

POD MAN, PART II

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Dr. Chester tossed the mess outside and returned to the kitchen, where Johanson was shuffling through paperwork he had collected from various cubbies throughout the house. He watched for a few moments as the dog wolfed down the last of his food and then gulped from the freshly-filled water dish.

“That’s one pretty dog.”

“Now that he’s settled down,” Johanson added, alluding to the drama they faced trying to get into the house.

“You just have to know how to treat them,” Dr. Chester countered, cautiously beginning to pet the big Shepherd. Wingnut responded warily but calmly, sniffing his hand before allowing it to stroke him. “The shame of pooping on the floor becomes deeply ingrained, even in special circumstances like this, just as you won’t poop your pants while you’re asleep. That’s how deep it goes, and dogs are no different. Once I convinced him that he was in trouble, and acted dominant, the guilt overrode his desire to kill us.”

“Whatever you say,” Johanson agreed, flipping through the mail he had stacked on the dining room table, “I just wish it hadn’t taken almost forty minutes. Five more and I would have shot him.” He flicked his head toward the sliding glass door after dropping the last envelope, “Looks like Mr. Marine was chopping wood when our friend showed up.”

“I can’t wait to get back to him.”

“Are you kidding? Why they made us come by here to check this place out I have no idea.”

“Our charm?”

Johanson snorted. “More likely we’re severely understaffed again. We need to finish looking this place over and get out of here. It’s getting late and I’m tired. The cleaners will be back to really look it over.” he said, gesturing around them.

“What about him?” Dr. Chester asked, nodding to the dog he was now scratching and petting safely.

Johanson shrugged.

“Well, we can’t just leave him, he’ll starve!”

“We can’t take him along, either, or it will look odd,” Johanson argued. “If we want this to look like an ‘ordinary’ disappearance, we can’t very well take care of his dog for him, can we?”

“No, but yes.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” the agent asked as he rummaged carefully around the kitchen.

“It means that Wingnut could have disappeared with him. It would be simply another fact, not a point of suspicion, that he was gone too.”

Johanson thought for a moment, twisting his lips, "I suppose that might work. Do you want him?" he asked, then wrinkled his brow, "Wingnut?"

Chester gestured to the big feeding bowls, both sporting the dog's name. He then picked up an envelope from the counter he had found the dog food in. At the same moment Wingnut let out a whine and padded off, sniffing.

"It's a pedigree. I would already have a dog just like him if they weren't so damned expensive. One like him, which hasn't been fixed, costs a mint. Get one that is fixed and it's cheaper. Sometimes you can't get the real thing at all."

"What's the big deal about him having balls or not?"

"Just purity, I guess," the doctor answered with a shrug. "Anyway, I'll take him. Let me gather up his stuff while he's looking for our civilian. Wow, a purebred! Lucky me! I guess there's an upside to working for you guys after all. Good thing we don't have kids, though. I doubt he's used to them having lived out here. Then again, do you know where he lived before he moved here? The papers make him about a year old, but he's only been here a few months, right?"

"He lived in a townhouse over by the base."

"Ah, guess that makes sense."

"This guy's got a higher credit limit on his Visa than my annual salary." Johanson mused, stuffing the bill back into the envelope.

"It's a damned shame what happened. Think they'll be any fallout for you?"

"Damned unlucky bastard," Johanson mused, looking out to the unfinished firewood, "wish I could afford a place like this. And I doubt it," he continued, turning back to the doctor, "the Stick had him before we got there, and there was only so much we could do once things got weird."

"And your, um, decision?"

"Oh, that," Johanson agreed, thinking for a few moments, "yeah, I may get an earful for that. But there's no real certainty that he caught the order and broke loose because of it."

"Oh come on, it's obvious he knew what you were about to do. That's why the whole fight started. If you don't mind me saying, that was a bad move. Especially considering who we were dealing with."

Johanson eyed him for a moment and then offered a resigned grin, "Hey, we didn't know who he was until an hour later. But yeah, maybe I could have been more subtle."

"I've been wanting to ask you," Chester began as he started putting Wingnut's things into a box he had found in the hall closet while Johanson was talking, "how were we able to respond so fast? That pod couldn't have been there more than a few minutes when we arrived, let alone when I got the call. Our ex-marine probably saw it right away to get there before us."

"You concentrate on examining our friend back at the lab and the remains of the pod, and I'll worry about how we're finding them." Johanson said, wagging a finger and grinning.

"Oh, come on." Chester prodded.

Johanson leaned against the counter and raised his eyebrows. “Do you actually think, with today’s technology - digital multiplexing, high-speed computers, digital relays, etc. - that we *really* need all those cell phone relay towers you see sprouting up along every highway? Hard not to trip over the things these days, isn’t it?”

