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Eleven meals later he took her outside.

She had no idea how long she was in wanting, then consuming, those eleven meals. Jdahya would not tell her, and he would not be hurried. He showed no impatience or annoyance when she urged him to take her out. He simply fell silent. He seemed almost to turn himself off when she made demands or asked questions he did not intend to answer. Her family had called her stubborn during her life before the war, but he was beyond stubborn.

Eventually he began to move around the room. He had been still for so long—had seemed almost part of the furniture—that she was startled when he suddenly got up and went into the bathroom. She stayed where she was on the bed, wondering whether he used a bathroom for the same purposes she did. She made no effort to find out. Sometime later when he came back into the room, she found herself much less disturbed by him. He brought her something that so surprised and delighted her that she took it from his hand without thought or hesitation: A banana, fully ripe, large, yellow, firm, very sweet.

She ate it slowly, wanting to gulp it, not daring to. It was literally the best food she had tasted in two hundred and fifty years. Who knew when there would be another—if there would be another. She ate even the white, inner skin.

He would not tell her where it had come from or how he had gotten it. He would not get her another. He did evict her from the bed for a while. He stretched out flat on it and lay utterly still, looked dead. She did a series of exercises on the floor, deliberately tired herself as much as she could, then took his place on the platform until he got up and let her have the bed.

When she awoke, he took his jacket off and let her see the tufts of sensory tentacles scattered over his body. To her surprise, she got used to these quickly. They were merely ugly. And they made him look even more like a misplaced sea creature.

“Can you breathe underwater?” she asked him.

“Yes.”

“I thought your throat orifices looked as though they could double as gills. Are you more comfortable underwater?”

“I enjoy it, but no more than I enjoy air.”

“Air. . . oxygen?”

“I need oxygen, yes, though not as much of it as you do.” Her mind drifted back to his tentacles and another possible similarity to some sea slugs. “Can you sting with any of your tentacles?”

“With all of them.”

She drew back, though she was not close to him. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wouldn’t have stung you.”

Unless she had attacked him. “So that’s what happened to the humans who tried to kill you.”

“No, Lilith. I’m not interested in killing your people. I’ve been trained *all* my life to keep them alive.”

“What did you do to them, then?”

“Stopped them. I’m stronger than you probably think.”

“But. . . if you had stung them?”

“They would have died. Only the ooloi can sting without killing. One group of my ancestors subdued prey by sting-ing it. Their sting began the digestive process even before they began to eat. And they stung enemies who tried to eat them. Not a comfortable existence.”

“It doesn’t sound that bad.”

“They didn’t live long, those ancestors. Some things were immune to their poison.”

“Maybe humans are.”

He answered her softly. “No, Lilith, you’re not.”

Sometime later he brought her an orange. Out of curiosity, she broke the fruit and offered to share it with him. He accepted a piece of it from her hand and sat down beside her to eat it. When they were both finished, he turned to face her—a courtesy, she realized, since he had so little face—and seemed to examine her closely. Some of his tentacles actually touched her. When they did, she jumped. Then she realized she was not being hurt and kept still. She did not like his nearness, but it no longer terrified her. After... however many days it had been, she felt none of the old panic; only relief at somehow having finally shed it.

“We’ll go out now,” he said. “My family will be relieved to see us. And you—you have a great deal to learn.”