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T'Lin was clearing the last of the breakfast dishes from the main table when Sorka and Vek walked in. She hurried her movements, but tried to stay quiet. Vek plopped down in the chair at the head of the table while Sorka paced.

The Vulcan slouched in his chair, resting his head in his hands. He managed to look both pouty and bored in one move. "Arven sent a message. The transfer went well. V'Lar is back among her people. They paid well for her."

"I thought it was Vulcan policy not to give in to terrorists?"

"It is, but they saw what we did to Soval, and she is just as valuable to them."

Sorka wrinkled his nose. "She is female. She should have been killed as an example, then returned to the Vulcans as a message."

"Perhaps..."

T'Lin turned to face them, anger radiating in her stance. "What did you do to my Grandfather? How could you hurt an old man?"

Vek's gaze was almost amused as he focused on her. "Ah, the little half-breed has a voice. We taught him a lesson for his arrogance. He will survive though." The look in his eyes went speculative, then malicious. "He called you Krenath, you know? Do you know what that means?"

Some of the anger fled as reason returned. She had done something stupid by bringing attention to herself. She shook her head in the negative. She had heard the phrase when Soval had spoken their first day here, but she didn't know what it meant.

"It means bastard, shamed one. That's what you and your brother are. I did some research you see. Your parents were not even life mates when you were born and your mother was ostracized because of it. She was a whore, and to a human no less. It wasn't until your brother was nearly born that their union was sanctioned by the Vulcans, and even later before it was sanctioned by the humans. You are nothing but the side effect of a useless human and his Vulcan slut."

T'Lin's hands fisted at her side, her temper boiling over. "You know nothing of my parents. You are lying, just trying to hurt me. It is you who are the Krenath, the bastard, you who are shamed in the eyes of Vulcan, and unworthy to even speak my parents' names!" She moved forward, ready to attack, only to find her

arm in the unyielding grip of a Satorian.

"She is something with that temper is she not, Vek?" The fingers of his other hand trailed over T'Lin's cheek. He chuckled as she tried to bite him. "She's a fierce little creature. I bet that passion could be harnessed." The look in his eyes as he said that last part sent a chill down her spine. "Yes, so much fire." His fingers slid over her cheek again.

Vek's mood shifted from taunting to bored once more. "Leave the girl alone Sorka, she's not for you."

"But I want her Vek. She is beautiful and unique. She will make a good breeder."

Vek's lip curled in a sneer. "She is a mixed breed, half-Vulcan and half-Human." The last was said with distaste. "She is an anomaly and an unlikely candidate for the indiscriminate breeding you Satorians are noted for."

"Perhaps, but she would still make a good slave."

T'Lin hissed at him and jerked in his grip. "I am no one's slave."

The Satorian turned his gaze back to her, a mixture of disdain and amusement crossing his features. "You have a strong spirit and a temper. It will be amusing to break you." He glanced back at Vek, ignoring the growling girl. "Sell her to me. I will give you a good price, even if she is untrained."

"She is not mine to give Sorka. Arven has specific goals for her and her brother."

"Bah, his revenge can be doubled by selling her to me." As T'Lin kicked out at him, Sorka focused on her once more. His hand wrapped around the long braid, forcing her head back. "I want her Vek. Make it happen."

The coldness in his eyes sent a shiver down T'Lin's spine. She fought against it as she did the pain of his grip. Fury sparked through her and she spat in his face. "I am mine, no matter what you say or do!"

Sorka swiped the spittle off his face in a deliberate move and slowly released her. As T'Lin stood defiantly before him, he studied his hand. Before she could blink, that hand swiped out in a vicious backhand that knocked her on her backside. Blood blossomed along her right cheek and dribbled from the corner of her mouth. Her ears rang from the force of the blow and as she tried to rally herself, Sorka removed his belt and looped it around his hand. He stalked toward her, grinning evilly as she tried to scramble away. The first lash caught her across the belly, forcing a whimper out of her. She flipped, still trying to get her feet under her and run. The second lash caught her hip and nearly flipped

her back over. The best she could do as they continued to rain down on her was curl into a tight little ball and pray.

