for a moment, allow myself to experience the sheltering sensation of being in the presence of a bigger, stronger, more powerful male. I could surrender and let him take me captive in any way he chooses.

But as my mind settles, and my true nature begins to reassert herself, I know what I have to do. He might have held me down and fucked me until my brain malfunctioned, but I am

still Sullivan O'Shannassay. I am still the most infamous female pirate of the Pleiades. And I will not be brought to anything resembling justice through even the most intense carnal experience.

I force myself to slip out of his embrace, missing his heat almost immediately. He grunts softly, still absolutely passed out. I wonder if it might have been a long time since he came that way. There's something about his reaction that makes me think he has not fucked a female in a very long time. I wonder how that is, that an alpha with his looks, stature, and clear virility has not found a mate.

There's no time to waste figuring out his life story, though. I have a bike to steal.



### 3 HELLO, PRIMAL

**T**horn

I hear the engine of my cruiser fire, the throttle wide open as the wheels grip the rough road. The roar of my beast is one I'd know anywhere — though usually I'd be hearing it from astride the machine.

I realize in that instant I let myself succumb to post-orgasmic tiredness, and that the human has taken full advantage of my only moment of weakness. As much as I thought I had punished and subdued her, she had not submitted one little bit. She took the pleasure I gave her, came like a woman possessed, and now she is stealing my prized possession.

Leaping to my feet and rushing to the door, I see reflected light glinting off the light tints in the human's curling hair as she speeds into the distance.

Fury rushes through me, but to my surprise, it is a laugh, not a growl that escapes my lips. I will hunt this little human down, and I will bring her to rough and painful justice. My cock will fill each and every one of her impudent human holes. I will make her scream. I will make her beg. I will make her *sorry*.



**T**he bike has a tracker on it, of course. It has never been activated before because nobody has ever been reckless and stupid enough to take it. Unfortunately, the tracker is absolutely no good to me in a situation like this. I'm going to

have to call this in. And that makes me even less impressed with the incredibly reckless human who has no idea what kind of wrath she just brought down on herself.

I may be without my bike, but I am not without resources. I initiate my mobile communicator and activate the first code on the list.

It takes a long moment before the call is answered, and when it is, I hear a muffled shriek in the background.

“Avel?”

“Here, Thorn.” His voice comes on, gruff and close, and if I am not mistaken, annoyed. Not at me, but at someone or something else.

“Can you bring a contingent out here to the Ground Bar?”

He grunts and I hear the sound of leather snapping in the background, followed by a small, short cry. I’ve interrupted him.

“I saw that alert. Something going down?”

“You could say that.”

Another snap of leather. Another cry from some poor unfortunate in the background. I hear Avel grunt with satisfaction before he responds to me.

“You need me now.”

It’s not really a question, but I confirm his statement nonetheless.

“Yes.”

One hard, harsh CRACK emanates across the connection. I hear another cry, this time followed by a burst of tears. Someone has just been saved from a probably well-deserved beating. I regret that, but I need my right-hand man right now. I may need several of them, but for now, I only need one who I trust knowing what just happened. The mockery that would ensue if a wider audience knew I had been taken for a fool would be intolerable, and the actions that I would have to take to restore my reputation would be deeply unpleasant.

“I’m on my way.”



I have straightened my clothing and washed up a little by the time Avel finds me outside the Ground Bar. His arrival is heralded when a shadow passes overhead, large wings spread out under the moonlight. It is the sort of shadow that makes small creatures run for cover and sends dread spearing through the hearts of the weak and deplorable. The shadow grows larger and larger still as he wheels toward the ground, landing heavily before me, his wings and weight creating a puff of dust as he makes his entrance.

Avel and I share similarly long hair, though his hue and heritage is very different from mine, as are his physical capacities. For starters, and most obviously — he can fly. His purple leathery wings fold up and away behind his back as he turns to face the remnants of what used to be the best outlaw watering hole in my territory.

“By the gods...” He lets out a long, low whistle that I know indicates he is impressed by what he sees. He turns to me with an impressed expression. “Did a primal go rogue?”

“A human did this.”

His brows rise, scales shifting to allow a greater expression of surprise in his golden gaze. “A human. Are you telling me the humans have come with their armies and weapons and attacked a remote bar?”

“I’m telling you one human female did this somehow. I don’t know what happened to the wall, the window, or the patrons. She giggled when I asked her and told me if I was unlucky I would find out.”

Again, looks surprised. “And you allowed that response? In a human? They’re edible, you know.”

“They’re more than edible. This one was exceptionally fuckable.”

Avel throws back his head and laughs. “Did all this destruction happen before or after that?”

“Before.”

“Humans are the species that stand around six feet and have no sharp fangs, no claws, no talons, no flight capabilities, and no natural armoring, correct? I am thinking of the right species?”

“Yes,” I confirm. I could add that they are also very hot, tight, and wet when they are fucked, but there are some details of the entire escapade I wish to keep to myself. And then there are others that I will have to unfortunately share.

“Where is she? Do you have her tied up somewhere? Or did she not survive the mating, Thorn, you animal!”

“She more than survived. She stole my bike.”

Avel’s eyes widen. “How did that happen? Did she pull a weapon on you?”

“I was... a little indisposed.”

“What does that mean?”

I don’t like that he is asking so many questions. I like that I am being evasive even less. I have been made a fool of, and though I know I can trust him with any secret, it still pains me to have to make these admissions. This is what the human has done to me. She has made me appear foolish.

There’s a short pause as he does the mathematics on all I have told him, sparing me the trouble of having to spell out in plain words that I allowed myself a moment of repose following my punishment of the human.

“You fucked a human and she stole your bike?” He laughs and then stops laughing almost immediately when he sees the expression on my face. “We’ll get it back. Don’t worry. I doubt a human could hope to control the thing anyway. I’m amazed she got it started. It’s like hearing that a primal one moved into a city apartment. Doesn’t seem right.”

“Humans are almost as intelligent as we are,” I tell him. “She’s highly devious, and it is clear she outplayed the entire patronage of this bar. We do need to be careful. Humans

always have their tricks and tools up their sleeves, and she has a whole suit of them.”

I should have stripped that suit off her completely. I should have peeled it from her body and left her entirely vulnerable. But I was not thinking practically. My mind was in the rut state, and nothing mattered besides having my cock deep inside her pussy.

I grip the bike’s tracker and push it into Avel’s hand. “You have the aerial advantage. She’s had a head start, but the roads are rough, and she went into the wilds, not toward the city. So there is a real chance she’s already lost control.”

Saying that gives me a pang of concern. I want to say it is for the bike, but the idea of the human coming off it does not give me pleasure, even if there’s some kind of natural justice in it. I felt how tender she was beneath my fingers. Her will is strong, but her body is weak, and the forces my bike generates could easily kill her.

I often lament my lack of wings. I have become alpha of this territory through a fearsome reputation and the ability to stay several steps ahead of the competition, but wings would be useful. Avel’s ability to spot a target and swoop down on them is unrivaled.

“You want a ride?” Avel turns his back to me, offering himself as my mount. It’s a kind gesture, but even if I could fit on his back, which I couldn’t because I am huge and would not only interfere with his wings, but weigh him down terribly, there are other concerns with such an action.

Avel’s lineage was once used as flight slaves. They were bred for strength and size, kept in chains, forced to wear bits, and often ridden into battle. Their riders would be armored, but they would not. There are so very many depictions of past battles with aerosaurians tumbling from the skies mortally wounded. For him to offer me his back as a friend is a gesture of the deepest caring, and I’d only take the offer if it was a matter of true life and death — which this is not.

“I will follow you on foot.”

“Very well.”

“Oh, and Avel?”

“Yes?”

“If you do catch her, save the human for me. She’s not to be hurt. I want to deal with her myself. I’m taking her in.”

He nods, understanding that what will happen to anybody who dares take what’s mine is going to suffer. This will not be over quickly. This human will be brought to justice, saurian style. Assuming she is not terribly injured, I will have to make an example of her, before Avel for having stolen my machine, and before others for the damage done to the bar.

“I’ll find her,” Avel says, his wings unfolding with a dramatic FWOMP sound, creating fresh gusts as they beat against the air. In an instant, he is up above the ground, looking for the troublesome human who has caused all this chaos.

*Sullivan*

*Brrrrmmmmm brrmmmmmm...*

I am literally having the absolute best time. I’ve ridden a lot of motorbike type machines in my time. The wheel is a universal invention. Pretty much everywhere discovered it pretty much at the same time in their developmental cycles, as far as I can tell. Every planet I’ve ever been on, there’ve been wheelbarrows and motorbikes and cars. They might not all call them the same things, but they’re all the same things. What differs between planets is how cool they are. This is a very, very cool bike. It’s been made to look like its owner, with fiery red scaling patterns.

It’s powerful too. I can feel it wrenching against my grip every time I open the throttle or hit a little bump in the road. It’d be safer to slow down, but I’m not consumed with safety right now. It hasn’t been that kind of a day.

I can feel the ache between my thighs, the undeniable feeling of having been very well fucked. He felt so damn hot inside me. So damn good. The orgasm was absolutely unbelievable

too. I feel as though I can still feel it rumbling through me with the thrumming of Thorn's bike. That's why I keep revving it, letting the roar of the engine carry through the night.

It is really starting to get very dark now, and the road really sucks, but the machine has good lighting. A front facing headlight illuminates my path ahead, and a reddish downlight places me in the middle of what feels like a halo of aggressive passion. I'm small on this bike, but I can imagine what a sight Thorn must be when he rides it.

He's going to kill me if he catches me, I'm sure of that. The glimpse I got of his face as I rode away was almost enough to... scare me.

There's something about that saurian alpha that gives me real pause. When he was inside me, fucking me, punishing me with his cock for all my little human trespasses on his territory, I started to feel little quivers of emotion I haven't felt in a long time. Softer feelings, and harder ones too. It almost felt like he fucked the chip out of place, which doesn't make sense. That's in my head. It's not accessible via my pussy.

Whatever the hell went on when we fucked, I know it can't happen again. I felt more than his desire. I felt his need to possess me. He wasn't just going to take me and use me and let me go. He was going to capture me. A pirate knows these things. These are instincts I've honed over a very long period of time. You've got to know who is a mark, who is a threat, and who is a potential end of everything. Thorn is one of the universe's rare full stops. He could put an end to my ways for good, and that will not do. I'd say it terrifies me, but that's not possible.

These thoughts make for concerning distractions, and I can't afford to be distracted right now. The way this bike is moving is starting to get rough, jolting over uneven ground as the track stops even pretending to be paved and instead turns to straight up dirt and rock. This is not terrain made for vehicles. These are animal tracks. And I hate to admit it to myself, but this means I've gone the wrong way.

I need to get to civilization, not ride out into the wild. I need a ship. I need a crew. I need a lot of things I've lost lately, and none of them are going to be found rocketing through increasingly dense foliage.

Slowing the bike, I endeavor to make a turn. But there's not exactly a lot of space here, and the same massive mechanical beast that seems so impressive and powerful at full speed, turns into a big, lumbering, and damn-near-impossible-for-me-to-manuever metal rock when it is idling. It doesn't help that my feet don't actually reach the ground from the seat, so I have to get off and push and...

THUD

Something makes the ground shake beneath the force of its bulk.

THUD

These are not sounds. These are feelings. Vibrations running through me. There are sounds too though. I can hear large trees being snapped like twigs. I can hear birds screeching and wheeling into the sky. Something very, very large is coming toward me. Not at a run, but at a saunter that is somehow faster than I could ever hope to move. It's too big to escape. It's too late for me to run. There's no outrunning something this massive.

I freeze.

I might not feel fear, but I still have basic survival instincts, and right now every single one of them is telling me to Stop. Fucking. Moving.

This entire planet is making me feel as my ancestors must have felt an impossibly long time ago. Once upon a time people were prey to pretty much every animal on ancient Earth. Here, I feel much the same. The little mammal in the middle of my brain is crouched, alert, and helping me survive.

There are only two more thudding impacts before this force of nature is upon me. Each one of them is louder than the last, and by the time it is atop me, the shaking and the cracking of ground and foliage fills my ears to the exclusion of all other



sounds. It is though the world is ending and beginning all at once. Even if I could feel fear, I think I would be too overwhelmed to process it. This is one of those events in life where one forgets about oneself and is instead entirely overwhelmed by that which is happening instead.

It's not an animal. It's an event.

A truly leviathan scaled creature standing at least forty feet tall is standing over me, head as big as a small shuttle swinging back and forth, scanning the area. It senses something, because it has stopped moving entirely.

Three moons have risen since the sun set, and the silvery light from those triple orbs reflects and bounces around the landscape in ways that illuminate this creature all too well. Even at this relatively great distance from my head to its head, I can see that the jaws are powerful. The teeth seem to be longer than I am.

A little worm of logic tells me that there is no way a massive predator like the one above me feeds on creatures my size. It looks like it is made to kill creatures far, far larger. I tell myself I'm like a fly to this thing. It doesn't want me. It's just passing through.

I hear the bushes behind me being crushed by its tail swinging as the leviathan lowers its head. I feel a fetid breeze blow across me from nostrils practically large enough for me to crawl up onto. Then the air is sucked up around me, little pieces of leaf and stick being drawn up with the dust around me. My hair flows up with the breath too, and I know that a few of my particles are making their way into the beast. There is a brief snort, a shower of dinosaur snot raining around me as the beast attempts to work out what is happening beneath its nose. I know I stand out among the typical scents for this planet, and that is going to make any animal curious.

I hunker down next to the bike, hoping its scent will cover mine. It has to smell like saurian alpha and hot oil. This is the most tense of moments, in which literal death hangs mere inches above my head. One little snap of monstrous jaws and that is the end of me.

There's a grunt. A grunt that sounds like the universe itself trying to work out a problem. And then the jaws open, and heat rushes out around me, the wetness of the interior of something that wants to eat me.

There's a snap, and the beast grabs the seat of the bike and its handlebars, and crunches them both, sharp teeth going right through the metal and mechanical bits and pieces like a hot knife through cotton candy. There's a small snacking sound as it tests what it put in its mouth.

*Pthlew!*

It spits out little bits of bike, twisted metal shrapnel dropping around me in a heavy but languid rain.

Then the ground creaks, the animal lifts its foot, and it moves on, one, two big strides taking it away from me as it continues its hunt through the night. The bike and I were nothing but a passing curiosity to the leviathan.

In a matter of minutes, the creature is gone, heavy footsteps receding into the distance. I look at what remains of the bike. The poor thing is bleeding heavy black and green liquid. The seat is missing. The handlebars and steering column are gone.

**T** *horn*

Following Avel is possible because he does a good job of going just high enough to stay in my field of view.

I am at a sprint, moving through the forest at high speed. It feels good to move my body this way, to be on the hunt. My size can make it seem as though I might not be capable of much in the way of haste, but that is an illusion. I was made to hunt, and that means I was made to chase. Running turns some of the fury at having been robbed out of my blood, and reminds me how satisfying it is to move under my own power. I am not as fast as my bike, but I am faster than most.

Ahead of me, I see Avel start wheeling around, signaling he has found something. When I wave to indicate I've seen him, he puts his wings back and swoops down in a dive. I wonder if

he has caught the human. She deserves to be snatched up by him, though I do feel a pang of something like possession and jealousy at the very idea of her being touched by anyone else.

Seeing him disappear gives me an extra boost of motivation and speed. I reach the place he landed within minutes, amped by the process of catching the human again.

When I arrive, Avel is standing in the middle of a narrow path, his wings extended slightly as if to obscure what is behind him.

“Bad news,” he says as I approach.

“Did the human get herself killed?”

“Worse.”

“Worse?”

For a moment, I don't know what could be considered worse, and then I see them. The mangled remains of my bike laying in a roadside clearing made not by any technological means, but with the downed trees and crushed underbrush that is the unmistakable mark of the passing of a primal.

Avel is standing solemnly in the clearing, his wings now wrapped forward around him. True primals are rare now. Sightings of them are uncommon even from the sky, and actual interactions with the beasts themselves are so remarkable that scholars will develop entire careers based on one fleeting moment.

There is something about the human that makes me feel as though I should not be surprised to discover yet another scene of impossible chaos. My poor bike is destroyed. No amount of restoration is going to put that back together. It's ruined. An hour or two ago, if someone had told me my bike was going to be primal chow and end up in ten thousand pieces, I would have felt my body absolutely flood with rage.

For reasons I don't dare to begin to explore, I find myself slightly more worried about where the human is than what state my bike is in.

“She was here.”

“She was here,” he confirms.

That means the human has enjoyed an honor she will not understand, and she has destroyed something very precious to me, an act I also am beginning to doubt she has any capacity to understand. She seems to be of the type and mind to simply blunder through life without appreciating any of the treasures she destroys along the way.

My desire to catch her is only growing. She needs to be brought to justice. She needs to be taught a lesson. And she needs to make amends for what she has done within a matter of hours in my territory. This kind of chaos and destruction will not go unpunished.

“She can’t have gotten far.”

“Hard to say. She might be in the digestive tract of a primal one by now, in which case she could be miles away.”

Avel is being practical, but he’s not seeing the clues that strongly indicate her survival.

“There’s no sign of blood.”

“There wouldn’t be. She’d be less than a mouthful for a primal.”

“But there’s plenty of metal shrapnel from the bike here. It would be bloodied. There would be chunks of flesh, bone, and hair. She escaped. I’m sure of it. And she’s probably close.”

“We could bring in the hounds. Track her down.”

“We could. Or we could look around a little. If I’d just seen my first primal, I’d be heading back toward civilization, following the track I knew at least led somewhere. Odds are, we’ve already passed her.”

We turn around in time to see bushes rustling at the side of the track a few hundred feet away.

“There,” I say. “That’s her.”

“Thorn...”

I don’t hear Avel. I am too busy rushing to claim the human I intend on capturing and dragging back home to impart long,

hard, hot justice.

I dive into the bushes, wrap my arm around the solid beast I find within.... And drag a small, very confused raptor out. It kicks and flails, powerful back legs replete with claws six inches long, each and every one of them as long and as dangerous as a machete. A sharp-toothed skull flails back against my chest and neck, just barely missing my jaw.

“Let it go!”

Somewhere in the midst of my mind, Avel’s shout makes it through the fog of chaos and makes enough sense for me to realize that would be a very good idea. Fortunately, it is more scared of me than I am of it, and the second I release my hold, it is up and bounding back for the safety of the undergrowth.

“That was bigger than she was. And had a lot more teeth.”

“I’m sorry if you wanted to recapture the human, but the odds something hasn’t already eaten her are low. Do you want to get the trackers out here? They might pick up her scent. Or what is left of it.”

Avel remains convinced that no human could possibly survive the primal wilds. I think differently. I feel her. I can taste her on the wind. I can smell her scent. She is either close by, or so far under my skin I cannot tell where I end and her absence begins.

“I want every inch of this jungle searched until we find either her or her remains.”

*Sullivan*

Yikes. I’ve really pissed this guy off.

The snarl in his voice as he declares me the object of his obsession is intense. He did also just save my life, however, because that fucking thing he just yanked out of the bushes was one lunge away from ripping my abdomen open and turning me into a soft and bloodied feast of innards for the wildlife.

Someone somewhere is looking after me. They have to be. I've had three near-death experiences in the last three hours. Or maybe it's just luck. But the thing about luck is that it always runs out in the end, one way or another.

I can actually see him, a flash of fire-red scales visible through the undergrowth. It is the strangest thing, but there is an impulse to go to him and to seek safety with him, though I know he is the most dangerous creature I have encountered so far. That massive dinosaur that smashed the bike to a thousand pieces might have swallowed me whole, but it would never have taken me apart the way I suspect this much more sentient and intelligent man-like creature wants to.

I wonder if the fact that his scent is all over me is helping disguise me from him. I would not smell like anything else in this world. That is what is bringing out all kinds of wildlife, I think. When I look down at my feet, there is a small flurry of creatures, small lizards, bugs, even something that looks faintly mammalian with thick, dense fur investigating me. This planet is curious about me and is sending out every little living sensor it has to test and taste and experience me.

*Thorn*

"I'll fly back and rally the guard," Avel says. "And I'll have them bring your spare bike. Don't worry. We'll ensure whatever is left of that human is captured."

He takes off, and I know that I won't see anybody for a good while. The hour is late, and they will be sleeping in their beds which means Avel will have to wake them all up if they are to come to my aid. It is my intention to finish the hunt before he returns with anybody else. I want to be triumphant. I want to capture this female and I want to start her punishment as quickly as possible. Never before in all my days as alpha have I ever suffered such repeated humiliations. Each and every one of them will be visited on the human soon enough. She will pay. But before she can pay, I'll have to catch her.

"I know you're here," I growl the words to the quiet undergrowth. "I can sense you. Come out, and I might spare you the worst of the punishment you have earned yourself."

If she is as close as I think she is, she won't dare move at first, but eventually she will have to. She will get uncomfortable. She will get scared.

All I have to do is flush her out.