Dr. Chester gaped. “Pod detectors?”

Johanson winked and looked around. “Get your dog. It’s time to get back to our new friend.”

“Question?” Crotter asked again, louder this time.

“Huh?”

“Question? You surprise.”

“Oh, sorry,” Ken said, waving a hand, “something just occurred to me.”

Once that phrase was clarified the wolf raised his eyebrows again. During the last two days Ken had learned that the wolf who originally spoke to him was indeed a “him,” and that his physiology included all the things one would expect of one. Not that he had observed so directly, but several good glances between his thighs showed clues in the shape of three unmistakable bulges.

But what had him suddenly staring wide-eyed at the wolf was the shocking realization of who it must be. For this wolf, a linguist from what he could tell, was generally a mix of dark grays and browns but had a large white patch covering the top of his head; one that spread entirely over one ear.

This was the only one he had seen, out of dozens so far, that matched the description of the one he had seen two nights ago. The one who was getting its, no, *his* ass humped, and liking every second of it. Now that he was feeling better, the image caused an instant tent on the loose shorts he was now wearing. One thing was for sure; Crotter was just about the sexiest damned thing he had ever seen, and picturing two of them, two males, together made him instantly horny. No movie werewolf or piece of art could capture what it was like to sit close to one of these Plaktins, as they called themselves.

And this one took it up the ass.

“Question?”

“No!” Ken said quickly, fighting off a smile.

“No? No question?”

“No question,” he confirmed, then reconsidered, “well, yes. When can I work out?”

“Work? No one here to teach fight.”

“No, no, not work. Work *out*. Exercise.” He stood and jogged in place for a moment, flexed his arms, and blew out a few strong breaths. Then he winced at the bruised, tight skin on his back and sat back down. “Never mind. I feel pretty bad and you still won’t give me anything for the pain.”

“Ah! Exercise! Work *out*. Exercise. Work *out*. Many words for same?” With that Crotter made an entry in the ever-present electronic device of his, which Ken now knew was some kind of translator.

They had made a lot of progress but Ken was getting impatient to know where he was and how he was getting home.

“Yeah,” he confirmed, then listened to Crotter again explain how they hadn’t verified the safety of pain drugs for his system yet. Once satisfied with his translator, Crotter glanced at the wall clock. Ken couldn’t read it but its purpose was obvious enough.

“Eat time.”

“I’m not hungry,” Ken lied, “I want to know where I am, how that pod got me here, and how I’m going to get back home.” He leaned forward and, trying to ignore the fact that this otherwise friendly creature looked like it could eat him at any moment, gave him the hardest stare he could conjure. “Now.”

Crotter paused.

“Eat time.”

“Now!”

“Eat time, then pod talk.”

Ken sat back and blew a breath through his cheeks. He had been doing quite a lot of that, and he suspected that Crotter and others thought it was cute, because he always got a smile for it. He wasn’t in the mood to be cute right now, though.

“No bullshit?”

“No bullshit.”

“Is that all?” Bessegan asked, looking around the table. Everyone nodded.

“Until tomorrow, then,” he said, getting up and moving toward his desk. The assembled team all stood and shuffled out, chatting among themselves.

“Thorm, stay please.”

The doctor turned and nodded, waiting by the door as the rest filed out. He shut it and turned.

“Lock it.”

Thorm raised an eyebrow and then did as instructed, his tail moving between his knees as he approached the long, curved desk. Butterflies sprang in his stomach as Bessegan patted the chair beside his own.

The administrator really liked this young one. Handsome, clearly strong and fit, but appropriately shy. He smiled as the doctor settled in and faced him with an unsure look on his face.

“So, why did you spend the entire meeting staring at your desk, doctor?”

Thorm’s heart skipped a beat. He hadn’t realized he’d been so distracted. “I’m sorry, sir, I just, well, suddenly have a lot on my mind.”

Bessegan looked him over as he answered. Strong thighs, just a hint of malehood showing against the loose pants, clean, well-combed fur. Quite nice.

“About the Pod Man or something else?” he asked, genuine concern overriding his irritation.

“Two things about the Pod Man,” Thorm confessed, “which I didn’t bring up at the meeting because the first can’t be proved, and I wanted to get some advice from the Genetics Bureau on the second before speaking of it.”

Bessegan cocked his head and thought for a moment. “What is the first?”

Thorm sighed and shifted, obviously uncomfortable with what he wanted to say.

“Go ahead, young one,” Bessegan said, giving him a reassuring smile, “I know we haven’t worked together before this but you can be sure I will give what you say due consideration.”

Thorm’s ears perked slightly and he relaxed a little. Gods, but he was a sexy young thing.

“We have analyzed his blood completely. There is a problem.”

