

Emotion

by Michael P Calligaro

Talas bin Grakin hastily put down the duosplicer and wrapped four of her arms around herself. It was all she could do to keep from shivering uncontrollably. She was afraid, very afraid. No, she was terrified. She had been for over a light cycle. It had been novel for a short time, and interesting for a short time after that, but she was starting to wonder how much more of this she could take.

In her standard, uneventful life she'd never experienced anything like this. Her days were full of taking care of the young, keeping the domicile in order, and preparing sustenance. She probably bored her transmout to tears. And, for the longest time, her own transmin seemed boring as well.

She'd had the fantasies that most Grakin had. She and her friends had often spent time imagining exciting roles for their transmins. "Wouldn't it be great if mine were a shadow spy, or a fire warrior, or an emergency healer?" But she was starting to doubt the wisdom of such wishing. A nice, boring, transmin was rapidly becoming appealing.

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Samantha paused and stared at the tag on the door. Dan Carena. The name still brought back infuriating memories. She took a deep breath and held her hand up, but paused again. Wouldn't it be better to just go away, to pretend she'd never gotten his message?

No, she decided, it wouldn't. She couldn't imaginewhy he'd want her to come in, and wondering about it would slowly drive her crazy. She had to find out what this was about.

Cursing her curiosity, she quickly rapped on the door.

"Yeah."

After taking another deep breath, she strode inside. The room hadn't changed much. The walls were still covered in those tacky, fake wood panels that bowed in the middle and the floor was still a faded green carpet. But the five months hadn't been good to Dan. He looked worn out, and his hair seemed grayer than she remembered.

He nodded to her, but didn't smile. Coolly, he said, "Thanks for coming in, Sam. Have a seat." He motioned to the guest chair in front of his desk.

Samantha stared at the chair for a moment. She remembered it being hard and uncomfortable, but that wasn't what really stood out in her mind. She'd been sitting in that chair when he told her what had happened to Kiko. It had taken every last ounce of her reserve to keep from throwing it at him.

"Get over it," she told herself. "You're bigger than this."

With a quick nod, she sat down.

Dan stared at her for a moment, then sighed. "Look, I don't want you to get the wrong idea. My team efficiency is up eighteen points since you left. You had no respect for your superiors, and you always questioned every decision we made. Hell, you were downright belligerent most of the time."

Samantha stood back up. Calmly, she said, "Belligerent? That's a pretty big word for you, Dan. But don't

you really mean, 'bitchy'? Or are you afraid that if you say what you really think I'll slap you with a discrimination suit? Don't worry; you're not worth the time." She turned to leave.

"Sit."

While turning back around slowly, she fixed him with a bemused stare. "Let's review history, shall we? I didn't leave. You fired me. One of the many things you lose when you fire someone is the power to command them to sit...."

He sighed and rubbed his temples, then said softly, "I'm sorry. *Please* sit back down."

That actually sounded sincere. She raised an eyebrow as she realized that he needed something from her. The same burning curiosity that had made her knock on the door forced her to sit back down. But she couldn't leave what he'd said unchallenged. "Your memory is selective. I didn't become belligerent until after you murdered Kiko."

He exhaled angrily. "Kiko was *an animal*, Sam. You can't 'murder' an animal--"

Growing angry herself, Samantha cut him off. "She was *an animal* with an active vocabulary of four hundred words!"

"And we learned an enormous amount from the autopsy."

Samantha opened her mouth for a retort, but realized that she'd had this conversation with him twice before. Nothing good had come of it then, and nothing good would come of it now. She sighed and said calmly, "Look, I don't know why you called me here, but we're never going to get through this if we keep reminiscing about the past. So can we cut to the chase?"

With a nod, he said, "You can imagine the straits I must be in to ask you to come back."

Samantha blinked. "You're kidding."

He stared evenly at her and shook his head. Her mind started to race. What could possibly have happened to bring this about? As much as she hated the idea of working for the bastard again, she knew that the same curiosity that had made her knock on the door and sit down would make her accept. Carefully, she asked, "What's the job? Another gorilla?"