I step into the undergrowth and start moving through it, carefully, but loudly. I want anything wild to hear me coming, and I want to ensure my human prey is suitably scared. I can sound like a beast when I want to. I can growl and I can snarl and I can make threats that would cause a primal to panic.

“Come out, little human. If I have to catch you, you know what will happen. I'll impale each and every one of your hungry holes on my cock, use you for my pleasure, and leave you flooded with my seed.”

I push over a small tree.

“I'll fill you up. I'll make you sore. I'll make you sorry. I'll make you come the way you did once before, and I'll make you feel that fear you were so terrified of. That's right, little human. I saw what happened to you. I felt it too. I don't know what you have going on inside you, but I will know soon enough when I take you apart.”

## *Sullivan*

He sounds mad. Real mad. That makes a devious smile spread over my face. I like making big, mean men mad. The sheer joy of knowing I've made his life hard really makes up for the fact I was almost eaten by what frankly came across as a featherless chicken with a homicidal streak. This planet is wild, and I know there's a chance I won't survive it. I might not even survive the next two minutes. That just means I'm basking in it while I can.

Every new threat he makes is a little worse, and every time he makes a new one, I have to clap my hands over my mouth to stop myself from giggling out loud. Excitement is rushing through me, tingling across my scalp and making all the joints in my toes and fingers feel fizzy.

I can feel his seed dried between the suit and my thighs. My pussy is still dripping with his last load, or maybe it is fresh arousal at how incredibly exciting this new game is.

“Isn’t this fun?” I laugh in his face.

He gives me a little shake by the scruff of my neck, handling me like a kitten who won’t stop biting. “Fun!?” He asks the question in an outraged tone. “What’s fun about this?”

“Everything,” I laugh.

He looks confused, and then outraged, and then confused again. Then I see a little glimmer in his eyes, and a slight turning up of the corners of his mouth.

“I suppose this could be considered fun,” he says. “If you were an unrepentant criminal intent on causing the most chaos possible.”

“Oh, can I use that quote in my professional material?” I laugh.

I can’t help it. I know that this sort of thing drives men absolutely insane. It’s enough to make them kill you, or try to.

But the alien doesn’t try to kill me. He doesn’t seem to get any angrier. If anything, I see a cooling in his gaze as he takes hold of his temper. That is sexy. It’s one thing to be a massive saurian alien with the capacity to destroy me outright. It’s something else for all that power to be so very well contained.

“What’s your name?” He snarls the question at me.

“Sullivan. And yours is Thorn.”

“Sir to you.”

“Sirtoyou? Alright. If that’s what you want to be called, Sirtoyou.”

I am absolutely giddy with the energy that comes from defying someone much more powerful than I am. I adore this dynamic, and I get to indulge it so rarely, because usually this would be a kill-on-sight situation. Most of my enemies have to be avoided if I want to stay alive. But not this one. This one picks me up and holds me and fucks me and makes me feel things I



haven't felt in years. I find myself squirming in his grasp, grinning with glee.

“This is not the time to give me backtalk,” he says. “This is the time to start respecting me, before you end up in pain of the kind you will certainly not recover from.”

This would probably be a good time to stop laughing, but I physically cannot. The more he threatens me, the more mirth takes me until finally he grunts and simply tucks me under his arm, carrying me off into the night.

## 4 MANY DARING ESCAPES

**T**horn

I've got her. I've got her and she is absolutely not getting away again. I have no intention of letting her out of my grip until I have her securely in a cage. This human is going to find herself so captive she will forget what freedom is.

She is still giggling as I haul her back toward the bar. I am also in a good mood, as I am now able to contact Avel and let him know I have emerged triumphant.

"Avel, I have the human. Meet me at the bar, no contingent needed, just transport. Something with the capacity to lock. This creature needs containment."

I put my communicator away and use my now free hand to smack her ass hard. Her backside is facing toward my front, which gives me plenty of access to her rear. It occurs instantly to me that there's no point smacking her suit. That thing protects her from all manner of consequences. I rip the rear panel down, exposing her cheeks and her gleaming, curvy inner thighs which are both streaked with the remnants of our coupling. She is wearing my seed, and that revelation gives me a pulse of fresh arousal.

"Isn't that right?" I snarl the question down at her, smacking her ass hard to make a pink flash rise across her cheeks. "You need to be kept caged."

"You can try," she laughs. "Many have tried before you. Many have failed."

Her impertinent, absolutely unrepentant responses lead to a dozen more hard smacks, all delivered to her bare cheeks. I have to be so careful when punishing her, but punished she must be. I have always enjoyed the element of control around being the alpha of my territory. Punishment is a saurian way of life. How else are we to maintain order in large groups of territorial, powerful creatures? I have dominated far more deviant and rebellious creatures than her in my lifetime, I am almost certain of it.

Every time my palm lands on her deserving rear, she lets out a little yelp, followed by another laugh or giggle.

“When I get you back to my den, I will punish you in a way that you will not be able to laugh at,” I growl at her.

Her response is to laugh harder, so much harder that I can feel her flexing and squirming against my arm, the muscles of her belly deployed in the expression of her rebellious mirth.

I have to admit, there is some admiration in me at how she manages to maintain this level of resistance. There is a joy to this human, Sullivan. What a formal name for such a wild little thing. I do not think I would call her that name, if I were to call her anything other than my captive.

“You have destroyed my personal possessions, you have somehow obliterated an entire bar. I do not know what happened to the patrons, but I suspect nothing good. You are worse than a criminal. You are a living, breathing disruption.”

“I’m a pirate.”

Pirate. A term used for the most vicious, dangerous, and mercenary creatures in the universe. She might be claiming the title for herself, but she clearly has no other crew members. She is alone on my world.

“You’re not a pirate anymore. Not now that you’re in my possession. Now you’re nothing but a very bad little girl.”

*Sullivan*

Oh god. There's something about the way he calls me a very bad little girl that turns me the hell on. It might be because he's almost right. I am a fearsome pirate, even tucked away under his arm, but compared to him, I suppose I am little. He is huge, not as huge as some creatures on this world, but pretty damn large compared to me.

I am very much enjoying myself still, even with my ass stinging. I actually, against all odds, feel much safer tucked away under his arm than I did roaming the wilds by myself.

"That big dinosaur," I say. "The one that ate your bike. What was that?"

"We call them primals. They are ancient, and many regard them as our ancestors. Still others regard them as living gods. This is a planet unlike many. We have not lost our history. It moves around us. It connects us to what was and informs what will be."

I did not expect to have another rush of arousal when he explained the big fuck-off lizard, but damn, do I feel a whole new kind of attraction hearing him speak calmly and informatively for the first time. This is a guy who knows his shit, and someone who cares too.

"You were fortunate to survive an encounter with one," he says. "Few of us are ever so close to one. There may only be three in this area, and the territory is vast. They generally avoid civilized, built-up areas."

"That's good, because one of those things could flatten a building and not even notice."

"Yes. We use shielding to ward them off most of the time, but in the past there were a few regrettable incidents in which it was not so. Damage was done, to both primals and our own species."

He likes talking, I realize. He's clearly enjoying the process of educating me, even though I remain under his arm with my pants down. At about the same time I realize that, I think he comes to the same conclusion, because I get three swift, hard smacks across both of my naked, sensitive cheeks.

“Don’t think you’ll talk your way out of this, Suli.”

He’s shortened my name, and there’s no way he could know, but the shortened version he’s hit on is the very same pet name my father used to use for me. He’s even hit on a phrase my father would have used once a very long time ago.

I feel myself going soft and even a little still in his arms in response, as he somehow instinctively plays with the little pre-installed buttons in my mind.

“That’s right,” he says. “You’re in a proper kind of trouble now. Just wait until I get you home. That’s when we’ll start addressing your rampage through my territory properly.”

*Thorn*

She feels a lot more subdued now. Maybe she has finally run out of energy to resist. Or maybe she has simply decided to conserve it. Regardless, we are almost at the rendezvous point. I will feel better when I have her behind at least a couple of locks.

On the final approach to the Ground Bar, fate, or whatever the twisted version thereof exists around this human, intervenes again. There is a rustling to the left, a sort of awkward lumbering sound that usually indicates some kind of animal presence. I expect to see some kind of night predator mistaking us for easy prey.

A beast comes lumbering out of the undergrowth. I say creature, because it is as big as a small primal, but completely unrecognizable as anything belonging to this world. It has a massive, round maw, no discernible eyes, chunky little legs, and a smooth, large body which I can only describe as being made to devour things. I see bits of food around its mouth, hanging from some of the outer teeth which appear to have been partially dislodged. I see scales and pieces of clothing. This thing has been feasting on saurians and is now rippling with their flesh.

“You’re going to want to run,” the human under my arm giggles. “He can sense respiration and body heat. It’s not like

your movement-detecting beasts here. This thing knows you're alive and wants you inside him."

I am staring at the beast, which is now moving what passes for a head back and forth. It has no neck, so the entire front of it sways with the scanning motion. It catches our scent and rears back, small paws and sharp claws scratching at plain air for a moment before it slams to the ground and starts to charge.

I take Suli's advice. I run. The bar won't provide much in the way of shelter, I already know that. I've seen the way this thing treated its walls like nothing more than tissue paper. I'm not running for shelter. I'm running because I am the alpha of this land, and I know what happens next.

Somehow, it is gaining on us. That doesn't seem possible. It is like being chased at high speed by a very rotund caterpillar with a horrific maw where a mouth should be. I can hear Suli laughing with a certain manic edge. She should be screaming, or better, staying silent. The last thing anybody needs right now is more chaos, but I don't think she is capable of bringing anything else.

"It's going to get us!" she yells back to me. "It's getting really close!"

I do not waste energy replying. Instead, I run around the edge of the Ground Bar, hoping that the change of direction will be impossible for the creature to adjust to. It's a move to buy some time, and it doesn't work. Somehow that behemoth corners like my bike used to, maybe the short legs and the low center of gravity help that. At any rate, circling the Ground Bar only makes Suli shout all the more.

"What the hell are you doing!? Playing games!? This thing almost has my face off. Argh!"

I hear teeth snapping right behind me as I round the corner of the bar and head up and away.

"Is this creature of your doing?"

"Sort of?"

She manages to sound half-guilty even while nearly being eaten, and I know that somehow it is linked to her, even

though it makes absolutely no sense. She claims to have wrecked her ship, but now I have to wonder what else was on that ship when she wrecked it.

There's no real time to ask questions now, though. I decide to make a break for the city, though by the way this beast is giving chase it feels like outrunning it might not be possible. It is not acting like any creature of this world. It is acting like pure hunger made incarnate. Even primals don't act with this much sheer determination in the act of consumption.

**BOOM! BOOM! BOOM**

Just as it seems we are going to be overhauled by the alien abomination, light explodes out of the darkness as several large vehicles roll up over the ridge. Photonic energy bolts arc all around us as my soldiers open fire on the beast. White and gold energy snaps into the heavy white-gray flesh of the thing. The first hit lands and the creature stops dead, rearing back. It is followed by another volley of fire that further damages it, and prevents it from following us as I throw my bike into a sliding halt in front of the vehicle Avel is driving.

"It's good to see you," I say, speaking a pure dialect of understatement.

"I thought I should bring backup," Avel says dryly. "Seemed like things could get out of control."

"Yes. Things did. Especially this thing."

One of the vehicles has a metal cage on the back, expanded steel mesh allowing air to pass through. It is the sort of cage suitable for an animal.

I lightly toss her into the interior, which has been lined with hay. It's not exactly the sort of containment one would organize for a sentient creature, but I don't think Avel explained what they were trying to contain. Or maybe he decided a human is a beast like any other. He might be right on that front.

*S uli*

This tinny, shitty little cage is not going to keep me contained. I know that already. I don't know why Thorn hasn't had the presence of mind to take the suit off me as yet, but perhaps he is distracted. He and all his saurian underlings are standing around the remains of the Chaos Fish. One of them picks up a long stick and pokes at it, proving that no matter the world, or the life form, boys will... well.. probably try to poke something with a stick.

Meanwhile, I am digging out the smallest and most elegant of tiny thermite charges you have ever seen. It's just a sweet little capsule with two substances in separate compartments. When they're away from one another, they're completely inert. But put them together and something very special happens.

Specifically, 4500° F happens. All at once, very hot and very bright, and right in the locking mechanism. It is such a small amount it doesn't destroy me, but it absolutely decimates the lock and the cage as it drips down, and then it goes through the bed of the vehicle on its way to keep boring a hole into the dirt beneath until the reaction is over. The hay at the base of the door catches fire as the thermite glob moves past, but I stamp that out before it has a chance to really take light.

The door pops off, and I am free. I slip out of the cage, feeling very self satisfied. My plan, of course, is to take the car or whatever they'd call this large vehicle with big wheels and plenty of heavy plating. Whatever they're using to power these things, it must be in ample supply.

This vehicle is going to be much easier to drive than the bike was, probably. I won't be fighting the weight of it every time we come off-balance a little bit, and I'll be protected from most of the monsters that casually roam this world.

While Thorn and his men are still occupied with the unfortunate remains of the Chaos Fish, I climb into the driver's seat. I'm not going to be able to actually sit down to drive this thing. The distance between the pedals and the steering column is too far. One might think that alien vehicles would be hard, or perhaps even impossible to drive, but much like language has been standardized across sentient planets in a slow meme creep that took thousands of years, so too have



certain other technologies become familiarly standard and familiar. There are easy ways to do things, and hard ways to do things, and once someone develops a tech that makes things easier, it spreads. Tonight, this means the alien vehicle control scheme is familiar enough for me to take control.

They left the vehicle running, which also helps. So I put my feet on the pedals and my hands on the wheel and I set off at speed, doing a big spinning circle around the Chaos Fish and the befuddled saurians, each of whose faces is a perfect mask of shock and amazement. Except for Thorn. He's looking dead straight at me with an expression on his face that sends a chill down my spine. There's something so terribly exciting about defying someone truly dominant, someone you know will not let the matter rest, but will pursue you to the ends of his world, and perhaps many others as well. There is a determination in his gaze that is not reflected in the eyes of the others, a certain understanding, not only of what he is up against, but who he is up against.

It's funny. Some people can know you for a hundred years and never know you at all. And other people slash aliens can know you for an hour, hunt you down through a monster-infested jungle, and know you better than anybody else ever has.

I smile, wave, almost lose control of the vehicle, and then send it careening back toward what I figure must be civilization, given the road being much better in that direction.

They're running now, heading toward the other two vehicles. I don't know what the relative speed of these things is, but this is not my first high speed chase. Or low speed chase, for that matter. It's the second one today, though I expect this will be a little more exciting.

Behind me, they're leaping into the remaining vehicles and already moving. The road ahead is getting smoother and wider with every second. I have to put a significant amount of my weight on the accelerator to get it to move. It is calibrated to be driven by something a hell of a lot stronger than I am, not to mention much taller. Driving this thing is work, as is keeping it on the road.

The bike had more responsive steering, I quickly find. Driving this is like trying to race a tank while other, more maneuverable tanks give active chase. I let out a hysterical laugh as I almost run off the road entirely. Shit. I have to be more careful.

*T horn*

She's going to get herself killed. I can tell that right away. She has no control of the forty-tonne vehicle, and it has more power going to the wheels than a primal does in its hind legs. She's gotten away from me for a second time, and I don't know how the hell it happened. That woman has more tricks up her sleeve than I can keep up with.

I'm going to catch her, and when I catch her, I am not ever going to let her out of my sight. She's a danger to herself and everybody else, especially now as she overcorrects the steering and swerves from the right side of the road all the way over the the left. She needs to be stopped, and quickly.

"Hold on!" I shout to my crew as I push the truck to its limits.

The problem with trying to stop a moving vehicle is that it's a moving vehicle. It has momentum. And an insane driver behind the wheel. My hope is to pit her into heavy bushes, make her slow gradually, and hopefully bring her to a halt before the whole thing explodes in a ball of flame.

She swerves off the main road, which is a good thing. Getting her out of the path of oncoming vehicles is a priority. Now there's just convincing her to slow down. She'll run out of power eventually. That would be the best case scenario.

"Boss."

Trick is trying to get my attention, but I can't concentrate on anything besides staying on her tail. I can't lose her again, but she doesn't seem to care what she is doing. We could outpace her now with the erratic driving, but there's no way we can get around her with this dense bush without risking a serious crash or turnover.

“BOSS.”

Trick reaches over and taps my shoulder with an urgency.

“This is the gorge road.”

“Yeah?”

“It was washed out in the last rains.”

I have the sickening realization that he is absolutely right. There used to be a bridge over the gorge, which is really a crevasse. That bridge is now gone. Where the end once stood proud between two wood pillars, there is now nothing besides a crumbling rocky surface.

Suli sees it, but far too late. She is going way too fast. She'd need dozens of feet to stop that truck and she barely has ten before she sails off the edge of the cliff and into eternity.

She hits the brakes, but it's too late. She skids off the edge of the cliff, the momentum of her vehicle taking her over the edge as we scream to a halt just behind her, only barely avoiding the same fate ourselves.

A shadow of wings opens above me as Avel hurls himself into the abyss, his entire body pointed like an arrow as he folds his wings back and falls aggressively.

Peering over the edge, desperate to do something while being able to do absolutely nothing, I see Suli jump from the truck, her fragile human form cartwheeling through the air below us. That was the smartest thing she could have done, because it turns her from being an unstoppable object destined to be crushed on the river rock below into a ragdoll that can be caught.

Avel's arms extend a moment before his wings do. He snatches her from certain death, wrapping his limbs around her snugly and beating his wings hard enough to overcome the extra drag created by her falling weight.

A cheer goes up from the men and me as he soars easily back up to us, his hair flowing in the breeze made by his flight. Suli looks minorly inconvenienced by being wrapped up by him,

almost as if she'd been curious what she might find at the bottom of the crevasse.

"Yours," he says, tossing her into my arms like a particularly offensive burden he is glad to be rid of.

"Hi," she says, looking up at me with an absolutely irrepressible grin. Far from being terrified that she almost died, she looks completely pleased with herself.

"You're in trouble," I inform her.

"Boss, I *am* trouble," she says before passing out in my arms.

## 5 CAUGHT AND AFRAID

**S**ullivan

The second I wake up, I know I'm caught.

My suit is gone. Instead, I am dressed in what I can best describe as a kind of tunic slip dress. Something that feels like it was made very quickly to cover me when I was stripped. I bet they took that suit off me as soon as they could. It's what I would do if I was trying to capture me.

I'm in a small room with nothing besides a bed, though there are marks on the floor that suggest the space was furnished recently. It looks like things were taken out. Maybe to stop an occupant from getting herself into trouble. I get out of bed and go and try the door. It's locked, but it was worth having a look at. This doesn't feel like a prison. This feels like the worst room in a very fancy house, which means I can probably escape it given enough time.

First, I get my bearings by going to look out the window. Even this is a potential escape portal, come to think of it. For the moment, I just look at the city outside. Like a lot of primitive cities, it is constructed from stone. I don't think this place was poured and cast the way a lot of old human cities used to be made, though. I think it was carved deep into the earth, like a massive open-air burrow, or a mine, I suppose. A river flows into it from one side, in a cascade that should be flooding the city completely, and yet doesn't because it all goes pouring into a series of rivers that wind their way down to a very big sort of plug hole in the center that has to be a health and safety issue in the most serious of ways.

The lake at the bottom of the city seems organic, however. There is a very impossibly, incredibly large skeletal ribcage quite visible from my vantage point. It belongs to a creature that must have been the size of... it's almost impossible to even fathom the size. Probably the size of a whole city block or more.

Above us, there are huge cliffs. I can see saurians taking off from them, and windows and doors and whatnot, so I guess they live up there, miles above the lowest point of the city. There are impressive places all over the settled universe, but I've never been in one like this, where high technology and ancient relics stand side by side. Everything here is wild, as well as being deeply developed. I can't wait to get out of the room I'm being held in and explore it.

No sooner do I have that thought than the door opens behind me and Thorn appears. He has changed clothing and is wearing black scaled leggings and boots with a matching vest. There's something fancy about it, though I don't know that it is formal attire. If I had to describe it, I'd call it ass-kicking clothing. I can guess whose ass he intends to kick.

"Come with me," he says, crooking a finger at me in that authoritarian, I-intend-to-be-obeyed way that he has.

I indulge him, mostly because it gets me out of the room and gives me a chance to see some of the house outside it. My first impression is that it is fancy and large. Everything here seems large to me. Everything was made for massive saurians to lumber about in. But even with that scale difference taken into account, this place seems huge.

We don't walk far. We only go to the very next room in a hall full of rooms. Nothing here is overstated or ornate, but there's a quality to the materials and the craftsmanship used to form them into a house shape that tells me this is an expensive sort of place.

In the very next room, there is a table and two chairs. On the table is my suit, and next to my suit is every single bit of the contents of it, all laid out in neat rows.