“Oh? What is that?”

“We have an element called alticin, which you may remember from school. Alticin, in very small traces, is in everything; our air, soil, and oceans. It is also present in every cell of our bodies; in those of every living organism on the planet, for that matter.”

“OK, go on.”

“Pod Man also has the normal trace amount of alticin in his blood and cells according to samples taken this morning. However, I did a comparison with samples taken during his surgery. There were so few alticin molecules that the computer took three tries to find any. We must assume that his body contained no alticin upon arrival, and that what he had was from breathing our air from the time of his arrival until the first sample was taken during surgery.”

Bessegan thought for a moment, enjoying the sound of Thorm’s voice and the cute way his face came alive when he talked about his work. The worried crimp of his brow bothered him, though.

“So,” he said after a few more moments, “one could guess that his planet doesn’t have alticin?”

“Right!” Thorm exclaimed, nodding, “So, you understand?”

“No,” Bessegan answered, “I don’t. I am an administrator, remember, young one.”

“Oh! I’m sorry, sir,” Thorm said, blushing a bit and folding back his ears. His paws fidgeted in his lap for a moment, which only served to draw Bessegan’s eyes there.

“Alticin bonds with other molecules and cells,” he began, trying not to get too technical, “and in so doing subtly alters how the host cell works. For us it is nothing, we are born with it and no nothing of it’s presence. Pod Man, however, never had it. Now he does. It has been absorbed normally by his system.”

Bessegan shrugged. “Then what is the problem?”

“Once it is there, it *must* be there,” Thorm said emphatically, “do you understand what that means? Just like us, if he now spends more than, say, four days in an environment with no alticin, his body’s supply will not be replenished. As the existing alticin biodegrades, the host cells will rapidly disintegrate. Imagine every cell in your body dissolving within hours.”

“I still don’t under.....oh. Oh my.”

“Yes, sir. If I’m right, he couldn’t go home even if we did manage to get a pod and send him back. He would die horribly within days.”

The elder wolf thought that through for a few moments, tapping a claw on the side of his snout.

“He will not like hearing that.”

“I doubt he will. I wouldn’t.”

Bessegan sighed, tucking that away for the moment. He wanted to get through this quickly and get on with the rest.

“And the second thing?”

“The computer has finished the DNA scan,” the doctor began, “and I must say the results are...compelling.”

“How so?”

“Do you remember the image in the small pouch he carried?”

Bessegan raised his eyebrows and picked up a comppad, bringing up the images recorded of the Pod Man’s wallet contents. “Which one?”

“This one,” Thorm answered, leaning close and pointing to the image of a four-legged being of some kind.

The elder wolf took a long breath of Thorm’s scent, noting the light unease and the pure musk of youth, and turned to him.

“What does this have to do with his DNA? Bear in mind that I am not versed in these things.”

“Yes, sir. What is compelling is that the computer shows a DNA match of over 96 percent.”

“With this thing? How do you know?”

“No, sir. With us.”

“Ninety-six? Is that a lot?”

“Enough to make me start thinking about the Mystery of Origin.”

“You can’t be serious!”

Thorm pointed back to the picture. “Surely you noticed the resemblance?”

Bessegan frowned at the dog’s image. “The snout is too long, there’s hardly any lips, the ears are too big, and the fangs too long. It must use all four legs, I think, also.”

“And that is about it, isn’t it? Just as if, maybe, you combined that with a Pod Man.”

“I think you may be jumping to conclusions, young one.” Bessegan cautioned.

“It is only a theory,” Thorm hastened to add, “but the evidence is scary. You just *do not* get a 96 percent match by accident when you are dealing with a person from another planet. And to find, on the same planet, another being which shares just those traits the Pod Man does not is, well, it is impossible!”

“There are a lot of potential planets out there. Impossible?”

“Well, OK, not impossible, but amazingly improbable. This is no small thing, sir! Ninety-six percent! He carries a picture of this creature around with him. It must be a companion species. Maybe even an intelligent one. What if...what if they can interbreed? That seems unlikely, but even so, could

they be easily mixed by someone with the technology to make the resulting DNA stable? What if the other four percent comes from that?" he said, pointing to Wingnut.

Bessegan thought it over for a moment, but was having trouble concentrating. Thorm's excitement was contagious, but it was effecting the administrator in a different light. There was a definite moistness stirring within his pants.

Thorm must have noticed, because he sniffed the air for a moment while Bessegan contemplated the possibilities. Or, at least, tried to. All he could do was imagine that handsome face between his legs.

"Trust me, I will give it serious thought. As a matter of fact, I would like a complete report that includes the evidence you've gathered and the thought process behind your theory."

"Yes sir," Thorm said, beginning to stand.

