

# THE ALIEN MAIL-ORDER BRIDE

A SCIFI ROMANCE SHORT STORY

JENNY FOSTER



**\*This exclusive eBook is not for sale.\***

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Warning: Intended for mature audiences only.

DEAR READERS\_



I am so pleased that you have joined my readers' list.  
I welcome you as a reader and want to surprise you with a short story  
to express my thanks to you for making my dream of becoming a  
writer come true.

I hope you enjoy this story!

Yours truly,  
Jenny Foster

## ABOUT THIS SHORT STORY\_



Zavir Tharok is a man who knows only one goal.  
The preservation of his race.

He is cold.

He is strong-willed.

Above all, he is determined never to give up.

To minimize his effort, he orders women from Earth, for himself and his men, instead of abducting them. These women know what awaits them and will not put up any resistance.

After all, the goal is not to woo women with sweet words, but to make them the mothers of the next generation.

But one woman on board tests his cold attitude.

Sally Smith is playing both sides of the fence, and is pushing his legendary self-control to the limit...

## THE ARRIVAL\_



SALLY SMITH HAD to admit that her first evening on board the *Cyrac* was not what she had expected. She had reckoned with anything, from a communal sleeping hall and bad food, to treatment that was reminiscent of herding livestock, rather than the arrival of 150 mail-order brides. But these strange Zevkorians, who had looked for genetically compatible women on Earth, with authorization from the highest levels, did things in style.

Every one of them had a single room with an adjoining bath, and dinner had consisted of three delicious courses. Apparently, the aliens had gathered information about the eating habits of women from Earth, ahead of time, because they didn't serve anything that you couldn't have found on a menu in a restaurant on Earth.

The only thing was, that the examples the chef used, were obviously continental, and a few hundred years old, at that. Snails and frog legs were probably delicacies in France in the past, but had not been on any menu in the Pan-American States for several hundred years.

When Sally looked at the creatures, she wasn't surprised that France had gone down, so gloriously, in one of the European Wars. You just couldn't take men, who enjoyed eating crawlers, seriously as soldiers.

Just like Sally, most of the women had politely pushed the appetizer around on their plates with their forks, and had sighed with relief when the next course was served. It was noodles with tomato sauce, and the plates had been licked clean faster than you could blink. Sally looked around and eyed her fellow travelers, whom she had met for the first time, today. Most of them seemed to be excited and not overly nervous.

Contrary to Sally, many of them were extremely skinny, bordering on malnourished, which didn't surprise her, given the shortage of food on Earth.

Sally was definitely the exception with her curves, she thought, annoyed. This was something that neither she, nor Captain Jack, had thought of at the briefing. She could not expect a man to think of such a supposedly small thing, but *she* should have thought of it. Sally had gone over everything with the captain countless times: which clothing would be best for her cover identity as a typist, if she should change her name, and she had even taken a course in stenography, just in case the aliens wanted to get an idea of her skills. Her figure showed that she had held a well-paying job, in contrast, for example, to the woman sitting next to her. She was pretty and the combination of warmth, food and the drink in front of her gave her features a much needed hint of rosiness. Almost all of the women had the pale complexion humans get when they have spent the majority of their lives underground. None of them talked to the other women seated next to them. All were much too occupied with the food they were being served.

When the sound of scraping spoons finally went silent, and they had all eaten their dessert, a strange hush fell over the great hall. It felt as if they were all waking up from a dream they were dreaming together. They looked around shyly and some even started quiet conversations. The woman on her right was a very young girl, who introduced herself as Melanie and asked Sally why she had made herself available to the aliens as a mail-order bride.

“I ... well, I had an affair with my boss,” Sally began.

“You don’t have to talk about it, if you don’t want to,” Melanie interrupted her, but in a nice way. “I understand.” The pretty blonde’s sad expression spoke volumes. Everyone here probably had the same story to tell, more or less; dealing with being dumped and with loneliness. Everyone, that is, except herself, whose story was nothing but a lie.

She needed to pull herself together. Doubts about her assignment were counterproductive and would only lead to failure. She had promised Captain Jack that she would return with a DNA sample from the aliens at the conclusion of her assignment. The sample would bring about the beginning of a new era for humanity.

“Have you seen any of the alien men yet?” Sally asked and looked around. “I would love to know if what they say is true.”

Melanie blushed. She had also heard the rumors. “They are supposed to be good-looking,” she whispered dreamily. “But the thing that scares me a little is the other thing. You know. The thing about how they change into animals when they are having sex with a woman ...”

Sally briefly wondered if she could confide the truth about the supposed animals to Melanie, or was this the kind of knowledge that she, an alleged secretary, would definitely not be privy to. However, her thoughts were interrupted, when the doors suddenly opened and

the sound of marching boots filled the room. The women who were sitting with their backs to the door turned around. They all, Sally included, took in a sharp breath and froze.

The alien men marched into the hall at a brisk pace, and in tight formation. Sally's first thought was a breathless "Wow," closely followed by panic. How could she have ever thought that it would be child's play to deceive these men? Not only did they look breathtaking, but they also looked alert and clever, all at once. Her heart began to race when her gaze fell on the man who was leading the alien men. He towered head and shoulders over even the other aliens, but it wasn't his height that took her breath away. He had presence, Sally thought and realized that she couldn't take her eyes off of him. He dominated his men, the women, the room – just everything. The lump in her throat got bigger. Hopefully, he wouldn't notice her. She might be able to wrap one of his men around her finger. They certainly instilled awe in her. Under his watchful gaze, however, she doubted she would have a chance to gather the DNA without being noticed, and then to make her way back to Earth in a rescue pod.