“You are charged with thirty-two counts of property destruction, two counts of theft, and one of illegal importation of a destructive species,” Thorn says to me. The formality of him reading my charges is somewhat offset by the fact he also decides to pick me up under the arms to sit me on the chair he clearly intends to interrogate me in.

“What are these?” He points to the contents of my suit. “I want a full description of each and every one of them.”

Answering his question would not be difficult. I know each of those things. This is like seeing all my old friends displayed before me. I miss them with a nearly physical ache.

I sit back in the chair, lounging in the seat. It’s all too big for me, but I pride myself on being able to make myself comfortable anywhere.

He’s waiting for me to answer, his eyes focused intensely on me under his brows. He fits this room, in stature and in style.

“I couldn’t tell you. I mean. I could. But won’t. Should, maybe? But shorn’t.”

“I can make you tell me, Suli. Or I can get my team to look into these things and discover what they’re about for myself.”

“I really, deeply, do not recommend that. What you’ve got there is enough to obliterate this entire city if you handle it wrong. Hell, I’m surprised you’re alive as it is. The suit doesn’t like being messed with. It’s not made to be handled by anyone beside its owner.”

“Similar to you, I imagine.”

He’s insinuating that I’m owned now. By him, presumably. I should correct him on that misapprehension before someone really gets hurt.

“I’m not one to be owned, my guy.”

He stare at me, deadpan. Waiting for me to be intimidated. If only such a thing were possible. He thinks he has all my tricks laid out in front of me but the greatest trick of all? That lies deep inside me, in a place he’ll never reach.

“Anyway, regardless, I’ve seen what happens to things you own. I have a tendency to break them.”

*T horn*

She’s talking too much. I’d say she’s nervous, but it’s obvious she doesn’t get nervous. There’s something about her that suggests she’s almost incapable of those emotions, which is strange, because humans are traditionally universally regarded as being intensely neurotic and terrified, as any natural prey species should be.

“What’s wrong with you?”

She smiles broadly. “What isn’t wrong with me?”

She’s not going to tell me anything. She’s not going to cooperate in any way. Not unless I make her sore. I’m going to give her one last chance. Point out the position she is in. Hope she has some sense, though there is no evidence of that so far.

“You don’t have the suit for protection anymore. You don’t have anything left. You are my captive. You are my owned possession. You have no rights. You have no chance or hope of escape. And you are very close to screaming and crying for mercy you will not receive if you do not start talking to me.”

“Let’s do that part. Let’s do that right now.”

She stands up and opens her arms, not in a gesture that invites a hug, but in one that challenges me to do something. It is a very strange expression, one that invites damage of a kind she would not survive. This human is banking on my self-control, and she does not know me well enough to do that.

I extend a hand, which with my fingers spread, covers the entirety of her chest, and nudge her gently back into the chair.

“Sit down,” I growl at her.

“I thought you were going to make me scream and cry for mercy.”

“I am. But I don’t have to touch you to do that. I can tell you what the next years of your life are going to look like if you



don't give me what I want. You will be taken from this room, and you will be put into one of the interior cells. There is no natural light there, but you will adjust to the lower lighting that comes from the occasional torch or perhaps if nature blesses you, fireworm so you'll be able to see time as it slips away from you.

You've lived a life among the stars, but I promise you, you will never see their glow again. You will end your days underground, far from adventure, with nothing in the way of excitement. You will not plunder anything. You will not cause chaos. You will not enjoy the company of others. You will sit and you will exist until there's nothing but existence left. Until the hours turn into years, and you cannot tell the difference. Until you wither, and until finally, nothing is left but what was."

She has been listening as I speak, her pretty human eyes locked on mine. They are so perfectly round, both her pupils and the green hue around the exterior of them. They give her a slightly innocent appearance, or a perpetual expression of surprise. I don't think she's either surprised or innocent. In fact, the corners of her lips are turning up as I finish speaking, almost as if I have amused her.

"I don't believe you."

That sentence takes me aback, though perhaps it shouldn't. She is going to be difficult to discipline. Perhaps impossible. But I've dealt with much larger, much more intense, much more dangerous creatures than this one. She's just a human. Just a small female human. I can handle her.

Why is she smiling?

She opens her mouth and begins her retort — and what a retort it is.

"I stole your bike. I know you like flashy things. I know you are a creature of status and of display. You want to own me just like you owned that bike. And that means you want others to see me. You want me out and about. I'm no good to you languishing in a dungeon getting old. You've captured *Sullivan O'Shannassay: scourge of the skies*. You've stripped

me down and you've found all my little tools and toys. I don't believe, for a second, that I will ever see the inside of one of your dungeons."

She pauses for a brief moment, her eyes flashing with rebellion and excitement as she uses the energy from her little speech to further gas herself up, riding high even in captivity.

"And you know what, Thorn? I usually wouldn't point this out, because it's the sort of thing that's very useful for me to know, and for you to have no idea I know. But the little scenario you just tried to scare me with? That's not my greatest fear. That's yours. Good to know, thanks for the very detailed description. I'm sure that'll be handy one day."

She sits back, smirking broadly, as smug now as she was when I first found her in the remains of the Ground Bar. She should be trembling before me, begging for mercy and lenience, but for some reason best known to her own twisted human psychology, truly seems to be enjoying this predicament.

Talking to her does nothing. You cannot argue her into submission. You cannot intimidate her with words. Maybe whipping her deserving little ass will have a greater effect. And if that doesn't work, she has three very tender places I can thoroughly dominate, and I intend to do so.

Having just pushed her back down into a seated position, I now reach out, grab the front of her shift in a big fist of fabric, and draw her toward me. In my hands she is as helpless as a ragdoll. I feel her weight, a solid but ultimately handleable amount of heft. I will tame each and every ounce of her.

I take the seat she just vacated, and I pull her over my lap. Taking the hem of her dress in my hands, I tear it from the hem all the way up to the nape, exposing every delicious, creamy curve of her human form. She utters a little gasp as she feels herself bared in this primal way, indicating that she's not entirely immune to my actions after all.

As she comes into view, I find my energy shifting slightly. I started to dominate her out of a deep need to control this wild little thing, but now seeing her naked, I am feeling a host of other impulses. She really is a beautiful thing to behold. She's

so soft. Every inch of her is a precious little piece of art. When I touch her, I feel her warmth. There is a fire in this creature, a small inferno that never abates and does not exist inside me. We are cold-blooded creatures. We rely on the big burning balls in the sky to keep us alive. But this girl, all she needs is food and light and air, and she is able to burn inside and out. I want to press her against me in all her naked glory. I want to feel her heat pressed against me, and I want to feel it wrapped around me. I want to be deep inside her. I want to know what every part of her feels like when I am inside her.

## *Sullivan*

His rough hand runs over my back and ass with surprising gentleness. I really thought he was going to beat the absolute hell out of me, but he is caressing me, which is almost worse. I feel myself start to squirm over his big, strong lap, his hard thighs pressing intermittently against very sensitive and now very exposed parts of my anatomy. He's wearing what must pass for leather pants on this world. They're not smooth skin, they have a certain grain and texture to them that I feel rubbing roughly against me. I'm used to being covered by my suit. I very rarely take it off, with the exception of showering. I certainly have not been grinding against any alien men lately, no matter what I told him. There's no way I'd admit that it has been a long spell since I've had any intimacy.

"You're such a soft little thing physically," he murmurs. "And such a tough little thing psychologically. What will it take to break you, I wonder?"

His hand lifts away for a moment, then returns with a swift, sharp, stinging smack that jolts my hips against his thigh and makes my clit grind against the ridges of his pants. I let out an involuntary gasp and hear his chuckled reply. He will relish each and every little sign of weakness he gets from me. I can use that to my advantage.

Again he spanks me, and again I feel the sting and the heat and the shame flash through me. This creature has a strange effect on me.

I want to moan, and I let myself moan. I know I'm getting wet.

"Soaked," he growls, and somehow the hot flash of embarrassment still rushes through me, even though I planned for that to happen.

"I know what you like," he says. "I know you like to be chased. I know you like to be caught. And I know you like to be punished. That's why you're such a badly behaved little thing, isn't it?"

With every word, his palm whacks me hard and my clit grinds against his thigh, and my pussy clenches tight, wanting something I know he's going to give me. I ache for him.

"I knew you weren't going to be easy to handle," he continues. "I came prepared with my own set of tricks."

I feel something against my pussy. Something thick and hard, something designed for penetration.

He pushes it inside me slowly, ribbed surfaces and scales and ever growing thickness that is already vibrating inside me.

"Is that... getting bigger?"

"Yes." I can hear the smirk in his voice. "It inflates. I'm going to stretch you, Suli. I am going to make sure you remember this punishment. I'm going to leave my mark on you. Inside and out."

"What the hell is it?" I barely get the question out.

"We use these to train females to prepare for their first lay," he says. "It conditions the musculature of the canal. In your case, it will teach your naughty pussy a lesson."

He turns it slowly inside me, making me feel every bit of it. I feel my pussy rippling internally, my muscles and inner walls reacting to the pulsing, humming, rolling sensation of this saurian sex toy.

I reach for some kind of stability. Something to hold onto. All I find is his leg. His big, muscly leg beneath the leathery fabric of his pants. I clench my fingers around his leg, and I hold on as if holding on will somehow stop the overwhelming sensations inside me. But it won't. Nothing will, because he is

doing this very intentionally. He wants me to suffer through pleasure. He wants to break me through my own desire.

He might just succeed.

My breath is coming in short, rasped gasps as pleasure rushes through me, finding every part of me, even the little joints in my toes and fingers. There's no part of me he's not touching with this infernal tool.

I start to curse. First under my breath, and then out loud, more robustly as I start to lose control.

Damn him for being smarter than I gave him credit for. I figured he'd beat me, that made sense. I thought he'd fuck me too. The way he came the first time we were together, he passed out so hard I was able to steal his bike. I don't know much about saurian mating customs, but I am pretty damn sure that's not entirely normal.

This time, he's not fucking me. This time he's keeping himself clear of the arousal zone. His cock is safely in his pants, and I am the one losing my mind with arousal as he keeps using the tool to ever increasingly effective... er... effect. I can't even think with words anymore. It's all starting to be colors and feelings. Even distinguishing objects one from the other is getting a bit much. The world is a big buzzing confusion of things and I am a helpless little consciousness at the very core of it.

He's doing something to my brain.

He's fucking my actual brains out. That's what it feels like. It feels like being manually rewired in real time. He's now plunging and thrusting the tool in and out of me, having deflated it just enough to allow it to slide in and out of me.

**T** *horn*

I love having her over my lap, writhing and moaning, her pussy dripping with need. She's so close to orgasm, but she won't be coming yet. She won't be coming until she's good and submissive to me. She'll be suffering for quite some time,

I imagine. It won't be today. It probably won't be tomorrow. It may not even be the day after.

"This could go on for weeks and months. This might be the torment I promised you," I say to her. "You might never come again. I might hold you over my lap hour after hour, day after day and toy with this wet little human hole until you are so close to release it feels like you might go insane if you don't come. And then I won't let you come. I won't give you the satisfaction of orgasm or release or relief."

She makes an incoherent animal sound in response. I know I am getting through to her. She can't argue in this state. She can't resist. Every impulse and instinct she has is forcing her to abandon her rebellion and simply be what she is, a helpless little human suffering in the way nature made her to suffer.

I keep fucking her with the tool, so glad I thought to co-opt it. This is essentially a medical device, designed to aid the rare females of our species when they start their first laying cycle, or sometimes to recover from egg injuries that can occur. This is not designed to punish, or to pleasure. But when used on this creature, a human female, it does both those things in intense measure.

"What do you have to say for yourself, Suli? Are you ready to admit what you are?"

She says something completely incoherent once again. It is not quite as satisfying now that I really want her to beg.

"After all you've had to say so far, now you can't form even a single word?" I tease her mockingly. "You were so bold, so brave, and now you're just a speechless, writhing little mess over my lap, wanting nothing more than to come. That's what you want... isn't it?"

"Yes!" She finally gasps a word. "YES!" She repeats it more loudly than before.

"Well, if you want to come again in this life, first you're going to have to give me an apology. And you're going to have to make it a very good one. It's going to have to be the kind of apology you remember for the rest of your days."

“Fucking asshole,” she curses. “Just let me... please... you dick.”

“That’s not an apology. That’s not even close to an apology,” I chide her, leaving the tool deep inside her for a moment as I return to the task of punishing the thick, round cheeks which nature may as well have made expressly for the purpose of being beaten.

She bucks and squirms and continues to curse until I start again with the egg tool, and once again the state of need takes her to a point where she can no longer articulate a word.

“I can do this for as long as it takes. I can do it until you are entirely dehydrated, and then I will soak you in water and start over again.”

“I drink water,” she manages to get out before once again collapsing against my legs.

“Then I’ll give you water to drink before I start over again. I suppose I’ll have to feed you too. I don’t want you passing out. I don’t want you missing a single moment of the experience. I am going to take very, very good care of you. Each and every one of your needs will be catered to, so I can ensure that you stay here, like this, for as long as it takes to break you of the habit of being an unrepentant criminal.”

I pull the tool from her sex for a moment. I want to see what physical impacts are left behind. Her lips are swollen and there is a trail of arousal leading from them all the way down over the little bud that has peeked out from the hood of flesh that kept it hidden before. I take my time inspecting her pussy for any signs of damage. I don’t want to hurt her. I want to punish her. I want to make her sore. But I don’t want to do the slightest bit of harm to her in any way. I do, however, want to find her limits and take her all the way up to them.

The moment the toy leaves her body, something changes. I feel a shift in her energy and see it in her expression. Something is wrong.

*uli*

Something is happening to me. Something is happening deep inside my brain. The shifting of neurons is starting to feel like a cascade. I feel something snap inside. Or maybe not so much snap as much as crack, pop, and fizz. It wouldn't surprise me if smoke came out of my ears.

Something inside me just broke. It's like a little dyke that has been inside my head all these years has suddenly disappeared, and a cascade of pure fucking terror I didn't even know I had dammed up inside me is bursting through my mind, bathing every single thought in a coating of thick, choking fear.

"What's wrong?" Thorn's voice seems to come from very, very far away.

"Everything."

I want to curl up and hide, and I also want to run away, but I can't run because I'm dizzy as hell, so though I have the impossible-to-ignore urge to get the hell away, I can't. And I also don't know what I'm even trying to get away from. I'm trying to get away from myself, I think. But I can't crawl out of my own skin. I'm stuck in here with me and it's fucking awful.

*T horn*

The human has turned pale and clammy. Sweat seems to be dripping from her every pore simultaneously as she fights for breath.

"What is wrong?"

"I don't know," she rasps. "I don't know what is happening. I think something broke inside me."

I did intend to break her, but not like this. I was planning a more subtle, and frankly, enjoyable response. I wanted to see her beg for mercy and admit all her wrongdoing. I did not want an actual medical event to ensue.

"Sona! Call for the doctor!"

"*As you wish, my alpha,*" Sona says, dutifully behaving without a hint of concern. I like being alpha, and I like my



temperament. But there are times like these in which I wish I had some of his controlled equanimity. I've never seen anything rattle Sona ever. He seems almost like the human in terms of how immune he is to crises. Somewhat like the human was, I suppose. Until she wasn't.

I haven't scented fear on her once in all the time I've known her. Suddenly, she stinks of it. I wrap her up in my arms and hold her tight, hoping the comfort will alleviate some of the distress.

*"The doctor is here, my alpha,"* Sona intones over the intercom not long later. *"Would you like him in the medical bay? Or would you like him here, in your..."* he sniffs. *"Bedroom?"*

Doc Xotic is highly capable when it comes to healing injuries sustained in combat, and he comes with some pretty impressive tech, but I am worried he will not be able to help this human, who is now whimpering softly in my arms, and clinging to me with weak fingers.

I ignore Sona's disapproval and carry her down to the surgery. The alpha's residence has a fully equipped medical bay to rival any hospital on the planet. She will not get better care elsewhere.

The doctor is a mature saurian with gray skin and scaling, plenty of thick plates over his head, and a tail that ends in a vicious set of six-inch spikes. He's a natural defensive tank, and that has served him well during his work in a great many conflicts.

"I've got a human," I say rather unnecessarily, as it's pretty obvious what she is.

"So you do," he says, extending his arms for her. I hand her over. This is probably the only creature on the planet I'd willingly allow to touch her. Besides Avel, I suppose. Regardless, there is a small moment's hesitation as I feel her weight leaving my arms.

"What's happening here?"

I tell him all the details I can remember as he takes her and settles her gently on a medical bed that dwarfs her several times over and begins the most careful examination I have seen. She is staring around, her eyes wider than they have ever been, and she is emitting pheromones of the kind I have not scented on her before. The human who was not worried whatsoever when she went flying off a cliff and nearly plunged to oblivion is suddenly terrified.

“Stay still. There you go. That’s right. Let me listen here.”

She is letting the doctor do his job, which is probably the first time I have ever seen her cooperate. It’s odd. Eerie.

“I believe I have heard of this phenomenon before. Let me find the document...”

He holds her down, one hand on her chest while he goes through a small tablet pulled from his pocket. It is essentially an almanac of all medical knowledge, and I suppose it makes sense he would consult it, though I do always feel unsettled when a medical professional starts researching a condition in front of me.

“Yes,” he says. “I believe what we have here is an unexpected triggering of the human fear response. It is harmless, though it looks and seems dramatic. It passes in relatively short order, though generally speaking the effects can sometimes be felt for quite some time due to the ongoing psychological stresses associated with the experience, or repeated triggering of the stimulation.”

“Hm,” he says, looking up from the text. “Must be a warmblooded thing.”

“What’s the treatment?”

“Well, we can give her drugs to try to manipulate her brain chemistry. Or...”

“Or?”

“We can talk to her.”

“Talk to her? We can either moderate her brain chemistry with drugs, or we can... talk? Those two things seem very, very

different.”

“Humans are interesting creatures, their emotions and physical state are moderated by their social interactions and the way they feel about themselves. Their self perception. They are not as logical as we are. Warmblooded creatures are wild.”

“Hm,” I say. “So you’re telling me that there’s two main points of view. That the perception is bad because the chemicals are bad, and or the chemicals are bad because the perception is bad. In some humans it’s more one than the other, in some it’s both? How can they tell?”

“They can’t. So the treatments generally involve tackling both potential causes in the hopes that one or the other will be effective.”

At this point, Suli clears her throat.

“It’s not my thoughts. And its not my chemistry. It’s my brain chip. It’s broken. I need a new implant. I’m not going to be okay until I get a new one.”

That’s a series of words that makes even less sense than the absence of them.

“Explain.”

She is looking much more like her usual self now, assuming you do not look in her eyes. The expression in those big round orbs of hers is immensely vulnerable.

*Sullivan*

Thorn looks at me with a calculating gaze, his big alien arms folded over his chest. I see the scales rippling with the little motions of his muscles as he makes a concerted effort to stay calm. This is not something I ever thought I’d have to explain to anyone, but I guess now that I am broken, I don’t have much choice.

“It was implanted a few years ago after a crash. I had to have brain surgery, and while I was under, they put something in to stop me from being afraid. It worked very, very well. Maybe too well.”

*S*everal years ago...

I am lying barely sensate in a hospital bed with crisp bleached white sheets. Nothing hurts anymore, and that alone is a relief. A lot of things were hurting for hours. A lot of things have been hurting for a long time, actually. Ever since I got into Galactic Prime Personal Security Academy, GPPSA for short, I've been getting hurt.

I cast my mind back to the day I arrived here...

I shoulder my bag nervously. Most of the other cadets have several suitcases, because you're supposed to bring everything you need when you start at GPPSA. All I have is what I've come with, which isn't very much. I don't own many things. I've got one set of the uniform, one set of boots, a bedroll with a pillow, and I also have a toothbrush and three new pairs of socks. I thought that was a lot, but now that I'm watching others dragging big rolling cases behind them, I'm realizing I have nothing at all.

My dormitory assignment is in the basement. There are bigger, nicer rooms upstairs, but I'm here on a scholarship rather than a fee-paying sort of situation, so I go down while the others go up. If I had a big suitcase, that would make things easier, I suppose.

I glance at the card in my hand. It has my face on it and my name, and it also has my room assignment number, and a bar code that they can scan to know everything about you. There are just so many people here nobody can know them all by face and name. I'm a code now. A code assigned to this room right...

**SMACK!**

A fist comes out of nowhere, making harsh, crunching contact with my nose. I fall back, just barely missing cracking my head on the door frame. Lying on the ground, head spinning, nose bleeding, I look up into the merciless eyes of my attacker.

A woman stands over me, around my age, but twice my size. She has an expression of satisfaction on her face. "You're not

going to make it,” she says. “You’re going to wash out in the week. Colony trash.”

My roommate’s diagnosis proved to be accurate... lying in the medical bay with injuries so severe it’s likely I might not survive them, all I have left are my senses. I can taste blood. I can feel pain. And I can hear the doctor talking to my parents, who must have scraped the village’s last credits to come here. It wasn’t supposed to be this way. I was supposed to be the one who made it out. I was supposed to bring pride and money to my family and village. Instead, all I’ve done is bring them shame and disappointment.