Bessegan stopped him with a paw on his shoulder, and nudged him closer in his chair. "Not quite yet, young one."

Given the fact that the doctor had no doubt caught scent of his arousal, it was no surprise when Thorm looked down shyly. He loved it when strong ones like this were still young enough to be timid with him. Gods, but he smelled good, and he sensed the quickening of the young doctor's pulse. This was one benefit of his position that he always enjoyed.

"Let's start the day off right, shall we?" the admin said. He moved his paw up to caress behind Thorm's ears and tilted up the firm chin with his other. Their tongues met softly and lingered together for a few moments, and Bessegan felt more rapid breaths blow across his snout as their lips met.

Leaning back in his chair, he continued rubbing the doctor's ears as he guided the young head downward. Paws immediately and quickly worked to open his pants, revealing his dampening sheath. A few moments more and his bare, hefty balls were also on display, spilling out over his fly like two bound sacks of coins.

Thorm breathed in deeply and set about licking the gray furred sheath and smooth balls. The taste of drip bloomed on his tongue like a summer flower and he added lips to his efforts, lapping and squeezing the hardening sheath and slathering the fragrant sack.

Bessegan watched the handsome wolf lick him, rubbing and stroking the young head as the warm tongue played over him. Keese, he was handsome. He couldn't wait to see that muzzle wrapped around him.

That thought brought the tip of his sizable prick to the surface, a welling of pre-ejaculate heralding its arrival. The young one's lips were on it instantly, making him gasp a little, while a paw took up the teasing of his balls that the mouth was now too occupied to continue.

The younger wolf spread his lips over the damp tip and sucked gently, rubbing them over the inch of exposed flesh and daintily flicking his tongue across it. Bessegan groaned and shifted slightly, sliding his rump forward on the chair and scratching over Thorm's head. The doctor hastily undid his own pants at the behest of his hardening member while sliding his muzzle down the thickening sheath.

A few quick, gentle squeezes of his front teeth at the base of his boss's sheath brought a shudder from the older wolf and the wonderful feeling of a strong cock emerging from its home. He pulled back and nudged the sheath down while pulling the hot shaft into his mouth, relishing the feel of it running along his tongue and the roof of his mouth.

Pressing his tightly-closed lips against the opening, Thorm pushed the sheath completely back and over the slight swell of Bessegan's knot. He paused there, the entire length of his boss snugly held in his snout, and worked his mouth slowly around as the strong scent of arousal washed over his muzzle.

The power of both Bessegan's mind and body seemed to be channeling through the hard, gently pulsing meat. All the experience, commanding presence, and power radiated through his snout and head. The feeling of serving the desire of such a man made his thoughts hazy and his own manhood ache. He used a paw on himself, gripping and stroking the base of his member while his mouth began slowly riding the hot flesh.

Bessegan growled softly as he watched the handsome doctor start a slow rhythm on his cock. The sight of his manhood alternately sinking into and emerging from the lovely muzzle filled him with a unique sense of power one can only get from these situations. Thorm worked him expertly, too, sucking hard but not rushing, his tongue in constant motion against his length.

With one paw working the base of each of their cocks, Thorm slowly built his pace. Every time his muzzle took in Bessegan's full length he let out a soft groan, overcome with the thrill of satisfying such power. This was only his second assignment, yet he was certain that providing for his superiors would remain a favorite pastime. He had to pause now and then to keep himself from cumming onto the floor.

He let the tasty pre wash repeatedly over his tongue before swallowing, and the amount confirmed that Bessegan was getting close. The balls in his paw were getting tighter and the flat stomach before his eyes rose and fell faster. His own need had ramped-up quickly and was getting harder to deny.

At that moment Bessegan gripped Thorm's head and pulled him up, gasping as his dick was released with a soft pop. His cock shot a small squirt of pre with each tingling throb as he leaned toward the beautiful sight of the doctor's rising manhood. He grabbed the young one's hips and pulled him close, catching a shot of pre on his tongue before hungrily engulfing the exquisite flesh. Thorm let out a loud grunt and his knees nearly buckled, while Bessegan yanked the doctor's pants to his ankles.

Neither of them were interested in a tease, and he sucked hard and fast before grabbing the quickly swelling knot and squeezing. He was rewarded with long shudder and an even louder, extended grunt as the shaft swelled and thudded hard against his tongue. That was quickly followed by a powerful flood of semen that splashed against the back of his throat. Holding the young wolf steady with a paw on his rump, he milked the thumping cock with hard, tongue-lashing suction along his whole shaft, savoring the taste as he repeatedly filled and drained his muzzle.

Thorm's hands fell onto Bessegan's shoulders as the doctor pounded out his load. As the initial, almost shocking bolts of delight subsided, he rested there and panted as the administrator continued pulling seed from him until he could give no more.

