



Her Alien Hero

Author: *Melissa Riddell*

Category: Fantasy

Description: Are you looking for a quick escape to another world with a little steam and a lot of plot? Check out each standalone, interconnected book in the Alien Quickies series. Each story can be read in under two hours!

In the secretive depths of Roswell, a specialized unit of the United States Air Force conducted experiments, intertwining alien and human DNA.

Two Volderen brothers, Voren and Baraxen, strive to save their race and prevent the awful experiments from happening again. Their mission turns personal when they abduct Lilly, whose unique genetic marker makes her the key to their peoples survival. Unfortunately, Voren harbors a deep grudge against humans, scarred by the USAFs cruel experiments.

As Lilly uncovers the dark secrets of humanitys sins against the Volderens, she faces an impossible choice: escape back to her old life or embrace a new destiny among the stars.

In a race against time and prejudice, Lilly understands how her DNA might be the lifeline the Volderens need to avert a future calamity.

Can love blossom in the void of space, bridging the gap between two worlds and saving them both?

Total Pages (Source): 5

Page 1

Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:25 am

A strange scent—like fresh-fallen snow sprinkled with pine needles—sent a spike of alarm through my brain.

No, I don't want to wake up.

Keeping my eyes closed, I willed myself to slip back into sleep and pulled the soft, warm comforter to my chin. The scent lingered in my nostrils, reminding me of how Jeremy smelled after a long day of chopping wood at the back of our cabin—his sweat mixing with the sunshine and freshness of the outdoor air.

But he's dead now whispered an internal voice of truth and pain always lying in wait during my weakest, saddest moments.

No, he's not dead. Please. I don't want it to be true.

Jarred awake, I launched to a sitting position and stared into the darkness of night, my hand reaching for his side of the bed, hope making my heart race. Once, just once, let the last two years be a terrible nightmare .

The blankets were cold and flat, and the memories of his loss crashed me into reality once more.

"I miss you," I said, choking back tears and caressing the pillow, his pillow. "What I wouldn't give to bring you back." The pain of his death lingered like an injured animal. "Will I ever learn to let you go?" How empty my life had become.

If we'd been able to get pregnant or if I'd pushed for adoption, maybe you'd still be

here.

Knowing it was a selfish thought, it didn't change the fact that had we started a family, things could've been different.

We'd both wanted kids, yet after several years of trying, a doctor had given us the bad news: Jeremy had been sterile. We'd discussed adopting, but something always got in the way.

Maybe we just weren't meant to be parents. Though tears had been shed, we'd managed to keep our love alive and dreamed of the day we'd be financially secure enough to adopt and have a big family. One year turned into five, and ten years turned into twenty. We'd finally managed to take the first step with an application when I'd turned forty-one and he'd hit forty-five, then tragedy struck.

No one in his family had ever experienced heart issues. Why didn't I make him go to the doctor for a checkup?

But I knew why. He seemed so fit and healthy. I'd never suspected his arteries were clogged and stiffened with cholesterol, not with how well we'd eaten. "Genetics," the emergency department physician had said. "Even the healthiest person in the world can't fight their genes. I'm sorry."

How I'd longed for the opportunity to be a mother, to raise miniature copies of me, of him, of caring for any child, so we could grow old and enjoy grandchildren, have the big family that we'd both yearned for.

He would've been a great father. I wiped sweat from my brow and inhaled deeply, knowing there'd be no more sleep tonight.

The slightest whisper of sound brushed the still air, and I frowned. What is that? Why

did it smell like fresh-fallen snow? Summer currently reigned supreme even in the mountains of Colorado, with temps in the seventies and eighties most days, though the cool, fifty-degree nights felt delicious against my skin. I always left the bedroom window cracked when I slept. The sounds of wildlife and trees blowing in the breeze were a comforting background noise for rest.

But something's disturbing the night. The hackles on the back of my neck stood straight up. My intuition rarely failed me, and right now, it screamed wariness.

Gingerly, I slid open the drawer to my nightstand and dug around, sweeping my attention across the darkened bedroom. With no neighbors for miles on One Peak Mountain, I'd learned to enjoy my freedom but be cautious. If someone tried to break in, they'd find a five-foot woman with mousy brown hair, mismatched pajamas, and a sour attitude aiming a cocked pistol at their chest.

There you are. My fingers grazed the handle of my Glock's cold metal, sending a reassuring calm through my blood.

Bright, piercing light from outside flooded the windows, turning the dark bedroom into a blazing sun.

"Jesus." Out of reflex, I jerked my fingers from the gun and protected my sight. The agony from the sudden blast of light piercing my brain.

It's the middle of the night. Why does it feel like the sun is eating the world?

As quickly as it started, the light seemed to turn off.

Probably some jackass teens outside got lost and used the driveway to turn around.

I opened my sight to the dark room once again. My retinas were still imprinted with a

bright afterglow. I blinked a few times, hoping my night vision would return.

Swinging my feet out, I sat on the edge of the mattress. The coolness of the wooden slats pushed against my toes. My irises slowly adjusted, revealing the hard angles of my dresser, of the bench at the end of the bed, and the door cracked open a bit, letting in the subtle glow of the hallway nightlight.

Wait. I closed the door before I went to bed—I'm sure of it. I can't sleep otherwise.

A terrifying sensation crept up my spine. What if I'm not alone?

I don't know why I thought this—sixth sense?—but a palpable presence lurked in my room. My breathing increased. Should I dive toward the nightstand or sprint into the hall?

"Shhh," whispered a male voice from dark.

My heart stopped.

Before I could react, something cold pressed against my temple. Everything turned black.

My head pulsed like a bowling ball slammed against a wall. "Ugh," I groaned. What a terrible nightmare. I stretched, not wanting to see the bright sunlight and empty spot beside me in the bed.

Someone spoke words in a strange language.

My mind immediately cleared, remembering last night's weird dream. There'd been a male voice that had spoken. I opened my eyes and immediately regretted it.

Two beings— I can't call them men, because that would imply human —towered over me. They were definitely masculine judging by the pronounced muscles of their shoulders and necks, yet an otherworldliness lingered on their skin, a faint shade of purple. Definitely not human, so they can't be real.

The one to my right squinted his electric blue peepers as he watched me. Two small horns jutted from his forehead, and long black hair fell to his chest.

He reached out an enormous hand and laid it on my stomach.

"The fuck you think you're doing?" I screamed, scrambling up and pushing myself away.

Unfortunately, I fell to the floor. Apparently, I'd been lying on a table. Something warm and hard bumped into my back, but I had zero time to look because the big purple guy— colored like Barney the dinosaur— strode closer, bending to look at me.

"Get away." I tried to scramble upright, but the warm, hard thing at my back stopped me. Call them what they are, Lilly, aliens.

No-no-no-no. This was just a horrible dream, that was all. There was no such thing as aliens.

Yes, that's right. Just a nightmare, like losing Jeremy.

"Human female. We do not want to hurt you," said another voice from behind, right next to my ear. "But we will if you do not cooperate."

Barney reached a hand toward me.

I swallowed. If this was just a dream, they wouldn't really hurt me, right?

Still, I hesitated.

"I'd suggest taking his hand. He's much more patient than I," whispered the unknown voice in my ear.

I gripped the outstretched fingers and scrambled to my feet. As soon as I stood, I released Barney's fingers and turned, needing to keep them both in my vision to form a plan of escape.

The alien who'd been whispering in my ear looked similar to the other, though his eyes were a brilliant shade of yellow and his horns were curly. His stare, hard and unforgiving, sent a shiver down my spine.

"Why am I here?" I asked, trying not to panic.

"Because we wanted you," said Barney. my neck, and I screamed.

"Why do you yell? We will not harm you unless you try to escape."

I'm so fucked. God, if you're listening, I'd really like to wake up .

But nothing changed. I was in a room filled with blue light. As I surveyed my surroundings in an effort to ground myself, to stay calm, I saw more beds like the one I'd just fallen from, but these weren't empty. Other people—men and women, not aliens—rested with their hands at their sides and slept.

But there was something off with them. Small circles of pink light glowed from their temples.

What the actual hell?

"They were not so lucky as you," whispered Barney, his words a low rumble.

"Lucky?" My voice, barely more than a squeak, sounded breathless.

"Their DNA was not a close enough match for what we needed."

"And what...what do you need them for?" Shut up, Lilly, just shut up. But my curiosity had always been my undoing.

"For mating."

I whipped my head around to stare at both aliens then backed away.

The golden-eyed, purple-skinned alien stalked forward, a look of interest on his face. He opened his mouth in what I thought to be a smile, revealing sharp teeth like daggers.

Something bumped the back of my spine and I froze. Another table, probably, but I didn't dare take my attention from the alien because he stalked forward, a predatory gleam in his stare.

"Do you smell that, Baraxen? She's primed and ready for us."

Barney—or Baraxen—walked toward me, his eyes softening. "Stop it, Voren. You're scaring her."

"Good. She should be scared. To be bonded and mated with not just one Volderen—but two—will test her limits." The purple alien named Voren stalked right against me, his face only inches from mine.

"I'm not mating with you monsters." True panic stirred in my bones. Please wake up,

please wake up, please wake up.

"Perhaps not yet, but you will, Lilly." Voren flicked out his split tongue and ran it over his fangs. "And I promise you this," he said, his form no more than an inch away.

I tried not to cringe, but it was no use. Terror poured through me. Would I become like these other human beings lying motionless in their beds? Would they experiment on me? Was this really happening?

"I will have you screaming from the pleasure we will bring. As long as you behave. If not," he dipped his head and laid a hand on my neck, "we will punish you which brings its own kind of pleasure, though you may not see it that way."