"Part of the reason you're here is that you had Top Secret clearance during your former tenure with the military. This is beyond Top Secret. They say they'll kill anyone who talks about it inappropriately." He leaned forward and said quietly, "And I don't think they're kidding. I haven't seen an ounce of humor in these guys since they arrived."

What could possibly be so important yet need her? She was just a researcher who worked on communicating with animals. In an even tone, she said, "My clearance has expired."

"They've been doing background checks for the last week. It's been renewed."

Frowning, Samantha said, "Oh damn, they want me to teach a monkey to carry a bomb, don't they?"

Dan shook his head. "It's not a monkey."

"What then? A dolphin? Do you have a dolphin locked up in a tiny little tank downstairs? I won't do it."

He shook his head again. "Not a dolphin either. And they're not trying to make a soldier. When I offered the same suggestions, they told me point blank that they abandoned that research when they realized that

they can do better with a smart missile."

She leaned back and frowned. "What is it, then?"

"I can't tell you anything more until you're on board. And, by 'on board,' I mean that you literally swear on your life not to breathe a word of this *to anyone*. You tell everyone that you know that you're going on an extended vacation, sever all communication with them, and move into a nearby apartment we've arranged. Go home and think about it. Give me an answer by noon tomorrow."

She tried to read his expression, but failed. He stared at her emotionlessly. There should have been something there. He knew about her curiosity. He knew he had her hooked. He should have been showing something between elation and remorse.

Though frowning, Samantha nodded and stood up. "I'll let you know."

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Talas bli Sporn looked around suspiciously, worried that people were watching him. He cupped two hands over the readout on his traveler and hastily punched in the special coordinates. Even knowing these coordinates made him nervous. The authority had declared that what he was about to do was Wrong, but he couldn't see any alternative.

He stared down at the readout and hesitated for a moment. Before he could psyche himself out, though, he hit the "send" button. The next thing he knew, he was in a dark corridor with a dim light ahead. Resisting the urge to flee, he got down on six arms and forced one hand in front of the other toward the light.

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Samantha didn't sleep at all that night. She lay in bed alternating between trying to imagine what Dan could possibly be doing and trying to imagine herself working for him again. She got up at first light, groggy and unsure of herself. She knew she'd regret every moment spent working with him, but she also knew she'd regret every moment of the rest of her life if she didn't find out what this was about.

She arrived first thing in the morning, and, this time, didn't hesitate at the door. She just pounded loudly, and then went in. "Okay, I'm on board, but under two conditions."

He crossed his arms and said, "Yes?"

"One, you stay out of my hair. Point me at the animal you want me to communicate with, then let me do it my way. If you're calling me in, you've already tried and failed. So I don't want you or your people telling me how to do my job. Clear?"

He nodded. "And number two?"

"You call me by my name. It's Samantha, not Sam. I know having a woman on your staff drives you nuts, but you'll just have to learn to deal with it."

He clenched his teeth and looked ready to shout, but then sighed, looked at the floor, and said, "As you wish. Is that it?"

He'd caved a little too quickly. The woman slap should have caused at least a minor argument. It was almost sad to see him so cowed. Almost. She considered taking advantage of his apparent flexibility and pushing for more money, but decided against it. She was more interested in learning what was going on.

"No, that's it."

"Good. Now get this straight. You get results and we'll be fine. You don't and I'll fire you so quickly it'll look like I dragged my feet last time. Understand?"

"If I can't communicate with the animal, I'll be out of here before you can fire me."

He nodded and slid a contract across the desk at her. "Pay's gone up, presumably to buy your silence. There's an extra clause at the end that warns of dire penalties if you do not keep quiet. Take that clause seriously."

Samantha read the contract quickly and blinked when it came to the salary portion. She'd be making twice what she had been before. After signing the contract, she said, "Okay, tell me what this is about."

Dan shook his head and stood up. "Much better to show you. You know the way."

