

It did not take long from Captain Sulu's proclamation on non-cooperation for the Jush.ra to take action. Gonzoles and Briscoe were transported out of the group sleeping area. They materialized in the sterile domed room. It was empty and they were alone.

"Now what?" Briscoe asked.

"Our orders are clear." Gonzoles said. She turned around slowly to survey the room. The walls, the ceiling, and the floor were all the same bright white. "We don't cooperate. However I see no reason why we can't look around for anything that could help our situation."

"They appear to control the transporter with their minds." Briscoe said. "I don't know how we can use that."

"Appearances can be deceiving." Gonzoles said as she walked over to touch the wall. She could find no seam, no evidence of any closed opening. But she kept looking. "Wish I had my tricorder."

"But they manipulated our tricorders too." Briscoe said. "Face it Lieutenant. We are outgunned here."

"True." Gonzoles nodded. "But there has to be a chink in the armor some where. And we have to find it."

"Yes Sir." Briscoe started inspecting another section of the wall. As she walked along the wall looking, she added. "This could be another test. They could be trying to trick us into cooperating."

"You have a point." Gonzoles said. "But we must do everything we can to escape, Ensign."

"Should we be talking about escaping?"

"I don't think our desire to return to Excelsior is a secret, Maggie." Gonzoles said. "I believe Suran A'Gar knows exactly what I think of this situation."

Briscoe stopped and turned towards Lt. Gonzoles. "What did they do to you, Rosita?" When Gonzoles hesitated, Briscoe asked. "Did it have something to do with why they separated us from the men?"

"I'm not sure about that." Gonzoles sighed. She looked away when she explained. "They put me in a cell with Dr. Patrick. They took away our clothes."

"Oh my god." Briscoe momentarily closed her eyes. Without hesitation, she walked over to Gonzoles and hugged her. "I'm so sorry, Rosita. Are you all right?"

"I have to be." Gonzoles accepted the hug then stepped back from Briscoe. She needed to keep her emotions under control "And I will be. Thanks Maggie. But we better get back to work."

"Aye." Briscoe returned the section of wall she had been examining. They continued in silence, intent on their work. They had examined most of the reachable surface of the walls when Suran A'Gar transporting into the domed room unnoticed.

"Lt. Rosita Gonzoles." Suran said. Gonzoles startled. She turned around to face Suran. "You have not told us the truth."

"Regarding what?" Gonzoles folded her hands across her chest defensively. Ensign Briscoe quickly closed ranks with Gonzoles.

"La-hoo." Suran said. "You said you la-hoo with males. Yet did not the one called Briscoe offer la-hoo? Why did you refuse her?"

"She offered support and comfort as a friend." Gonzoles said. "As a compassionate person."

"And she did not refuse me." Briscoe put her hands on her hips when she demanded. "What else did you expect to happen?"

Suran A'Gar studied them both silently. Briscoe met her stare for a moment then self-consciously looked away. Suran turned to Gonzoles. "You did not mate with the male."

"No." Rosita said icily. "I did not and I will not."

"But you choose the male, Dr. Patrick." Suran insisted.

"No! I told you I wanted none of them." Gonzoles barked angrily. She struggled to control her anger digging her fingers nails into her own arms to keep from lashing out at the Jush.ra woman. "Who I am intimate with is my choice. Not yours! What you did to us was criminal. In the Federation you would be charged with sexual assault."

Suran cocked her head to one side then the other as she stared at Gonzoles. She turned to Ensign Briscoe. "You are called Briscoe."

"Yes." She answered warily. "Ensign Margaret Briscoe."

"Lt Rosita Gonzoles called you something else." Suran said.

"My friends call me Maggie." Briscoe said. "You are not my friend. And my orders are not to cooperate with you."

"Which of the human males do you choose?"

"None of them." Briscoe shrugged and crossed her arms in front of her.

"I do not understand what human females find attractive in their males. Thin and furless. They are all ugly to me." Suran wrinkled her nose in distaste. "Explain."

"I do not find any men attractive." Briscoe tossed her chestnut brown shoulder length hair. It had started to escape its braid while she was crawling under the force field at the spring. After repeated attempts to get it back in order, she had set it free. "I never have."

"What does this mean?" Suran asked.

"That I only mate with females." Briscoe said.

Suran turned to Gonzoles. She smiled at Briscoe and said "Then you will mate and la-hoo with Lt. Rosita Gonzoles."