I ran, but he was faster. Gripping my shoulder, he bent his mouth toward mine, our breaths mingling. "First lesson, Lilly. Never run. It excites the beast within me."

My muscles shook. Tears threatened to spill onto my cheeks. Don't you dare cry. But if I cried, it would be from the anger building inside of me. "Fuck off," I spat, raising my knee at the same time.

The smack of my leg smashing his crotch gave a satisfying thump. I just hoped he had balls in the same place human men did.

Apparently so, because the big alien stumbled backward and collapsed to his knees. "D'janit deh- o!" He motioned to Baraxen, then to me. "Tame her, Brax, or I will."

Baraxen's blue eyes seemed to sparkle with mirth as he responded to the other man in the same language.

Voren snarled, then slowly got to his feet, his hands still cupping his crotch. "You

will pay for that." Turning, he stalked away. A door in the wall opened with a quick hiss of sound and he disappeared.

"You shouldn't have done that," Baraxen said. He held out a hand. "Come. I'll take you to your quarters."

"Go fuck yourself." I wasn't about to be a good little human for these aliens. "You took me from my home. You kidnapped me."

He stopped a few feet away and crossed his arms over his chest. Where Voren resembled a gladiator, Baraxen had a runner's body with sleek, toned muscle built for stamina.

"It may seem that way right now, but your perspective may change once you get to know us."

"I don't want to know you. I don't want anything to do with you."

"What you want doesn't matter. It's what we need." He gestured behind me, where the other humans slept or dreamed or whatever. "If you don't cooperate, these people will die. You're the only one who can save them."

"What?" He's trying to manipulate me into obedience, that's all. Yet something in his words felt dire.

"Come with me. Don't force us to make this happen. Voren enjoys submission, but I do not. I'd prefer my mate to be my equal and a little less feral."

"I'm not your mate. We're not even the same species." Maybe I should've been more concerned about being held captive on an alien ship, but the idea of mating with these barbaric aliens made my skin crawl.

"Which is exactly why your DNA calls to ours. Survival of a race depends on strength, adaptability, and lust. Tell me you don't feel it, too."

I stared at his angular face, his light violet skin, the short horns on his head, the flowing black hair, and I couldn't deny there was something primally, dangerously attractive about him.

But only him. Not that psycho, Voren.

My thoughts shamed me. Jeremy had been my husband, and we'd loved one another fiercely for the past twenty years. Dead or not, he could never be replaced.

"Do I have a choice?"

Baraxen shrugged. "In some matters." He nodded toward a sleeping female with red hair. "You can choose to save your people and live a life of luxury, or you can choose death."

I take it back. He's an asshole, too.

"So much for being a mate," I mumbled.

"Not your death. Once bound, you'll benefit from our enhancements. But those individuals? Yes. They will perish if you choose not to be a willing subject."

"This is crazy shit. This dream is ridiculous." I raised my hand to slap him, but his reflexes were sharp.

He held my wrist midair, his six-foot-four frame towering over me. "Do that again, and you will face the consequences. Voren and I will each take turns subduing you."

The way he looked while threatening to punish me made my thighs clench together. What the hell? Why am I turned on? They literally abducted me from my home.

His bright blue gaze focused on my lips.

I tried yanking my wrist away, but his grip grew tighter. With his other arm, he jerked me into his chest and grabbed under my arm, lifting me off my feet.

"Hey, stop that. Put me down right now!" The sensation of floating in the air cooled the desire flooding my veins.

He threw me over his shoulder without a word and began walking.

The world swam and my sensation of up and down made me dizzy, but I began beating his bare back with my fists. "You son of a bitch. Let me go."

His strides were long as he maneuvered through the long room and out the exit with a whoosh.

Cool air touched my skin.

He never said a word, just kept walking down a corridor with metal walls and floors.

I raked my fingernails across his back. Blue blood welled from the cuts. Instead of the tang of copper, something like ice or snow met my nose.

He grunted but didn't break his stride.

Is this a dream? I remembered reading somewhere that in dreams, a person couldn't smell.

Oh God. No. This cannot be real. It. Can't.

Another set of doors swooshed open, and he stepped into darkness. Grabbing me by the waist, he slid me off his shoulder and released me. I floundered as I fell, reaching for anything to stop the fall, but a soft thud under my belly cushioned the blow.

I immediately tried to rise, but pressure against my shoulders kept me down.

"Do not make this harder than it has to be," he said, his tone low and close to my ear. "I do not take pleasure in pain. But Voren? Well, if you continue to fight, he will break you. Do you understand?"

I froze. Baraxen sounded serious. Out of the two aliens, Voren seemed the most volatile. If I wanted to live, I needed to pay attention, pretend to cooperate, and devise a way to escape, though I had no idea where I was even at.

"I-I understand." Choking out those words felt like defeat.

"Good." The pressure at my back lessened, and that fresh-fallen snow scent got stronger. "Now tell me. What makes you wet, little human?"

My breathing quickened. He is not asking me what I think he's asking, is he?

I turned to give him the side-eye. "What?"

He leaned over, putting a leg on either side of my hips, and licked my bare shoulder.

A burst of pleasure tightened my lower belly. Oh Jesus, that feels good. Mortification chased the sensation of pleasure. Jeremy. I'm still married to Jeremy. I can't do this. These assholes have taken me from my home, threatened me, and now they want to screw me?

Yet, if I fought, I would die. Perhaps not by this alien's hand, but surely by Voren's. He hated me. The feeling's mutual, buddy.

Brax flicked his tongue along my jawline.

I shivered with revulsion and lust. Something in his saliva must've reacted with mine, making me respond with such desire. Hell, maybe they carried some sort of drug and released it with their tongue.

"Do you like that, Lilly? I can make you experience things you've never felt before. Give in. Let me show you how Volderens make love."

His touch, so gentle and sweet, undid me. I can't fight them. Fighting will make it worse. Tears pooled on my bottom eyelashes, and I pushed my face into the mattress. Please let this be a dream, God. Please.

"Why do you cry? Does this not feel good?" He shifted his weight off of me, and his long, warm body settled next to mine.

Instead of answering, I sobbed harder.

He stroked my hair. "Shh. It will be okay. I promise."

"No, it won't," I said, raising my head to look at him. Dark hair framed his head, but he kept quiet. "Please, don't make me do this. I miss my husband. I want to go home." Would my plea do any good? Everything I said was true. Since Jeremy's heart attack, I'd been alone with his ghost, not really living, but existing; my mind always focused on the memories and loneliness.

"I promise we will take you home, if that's what you want, once you give us what we need."

"Really?" I hiccupped, the tears slowing. "You'll really let me go?" Was it a ruse to get me to cooperate? I couldn't stop the flaring hope in my chest.

"I swear it, Lilly, as long as you obey and do not try to escape or hurt anyone again. Can you do this for me?"

An image of Voren, how angry he'd been when I'd kneed him in the balls, sprang to mind.

"What about your friend, that Voren guy? He hates me."

Baraxen chuckled. His teeth, though sharp like the other alien, didn't scare me the same way. "Vor is my brother first and friend second. He does not hate you. Dislikes perhaps, but that's just because he's scared of you."

"Scared of me ? Why?" It was preposterous to imagine I struck fear into such a large, imposing alien.

"Because he's had a horrible experience with humans. Knowing your...significance to our cause...is an unwelcome thorn in his side."

"A bad experience with humans ?" Disbelief tinged my words.

"Abduction isn't exclusive to your race." His icy stare flicked over my face. "The difference, though, is we learn from our tests. Humans, on the other hand, only destroy, take, and conquer out of their fear and need for power."

He had a point based on our history books.

"Why am I important? Why do you need me?" I carefully pushed myself to sit, hugging my knees, keeping my distance and attention on his hands.

Baraxen watched but made no move to stop me. "Our race will not survive what's to come. Which means putting aside an ages-old rivalry with your secret human government."

I glanced around, hardly believing I sat there talking calmly with him. I'd never believed in UFO/UAP sightings, and barely watched anything sci-fi related. My belief had always been people who saw little green men were nuts.

Turns out they're purple, humongous, and I'm the crazy one.

My eyes wandered as my brain digested this new information. The room had no corners. Everywhere I looked were smooth metal walls. Only a bed and couch sat on the thick, white carpet. A folding screen—decorated with blue symbols and words I didn't understand—juttied against the farthest wall. I wondered if these Volderens peed because the urge built in my bladder.

"Your government is not kind to those who would help," Brax said, his words drawing my attention.

"What? I don't understand."

"Since ancient times, Mesopotamian to be exact, my ancestors have visited Earth looking for the source code under relative anonymity. Unfortunately, we've had a few major ship malfunctions over the past few decades.

"Like crashes?"

He nodded. "Instead of offering aid, humans chose to imprison and inflict pain on survivors, and even succeeded in confiscating pieces of our technology."

I shivered at the coldness in his tone. His lips turned downward, and he stood.

"Voren..." He shook his head as if realizing he said too much. "Never mind." He pointed to the screen. "There are facilities for you to use, and if you get hungry or thirsty"—He swiveled and pointed to an alcove near the door—"just stand facing the replicator and tell it what you want."

I'd like a gun and some mace. I wondered if it would make a weapon to help me escape.

"And don't entertain trying to leave."

I glanced upward at the tall alien, hoping my thoughts didn't show.

"One foot outside this door without our approval, and you will be shackled and lose all privileges. Do you understand?"

Biting my lip, I looked away. Was I really a prisoner of extraterrestrial beings?

No. No way. This isn't real.

"Lilly," he said again, stepping closer and bending so his eye level met mine. "Do not try to leave. It will be so much worse. We are in orbit above Earth, so even if you did manage to find a way out, there is nowhere to go. I would not see you suffer needlessly."