There were two heavily armed guards in military uniforms flanking the door downstairs. Disturbingly, they knew her name. Samantha was looking back at the guards as she and Dan went downstairs. However, after taking a few steps she realized that something was wrong. It was eerily quiet. Before, there had always been at least ten different animals in habitats, and, invariably, they'd slept at different times. The chatter of animal sounds always filled the place. Now, most of the habitats had been emptied of everything, including their plant life, and there were no sounds at all. Only the multifunction habitat, number seven, showed any signs of occupation. She looked to Dan questioningly.

"We couldn't get clearance for everyone, and we couldn't keep the other work going with a short staff, so we cleared everything out."

She frowned. "Really? Didn't that mess with your funding?"

"As you may have noticed from your salary, our new employers have a lot of money to throw around."

They went over to habitat seven, but Dan stepped in front of the viewport before she could look inside. "When you see what's in there, you're going to think it was unfair of me not to tell you about this before. You're going to think that this is such a big deal the contract you signed can't really be valid. I'm telling you now that the contract *is* valid. This is your last chance to back down."

He was as serious as she'd ever seen him. She paused for a moment, then nodded and said, "I understand."

He stepped aside saying, "Then meet your new subject."

Samantha stepped up to a viewport and stooped to look inside. Habitat seven had the typical water, trees, and rocky areas that she was expecting to see. What she was not expecting was the creature sitting on one of the rocks and staring back at her. It was about the size of a man, but had eight appendages, each of which ended in a hand with eight fingers and two opposable thumbs. The fur covering its body was bright purple. It had three eyes arranged in a triangle around its nose. Its mouth stretched all the way across its face and bent up at the ends.

After staring at the creature in shock for a moment, she stammered, "That's not--"

"Terrestrial? No, it's not. It's some sort of alien."

Samantha could do nothing but stare.

Dan continued. "Now, before we get into another misunderstanding, let me lay everything on the table for you. The government boys want to dissect it." She looked back at him angrily, but he ignored her and continued. "Unless you come up with some proof that it's sentient *right away*, that's what they're going to do."

"How much time do I have?"

"Less than you need. So get to work."

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Talas bli Sporn reached the light at the end of the tunnel and found that it was coming through a cloudy window on a door. He drummed twenty fingers across the door then opened it. The room inside was small. A male leaned against a wall with the fingers of all eight hands intertwined. His fur was a motley combination of clashing colors and was shaved off in areas. He had pieces of metal attached to different parts of his body in painful-looking ways. All in all, he was a shocking sight.

Of course, Talas' revulsion was probably exactly the emotion this rogue wanted to illicit, even if he couldn't see it first hand. Talas did worry though that he was somehow incriminating himself with his transmout.

In a spacey voice, the rogue said, "What do you need?"

Hesitantly, Talas replied, "It's my spouse. She has been having a very difficult time lately, and I don't know what to do. She is always terrified and--"

The rogue cut him off. "You need a trace."

Hearing it said out loud made Talas look around in worry.

The rogue simply said, "No fear. It can not hear me here."

Mumbling, Talas said, "Yes, I need a trace."

* * *

Samantha heard footsteps behind her. She dragged her attention away from the creature and looked over her shoulder. It was her old partner. "Hey, Thomas. How are you?"

He smiled. "Not bad, Sam. No, wait, you go by Samantha now."

She returned his smile. "Naw, not for you. I was just making life difficult for Dan."

Thomas laughed. "We had a pool going for when he'd break down and bring you back. I'll have to check, but I think Kevin won."

Kevin always did know best how to read Dan. "So, any luck at all communicating with our friend? Is it male or female?"

Thomas shrugged. "We can't tell. If she has sex organs, they're nothing like what we're used to seeing. We got tired of referring to her as 'it' though and decided to pretend she's female."

Typical. Everyone working down here was male, so they assumed their captive was female. Then again, the purple fur had been causing Samantha to think of the creature as a female too.

Thomas continued, "How long have you been watching her?"

"About an hour."

"Have you seen any emotion swings?"