Sally only had a few seconds to think about this, because he was coming closer.

And closer.

She hardly noticed that his men had each started taking up positions behind a single woman's chair. Now that he was approaching her, quickly, Sally noticed further details of his appearance, and she started to get a funny feeling in the pit of her stomach. His green and slightly slanted eyes looked for hers and found them. The rush of adrenaline that coursed through her body almost made her jump up from her chair. His face had many sharp angles, but they all combined to make the most handsome face Sally had ever seen. His wide mouth with its sensual lips seemed to be the only soft thing, and she wondered how those lips would feel on hers.



He closed the distance to her chair in two strides, and if she didn't want to dislocate her neck, like a schoolgirl in love, she would have to stop staring at him, RIGHT NOW, and not wait until he was right behind her.

Why would he not take his eyes off hers? She thought she could read a silent challenge in those green eyes, and suddenly, Sally was sure that he knew. She grew hot, and then ice cold. She needed to escape, right now, and not wait until he ... and then everyone around her stopped moving. Sally looked carefully to her left and right, out of the corners of her eyes, but he wasn't there. That could only mean one thing. The man who was the leader of these troops was standing directly behind her.

She felt the heat rising off his body, behind her, and tried desperately to still her racing heart. His hands were resting on the back of her chair, and she scooted up to avoid his touch.

"Welcome aboard the *Cyrac*, ladies."

His voice gave her goosebumps up and down her arms. The combination of the deep, silky-smooth voice and the harshness, with which he rolled his Rs, burned itself into her memory. He looked exactly as his voice sounded: tough, dominant, but with a hidden soft side. Any woman would have sold her soul just to have the chance to coax it to light.

"My name is Captain Zavir Tharok, and I am here to ensure that your three-month journey to Zevkoria is a safe one."

What did he mean by that? Sally had no time to think about it, because he was already continuing. "The man who is standing behind you, now, is the companion who has been assigned to you. He will be at your side for the next three months, until we reach our destination."

It took a few seconds for his words to sink in and for her to understand what she had gotten herself into, with this assignment. Now

she had two possibilities: give up and return to Earth as a failure, or follow through with the assignment until the bitter end, and go home with the DNA in her luggage.

Giving up was out of the question. Even if it meant that she would have to fight off the alien man's advances with violence.

## THE DECISION\_



AT FIRST, a tense silence prevailed in the hall. It felt like Sally wasn't the only one who was irritated by the direct and seemingly almost brutal approach of the Zevkorians. She exchanged a look with Melanie, who looked even more scared than Sally felt. She leaned forward, took the other woman's hand and squeezed.

"They do not mate in their dragon state," she whispered. "I heard this from a reliable source. You don't need to be afraid."

The last few words got stuck in her throat. What was meant to be a small comfort, obviously had the opposite effect. The young woman paled, her eyes rolled back in her head, and her head fell forward. Sally pulled her plate to the side, but the alien who had been assigned to her was faster. He leaned forward, grabbed Melanie by the waist from behind and picked her up as if she weighed nothing. Sally wanted to push her chair back so she could stand up, but two hands landed promptly on her shoulders, keeping her in place. Before Sally could say anything, the young warrior had buried the unconscious Melanie in his chest, and after exchanging a look with his boss, carried her out.

Zavir Tharok's grip loosened and Sally took the opportunity to wriggle out from behind the table so she could stand next to him.

"Where is he taking her?" she asked the captain and tried to return his hot-cold look without blinking. He really was tall, she thought.

"To their joint quarters, of course," he answered.

His voice no longer had a smooth undertone. The silk was gone, replaced by harshness. He crossed his arms in front of his broad chest, a move that made her notice his well-defined muscles.

"Not that it's any of your business, woman," he said and tilted his head, as if she were an interesting research subject. "She belongs to him and he will take care of her."

Sally gulped dryly.

This was not a very good start, but she would not let herself be intimidated. Once the Zevkorians had become used to the fact that they could order the women from Earth around - something that was probably customary in their culture - it would be too late to do anything about it. It would be better if she earned the necessary respect right away and made it clear to him that she would never be his damned property. So, she did the same thing he had done, and crossed her arms in front of her chest. His eyes traced her every move and rested for a moment on her ample bosom.

"She is young and probably terrified," she said and puffed her chest up, a move that was not meant to be a provocative display of her feminine charms, but to make herself feel more confident. "When she wakes up and finds herself alone with this ...," she bit her tongue. She had almost said "barbarian." "... heavily muscled guy, she will be scared. He will be nice to her, won't he?" She looked at him, with equal measures of defiance and pleading.

"You don't need to worry about her." Zavir's eyes changed while he was talking. His round pupils grew longer until they were just

black slits in the middle of his dark green eyes. His close relation to a reptile was further emphasized by the fact that his eyes were darting about much faster than any human's eyes could. He seemed to be able to see everything that was going on around her, without actually taking his eyes off her for a second.

His expression told her that any objection was useless.