Gonzoles looked her in the eye. "I only mate with males."

"How can this be?" Suran asked. "You are both human females. How can you be different in such basic behavior?"

"We are." Gonzoles said simply. "And we are tired of the callous way you have been treating us. You have no right to hold us. Or to separate us from the rest of our people."

"You wish to be returned to Captain Hikaru Sulu?" Suran asked.

"Yes." Gonzoles said.

Suran slowly raised her hand to the ceiling and then brought it back down. Two low couches and a low table were beamed in behind Gonzoles and Briscoe. On the table were a tray of fruit and a tall ceramic pitcher with two glasses. The domed ceiling dimmed to a pleasant dark blue. Soft music from some kind of wind instrument played. Mingled with the music was the soft laughter of children.

"You may stay here." Suran offered with a wave of her hand. "With us."

"As your pets." Briscoe said.

"We enjoy music, art, poetry." Suran ignored Briscoe's comment. "Do human females appreciate these?"

"Of course." Gonzoles said. "And so do human males. Don't your males have music and art?"

"Their music is crude." Suran dismissed the very idea. "Their art, base."

"Base." Gonzoles shook her head. Concentrating on something other than herself made her feel more in command. "That tells me nothing except that you don't like it. There are many types of art and music. No one likes it all. Do your males have the same technology as you?"

"Technology?" Suran asked vaguely. She waved the subject away with her hand. "Their uses are different. But their abilities are similar."

"You seem to control it with your mind." Gonzoles continued. "Or are there control devices that we simply can't see?"

"The technology is not important, Lt. Rosita Gonzoles." Suran said.

"It is to me." Gonzoles said.

"And me." Briscoe echoed.

"Technology is important to all human females?" Suran asked, suddenly interested.

Gonzoles and Briscoe looked at each other then back at Suran A'Gar. Gonzoles nodded. "To every female in Starfleet technology is very important."

"And if I show it to you, you will cooperate?"

"Our orders are not to cooperate." Gonzoles said.

"Males do not order females here." Suran said. "The males live in military order, but we do not recognize their authority. We are a family."

"Maggie and I need to talk." Gonzoles said. "Privately."

Suran nodded. Gonzoles grabbed Briscoe's arm and walked her as far from Suran as they could get in the domed room. Briscoe whispered. "You can't be considering... What about the Captain's orders..."

"Mr. Chekov needs the location of the control room." Gonzoles cut her off. "This is our chance."

"Orders..."

"If we get out of here, he will be happy we disobeyed orders." Gonzoles said.

"And if we don't get out of here?"

"He'll understand why I took the chance." Gonzoles said. She took a deep breath. "We have to try."

"You know what this means?" Briscoe said. "She may require us to do something before showing us the technology."

"We'll try to do it our way." Gonzoles said. "Are you with me?"

"Aye." Briscoe answered without hesitation. They both took a deep breath, squared their shoulders, and walked back to Suran A'Gar who waited patiently.

"We'd like to see the technology." Gonzoles said. "I am interested in how your world functions."

"And will your males stop their stubborn behavior?" Suran asked.

"What are they doing?" Briscoe asked.

"You heard Captain Hikaru Sulu's order." Suran said. "They were sitting in the sleeping area in the dark and cold. When we moved them to cells, they did the same thing. They have not answered questions or moved to overcome any obstacle. Even when prodded."

Briscoe's mouth fell open. "Prodded?"

"I can not promise. But if I could speak to Captain Sulu privately, I may be able to convince them to stop." Gonzoles offered. Suran A'Gar closed her eyes. Gonzoles materialized into darkness. She stood still trying to adjust her eyes. But there was no light. "Hello. Is anyone

else here?"

"Gonzoles."

"Yes Captain." Gonzoles turned. His voice had come from behind her. She shivered. "It's cold in here. Are you all right?"

"Yes." Sulu touched her shoulder. "I expected there to be a force field between us. After you were transported out, they turned off the lights. Then they set the environment to this pleasant barely above freezing temperature. Finally they beamed me, and I assume the others, into isolation. What's happened with you?"

"Briscoe and I have been in the domed room talking to Suran A'Gar." Gonzoles said. "I've made a deal with her."

"**You've** made a deal?" Sulu asked with surprise. "Explain yourself, Lieutenant."

"In return for our cooperation, she will show me the Jush.ra's technology." Gonzoles explained. "I am hoping to find their control room."