“She’s weak. That’s her problem, Mr and Mrs O’Shannassay. She’s soft. Not cut out for this. Not cut out for anything, if I’m to be honest. It’s a tough world out there, and our students have a reputation for being able to keep anybody safe in any situation. I’d recommend this procedure. Yes, it’s experimental. But I think the benefits outweigh the potential drawbacks.”

The only thing between my parents and the doctor and me is a frosted pane of glass and it’s not doing anything to stop the doctor’s voice from traveling. She’s a woman from a very privileged background, and every word she says sounds like it has been rolled around a mouthful of marbles.

It’s very different from my accent, and from the way my parents talk. They’re speaking more softly than ever. I know they’re ashamed. I’m their only child, and the only one who has any chance of bringing any money into the family. The village scraped up just enough money to get me into the academy, and though I’ve been working as hard as I can, I’m not doing very well.

“She’s scared. And the fact is, if she stays scared, she’ll keep making mistakes that are going to get her killed. And, more importantly, they may get the people she is being paid to protect killed. She will not graduate from the academy as she is. But with the implant, we can turn her from a cowering puppy to the ferocious guard dog she needs to be. All her reports indicate she has moments of brilliance and bravery. She’s smart. She’s tactically brilliant, in fact. But if she can’t

overcome this fear, she's going to be useless to herself and everyone else."

*Useless...*

That word echoes through the years and finds me sitting in another medical bay, being looked at with the same kind of sad disappointment I experienced before. People hate it when they find out that you're weak. They might not like it when you're a pain in their ass, but they really hate it when you're a complete mess.

"I think we need to scan her head and see what's happening inside it. If there's something physical, then we may need to do surgery to address it."

"It's the implant. They put it in there to stop me from failing out of the academy."

"Some kind of mental modification device?"

"Yeah. Something like that. It makes me less afraid, even if I get hurt. Actually, I think maybe especially if I get hurt. I was trained to be a bodyguard. The sort that throws themselves in front of a bullet for someone when they need protection. But I was afraid. And I kept getting hurt. I got a choice, fail out and go back to poverty, or get the implant. I got the implant."

"And you graduated?"

"Not quite..." I feel myself smirking. "I lost my fear. But I also lost my sense of obligation to the academy. Seemed to me that I needed to make money, and it didn't really matter how that happened, as long as it did. So I ran away from the academy, became a pirate, and for the first time in my life, I was rich. I was good at something. I am very, very good at piracy."

Thorn rumbles with reluctant agreement. "I'm aware. You've stolen everything that hasn't been nailed down since you landed on the planet."

"I did what I needed to do, to do what I needed to do," I say, repeating myself. "And then I started to enjoy it. And then I started to get even better at it. And then I enjoyed it even more... and then there were a few hiccups."

“What kind of hiccups?”

“A mutiny. My first mate decided to take over my ship after a raid went wrong. We lost three shipmates. She said I was reckless and was going to get them all killed. The crew sided with her. They were nice enough to give me a shuttle with rations and some funds to get myself started as a solo act. Which I did. Which, sort of, I guess, lands me here, freaking out in your medical bay.”

I make my confessions, giving him the very abridged version of a misspent life.

I hate how this feels. It's like I've been wearing armor for years and now it's been ripped off, but it wasn't just over my body. It was knitted into my skin. I feel raw and exposed and in pain with every breath I take. It just doesn't feel right. Not any of it. It's not my head that feels wrong. It's my body. It's all off.

“Can you give me anything for this?”

The doctor answers my question. “I can give you all sorts of things. No real way to know how they'll affect you, because your biology is so different from ours. We can experiment and take notes, and see what is effective and what isn't. That way, any future humans arriving will have some kind of medical history to refer to. So if we kill you with a compound of some kind, we will know not to do that again.”

A couple hours ago, I would have laughed that comment off. Now it strikes an unpleasant chord somewhere deep inside, makes my heart beat faster. Makes my breath come in shorter gasps.

A very large hand clasps me by the shoulder, and then another one lands on the other shoulder. Thorn looks deep in my eyes, and I feel myself starting to calm down.

“Nobody is going to let you get killed,” Thorn says. “I have done everything in my power since I met you to avoid that outcome. You can breathe again.”

I take a deep breath. I don't know when I forgot how to breathe properly, but I hope I remember soon, because this is

deeply painful.

“Then what am I going to do?”

“Get used to the way your brain works without the augmentation, I imagine,” the doctor said. “You’re physiologically well enough as far as I can tell. It’s not a problem with your body. For the moment we’ll monitor you and see how you do.”

“Don’t worry,” Thorn says. “You’re safe.”

I’ve never felt so unsafe in my life.



## 6 BROKEN

**T**horn

I fucked her brains out, in some way. I did exactly what I wanted to do. I broke through her exterior and I found her weakness, I drew it out and I turned her from a wild, confident thing into a cowering, shaking wreck. And I hate every little bit of it.

Sometimes it is so easy to get focused on breaking a thing that I forget what will be left after it is broken.

“Come here,” I growl, picking her up. “You’re coming with me.”

She doesn’t fight me. She curls up in my arms and she presses against me, a warm weight that I carry from the medical bay to my own private chambers. Nothing about this human is predictable, but I am glad she has stopped shaking and crying. That feels like a positive development.

“What are you going to do to me? Are you going to put me back into the cage? Put me deep in a cell like you threatened? Are you going to beat me? Are you going to...”

I cut off her incessant questions the only way I know how, by pressing my mouth to hers in a firm kiss. When I feel her soften in my arms, I answer her question.

“I will take care of you.”

She gives me a look of deep concern and fear, but she stops asking questions rapid-fire. I’d like to think that I have

comforted her, but it may very well be that I've terrified her back into silence.

I sit her down in a soft chair, give her a hot compress, and wrap a blanket around her. These are treatments we use for females of our own kind. External heat is presumably a comfort for creatures of all kinds. My chambers are something of a home within a home. The alpha's residence has an official staffed kitchen, but I also have my own here so I can cook when I do not feel like troubling an entire staff.

"Does this make you feel better?" I snug the blanket a little tighter around her.

She nods.

"Good. I will get you sustenance. You have not eaten properly since you arrived. I intend to serve you the flesh of a hunted beast."

"Sounds good, though I am not very hungry."

"You're probably starving. And you will eat. I insist."

She withdraws into the blanket, giving me a baleful look. The grey fuzz of the material provides quite an adorable frame for her quite delicate features. She is a very pretty, soft little thing, and now that she is less of a constant threat to literally everything and the order of my territory itself, I can appreciate just how appealing she is. In fact, when covered with a blanket so entirely only her face is visible, she could actually be a saurian. If you ignore the round pupils, I suppose.

I start to cook what is my favorite meal, and one that is likely to be safe for her to consume. Proteins. Starches. Fiber. Meat and potatoes, all fresh and nutritious.

She watches me until her eyes start to close. She blinks slowly, once, twice, and then her eyes stay shut a little longer a moment or two before she forces them open again, but not for long. They close again seconds later, and then they stay closed.

She's won. Can't make her eat when she clearly needs to sleep.

I feel a certain sense of peace and calm that I hadn't noticed was missing from life before. It doesn't make sense, really. She's chaos. She's an invader. She's a criminal who should be facing charges and will certainly face consequences. But she's also adorable.

*"You have a visitor, my alpha."*

Sona's voice drones through the intercom moments before Avel strolls through the door to my chambers, letting himself in without so much as knocking.

"How is it with the human? Do you have her safely caged? I notice she's not in the city prison. Are you using the alpha cells beneath this place?"

"She's behind you."

He turns around and looks at the chair where she is sleeping, then turns around back to me and looks at me with a sort of deep disapproval I know all too well.

"She's not even handcuffed," he says. "She's going to escape."

"She's not going anywhere. She's exhausted, for one, and for two, I've broken her."

A skeptical brow is raised in my direction.

"After all we've seen her do, you have her curled up in the kitchen like a pet? Why would you be so reckless, Thorn? That is not like you."

"She doesn't have her suit anymore," I explain as I cut up ingredients for my dinner. "She's exhausted. And like I said, I broke her. She had some kind of implant in her head. Something that was stopping her from feeling fear. I think it made her reckless and impulsive. But it's not functioning anymore. She's very different now."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes. Why?"

Avel's tone has a certain edge to it. "Because sometime between my walking in here, seeing her, talking to you, and looking back at her again... she's gone."

I put the knife down, walk around the cutting board, and go to the chair where she is all curled up. Lifting the blanket, I discover that Avel is correct. She is gone.

“Suli?” I call her name.

“She’s escaped,” he declares, not bothering to hide his agitation or annoyance. “She’s loose somewhere in the city. She’s probably on her way to stowaway on a ship, or outright steal one. We need to set up a perimeter and ground all ships. Now.”

“Or...”

She’s in the next room, cowering under a different blanket in the corner of a seat that is designed to sit three of us at once. I can see the blanket shifting around as she tries to get both comfortable and hidden. The slight bit of tension that had risen in me at discovering her missing is now gone.

“Or she wanted to sleep somewhere she could lie down, and somewhere you weren’t terrifying her. She’s different now, Avel. So different she may as well be a completely different person.”

“It could be another trick.”

“Believe me, it isn’t.”

I walk back to the kitchen and continue cooking. “Humans are so desperate to control their natural weaknesses, I think. They had no claws, so they had to develop knives. They had no armored outer plating, so they developed clothing and armor. They couldn’t run fast enough to escape all their predators, so they invented the Honda Civic...”

“We have all the same technology,” Avel points out.

“Yes, but we have it because it’s an adopted convenience, not because without it we’d be dead in our natural habitat within days. Humans are very poor survivors. And that means deep down, right at the core of them, each and every one of them knows that they are in danger all the time. And that makes them very afraid...”

These are ideas I have formulated in the time I have known Suli. It all seems quite obvious to me now. It just makes sense. Humans should be perpetually afraid. I certainly would be if I was a small meat-filled creature with limited vision, physical agility, or strength in a universe full of predators.

“So what are you going to do with her?”

“For now, I am making her dinner, and then I intend to put her in bed and have her get some sleep.”

“And when will she face punishment for her crimes?”

“Later on, I imagine.”

Avel folds his arms over his chest and his wings around his body. Even his hair seems to draw close around his head, framing judgmental eyes. “You need to meet with the patrons who escaped the Ground Bar with their lives. You need to explain how a human infiltrated your territory and led to loss of life, not to mention immense property damage. The owner and manager of the Ground Bar wants reparations. And you are going to have to replace your bike. Even at a rough estimate, I’d say that the damages reach into the thousands. Is she going to pay reparations? Is she going to face imprisonment?”

“I haven’t decided yet. The punishment has to fit the crime, and amends will have to be made. I will send construction crews to the bar tomorrow to start the rebuild, so you can assure the owner that they will not be left out of pocket.”

“You’re going to need to address this, Thorn.”

“And I will. But for now, I am going to feed my human.”

## *Sullivan*

I needed to get out of the kitchen. I wanted to stay away from Avel. The judgement in the winged dinosaur’s voice is hitting me in a place I didn’t know I had. I feel something that I didn’t know had been subdued inside me — guilt. I feel bad. I feel as though I have done many wrong things, and I feel as

though hiding is the only way to avoid taking responsibility for my actions.

“Suli. It’s time to eat.”

Thorn’s voice is gruff and serious. I get the impression that telling him I am not hungry would not go well. And the truth is, I am absolutely starving.

I barely notice what is in the bowl he hands me. It’s meat of some kind, vegetables of some other kind. It’s probably very good, but when I put it in my mouth, I can’t even taste it. My body isn’t ready to enjoy food. It’s just a matter of needing it.

I eat every bit of it under his watchful eye. It feels weird to be both captive and ward of this saurian, dominant, territorial alpha, who I know must run this entire city and the surrounding lands. Thorn is an incredibly powerful creature in every way it means to be powerful. I am weak in practically every way it means to be weak.

“Good,” he says when I am finished. “Did you like it?”

“I did. Thank you.”

I have no idea if I liked it or not. What I do know is that my stomach is much more full than it has been in quite some time. I feel better as a result. Without the chip functioning inside my head, I’m much more sensitive to things like being hungry and being thirsty. It’s weird. It’s almost as though I’ve been ignoring all the signals my body has been sending me for years now. It’s almost as though I’m not sure what the hell I think or feel about anything. Did I like the food? Maybe. It’s all just symptoms and signs and experiences.

“Good. Now you’re going to get some rest. Proper rest.”

I am ready to sleep. I’m more tired than I’ve ever been. All of a sudden, the crash, the bar, the Chaos Fish, the bike chase, the sex, the primal, the car chase, the fucking hot fucking sex and now this couch and this blanket, both of which are so much larger than any I’ve ever encountered, and which, along with Thorn, make me feel incredibly small — but also incredibly safe.

Thorn scoops me up, blanket and all, and carries me off to what must be a bedroom. I make this deduction by the presence of a very large saurian-sized bed. You could fit ten people in this big, soft space.

“You don’t leave this bed without my permission,” he says. “Understand? If I find you out of bed, you will be spanked soundly and a little more of your freedom will be taken from you.”

He continues to make threats, but I am already falling asleep. All I can hear is a low, growling rumble as I drop off to the deepest and most rejuvenating sleep I’ve had in years.

*A great many more than eight hours later...*

When I wake up, light is streaming through massive windows. I feel relaxed and refreshed. I feel like I’ve slept for months, maybe. My entire brain feels different. So much so that for a moment I not only forget where I am, I forget who I am.

The light calls me, so I slide out of the very tall bed and pad across the floor to the window...

SMACK!

A large hand sweeps through the air, catching me so hard I find myself rising up onto my toes.

“What the..!” I squeal the question as my hands shoot back to cover my tender posterior.

Thorn is behind me, glowering in all his scaly glory.

“I told you not to get out of bed without permission.”

“I forgot!”

“You’d better find some way to remember, otherwise you are going to be very sore very often. I do not tolerate disobedience in my territory. You will be atoning for this for a very long time as it is. Starting today.”

“What?”

“First count for you to answer, crashing recklessly into my territory, potentially causing loss of life. I doubt you were flying your machine in a responsible manner. You could have

killed someone. Someone important to someone else. You could have killed yourself. You've had no regard for yourself."

"That's because of the implant, which is no longer functioning."

"I'm not going to give you a free pass just because you had an implant in your head. You were still in control of your actions. You were still responsible for them. Fear is not the only reason we don't do dangerous things. We don't do dangerous things because of the danger they are not only to us, but to others. We are careful, because everybody else needs us to be. Your behavior is not reckless only because of a lack of fear. It is selfish."

I think back to my crew, as his words echo words I heard just before I was jettisoned. My first mate called me selfish too. Thorn's words cut deeper because they are fresher and because there is already a wound where they land. I hate that the words are true. I am selfish. I didn't start out that way. When I was young, I was anything but selfish. I wanted to be everything for my family, and for the people I had grown up with.

"Do you understand why you are receiving this first round of punishment?"

I bite my lower lip and nod. I don't trust myself to speak. I don't want to cry. I don't want to feel any weaker than I already do. I just want to take whatever I have coming and get it over with.

"Bend over the bed, Suli." He gives the order in a firm, but softer tone.

"I don't want to." I find myself whimpering and squirming in front of him, hoping he won't punish me and hoping that he will too. It's so strange to want this punishment and this absolution. It almost feels as though he can fix what has felt unfixable in me for so long.

I know it's nuts to look for someone else to fix me. I know I have to fix myself. I know everybody is responsible for themselves in the end. But it's nice to maybe imagine for a



second that there might be someone in all creation capable of actually handling me.

“I won’t let you do here what you have done across the universe. I won’t let you turn my territory into the Suli show. I won’t let you misbehave with me. I will be harsh with you. I will make you sore. I will be strict and you will be very sorry when you step out of line with me — which I know you will.”

He spins me around, picks me up, and pushes me down on the bed, keeping me easily in place with one hand. It is all so easy for him. I don’t weigh anywhere near enough as I would need to in order to fight him. Underneath his palm, I am a helpless little wretch about to get everything she deserves.

“I’ve gotten this little leather lash for you,” he declares, showing me what he has in his hand. “It’s a scaled down version of the one they used to use to discipline out-of-control young whelps. I think it will suit you very well. You are an absolute brat, and this will thrash it out of you — I am very nearly certain of that.”

“Can’t I have breakfast first?”

“You’ll have breakfast when you’ve been punished.”

With that, punishment begins. There is something of a formality to this, a strictness and a determination in the way he is acting.

The lash lands with a hot, stinging bite. I feel my entire body contort for a moment, then relax as heat floods through me. I am rather good at being beaten, if I do say so myself. It’s a talent, I think. Not one I’ve had the chance to explore greatly in general, but one I’m embracing now as my saurian master proceeds to lash me thoroughly, going back and forth from cheek to cheek until he sees fit to stop.

My ass is hot and welted and sore, but my pussy is dripping with need and emitting a scent that seems to drive Thorn absolutely wild with saurian lust. He stops talking and starts making those distinctive growls and grunts associated with mating. I know that his cock will soon be inside me, stretching

me wide, overwhelming my senses and helping me escape the pain of discipline.

“Tell me you are sorry,” he growls.

“I’m sorry,” I say, obliging him.

“What are you sorry for?”

“For being... bad?” I don’t know why I’m being coy. There’s nothing to be coy about. I know exactly what I did. And I know what I’m being punished for.

“For being a selfish, badly-behaved little human who damn near killed herself.”

“And the bar...”

“What you did to the Ground Bar will be dealt with tomorrow. You’ll be getting punished each and every day until I run out of reasons to thrash you. I expect it will take a very long time. I think..”

I feel his cock starting to penetrate me, the scaled head of his member making my pussy lips spread out slowly.

“I think you are going to be very sorry by the time I am done with you. I am also sure you will be very well fucked, and very well filled with my seed. You may even start to gestate, seeing as I am fucking you nice and deep and hard and long, filling you to the absolute brim every chance I get.”

His threats are not nearly as frightening as they might be, because my pussy is starting to wrap around the devastatingly thick, slow intrusion of his cock. I feel an internal ache from previous ravagings, all beginning to build up over time. Every time he takes me, my pussy is forced to accommodate him all over.

“Having a human fuck toy is almost worth the trouble you’ve caused,” he says. “Almost. It will be absolutely worth it once I have you well trained.”

His hand fists my hair, pulling my head back, making me arch. I can see my reflection in the nearby mirror. I can see the generous curve of my ass, and the long, thick, scaled length of his cock which was made for another creature much larger

than me, and yet is still disappearing inside me, slow inch after slow inch. I see how I look, kneeling on the bed with my knees spread, back arched, head back, my mouth open in a gasping moan as I feel myself being fucked by the saurian alpha.

I am not the only thing to look at. Thorn in all his glory is a sight hot enough to make my sex gush with another flood of arousal — which only serves to help him go deeper inside me. Thorn towers over me, massive, muscular, powerful, his long hair falling forward over his face. He brushes it back over his shoulder, exposing the hard line of his jaw and the slabs of his cheeks, all those fearsomely commanding features that make me melt.

We look good together. I don't know how, because we are two completely different animals, but there is something about my fragile softness and ample curves in sharp contrast to his much harsher, rougher body. I look so helpless as his powerful hips flex and his cock slides inside me another couple of inches. I am being spread impossibly wide, taken incredibly deeply, disciplined and dominated. Every single moment of it is so goddamn hot I start to forget whatever lesson it was he was trying to teach. Instead, I give myself to the moment and to everything in it.

Surrender is the only option when being fucked by Thorn. There is no other alternative, and there is certainly nothing more pleasurable. I could die in this moment and not really notice. I could give myself to him for eternity, feeling this intense heat between my thighs, but also all the way up my belly and into my chest and flowing out through my limbs to my extremities.

I've heard of sex. I've heard of making love. This is more than either of those things. This is rutting and fucking and pure transcendent energy wrapped up into one brilliant experience that will be written on my soul forever. I look back at him and me, me and him. I can't see anything but us. I can't feel anything but us. He and I might be everything that was ever created, and everything that will ever be created.

And then the thoughts stop, and the experience continues, rolling on through my body, his cock pushing inside me with

wave after wave of fresh sensation. His claiming happens over and over, every new stroke an entirely new seal of possession until orgasm comes upon me like a storm, erasing all the pain of the punishment, all memory of transgressions. There is only pleasure. There is only connection.

## 7 THE GREAT ESCAPE

**T**horn

I feel as though I have dealt with the human thoroughly. Unfortunately, that is not as widely shared a sentiment as I might like. Those who are not privy to the behind-the-scenes encounters and who do not see how she softens for me, and how she submits to me when I command it, no doubt still imagine she is dangerous.

“Justice has to be done, Thorn.”

“I know.”

“Rumors are swirling that a small invasion happened last night. There’s a steady stream of saurians going out to visit the Ground Bar, to look at the carcass of the beast we slew. Conjecture is rife, and the fact that you have a human prisoner is also known.”