She nodded. "She's more expressive than my last husband."

Thomas grinned, "That doesn't say much, but she does have an extremely large range of facial and postural expressions, probably larger than that of a human. Unfortunately the emotions seem to be random. We've totally failed to correlate them to anything going on around her."

"Is she violent?"

"There are times when we could swear she's angry, but we haven't seen any signs of physical violence yet."

That was all she wanted to hear. If someone hadn't gotten here soon to answer that question, she'd have just taken her chances. "Thanks, Thomas." She unlatched the habitat door and went inside.

The creature's facial expression didn't change. Her mouth seemed to be in a wide grin, and her eyes were partially squinting. And, even though she backed away from Samantha, she continued to look mirthful. If that expression was one of fear, why didn't it get more intense when she came inside?

Samantha slowly sat down, crossed her legs, and put her hands on her knees. In a calm, soothing voice, one she'd perfected working with many animals, she said, "I'm not going to hurt you. It's okay."

The creature stared at her for a moment, then sat back down herself. She crossed her lowest pair of arms and stacked her hands up on her lower elbows. This was a different position than she'd been sitting in before. And it sure seemed like she was mimicking Samantha. Of course, the suits would be quick to point out that a parrot could mimic even speech, yet was still just an animal.

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Talas bin Grakin dropped the meal container, ignored the crash, and raced into the rest center, where she disabled the lights, grabbed a covering, and threw it over her head. She curled up in a ball and lay there twitching uncontrollably for a short time. Eventually she was able to remember that these were her transmin's emotions, not her own. She couldn't imagine what could possibly happen in her life that would cause such intense fear. But she did know that she couldn't handle much more of this.

Suddenly, the fear dissipated. It was replaced with a bit of confusion and then curiosity. After that she felt the faintest twinges of, could it be? Yes, she felt the faintest twinges of hope.

The door burst open in the other room, and she heard the sound of her spouse's voice. "Grakin? Where are you?"

Talas crawled out from under the covers and meekly left the room. She idly wondered what her feelings were doing to her transmout. Usually her transmin's emotions were nothing more than a matter of voyeuristic interest. They'd never before been so powerful as to affect her own emotions as well. Of course, they affected her facial expressions, but that was true of all transmouts.

She turned the corner to find her spouse looking for her. His face showed the bored expression his transmin was feeling, but the tone of his voice earlier, his own emotion, had been one of extreme worry.

He said, "Something is very wrong!"

She clapped four of her hands together. "You think I haven't noticed?"

He made slashing movements with his hands, a sign of negation. "It is worse. I had a trace done."

She gasped. "But, that's ... Wrong."

"So is you going insane from your transmin's influence."

"But--"

He cut her off. "Your transmin is not in the area. The trace showed that he was very, very, very far away."

So, her transmin was a male. She had speculated on that many times. "Why doesn't he just transport back?"

"What if he got there due to a malfunction in his transporter? Maybe he can't come back."

She inhaled sharply. "You think that's why he's so scared?" At the moment, he was anxious and maybe a bit curious, but not terrified like before.

Her spouse's voice gave off utmost concern as he said, "We need to do something."

This time, the worry was her own. "We can't go to the authority! How can we report this without revealing that you had a trace done?"

"His life might be in danger. That has to be more important than the trans taboos."

"But what if they take you from me?"

He held her gently with all eight of his hands. "A trace may be Wrong, but saving a life is right. And saving my spouse this agony is doubly right. The authority must accept balance."

"And if it doesn't?"

With conviction, he replied, "Then the authority is Wrong."

* * *

Samantha had been sitting there quietly for over an hour, allowing the creature to get used to her. Finally, she slowly lifted her hand and pointed at herself. In a soothing voice, she said, "Samantha." She placed her hand back on her knee.

For the last few minutes the creature had been blinking her eyes in a circular pattern running clockwise, and the speed of the pattern had been increasing gradually. When Samantha spoke, the creature's facial expressions didn't change, but she did lean forward and seemed to stare more intently.