How do I know he's telling the truth? If there's really nowhere to go, then why warn me? But I had to play their game if it meant surviving.

"Okay. I won't." My words were weak, and I schooled my demeanor into meekness. Please believe me .

"I'll return in a few Earth hours. Freshen up, eat, and get rest. You will need it for

what is to come.” His gaze flitted down my form. "You are the precious gift we have been expecting and the key to our plan. Do your part, and you'll be returned to your planet if you choose."

What exactly is my part, though? I fought against shivering. Maybe it's not as dire as it sounds. I wanted off of this ship of barbaric assholes asap, so I'd cooperate for as long as I could, all while looking for a way out.

I tried not to linger on his message after he left. 'You will need it for what is to come.'

Wings of panic beat inside my mind but I stuffed it down. Keep calm and focus. One thing at a time.

Since I wouldn't be able to sleep, I decided to scout the room. If there were vents or other spaces large enough to slide into, I'd find them. Still in my pajamas, I rolled the flannel sleeves and ran my hands up and down the nearest silver wall, touching its smooth surface for any kind of indentions or seams.

Nothing. This room, bare and sterile, offered absolutely zero ways to escape. Unlike Earth-made things, there were no corners or angles besides where the floor connected with the walls. Overhead, the domed ceiling shone light, though it seemed to seep through the metal because there were no visible bulbs. I didn't have a clue how it worked, and I couldn't have cared less. Freedom and escape rang through my thoughts.

My future with these Volderens didn't look good. Especially seeing those other unconscious humans, their forms laid out like bodies in a morgue. Their chests rose and fell, so I knew they weren't actually dead, but I didn't want to find out how they became vegetables.

No. I'll fight these dickheads with all my strength.

But first, I needed food to keep up my strength.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:25 am

" A T-bone medium well with homemade macaroni and steamed broccoli." Okay, it's not breakfasty, but it'll be packed with protein, carbs, iron, and strength so I can get the fuck outta here.

A soft ping, then a white plate piled with aromatic food appeared in the alcove.

"Shit. Now this is cooking I can get behind." A fork appeared next to the plate, but I also needed a knife. Could this clone thingy create gadgets like that? I mean, I needed to cut the steak.

"Can you create a knife for the steak?" I held my breath, then a neutral voice spoke, but not in English. Nothing materialized in the alcove.

Well, damn. It was worth a try.

The scents of smoked meat, melted cheese, and broccoli filled the air. My stomach rumbled. I didn't know if it would taste as good as it looked, but that didn't matter. So long as it gave me energy for what I had planned, I'd eat it.

Grabbing the plate and fork, I sat on the floor and cradled the food on my thighs. Volderens must not use furniture. Maybe I should've worried about poison or drugs in the food, but that seemed silly. These aliens were obviously far more sophisticated than humans, so why stoop to such barbaric means?

No, they could've killed me at any point, but they didn't, which meant they did want me alive, and once I figured out how, I'd negotiate for my freedom. Or escape. Whatever seemed the best course of action.

The first bite of macaroni and cheese hit my tastebuds, and I moaned. Oh my God. This is the best thing I've ever eaten. I shoveled more into my mouth. If they were watching, I hoped my lack of manners would disgust them, and they'd send me home.

I scraped every bit of creamy cheese sauce from the plate, then started on the broccoli, which also did not disappoint.

"Don't worry. I'll get to you next," I said through a mouthful. One food at a time is how I'd always enjoyed my meals. It made it easier to savor the flavors.

I debated trying to get the replicator to create a knife once again but decided against it. They were probably watching me. But I can do something with the fork if I can keep it hidden.

Grabbing the warm meat with both hands, I bit a piece and ripped it away with my teeth. Juice ran down my chin and my hands. I tried not to chuckle at the sight I probably made; a grown-ass woman biting steak with her teeth like a savage neanderthal. The meat, tender to the point of perfection, also ranked high on my foodie list.

If I make it back home, I'll never enjoy any of these foods again.

After several minutes, with the plate clean, I stood and stretched, slipping the fork into the waistband of my underwear since the pajamas didn't have pockets. Casually, I raised my arms and stretched deeper, scanning the area for anything that might've been a camera.

But there was nothing besides the screen, replicator, the couch, and a small bed.

Do these guys even sleep, because there's no way they'd fit in that thing.

An even worse thought followed. This is a cage, and they'll keep me locked away forever.

Those wings of panic rose but I mentally shoved them away. My survival meant going along with whatever these jerks had planned and finding some way out.

Obviously, they didn't want to kill me—at least, not yet—which meant they needed me. Yeah, they need you for mating, Lilly.

I shoved that mental picture away. As long as I had something to offer, I had a chance.

But what happens when they're finished with me?

No. I couldn't think like that.

What did Baraxen say? Eat, clean up, and rest.

"Got the first part done." Breathing deeply, I strode to the folding screen and looked behind it.

A small tub, reminiscent of the deep porcelain baths of the old days, sat on clawed feet. No pipes showed anywhere, but a spigot jutted from the end. "How do I turn this thing on?"

I perched on the edge. You'd think with all the alien technology they had; they'd have come up with a better way to clean their skin.

Then again, they're in the business of abducting human women. Maybe the bath is a replica to make their slaves more comfortable.

Inwardly, I shuddered. This had to be a dream.

The porcelain should've been cold, but it radiated warmth under my touch. Reaching out, I ran an index finger over the silver spigot. At my touch, water began gushing into the tub. Though there was no discernable stopper, but the liquid didn't drain away.

"Where's the soap and shampoo?"

A shelf slid from the wall, and a basket materialized. Inside sat a bar of pink soap, a loofah, and a clear bottle of yellow liquid, which I guessed to be shampoo.

If I hadn't been kidnapped, I would've probably enjoyed these things appearing at my whim. However, knowing my freedom lay on the line tempered my excitement. I'm nothing more than a game piece to these beings, that's it. They probably see me as a wild, dirty animal. No wonder they want me to take a bath.

A rebellious streak rose within to refuse everything they'd asked, but I tamped it down. Play the game, get home. It's really that simple.

But deep fear churned in my gut. I'd always thought the most dangerous part of living alone would be someone breaking into the house, not being taken hostage by otherworldly creeps.

Still. Everything that had happened could be an elaborate fantasy created by my mind. How many times had my dreams seemed real, especially when Jeremy visited after death.

No, I didn't need to dwell on him. He was gone and I wasn't. I'd be strong; I would live.

Straightening my shoulders, I began stripping. "If you're watching, enjoy the show, creeps." I didn't know if they could see me and I didn't care. Modesty had never been a major concern. My body wasn't perfect, but Jeremy had always treated me like a goddess, and that confidence carried through even after his death.

I deftly slipped the fork into the messy clothing pile, then tested the water with a finger. Not too hot or too cold. The faucet still ran, and I gripped the edge and slid inside.

With a quick hiss, the water stopped. My weight or some other alien technology had forced it to stop. They might think they were winning me over, but I wouldn't hesitate to fight naked if it came down to it. If their aim was to disconcert me, they'd be sadly mistaken.

I sat in the water, listening for any signs of movement or whoosh from the entryway.

Nothing. Utter silence, except for a low drone vibrating from underneath.

Satisfied I truly had privacy, I leaned against the tub.

A meal and a bath within an hour of being kidnapped. What kind of abductors are these guys?

I remembered the ones asleep on those tables. Was that my fate? To be put under and experimented on? What if my idea of mating was nothing like theirs?

"What are you doing?" growled a voice from behind the screen.

My entire body jerked in startlement, sending water sloshing over the tub. The gravelly voice told me Voren—the alien who scared me much more than Baraxen—must've snuck inside.

"What does it sound like I'm doing?" I said, keeping my tone even, my words steady.

He stomped around the screen and came into view. His golden eyes burned with anger or something close. "You were supposed to get suited up." He tossed a square package onto the floor. "Not lounge around like a queen."

I wanted to shrivel under his stare, to dunk myself in the water and hide until he left.

Instead, I shrugged. "Brax told me to eat, bathe, and change." With exaggerated slowness, I grabbed the bar of soap and began rubbing it in my hands for lather.

Voren stepped closer, the scowl turning his lips downward, making his face even angrier than before. His booted foot stepped on my pajamas and underwear, where the fork hid.

A moment of panic flew through my chest. If he finds it, I'm doomed.

His hand reached out faster than I could follow, and he grabbed the hair at my nape.

I stopped breathing. His grip wasn't exactly painful, but it wasn't comfortable, either.

He leaned down, bringing himself so close, pushing his cheek next to mine. "Do you know how easily the human body breaks?"

Licking my lips, I couldn't stop staring at the black horns flanking his forehead. Their tips look sharp.

"Do you?" His tongue flicked out as he spoke, revealing the split at the end.

"Well, we do break pretty easy. I once fractured my tailbone in a fall. Hurt like a bitch for months." I smiled, hoping it didn't look like a grimace. "Seems like

Volderens can break, too, especially in their crotch area."

He continued staring at me. His eyelids narrowed. "Why are you not afraid?"

Was he fucking kidding? He terrified me.

"I lived in fear all my life until I met my husband. He showed me only weak men hurt others."

"Are you insinuating I'm weak?" He tilted his head and lowered his gaze to my chest.

I glanced down. My nipples hardened, and I fought an urge to cover them.

"Well, you're not a man, so I can't say for sure."

His attention shot to my face. "That's a blessing for both of us."

I frowned, trying to figure out what he meant.

With a low growl, he released my hair and stood. "Lean forward."

"Wh-what?" The sudden change of his position and mood confused me.

"Lean. Forward. If I have to say it again, I will punish you."