It probably didn't make any sense right now to harp on about cultural differences and to introduce the topic of equality. But, he wasn't done yet. "Maybe you should have thought it through before you confronted her with the truth about our race." So, Zavir also had acute hearing, in addition his impressive body. His senses were probably a hundred times better than hers were. No wonder the scientists on Earth were so determined to get their hands on the alien-dragon shifters' genes.

"I don't understand why you Zevkorians didn't put all the cards on the table. The more the women you bought know about you, the faster they will get used to you. I was just trying to ease her fear, that's all." She shrugged, trying to look relaxed.

Zavir turned until he was not standing next to her anymore, but was right in front of her, instead. Only a few inches separated Sally from this mountain of flesh and blood. God only knew what color his blood was. "Did you ever consider that the women might have come with you of their own free will if you ..."

"Enough, woman," the captain snarled and looked down at her with narrowed eyes. "You will come with me now, so we can have a little chat."

Her heart skipped a beat. Zavir smiled, showing two rows of bright white teeth. Could he hear how loudly her heart was beating right now, or was her fear making her imagine it? "Resistance is futile. Unless you want to put the fear of God into the rest of the women,

Sally Smith.” The smile disappeared from his features when he growled her name, rather than said it.

She glanced at her fellow travelers, or should she call the women her fellow sufferers? Some had stood up and were walking through the room, on the arm of their dragon man. Others were enjoying the view of the universe through the picture window, and some couples were already leaning over their leftover dessert, heads close to each other in intimate togetherness. Unbelievable! Didn't these women have any self-respect? They were throwing themselves into the arms of the first mountain of muscles who signaled that he wanted to be intimate. The only reason any of them were on board the spaceship, was because they had been bought in order to produce offspring. They were nothing but catalog brides!

She must have been thinking for too much too long, or hesitated half a second too long, because the next thing she knew, two strong hands were grabbing her and pulling her towards him. With one smart move, he threw her over his broad shoulders. Her protests went unheard, and he didn't even seem to notice her kicking legs. That, or he was just ignoring them. All of the other women either weren't paying any attention to her, or they were looking at her with mild astonishment.

Sally heard the doors open automatically. Zavir picked up the pace and fell into a slight jog, which made her head bang against his muscle-packed, hard back. “Put me down right now! This is humiliating!” She started using her fists, drumming them against his backside, which was ... no. She would not admire the view of the firm ass of the man who was carrying her off, like captured prey.

He stopped abruptly, and her nose banged painfully against his muscles one last time. Slowly, Zavir put her down. Her painful nose came to a stop right at the point where his tight shirt revealed some naked skin. Sally closed her eyes and forgot for a moment who was

holding her against him and whose scent she was breathing in with pleasure. When her feet finally met the floor, she reminded herself of her mission and the captain's arrogance, but especially that she wanted to go back to Earth as soon as possible.

Zavir's hands were still on her waist. Then his hands wandered down to her hips, inch by inch, cupping her curves and pulling her even closer to him. The words "stop that" died on Sally's lips, and before she could pull herself together to put an end to his fondling, Zavir stepped back and put his thumb on the door scanner.

Sally moaned to herself. The scanner was yet another obstacle that she would have to overcome. Surely, the area with the escape pods was secured against unauthorized entry in the same way. Well, she would find a way to make her escape. After all, Sally hadn't been recruited into the secret service for no reason. She still had many tricks up her sleeve.

Zavir crossed the threshold and, pointing with his hand, he invited Sally to follow him. Her stomach was starting to do flips, but she followed him into the room. There were only a few lamps on the walls, casting a warm glow around them. Her first impression was of colorful pillows, a soft rug into which she sank nearly ankle-deep, and an intense heat. Zavir was already pulling his tight jacket off and putting it on a chair.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"Water," Sally croaked, and wiped her forehead. She watched him pour a glass from a pitcher and took it from him, hesitating. She tried to sniff at it inconspicuously, but, of course, he noticed. Zavir gave her a tight-lipped smile, and sank elegantly to the floor, instead of sitting on the sofa. He crossed his legs, Indian-style, and leaned casually back on the couch.

"You don't have to worry about drinking it," he commented on her hesitation. "The water is not poisoned."

Sally sipped carefully at the water. “Maybe there is no poison in there, but a sedative?” Right when she said that, she felt ridiculous. Indeed, he had enough charisma for three men, and surely didn’t have to depend on sedating the woman of his choice – he would just turn on the charm. Surely, he had some. Sally shivered when she realized what she had been thinking. The woman of his choice – that was she! Embarrassed by her thoughts, she looked around for a place to sit that was as far away from him as possible, but couldn’t find anything.

He raised his head, brushed his hair from his forehead and looked directly at Sally. “You are here of your own free will. I paid for your company,” he emphasized the word in a way that made her blush. “Why would I poison you or even sedate you?”

Sally took another sip, and finally put the glass on the low table. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other. “So you ... can sleep with me?”

He threw his head back and laughed.

His broad chest heaved. “You really are strange,” he said when his amusement finally subsided. “Look at me, Sally Smith. And this time, look closely.” Zavir jumped up with one smooth move and closed the distance between them with one leap. “Do I look like I would need to sedate a woman so she would give herself to me?” He stretched his arms out and turned slowly in a circle. He was so tall that his outstretched arms went over her head.