Samantha tried again. Pointing at herself, she said, "I am Samantha," while putting stress on the name. She then pointed at the creature and said, "Do you have a name?"

The creature held up the topmost arm or her right side and looked at her hand. She wrapped up her fingers so that the one closest to her left thumb was the only one extended. She stared at it for a second, then pointed at Samantha. In a voice that sounded exactly like Samantha's, she said, "Samantha."

Samantha smiled broadly, but kept her voice calm and soothing. "Yes, that's correct." She pointed to herself again and said, "Samantha." Then she pointed to the creature and said, "Do you have a name?"

The creature pointed at herself and, in Samantha's voice, said, "Do you have a name?" then made slashing sounds with the second and third arms of her left side. She pointed at herself again and, still in Samantha's voice, said, "Maka bri Traz."

Samantha pointed to her again and said, "Maka bri Traz."

Maka's facial expression hadn't changed in the least, but she made circular motions with four of her arms.

Samantha pointed at herself and said her name again. Then she mimicked Maka's hand motions with two of her arms. She then pointed to Maka and said, "Maka bri Traz" and made the gesture again.

Maka hopped up onto all eight hands, bent down and leapt across the habitat, to land directly in front of Samantha. Samantha fought the urge to jump back. Maka's eye's stopped blinking, and she stared carefully at Samantha's face. Then she reached out with one hand to touch Samantha's cheek. The skin on the hand was tough and leathery, which made sense since she seemed to use her hands for walking.

Cautiously, Samantha reached out and touched Maka's face. Maka allowed her to stroke her fur without flinching.

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Talas bin Grakin paced nervously in the authority's waiting room. Her spouse stood quietly on all eight hands, breathing deep breaths. She knew him well; it was not only his transmout that could read his true feelings. He was putting on a calm exterior to hide the extreme nervousness he felt inside.

She said, "My transmin hasn't been scared in three light cycles. Maybe he's returned safely. We should abandon our petition to see the authority."

He arched his back to raise his second and third hands off the floor and negated her. "What if your transmin is just becoming accustomed to his prison? If he's trapped, we need to help him."

* * *

Agent Mustasen didn't knock; he just barged right in. He never knocked. Dan hated that. Then again, there was little about the agent that he liked. He painted on a smile, but stayed seated. "Agent Mustasen, I've got good news. My specialist has proven conclusively that the alien is sentient. She's been communicating with him all day long."

In his normal gruff tone, Mustasen said, "What have you learned?"

No congratulations. No "good job." Dan fought through the urge to frown as he said, "Well, for one thing we learned his sex. We'd thought he was a she, but he corrected us--"

Mustasen cut him off, "How about something useful, like where it's from?"

"He doesn't know where he is, so he can't tell us how to get to where he's from. We tried to show him a star chart, but he said that he didn't recognize any patterns."

The agent nodded, but frowned while doing it. "Does it know how it got here?"

"Apparently his transportation device malfunctioned. Did he crash in a ship or something?"

The agent ignored the question and said, "What else?"

This time Dan did frown. "Well, we've learned some amazing things about his race. The facial expressions he makes and the emotions he feels are not his own. They're someone else's. And he doesn't feel his own emotions. Another member of his race does. We're having trouble understanding why this is so. They did it to themselves, but near as we can understand, it had something to do with a mixture of voyeurism and a desire to draw the race closer together. It's really quite--"

Mustasen cut him off again. In a worried voice he said, "Wait a minute. Are you saying that it's in contact with its people?"

"Well, sorta. We think it's only through emotions though. I don't think he's communicating directly."

Mustasen abruptly spun around and strode through the door. Dan was about to go back to work when he noticed the agent turn left instead of right. Left went downstairs. He hastily got up and followed his benefactor.

* * *

As was the case with all audiences, the authority didn't look at the Talases. It was hearing the issues of ten other groups simultaneously, and didn't seem to look at any of them. Instead it stared up through the clear ceiling at the stars.