Bessegan moved slowly away, allowing the shrinking shaft to fall free. He gave it a few soft licks before leaning back. He smiled up at the woozy doctor as he pulled off his own pants and dropped the armrests on the chair. His cock danced and dribbled in time with his racing pulse as Thorm leaned down to share a long, passionate kiss.

Turning his chair to face the table, he pulled the doctor between them and rested his foot paws widely on the table's edge. Thorm smiled and dropped back to his knees. His tongue immediately found Bessegan's fat balls and roamed over them while a paw pulled the raging cock straight up. He used it to tease the shaft and capture the soft squirts of pre, spreading them down its length and over the small knot.

His nose told him that Bessegan was perfectly clean, so he continued down, wiggling his tongue to his boss's tail base and earning a long, shuddering gasp. With both paws now busy on Bessegan's cock and balls, he slurped and licked his way over and around the sensitive pucker. A few moments later he was licking from the base of his knot to that of his tail, lips and tongue working every inch of skin between them.

As Thorm began carefully working the heavy balls into his snout, Bessegan dropped his foot paws to the floor and moaned for a few moments before pushing himself out of the chair. He stood over the doctor, holding up his straining, drip soaked cock, and watched the dapper, upturned muzzle gently work his nuts. Brown eyes met his gaze with dreamy gratitude.

He could take no more, and coaxed himself free. He practically yanked the doctor to his feet before pushing him back. Thorm gladly followed his lead and quickly hopped onto the table, throwing his legs into the air as the administrator immediately moved to mount him.

Bessegan wasted no time in pressing his desperate cock to the tight, perky tail hole now on offer. He pushed in quickly, eliciting a soft groan from Thorm. As he watched every inch of himself sink into the hot, tight hole, he noticed the doctor's cock simultaneously emerge. Keese, but he loved the young!

Grasping that lovely cock, he leaned forward and kissed the doctor hard as he pressed his hips tightly against the furry rump. He was delightfully, tightly enclosed, and remained still as he stroked the doctor's member and kissed him fully. Their tongues flowed and wiggled together as their combined moans filled the air. Thorm's claws played over his back, urging him on.

He withdrew and then pushed himself home, beginning a firm, steady pounding he could no longer abate. His paw moved along Thorm's dripping shaft in time with his hips. Watching that young body squirm and pant beneath him drove him wild, and within moments he grabbed the young hips with both paws and stood upright.

Unable to break his gaze from the surrendered male before him, he thrust hard and deep a few times before letting out a deep grunt and shoving his knot home. His entire body tingled as he felt his cock strain and lock itself within, and he began jerking his hips rapidly against the doctor's tight ass.

Thorm stifled a yelp as his hole was stretched to its limit before relaxing once again around the girth of his boss's invading bulb. The thrill of being so completely taken and filled washed over him and

he grabbed his dripping shaft as Bessegan jabbed repeatedly against him. The two were pressed tightly together, yet the administrator's pounding hips jolted the cock within.

Seconds later Bessegan threw back his head and roared as his shaft erupted inside. Every muscle in his pelvis rhythmically strained forward with each surge, pushing him even deeper.

The feeling of his superior's thumping manhood and gushing seed proved too much for Thorm, and he gripped himself with both paws as another orgasm overtook him. His back arched and his dick sent pearly streams of semen arching onto his chest and stomach.

The two of them jerked and writhed as their climax continued until Bessegan collapsed onto the young doctor. They lay together, panting softly as they rode the soft, lingering waves of passion for a few minutes. Once able, Bessegan slowly withdrew, allowing the doctor to adjust and avoid making much of a mess.

Still kissing, he helped the doctor onto his feet and into the adjacent restroom. There they shared a quick shower, after which he dressed and returned to his office while Thorm set about cleaning up the juicy remains in the meeting room. Being in charge was a good life, he thought aloud, and settled down to review the latest details of their guest.

"Bullshit!"

"No bullshit." Crotter countered, holding up his paws.

"Are you telling me, you big lint ball from Hell, that you have no idea how to get me home or even get your damned paws on a pod in the first place?"

"Slow. Slow."

"Fuck slow! One thing I do know about you is that you know who these stick people are and you know about pods! Now get me home!"

"This 'fuck,' not computer. Too many."

"Fuck you."

"Ah! See?" Crotter said, pointing at him, "too many! Yoose not computer."

Ken sat on the bed fuming for a few moments, trying to calm himself. It felt as if it was getting late and he was tired. Days here seemed just a little long and his internal clock was already thrown off. And this whole argument about getting home was going nowhere fast, plus his back hurt like hell.

"So," he began slowly, "I'm a little bit closer to the galactic center than I would be back home?"

"Ah! Galactic...galactic..."