Sorka punctuated each stroke with a word. "Slave or no, disrespect to a man will not be tolerated!"

The viciousness of the attack paralyzed her. As pain speared through her body, she bit her lip, trying desperately not to cry out. A mantra chanted through her head with each lash, *I will not cry out, I will not cry out...* She didn't want to give him that satisfaction. Blood dribbled down her chin as sharp little teeth imbedded in flesh. *I am mine, and I will not cry out...* Her concentration was so deep she barely heard the soft pleas filling the air, or felt the protective curl of another body around her. For a moment her mind couldn't comprehend that the sound of the belt and jerking of a body against her meant the stop of leather biting into her own skin. It took another moment for her to recognize Grace's voice, and scent.

"Please... she doesn't know any better..." The words were punctuated by sobs of pain as the belt continued its downward motion. Sorka didn't seem to care who was on the receiving end.

Finally Vek intervened. "I did not interfere with the punishment of the child, for it was deserved, but I will not allow the abuse of my slave."

"She intervenes where she has no right."

"Yes, but she is female and maternal. It is her nature to protect and care." He stood and came closer, but stayed out of reach of the furious Satorian. "Let it go, the child is barely conscious as it is." His eyes flicked down with disdain. "I doubt your belt would make any more of an impression on her."

Sorka scowled down at the women on the floor, his lip curling in disgust. He nudged Grace with his foot, sneering as she looked up at him. "Clean her up and have her serve the evening meal." With that he turned and stalked off.

Grace dragged T'Lin to her feet. Though the girl wobbled and barely responded, the older woman wasted no time in getting the child out of sight. Once in their quarters, she helped T'Lin onto the bed. "You foolish little twit! I warned you. That was so stupid. How could you challenge him like that. What? You wanted to be beaten? You're lucky you aren't dead!"

T'Lin groaned in response. She was dazed, confused, and winced as Grace began to peel the bloodied shirt off her. She had not meant to set Sorka off. The violence that surrounded her was incomprehensible. She had come from a place where she was loved and cherished. Punishment was something she was familiar with, but nothing like this. Even discipline in her childhood had been tempered with love and logic. This was beyond her scope. Here hatred and

domination ruled and she wondered what she had done to end up in this place. Wincing again as Grace began washing the bloodied lacerations, T'Lin tried to figure her next move. Her words were weak when she spoke, but they made Grace pause. "I am mine... I didn't cry out... I didn't cry... I'm stronger than he is..."

Grace ran a hand lightly over her hair. "Oh baby... of course you are, but don't push him. You got off lightly Pixie. Sorka was furious. He could have killed you, or worse, raped you. It doesn't take much to push a Satorian over the edge. I'm worried he'll take the last of that temper out on the boys."

Tears began to fill her eyes, but she fought them back. "I'm sorry, Grace. I wasn't thinking, at least not about the boys, or you." Her eyes met Grace's. "You took part of that beating for me. Are you okay?"

Grace was pale, her hands shaking. "I've been through worse. I only caught a couple of lashes really. I'll clean up in a minute." She stood slowly, picking up as she went along. "Sorka wants you to serve dinner. Your clothes are ruined from that beating you took. I suggest you wear your robes. They will cover you more completely than Aidan's trousers anyway, and possibly even hide more. After the meal, I suggest you get back to the kitchens and stay out of sight."

"I'm scared Grace."

I know, and well you should be. That was a hell of an insult you threw at him today. Just..." She stilled, chewing on her lower lip, "just stay out of his way. Sorka wants you Pixie, and he is used to getting what he wants. You have to stay away from him. Be smart, and give your folks a chance to find you."

"I'll try, but it's so hard. I've never been good at disciplining myself, I've never had to really. It's just that I'm nothing to them, less than nothing, and I've never been that before." Tears swam in her eyes again and this time she let them fall. "Do you really think my parents will come for us?"

"Yes, I do. If you were mine I'd come for you and I know your parents love you even more than I do. You have to believe. You must harness your fear and anger and doubts, and if you can't suppress them, then use them to help you achieve your goals. You do none of us any good if you are dead."