The ominous tone of his voice sent goosebumps along my skin. "Punish me? Like a spanking?" My smart-ass mouth had always gotten me in trouble, and I immediately regretted my words.

"If you don't lean forward right now, you'll find out."

I hated myself for it, but I did as he demanded. Squeezing my eyes shut, I mentally braced myself for a punch or something worse and wrapped my arms around my bent knees.

Being naked in a tub didn't bother me like the thought of being hit.

The soft swish of clothing rubbing together sighed through the silence, telling me Voren positioned himself at my back.

"Humans are filthy. You carry a plethora of bacteria and viruses. My brother was not wrong instructing you to bathe."

Something soft trailed across my exposed skin and I shivered. He lifted the hair from my nape, then pushed a muscled arm next to my side to retrieve the soap.

Is he going to...wash me? The thought seemed preposterous and crazy and ridiculous, yet I didn't know what else to make of his actions. Why am I not fighting harder?

His touch was nothing like his gruff personality; it trailed across my flesh with tenderness.

"Tell me, where is this husband you speak of?"

"Dead." My voice carried no emotion, even though my chest gave a painful squeeze.

"Good," Voren said.

A hot rush of fury flared through my veins. Unable to stop myself, I twisted around to face my abductor.

"How dare you." The fury kept building at his words, at my helplessness, at my shattered life. "You talk about filthy humans? What about disgusting alien creeps who steal women in the night like animals? You didn't know him. You're nothing like him. He was kind, he was loyal, and he loved me." I balled my fist and punched.

He didn't try to duck or grab my arm. Instead, he stared at me, as if waiting for contact.

My fist found his face, and a resounding smack filled the air. The shockwave traveled up my wrist and into my upper arm. I at once pulled my arm away and twisted around, putting as much distance as possible between him and me.

So much for playing the calm, cool, trustworthy prisoner.

His chest steadily rose and fell with each breath, and his expression remained placid, but a darker area of purple spread near his nose, under his cheekbone.

Only the sounds of my breathing and the low hum of the ship filled the air.

With grace, he stood, dropping the bar of soap into the water. "You will not do that again." His voice lost the arrogant aggression it held earlier. He bent and scooped the square package. "When you finish, put this on and walk to the door. Baraxen will be waiting. The timetable has been altered."

"What?" I had no clue what he was talking about. First, they tell me to eat, bathe, relax, and now they're busting in and hurrying me along? "Why do I care?"

"Because if you don't help us, all those humans—" He indicated the door hidden by the screen. "—will die."

Damn. There was more at stake than just my life. I would not put those people at risk

by disobeying. There had to be a way out of this, a way for me to save myself and my fellow humans.

With a deep breath, I nodded. With a hand on either side of the tub, I pushed myself up to stand. Water cascaded down my breasts and legs.

His glance slowly roved my naked flesh. He flicked his pink, forked tongue against his top lip.

"Take a picture. It'll last longer." I should've been grossed out by his possessive stare. Instead, a tiny part of me perked up at his obvious interest. I hadn't been touched by a man in two years, not since Jeremy, and sometimes, during the deep dark of night, I yearned for that contact once more. Not just the sex, but the closeness—the connection—once more.

"You have a sassy mouth for a human." His attention snapped to lips. "Why are you not scared of me?"

Oh, I am, just not as much as I probably should be. "You haven't hurt me. Other than being sadistic kidnapper, you haven't done much to actually prove you're evil." I gave him a smile, hoping it looked real this time.

He caressed a horn, his fingers rubbing the smooth black surface in circles. My lower belly tightened, and I had to focus on not squeezing my legs together. An image of his hand between my thighs, nudging me to climax, forced me to drag my attention away from his long, slim fingers. I don't know if he even realized what he was doing.

What in the fucking hell is wrong with me? I should not be having sexual thoughts about my abductor. He's an alien and a criminal.

"Well?" I asked, making a shooing motion. "Do you expect me to get dressed in front

of you, too?"

"I smell your essence, your lust." He moved his fingers from his horn and settled his hand on his hip.

His words sent a thrill of danger and desire through my bones and a flash of embarrassment to my cheeks. My throat closed up, leaving me unable to give a suitable retort.

Luckily, I was saved.

The door opened with a hiss. Footsteps approached.

Voren gave me one last unreadable glance before turning away. "She's almost ready."

Baraxen came into view and froze, his gaze riveted to my physique for two seconds until he forced his attention to my face. He swallowed, then quickly turned his head toward his brother.

These aliens are so goddamn weird. It's like they have no clue about privacy or how to act around humans.

"She's..." Brax cleared his throat. "She's not clothed."

"Insightful observation." Voren's words were sarcasm lace with a hint of humor.

Brax snatched the clothing package from Voren and held it to me. "Put these on. We're about to engage the enemy."

"Wait. What's going on?" I grabbed the dark gray jumpsuit and stepped out of the tub, water pooling at my toes. There were no towels, so I slid into the clothing, which was

a tight fit, especially with wet skin. "Who's the enemy?" I had no desire to be on an alien spaceship while they battled whatever else was out there.

"Your people." Voren continued facing his brother even though the words were for me.

My people? Rescue. I could get rescued. The idea sounded though. First, how would they even know I'd been abducted? Second, how could anyone on Earth compete with the technology here? Third, why would they—Voren and Baraxen—bother telling me?

Maybe it's a ruse to see how I'll react.

Boom! A terrible rumble shook the walls and floor.

"Get her in the med bay. Quick," Voren said, shoving me into Baraxen. "I'll hold them off until we can get a tunnel opened."

"Hey! You can't—"

"Go, Vor. Get the ship ready." Baraxen grabbed my wrist, pulling me behind him. "Ner vani vru pasen."

Voren responded with two words or syllables that were more grunt than language. A bright flash of light appeared in the ceiling, and he disappeared.

Brax continued dragging me away, but I couldn't ignore the spot where we'd stood moments before. This can't be a dream. I'm not that creative when it comes to making things up.

Another shudder ran through the ship. Blaring alarms sounded as we stepped through

the sliding door and into a corridor.

Brax broke into a run, forcing me into a sprint to keep from falling on my face.

Another alien ran from the opposite direction, her skin a deep blue. She wore a black leather jerkin, tight white pants, and carried a lightning rod in her hand.

"Nerini vu marethenanie pasen?" she asked, her voice lighter and more musical than the males of her species.

With a brief nod, Brax pointed behind us but never slowed down.

My lungs burned and my leg muscles tightened in protest. I hadn't exercised in over two years, other than the occasional walk outside to gather wood for the fireplace or down the driveway for a once-monthly grocery trip by car.

"Why are we running? Your brother transported or whatever the hell you call it."

"Because if we were to upload you right now, they'd recognize your DNA."

"What..." My head swam with darkness coalescing inside. Nothing he said made sense. Hell, nothing that happened recently made sense. "I...I need to rest. Please," I gasped, unable to move my feet fast enough.

"Just a little bit farther." He gave my palm a squeeze but didn't reduce his pace.

"Can't." My legs buckled and I stumbled. Darkness fell like a blanket of stars and night.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:25 am

"Ugh," I groaned, opening my eyes. Voren and Brax stood over me as I lay on a bed. I moved to sit, but Brax laid a hand on me.

"No, just lie still." He gestured towards Voren. "He's running a sweep, which will cloak and hide you from your people."

"What?" My heart pounded like a jackhammer. Hide me from my people? No. I want them to find me. "Please. Just take me home."

Voren twisted toward me and frowned, then looked at his brother, who shook his head. Were they telepathic, or so attuned to one another they could read each other's emotions?

Brax's big hand rested upon my clavicle. His fingers stroked my skin. "What is it?"

Voren sighed. "They must've finally figured out the algorithm. We don't have much time."

"Then work faster. It is imperative we get this right."

With a deeper scowl, Voren turned and began tapping on the wall. Strang symbols and images flashed as he worked, their progression faster and faster as they slid across the screen.

In the mix of thrumming background noise, a steady blip beat in time with my heart. My attention wandered to the other folks lying on the tables next to me. Their eyes remained closed, and there were no IVs or monitors hooked to their bodies, but they

breathed evenly. These were the people I'd seen when I first arrived.

Are they my fate? To be unconscious and subject to experiments? No. I would not be their victim. I needed to fight, to escape.

Static filled the room then faded to silence.

"This is General Teggart of the United States Space Command. Surrender immediately and prepare to be boarded. Our electromagnetic pulsars and lasers are pointed directly at your life support. Surrender now and live or fight us and die. You have one minute."

Brax and Voren began conversing in their language. Another alien, the female I'd seen earlier, burst into inside, her eyes wide and mouth set in a hard line.

Voren directed a few words to her, then made a chopping motion with his hand. He seemed angrier than usual. His stare focused on me.

Jesus. Is he talking about killing me?

Brax removed his hand from my shoulder and growled something to the woman. With another grunt, he stalked past her and left.

Her tone, higher and less gruff than her male counterparts, rose as she responded to Voren. Neither seemed interested in me.

This might be my only chance for rescue. But how? The United States military was about to board this ship. I would survive long enough for someone to find me, which meant locating a place to hide—and fast.

The door began sliding open once more and I stopped thinking and lunged. A few

seconds was all I had before getting caught. I had to make them count. With a desperate sprint, I pumped my legs faster. Come on, come on, come on. Just make it through the threshold.

Only three feet or so separated me from the ever-widening opening, then Voren's scowling face appeared.

His amber eyes widened as I dove downward, pushing myself low to slide between his legs. As I flew under, something brushed against the back of my scalp.

Please don't catch me , I thought, pushing myself upward and tearing off down the corridor, my blood pounding wildly, my thoughts a jumbled mess.

