

"Captain." Dr. Patrick said. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." Sulu nodded. "Terra Suran has ordered us all to remove our jackets and any sign of rank including the use of titles."

"And we're cooperating?" D'Amico asked skeptically.

"Yes." Sulu nodded. He raised his voice and said. "It appears that Pavel has been chosen to be Maggie's Briscoe's mate."

"Damn." Silverman spoke loudly as Sulu and Chekov put their heads together in the corner. "I always wanted that honor."

"You?" D'Amico laughed. "What makes you think she would ever give you a second look?"

"Why are we being so damn cooperative, Captain?" Chekov whispered.

"Because," Sulu smiled and pulled the communicator just far enough out of his pocket so that Chekov could see it.. "Gonzoles passed me this in the council room."

"That's great." Chekov nodded. "But we can't contact the ship without lowering the shield."

"Lt. Gonzoles said the other ones are in the defense center." Sulu pulled his hand out of his pocket keeping it over the communicator as much as possible. Chekov took it and slipped it into his pocket as quickly as possible.

Now Chekov grinned. "So we can use the communicator to pin point the defense center then beam there with the transporter."

"Take out the shield and call for help." Sulu finished his thought. "Can you do it?"

"I believe so." Pavel smiled. "It may take a few minutes."

He walked into the eating area. The lights were dim, but on. One of the changes that had come with cooperation. Chekov jumped up on the counter and started to work. The loud conversation died down after he left the sleeping room. Sulu looked around to find that his crew had discarded their jackets on one of the bunks.

"Now what, Hikaru?" Pat asked.

"Now Pat, we wait." Sulu said. "And see just what happens next. Everyone stay alert."

When Suran A'Gar went home she found Rosita, Maggie and her three oldest girls sitting on the patio. Maggie and Rosita were sitting on the floor like good pets. Maj, Haj, and Raj were stretched out on the benches. Maggie leaned against the bench Raj reclined on. Raj stroked Maggie's hair which was now hanging loose.

"But is that typical for human males?" Maj insisted.

"Pavel is just friendly." Rosita said. "He has always been that way. It sounds to me like you appreciated his comments."

"All our males care about is mating." Haj said. "But Pavel's comments had nothing to do with that. It was just..."

"Flattering." Raj supplied the word Haj was searching for.

"The human males are different from ours." Suran said. Maj sat up making room for her mother to sit down. "Perhaps Genel is right. You girls should stay away from them."

"But, Rosita says Pavel was teasing us." Haj said. "In a good natured way."

"You weren't there, Rosita." Suran said. "How can you know this?"

"I have known Pavel Chekov for many years, Terra." Rosita said. "He is a truly nice man

with the ability to put people at their ease."

"You are friends?" Suran asked. Rosita nodded. "It is such an odd thing to be friends with a male."

"I have not met any of your males." Rosita said. "But is it possible that there is more to them than mating? That you have lived separately for so long that you no longer know them?"

"That is not possible." Suran dismissed her statement and warned. "Do not speak of what you do not know."

"Yes Terra." Rosita nodded.

"Girls, I need to speak to the humans." Suran said. "Leave us."

"Yes Mother." They got up and left.

"Rosita. It is time for you to mate with Hikaru." Suran said. Rosita took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and nodded. "Since you have previously mated with males I believe there should be no trouble. Try to let it happen naturally."

"Yes Terra." Rosita whispered.

Suran closed her eyes and Rosita disappeared. She turned to Maggie. "Come Maggie. Sit with me."

"Yes Terra." Maggie got up and sat on the bench. Suran moved her finger in a circle to tell Maggie to face away from her. Maggie complied.

Suran started to massage her back. "Maggie, you have never mated with a male before?"

"Never Terra." Maggie rolled her head back and forth to get the most out of the firm circular movements of Suran's fingers.

"I would tell you what my mother told me about mating." Suran undid the back of Maggie's robe. She exposed the human woman's bare back and continued the massage. "But humans are so different than us that I doubt it would be helpful."