When she stepped back, it was only to remind him that a great body wasn’t everything. Or a seductive scent. The mix of charisma and physical strength was incredibly appealing, even to Sally, who had come on board with a completely different intent than giving herself to him.

“I still remember your first visit to Earth very clearly,” she replied. “You abducted women and forced them to go with you. I don’t know why you have chosen a different method now, but I can’t forget that.”



Zavir lowered his arms. "That is in the past," he growled and stared at her from above. "In the meantime, several things have changed on our planet. But it doesn't hurt to remind you humans, from time to time, that we are superior to you in every way."

He reached for Sally's hand and pulled her to him so quickly that she didn't have time to defend herself. One second she was standing in the middle of the room, and the next she was sitting in his lap. Zavir loosely laid his hands around her waist and started to caress her hips with his thumbs. His touch was determined, and every caress excited her just a little more, which was obviously his intention.

"I ... need more time," she croaked and, at the last second, reminded herself that she had a job to do. Somehow, she needed to try to delay this. If she refused to sleep with him, flat out, his suspicion would be aroused.

"We have all the time in the world," Zavir agreed with her calmly. "Three months until we arrive on Zevkoria. But tell me one thing," he lowered his head to the bend in her neck and breathed in the aroma of her, "Why are you so contrary and nervous? You knew what you were getting yourself into when you signed the contract. You also received what you asked for, in return for your willingness to come with us." His tongue tickled the sensitive spot behind her ear.

Sally sat on his lap as stiffly as she could. Her body was responding to his touch, but differently from what she had intended. Her hands had taken on a life of their own and had gone around his neck.

In theory, her plan had been so wonderful. In reality, it turned out to be astonishingly difficult to keep her lust under control.

"I am ... it has been a long time, since I have been with a man," Sally improvised. She couldn't see his face, but she felt his mouth move against her skin, and knew that he was smiling. "Anyway, things aren't quite so simple with us women from Earth. We want to

be courted. You have to conquer me, show me how much you desire me.”

His answer consisted of grabbing her, spreading her legs and placing her on his lap, just right, so she could feel exactly what she had just asked for. If the size of his erection was a sign of desire, then Zavir was crazy about her. Her body heat started to gather at her middle, and then started to wander downwards. Zavir’s hands were on her round ass and were moving her back and forth rhythmically.

“You can tell me to stop anytime,” he offered. His voice had taken on a raw undertone and his pupils had turned into slits again. Despite these strange characteristics, he was a very handsome man – but above all, he was a man who had absolute control of his body. His body moved in sync with hers, and the only thing that showed her how much he was enjoying this game, was that his chest was rising and falling more quickly. Sally knew that she was getting wet. She could practically feel her panties dripping with moisture. It took all her willpower to put her hands on his chest and to say the word. Her “stop” came out weakly, but Zavir took his hands off her immediately and stopped moving.

“As you like,” he growled.

Under the thin fabric of his shirt, Sally could feel something moving on his skin. Without knowing it, she lowered her eyes and pressed her hands against his muscles, searching. Through the gap in his shirt, she could see that his skin was covered in scales, now. They shimmered, light-blue, but their tips were of a gold color. They rustled softly when she put a fingertip on one of them. “Oh,” she said delighted and forgot for a moment that she didn’t really like reptiles and should be disgusted by him and the animal that he carried inside him.

Now it was Zavir who sat up. From his throat came a half snarl, half growl, and it told Sally without a doubt that she had gone too far.

Ah, if only she could have just one of those scales! That would be even better than a blood or saliva sample. With a scale, she would have the genetic information about his species, and she would have the information the scientists could use to improve the armor, also. Zavir and his men were considered to be invulnerable, because most weapons just bounced off their scaly skin without effect. The only way to injure an alien-dragon shifter was to act quickly.

You had to be fast enough to get to them before the transformation – only then would you have a chance.

Zavir tilted his head and caressed Sally's cheek with his fingers. Suddenly, as if he had been burned, he pulled his fingers back and stood up. It happened so quickly that Sally could find nothing to hold on to, and landed roughly on the floor.

"I will give you one night," he said, looking down at her from his imposing height. "You will spend one night in my bed with me. If, after that, you still want to back out of the contract, I will send back to your miserable home, via the quickest route."

He turned his back to her and went to a door that Sally had not noticed earlier. Before he went into the adjoining room, he turned and stared at her with an unreadable expression. Sally grew cold, and then hot. He radiated power, which she could barely pull herself away from – and, as she realized with a shiver, more and more, she didn't want to.

ONE NIGHT\_



IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG for Sally to reach a decision, or at least, that is what it felt like to her. In reality, a whole hour or more may have passed. She had no idea.

"Take a deep breath," she told herself and stood up. Her legs felt like Jell-O, and taking the few steps to the door of the bathroom were the most difficult ones she had ever taken. Her mother's face came to her in her thoughts. She needed to complete this mission. The secret service had promised her that her mother would be allowed to live, if she returned successfully. They would take her out of the home that the dragon shifters were paying for now, and she would be able to live with Sally again. That was all that mattered.

She remembered what the liaison officer had told her. She could send for her mother, if she fulfilled the contract and gave birth to one or two children. She could feel her heart start to race as this thought took hold. If she failed; if she couldn't manage to get the dragon scale, she still had the option of becoming Zavir Tharok's obedient catalog bride.