Air flew past and my hair whipped back and forth. The slim jumpsuit reduced air friction. I flew like a bird. Thank you, crazy alien brothers. Had I been wearing my old, ratty pajamas, I'd had to worry about the ragged hems tripping my bare feet.

Doors graced either side of the corridor, but I kept pushing myself forward. The way my luck was going, they probably led to living quarters. That's if they would even open for me. I needed a place to hide, or even better—an escape pod.

The hall began widening outward, the walls curving left and right, opening to new hallways, with the main corridor continuing straight on.

Behind, someone shouted, the voice distinctly male. I had no desire to find out who or how close they were.

Following a gut instinct, I took the next left and pushed myself to run faster. My lungs heaved and my heart thumped. This hall, three times as wide as the earlier, smelled of tar, oil, and burned electrical wire. No doors graced the sides, but clear glass showed a bay or hangar with several vehicles, like Cybertrucks, with wings.

They were hideously ugly and possibly my salvation.

The glass wall gave way to a large arch, and I sprinted inside, putting one of the vehicles between me and the glass.

I leaned against the door with my attention on the solid wall at the back of the room. Panting, I focused on regaining my breath.

Please, let me hide and escape. I don't want to be a prisoner... I just want to go home to my cute little cabin in the mountains. Amen.

Shouting and running footsteps filled the hallway, their echoes bouncing into the enormous bay.

Sweat dripped into my eye. I wiped it away and crouched, focusing on the vehicle that hid me. There has to be a way inside. My fingers clawed at the metal as my eyes roved for seams on the surface, looking for doors or handles or anything to get me under cover.

"Nemethe pasen, vlaren!"

I didn't dare glance toward the glass wall to see which alien—Voren or Brax—was gaining on me.

As I ran the pads of my fingers over the metallic vehicle, close to where it rested on the floor, there was a tiny indentation. A trickle of excitement overrode the sour taste of fear. If I can get this to open, I might—

"You idiot," roared Voren.

I jumped, my chest pounding and my nerves on high alert.

He stood two feet away with a terrifying scowl on his purple face.

"I-I-I..." Desperate, I looked around for a weapon or anything to defend myself. Nothing. Not a goddamn thing to help me escape. The fork! Shoving my hand at the small of my back, I grabbed the tines of the eating utensil. Should I stay and fight or run away? Somehow, I didn't think silverware would do any real damage to this hulking alien.

He stalked forward, thunder in his gaze. I yanked the fork and threw it at the alien, not seeing where it landed because I turned to run. Something slammed into me, knocking me onto my stomach.

"If you make one more move, I will cuff your wrists, throw you over my shoulder, and lock you in my living quarters. Do you understand?" His voice boomed, and in its depths I sensed fury and frustration.

My cheek pressed against the floor with the weight of the tall man spread over my body.

"Fuck. You." I kicked my legs and arched my spine, praying I'd dislodge him enough to scramble out from under him.

"You think you can escape and find rescue by your government? You're wrong. Even if you somehow managed, they would see you as an opportunity to exploit and use you until you are dead or close enough."

"Like I'd believe that, you asshole. You're the ones who abducted me and plan on doing screwed up experiments." God, I hope that doesn't mean an anal probe.

He dug around, near my lower back, his fingers pushing against my clothing while I fought with my lower limbs, still bucking and wiggling to free myself.

"It's the truth. I know how humans treat those they believe are a threat or opportunity. They're savages, and if there weren't other lives to consider, I wouldn't have a problem turning you over to them. Humans deserve each other." Something cold encircled my wrist, paralyzing my entire arm. "You are insolent, crude, and weak. Unfortunately, that puts you under my protection."

With my free hand, I reached backward, my fingers clawed and ready to scratch the first bit of skin they encountered. "And you're a brute who wouldn't know fun if it reached out and slapped him in the face." Why did I need to hurl insults at him while fighting for my life? I had no idea, but something in his tone got under my skin.

Another cold snap on my free wrist, and both arms became numb.

True panic set in and I kicked harder, throwing my feet backwards, hoping to damage or shock him enough to let me go.

Unlike my arms, my back hadn't been numbed and something rumbled against it. A deep chuckle, so low it vibrated my bones, reverberated through the air.

Is he...laughing?

The weight against me disappeared, and suddenly I found myself flying through the air to be tossed over his shoulder like a ragdoll.

"Vor, they're about to launch," said a voice I recognized as Baraxen.

"Release me, you stupid bag of muscle and horns or I'll bite the fuck out of you," I screamed as I hung upside-down, my nose pressed against his flat, muscled stomach.

Something smacked my ass. "Quieten down, you little terror, or I'll give you something to scream about."

"Brother, are you smiling?" Brax's voice, filled with wonder, jerked my attention for a few seconds. He stood close to Voren, one hand rubbing his chin while the other carried something that looked like a silver wand or elongated pen.

"Odd. The more grief she gives me, the happier I am."

The indignity of being spanked overrode all sense of survival and dignity, and I started kicking, letting my bare toes smash against his hips, his ass, his thighs. Any exposed part of his body was fair game.

From the corner of my eye, even though my upside-down view skewed the world, I could make out Brax's risen eyebrows. He backed away; his lips turned into a wonderous smile.

"Kick me one more time, little human," Voren growled, "and I will march into the med bay and pull one of your people off life support. You can watch them die, knowing you could've prevented it by reining in your temper."

His words were a glass of ice water smothering my fury.

I became a deflated balloon. A hard knot of defeat rose in my throat and tears filled my eyes, dripping onto my brow.

"Easy, Vor. Don't you think she's been through enough?" Brax's words were a gentle rain on my soul. "Besides, we've got bigger problems to worry about, like Xeno. Larralian is scanning their base and picking up active mobilization. After recent events, we need to be extra careful." He spoke something in their native tongue.

Voren grunted, still carrying me like a sack of flour and marching to God knew where, every step of his big, booted feet a jolt through my body.

I didn't give one shit about their problems. Maybe this Xeno base is military, and I can escape with them.

That earlier female voice spoke foreign words throughout the ship, her tone sharp and quick.

Voren and Brax sprinted through the corridor, bursting through automatic doors, their voices deep and hurried as they shouted words that sounded vaguely middle eastern mixed with some other language I'd never heard.

"Stay here," Voren barked, sliding me off his shoulder and to my feet.

For a second, I glared at him, fighting an urge to curse.

With his huge body blocking most of my view, he pushed me backward until my spine bumped against the wall. He placed both of his hands on my head and whispered in my ear. "Do what I say if you want to live."

Now he's threatening to kill me? "You're a bastard."

He pulled back, his golden eyes on mine, a line between his brows. "A bastard? I'm trying to save your—"

Boom-boom-boom!

A great thunderous sound rang through the ship, the vibrations traveling up my legs. The floor lurched, and I fell forward until Voren caught me.

We were back in the med bay. The unconscious people from earlier still lay on their beds.

Voren released me and rushed to a console jutting from the opposite wall. His fingers flew over the flat screen filled with symbols.

Brax ran to the humans and began swiping small devices near their heads. "They've knocked out life support. Hurry up, get it back online."

"I'm trying." Voren's fingers moved faster. "Xeno must have figured a way past our defenses. Larralian sent a secure message and said we're being boarded."

"What?" Brax swiveled around, his attention riveted toward Vor. "That shouldn't be possible, unless..."

"Unless they finally broke him." Voren made a hand motion to his brother, similar to the peace sign but turned on its side.

Now would be a great time to skedaddle, find my people, and get the fuck out of here. I inched closer to the doorway, knowing it would take me out of here.

Both men's attention turned to me.

I froze.

A blinding light pierced the area between us, and I squeezed my eyelids shut.

"Do not move!" screamed another voice, one that didn't have an accent. Human. That's one of my people.

I risked a glance and nearly collapsed with relief.

Men and women—around ten or so—in military fatigues and heavy weaponry, pointed their guns at the aliens.

Brax and Voren stilled, casting unreadable glances at one another.

"Oh thank god," I said, stepping toward the group.

"Step back," yelled a young man, swinging his gun in my direction. "I won't ask again."

I stopped and held up my hands. "Please. I'm human. They abducted me."

The older gentleman in the middle sported a flat top haircut. His hair seemed mostly blonde, but there were quite a few grays mixed in. "I want her cuffed." He glanced at the others who slept. "And I want these abominations extinguished."

Extinguished? Like killed? "No," I said, lifting my hand in a stopping motion. "We have to save them. Why would you—"

"Secure her."

"Yes, Major." A young woman strode towards me, her gun sights set on my chest.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" True panic began setting in. I looked toward Voren and Baraxen, who remained still but their eyes tracked the woman moving toward me. Both men's jaws were clenched.

The woman tossed plastic handcuffs at my feet and nodded where they fell. "Put 'em on."

"I don't understand. Why am I being arrested?"

"If she doesn't comply, shoot her." The major's irises were cold and calculating. He meant what he said.

The entire squadron nodded in unison. "Yes, sir."

Quickly, I bent and grabbed the white cuffs, then straightened and shook my head. "I am not one of them." I pointed my chin in Vor and Brax's direction.

The aliens, even with guns pointed directly at them, still looked imposing with their height and sharp horns. If I hadn't been terrified, I might've laughed at the ridiculousness of the situation.

But I could no longer tell myself everything had just been a dream. Sweat lingered in the air, the tension palpable. An unshakeable doom weighed on my shoulders. This will not end well.

"Lieutenant Grice. Take care of them." The commander pointed to the sleeping people.

At least they'll be saved. I could understand why he didn't trust me. After all, he didn't know what side I was on. But those people? They'd been the victims of abduction, just like me, and I felt a small bit of relief knowing they'd be saved.