"Terra Suran?" Maggie asked with a sigh. "Is this la-hoo?"

"It is part of it." But it was Genel who answered from the archway that led to the bedroom. "Are you enjoying it?"

Maggie looked around at Genel. But there was no anger in her voice or in her eyes. No jealousy. "Yes, Terra Genel. I am enjoying it."

Genel sat on one of the other benches and watched. Suran continued the massage. Genel asked. "Is this one of your techniques for training the humans, Suran?"

"Yes Sister." Suran smiled at Genel. "Although it has had a different effect on Rosita and Maggie."

"Rosita did not enjoy it?" Genel asked.

"Of course she enjoyed it." Suran laughed. She moved up Maggie's shoulders, pushing the robe out of her way as she went. Maggie held the front of the robe to her breast so that she was not completely exposed. "But she was angry at herself for enjoying it. It was giving in. Once she started giving in it became easier for her to give in on everything."

"And Maggie?" Genel asked.

"Our Maggie is more like us." Suran smiled. She leaned forward and ran her tongue lightly up Maggie's spine. Suran looked at Genel, her eyes wide with surprise. "Her skin tastes of salt."

"Salt?" Genel got up and came over to them. She sat on the bench in front of Maggie. "Really?"

"See for yourself." Suran said.

Genel brushed Maggie's loose shoulder length hair away from her neck. Carefully she leaned forward and lightly licked Maggie from the base of her neck up to her ear. "You are right, Hellah. Salt. Imagine that."

Genel stared massaging her neck and slowly moved down her chest. As she worked, Genel occasionally licked the human's odd tasting skin. She favored the outer edge of Maggie's ear lobe. With eyes closed Maggie enjoyed the attention. "Terra, should I be doing something in return?"

"When one of us must mate with a male," Suran spoke softly to her. "Her sisters prepare her. We relax her mind and body, so that she can tolerate the male."

Peretroh transported to Suran and Genel's patio. "Suran. There is a problem."

"Sit down, Peretroh." Suran did not stop caressing Maggie. Peretroh did not sit down. "What is this problem?"

"One of the human's communication devices is missing." Peretroh said. Both Genel and Suran seemed to forget Maggie and stood up to face Peretroh. Maggie pulled the robe up to cover herself. Reaching behind her back, she attempted to fasten it. "You must search the one who was in the defense center."

"Didn't you say their devices could not penetrate the shield?" Suran asked.

"Yes." Peretroh said. "They can not escape. But that is hardly the point."

"She is right, Sister." Genel said. "You thought that Rosita was completely trust worthy. Even allowing her to sleep in our bed last night. Look how she repays your kindness."

"She is with the male now." Suran said. "We must go to the observation room. Maggie. Come."

"Yes Terra." Maggie stood up. They all transported to the domed room where Suran had originally confronted Sulu.

"Sit." Genel ordered. Maggie sat on the floor. With a wave of her hand, Genel surrounded Maggie with a force field.

"That is not necessary." Suran said. "Maggie was not even in the defense center."

"Do you think she does not know what the other one has done?" Genel asked. "If she was as well trained as you thought, she would have told you about Rosita's deceit."

Suran closed her eyes and waved her hand. For the first time, Maggie saw a small blue disk on the heel of her palm. A holographic view of Sulu and Gonzoles in their one bed cell appeared in the center of the room. There were sitting on the bed apart from each other.

"I guess we will have to go through with this after all." Rosita sighed.

"It's either that or find out what Genel meant when she said any trick would be dealt with severely." Sulu said.

"She said that?"

"Just after you left us this morning." Sulu nodded. "You could close your eyes and think of L.J."

"L.J.?" Rosita asked. "He's married. Remember?"

"Sure." Sulu smiled. "But you two were close. You aren't going to suggest you never think about him?"

"Sure, I think about him." Rosita shrugged. "I always had a good time with him. I wonder how Mr. Chekov is doing."