Clear walls divided the room into ten wedges. The small end of each wedge contained the authority. The Talases could just barely hear the other nine groups speaking. They could not tell if the authority was paying attention to any of them. It had showed no emotion when Talas bli Sporn admitted to having committed a Wrong act, nor did it show any emotion when he explained about the strange location of her transmin. She began to wonder if it had heard anything.

Her entire life long, she had heard how wise the authority was. It had taught them how to feel each other's emotions. It had taught them how to travel. It had largely shaped their society. But, having finally met it, she was unimpressed.

Suddenly, the clear walls became opaque, making them only able to see the authority. Slowly, as though to remind them that it did not need to hurry, it turned its head, bringing its ten eyes to focus on Talas bin Grakin.

In a slow, quiet voice that she felt more than she heard, it said, "I do not require your worship, child. I require your obedience."

It had read her thoughts. Her transmout must have been wearing a shocked and worried expression right then. She abruptly sat down and placed all of her arms straight out, with her hands pointing downward. "I am sorry, Authority."

"I do not require your apology either. You," her spouse became encased in color. "If I had wanted you to know who your transmin is, I would have made you know that information implicitly. By tracing him, you have invaded his privacy in a way that I promised your people would not happen. If you do this again, no matter the reason, your sentence will be that all around you will be able to read your thoughts. I will be lenient this time, however, because your intentions were good, even though they were misguided."

Talas bin Grakin's transmout would have been feeling extremely relieved right then. Her spouse sat down and put all of his hands outward from his sides. "Thank you, authority. What of the transmin?"

The authority squinted its eyes. In an angry voice, it said, "Yours is not to question. Due to your actions, I

am aware of the situation. That is all you must know. Be gone."

* * *

The habitat door opened suddenly, and a man in a dark suit with dark glasses stepped through. Without so much as an introduction, the man gruffly said, "Ask it how many more are coming."

Samantha looked at him for a moment, then looked to her subject. Maka's face, of course, didn't show anything useful, but he had moved behind her, as if to put her between himself and the government suit.

Carefully, she said, "Since you've asked for that, you must understand that he's sentient. Correct?"

The man brushed this aside. "Yes, yes. Now ask the question."

"And since you understand that he's sentient, he's no longer in any danger of being dissected, correct?"

Annoyed, he responded, "Lady, that's a policy decision. It's not your concern."

Dan stepped in. "Wait a minute. You told me that we just needed to prove sentience to save Maka's life."

The government man took off his glasses and glared at Dan. "I told you that if you didn't communicate with it soon, we'd dissect it. How you misread the corollary is your own problem. He turned back to Samantha and, in a voice bordering on a shout, said, "Now ask the question."

Maka moved close to Samantha, and she could feel him quivering as he cowered behind her. She crossed her arms. "You've always known he was sentient, didn't you? Did you take his transportation device from him as well?"

Exasperated, the agent said, "Look lady, that creature appeared *inside* a security area. If they decide to attack, there's little we can do to stop them. Now ask the bloody question!"

Samantha tapped her foot. "When he appeared, did he run around breaking things, or did he look around confused, like someone who'd lost his way and ended up where he was on accident? Do you have *any* reason to believe these people are hostile?"

The government man turned a bright shade of red. Before he could explode, however, Dan stepped forward and said, "Agent Mustasen, if you would give me a moment in private with my employee, I'm sure we can get this all straightened out."

Mustasen glared at Dan and then at Samantha. Then he stormed out of the habitat. Maka stopped shaking.

Dan closed the door, looked through the portal and drew a finger across his neck. After waiting a second for Thomas to cut the internal microphones, he walked slowly across the habitat to Samantha.

She said, "Look, Dan. If you think I'm going to turn Maka over to them to be butchered--"

He cut her off with a stern voice, "Shut up and listen. You've got a tough choice to make. I can get him off your back for a little bit, which would allow you a chance to take Maka and run. Maybe you can think of a way to contact his people, I don't know. But, if you do that, you'll be on the run from Mustasen for the rest of your life."