"Would you *please* stop tapping that thing?"

"Yes," Crotter answered, putting it down for a moment, "and yes."

Ken poked the display on the electronic notepad in his lap. "Here?"

"Yes."

He frowned as another thought occurred to him, and poked a few more places, all at the same distance from the center but at different spots around the arms.

Crotter nodded and then, in a very human gesture, shrugged.

“Not thought of that.”

“Hell, I might not even be in the Orion arm anymore,” he mused, as that began to set in, “I could be on the other side of the galaxy instead of right next door.”

“Can a pod travel that far if I’m on the other side of the galaxy or do they only work locally, say, along one or two arms.”

“Nobody knows.”

Crotter fell silent as Ken sighed and leaned back, resting his back carefully against the raised upper third of the bed. Shaking his head slowly, he gave the wolfish interrogator a calm smile.

“I’m sorry for losing my temper. I keep looking for someone to blame for all of this, and I’m throwing angst at an innocent party. At least, I hope you are. Either way, you’ve done nothing to deserve this and I apologize.”

The human remained patient while Crotter fussed briefly with the translator.

“You are welcome,” Crotter offered, reaching out and giving his shoulder a pat.

Ken chuckled and shook his head. “No, thank you.”

“Ah,” Crotter said, working at the translator again, “thank you,” he finished, flashing a genuine smile.

Good God, you are one handsome devil, Ken thought as that smile reached him. The way that smile worked on that face was making him hard again and he shifted to hide it. It probably didn’t help that he suspected a slightly higher concentration of oxygen in the air here. He had been borderline high since waking up fully. It would also explain the slightly green tint to the sky he had seen on his way down.

Ken took the opportunity to lean a little closer. A lump formed in his throat as he mustered up the nerve to ask, “Crotter, what do you think of me?”

Eyes blinked within the wolfish face and the linguist took a deep breath. How was he going to answer that? The translator was working wonderfully but still couldn’t be fully trusted, although the question seemed straightforward enough.

Should he be entirely honest? As they had talked – almost constantly – over the past day or so he had been detecting hints of an ever-present sense of humor, but had stifled his mirth just in case he was reading him wrong. He liked this Pod Man; and liked the way he smelled, especially now that he’d had a bath. Also, his mind couldn’t stop coming back to that peak at his crotch. It looked tasty indeed.

He had to say something, though, because the Pod Man was waiting patiently for an answer.

“You are funny,” he said, smiling.

“Funny?” Ken asked, aghast. He laughed and slapped the being on the shoulder, sure it was all right having just been patted himself, “I’ve arrived on an alien pod from an unknown planet light years away and all you can say is that I’m funny?”

Having spoken, the Pod Man was now laughing again. The blunt face lit up and the strangely erotic green eyes twinkled. He had never seen eyes like that before, but above all, it was seeing this strange creature genuinely laugh for the first time that really lifted his spirits.

As the laughter died down the door opened, and several Plaktins sauntered in. Ken never tired of watching them move. One would think that, with such short legs, they would move awkwardly. Instead, they had a sense of grace about their movements that seemed entirely at odds with their physique. It must be the long torso and racks of muscle they all seemed to have.

Ken's military sensibilities immediately identified the first to walk in as the man in charge. A curt, friendly gesture and Croter was standing back a pace. He was lighter in color than the others he had seen so far, with a lot more gray and silver; and a rougher, older cast to his features.

Trying not to be intimidated, he met the elder's gaze as the rest filed in. This one wasn't just in charge, he deserved it. There was a palpable feeling of authority coming from him. Ken had always liked feeling that.

A big paw and fang-filled smile were offered after a quick glance at Croter. He smiled and shook the warm, firm hand. Touching someone who radiated such power was almost an event all itself, but he tried not to be obviously affected.

"He wants you," Croter whispered, leaning to Bessegan's ear.

"Really? Oh, shush! This is serious, youngster!"

"What?" Ken asked the younger beast.

"Nothing." Croter said, standing back and giving Thorm a private wink.

"Bessegan Ullen of Leeahwan."

Croter leaned in again before Ken could respond. "That means 'Three of the 5th Generation.' He is the 3rd born of his father, and his is the family's 5th generation."

Ken raised his eyebrows, dividing his gaze between them. "You know we're not that formal where I come from."

Croter gave what appeared to be an accepting shrug.

"Kenneth Allison Foster. But you can call me Ken." he said, his attention back to the boss. Bessegan nodded and stood back, then gestured to a pair of wolves standing at the foot of the bed and gawping openly at him. Shifting nervously between the two was a little toddler of a beast, much like the one he had saved.

It only took a moment for him to realize that it was indeed the very one, and the two must be his parents.