"Nothing we can do about it, but wait." Sulu sighed. Waiting was hard on them both. And neither wanted to move ahead with the assignment they had been given.

"I know." Rosita sighed again. "Will you be thinking of Jimmi?"

"I will be trying not to." Sulu admitted.

"They are not mating." Genel observed. "They are not even touching."

Suran closed her eyes. The hologram evaporated. Sulu and Gonzoles appeared sitting on the floor. Sulu tried to get up but was shocked by a force field just over his head.

"No need to get up." Suran said. "Rosita, where is the communication device?"

"What do you mean, Terra Suran?" Rosita asked.

"Do not lie to me, human." Suran's voice was hard. Her eyes cold. "You were in the defense center. The device is missing. It is of no use to you."

"I don't have it." Gonzoles said.

"Down." Genel ordered. "On your stomachs. Hands stretched out over you heads."

Gonzoles looked to Sulu. The force field adjusted downward, shocking them both on the head. They each screamed and pulled away from it. Sulu nodded to Gonzoles and they both laid down on the floor as directed. A new non shocking force field held their wrists and ankles to the floor.

Genel and Peretroh searched the humans. Peretroh unfastened Rosita's robe searching for any place the communicator could be hidden. When she was done she threw the edge of the robe over Rosita but did not bother to fasten it again. Genel searched Sulu. She turned out his pockets. Felt into his boot tops. Pulled his shirt out of the waist band. And ripped the top of his pants so she could check his under clothes.

"Nothing." Peretroh said.

"He doesn't have it." Genel said. "But he was back in the cage. If Rosita gave it to the male, any one of the males could have it now."

Suran closed her eyes and waved the hand with the blue disk. A holographic view of the away team's quarters appeared behind Sulu and Gonzoles. The sleeping area was empty. The view changed to the feeding area. It was empty also.

"Where are they?" Peretroh demanded. "How did they get out of the cage?"

"I don't know." Suran said as the image evaporated. She walked over to Gonzoles and crouched down in front of her. "Rosita Gonzoles. How did they get out?"

"Mr. Chekov accessed the transporter you used to feed us in the cage." Gonzoles answered.

"Even if that is possible." Peretroh said. "Did they use a random destination and hope to transport to safety?"

"The communicators are also used to keep transporter locks on personnel while away from the ship." Sulu explained. "Chekov used his communicator to call the one still in the defense center. He beamed to those coordinates. From there he could disable your shields and return to the ship."

Peretroh walked quickly to the edge of the room and clapped her hands once loudly. A podium appeared. Peretroh touched the control board. "Our defensive shield is down. Tisda does not respond. I will go check on her."

"Genel, you were right." Suran said after Peretroh had transported out of the observation

room. She shook her head sadly. "Rosita, how could you do that to me?"

"I did it because I am Lt. Gonzoles of Starfleet." Gonzoles looked up at Suran. "And I had my orders."

"So. It was all a lie."

"Yes, Suran A'Gar." Gonzoles said. "All of it."

"Sister." Genel said from the podium. "Peretroh wishes to speak with you."

The holographic image of Peretroh appeared in the room. "Suran. The humans have been here. Tisda was unconscious when I arrived, but is now recovered. The human males took their weapons and equipment. They destroyed the compound's protective shield and returned to their ship."

"Was anything else destroyed?" Suran asked.

"No Sister." Peretroh said. "The power grid is intact and the perimeter still secure."

"How long will it take to repair the shield?" Genel asked.

"I don't know if it can be repaired." Peretroh said. "Tisda and I will try to undo the damage. I will let you know."

"Thank you, Peretroh." Suran said. She looked to Genel. "What should we do now?"

"Now would be a good time to release us." Captain Sulu said.

"Quiet!" Suran snapped at him.

"Are you all right, Ensign Briscoe?" Sulu craned his neck to look her way. He could barely see her.

"Yes Sir." Briscoe answered. "I'm fine."