She had hesitated too long to join him in the bathroom. The door

opened and he came out. The only thing preventing her from seeing a completely naked dragon shifter was a thin hand towel wrapped around his waist. Without looking at her, Zavir brushed by her and pushed a button in the wall.

Sally was already closing the bathroom door behind her, but she pulled it open a little and peered through the crack. A quiet squeaking and whirring was coming from a trapdoor that was opening in the floor. Table, chairs and couch disappeared, and the trapdoor closed again. A huge double bed came out of the floor. It took up almost a third of the room and stood exactly in the center. Sally almost smiled. A bed that was big enough for a dragon shifter to roll around in, with two women. This was so close to the impression that she had formed of him, in the short time since she had met him, it almost made her laugh.

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WHEN SALLY CAME out of the bathroom, she felt much more confident. Coming straight from the shower, the dragon world already seemed much less scary. Unfortunately, the man, who was at the center of this world, was still just as attractive and terrifying as in the beginning. But, at least, she had a plan that she intended to put into action. She would have sex with Zavir, and during his climax, when, hopefully, he wouldn't notice the quick pain, she would steal one of his scales. Then Sally would wait until he had fallen asleep and find her way to the space capsules. She knew the ship's plans by heart and knew which way she needed to go. If the scanner was made, even basically, the same way as the ones on Earth were, she could take it out of commission using pure violence. Then she would hot-wire a capsule and once she was underway, it wouldn't be long until Captain Jack came to rescue her. He had promised to follow the alien

space ship at a discreet distance. Surely, he would notice when a small capsule crossed his flight path.

That was the theory.

She took a deep breath and braced herself. Zavir was stretched out on his back in bed. The light from a single lamp fell on his face, and in the soft light, he didn't seem so tough and merciless, anymore. His eyes were closed and his chest rose and fell regularly under the thin blanket. It stung Sally that he had just fallen asleep while she, nervous and a little scared, had been unable to do anything other than think about him. Quickly, and before she could change her mind, she crawled under the covers next to him. Now what? Here she was, naked and ready to sacrifice herself to the dragon, for the sake of the matter, and the man was sleeping!

Since he was out, she could at least get a better look at him. She had no idea if a dragon shifter's genitals were shaped differently from a human man's. Maybe it even resembled the tail of animals she was familiar with from books, and had a sharp tip or had spikes that would hurt when he entered her.

It was time to turn her head off and let her body take over. "Body, take over," she whispered, imitating old police TV shows she had loved to watch as a child. This almost made her giggle hysterically. Sally threw her hand over her mouth and forced herself to calm down. Then she reached out her hand and pulled the blanket off his body, inch by inch.

Lord have mercy! Being able to see him this up close, she realized that he wasn't just handsome, he was darn near breathtaking. From his broad, muscular chest and his defined abs, to his narrow hips and ... Sally gulped. Either he wasn't sleeping, or he was having a very pleasant dream, because his cock was bulging and hard. It was lying like an arrow on his stomach and was larger than any human genitals she had ever seen. How would she be able to take him?

Curious, Sally leaned closer over his middle. His manhood was covered with scales, just like his skin, but they looked different from the ones on his chest or arms. They were bigger and thicker, and, thank the Gods, not at all sharp. She brought her hand closer to his cock, and could feel the heat rising from it. Suddenly it twitched, as if it wanted her to finally touch it. Sally began to tingle. Against all expectations, it was arousing to look at him, and to imagine the things she was going to do with him. She had thought she would have to get herself ready by artificial means, or with the help of technical aids, but the longer she looked at Zavir, the wetter she got.

Fine. She climbed over him carefully. Her legs were spread on either side of his. She moved her hips forward until the tip of his manhood was lying against her pussy lips. A small nudge, and the tip spread the two soft folds. Sally supported herself with her hands against his ribcage, gently, just to keep her balance and slid down a little, to take him in deeper. A little more ... she moaned softly. His cock was thick, but it didn't hurt. Quite the opposite. She moved her hips a little faster, until his manhood brushed against her clit. The combination of his heat and how hard he was, was so arousing, that she could barely hold back. Bravely, she moved down even more, and finally, he was inside her all the way. Sally sat up tall and arched her back, enjoying the feeling of his hard cock filling her completely. She looked down at her hands, on his scaly chest, and flinched. His member inside her was ... bigger. What was going on? It felt incredible, but it was also strange, almost as if his cock were alive. It must be the scales getting bigger and moving gently! She stopped, even if it took effort, so she could savor the strange and intoxicating feeling it gave her. Her eyes fell on his face. He was looking at her, his slit-shaped pupils burning into hers, and ... with one jerk, and without sliding out of her, he flipped Sally onto her back.

Zavir grabbed her hands and pulled them above her head. He

held her down with one hand and supported himself on the bed with his other. He slid out of her and then back in, brushing against her clit every time, until she thought she would explode with lust.

“Let go of me,” she begged him. “I want to touch you. I want to feel you. Please.”

He let go of her hands immediately. Sally threw her arms around his shoulders and arched her back. Two, three more thrusts and she would explode. She raised her head and bit into his shoulder, tasting salt and something that she could only associate with him. A growl came from his throat and he whispered in her ear, “Come Sally. Come for me.” She did. Her climax was so intense that she thought she would have passed out, if the waves hadn’t subsided slowly.