"I see." Sulu kept his hand on her shoulder because he still could not see her at all. "Is this deal for the entire away team? And does it include having sex for their entertainment?"

"The deal can be for the entire team. If you cooperate." Gonzoles said. "However, I don't believe they intend to return Briscoe and me to you."

"What do you mean?"

"They want to keep the two of us with the rest of the women. Briscoe said they want to keep us like pets and I think she is right." Gonzoles covered his hand on her shoulder with her own. "Captain, I believe if we do not escape the only time we will see each other is when they expect us to mate."

"This is your deal?"

"I would not have agreed." Gonzoles took a deep breath to maintain her composure. "But I don't know how else we will find the control room or power source."

"All right, Gonzoles." Sulu's deep voice was calm and steady. Gonzoles drew strength from his words and his touch. "You are my eyes and ears here. We will stand by your deal. Learn what you can. We will be ready."

"Yes Sir."

"You're ok?"

"I'm ok." Gonzoles nodded even though the Captain couldn't see her. Captain Sulu and the rest of Excelsior men materialized in their sleeping area. The lights were on and the heat was turned up.

"Damn." Mr. Huynh shivered. "Don't they believe in blankets around here?"

A blue blanket appeared neatly folded on the bottom of each bunk. "Wow." Mr. Silverman grabbed the closest blanket and wrapped it around his shoulders. "What happened?"

"Lt. Gonzoles is working in our behalf." Captain Sulu grabbed a blanket. He met Chekov's eye and nodded towards the bunk. "Chekov."

"Remind me to thank Lt. Gonzoles." Mr. D'Amico smiled as he wrapped one of the blankets around himself.

Dr. Patrick started walking around briskly and talking loudly. "That was too cold for me. What do you think, Dave? Are we going to live?"

"You're the doctor." Silverman answered loudly. "By the way Doc, can you look at my fingers? I can barely move them. What about you Tony?"

While the loud conversation about the cold continued, Sulu and Chekov whispered

together on the Captain's bunk. "Gonzoles made a deal. The team's cooperation for a look at their technology."

"Why would Suran A'Gar make that deal?" Chekov asked as he rubbed his hands together to warm them.

"I'm not sure." Sulu admitted. "But Gonzoles feels the Jush.ra have some interest in keeping her and Briscoe happy. I believe the better treatment of us is part of that."

"Cooperation?" Chekov asked. "You know what they want."

"Yes." Sulu nodded. "She's hoping to get to the control room before things get out of hand. We need to be ready."

"I'd like to study that transporter in the other room again." Chekov said. "If Gonzoles comes through when some of us are elsewhere, I want to be able to scan for humans."

"They should be feeding us soon." Sulu nodded. "We'll give you as much time as possible."

When Lt. Rosita Gonzoles materialized back in the domed room, she was naked again. Briscoe quickly covered her with a robe. It was similar to what Suran A'Gar wore, but a dark brown instead of the sand color. Briscoe was also now dressed on one of the robes. She helped Gonzoles fasten it.

"Thanks." Gonzoles said.

"Suran says we are no longer in Starfleet so we are not to wear the uniform." Briscoe fastened the back of the robe slowly so she could whisper over Rosita's shoulder. "How are the others?"

"They'll be ok." Gonzoles said quietly. "I only saw, or I should say heard, the Captain."

"Heard?" Briscoe asked.

"The cell was pitch black." Gonzoles said. "And only a few degrees above freezing. He agreed to cooperate and they will be ready when we cut the power."

Suran A'Gar reclined on one of the couches. She sipped a drink and watched them. Genel transported into the room. She took a moment to look Briscoe and Gonzoles over before walking over to Suran.

"Sister." Genel said. "You are needed."

"I am making progress." Suran said.

"I see." Genel said. "But the Starship has unexpected abilities. We would like your thoughts on the developments."

"Very well." Suran sighed. "Lt. Rosita Gonzoles."

"Lieutenant was my rank in Starfleet." Gonzoles said. "If I am no longer in Starfleet, then I am merely Rosita Gonzoles."

Suran stood up and faced Gonzoles. Her eyes wide with surprise. Gonzoles met her gaze then slowly lowered her eyes to the floor. Suran stepped closer and gently laid her palm on Rosita's cheek. She looked to Briscoe. "And Ensign Margaret Briscoe?"

"Maggie Briscoe." Maggie shrugged and followed Rosita's example of lowering her eyes.