My council is looking at me with grave expressions. I would no doubt share their mood if I did not know that I have the creature responsible very much under control.

“I do have a human prisoner. A female. We all know this, you all met her last night and aided in her capture. She has since been discovered to be carrying technology that altered her mind and caused her to act in a reckless manner. I have deactivated this technology...” There’s no need to mention that I did it accidentally with my cock. They may as well believe that I have ability in such matters. Half of being alpha is appearing to know more than others know and being able to do more than others do.

“She is harmless,” I finish up. “Truly nothing anybody needs to concern themselves with. Let the people visit the bar and the carcass of the beast. Let them see the spectacle. Our world is a strange one, and the universe outside it is stranger still.”

The men exchange looks.

“Out with it. Say what you want to say.”

“There was the time you wanted to keep a miniraptor as a pet,” Karn says. “And you said much the same thing about that creature until it began to consume smaller, weaker guests to your home. I am concerned that a similar impulse is at play. You have always had a soft spot for dangerous things, and even more than that, small things. You love to bring all creatures under your command. That’s your alpha instinct. You can’t help it. But it does mean that sometimes you make the wrong decision. That’s why you convened a council. So we could advise you.”

“Do you want to see the human for yourselves? Make your own determination as to how dangerous she is? Suli! Come here!”

Suli looks suitably overawed as she steps into the room. She is wearing a simple white shift dress which comes down to mid-thigh, exposing the soft curve of her legs. She is quite a sturdy little thing in her own right, the roundness of her thighs, rear, belly, and chest giving her a sweet and appealing appearance. She looks like many things, but not one of them could be considered dangerous.

I see the council exchanging looks. They saw her last night, but last night she had a mad, reckless energy and a suit full of tricks, and in the strobing lights of a car chase she may very well have appeared larger than life.

Seeing her now, creeping barefoot into a room full of apex predators, her eyes hold that softer, haunted, hunted look that makes her seem like natural prey.

“Come here, Suli,” I say, crooking a finger at her. She gives me a brief glance before her eyes go back to roaming the room again, staring at each of my council with an increasingly

concerned expression. We do make for an imposing collection of saurians, representing all the main phenotypes. Avel is here, back in the corner with his wings wrapped around him. Cirrus is also an aerial saurian with black wings and dark hair, his sky-blue gaze locked firmly on Suli.

Many of them are seeing her properly for the first time. Their gazes are a mixture of stern interest and reluctant appreciation. She is rather cute, especially with her hair curling into her eyes and somewhat covering her face. There's nothing threatening about her whatsoever.

"This is what you are all so concerned about," I say, pulling her close once she gets in arm's reach. The motion makes her hem ride up over her haunches, exposing her hot red rear and the various little marks left from my punishment. "This sore bottomed, sorry, chastised, scared little human female. This is what has you baying for justice and imagining that we are at great risk."

"She's just a baby," Fang murmurs.

"She's a sweet little baby," Karn agrees.

Fang and Karn are of a similar type to me, great predatory hunters with a dominant and disciplinary streak. The two of them function as bounty hunters from time to time, and occasionally work as jailers if they consider the prisoner important enough. I note the way their gazes settle on her with much more interest than I expected.

"Do we need to continue this conversation in which you all fear this creature terribly? Or are we of an understanding that yes, she made an initial impression of chaos and damage, but there's nothing to fear here now she is under control, deprived of her technology. Humans are dependent on tools, and she has absolutely nothing left."

I feel her move against me, squirming in some kind of discomfort.

"I am dangerous," she insists softly, so quietly I do not think any of the others hear her at first.

"What was that, Suli?"

“I am dangerous,” she says, pulling her head away from me. “I am Captain Sullivan. I have hauls and hoards you would not believe. I have engaged in pitched battle with the forces of Interstellar Justice more times than I can count. I am not weak. I’m not a little baby. I am an enemy you would do well to reckon with.”

“Awww!” A small sound ripples around the room. She has no idea how cute she is when she’s trying to sound scary and impressive.

“Just because I feel fear now sometimes doesn’t change who I am,” she says, looking around.

## *Sullivan*

There’s another round of laughter. I hate being laughed at.

They’re mocking me. They think I’m nothing. They think I’m a chubby, harmless little human. Some of them even seem to think I’m a baby, though I don’t think they’re confusing me for an actual infant. They are considering me diminutive and small, and I know I should let them think those things and take advantage of them. But I’ve been through a lot lately. I’ve been paralyzed with fear. I’ve been shamed. I’ve been punished. Now I’m being displayed.

“You’re going to regret this,” I mutter.

“Behave yourself,” Thorn rumbles down at me. “I don’t need to remind you of your place, do I?”

“No,” I grumble, turning my face toward his chest to avoid looking at any of the others.

I feel his arms wrapping around me, snugging me close, giving me unexpected comfort.

“Good girl,” he murmurs.

I am not a good girl. I am a captured pirate, and I don’t care how cute and helpless I seem to all of these massive carnivorous predators, I am going to be free. I owe that to myself.



The fact that I am in the city is a good thing. Once I get the lay of the land here, I will find a ship. I know this planet is involved in interplanetary trade. I know they have ships capable of leaving the atmosphere and traveling to others. And I know that I am absolutely not going to remain a captive.

I need to get my suit and stuff back, and then I need to get the hell out of here before I get too used to being snuggled close to a powerful beast who thinks of me as a cute little creature to be trained and tamed. He carries me away from the group of saurian officials, over toward a window. He's trying to distract me, and it works.

"Can I ask you a question?" I form the words in order to change the subject and hopefully change the feeling I have stuck in my body.

"Of course."

"What is this city called?"

"We call it Grave City," he says. "As you can see, this was once a primal boneyard. This is where the ancient ones came to take their eternal rest."

"Oh, and you built a city over it?"

"It was a settlement that offered some protection to our ancestors, because many of the more dangerous creatures of the world avoided this place unless they were coming to pass away. Over time, the small settlement became a township, and then a city, and now we have this great metropolis."

"Do primals still come here to pass away?"

"It has been a great many years since a primal approached the gates of the city."

I nod. I don't really care about the history, or at least, I don't really want to care. Though I have to admit, there is something compelling, awe-inspiring, and even melancholy about the origins of this city. This is a place where early saurians, finding themselves sentient prey to beasts who were so much larger and more powerful than themselves, took refuge in moldering corpses.

What I really want to know is where the space ports are and how to get there. Usually, such structures are relatively easy to see if you have a bird's eye view of a place, but I don't see any obvious large swathes of flat land used for takeoff and landing. I can't very well ask Thorn outright where my best point of escape is, so I am going to have to keep investigating. I also need to know what he did with my things and my suit. I know they will likely be locked away from me as securely as they can be, but I am a thief by nature and I'll take what's mine.

“Can I go, please?”

Thorn lets me down and his big palm pats my bottom. “Back to my bedroom,” he says. “You need to get some more rest.”

I am glad to escape the gazes of all these powerful male creatures. They make me feel small in that way I do not like. They also make me feel impossibly seen. Thorn exposed me in part. Showed them my bottom. Put my marks on display. I think he liked doing that.



I don't go back to the bedroom, obviously. I use the fact that Thorn is busy talking to all those other saurians. The rest of his house seems empty. Now is my chance to explore with plausible deniability of getting lost. If I get caught, I'll just say that I couldn't remember the way back on account of my broken brain.

Thorn's place is huge. The stairs are exhausting to scale because they're made so much larger than human-scaled steps. I have to lift my legs very high to get up each and every one of them and before I know it my thighs and ass are both burning for a whole new reason. This is good for me, I tell myself. I need conditioning. Most of my piracy has taken place inside a ship, which does not require much in the way of physical ability.

Climbing up to the next level, I find a great many rooms to explore. None of them seem to have anything actually inside them besides furniture. This place seems like somewhere that

should be inhabited by a large family, perhaps several generations of such. Thorn doesn't seem to have a family. I sense no wife, I see no evidence of offspring, and his parents and any potential extended family also seem just as absent. Thorn is a loner, I think. Like me, he seems to have made what passes for family by assembling compatriots and trusted friends. I hope those he trusts are better for him than mine were for me.

“What do you think you are doing!?”

My thoughts are interrupted as I am confronted by a tall, lanky saurian with a gentle face and a flared sort of crest extension from the back of his head. I notice when his teeth flash that they are broad and flat, and set in a face that is humanoid in the same way Thorn and his companions are, but less threatening. This saurian must be of herbivorous descent.

“Hello,” I say. “I think I might be lost.”

“These are the servants quarters,” he says. “You do not belong here. How did you sneak in?”

“I...”

I think quickly.

“I came in through one of the lower windows,” I pretend to admit. “I wanted to see what was in this big fancy house. I'm supposed to be passing through on a connecting flight, but I left the port and got turned around. Do you think you could possibly get me transported back to the port?”

This is quite the gamble, but I have to take it.

A pirate's job is significantly comprised of convincing lying. I've lied a lot in my life, albeit without fear. I used to be able to tell untruths without so much as skipping a beat, but right now there's a fluttering in my chest and a general coursing of excitement that I have missed.

“You are in the home of the Grave City Alpha,” the servant says. “You are about as far from the port as it is possible to be. If you were to be caught here, you would be imprisoned for a significant length of time. There is no excuse for this.”

“I’m so sorry,” I lie. “I was really just trying to find my way back to the ship. This house is so large I thought it might be some kind of mall or information center. It looks like hundreds of people could work here. If you would be so kind as to send me back to the port, I promise I won’t set a foot out of line.”

I look at his face. I used to have some trouble working out what people were thinking and feeling. An effect of the chip, maybe. Suddenly, I have a flash of inspiration. I know what might tug at this guy’s heartstrings. He’s being very stern and officious, but I know he works for Thorn and the other carnivorous saurians. I’m willing to bet there’s a hierarchy there between plant eaters and meat eaters. Thorn’s his boss.

“I have a new position,” I explain to him. “I don’t want to let my new master down. He will be terribly disappointed in me if I miss the next shuttle out of here. I’ll be bringing shame to myself and to my family. It’s the first time I’ve ever been away from the colony. I’m truly sorry.”

I see him draw in a deep sigh and deflate slightly. “Very well,” he says. “I will call you a transport to the shuttle. Come with me. It would not do for you to be seen in the main house.”

I am all too willing to follow him. He takes me to a staircase. Not the large main one I just scaled, but a much smaller one made of wood rather than stone, winding down and around through the internal structure of the house. It’s not exactly dilapidated, but it is certainly much more unassuming. It’s darker and closer and I like the feeling of being inside it.

We go down through the kitchen, where several other saurians who look a great deal like the one I am with are working industriously, cleaning and cooking. They have pale green and blue skin and less in the way of scales. They all have these protrusions rising up from their heads in scoop type shapes. I wondered what they were for when the servant by my side found me, but down here I suddenly understand exactly what they’re for. They’re a sort of musical appendage, in a way. There are cooks humming to themselves as they work, and the sound reverberates through the extended areas of their skulls in a beautifully haunting and sonorous way. The kitchen is

filled with the sound which is complex and rich in a way that soothes a part of me I didn't know was agitated.

"The music is so pretty," I say.

"It is native to our kind," my escort says.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Sona," he says. "I am the major-domo of this house."

"And the staff all report to you?"

"This is my family," he says. "My wife, Allegra, and my daughters and my sons and I run the household for Alpha Thorn. We have been doing so for a very long time. Thus far, I have served three alphas."

"Alphas come and go?"

"A saurian alpha can be deposed or displaced for any number of reasons. Power struggles are constant in this world. There are many with designs on Thorn's station and home. An alpha must incessantly defend his position. A servant need only remember his or her place. You should keep that in mind as you embark on your career of servitude. Your place is where you can do the most good in the world. It is not shameful to serve. It is necessary, and it can transcend power."

"Wow, Sona. You are incredibly wise. I'm sorry I can't stay and learn more from you."

He smiles and ushers me out of the kitchen, out to the back of Thorn's massive saurian mansion. I didn't see this properly when I first arrived. Now, looking up at it from the outside, I see how incredibly impressive it is. No part of the building is a straight line. Instead, it is built in the form of a rampant primal beast. It is somewhere between sculpture and architecture, and I could stare at it for days.

But Sona is already flagging down one of the vehicles sliding around the street. It has a pleasant, cheerful bubble shape and a friendly yellow color. It is being driven by another one of the servant class, who slides to a smooth and precise stop next to Sona and me.

“To the port,” Sona says, handing over a few silvery coins to the driver up front. “This should suffice for the trip. Make sure the young creature gets there good and safe.”

He doesn't know I am a human. He doesn't know what the hell I am, and yet he's still being so incredibly nice to me.

I get into the vehicle, barefoot and lightly clad in my gown. I don't like that I am leaving my suit and tools behind, but escaping is the highest priority. I can get a new suit and new tools. I can steal, I can borrow, I can charm, and I can lie. All the tools I truly need are locked away in my skull. Except for the implant, which is entirely broken.

“Thank you, Sona,” I say. “You're more generous than I deserve.”

He smiles, shuts the door, and I am swept away into the city.

I should be celebrating at the smoothness and slickness of my escape. What I just did was textbook social engineering. I could teach a master class in it. But instead of working to contain my glee, instead I just feel guilty.

I find myself worrying. Is Sona going to get in trouble for helping me escape? Will he even be dismissed? He spoke of his place as something very important for not only him, but for his entire family. I could get them all thrown out on the streets, and then what would they do?

It was a lot easier when I didn't think so much about wider consequences, when all I thought about were my own short-term impulses.

I suppose it doesn't really make a difference that my thoughts are different when my actions remain entirely the same. I'm going to do everything I would have done with my implant functioning. I'm just going to feel worse about it.

“Excuse me, driver. How far away is the port?”

The driver doesn't respond to me. I notice he has something in his ears. Maybe he can't hear me.

Oh well. Doesn't matter really. I sit back, close my eyes, and let events unfold as they have been set in motion. The closer

the port, the more likely I'll get off this planet before Thorn notices. If it is further away, it will probably be the first thing he locks down. I'm taking a lot of chances here, but I take a lot of chances everywhere, I suppose.

The vehicle slows to another halt, and I get out of it. I am very underdressed. It would be a good idea to get some clothing that will make me look a little less like I escaped from a hospital.

The port is bustling though. There are aliens of all kinds around here, the majority of them not actually saurian. I move through with the crowds as they sort of filter up and into the busy building, which appears to sit at the edge of the city. That makes sense. Most cities don't put the port at the center.

I move through the port until the way to the docks themselves is barred by security personnel who predictably ask for my papers. Of course I don't have any. I am barely clothed, for gods' sakes. What I do have, however, is my ability to readily spin a tale.

"You're not going to believe this, but I've managed to lose my passport with the rest of my baggage, which contains my clothes and shoes. I was transiting through the Gemini system and I think they probably ate it, stole it, or sold it. Anyway, if I don't get to my sister-in-law's wedding in the next solar cycle, I am never going to hear the end of it. She's been planning it to coincide with the astral flares of three separate suns for the last two decades, and the conjunction doesn't last all that long. I had the rings in my suitcase, and losing them is going to be enough of a blow..."

The agent, losing interest in my story, waves me through. Obviously, I am not from this planet. I am not a saurian. I do, however, look like exactly the kind of human whose sister-in-law has an overly complex dream wedding the entire family will be forced to travel to the ends of creation to accommodate.

"Thank you," I say. "May you never have to attend a destination wedding."

That's the sort of wish that turns a stranger into a friend, which means I get a bored smirk from the agent who will forget they ever saw me within the next few minutes, because I have told them the kind of story that makes one aggressively forgettable.

I am now past external security and have access to the docks themselves. Once again, I blend in with the crowd and let it sweep me along through the vast facility. Finally, we end up on the docks proper, the place where ships of all kinds are loading stock and trade and passengers. This represents my last barrier to escape. All I need to do is get aboard one of these ships and let its great engines transfer me off the planet.

The fun thing about complex systems requiring a great deal of security is that once you break them down piece by piece, they become much less complex and much less secure. I know whoever is running this place would insist that it is impenetrable. Hell, Thorn probably thinks his place is escape-proof. He'll know better soon enough.

I look at the various ships, trying to decide which of them is the best target. I want something with a lot of passengers. I want to blend in with others, and I want the opportunity to help myself to a few of their supplies, communally speaking.

The attitude I have now is a workmanlike one. I'll do what I need to do, and I'll freak out later as time permits. This is not a time to lose my nerve. I am very, very close to one of my most daring escapes yet, and I will not allow the fact that the implant in my head no longer shields me from thoughts of the consequences of my actions to stop me.

So why aren't my feet moving?

I can see the perfect ship up ahead. It even has other human passengers. I can see them on the decks. I don't think they ever got off the ship. They won't have clearance to set foot on this world. And they're probably too smart to push their luck and do any sightseeing. Interstellar cruises can take an entire lifetime, and the people who go on them become such seasoned travelers they no longer become space-sick, or risk things like unauthorized departures on primal alien planets. The people up on those decks will almost all have contented



themselves with footage taken by drones for their viewing pleasure.

I make a beeline for the ship, which is loading new passengers of other species. There's a few Euphorians, and I suspect there might even be a Scythkin hiding among our number. Scythkin wear the skins of other species as suits, but I find there's a slightly metallic, deathly kind of scent at play when you are near one.

The vessel is bright pink, which I like because there's no chance that anybody would think I'd go for the boldest, brashest vessel. They're going to assume I'm sneaking off on some super quick skimmer. I can see a few ships here that would quite easily outrun law enforcement of almost any world, but they're the ones Thorn will have stopped and searched. And I don't have time to build the kind of relationship with a smuggler that doesn't get you turned in for more than you agreed to pay them. I have to take a different approach. I have to hide not in plain sight, but in very, very fancy sight.

The HMS Mandalay towers above other ships in dock with a simultaneous brilliant elegance and gaudy appeal that you get with a childfree aunt the day after a big night out. It has been designed to look like old ocean-going cruise ships, with multiple decks for passengers to walk around on. Of course, the entire thing is covered in a transparent shield, which once the vessel is underway, will keep the outer space out.

It's the sort of vessel you could spend hours, if not days looking at, noticing new details with each and every new glance. I don't have time to fully appreciate it now, but I hope I will soon. First, I need to get aboard.

The gate agent might be my toughest opponent yet. She's a human woman in her late fifties, and she has the energy of someone who has seen it all and was not impressed by any of it. She is wearing a very chic uniform suit, blazer and skirt, both in pink that matches the ship, edged with gold trim.

"Ticket?" She snaps the word at me and I feel it pass by my face just inches from my nose, like a physical bullet I just

barely dodged.

“I’m sorry, you’re not going to believe this, but I slept-walk off the ship! I’ve been doing so much of that lately. I think it’s the increased magnetic rays from space, you know? I can feel them moving things about inside my head. Anyway, I went to sleep in my cabin, and I woke up somewhere in the city with this big, green, scaled alien yelling at me!”

She looks me up and down, finding me wanting.

“Can’t let you on without a ticket.”

“Can you leave me here, on a saurian planet with no money, or ID, or any way to support myself? This is either going to be a funny anecdote I tell my family in a few months, or it’s going to be the beginning of an ordeal from which I may never recover.”

I appeal to her better nature and to her sense of mercy. I know how I look, I am a curvy woman who looks like the type to be taken advantage of. It’s something about the set of my eyes, how wide they are, and how my hair is always trying to curl into them. I look chaotic and messy and relatable. I have to hope that somewhere inside this woman, a younger version of herself going out and getting into trouble still exists. Or, hell, a future version. I just need her to relate to me enough that she puts herself in my shoes and is compelled to help me.

The look on her face tells me I might just have encountered the one kind of person who is utterly immovable and unshakable in their job, someone who has a small amount of power and will use it to an obsessive level. I just told her she can ruin my life, and I think she likes the sound of that.

“I’m sorry,” she says, in a tone that suggests she is practically on the verge of orgasm. “I can’t let you back on the ship without either a ticket or some proof of your identity.”

“Alright, well, when the ship docks and they ask where the magistrate potentate of the Mars colony’s daughter is, and who left her stranded on a hostile alien planet, I’ll tell them it was...” I glance at her badge. “Clara Have A Nice Day.”

She glances over my head. I see her lips tighten for a moment, then spread in a smile. “You are a wanted fugitive,” she says.

“Am not!”

“Are too.” She points over my head. I turn around and see my face displayed on the screen. There must have been security footage at that dive bar I accidentally destroyed on purpose because they deserved it. My face is very clearly displayed while I’m sitting on the counter, going through pack after pack of bar snacks. And, sure enough, underneath my face are the words, WANTED FUGITIVE.

“That’s obviously not me,” I laugh. “I’m flattered that you think it is. That’s a much younger woman with an incredible suit and an even greater tolerance for commercial amounts of sodium and preservatives in her diet. If I tried to eat even one of those things, I’d be on the toilet for a week.”

