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When she woke, it was sudden and sharp. She was instantly alert, despite the pain in her head and the nagging aches of her body. She tensed as she took in her surroundings, trying to figure out what exactly had awakened her. The bed dipped beside her and she turned her head to see what had caused it. Her eyes widened as she took in the figure of a large male form easing onto the bed. Panic flared for an instant, and then logic prevailed. He was not interested in her, rather in Grace, who had been sleeping beside her. The older woman was awake, her hands pushing against the man intent on joining her.

A hushed whisper echoed through the room. "You can't. The children are here."

As he spoke, T'Lin recognized him. It was Vek. He didn't bother to whisper. In fact, his eyes met T'Lin's as he spoke. "I can. Send them away, or give them a lesson. It matters not to me."

T'Lin shuddered. For all that Vek looked Vulcan, he was not what she was familiar with. She had always thought an emotional Vulcan would be a good thing, after all her mother displayed a glimpse now and then, and V'Lar certainly wasn't typical, but Vek just plain frightened her. As Grace agreed, Vek stood to allow her to move. His eyes glittered with a strange light as she turned to T'Lin.

Grace sighed in relief as she noticed T'Lin was awake. Her hand came up to gently cup one cheek. "Take the boys and go into Aidan's room with V'Lar." Reaching down, she gently shook Aidan awake. "Don't come out until I come for you."

As the boys woke, T'Lin rolled off the bed, ignoring the pain that flared in her body. She silently encouraged the boys to follow her, staying as far from Vek as possible. Grace too encouraged them to move quickly and quietly.

Aidan's bed was in a corner of the room that had been curtained off. To call it a room was stretching things a bit. Grace had given the space to V'Lar in an effort to provide the older woman with some privacy. T'Lin and the boys had sprawled across the big bed in the main room with Grace, never expecting to have their sleep interrupted. It had been obvious to T'Lin that Grace hadn't expected any visitors either. They had barely made it behind the curtain when the first soft sounds filtered their way. T'Lin shuddered and hugged both boys close, barely noticing as V'Lar made room for them. T'Lin fought back tears. She knew about love, and love making, to some extent, for she had been surrounded by it all her life. She understood the affection and its expression through sex, and had even walked in on it once or twice with both her parents and the Tuckers. She

understood the technical aspects of it and the purposes, and while embarrassing, accepted it. This however, was new to her. This was something she couldn't define or understand, but knew was wrong just the same. She sat, huddled against V'Lar and the wall, with two young boys curled into her, and waited through the long night for Vek to leave.

The first light of dawn was creeping through the barred window when T'Lin heard the gentle click of the door closing and locking. She paused only a moment, glancing at her sleeping companions, before easing from the bed. Both boys slept like the dead, arms and legs flung in different directions. They seemed to connect though, even in sleep they curled in and around each other like a couple of puppies. Pain speared through her and she fought to ignore it as she moved to the window. Her fingers curled into the crumbling brick at its edge as she studied the area with hopeful eyes. A soft sigh eased from her as she took it in. Rain fell in a shifting gray sheet that reminded her of the mist that had seemed to coat her dreams. Weak sunlight tried to filter through it but only succeeded in enhancing the miserable wash of gray and black that surrounded the compound.

Even with the rain, people were moving about. A large metal building stood about 50 feet from the one she was in. The square of the courtyard was completed by two long units running the length of the yard, one on each side. Treetops waved in the wind, indicative of the forests surrounding the compound. With another sigh, she turned. Her eyes skimmed the small enclosure as she moved toward the curtain. Chilled fingers hovered over the edge of the rough material. Time stilled as she tried to decide her next move. Screwing up her courage, she eased the curtain aside and stepped into the main chamber. The room was the same dusky gray as her area, the weak light valiantly trying to chase away the gloom, and failing miserably. She noticed Grace standing by another window, her stance remarkably like T'Lin's had been moments before.

The pose lasted only a moment as the older woman noticed her presence and turned to face her. The same encouraging smile she had used the day before graced her lips, and her eyes lit with welcome, chasing away the shadows almost instantly. "Good morning, Pixie. How are you feeling today?"

The girl shrugged, confused. "My head still hurts and so does my stomach, but it's better than it was."

Grace's smile widened. "That's something then. Why don't you come help me get things started for the day?"

The forward momentum was jerky at first and then smoothed until she was within an arms length of the older woman. She started as a gentle hand reached out and brushed the hair away from her eyes. It was a parental move and one so missed that T'Lin nearly cried. That warm hand cupped her chin and studied her eyes. She stilled as Grace looked her over.

"Your eyes are clearer this morning." The softest of touches tested the lump on her head. "This is a pretty color, but the swelling should go down soon. We'll put a cold pack on it later."

T'Lin nodded, slightly uncomfortable. Finally she could stand it no longer. "Grace?" As the older woman met her eyes, she swallowed. "Vek? You didn't want him here right?"

Sympathy filled her eyes and she drew the girl into a loose hug. "No, I didn't want Vek here."

"Then why...?"