"Good." Suran smiled. She gently put a finger under each of their chins and lifted their faces towards her. "Rosita and Maggie will live with the family and they will cooperate."

"Sister." Genel urged. "You are needed. Return them to their cage."

"I will keep them with me." Suran said to Genel.

"Not wise." Genel argued. "Their kind is tricky. Do not think they will keep your deal."

"They are not males." Suran said. "We need not be suspicious of their motives."

"You are blinded by these humans." Genel said. "Their ship is attempting to penetrate our defenses and you propose to take these two to the defense center?"

"Perhaps you are right." Suran gave in reluctantly. She turned to Rosita and Maggie placing a hand on each of their shoulders. "Stay. Eat. I will return shortly."

After Suran and Genel had transported out of the domed room, Rosita sat on one of the couches and inspected the fruit. Maggie watched her for a moment. "What are you doing?"

"Cooperating." Rosita said. "That's the deal we made. Sit down."

"Didn't you hear?" Maggie asked. "The Excelsior is trying to rescue us."

"As you said before, we are out gunned. They won't be able to rescue us. And we made a deal." Rosita said. "So do as Suran A'Gar has said. Sit down and eat."

Maggie reluctantly sat next to Rosita. "You don't think the ship is powerful enough to penetrate their defenses?"

Rosita held a piece of fruit in front of her face pretending to inspect it for bad spots. She whispered. "She almost trusts us. If we are to help the others and get the shield down so Excelsior can rescue us, she has to trust us completely. Got it?"

Maggie poured herself a drink and spoke at a normal volume. "I guess we will have to forget about the ship. You are right. We did make a deal."

Rosita and Maggie did their best to appear calm while maintaining alert status. They ate and drank what was available. But Suran A'Gar did not return. Maggie started pacing back and forth.

"Not even a deck of cards." Maggie grumbled. "What are we suppose to do?"

"I don't know." Rosita admitted with a sigh. She adjusted her robe so that she could sit in the lotus position. "A little meditation might help."

"I'm not sure I can calm myself enough for that." Maggie said.

"Try." Rosita said.

Maggie sighed and settled herself on the other couch. She closed her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths. Feeling calmer, she opened her eyes and smiled at Rosita. "Since you aren't a lieutenant anymore, I don't have to listen to you."

Rosita returned her smile but said nothing. She had never been very good at standard meditation. Instead she was mentally walking the halls of Excelsior. She visited the shuttle flight deck, main engineering, the gym, the rec centers. Forcing herself to go slowly, Lt. Gonzales came closer and closer to the bridge and her duty station. She had just sat down at her station and started going over every control when Suran's voice brought her back to reality.

"Rosita. Maggie." Suran stood in front of them. "What are you doing?"

"It is a form of meditation." Maggie explained. "It helps us center ourselves."

"Center?" Suran asked. "The word translates but the meaning escapes me."

"It calms us." Rosita said as she put her feet on the floor. She wanted to ask about Excelsior, but forced herself to wait. She stood up and faced Suran. "If I may ask, when will you show us the technology?"

"Don't you want to ask about your ship?" Suran asked.

Rosita looked up at the ceiling. "If Excelsior had come to rescue us, they would be here now. But you are here. What else is there to ask?"

"Is it that hard for you, Rosita?" Suran asked gently. Rosita said nothing. She did not trust herself to speak. Suran sat on one of the couches. "Come. Sit here, Rosita."

Rosita sighed and sat down next to Suran A'Gar as instructed. Suran put her hands on

Rosita's shoulders and turned her so that her back was to Suran. With strong fingers she started a massage on the center of Rosita's back. She moved out in circles reaching down to the small of her back and up to her shoulder blades.

Fascinated, Maggie sat down on the floor in front of them to watch. The massage was sensual but not overtly sexual. Rosita closed her eyes and felt all the tension drain from her back. Suran stopped and asked. "Better?"

"Yes." Rosita nodded but would not look at Suran A'Gar.

"You will learn. Maggie, sit next to Rosita. Your back towards her." Suran ordered. Maggie did as she was told. Suran took Rosita's hands and placed them on Maggie's back. Using her fingers, she adjusted the pressure Rosita applied until she had it right. While Rosita attempted it by herself, Suran asked questions. "Why were you so angry about the male Dr. Patrick, Rosita?"