"I told you to be quiet." Suran said.

"I hardly have incentive to cooperate with you now, Suran A'Gar." Sulu said. He turned to Gonzoles. "How about you, Lieutenant?"

"I've been more comfortable, Captain." Gonzoles said. "But I'll survive."

"Sister." Genel called from the podium. "A communication signal from the starship is being transmitted to this frequency."

Suran went to the podium and checked the controls. She and Genel just looked at each other. Sulu said. "Better talk to him, Suran. I doubt Commander Chekov is in the mood to wait."

"What will he do?" Genel asked Sulu.

"Talk to him and find out." Sulu suggested.

"It's not a holographic signal." Genel worked the controls until a view screen appeared on the wall behind the podium.

When the view screen came on, a yeoman was handing Chekov a uniform jacket. He put it on and fastened it before turning his attention to the screen. "Suran A'Gar. You are still holding three of our crew. You will release them now."

"And if I do not, Pavel?" Suran asked.

"I have one hundred heavily armed troops standing by to search your compound room by room." Chekov said. "When we left, the only system we disabled was the shield over the compound itself. If I send my troops in, they will destroy every power grids you have. And you will be vulnerable to every other faction on your planet. Do I make myself clear?"

Suran A'Gar closed her eyes and released the force fields over the Excelsior crew members. Captain Sulu immediately got to his feet and joined Suran at the podium. Holding his

ripped waist band in one hand, Sulu addressed Chekov. "Thank you, Commander Chekov. Please stand by."

"Of course Captain." Chekov nodded.

Lt. Gonzoles had to fix the robe before being able to stand without completely exposing herself. She silently vowed never to wear anything that fastened in the back again. She joined Captain Sulu at the podium. Ensign Briscoe came over more slowly.

Sulu turned to Suran. "My report to the Federation will contain a warning to all other ships in this sector regarding your practices. There will be no other unsuspecting visitors. No one else for you to play with."

"That is all you will do?" Genel asked skeptically. "You have no desire to inflict punishment and pain, Captain Hikaru Sulu?"

"I have no desire to stay on this planet any longer." Sulu said. "Chekov."

"Aye Captain."

"Maggie." Suran turned to Briscoe. She took Maggie's hands in her own. "My girls will miss you and so will I."

"I have to get back to my own life now, Terra." Briscoe smiled at Suran.

"You could stay with us." Suran said. "Maj, Haj, and Raj would never forgive me for letting you go."

Briscoe smiled at her, but pulled away and stood next to Captain Sulu. "Say goodbye to them for me, Terra Suran."

"Energize." Sulu ordered.

Back on board Excelsior, Captain Sulu, Lt. Gonzoles, and Ensign Briscoe each headed for their own quarters to change into standard uniforms. Sulu left the turbo lift first. Gonzoles and Briscoe lived on the same deck. In the Jush.ra robes they looked like a couple of alien monks walking down the hall.

"I am so glad to be home." Gonzoles sighed.

"Yeah." Briscoe nodded quietly.

"Are you ok, Maggie?"

"I will be." Briscoe said.

Gonzoles placed her hand on Briscoe's arm, stopping her. "Are you sure?"

"Are you questioning my mental health, Lieutenant?" Briscoe asked. "Or my conduct on the surface?"

"I have to admit, Ensign, that I wasn't always sure if you were with me during our captivity." Gonzoles said.

"Were you always sure of yourself?" Briscoe asked. "Sir."

"Turn in a detailed report on the entire time period you were removed from the cage to the Captain no later than eighteen hundred hours." Gonzoles said.

"Aye Sir." Briscoe said. "Anything else, Sir?"

"Dismissed." Gonzoles said. Briscoe nodded and continued towards her quarters. Lt. Gonzoles waited until she had rounded the corner before continuing towards her own quarters. When she reached her quarters, Gonzoles stripped off the Jush.ra robe and took a long sonic shower. Putting on her uniform made her feel like herself again.