She felt him come inside her.

Her fingers ran up and down the sharp edged ridge of scales that had risen on his back. His semen was hot, and like a resonating tone, a second, completely unexpected climax flooded her exhausted body.

“Now tell me again that you want me,” Zavir whispered. He was still lying on top of her, and his sperm was running down her thigh, warm and sticky.

“Come with me to my home planet. What do you have to lose?” She remained silent and closed her eyes. Without that afterthought, his first few words after their lovemaking might have sounded like boasting. Why did he have to be such a great lover, and then choose this moment to show his softer side? She hated herself at that moment, but she hated the little thing hidden in her fist even more. When she didn’t say anything, Zavir rolled off her, turned his back to her and fell asleep without a word.

She opened her cramped fingers carefully. One of his scales was stuck to her sweaty palm, light blue with a golden tip.

She had done it. She slid out of bed quietly and got dressed. She stashed her bounty in her bra, close to her heart, but then changed



her mind. The small little thing was still warm and reminded her of Zavir's body that had played so artfully with hers.

He was ... she swallowed and put the scale in the pocket of her pants. He had been nice to her, and even a little more than that. And how was she thanking him? By going behind his back and betraying him. Sure, she and the other women were not used to being "bought" and to offering their bodies in exchange, but he had not lied to her. He had put all the cards on the table. Maybe it was possible, after all, that a good, maybe even a happy, future awaited her and the other women? The sex had been good, excellent even, and it would be all too easy to fall in love with Zavir.

He was different from the men she knew.

Now, as she felt her way through the ship towards the hangar, she wondered if that wasn't good. The dragon shifters had one goal, and that was the survival of their species. The humans, on the other hand ... she sighed. They had sent her to steal his DNA, but Sally had no illusions about its intended use. Earth's scientists were trying to develop a stronger, more defensive race. In the end, they would definitely not be satisfied with staying on Earth. Resources were too scarce and the population too large. Raids and conquests would follow, maybe not in her lifetime, but presumably in the next generation. A vicious circle of war and exploitation would start.

She turned left, thankful for the soft soles on her shoes. They didn't make a single sound on the hard floor. Involuntarily, she compared the hard floor to the rug in Zavir's quarters. It was just a small leap from there to the dragon shifter. Why couldn't she just get him out of her thoughts, before he settled in her heart? Sally imagined what his face would look like when he discovered her betrayal.

Just a few more feet, and she would be there. The hangar with the emergency capsules was over there. Her feet slowed.

She took the single dragon scale out of her pocket and looked at it again. Was it really worth it?

She brushed her index finger over the golden tip and exclaimed when the sharp edge cut through her skin. A drop of blood appeared, and she put her finger in her mouth. The pain was disproportionate for such a tiny wound, she thought, and looked at the tip of her finger. The burning and itching started at the tip of her finger, and spread until her hand, and then finally her whole arm tingled. It felt like someone was giving her constant electric shocks.

She could barely breathe. The liquid fire kept spreading through her veins. She felt like her whole body stood in flames.

Her heart sputtered, and then she felt the lava in that organ, too. Stars danced in front of her eyes. She wanted to lean against the wall, but all she could see was a red, shimmering fog in front of her eyes. Her heart beat once, then stopped, only to beat again and again in a rhythm that sounded like dull drums in her ears.

Then, just as quickly as it had started, the pain disappeared again. She looked down at her finger. It was throbbing lightly – nothing else. She couldn't even see where she had stuck herself!

So little blood, so much pain. Sally felt her knees go soft. She saw her mother's face in her head, crying first for her son, and then for her father, who had both fallen in the war. Her stomach cramped as she thought of what her mother would say to her if she knew about Sally's mission. No, her mother would never approve of what she was doing, right now – even if it meant giving up her own life. This is what all humans above the age of fifty were facing, due to the scarcity of resources. Sally stared at the dragon scale which was lying in the palm of her hand, little and innocent. If she fled back to Earth now, if she betrayed Zavir and his people, then her father and brother would have died in vain.

She fell to her knees. There were only a few days remaining until

her mother's fiftieth birthday. Captain Jack had done everything within his power to get a delay, but even he had been unsuccessful. If she didn't report the success of her mission as soon as possible, there was no doubt the ministry would pick her mother up and liquidate her. Sally's throat constricted and she felt the tears well up in her eyes. "Damn it," she mumbled and wiped her eyes with her sleeve. If she decided to return to Earth, the warmongers would unleash the next struggle for power, but this time, under different circumstances. They would be well on their way to being invincible, with the help of a new and stronger race. If she decided to stay with Zavir, her mother would die.

No matter how she decided, Sally would have to live with her choice. Her heart beat painfully in her chest. Sally held the hand with the dragon scale to her chest. She could not make a decision right now, not now, not here.

She needed time. Even if it was only twenty-four hours. She could use that time to try to find a way. That was still better than nothing.

The sound of footsteps tore her from her self-pity. She rose and anxiously looked for a place to hide. At least the hallway leading to the hangar wasn't brightly lit. Towards the back of it, she saw an alcove in the shadows. It wasn't an ideal hiding place, but it was the only one. The other option was to turn around and walk towards the soft, almost sneaking sound.