“What is that about?” Clara Have A Nice Day suddenly shifts gears with me. “I used to be able to eat anything, and now if it has so much of a hint of dairy or wheat or soy or egg or any number of what should be innocuous substances in it, it’s like I took some kind of dietary explosive device.”

“I know. I don’t know what it is. All they say is that you have to modify your diet, but surely there’s something else going on. It feels like a conspiracy, but not a fun one. I do have some supplements that help, from time to time, but they’re in my cabin. I guess you’ve got to hold me for the authorities, though, and I’ll miss the ship’s departure. My mother-in-law is going to be so smug about this. I’ll never hear the end of it. She’ll probably think I did it on purpose. I swear to god she’s trying to force a divorce between my husband and me...”

Clara Have A Nice Day’s interest has been piqued in multiple different ways now, and I am almost certain she is going to let me board the ship. I’m no longer just a tedious three-dimensional pawn she can push around. I’m potential gossip, drama, and commiseration. We’re practically best friends right now.

“Go up quickly,” she says, standing to the side. “I won’t say you were here.”

“Thank you!” I don’t wait for her to change her mind. I rush up the gangway and do my best to once more blend into the heavy crowds thronging the many decks of the ships as they attempt to find their cabins, or relocate friends and family, while also being awed by all the entertainment options surrounding them. This place is one big flying casino, essentially. There are gambling machines on every corner, and in the middle of the main deck there is a gaming floor with what has to be more than a hundred attendants in sleek black and white suits ready to take your money in the most charming and entertaining of ways.

This is perfect for me. All I need to do is hover around one of the accommodation corridors long enough for someone to leave with the intention of gambling, slip into their room before the door closes, and start putting myself a new outfit together.

This is a ship where Lady Luck rules supreme, and she has been smiling on me today. I hope she continues to favor me for just a little bit longer. All I really need is for this big vessel to depart and I can consider myself entirely escaped. Thorn might have people out looking for me, but it’s pretty clear that the ships departing his planet don’t consider his crisis their problem. Once we hit open skies, we will be entirely out of Thorn’s jurisdiction, and he’ll have no way of reclaiming me.

There’s something surprising about how easy this all is, even while I’m afraid. Or maybe I’m not afraid. Maybe I’ve been focusing on doing what I need to do so much that I haven’t had time to be afraid. There’s still no time for that.

I slip into one cabin after another. Obviously nobody has a suit for pirates with them, but they do have some pants I can wear, and putting pants on makes me feel instantly better. I also find some socks and some pretty sweet boots. The pants are a nice dark black color, and the boots are white and have a thick platform heel. There’s just something about a nice pair of boots that really makes one feel secure and sexy at the same time. There’s power in good footwear.

I find an undershirt which snugs me nice and tight, making me feel very controlled and contained. Then I grab the clothing

that looks most generic and will help me blend in with the other passengers. Right now, brightly colored windbreakers with interstellar patterns are very much in, so I put one of them on. The back contains the letters HMS Mandalay in large pink and gold lettering. I also grab a visor with similar branding. Perfect. My face is covered and I look like any one of several hundred people on board.

Maybe I don't need the chip anymore. Maybe I needed it back when I started, but my criminal self has developed a lot in the last few years, and I've learned a lot.

*"All guests are to return to their cabins in preparation for departure."*

A thrill runs through me. I'm getting away with this! It's actually happening! I've successfully escaped, and to tell the truth I was barely trying. This is what happens when you take opportunities, when you're brave, and you don't second guess yourself, implant or no implant. I have to remember this lesson. I have to remember not to forget myself again.

Then another voice comes through the speakers. It is not the human voice that sounded so relatively comforting and calming a moment ago. This is a rougher, darker, harsher tone, albeit a familiar one.

**"Sullivan! I know you are here. Security footage showed you entering the port. Further footage shows you boarding this ship. I can pull footage from each and every one of the cameras on this ship and track you down like the little animal you are. If I do that, you will be punished publicly."**

I'm impressed. Deeply impressed. I had no idea that this was a surveillance state. The speed with which they must have tracked the cab I took, and then followed me through the port and to the Mandalay is impressive. It means I'll have to up my game next time I make an escape.

I can't actually take him at his word, though. It might be that they don't have that level of surveillance at all. It might be that they asked around and tracked me manually and want to lure me out with false information. To really know his capabilities, I have to force him to carry out his threat.

There's a thrill coursing through me now, another old yet new sensation. It feels like excitement, though I know logically it must be a variant of fear. Who knew it could be so delicious. Who knew that fear itself could actually encourage one to court even more danger. I bask in the sensation as I tuck myself safely away into a cleaning closet. I like places like this. See, cleaners are best kept out of the way of the paying public. That means their closets aren't just places to keep mops and deliciously foamy cleaning supplies. They're also backdoors to hidden networks that run between the major gathering places on the ship. Ballrooms. Kitchens. Bathrooms. They're all networked together with these passages that echo when you walk if you're not careful, and which do not open to the outside world except for the worker decks and those aforementioned workspaces. The interior of this hall bears the marks of many thousands of buckets of dirty water being accidentally sloshed into the lower walls. The floor beneath my feet has been eroded too, the footsteps of people fated to work this vessel wearing paths into aged linoleum-type material.

He's not tracking me through here. Not for long.

I hear the door behind me open. The sound of it squeaking sends another bolt of pure excitement through me. Maybe they are on my tail. Maybe they really did see me make my escape. Heavy footsteps indicate that might very well be the case.

Fortunately for me, the passageway splits and splits again before splitting even more. I scoot down passages not quite randomly, choosing left and then middle and then right, mixing it up.

Unfortunately, I hear other doors opening.

It must have occurred to my saurian pursuers that it's possible to use these tunnels to move about the ship unseen. They are smart. And now I'm kind of fucked. It's only a matter before I am cornered, and before any chance of mercy disappears entirely.

"Alright," I say, stepping out onto the main deck. "You got me."

As luck, or whatever force passes for luck deserts me, I find myself standing just a few feet away from Thorn. He is looking directly at me, indicating that I didn't have a chance of escaping him. Somehow, he knew exactly where I was the whole time, even when I was running about in those interior passages. I have to assume that he sent his minions in quite deliberately to flush me out here.

Thorn's gaze is cold and hard. "Too little of a surrender, too late, Sullivan."

He used my full name. He never uses my full name.

He also looks a lot larger suddenly. Maybe that is because this is the first time I've seen him anywhere that human scale is the order of the day. I feel small in his world, in his house, and in buildings made for saurians. But the door I just came through? He'd have a hard time fitting through it. It must have been a very claustrophobic sensation for the others to have to push themselves through those relatively narrow spaces.

"I warned you what would happen if I had to come and find you — and you made me come and find you."

He reaches for me. I take a step back reflexively, even though I know there's nowhere to run.

"You can't blame a prisoner for trying to escape, jackass."

The chip in my head might be gone, but righteous indignation goes a long way toward keeping fear at bay. As long as I remind myself that I've done nothing wrong, then anything he does to me is an injustice I just have to suffer through. It's something that makes me stronger rather than weaker.

He gives me a look that does not bode well for me.

## *T*horn

To have seen her yesterday, curled up in absolute terror, practically promising never to do anything bad ever again, one would have thought she was cured of her criminal ways. I had allowed myself to think that the beast had been tamed, at least

to the extent that she no longer had the confidence to embark on any great displays of disobedience.

I was wrong.

Apparently, even the most timid of humans can sometimes act through fear, overcoming their baser impulses and allowing themselves to contravene laws and social conventions alike.

The moment I discovered her missing, I was struck with a very unpleasant sensation of loss. I have mated this human. I should have been aware of the potential that act had to bond us. Well, to bond me. In the act of taking her, I gave something of myself. I wonder if she feels it too, or if she is just so consumed by her need to escape and rebel that there is no fondness in her whatsoever.

“You are not a prisoner,” I tell her. “You are my owned mate. You are a possession.”

She blushes, her skin brightening and turning a pinkish-red, while her eyes gleam with what I might very well consider to be pleasure.

“A possession, huh?” She smirks at me. “Well, you’re going to have to get a lot better at keeping me for your own.”

I grab her and I start to strip her of the clothing she has no doubt stolen. It tears beneath my hands, made of inferior materials and poorly made seams — though in this mood I doubt there is a garment that could withstand my ire.

“You don’t deserve to be clothed,” I growl down at her. “You haven’t earned the privilege of modesty. After all the mercy I have shown you, you not only have the temerity to continue to break the law, but to flaunt it in my face.”

With the soft, generous curve of her ass exposed, I start the punishment. It is not as public as she deserves it to be. Most of the passengers are confined to their cabins — but it is still happening in an exposed location and that will have to do. I want her to know there is nowhere she can go that I will not reach her.

I did not come unprepared. In fact, I have the little leather lash that is perfectly sized to catch both of her cheeks in one stroke.



It is textured like the hide of the beast it came from, and when it lands, it leaves a set of pink scale markings across her deserving flesh.

“I warned you,” I lecture her. “I told you I would be merciful as long as you were good and obedient, and you have been neither. You have forced me to mobilize my men city-wide, to distract surveillance from other targets, and focus it all squarely on you. Once again, you have caused disruption in my territory, and once again you will be soundly, sorely punished for doing so.”

The lecturing is satisfying, as is landing the lash across her cheeks and upper thighs as she squirms and dances in front of me, held by the fabric at the scruff of her neck — but this is not an entirely proper position for punishing her.

I sit down on what is a counter height for these creatures, and I swing her over my left thigh, leaving her dangling with her head toward the deck, and putting the curve of her cheeks on ultimate display. Now I can properly punish this deserving ass of hers. Now I can mark it with my very own brand of discipline.

She is wailing and writhing as I begin the necessary task of properly whipping her. I want her to remember this next time she spots an opportunity for so-called escape. I want her to see a chance to run away and instantly know what it is to feel her bare flesh exposed and on fire.

“Don’t you ever run away from me again,” I lecture, aware that on some level I sound like a disappointed father chastising a bad little whelping. “Don’t you ever make me worry about you in this way. I have claimed you for my own, and I intend to keep you whether you like it or not. So if you want the privilege of being able to sit comfortably, you had better start understanding your place.”

Suli’s cries have been largely incoherent since the strapping started, but if I am not mistaken, I hear a soft, slight moan in response to that last set of declarations. I am not trying to terrify her. I am trying to show her that she has a place with me, and that I, of all the creatures she has ever encountered in

her piratical reign, will not allow her to continue what seems to be a lifetime of crime.

“You are going to be a good girl for me, or you are going to be a very sore girl because of me,” I say, laying down the lash for a moment to give her bright red, rather welted ass a short reprieve.

She takes a deep, shuddering breath, her hips still making that impulsive grinding motion. I don't think she can help that response. It is part of her body's attempts to integrate the discipline and the sensation and her own ever-present arousal.

On some level, she likes this. I can smell her need, and I can see it too, a gleaming stripe of arousal emerging between her lower lips.

I wonder if she does not engage in such outrageous behavior in hopes of provoking just this sort of reaction.

I am aware that my men are watching. Having captured their prey, they are now ranged around us, a good two dozen saurians of all kinds with their gazes locked on the unfortunate human whose punishment is not nearly over.

*Sullivan*

“I am going to make an example of you,” Thorn growls down at me.

I thought he already had. He didn't take my pants down. He ripped the seat out of the ass. I still have an entirely useless waistband around my hips while the ragged remains of the legs slide down my thighs, held in place by the crotch and front of the garment. I must look like an absolute mess. I feel like one. My ass is burning, my pride is nonexistent, and there is a growing saturation between my legs that I know he is aware of.

He picks me up from his lap, holding me under my thighs, letting my back rest against his chest as he stands up. I find myself spread and displayed to every single one of his saurian troops.

“Every single one of these soldiers and officers had to take time from their normal duties to come and hunt you down. Every single one of them has no doubt wondered why you have been permitted to have free rein this way, how you ever escaped, especially after all that happened yesterday. Your kind is not permitted to roam our world. And yet you have run free throughout the city and the wilds, causing destruction and chaos wherever you go.”

He lifts me up, and I feel his cock, free of the constraints of his pants, rubbing along the length of my pussy. I knew they could see my privates, of course, but I had hoped that all these grim, dominant saurian gazes hadn't particularly noticed what they were looking at.

I lose all semblance of that illusion as Thorn lifts me a fraction higher, the massive length of his cock no longer sliding across my wet slit, but instead the head of his rod finding the slippery and all too soft and open entrance of my body. He is going to fuck me again, but this time he is going to do it publicly. He is making a spectacle of me, and there is nothing I can do as I feel the thick dominance of his cock spreading me open, claiming my interior, making my inner walls stretch around his scaled rod.

One of his hands slides around my waist and his hand cups my crotch, giving me something to rub my clit against as he fucks me with long, easy, flexing strokes not designed to give him an orgasm, but to draw out my public humiliation.

“You're mine, Suli,” he growls in my ear. “Mine to hunt down. Mine to capture. Mine to punish. And mine to fuck wherever and whenever I feel the urge. If you want modesty and privacy for the claiming of your cute little cunt, you had better learn to behave, or you will find yourself in this position time and time again, my cock sliding in and out of you while you face the very saurians you have caused so much trouble for.”

He can't know this, but this is fucking hot. Embarrassment can be the worst feeling, but it is also one of the hottest and most intense. The shame he wants me to feel is making my body feel like every single cell is being personally called out.

My pussy is soaking his lap, my hips gyrating with incredible need as I squirm on his dick. Right now I don't care what happens to me. I feel free. I feel wild. I feel rebellious. All the feelings he seems to be trying to curtail are only all the more intense for finding expression in this searing hot moment.

"Fuck me," I moan, inviting my own humiliation.

I feel him pause, his cock stilling.

For a moment, I am almost afraid he will pull out, deny me what I want. Then I feel a deep, rough thrust that goes deeper than any before it and makes me cry out with unrestrained pleasure.

"You are such a hot, desperate, wanton little human fuck toy, aren't you," he snarls as he gives me exactly what I want, turning me around so I can brace my hands on the ship wall, his hands going to my hips as he holds me aloft and in place, giving me the fucking I deserve. A proper public ravaging, one that makes me squeal and moan as my arousal runs down over his cock, coats his saurian balls, and even starts to drip on the deck below. This ship never sees the ocean, but I am making it wet.

I can feel my thrashed bottom bouncing against the hard, scaled lines of his lower abdomen as he slaps against me, claiming me over and over with increasingly hard and rough thrusts. I am going to feel this later. I am going to be sore, both on my ass and in my pussy. My lips are doing their best to grip his huge cock, swelling with the effort of being pounded so mercilessly.

"I am going to come inside you," he says. "I am going to fill this pussy up, and I am going to make you take every drop of it, you filthy, naughty, badly behaved little human girl. You are going to wear my cum for the rest of the day."

My pussy contracts hard around his cock, gripping him with that internal undulation that demands he make good on that threat. I don't care who is watching. I don't care who sees. This is something that should be seen. The world should see me wrapped around his cock.

Thorn has made me feel so many things I never knew I was capable of feeling. He has introduced me to fear. He has taught me what it is to be ashamed. He has even managed to make me flirt with being sorry. But no lesson is as intense as the one I am learning now. He has made me feel deeply loved.

I know this is not for the benefit of anybody besides myself. I know he would rather have me tucked away, making love to me in secret. I know he would have much preferred I never ran away. But spreading my legs and punishing my pussy with his thick, saurian cock, making the consequence so shameful and so intense I will never be able to erase it from my mind is his way of showing me that no matter what I do, he will match it.

I have lived a life of being too much for too many people. I have been extra. I have been impossible to handle. Even as a pirate, I was too much for my own damn crew. But I have never been too much for Thorn. He has always been able to meet me and then outpace me. As I feel him start to do just as he promised and pump his cum inside me, he fills me so deeply and completely it drips out of me again, even with his cock inside me, leaking past the seal of his scaled rod and then even through his fingers, which are wrapped around my pussy, holding me in place by my pubic bone.

“Are you ready to be a good girl for me?” He murmurs the question in my ear, shifting his grip a little so he can massage hot, fresh seed into my straining clit.

“Never...” I moan.

I will maintain my resistance, and he will continue to break me for it, over and over and over again.

## 8 SORRY

**T**horn

My human sleeps a very long time after her recapture. I enjoy the memory of our public mating many times over, knowing that I made an impression that will not soon be forgotten, both on her and on my men. The event has been broadcast on certain channels, which has gone to mollify the sensibilities of those whose property was damaged in the attack on the Ground Bar.

Of course, all is not entirely well. This is the calm after the storm. Also, the calm before the storm. Essentially, with her asleep, this is the calm between storms. I am not foolish enough to believe that the actions undertaken yesterday will be enough to subdue my little pirate for long.

“Mngggghh...” she groans as she wakes up, her eyes fluttering open amid a tangle of riotous blonde curls. She is, without a doubt, the most beautiful creature I have ever had in my bed. Everything about her calls me.

“Good morning,” I say. “Have you learned your lesson?”

She smiles before she responds, before she’s even entirely awake, I think. The question makes her eyes spark with excitement, and I already know the answer.

Suli takes a moment to bury her face in a pillow, ironically taking a deep breath somehow into the soft surface, before pulling back again and answering me with an evasive question.

“Depends what the lesson is, I suppose.”

“Have you learned that I will hunt you down and claim you if you dare try to escape?”

“I got that idea,” she grins, her hips performing a no-doubt aching gyration beneath the blanket that covers her lower half but hides nothing from me. I know this woman in a way I have never known anybody. I feel my understanding of her deepening with every breath she takes. Humans betray themselves constantly, and though she has shown alacrity as a liar, I suspect most of her success has come because she is speaking to people who do not understand her.

I reach out and tenderly brush some of the curls out of her face. It is time to speak plainly. Though these feelings and this connection may have happened swiftly, they are very important. This is one of the few times I have had her in my presence while calm and chastened enough to take some information in.

“I don’t want you to leave, Sullivan. I have never felt the kind of mating bond with anybody else that I feel with you. It is not easy for an alpha to find his mate. It requires a strength and a softness not often combined. You are bold and you are brave, but you are also terrified and weak.”

## *Sullivan*

I didn’t know what would happen when I woke up. I didn’t know if there would be fresh punishment, or if I would be roundly chastised. I did not expect a declaration of devotion from the alien I have been tormenting and defying since my arrival.

Usually, people who are crossed by me hate me instantly. By the time I’ve done as much property damage and caused as much chaos as I have already caused, they usually want me dead on sight.

It takes me a very long moment to collect my thoughts, let alone my feelings. I know I have never felt as cozy as I do right now, or as safe. Not just safe from the outside world and all the terrible things that could potentially arise in it, but from

my inner demons. I feel as though I could curl up with him and never have to worry about my own wildness again. When I look into Thorn's eyes, I see a possible future in which things are sane and safe — including me.

It's an intriguing possibility, but it comes with a side of the new emotion that seems to accompany literally every thought I have — fear. I can't let myself be captured and tamed this easily. I can't just give into captivity. That goes against every single one of my principals, the few of them that are left. It also freaks me the hell out. I have been roaming this universe being generally awful for years now. I can't imagine what it would be like to be terrible in one place with one person. It feels like that would be entirely odd and maybe even impossible for me.

Whatever this guy wants, it's not me. He might be confused now, but I know better. People think I'm hot and exciting at first. That's how I recruited most of my crew. But the appeal wears off after a while, and the attraction turns to disdain or worse. I don't really feel like being abandoned by a saurian alpha in a few months' time when he inevitably gets bored of me or irrevocably annoyed by me.

"I thought being terrified and weak would be a turn off for you."

"No. Because I can then comfort you and look after you until you are brave and bold once more. And then I can hunt you down and bring you back from wherever it is you have run off to."

"You're not angry I ran, then."

"Not at all. I enjoyed the hunt. And I especially enjoyed the capture. Reclaiming you publicly, making you come on my cock while everybody watched your sweet shame was a delicious adventure I would happily repeat."

I find myself blushing but not disagreeing. It was incredibly hot to be treated in such a way, to be punished and cherished and displayed all at once. I can feel my pussy responding even now, tightening at the memory of having been ravaged so roughly.



I wonder if I really have a choice in staying and being his. It feels as though fate has wrapped itself around me and is holding me right where I need to be. Thorn has no intention of letting me go, and now that I've been caught, a second escape will not be easy. He reaches a strong, saurian arm around my waist and snugs me close to his body. I feel myself respond to his presence with a rush of arousal that brings me deep pleasure and even more anticipation. Being around Thorn is like being attached to a machine that produces nothing but excitement and need. It's like having a chip in my head, but the chip makes me want to be fucked.

"I like your blushes," he murmurs, letting a rough finger play over my cheek then slip under my chin and raise my face to his. "And I adore your moans. But there is more you need, isn't there. There is pain, and there is atonement. There is being something you have never been in your entire life...."

"What is that?"

"Sorry," he growls. "I am going to make you very, very sorry."

I feel my pussy start to well with desire. I want him inside me. I want him to absolutely obliterate me so I don't have to think another thought.