Grace drew her to the bed and sat, encouraging T'Lin to do the same. The girl shuddered at the contact, but did as she was bid. "I mentioned to you that I was sold to Vek. In essence I am a slave, his."

Anger rolled through T'Lin. "But you are a person... not a thing. Why don't you fight him?"

Grace's smile disappeared. "Vek and I have an understanding, Pixie. I provide him with what he needs and he provides for me and Aidan. That protection includes food, clothing, and training for Aidan."

"But it's wrong!"

Grace stood and paced away. For the first time since she had been there, T'Lin saw the edge of temper in her eyes, though the bite was softened by the time she spoke. "I don't like the situation, but I don't have many options. I do what I have to do to ensure the survival of myself and my son. What would you have me do?"

"Escape!"

Grace's hands slid to her hips. "How? I don't know the first thing about surviving in the wild. The compound is surrounded by woods. I don't even know how to make a fire without some kind of accelerant. What types of wood can I burn? What is safe to eat? What types of predators are waiting to kill me and pick my bones?" She spun on her heel and paced the length of the room. "You would judge me for catering to Vek, but it is the only thing I know how to do. Even if I could steal a ship, I don't know how to fly it." She faced T'Lin again, her eyes narrowing. "I imagine you know more about those things than I do. Why do you think I allow them to train my son? Why do you think I let them teach him to fight and survive on his own? We may be here for days or years, but I never give up hope. I don't want to be a sex toy, a slave, but better Vek than one of those

damn Satorians."

"But..."

"Enough, child." T'Lin's head snapped to the side at the soft command. V'Lar moved closer to her, eyes meeting hers. "Grace is more aware of her abilities and limitations than you are. She also knows these people, what they are capable of. You should watch and listen."

T'Lin's head dropped as she considered the words. "I just... how does she do it. How can she be that...close to someone she despises?" She shuddered as the memory of hatred through a touch chased through her mind, intertwining with a memory of violence she barely remembered or understood. A Vulcan, an out of control Vulcan, and her mother... and the wrongness of it all. She shook away the thought. It wasn't real, was it?

V'Lar placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "What is it that bothers you child?"

"I don't know how to explain it Grandmother. I have this image in my head of a man like Vek, only not Vek. He doesn't act right. There is anger and desperation and... hate. It feels like a memory, but I can't remember. I just know it scares me because I see, feel that so un-Vulcan like behavior and an image of my mother covered in blood comes to mind. Vek makes me uneasy like that only..."

"I'm not sure what is playing in your mind. Vek is very emotional for a Vulcan. He is one of the V'tosh ka'tur, Vulcans without logic. Because of it he is unpredictable."

Grace knelt before the girl. "I think I understand why you are confused. I have explained to you that I do not want to be intimate with Vek, but I allow him sexual liberties without a fuss. You don't understand how someone can be passive about sex if they don't want a part of it?"

T'Lin nodded, her eyes meeting Grace's. "It's wrong."

Grace glanced up at V'Lar and receiving silent support, continued. "No one, man, woman, child or anything in between should be pushed to engage in sexual relations if they do not wish it. In a perfect universe it would be thus, but there is always someone who must have that control over another, just as there are always people who participate for all the wrong reasons. Some do it for experimentation, or because of low self-esteem, or even because they just want to be accepted by others. Sexual situations should be between consenting adults who care for and respect one another. However, there are times when necessity dictates your actions and you have to find a place, something in yourself that you can live with. Vek rarely hurts me. I have value to him even if I am a slave. My choices are limited, and I choose the devil I know. I've seen the

Satorians in action and that frightens me more than Vek ever could. They care about nothing, especially if it's a female." She stood then, rubbing her arms as if chilled. "I need to get the boys up and head to the kitchens. Its almost time for the morning meal." She wiped her hands nervously on her pants. "Pixie, I want you to stay with me at all times if possible. In fact, I would prefer you stay out of sight as much as possible. Satorians are extremely aggressive and violent. I'd rather they not take an interest in you."

V'Lar's eyes snapped up to Grace's. "You think she is in danger from them? She's just a little girl..."

"She's female. Sorka has a child on his ship, she can't be more than five, and he..." She shook her head to clear it of the image. "Vek tells me she's a half-breed, but she looks Satorian. If she looked enough like the other half of her parentage, she would be trained in languages and such and used as a translator or even taught to infiltrate that culture, used as a spy or a highly trained whore to gain information. But because she looks Satorian and is a half breed, she is less then nothing. From what Vek has told me, the child will be lucky to reach her teens. Those unlucky enough to be of no use to the people are sold and traded and used, until there is nothing left. The Satorians care only about the male line and warring. Vek believes they will destroy themselves if they do not change. Pixie is an exotic young woman compared to that child. She's definitely in danger."

V'Lar's hand tightened for a moment on T'Lin's shoulder before releasing her. "So barbaric, so sad... Listen to her Pixie, in this I believe Grace knows best."

"Stay with me, stay out of sight, or stay with your brother."

The conversation and the seriousness of both women were enough to convince her. She stood slowly. "Do what you have to Grace, I'll wake the boys for you."

The older women shared a concerned look as the girl walked away.

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