Lieutenant Grice, a guy probably no older than twenty-eight or so, stepped out of the huddle of soldiers. "Which setting, Major Sewell?"

"Highest."

"Yessir." The younger officer straightened his shoulders, then tipped his head and flicked a lever or button on the side of his gun.

Odd. I've never seen anything like that before. But then again, I'd never seen military weapons this close, either.

He leveled the barrel of his rifle at the nearest woman.

"No." My heart stopped. "What are you—"

A thick, red line shot out of the gun and into the woman's head.

I raised my bound hands to my mouth. My thoughts swam. No. Nononononono. I couldn't look away. The red laser filled her body from within. Pink light glowed through her bare arms, every bone and vein visible under the skin. I took a step toward her, not knowing how I could help needing to do something.

A soldier or airman or whatever the fuck they were used the end of his gun and slapped it against my shoulder; a warning to stop.

The lady's eyes opened slowly. Her gaze met mine. Such confusion and pain shone from her brown irises.

I couldn't breathe. "Please. Please stop," I begged, but no one seemed to hear. Or they didn't care.

The light stopped and in two seconds, her entire body turned into gray ash, even her clothes.

She looks like one of those bodies in Pompeii. I turned my attention to the guy in charge. Major something. I couldn't remember if they'd said his name or not, and it didn't matter to me.

"You asshole . Why would you do that to her?" My heart twisted with sorrow and pain.

He smiled, the gesture not quite reaching his eyes. "Don't worry. You'll get your

turn. This is the only way to cleanse the filth they've done to your DNA."

"Liar," said Baraxen. "We've been trying to save them from what your people have done."

The major pivoted to look at both brothers, his little army keeping their guns drawn and aimed at everyone. He pulled a cigar from one of his front pockets. "Now that's where you got it wrong, but we do appreciate your generous...donation." He chuckled as if he'd made a joke.

"You filthy, disgusting human." Voren's muscles strained, and he clenched his jaw. "You took advantage of our kindness. Instead of helping, you tortured us, stealing our technology and our genetics."

"Well, that's not entirely untrue." The major bit off the end of his cigar and spit it on Brax, where it hit his chest and fell to the ground. "Thanks to you and your... brothers, we managed to extract some code for human DNA enhancements. Our subject has been a bit unwilling, but nothing important comes without a fight. We'll continue extractions on our prisoner, and one day soon, we'll crush you like the shit faces you are." He lit the cigar, gave it a two puffs, then blew the smoke into their faces.

My government is experimenting with its own citizens, and possibly a Volderen? I thought the aliens were the bad guys. They'd mentioned taking me so the others could live, or something like that, and I'd assumed they meant my cooperation meant they'd spare lives.

The Volderens are the good guys?

My entire world shifted. The aroma of burnt hair and ash filled the room. Nausea roiled in my belly. Brax and Vor held my gaze. I imagined them saying 'Hold it

together a little longer. We'll make it through this.'

The handcuffs, firmly wrapped around my wrists, grounded me in the moment. Neither of the brothers had hurt me, even when I'd fought.

"Light up the rest of them," said the Major, his deep voice snapping me back to reality.

"What about her?" asked the guy pointing his rifle at me.

I swallowed, tasting bitter fear in my mouth. Surely they wouldn't...couldn't...

"Let her watch, then pop her last." He gave me a cold, calculating smile. "This is what we do to traitors."

"No, you can't do this. How can you be so cruel?" I ached for these people—for myself. "I'm an American citizen and so are they." Technically, I didn't know for sure they were Americans, but it really didn't matter. They were human...innocent. No one deserved to die.

"Not anymore." He puffed on his cigar. "The day those abominations touched you, touched them"—he nodded in the direction of the beds—"they tainted your blood." Pushing through his men and women, he stood before me. "When the subjects are no longer in a controlled environment, then we must eliminate the source."

From my side vision, Voren and Brax seemed to stiffen.

"They thought we couldn't reverse their engineering, but you see, we figured it out after their first ship crashed in 1947. We've been back engineering since. Soon, the perfect soldier will be ready using the materials they've so graciously donated—"

"You mean our people and equipment you stole ." Voren's words dripped with hate.

"Potato, potahtoe. Alien, alienate. We do what's best for our country. If that means sacrifice, then so be it." The major flicked cigar ashes onto the floor. "You're looking for the perfect donor to save your doomed race, but they don't exist. After thousands of years of searching, you should've just given up. They would understand the sacrifice required for science. Their death is a step toward our goal. You boys should've headed for home the minute you escaped because we both know no one's coming to save your kind. You were given a choice many years ago to work with us, and you chose wrong."

"We chose—and continue to choose—not to be your slaves. Our missions is peaceful. We came to learn, to better both races, and to share but Earth became greedy. You will pay. Maybe not today, but you will know our wrath soon."

"Mmhmm. You're still here without backup, still licking your wounds. Your people are stranded. And now? We've caught you with your pants down. We won. You lost. Prepare for the consequences."

He gestured towards the other sleeping humans. "Finish this."

Several soldiers swung their rifles at the unconscious figures and began shooting.

Reflexively, I ducked, making my body a smaller target.

Voren also ducked, gave me a slight nod, then turned his focus to a wall monitor. "Naranthelani pasen, Larralian. Vonsint tunal!"

Blinding, intense white light burst through the room like a wave.

The group of military members froze and then poof —they disappeared as if they'd

been ghosts.

I remained on the balls of my feet, huddled with my cuffed hands raised in defense. "What was that? Where'd they go?" So many more questions rambled around in my brain, but I couldn't voice anything else. I slowly stood and glanced at the bed filled with ash, a vague body outline visible of what was once a woman. My gaze traveled to the other beds even though I didn't want to look, knowing the military had probably incinerated them, too.

They didn't kill all everyone. Two more women and a man had somehow missed the destruction unleashed from the laser rifles.

Still. Where there had been eight breathing people, only three now lived. Such tragic loss of life.

"Here. Let me help you." Brax touched me, jarring me from such devastating thoughts. "We had Larralian release a weapon we've been working on that destroys non-Volderen genetics."

"So...those military guys? They're...dead?"

Baraxen squeezed my shoulder. "Yes."

I stood there between both men and looked at those who hadn't been killed. "Good. They deserved it."

"They deserved worse."

Nodding, I inhaled a deep breath. Something still bothered me, though. "You said that wave of light, or whatever it was, only killed non-Volderens?"

Vor slipped a finger under the plastic cuffs and braced my wrist with his hand. "Yes."

"Then what does that mean for me—for them?" I used my chin to point at the other occupants.

"What do you think it means?" Brax asked, working on my other wrist, his touch gentle.

"That part of what the Major said is true about the experiments?" My mind kept circling around something I didn't care to hear.

"We have been trying to reverse the damage your military caused to these people. So yes, our DNA flows through their veins and tissues. But even more important, for eons we've been searching for a human with the correct DNA strands to help our own race. We're advanced, yest, but we cannot create DNA. That cure lives in you."

The cuffs snapped and my hands were free. I rubbed the skin, forcing the blood to circulate.

"But they didn't experiment on me. Why did he say I was tainted like the others? Why am I not dead?"

"There is a trace of Volderen DNA running through your veins. How it got there, we have no clue. What job did your husband perform?" Voren inspected the skin around my wrists, his eyebrows furrowing.

"Phlebotomy." The question made me uneasy. "But I don't see how that's any of your business."

"A phlebotomist at a military treatment facility, correct? Did you ever let him take your blood?"

I jerked away from him. "If you're trying to imply—"

Brax gripped Vor's upper arm. "Enough, brother. We must leave orbit, at least for now. She's been through hell already."

Jeremy had kept a lock of my hair in his drawer at work. Could it be possible the military had taken it? Or did Jeremy do something to me when he'd drawn my blood the few times I'd used the medical group? These thoughts raised other questions, questions I tried to shove out of my mind. Maybe they were just lumping me in with the others because it was convenient?

Jeremy died two years ago. If they had tested my DNA or injected me, why hadn't they taken me earlier? I still lived at the same address.

"Come on, Lilly." Brax held out an arm.

Great relief flowed through me. I didn't want to think about anything except a long sleep.

"I'm tired—actually, I'm exhausted," I whispered.

"Come. We'll show you to your room, and when you're rested, we'll answer any questions you have."

Nodding, I breathed out a long, cleansing breath. "Does this mean I'm still your prisoner?"

Brax laughed, revealing his sharp teeth and forked tongue. "You've never been a prisoner, even if Vor believed otherwise."

Voren grunted.

"Then why did you treat me like one?"

"He's a bit of a bully." Brax put an arm around my shoulders and led me to the door. "You're our heroine, whether he admits it or not. And I must confess, as much as I wanted you to be my mate, it's clear you are better suited to Vor. Brother, you are one lucky son of a bitch."

Voren raised an eyebrow but remained silent.

Shaking my head, I let them lead me into a different section of the ship. My brain and body needed rest, and I'd sort everything out later.

I want to wake in my own bed.

But if I did wake up from this nightmare, something deep inside of me had changed. The hole in my heart didn't seem as large or as dark.

For the first time in two years, I found myself speculating about the future, about what and who was out there in the universe and what it all meant.

The hallways were a blur, and it was all I could do not to stumble.

Voren led me into a darkened room smelling of sandalwood and snow. "Here." He stopped in front of a bed covered by a thick, charcoal-colored blanket. "Sleep. We'll talk about things when you awaken."

I was tempted to argue, but instead, I crawled under the smooth blanket and pulled it to my chin, mumbled something that sounded like goodnight, and fell into sleep.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:25 am

“ I t’s about time.”