At the same moment she thought this, she knew that wouldn't stand a chance. Anyone who snuck around a spaceship in the middle of the night like that was up to no good. Just like her. As quickly as her trembling legs allowed, and as quietly as possible, she hurried to the alcove. The steps came closer. Sally pressed herself back into the wall as far as she could, and tried to remember Captain Jack. He had taught her things such as "become one with the shadows" and how to

take out an opponent with one well-aimed hit, but Sally had the feeling that those lessons would be of no use in a situation such as this. It was one thing to train in a group of recruits. It was a completely different thing actually to be operating in enemy territory.

The steps fell silent. She didn't dare breathe. Stars danced in front of her eyes. How far away was this person who was sneaking through the halls? If it was one of the dragon shifters, and if Zavir's superb sensory perception was any indication of his race's abilities, then she was out of luck. Her heartbeat drummed loudly in her ears, and she felt like she was panting rather than breathing. A dragon shifter would find her for sure.

What was he doing, anyway?

Why was he so damn quiet?

At that moment, she heard a voice. It was a woman who spoke. Sally couldn't be sure just how far away she was, because even though the sound was dampened, the voice echoed down the walls in the hallway.

"It's me," the woman said. The way she said the words seemed familiar to Sally. She heard a sigh. Even from this distance, Sally could hear how tense the woman was. "Okay, okay." Another pause. "This is Hornet. Code word Wyvern."

What ... Wyvern was an old-fashioned designation for dragons. Sally's thoughts raced. Her code word was Drakonis, and her identity in a conversation with Captain Jack was Queen of the Bees. Someone else had a mini transmitter, just as she had and, unless Sally was completely wrong, they were talking to Captain Jack. How many more women had he hired to get at the genetic material?

"Just as you predicted, the leader has made contact with the Queen of the Bees." They were talking about her and Zavir! She almost couldn't resist the urge to sneak a peek around the corner. "I am 99 percent sure that intercourse has taken place. He took her to

his quarters with him.” Sally turned ice cold when she heard the next words. “Good. I understand. I will put off my return until we are sure. Yes, I have made sure that his first officer will adhere to our agreement. Don’t worry.” The conversation partner on the other end of the line spoke for so long, that Sally thought she wouldn’t be able to stand it for another second, and would either faint from the strain, or would have to take a look to see who was talking about her, like she was an animal. “Yes, I understand. I will ...” The woman’s voice became softer and softer until even the echo didn’t reach Sally. “...tage. Understood. Hornet, out.”

The steps faded away. It took a long time for Sally to dare come out from her hiding place. She felt nauseous and lightheaded as she made her way back to Zavir’s quarters. At least she hadn’t lost her sense of direction, along with her mind. Captain Jack had fooled her from the beginning. Or was the other woman’s assignment only to make sure that she arrived safely back on Earth with the relevant sample?

No. Sally had felt something dark behind the woman’s words; something that went beyond the simple theft of a scale. She couldn’t quite understand the reasoning behind any of it yet.

Right now, all she needed was a quiet place where she could think in peace. Visions of the bed she had shared with Zavir, less than an hour ago, appeared in front of her eyes. She saw herself lying in his arms, feeling safe. The temptation to go to him and tell him about everything was so big that she stopped and pinched her arm, before she opened the door. She needed a clear head. What she didn’t need was a heart that was foggy with sentimental feelings, and was doing cartwheels because of a little sex.

But when she opened the door to his quarters, and saw him sitting up in bed, Sally knew that she was in trouble.

## THE BETRAYAL\_



HER JOB WASN'T MADE any easier by the fact that he was completely relaxed and was also naked, except for a light pair of pants. He had put a pillow behind his back and had crossed his arms behind his head. At least anything that might have distracted Sally was covered. At least, that's what she told herself, as she slowly stepped into the room. Just knowing how he was built; how he smelled and how he felt inside her – all of these things were enough to make her blush. Sally approached him, as if drawn by a magnet; pulled irresistibly by the look in his green eyes. While she was moving towards him, her head tried to analyze what she was feeling.

She didn't stand a chance.

Her head couldn't understand her emotions. Time seemed to slow down. Nothing existed, other than her and the man who was looking at her. She had hoped to be able to sneak back into the room, secretly, but to be honest, she hadn't expected her absence to go unnoticed. With a feeling that was close to shock, Sally realized that she might have even hoped that he would confront her. In that case, she would have to confess everything – and someone else, someone

who was stronger than she was, would take the decision from her, about what to do. Was this love? No, Sally didn't think so. Not yet. But it was the beginning of something one could call trust.

"Do you have something to say to me?"

Sally came closer, her heart beating wildly. Now or never. Truth or lie. Trust or betrayal. Life or death.

She opened her mouth, but the only thing that came out was a croak. To her dismay, she noticed that tears were running down her face. Zavir got up faster than she could blink, and stood towering above her.

His hand went around her upper arm. His naked torso was covered in scales, and they were fully extended. The calm was gone. The worst thing, however, was the look on his face. His eyes were those of a dragon, and his mouth, cheeks and forehead were changing, all while she was staring at him, mesmerized.

It was a sight she would never forget, for its ruthlessness had something scary, and also beautiful, to it.

The dragon also showed itself in Zavir's voice. He spoke in a dull and guttural tone.