Rosita stopped the massage, taken off guard by the question. Suran firmly took Rosita's hands and put them back on Maggie's back. Rosita continued the massage. "I don't know Dr. Patrick well enough to just be suddenly naked with him."

"Why?"

"I just don't." Rosita insisted. "Humans don't just meet and mate. There has to be a courtship involved."

"Courtship?" Suran asked. "It does not translate."

"It is a time when people get to know each other." Rosita said. "They decide if they want to mate or not."

"How long does it take?" Suran asked.

"No set time." Maggie said. "But you have to move from one level of the courtship to the next. You can't just skip to the end."

"And what is the beginning?" Suran asked.

"The beginning is hand holding and kissing." Maggie said. "It moves on to caressing and la-hoo and ends with mating."

"Quiet, Maggie." Suran said. "I wish to hear Rosita's thoughts."

"She's right." Rosita said. "But with the hands holding and kissing goes talking. Humans have to fit emotionally as well as physically."

"My sister, Genel, feels you will not honor the deal." Suran said. Rosita stopped the massage and turned to face Suran. "Others in the family agree with her. But I have said you will cooperate."

"We have caused a problem in the family." Rosita said. Gonzoles knew it wasn't her fault. Why did she feel so guilty? "I'm sorry. I will cooperate. May I ask please that we be allowed a courtship?"

Suran took Rosita's smooth hands in her fur covered hands. "A short one. And I will choose the male who best fits you."

"Thank you Suran A'Gar." Rosita said. Suran closed her eyes and Rosita found herself back in the cell she had shared with Dr. Patrick. She was relieved to find she still had the brown robe on. She sat down on the bed to wait. A few minutes later, Captain Sulu was transported into the cell with her.

"Gonzoles." He smiled. "It's good to see you. And I'm glad to see that we are both still dressed."

"Yes Captain." Gonzoles looked down at her hands in her lap. "Briscoe and I explained

to Suran A'Gar that humans require a period of courtship."

"So." Sulu looked around the empty cell. "This is our first date?"

"Yes Sir."

"I am a little out of practice." Sulu said. "But I can't remember ever being called Sir on a date. And I seem to recall taking the girl some place nice."

"We did not explain the concept of dates." Gonzoles said. "We just explained that there was a progression from hand holding to intimacy."

Sulu sat down next to her on the bed. "Are you all right, Lt. Gonzoles? You seem very subdued."

"I did not choose you, Captain." Gonzoles said quietly. She avoided looking at him. "I would not want to hurt Jimmi."

"But you agreed to cooperate." Sulu sighted. She nodded silently. Sulu took her hand in his. "It's all right. There is no need to tell her. No need to hurt her." Gonzoles looked at him for the first time since he beamed in. He smiled and said. "So, I see you dressed up for this date."

"Briscoe and I are to live with the family now." Gonzoles said a tear in her eye. "We are no longer officers, so we are not to wear the uniform or use our ranks. I worked a long time for that uniform."

"I know. Come here." He took her in his arms laying her head on his shoulder. Gently pushing her hair away from her upward turned ear. He whispered. "What else have you learned, Lieutenant?"

He bent his head down towards her. She whispered. "Excelsior has tried to break through the Jush.ra's shields."

Sulu kissed her briefly. When their lips parted, he asked. "Results?"

"I don't know." Gonzoles pulled back momentarily. She leaned forward to kiss his neck. "But it had them worried. Genel came to get Suran. She almost took us to the defense center with her, But Genel does not trust us."

Sulu pulled her against him wrapping his arms tightly around her and kissed her again. "Are we going to have to go through with this before she trust you completely?"

"I don't know." She said. "But I told her it would take a little time. So I don't think we have to go through with it now."

"Good." Sulu smiled at her. "No offense."

Gonzoles giggled and did not bother to whisper when she said. "None taken."

After a quick kiss, Sulu sat back from her leaning against the wall. "Well, this is definitely a more pleasant way to pass the time than listening to Silverman and D'Amico argue about everything."

"They can get annoying, Captain." Gonzoles agreed. She laid down next to him on her stomach propping herself up on her elbows. "But they'd do anything for each other."

"Yes. I understand that feeling." Sulu nodded. He covered her hand with his. "We will get through this. You and I, together."

"Yes. Sir."

"Rosita." Sulu laughed. "I think in this situation you can drop the ranks."

"All right, Hikaru." She smiled. "But only here in this room."

"Agreed."