A tangible quiet fell over the room as Bessegan gestured one of them forward. It was the larger of the two, Ken guessing the lightly smaller one to be female. He approached slowly, glancing between Ken, Bessegan, and Croter as he shuffled up. When he had come close enough, he raised his paws and offered a small box, a hopeful look recognizable on his features.

Eyebrow raised, he leaned forward and took it, wincing a little as he felt the fresh skin on his back stretch across his wounds. It was highly polished and hinged, with a small clamp holding it closed. He undid the latter and swung up the top.

Inside was a necklace of what looked like silver. Clasped to it was a pretty gold mounting that held a stone of least a full two carats.

At its center, the stone gleamed a soft green. Beyond that was a layer of burnt orange, then an outer layer of vibrant blue. The three depths of color somehow remained distinct, rather than blended together, and the inner green seemed a mile deep. The facet work was exquisite. It was the most breathtaking jewel he had ever seen.

The intention suddenly seemed clear, and he looked up and shook his head.

“No, I can’t,” he insisted, smiling graciously to punctuate the words he knew they couldn’t understand, “this is too much. I don’t need this. Thank you. Thank you very much, but I just can’t.”

The air of nervousness increased slightly, and Crotter gestured to the couple.

“Offer. Take. You. Pay. Life,” he said steadily, “Them. Pay. Not. Them. Yours.”

From the body language of those in the room, and especially from the way Crotter gestured among him, the boy, and the boy’s parents, he was convinced of what was going on. The necklace was payment for the boy’s life. It probably cost them everything they owned. If he refused the necklace, he would...own the parents? It seemed that way.

“Crotter,” he said carefully, giving the wolf a sincerely urgent look, “slavery is forbidden to my people. Tell them that for me. I can’t do this. I *won’t* do this.”

“Accept then gift?”

“But I can’t do that either,” he insisted, glancing at Bessegan and the father, “it’s not right. They don’t owe me. Seeing the kid alive and well is payment enough for me. I will *not* bankrupt them for their son’s life, and I would venture a guess that they spent their life savings on this.”

“I knew this wouldn’t go well,” Bak muttered to Bessegan.

“You don’t know that,” Bessegan countered, knowing Bak couldn’t understand the pod man any better than himself.

“It’s not,” Crotter offered sheepishly.

“What?” the elder wolf asked, turning to him, “Why?”

“From what I gather, owning another is forbidden by his Law, and accepting such an expensive gift is...Ah! Morally offensive?”

Bessegan tried not to look at Bak. Then he remembered that he wasn’t making a judgment call, he was obeying the law. He shook his head, let out a slow breath, and explained what was going on to the now nervous father.

Ken watched the father visibly deflate as Bessegan spoke to him. Without looking at him, the father turned and slowly joined his mate at the foot of the bed. When they embraced he shot a worried look at Crotter.

“What’s that about?” he asked quickly.

Crotter frowned and answered in broken English. “Recompense must be made. If you will not accept their gift or their lives, then one must be sacrificed to balance the gift you gave them - their son’s life and the suffering you now endure because of it.”

Ken’s eyes shot open and he looked back to the embracing couple, who were now reluctantly parting as the toddler looked on worriedly.

“No fucking way!”

“Obviously, his world has different traditions of recompense,” Bak commented to Bessegan, “and I’d rather not see our first contact with his people be like this.”

“Agreed, but our laws must be obeyed. I don’t like it any more than you do.” With that he turned to Crotter and nodded, “If you can convince him, it might help a little.”

Inwardly, the interpreter groaned. “It is *our* way,” Crotter stressed to Ken, encouraged by a nudge from Bessegan, “you’re welcome if you disagree, but it must be done.”

By now the female had removed an ornate knife from a sheath at her waist, one Ken was sure she had hoped would stay there.

“I’ll take the necklace! I’ll take the damned necklace and it’s *I’m sorry* if you disagree!”

“Are you sure?” Crotter asked.

“Yes!”

Crotter grinned and spoke first to the couple, then the room in general. Without a moment’s hesitation the male was moving toward him, the box again on offer.

Surprising everyone, Bessegan stopped the male with a paw on his chest and turned to Crotter.

“What are you doing?” Bak asked.

“Watch and take note,” he responded before turning back to the interpreter, “Are you sure he understands?”

“Yes, sir, as sure as I can be.”

“Certain? Make no mistake here and now,” he added sternly.

“As sure as I can be,” he repeated.

Bessegan nodded and removed his paw. The box was again offered, but this time the male’s face held a look of almost desperate hope.

Ken tried to keep from snatching it right from him and instead forced through a bit of decorum, taking the open box with a grateful look and a solemn nod.

When everyone was still staring at him apprehensively a few seconds later, he could only throw Crotter an exasperated plea.