"You're sore, aren't you?" He growls the question softly. "I made your pussy very sore yesterday, didn't I?"

"Yes," I moan.

He puts me on my back and begins to punish me all over again. This time my ass is safe, but a more sensitive, tender part of my anatomy is not. He picks up the lash, which is thick enough to cover my entire pussy. I know this for a fact when he brings it down with a flick of his wrist, and the infernal sensation bursts over my pussy and clit in a flash of heat and sting.

"Put your hands down," he orders. "Don't you dare try to cover your soft sex. I am going to lash this pussy, and then I am going to fuck it, and you are going to take this punishment because you know you deserve it. Both for what you have done recently, and what you have done in the past."

My lips are swollen and wet, and every time the lash lands the liquid I am producing is spread across my cunt. Being spanked wet hurts a lot more than being punished in my normal state. There's no escaping the lash, either. He is holding me in place and making sure every single one of these terribly punishing slaps lands directly over my pussy, catching my lower lips every time, and sometimes, when it lands a little higher, making my clit pulse inside her hidden little hood.

Within minutes, he has me writhing in aroused agony. I am just as sore as he promised I would be, and yet all I want his his cock inside me. He is above me, between my legs, his thick red and gold saurian cock hard and throbbing every time he lifts the lash and brings it down. He regards me with a triumphant gaze of desire, a look that makes fresh heat bolt through me.

He is going to fuck me again. I know it.

I cry out as he pushes inside me, my swollen lips gripping him, my molten wet interior saturating him. I am tight as hell, but he has primed me for this rough claiming. His kisses run down my throat as he arches his hips and forces the length of his cock into me in one long thrust that fills me all the way up, leaving no room for anything else.

"It hurts," I whimper, not wanting him to stop, and knowing that he will not.

"Good," he purrs sweetly, drawing his cock out of my tender sex only to drive it back in again in another one of those impossibly powerful thrusts that makes me feel as though he has complete mastery of me in every way. In his arms, I lose myself. I lose the drive to disobey and to rebel and to fight as I feel myself sinking into a state of submission I truly never thought I would experience.

I float in that post-coital haze for what must be minutes, but truly feels like hours. There is a timelessness to the moments spent in Thorn's arms. Everything about this world is primal, but he makes me feel as though we exist before the creation of silly things like seconds, minutes, hours. There's only a big, endless nowness when I am with him.

“Suli...”

“Yes?”

“It’s time to apologize.”

“Really? After all of that? You still don’t feel like I’ve made amends?”

I am aching inside and out. I know once the pleasure wears off, I am going to be very, very sore in the most intimate of ways for quite some time. It was worth it as far as I am concerned. For that kind of orgasm, I’d take all manner of intimate punishment. I’d let Thorn do with me as he pleases, which is just as well because he is going to do with me as he pleases.

“There is someone else you need to make amends to,” he says. “There was a member of my staff...”

“Sona,” I say. “Yes. He helped me escape. He was so nice to me even though he thought I was an intruder. And...”

“He came to me immediately upon learning that a prisoner of mine had escaped and confessed, offering his resignation. I did not accept it, obviously. Instead, I told him that you are an irredeemably untrustworthy little creature and it was not surprising you had manipulated him into letting you escape...”

“Okay, when you put it that way, it feels like I’m just a very terrible person.”

“I thought you celebrated being a very terrible person.”

“I celebrate being a pirate captain. Well, a pirate. Well, I mean, being a free person. But not terrible. It’s relative, you know? What’s terrible for a common person is practically required for a pirate. You can’t blame me for that.”

“I’m not blaming you for anything. I’m saying you broke the trust of one of my oldest, kindest, wisest servants, and he is now blaming himself for not seeing what you obviously were at the outset.”

“I know. I knew when I was doing it. He’s too nice a guy. I’ll apologize.”

“Good girl,” Thorn says.



Sona is not hard to find, because the house in its entirety is Sona’s domain. I locate him in the dining room, rearranging the silver in its many silver drawers. This place is refined. It’s wild, but it’s also clearly the result of many generations of refinement. Thorn is clearly not the first of his line or his kind.

I clear my throat, though I know that’s probably not actually necessary. Sona knows I’m here. I saw him twitch with slight irritation the moment I entered the room.

“Major-Domo Sona,” I say, attempting formality.

“Yes, human?”

“My name is Captain Sullivan O’Shannassay,” I say. “I should have introduced myself properly earlier. I would have, except for the fact that I was trying to escape. So...”

“Captain O’Shannassay,” he says, with an unmistakable cool distance in his tone. This man is not a fan. “And what are you the captain of?”

“Well, I did have a ship. *The Mare*. I’ve been temporarily separated from it.”

“How?”

“A sort of... a little... well, there was the merest hint of mutiny, and I thought it might be best if I went ahead and gave my crew a little extra space for a while. I’m still legally the captain, though. It’s my name on the papers. I pay the insurance.”

“Is that what a pirate captain does? Pays insurance?”

“Sure. A captain does a lot of things. It’s not all theft and swashbucklery. There’s a lot of admin. To be honest, I’m very glad for the break.”

“To be honest? Are you capable of such a thing?”

Sassy. He's very, very sassy. I suppose I can't exactly take offense.

"I'm sorry if I caused you any trouble yesterday. I felt rather guilty about taking advantage of you that way."

"You cannot help it. You are a human and a pirate, which means much of what you say will be a lie of some kind."

"See, this sort of sounds like understanding, but it feels like judgement, you know?"

Sona gives me a look that suggests I am indeed being judged.

"I'm going to stay, anyway," I tell him. "So I hope we can get over this little misunderstanding."

"Wonderful, a human with a loose connection to the truth and hardly any understanding of the workings on the world will have free rein in the home of the alpha of the territory," Sona says dryly. "I can see no way whatsoever in which this will inevitably be a terrible disaster."

"Really? I can see quite a few ways this could be a terrible disaster."

The answer to sarcasm is being deeply literal, I've always found.

"Indeed. If you will forgive me, I need to attend to my duties. I understand you have none, being nothing more than a general entertainment piece for the alpha."

"I think I'm a little more than a general entertainment piece," I say. "I'm trying to apologize here. I hope you know I've suffered a great deal as a result of my actions yesterday, and there's a very significant chance that I won't do it again."

Sona gives me an unimpressed look. "I knew the moment I saw you that you were trouble. I endeavored to rid the city of you, but unfortunately for us all, Alpha Thorn appears to be attached to you. Every alpha has his downfall, and it is usually a matter of poor taste."

"So, apology not so much accepted then, I take it."

“Your apology is received with thanks,” he says. Well, that’s what his words say, but his tone tells me to fuck right off, and I suppose I can’t blame him.

## 9 CAPTIVITY

**T**horn

We experience a few days of peace. I am beginning to believe that Suli understands and even enjoys her place with me, but I am not stupid. I do not trust her completely, so I have made arrangements to keep her safely contained when I cannot be physically with her.

“Why do you have that expression on your face?” She asks the question with sleepy suspicion as she lies naked in my bed, dripping with my seed and flushed from her recent orgasm. It is almost impossible for me not to fuck her every time we are reunited from even the shortest separation.

“I have something for you. Something you may eventually be spared, but something, for now, I think you need.”

She looks instantly more alert. “What is happening?”

“Nothing. And I intend to keep it that way. You are prone to mischief, and I know you will not be able to resist another escape attempt, simply out of habit. So. I have had an addition made to my chambers. I’ve made a room for you.”

Her eyes narrow at me, but before she can indulge any moodiness, I sweep her naked body up and off the bed. She cannot help her little shout of glee as she feels me take physical control of her. She has never been able to resist my power. She always melts against me, and she does so again now.

I carry her into an adjoining room. I said I had made a room for her, which is somewhat true. But in truth, I’ve had

something made that will hold her much better than any room ever could.

She lets out a scandalized gasp. “A cage?!”

I feel her start to struggle and squirm, but I have no intention of letting her go. She is going to go into the cage. She is going to feel her captivity in this naked state, and she is going to submit to confinement.

“What is the matter? You told me once you were not afraid of being put away in a cell. You told me so boldly.” I chuckle as I put her inside and close the door.

“You...” Suli stands naked inside the cage, which is more than big enough for her to stand up, turn around, and lie down. I have been kind enough to provide a soft matted area and some pillows for a bed. She also has water. “What if I have to pee?”

“You will have to be allowed out to do that.”

“Thorn!” She stamps her foot, her face coloring with temper. “This isn’t fair!”

“Oh, it is eminently fair, Suli. After how many times I have had to chase you down, how many times I have almost lost you? I have no intention of allowing you any semblance of the freedom that would be required for you to try to run again. And I hope you know the entire household is united in that aim. I have you, Suli. You are mine. And I intend to keep you.”

Her expression softens as I speak, just a fraction, but enough to show that she understands what I am trying to tell her. I do this because I know her nature, and I do it because her nature cannot be allowed to express itself and rob us both of the mate bond between us.

A knocking at the door of my bedroom interrupts the moment. There is an urgency I must respond to.

“Thorn!” I hear her call out behind me.

“Be good,” I reply.

“THORN!” She shouts my name louder, outraged and spoiled, and as usual trying to have her own way.



Avel is at the door when I open it. He speaks with a low, intense urgency that immediately arrests my attention.

“A human ship is landing near the remains of the Ground Bar.”



**T** rue to the surveillance information, there is a ship parked near the remains of the Ground Bar. It is a big purple shining thing with blinking pale lights around the edge. There is something very performative about it, something crass and glitzy. I have the feeling this is somehow related to Suli. I don't know how or why, but I can detect her handiwork.

I left her safely at home, cursing me from her cage. She will be safe there. For the first time, I am not worried about not having eyes directly on her. Caging the human was probably the best idea I've had in years.

The ship is sitting with all the entries closed, no indication that anybody has gone in or out. I don't see footsteps. I don't smell anything foreign. I do smell a rather warm, rubbery scent, but that is all.

“This is suspicious,” Avel says.

“Yes,” I agree. “It is. Where are the occupants?”

“Inside, perhaps,” he says.

“Why would they land and simply sit around?”

“They might be waiting for something.”

“This feels like a trap,” he says. “We should attack.”

“I think we should just have a look,” I say. “Attacking a ship for no reason whatsoever seems imprudent. It could be related to Suli.”

Avel sighs under his breath. I know he does not approve of my relationship with Suli. He does not understand the attraction to a human. He is a traditionalist, still seeking a suitable saurian

female mate, for all the trouble that is worth. But he is also a good soldier, and he falls in line as I head toward it.

The ship seems to shimmer and almost sway as we approach. It may have some kind of cloaking technology. It certainly does not seem to be behaving as I would expect something of its size, weight, and capacity to behave.

GRRROOOWWWWARRR!

I will never entirely understand how leviathan primals are able to sneak up on one from time to time. Perhaps it is part of their hunting style, to step slowly, to put their weight ever so gently on one foot and then the other so that the thundering of their feet does not warn unsuspecting prey of their approach.

The dense jungle that hid this beast's approach bursts open in a flurry of branches and uprooted trees as the very same primal that recently chewed my bike into a semblance of itself thunders into the clearing. Massive creature that it is, its legs are larger and longer and taller than the ship it seems to have taken exception to. It rushes for the craft, jaws extended, mouth open in a maw large enough to consume a thousand saurians in a single bite.

POP!

The ship disappears in a loud sound that takes both Avel and me, and the primal completely unawares. It is hard to imagine anything in this world, or off it, frightening a beast like the one before us, but the legendary primal turns tail and flees, leaving a very large, entirely deflated, massive sheet of rubber squashed into the remnants of its tracks.

Avel looks at me with an expression I know mirrors the one on my face.

“What the hell is happening?”

I cannot speak to the specifics, but I know there are two words to answer that question.

“Human trickery.”

## 10 WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

**S** *uli*  
“She’s here.”

“Is she?”

“This way. It makes sense they’d keep her in the most secure room in the house. No windows.”

I can hear voices. Familiar voices. The last set of voices I ever expected to hear. I feel a flash of excitement, followed by confusion. What are they doing here? What is going on? I strain my senses to pick up more information, hearing soft footsteps moving outside the door, and a brief flurry of whispers before the door swings open quietly, and three women enter the room.

At their head is a woman with raven dark hair flecked with purple streaks. She is slightly older than I am, taller, and she wears a nearly perpetual sneer on her face. It deepens when she sees me sitting cross-legged in my little cage, then turns into a half-grin of amusement. I’m naked, and I guess that means she thinks I’ve been humiliated. I have, but I’m not embarrassed to be seen by the likes of her in this state. Not since I’ve been seen in truly much more compromised positions than this.

This is Raine. She was my first mate. Then she became my first mutineer. This is quite the unexpected reunion.

Behind her are a stunning redhead, Zara, and a very quiet young woman we call Mouse. Mouse has brown hair that falls to her shoulders in a sleek yet modest fall. Mouse is a master

tactician, while Zara is just the sort of person you want on your side in a pinch. She's a jack of all trades, good at lock-picking, pretty serviceable with a weapon, and not stupid in a crisis. These women were all my friends, right up until they weren't anymore.

It's strange to see them. Almost as strange as it is good to see them.

"Hey, ladies," I say, trying to find a cool way to sit in my cage and failing. "To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

Raine takes the conversational lead. She has a rough, rather low voice, and an attitude that gives me the distinct feeling she's not happy to be here. When you're a pirate, you get used to awkward reunions. Usually with people you've crossed before. Not typically so much with your own crew.

"We're here to rescue you. There's a decoy ship at your crash site, to draw the aliens toward it. The actual ship is cloaked above us. We don't have long. Zara, can you open that cage?"

Zara pulls a digital pick set out of her hair and steps toward the locking mechanism. I have no doubt she'll have this lock open in...

*Plink!*

That was even quicker than I thought. She must have been practicing.

"Good job, Zara!" I praise.

She smiles and slides the pick set back into her hair. She has an abundance of red waves which hide an absolute plethora of sins. My suit held a lot of tricks in it, but Zara's hair is even more densely packed with the sorts of unexpectedly dangerous and disastrous tools that make people wish they'd thought once, twice, three times before crossing her.

"It's good to see you again, captain," she says, swinging the door open for me.

I hesitate before stepping out. Here's the thing. I'm not stupid. And I know that they didn't come back here out of the goodness of their hearts. They want something from me.

“Why are you here?”

“I just told you. We’re rescuing you.”

They’re all wearing black versions of the suit I was wearing when I came here. It makes me ache to see their attire. I miss having a garment that makes me more than I am, more than helpless, caged human flesh waiting for her ravager to return. Those suits hug every curve, emphasize every asset, and turn a woman into a warrior.

As if reading my mind, Raine steps over to Mouse, and opens a pack she’s wearing on her back. From that pack, she pulls out my suit. I don’t know how they found it, but if anybody can trawl through an entire house and find a single thing they’re looking for, it’s my crew. “Here,” she says, throwing it at me. “Put this on and let’s get out of here.”

I catch the suit and scramble into it. It feels like putting my skin back on, like some intrinsic part of me had been flayed away and has now miraculously been returned. I stretch my arms above my head and feel the interior portions of the garment snug into place.

She tosses me my boots too. Putting them on feels even better. There’s something powerful about shoes, I think. Something women have always known and men seem to rarely catch onto. Or maybe they do. Maybe that’s why Thorn has kept me barefoot. Hm. That’s an angle I hadn’t even begun to consider in all of this.

Once clothed, I can think a little straighter. I can ask a simple, maybe even obvious question.

“What do you want, Raine?”

“We came to find you,” she says, giving me a blank, bold response that she knows damn well doesn’t answer the question I am really asking.

“Why?”

“Because after we mutinied and let you go, we found ourselves both pursued by the law and with few suitable targets to attack. You are a terrible captain, but you are an excellent pirate.”

“So you want me back, but not as captain? You want me to return to my ship and watch you run it? Why would you think I’d ever take that offer?”

“Because we just found you naked in a cage, for starters,” she says. “We don’t have time to argue. You need to get out of here. We need to get out of here. Let’s go.”

“You might have found me in a cage, but that’s not why you came. Why are you here?”

“There was a vote,” she admits with a sigh. “Everybody agreed to come and get you after the shuttle registered the crash. We felt sorry for you.”

That answer hits me right in the gut. It’s the worst possible thing she could have said. I’d rather people thought I was a nasty, terrible, psychopathic pirate than consider me to be weak for even a single second.

“I don’t need your pity, Raine.”

“Well, you’ve got it. You’ve always had it, actually. Now come on, before we all get caught and end up in a humiliating cage like you.”

“This cage is probably the least humiliating thing that’s happened so far,” I say, reaching for the door to close it again. Am I being petty? Probably. But I’m feeling particularly petty. Whatever is happening now is not for me. These people rejected me en masse not all that long ago, and I don’t want their mercy rescue.

“Come out, Sullivan!” Raine practically stamps her foot in frustration, and I know she is probably thinking about grabbing me and just bodily dragging me out. But I’m not ready for that. I’m not ready to just go with these people who betrayed me so deeply I got myself into all this shit.

“I think you owe me an apology. I think you should be telling me how much I contributed as captain, and that you came to get me because you need me. Not because you feel sorry for me.”

There’s another reason I’m stalling. They don’t know my brain chip stopped working, and they don’t know that I’m not the

woman I was, and they don't know that I can't do what I used to do for them. I don't have the same reckless edge I once did, so if that's what they're counting on me for, they're going to be disappointed.

"Captain, please," Mouse says, her voice soft and timid. "We need you."

"Unfortunately, your crew mates decided otherwise, didn't they," I say. "And I don't recall much in the way of support from anyone, come to think of it. I was lucky to get the shuttle. Raine was ready to throw me out the airlock."

"I am ready to throw you out an airlock now," she growls, giving me a furious stare. "Only you could be so ungrateful to be rescued."

I give Raine a steely stare. "Fine words from a traitor who undermined me with my crew, took possession of my ship, and sent me off into the great unknown with a shuttle whose controls failed and flung me into the nearest planet of predators."

There's nobody you'll trust less than someone you once trusted completely who turned around and betrayed you.

A soft clearing of the throat indicates that we are no longer alone. My crew and I turn to see Sona standing in the door, flanked by a number of Thorn's soldiers. They make for an imposing wall of saurian. You might even call it impenetrable.

"I have locked the entire house. There is no way in or out," Sona says. "Believe me, I am not interested in making another mistake as I did the first time. You are all going to stay here until the alpha arrives to sort you out."

Raine swings around and levels her weapon at Sona in one easy movement. I've seen her act this way before. I know he's as good as dead if he doesn't do as she says. Raine isn't reckless like me, but she is a lot more dangerous. I get people killed by accident sometimes. With Raine, it's never an accident.

"No!"

I leap in front of the old servant, my arms outstretched, as if that's going to make a blind bit of difference as to whether or not she shoots me. "He has a family. And he's just doing his job. Leave him alone."

"He's getting all of us captured," she says, her eyes narrowed at me. "I knew that coming to get you was a mistake. I knew we should have stayed well clear. The only thing I know about you is that being near you is a surefire way to experience something worse than I was already experiencing. You're a fucking disaster, Sullivan, and I regret the day I met you."

"See? Now, you and Sona share the same opinion of me, so you have that in common too!" I smile, knowing this will do absolutely nothing to improve basically anybody's mood, but it does improve mine slightly, and that's really what matters.



For the next however long, we all sit in the room, guarded by Sona and the other saurians he has called upon to back him up. Raine gives me frequent dirty looks, which eventually turn into a bitter comment.

"I knew we should never have come for you. It was a mistake."

"Probably," I agree. "I didn't ask you to come."

"You knew we would, though."

"No. I didn't, Raine, because you had just abandoned me."

"THE ALPHA HAS ARRIVED!" Sona blares the announcement, interrupting our overdue argument before it can happen.

Thorn walks in, looking unimpressed and yet curious. I feel a spiking pulse of guilt in my belly, almost as if any of this was my fault, which of course, it isn't. Will he believe me, though? I don't know, and for a moment, I find it a little hard to care. Seeing Thorn sends a bolt of feeling through me, much of it unexpected. I find myself happy to see him, and even relieved he is here. That's odd. I have dedicated all my time on this



planet trying to escape him, and now, on the verge of escape, suddenly he seems like safest, happiest place for me to be.

“What do we have here?” He addresses the question generally, but he is looking directly at me.

“The human’s friends came to rescue her,” Sona says. “I captured them all.”

“Very good, Sona,” Thorn says. The tip of Sona’s tail wags with excitement at the praise from his alpha. It’s actually pretty cute. My situation hasn’t materially changed, really. If anything, I look good in Thorn’s eyes too, because I clearly didn’t try very hard to run away myself.

“You’re going to let us go,” Raine says. “Because we’re not alone, and if we don’t return to the ship in a very short amount of time, this entire building will be turned to rubble. Actually, you’d be lucky if it was rubble. It’s more like dust. Atoms, really.”

“You’re inside the building,” Thorn points out.