She stared at him in shock. She couldn't believe he'd actually go along with such a thing. "What about you?"

He shrugged. "I complained left and right about rehiring you. You'd do this behind my back and I'd say 'I told you so' to them. My butt's covered."

Starting to see him in a new light, she said, "Did you just find a conscience?"

He simply said, "You never let me tell you the whole story with Kiko." He let that sink in for a second, then said, "Back to the current subject. You've got other options besides running. You can work with the suit, get his questions answered, and show him that you're the only person who can really talk with Maka. If you convince Mustasen that there's more to learn, he won't be able to kill him. That might buy you some time as well. I'm afraid I don't see a long term solution in either way, though."

Samantha frowned. "Either way, though we need to answer his question."

Dan nodded.

She sighed. "Okay, bring him back in."

Dan waved to the viewport. Samantha turned to Maka and, using hand signals and a jumbled combination of words in his language and her own, asked if he thought more of his people would come here.

Maka let all eight of his arms hang limply at his side as he responded, "No."

She rubbed the fur of his upper left arm, a comforting gesture he'd taught her. She heard the habitat door open. Without looking back at the government man, she said, "He says that he doesn't think any more are coming. He's afraid that he's trapped here. What else do--"

She was cut off by the appearance of ten more creatures like Maka. They appeared without so much as a woosh of air in a circle around Maka and Samantha. Half of them faced inward, and half faced outward. All of them were carrying pointed metal objects in their hands. The inward facing ones quickly pointed their objects at Samantha. Her heart skipped a beat.

Maka yelled something she didn't understand, and the inward facing ones relaxed a bit. The ones facing outward, however, seemed to get more tense as they focused on the government man.

This gave her an instant to look at the newcomers. They were very similar to Maka, but showed differences in fur color and facial makeup. More importantly, however, they were all wearing clothes. So the government people had stripped Maka in order to pretend he wasn't sentient. She hopped he didn't have the same nudity taboos as her people did.

One of the inward facing ones handed a small box to Maka. His hands shook as he took it and quickly attached it to his fur. Then he rubbed her left arm for a second. She smiled and said, "Good bye."

In her voice, he responded, "Good bye." He pushed a button on his device and promptly disappeared. The inward facing ones followed him immediately. The outward ones stayed around for a bit, casting angry grimaces at the government man. Samantha wondered if they purposely made the emotional links to soldiers be people who stood around angry all day. After a few seconds, they too disappeared.

The government man immediately pulled out a cell phone and rushed out of the habitat while dialing.

Samantha shrugged. "Well, that was a short lived job." She looked to Dan, considered for a moment, then said, "Would you be willing to tell me the whole story about what happened to Kiko?"

He smiled. "Would you be willing to actually *listen* to the whole story without interrupting, or flying off

into a rage?"

She frowned. "I'll try."

"Okay, meet me in my office first thing in the morning, and we'll discuss it."

* * *

Talas bin Grakin sighed contentedly and smiled at her spouse. "He's feeling such intense relief that he must be home. Thank you for risking your life for me."

He responded, "Anything for you."

* * *

Using the carrier waves of their transferred emotions, the authority took in the sights, sounds, thoughts, and emotions of every living sentient on occupied planet 144394. In general it ignored their primitive ramblings and desires, only paying attention when the data represented output from one of its many mass psychological experiments.

Right now, it was carefully studying the data from the recent expedition to the newly discovered world. The transmout and her spouse had forced it to bring the primitive back ahead of schedule, but it had learned enough. The primitives on the new world were more advanced than these, but not considerably so. They were, however, much more paranoid. It would be more difficult to worm its way into their society than it had been here. But, with more sophistication would come better experiments.

The next step would be to bring a few of them over for study. The authority would need to find out what they desired that it could use to give itself access to their thoughts. They had found the transferring of emotions to be strange and unappealing, so that would not work.

It had observed them communicating over distances in archaic ways. Perhaps giving them constant mental access to a communication network. That had been the solution on world 97541. If not that, something else would work. Something always did.

The End

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