“What?!”

Crotter leaned forward and answered quietly, “Put it on.”

“OH! Shit!” Ken said, quickly removing the necklace and checking out the clasp design. It was unusual but simple enough in function, and he stole one more look at the amazing jewel before looping the chain around his neck.

The male nearly collapsed with relief and backed away, nodding deeply as he returned to his mate. She returned the knife to her waist, a paw lingering on the center of her chest where the point had been a few moments earlier.

Everyone must have been holding their breath, because an audible sigh filled the room as the couple strolled out arm-in-arm, the boy pressed between them.

Ken got Croter’s attention and pointed to the open bathroom doorway across the room, and then, ignoring the pain, jumped out of bed and rushed in.

Once the door had snapped shut behind him, he leaned his hands against the wall, the jewel swinging in front of his chest, and tried to regain his breath.

“Shit...shit...shit...shit...shit...shit...shit.”

“If this wasn’t so interesting to use I’d be bored stiff,” Ken mused as he selected another color from the palette, “it’s like the Etch O Sketch from hell. You guys really didn’t have to drag it in here.” He tapped the big planet on the main display and then drew a finger across its surface, smearing the color he had just chosen horizontally across the disk. That completed a passable likeness of Jupiter.

Croter snorted from across the flat, 3-D display table Ken was working on. “Learn fast.”

“I’m trying,” Ken stressed.

The translator paused a moment, waved his paw-like hands, “No, *learning* fast. Too many same words”

“Oh, well, this is hardly language, just a few symbols,” he commented, waving a hand over the table and grinning, “it’s not hard to pick up, especially as it’s mostly visual. As for English, I can imagine what a pain in the ass it must be just from what other cultures on my own planet go through to learn it.”

At that he poked a few symbols and started dotting moons around Jupiter, and Croter started tapping away on the translator to figure out Ken’s latest sentence. Once satisfied with the jovian giant, he turned to Saturn and picked the ring symbol. He started re-sizing and pasting them until he had a good approximation of their splendid real-life counterpart. Croter seemed impressed.

“See from home?” he asked.

Ken shook his head, “It only looks like a star, when visible. You need a telescope.”

With that Croter fussed with his translator. “New word,” he said, raising his eyebrows.

Having gotten that detail out of the way, Ken filled in the asteroid belt and the other planets. He had been saving Earth for last, and suspected that Croter knew as much and was exercising extreme patience.

“OK, now for home,” he said, letting out a heavy sigh. At that moment the dark doctor beast appeared, coming at him with a syringe.

Ken rolled his eyes and offered his arm without a fight. Giving blood samples had become almost routine over the last four days.

Crotter chuckled.

“Laugh it up, pal,” he warned, “I can still kick your furry ass with only half my blood.”

“Maybe.”

Thorm finished and tapped the veil. “Finished.”

“He said ‘finished,’” Crotter offered.

“For now, I’m sure,” Ken said, nodding and looking back to the table. He had heard that word enough to recognize it. Thorm pulled up a chair and joined them, setting the veil out of the way.

Ken tried to ignore it as the two Platkins chatted back and forth for a few moments. He cycled through the cloud cover options before picking a couple and working them onto the blue globe he had created.

“That color?” Crotter interrupted.

Ken nodded and kept working, getting the moon the right size and splattering it with craters. Two sets of eyes went very wide.

“Not that big.”

“Roughly three thousand miles in diameter,” he countered, which sent Crotter’s eyes rolling as he attacked his translator.

Once the distance was worked out, Ken pointing out a distant object through the window to help, the doctor looked at what Crotter came up with and looked at him again.

“Not thay bik?”

“He’s trying, how cute!” Ken said to Crotter, who snorted as they stifled a shared laugh. “Not that big,” he corrected, his attention back to Thorm, “but it *is* that big. Beautiful, really, when you think about it. You should see a full lunar eclipse. Wow.”

“Color. Your eyes.” Crotter said, pointing to the necklace.

Ken held the setting and once more looked into the impossibly deep center of the gem. He hadn’t realized that. The green center matched his eyes.

“Very pretty,” the interpreter offered, eyeing him almost dreamily.

“Thank you,” Ken said, matching his gaze for a moment. Damned if the furball wasn’t giving him the kind of look he’d drag his balls through five miles of hot lava to get. He wanted to kiss him right on the spot.

Instead, he snapped his eyes free and flashed a bashful smile before looking over his approximation of the Sol system a final time.

“Was that a ‘moment’ you two just had?” Thorm asked with an incredulous, mischievous grin.

“Keese, I think it was,” Croter said quietly, and a little shyly, before chuckling and shaking his head.

“Me, with an alien. Right.”

“It’s safe. Trust me, I know.”

End Part II