“I’d rather be part of the building than be subject to whatever horrors you’ve been putting our captain through.”

It’s strange to hear her refer to me as their captain. Maybe my crew really did miss me. Maybe I’m the sort of person you can’t easily forget. Or maybe captains and scapegoats have more in common than people like to think. Maybe without me around to blame, they had to realize that they all made mistakes, and that being a pirate is actually pretty damn hard.

Thorn has her measure instantly. He is also not alone. I can see Avel behind him, the great purple winged saurian glaring at Raine with overt disapproval at her rampant disrespect.

“Avel, take the aggressive female,” Thorn orders. “The other two will go to other captains. I don’t want any of these humans coming into contact with one another. Certainly not with Suli, and absolutely not with whoever this one is.” He gestures to Raine with a displeased, pointed finger.

“My name is Raine, and aggressive doesn’t begin to describe me,” she says. “I hope whoever you think you can just give me

to is ready to die, because I will kill him. I am not like Sullivan. I do not enjoy captivity for its own sake.”

Zara and Mouse are looking at me in the hopes I'll do something to intervene. They're the ones I feel sorry for. Raine, not so much. Raine deserves everything that's coming to her. She's the one who set the events in motion that landed us all here.

My suit has been restocked with all the items taken out of it, but they haven't all been put back in the exact places they came from, which means I have to take time sort of surreptitiously searching my pockets without being observed. It's not easy.

I find what I'm looking for while Raine distracts the saurians with an absolute tirade of threats that even have me concerned for our wellbeing, even though I know very well that the crew will never fire on us. With Raine and I both down here, they're going to stick around and they're going to hold fire.

Zara and Mouse are my priorities now. Getting them back up onto the ship, away from the threat of captivity, and able to communicate to the others exactly what is happening here. That's the best option we have right now.

“Zara. Mouse. Prepare to evacuate!” I snap the words as I toss an emergency transport beacon to the pair of them. Zara catches it, grabs Mouse, and in a flash of light the pair of them are safely transported up to the ship.

There is a collective sound of concern from the saurians, who don't seem to have that kind of transport technology. They really are a primal species. Things like bikes and cars might seem advanced to them, but they're really ancient tech at this point. And the port might allow ships to come and dock and whatnot, but the saurians themselves stay clear of the air — aside from the ones like Avel who can fly anyway.

I have to hope that Zara and Mouse have the sense to get the vessel the hell out of the city, because there is only a matter of time before the saurians realize we have infiltrated their near airspace. The last thing I want is to see my crew shot down, or perhaps even worse, captured en masse.

Raine catches my eye as the pair disappear, and nods at me with a hint of respect. She didn't expect to be rescued. She's brave, I will give her that. She knows what she has coming to her. She saw the condition I was in. Stripped naked, marked on my ass and thighs with the results of saurian discipline implements. She has to be afraid. She's one of the most prideful people I've ever known, and I am certain the last thing she is going to be allowed to keep here is her dignity.

"Take that suit off *now*, Suli!"

Oh. Right. Dignity is also the last thing I am going to be allowed to keep either.

Thorn is predictably pissed. I've deprived him of two prey, and I've performed another trick he can't replicate or understand. I'm going to keep my secrets too. He can have my body, and hell, maybe even my heart. But he can't have my mind.

I sigh and start to unzip it. I knew I wouldn't be allowed to keep it. I don't care about being naked and punished anymore. That's starting to become my natural state. I think there's a part of me that almost enjoys it. At least I'm finally getting what I deserve. All these years having become a perversion of the version of the person I set out to be have led me to this place, where shame and pain are like the very air I breathe.

"I left you in a cage," he says. "And I come back to chaos. How is that possible?"

"Well, for once, this wasn't my fault. My friends came to try to help me. That's not a crime."

"No. But breaking into my home after creating a deliberate distraction, interfering with the natural behavior of a primal, and threatening total destruction of the alpha and his home — those are all crimes. Serious. Significant crimes. And don't forget, you're all self-avowed pirates, which is also a kind of crime."

"Sure, but on this occasion, no piracy was committed. Raine can't help herself."

"Does she have a brain chip too?"

“What is he talking about?” Raine snaps the question. “Brain chip?”

“Nothing. Don’t worry about it,” I say quickly. I really wish he hadn’t mentioned the chip out loud. I never really explained everything about that. I told him the barest details necessary to explain the situation I was in. I never told him that chips are kind of a big deal among humans. That there’s...

“I do worry about it, Sullivan. Why is he talking about brain chips? Are you telling me...” Her eyes widen. “Oh my god, Sullivan. It makes so much sense. You’re a drone.”

My temper flares suddenly. “I am not a fucking drone!”

*Drone.* That’s the word I haven’t heard in years. A word I never wanted to hear again.

“What is a drone?” Thorn asks the question.

“There’s a fucking predatory organization that poses as a school of sorts,” Raine explains. “And it is a school. Sometimes. But sometimes, it’s something else. They get poor kids from colonies. Kids who have no chance of making anything of themselves. And then they get those kids fucked up and injured in training, and they sell them a cure. The cure is becoming a drone. They don’t think anything they’re not allowed to think. They don’t do anything they’re not told to do. They’re living, breathing robots. Fuck, Suli. Why did you never tell me?”

I hate hearing her tell him my deepest shame. I was hours away from becoming a peon of the academy when I escaped. The chip was only the first part of the proceedings. If I hadn’t run when I did, they would have severed parts of my frontal lobe. They would have turned me into an obedient, unafraid, programmable creature.

“I never told you because it was never any of your business. I’m not a drone.”

“No. But you were chipped. Tracked, probably. No wonder they’d always show up within hours of our raids. No wonder...” she looks at me. “You fucking Judas goat.”

“That’s not true. They never tracked me.”

“Of course they did!” Raine practically explodes at me. “The chips are tracking devices, idiot! You should have told me. You should have told all of us. Instead of that bullshit story about being a pirate raised by pirates.”

I guess I did tell a lie here and there. It didn’t seem to matter at the time. All that mattered was having a good time and doing pirate things. Making money to send home. Building a crew. Making a life. I didn’t want to think about the fact that some fucking institution had shoved a thing into my skull that changed everything forever.

I say none of this. I just look at her and give a tiny shrug.

At this point, Thorn decides he has heard enough.

“Take the other human, Avel,” Thorn says, standing aside to let Avel into the room. “Take her. Secure her. Deal with her.”

“With pleasure,” Avel rumbles.

“The fuck do you think you’re doing?” Raine’s question is a warning as she raises her side arm.

“That’s a gun, my guys,” I say. They don’t seem to be realizing how dangerous she potentially is. A moment later, she takes care of that problem by discharging it directly at Avel. By some absolute miracle, she misses and the projectile ricochets off the wall, zipping between Sona and Thorn before burying itself in the floor.

Avel grabs her before she can take another shot, wresting the gun from her hand with a very hard slap to her hand that I can see shocks her into a temporary kind of submission.

“That is unacceptable behavior,” he says, speaking mildly given she just tried to kill him. Or did she? I’ve never known Raine to miss a shot, certainly not at close range like this. Is she losing her nerve? Freak accident? Misfire? I might not ever know, because she is now being carried out of the room, kicking, screaming, and cursing all the way.

When we are alone, and Sona is dismissed, Thorn turns his attention back to me.

“What Raine was saying. Was that true?”

“Yeah,” I admit. “I didn’t really get a scholarship to the academy. I was sold to it. That’s what they do to poor kids who want to get out of their starving colonies and make a better life for themselves and their families. They say they’ll teach you to work in security or entertainment. Either way, you end up a drone or a whore. Sometimes both.”

His face falls into an expression of pity I neither want nor need. Then he starts apologizing for the past, which is the most painful thing he’s ever done.

“I am so sorry that happened to you, Suli. It makes sense now why you are the way that you are, why you trust nobody, and why you feel little loyalty to anybody besides your crew. You were betrayed deeply. That is the kind of pain that makes a wound that bleeds for a lifetime.”

His words are surprisingly poetic, though I don’t know if I should actually be surprised. Thorn is smart, and though his world is primitive, he understands simple things on a level the more advanced people I’ve encountered never did. He understands things like trust, loyalty, love, connection. Yes, he has also essentially enslaved me, but he’s left the parts of me that matter intact. The people I was sold to all those years ago never intended to leave anything untouched. They were going to erase me, piece by piece, and they were going to play with the shell of me until it cracked and broke and could be discarded.

“You’re my captor,” I say, though it’s not really what I mean. Sometimes there’s such a big disconnect between what I am thinking in my head and what comes out of my mouth. I wish he could see my thoughts. I wish he could know all the tender things and the little nuances I never seem to have the ability to communicate.

“I am,” he says. “But not like that. I intend to keep you whole.”

It’s like he has read my mind. But that might simply be the way it feels to be understood. From the moment I first met this creature, I felt that he saw me in ways nobody else ever had.

That feeling has only grown stronger with every passing day, and certainly with every carnal and disciplinary encounter.

He has me in ways the people who thought they owned me could never have me. His control makes me feel completely different. Instead of exploited, I am cherished. Instead of used, I am protected.

“I know,” I say, once again completely failing to communicate all the depth of my feeling. I hope he can feel what he needs to feel, because I don’t know if I will ever be able to say what I need to say. When we are connected, our bodies joined, there is a wholeness to us that I’ve never felt before. You could call it a mate bond. You could call it love. Whatever it is, I want it forever.

Seeing Raine has made one thing very clear to me: I no longer have any interest in escape. Thorn is more than my saurian master. He is my family. He is my home.

“You’re safe with me, Suli,” he says, telling me what I already know. “And so is Raine. Avel will take good care of her.”

“She won’t submit easily. She’s never had a chip. Never been sold. She’s always been free. She was orphaned before she was twelve. And she never answered to anyone. Not even me. The only reason I was captain was the fact I owned the ship, and I’d do things that she couldn’t, because I couldn’t feel the fear that stopped her. She’s worse than I am, because she’s learned to operate through her fear. She’s learned to listen to it, to work with it. She’s fucking dangerous, Thorn.”

“Don’t worry about Avel. He can take care of himself.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you if it turns out she’s already killed him.”

“I think for the moment, you should worry less about Raine and Avel, and a great deal more about you and me. There is a reckoning to be had, isn’t there?”

“What? Why? I didn’t call the ship here. They came of their own accord. All I did was not escape. I was practically perfect today, and I think you know it.”

“Except when you helped the other two escape me.”

“They deserved to escape. They’re not like Raine and me. They wouldn’t do well in the care of your type. They deserve nice men.”

“Oh, I’m not a nice man?” Thorn raises a brow and pretends to be offended, while also being a massive saurian alien with scales and a tail.

“You’re not a man at all, and you know it. Mouse and Zara deserve to get their happily-ever-afters. A nice place somewhere far from all this craziness. A farm or something. Good husbands. A small gaggle of offspring. That’s what I want for them. I don’t want them in a cage on a saurian world being repeatedly punished for following their natural instincts to escape. You probably wouldn’t be able to keep either of them in, anyway. They’re much better at what they do than I am.”

“Is that right?” Thorn smiles. “You have a lot of admiration and care for your crew, don’t you.”

“Of course I do. They’re the closest thing I have left to family. Family that wouldn’t betray me. I guess, right up until they did. But I think I might stop blaming them for that. It’s starting to feel like they might not ever have had a choice.”

“What do you mean?”

“When someone’s like me — reckless and thoughtless, and doesn’t take care of you in the way you need to be taken care of, then getting rid of them is the right thing to do. Getting rid of me was the right thing for them to do. Coming after me? That was the mistake.”



## 11 HAPPILY EVER...

**T**horn

This little pirate is taking responsibility for her actions in a way I am certain she never has before. I can see what inspired such loyalty in her crew. Whether she gives herself credit for it or not, Suli is a natural leader, and I don't think it ever had anything to do with the augmentations inserted into her brain.

"Maybe the chip did not break," I suggest. "Maybe you simply found yourself in a situation for the first time where you were being controlled by someone who had your best interests at heart. Someone who wasn't trying to exploit you. Maybe your perception of not feeling fear was some kind of survival instinct. Perhaps you couldn't afford to feel fear."

"I don't know. It's still in there."

"Sure. It's in there. But was it ever activated? If it is like most technology, it may have needed some kind of initialization or similar to make it actually work."

"Oh," she says, as that idea gets into her head and rattles around in a faintly plausible way. "Maybe."

"It is possible that all this time, you have never been anything or anyone other than yourself."

She stares at me. "That would explain quite a lot in some ways. But... then... why... how... have I been so fucking out of control?"

“You may merely be out of control, Suli,” I say, patiently and affectionately.

“Well, that’s not good. The chip really gave me some excellent plausible deniability.”

“I’m sure it did,” I laugh. “Regardless, you know I will hold you fully accountable now, no matter what. And I expect you to aid me, and Avel, in taming this other young human woman.”

That gets me a curt shake of her head. “That might be going a little far. She was my first mate. I’m not going to betray her. If anything, I’ll probably do my best to help her get back to the others and escape this planet forever.”

“At least you tell me where you stand,” I say. “I suppose loyalty is too much to ask at this point.”

“Hoes before dinobros,” she says.

I do not know what that expression means, but I have to assume it is disrespectful by the way she smirks in that cute way she does when she thinks she is getting away with something. So much of Suli’s inner workings are revealed by her very own face. She is betrayed constantly by the quirk of her lips and the gleaming of her eyes.

I raise a brow at her, and smile inwardly as she does just as I expected her to and starts squirming in front of me, making sounds that are precariously close to a very un-captainly giggle. I adore this woman. She has taken a place at the very core of me, and there is nothing I would not do for her.

Of course, what she most needs is for me to be precisely what and who I am, for me to look after her in every way, and to protect her from the wilder impulses that have always lived inside her.

“I will take that response as a yes, it is too much to ask at present.”

“Good idea,” she says.

“Fortunately for you, Raine will not be held anywhere you have any kind of influence. Avel is going to make sure she is

forced to confront all the same things you were, and trained even more completely. He does not have my soft spot for chaotic disobedience. He will ensure that she does as she is told.”

“She’s going to kill him,” Suli repeats. “I really mean it. Raine does not fuck around, and she does not feel any kind of remorse when it comes time to pull the trigger. She is not secretly a soft little bunny under a hard exterior. She’s a monster. Inside and out.”

I smile down at her, enjoying this glimpse into the mind of my captive captain as she shows her concern for one of my men. This little human is an alpha in her own right. My cage and my punishments are not what will ultimately keep her here. What will keep her by my side is this transition into truly becoming an alpha’s mate in her heart, and thinking about the saurians who depend on me to lead them.

“Don’t worry about Avel. He is much tougher than he looks.”

“He looks pretty tough,” Suli admits. “But Raine is a thousand times tougher than she looks. You should warn him. You should assign extra personnel. You should...”

I cut her dire warnings off with a passionate kiss, enjoying the way she stays tense for a moment before softening against me, surrendering to my dominance and sinking into her place in my arms and my life.

“Do not worry,” I purr softly down at her. “Everything is under control.”

## EPILOGUE

**R**aine

That winged alien bastard has finally left me alone. That's his first mistake. I'm going to make sure it is his last. No male of any species gets away with handling me the way he did.

This is what I get for trying to rescue someone who doesn't deserve rescuing. This is what I get for listening to my crew instead of doing what I know is best for them. When we saw Sullivan's emergency crash beacon activate, I should have turned the ship around and headed as many light years in the other direction as possible. Instead, I let sentiment rule the day.

Now I'm no better than she was.

Within hours of attempting that pointless rescue, I was disarmed, blindfolded, and brought here. Wherever *here* is. All I could sense at the time was rushing and gusting of wind. I figured we were moving very fast, and obviously flying. These saurians obviously want to put a whole lot of distance between me and the captain. That's smart, because the two of us have pulled off some heists and shenanigans over the years that would make their scaled heads spin.

I start to explore. It's dark, and I don't have the best sense of my surroundings, but that's no excuse not to escape. Running my hands over the nearest vertical surface, I note that this feels like a cave. There are solid earth walls all around me, and a passage up ahead. Curious. It doesn't make a lot of sense for a flying saurian to take me to an underground location.

I take a few more exploratory steps, the floor runs out, and I realize he did no such thing. In a rush of adrenaline, and a flash of light that threatens to blind me as I push past a heavy leathery curtain, I discover that this place is the polar antonym of underground.

I grip the edge of the wall and lean away from the void, my heart pounding as gusts of wind whip my hair back from my face and the ground drops away beneath my feet. I am up very, very impossibly high.

You could fall and fall forever from this vantage point. Without wings, you'd be worse than dead when you hit the ground. You'd be absolutely obliterated, every bone in your body turned to a soft mush. I know this, because I've seen the effects of such a fall before. People explode like water balloons if you drop them from a high enough place.

Vertigo assails me, but I don't let it win. I breathe deep, and I remind myself that there's nothing to be afraid of. Not here. Not ever. Captain Sullivan taught me that.

Following her over the years has hardened me in ways I didn't know I could get hard. But I have to admit, seeing her standing naked in that cage was a shock. It's the first time I have ever seen her in any semblance of what you might call humility. If these creatures can humble her, then they can humble me. I'm not hanging around to find out how.

The place they're keeping me in is obviously calculated to function as a prison for a creature like me. They think they don't need a cage to keep me here. They think I am stuck in this tower of rock because there's no way down. Maybe that's true for most people. It's not going to be true for me.

The more I force myself to look down, and up, the more I make my brain stop freaking out at how high up I am, the more I actually take in. These rocks are craggy and full of outcroppings. They're obviously naturally eroded by wind and rain, and that means that they've effectively been designed with a million different hand and foot holds all the way along them.

What would Captain Sullivan do? I don't even need to consciously ask myself that question anymore. I've asked myself it so many times I already know the answer. She'd get the hell out of here, no matter what the risk and no matter what the cost.

I lower myself to the edge, ease myself over it, and start to climb down.

I tell myself that the hard part is going over the edge. That's all. Once I'm on the rock face, it won't matter. Nothing will. All I'll have to do is climb.

Clinging to the rocks, I am glad for the naturally chalky texture of them. That coats my sweaty palms in a light covering of dust that stops me from slipping. I start to work my way down, knowing this may very well take hours. Holding fast to these little vestiges of solid ground, I think about things that make me brave. I think about revenge. I think about riches. I think about the crew. I think about everything and anything besides the thousands of feet stretching out below me.

The funny thing about starting to fall is that it takes me a moment to notice it is happening. I don't so much slip as simply become unmoored as the rock beneath my digits and toes crumbles in a clean sheet, taking me with it as it starts its inevitable descent.

In the little seconds it takes to register that I am falling, my mind comes to a very old animal place of acceptance. It's like it knows there is nothing it can do about this sort of thing. If I had anything to fight, I'd be fighting it. But gravity is the ultimate dom.

I've got time to think before I hit the ground.

So this is how it all ends. I always thought I'd be killed by security forces during a heist, or perhaps the ship would be obliterated in a hail of fire. I assumed the end of my life would be much like the beginning: violent, and cruel, and completely out of my control.

**FWOMP!**

Strong arms wrap around me, purple scales gleaming as bright slitted eyes glower down at me. I have stopped falling. Instead, I am being held against the muscular body of my captor, his massive wings beating against the air, defying gravity.

“You’re going to be punished for this recklessness,” he declares, looking at me with an expression of ferocious determination. I feel a thrilling chill run through me.

Maybe gravity isn’t the ultimate dom.

Maybe this guy is.

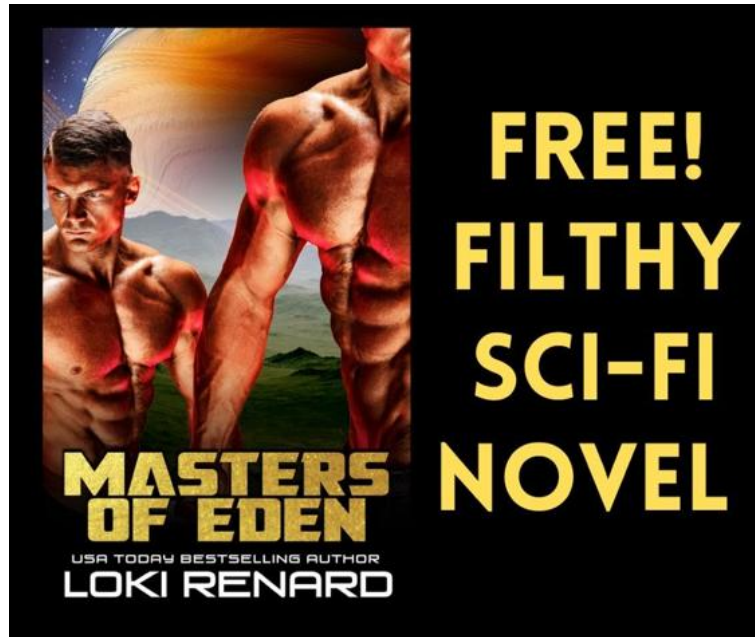


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