The deep voice startled me, and my eyes flew open. Where am I? For a brief second, my heart thumped in panic.

Voren lay stretched out on the bed, his huge frame creating an indentation on the covers. With one arm propping up his head, he stared at me with those liquid, golden eyes.

“Did you sleep with me?” Wait. That’s not what I mean.

A large grin softened his features. His teeth peeked through, and he licked his lips with exaggerated slowness. “No, but would you like to sleep with me ?”

“What? No. No.” My cheeks burned. “I just...I thought...” Shut up, Lilly. “It’s just weird you’re in the bed with me when I thought you hated humans.”

He broke his gaze from mine and glanced around. “I do still hate humans, but not all . I’m learning not all humans are the same. There are those who are capable of compassion and logic.”

It was my turn to prop up my head. I stared at his broad, muscled chest. This close, without fear dictating my every move, I had time to truly inspect his skin. The purple tone had a tiny sheen of gold near his nipples. Farther down, where his waist tapered, a thin, long, silver scar ran from his navel to under his pants.

“It’s where your people cut and experimented on me after I crashed.” Vor reached out

and gently took my hand, extending my finger and pulling it closer. “They didn’t use anesthetic, only a paralytic to keep me still.”

“Jesus. That’s horrible. I’m so sorry.”

He pressed my fingertip to his skin and traced the wound. “You had nothing to do with it.”

“Still. It doesn’t mean I can’t apologize.” The sensation of his skin on mine and his eyes on my lips sent a tingle through my nerves and straight to my core. “Torture is unforgivable.”

“Their goal wasn’t torture in the beginning. They wanted to create super soldiers by combining human and Volderen DNA. Though, they did spiral down into hurting me and my team when they realized they didn’t have the technology or knowledge to successfully carry out their vision.”

I traced his abs, my fingertip scratching his skin as I explored his obliques. “Those people in your med bay. Is that what happened to them?”

Voren nodded. “We’ve had them in stasis for decades, looking for the one human in a billion who carries the messenger gene that will allow us to splice their DNA, repair the damage, and save our own people.”

“Why didn’t they just impregnate the human women and raise an army? Not that I approve of that, but it seems much easier.”

“You surprise me, little human.” His serious tone lightened. “Trust me. They tried, but they don’t understand Volderen mating rituals or our anatomy.” He reached out and lightly traced my lips, then moved a hand to his stomach, sliding it farther downward.

My breath stopped. Fascination warred with desire. It's been two years. I mean, come on. He's magnificent.

"Our penises are made for double pleasure."

Inhaling, I closed my eyelids for a few seconds, willing my hormones to settle down. He smelled of all things fresh and clean, which didn't do a damn thing to calm my horny inner self.

"Um. Then how...how do you..." I widened my eyes, hoping I wouldn't have to say anything else."

"Do what?" The tip of his finger rubbed my lower lip, gently prying open my mouth.

My toes curled. Oh dear God. If he doesn't stop, I'm going to lose any little bit of self-control I have. "You know...do the thing with two of them." I couldn't stop myself from licking his finger.

"Gods. If you keep that up, I will show you how it's done," he said in a low, possessive tone.

Desire and excitement fluttered in my belly. Why not give in? He hasn't hurt me. Hell, after seeing the military, I think he and Brax actually saved me. "Is that a promise, or just a vapid tease?"

Voren sat, then shifted until his body hovered over mine, both bulging arms effective barriers keeping me in check. "I still struggle with human innuendoes, Lilly. Are you giving me the signal to kiss and pleasure you, to love you?"

"Yes. Yes I am, Vor. Show me how you make love, how you make babies." I hadn't meant for that last part to slip out, but as it did, I realized having my own child, being

a mother, excited me once again. After all this time, I've never believed it would happen, but it could. I have a few more years left.

He let out a primal growl in answer, then grabbed the zipper of my jumpsuit and slid it down, his gaze never leaving mine.

I reached upward, needing to reassure myself this wasn't a dream. My fingers swept over his dark eyebrows and traveled to the black horns on his forehead. Smooth and hard, they reminded me of fine, curled porcelain.

His eyes closed and he shuddered.

Hmm. These must be an erogenous zone for Volderens.

I continued exploring their length.

"If you keep doing that, I'm going to explode and embarrass myself."

Giggling, I moved my hand back to his face, cupping his cheek. "Put your money where your mouth is."

"What does that mean?"

"It means stop talking and start showing."

"Very well." He gripped both sides of my jumpsuit and pulled it apart, exposing my breasts to the warm air of the cabin. "Perfection. So perfect." Leaning down, he flicked his tongue over my nipple, and I saw stars.

"Oh, oh my God. Oh-my-god." I dug my hands into his hair.

He laughed, then moved his mouth lower, his teeth nipping at my stomach. “Then I shall help you out of this.” With a quick shift of his hands, he lifted me, pulled the suit from my legs and upper torso, then laid me back on the bed.

I stilled. What’s he thinking? What am I thinking? Did he see a forty-something-year-old woman who hadn’t used an exercise machine in at least three years, who enjoyed pizza far too often?

“Lilly,” he said, moving his attention upward. “The female body is beautiful, no matter the species, for many reasons, including their ability to nurture life. I assure you, your body is pleasingly perfect to my eye.”

Relief washed over me. His reassuring words filled me with confidence. I spread myself out before him, silently inviting.

His teeth appeared in a genuine smile. He lowered his head and used his forked tongue to lick down my belly, then even farther until he paused and hovered over my arousal. “Volderens release sperm through a gland in their mouth, which is delivered through the tongue. This means we are exceptionally skilled at pleasing mates with our mouths. Each tip of our tongue works independently, giving double the pleasure.”

Two dicks and essentially two tongues? I am a lucky woman.

I bucked my hips, eager to experience what he teased. I let out a small moan at the thought of him licking and sliding into me.

“From the moment I saw you, I knew you were my mate, even when I wished it were not so.”

“Are you sure?” My voice came out huskier than usual. My attention riveted to his mouth and teeth on the skin right above my pulsing need.

“Yes. Do you not feel it, too, every time our eyes meet, our skin touches?”

“I do, all the way to my bones.” A fleeting thought of Jeremy rushed through my mind. Would he be happy for me, or disappointed?

It doesn't matter. I'm alive and he's not. If I don't live my life, then I might as well be dead, too.

And that was just it. I had become lifeless these past two years. Going through the motions, reliving the past, barely leaving the cabin. Years of life loomed ahead of me, and I wasn't so old I couldn't fall in love again and start a family.

Voren slid his tongue over that most sensitive spot on my flesh and my brain exploded.

I grabbed his horns and urged him closer, losing myself in the present and in his attention.

This is living. I arched my back and rode the cresting wave into sheer joy.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:25 am

A couple of days later, Voren and I emerged from his bedroom and walked the short distance to the ship's bridge.

I couldn't wipe the smile from my face. His dedication and lovemaking had been out of this world. Though gruff on the outside, his fierce heart enveloped me in a love unlike anything I'd ever experienced before.

"There you are," said Brax, giving his brother a secret grin, then he looked at me. "You are looking exceptionally well compared to a couple of days ago."

"Yeah." I cleared my throat, glancing at Larralian, who sat at a control station tapping on the screen.

She arched an eyebrow and stared pointedly at my stomach. "I see you don't waste any time, Voren."

Wait. Is she saying I'm pregnant? No way. How would she be able to tell?

"It's in the glow of your skin, Lilly. An in-utero Volderen gives the mother special..." Brax rubbed his jaw as if thinking. "Special abilities."

Vor released my hand and stepped toward his Brax. "You are sure the DNA harvest did not harm Lilly or the baby?"

The DNA extraction had been a relatively simple process. Larralian had taken hair, saliva, blood, and dead skin samples from me. She'd then made me lie on an empty medical table in the med bay with the sleeping patients, hooking us up with tethers

similar to electrodes. After a few minutes, she'd nodded and said I was a perfect match for the splice.

"I am sure, brother. The repair serum has been administered. They will be reintegrated by our people on the Atlantis, their identities secret, their future rewritten." Baraxen tapped a tiny disc on his temple. The blank wall in front of us faded away, and Earth loomed in its place.

So many questions popped into my brain about Atlantis and more Volderens on earth, but they flew out as I stared at the viewscreen. "Wow," I breathed. My home. Or at least, it used to be my home. Would I miss my cabin, my things? It would be too risky to return, not after knowing what my government knew.

No. I may not have a physical home, but I have something better. I have a family and people who care about me. I have a future if I'm brave enough to take that step with my mate.

"Larralian, get ready to transport them on my mark."

She responded to him in their native language.

Tearing my eyes from the viewscreen, I swiveled to see how the Volderen transporter worked.

May you all find a new purpose, a new passion, in your new lives. Hopefully you'll adjust to all the changes between 1947 and now.

A silver light encased each body and then blinked out of existence, leaving only five empty beds.

I couldn't even begin to imagine the shock they'd feel when they awoke in a new millennium, their loved ones dead and gone. It won't be easy.

The Volderens had remained here all those decades, searching for a way to heal humans, even after being tortured and exploited by humanity. How could I not choose to stay, to love them like family?

Brax had called me a savior, but he had it wrong. They'd saved me .

“Time to fuel up. Everyone sit down strap in. Lilly will get her first up-close view of Mars.”

Voren motioned me to a sleek chair off to the side, and I sat while he showed me how the harness worked and buckled me in. “Why not just return to Voldera?”

“Because it's an exceedingly far distance for a small ship. We lost our means of returning home when our base ship crashed into the ocean thousands of years ago. But now that we've accomplished our last mission, we'll focus energy on reinforcing our hidden colony on Mars and getting the generational ship completed.”

“How old are all of you?” His mention of decades and thousands of years had me genuinely curious.

“By Earth standards, I'm forty-five, and Voren here is forty-eight. Larralian, our sister, is the baby of our trio at only thirty-five.”

The female looked up from her display, rolled her eyes, and ignored us once more.

“So, you live on Mars?” I looked at Voren, who'd taken the seat next to his brother, between the both of us.

He nodded. “For now. It is our hope—no, our dream—to one day return to Voldera with the cure our tribe had been tasked with finding. We've suffered many setbacks and calamities since being marooned in this solar system, but now that we have your DNA, our course is clear. You are destined to be the hope of the Mars colony and the

savior of our people on Voldera. You will be our Eve.”

I didn’t know how I felt about being a savior, but the idea of a second chance at love, at having a family of my own, of creating a new society of tolerance and acceptance solidified my choice.

“Being a savior doesn’t interest me.” The control panel on the arm of my chair, with its smooth glass, reminded me of a cell phone. The first thing on my list is learning their language.

Vor smiled. “Could I interest you in pleasure, and perhaps becoming my wife?”

I leaned to the side, pressing my lips to his ear, and whispered, “Pleasure first, then we’ll see about marriage.”

He turned and met my lips with his, flicking his tongue against my mouth. “That sounds like an enticing deal. I’ll have you screaming my name and begging me to take you as my wife.”

A delightful shiver coursed through my limbs. “Or maybe I’ll have you begging.”

He pulled away a couple of inches, his warm, golden eyes shining with intensity. “I look forward to our negotiations.”

I chuckled.

“You know what?” His hand covered mine. “I’ve never experienced such intense emotions before you. Now I cannot imagine life without it. The universe got it right for once. I admire your strength and resilience. When I realized my mate was a human, I wanted to hurt you. But now, I only want to protect and love you, to honor you as my equal.” He trailed a finger along my jawline. “Lilly, I love you.”

I'd only met these people a few days ago and it had been a rocky start, but deep in my heart, something opened and allowed me to love again.

"Well, I never believed in love at first sight, but here I am, and there you are."

His eyebrows drew inward. "That's a terrible way to profess your love. Is it so hard for humans to admit their feelings?"

I hitched a shoulder. "Love is complicated, Vor. I had it once and lost it. I never want to experience it again. It scares me."

"I shall do everything in my power to never leave you or our children."

"I believe that." Beneath my feet, the ship began thrumming, readying itself to leave orbit. "I do love you, Voren, even though it's crazy and doesn't make sense. Something deep inside tells me we're meant to be together."

"That is because we are mates. Even across the universe, love cannot be denied."

I smiled. "That's beautiful."

"It is true. Volderens seek their mates all their lives, and most never find them. You are my miracle, Lilly, even if you are a human."

"Gee, you really know how to make a lady feel special."

"Must I reaffirm my skills at lovemaking again?" His eyes darkened with lust.

My heart pounded at the thought of our bodies uniting once more. The way he moved his tongue and used his hips felt more like an addiction than a skill. "There's only one way to find out," I teased.

“Then I cannot wait until Brax leaves orbit. I have a lot of proving to do.”

A bubble of happiness and desire flooded my veins.

This is what it’s like to not be alone, to be accepted into a mismatched family who cares.

With a grin, I raised my chin and watched the view screen as the ship veered from my home planet to point at the stars.

An unedited sneak peek at book 2 of my Alien Quickies series, Her Alien Harmony, releasing March 2025:

Chapter 1

Drayven Narax

“Watch yourself before you fall into the lava, idiot,” said Garen, yanking on the collar of my shirt.

I froze with one foot in the air, hanging fifty rugars, about forty Earth feet, above the magma lake. The liquid fire bubbled and popped. Its scorching sulfuric scent tainting the thin oxygen with an acrid stench.

“What’s wrong with you, Drayven? Is Baraxen working you too hard on the Perseverance ?” Garen’s voice sounded higher than usual.

“Rorian’s beard, that was close.” With a relieved breath, I backed away from the cliff of death and wiped my brow, giving my friend a nod. “Something like that.”

That godsdamned ship is seriously going to be the death of me. Being the chief Volderen engineer, every design diagram had to be examined and approved by me.

Now that Baraxen and Voren had returned with the human savior named Lilly, renewed fervor on completing the generational vessel spread through the colony in anticipation of returning home.

“Well,” he turned to glance at the dark tunnel leading upward to the harsh surface of Mars, and also where the frame of the generational starship sat, waiting for its completion. “She may not be pretty, but she’ll do her job.”

“No, she is not pretty.” My tone came out harsher than I’d intended, but I couldn’t help it. “She will nurture and protect future generations of Volderen families long enough to return to Voldera.”

Garen raised his eyebrows, his violet skin flushing even darker. “I didn’t mean any offense, Drayven.”

Sighing, I patted him on the shoulder and deflated. “I know. It is just...” I lifted an arm and ran a finger along one of the horns on my head, collecting my thoughts. “How she looks should not matter, but a ship needs to be more than just functional. It should not only protect its people but sustain the mind and remind our children of what we have sacrificed, and prepare them for what the future holds. Traveling amongst the stars for decades on end will get boring and uninspiring.”

Garen chuckled. “You mean inspiration as in battle? I don’t think that’ll be a problem. We were bred for war.”

“No . I mean inspiration as in creativity, art, things that take one’s breath away with a glance.”

He quirked an eyebrow, his sharp teeth peeking behind a bewildered smile. “I’ll never understand you. When most Volderens were holding a sword or blaster in their sixth year, you were concerned with the beauty of the weapons and how they were designed.”

“What is so wrong with that? Why can function not have beauty? I think we lost something in our heritage when we left Voldera all those years ago. In our ongoing quest to save our species, we have forgotten how to create, to inspire, to truly live .” I tapped the band around my wrist bearing an ugly strip of metal—a lifecord—which allowed me to communicate with my crew and other useful functions. “Like our lifecords. They heal, connect us to the fleet, translate all the languages of Earth, and even change our appearances, yet they look like a manacle created by a human blacksmith. Why not make their function beautiful and meaningful?”

Garen shook his head and turned, heading up the slope leading to the colony’s underground hub of ships and living quarters. “Maybe you should finally take some time off and visit Earth, find some of that beauty you love so much.”

Is he mocking me because I have never visited the planet, or out of his distaste for all things human?

It didn’t matter. I had been made fun of my entire life. He was not wrong. I had enjoyed taking things apart not only to learn their purpose, but to marvel at their intricacies, always wondering how their creators were inspired to make them in the first place.

“Maybe I will,” I yelled at his retreating back.

He raised his hand and laughed but did not turn.

With determination, I stalked to a branching outbound tunnel where the small, personal ships called Sparrows slept in hangars.

He is right. It is time I finally left this rusty ball of red rock. Next month would mark my fortieth Earth year, and it was high time I took a vacation. After all, a few days of respite would not be much of a setback with the Perseverance . We had been working on it for the past five years, and now that the frame had been fabricated, the intricate

details of the inside would need to be hashed out with the other engineers, which would take another five years if we were lucky.

A flutter of excitement flowed through my veins as I pressed my hand against the lock. I am going to do this. I am really going to do this.

With a quiet hiss, the metal door slid upward into the ceiling, and I followed the bright blue pathway lights into the hangar, where forty or so personal craft waited for anyone with clearance to fire them up.

“Captain Drayven?” Ryllian, the lone lieutenant on duty, held a data pad in one hand and stared at me, his green eyes wide. “Can I help you?”

I smiled. “Yes, you can. I need a ship readied for a two- or three-day trip to Earth.”

“Oh, okay. I didn’t see you on the roster for today.” He swiped a finger across the data pad’s screen. “Unless I missed it, which is always possible.”

“No, you did not miss it. This is a private mission having to do with information on the generational ship design.” A bead of sweat popped on my forehead.

Why am I worried? It is not like Baraxen would deny me a Sparrow. The military does not use them for defense. They are mainly for civilians.

“Uh, maybe I should just double check that you’re authorized—”

“Lieutenant,” I barked, seeing my spontaneous quest about to shatter into a dream. “Are you questioning an order from Major Baraxen?”

Ryllian straightened, his eyes staring straight ahead, the years of training activated with the tone of my voice. “N-no sir. Not at all, sir.”

“Good.” I felt bad pulling rank, but if I had to wait for him to get clearance from Baraxen, that would take at least another ten minutes and honestly? I was afraid I would change my mind. Humans fascinated and terrified me. They were capable of such beauty...yet such destruction. “I am taking a Sparrow and will be back in seventy-two hours or so. You can notify Major Baraxen once I leave. Understood?”

The younger Volderen nodded.

I sprinted to the closest Sparrow, its number marked in our language as 42 , then turned to glance at Ryllian. “Is this one fueled and primed?”

“Yes, sir.”

With a nervous smile, I climbed the ramp and stepped inside the small vessel and slammed a hand on the control. The ramp lifted upward and became the door creating an airtight seal.

Walking past the tiny sleeping nook and two back passenger seats, I settled into the pilot’s chair and issued commands in my native tongue to start the engines.

With a quick tap on the lifecord, I adjusted it to project an image of a male human with short, black hair, an average physique, and a bland face. I would land somewhere outside a small city and keep the Sparrow stealthed. If I knew what I was looking for, that would help.

A map of Earth filled the view screen. I squinted, my eyes traveling over the land masses. So many cultures and people, how could I choose?

“Computer, put me in a park near a small city.” I had always enjoyed reading and watching the history of humans, so why not immerse myself in their culture. Between my lifecord’s information and what I had learned from others, I would be able to navigate their world effortlessly.

The computer chose a small city in Texas called Barkley, and I prepared my course.