"Why did you come back?"

Sally froze. Her hand took on a life of its own and shot out, holding her bounty out to him. "Take it," she whispered with a flat tone. "I don't want it anymore."

"You mean, you don't need it anymore," he spewed at her.

"What ... what do you mean by that?" She looked at him, confused. Zavir let go of her arm and took a step back, as if he didn't want to get too close to her. She had earned that, even if it hurt.

"You have my sperm inside you, and are probably carrying my child. That was your intention, was it not?"

"You knew I had an assignment?" Sally felt anger awakening in her. "You were playing with me the whole time, you bastard!" They

stepped closer to each other, at the same time, until their bodies were touching.

She didn't believe in love at first sight, but what then, was Sally feeling? Zavir stared into her eyes and she thought she saw something similar in his. He had bought a woman, so he could procreate, and what had he received? Her. Was this more than he had expected, or less?

"What do you want from me?" she whispered, and wished she could take the words back. She was afraid of his answer.

Her heart was racing as if she had just run a marathon, and stars were dancing before her eyes. Was this anger, still coursing through her veins, or was this something different, something equally hot? Zavir pulled her to him at the same moment that she threw her arms around his neck and pulled his head down to her. He leaned down towards her. She saw his nostrils flare and his eyes widen. For a second, the green was swallowed by the black of his pupil, until the dark ring retreated, becoming a narrow slit. He inhaled loudly, exhaled and took another deep breath.

Their lips met. Adrenaline rushed through Sally's body, accompanied by lust and something else that she didn't recognize right away.

The tip of Zavir's tongue brushed her upper lip and explored her lower one. He nibbled gently, before penetrating her mouth with his tongue. Sally opened her eyes. Zavir was still caught in a state between dragon and man, and in a way that even she herself didn't understand, she almost liked this Zavir better. His kiss was demanding, and he wasn't satisfied with just letting their tongues dance with each other or with pressing his mouth on hers. His whole, scale-armored body kissed hers and set her on fire.

As quickly as he had grabbed her, he let her go again. The dragon



disappeared and she was standing face to face with a man again. "I am going to ask you one last time. Why did you come back?"

She sank to her knees. Sally didn't care that she was losing her dignity. "I had no choice," she whispered. He towered threateningly above her. Then he smiled in a way she could only describe as triumphant and possessive. "If you aren't strong enough to make your own decision, then I will do it for you." He grabbed her and threw her over his shoulder, just as he had done once before. He made his way towards the hangar, as she had done only ninety minutes earlier. The hallways were still deserted. The only sound to break the silence was the barely noticeable noise his naked feet made on the smooth floor.

After what seemed like forever, Zavir stopped and put her down. He went to the door that had been his target, and put a finger on the scanner. The doors slid open silently. She followed him into the hangar, and saw all of the mini ships parked in neat rows. Zavir went to the closest one and activated it with a hand scan.

"Here. It's all yours," he said, indicating the small entryway. "Do you know what they are going to do to you down there on Earth when they find out that you are pregnant with a dragon shifter's child?"

"I am not pregnant," she replied, defiantly. "We only slept together once." She thought of the unknown woman's words. She had called Sally the *Queen of the Bees*.

"That is enough to receive a child," Zavir said coldly. He didn't take his eyes off of her for one second. Sally looked at him. He was right, but that wasn't what made her hesitate. She put her hand on her flat stomach. Her eyes went to the capsule and then back to him. "Even if you aren't, they will still extract my semen from you, freeze it, and fertilize other women so they can reach their goal."

She looked at Zavir, speechless. Nobody could make up some-

thing that horrible, not even a dragon shifter from a strange galaxy. It had to be the truth.

“Do you want to know how I found out about your mission?”

His voice sounded calm. Sally was cold. She closed her fist around the single scale and enjoyed the pain as the tip bit into her hand. Zavir continued, undeterred. “Your captain sold you out. You are a diversionary tactic, irresistible bait, supposed to lead me into a trap.”

She felt the color drain from her face.

“What do you mean? I ... don’t understand.” Sally shook her head.

Zavir looked at her with an unreadable expression. “Captain Jack gave me the mission of getting a single dragon scale.” She held out her hand to him. The blue and gold of her loot blurred in front of her eyes.

“Captain Jack sent you here to seduce me.”

“Surely he would have told me that!” Even she could hear her deep desperation over Jack’s betrayal.

“Not if he was really clever. And he definitely is, that devious bastard. The less you know, the less you can reveal.” She shook her head again, but Zavir came closer and held her head still between two fingertips. “We are dragons, Sally. We hear, see and smell everything a thousand times better than you can imagine. If you had come here with the intention of seducing me, and leaving here with my child in your stomach, I would have noticed that immediately. Before we ever slept together. Your heartbeat would have given you away.” He put a hand on her chest. “The way your lips twitch and the way you wrinkle your nose when you aren’t telling the truth,” he touched her nose with his finger tip and then brushed her lips, “are more revealing than you can imagine.” He paused and raised her chin, until she was forced to look into his eyes.

Sally swallowed dryly “But why did you sleep with me, then, if you knew that it was a trap?”

“A trap is only a trap if you don’t recognize it as one.” It was almost unbelievable, but Zavir smiled.

A shiver went through her entire body when she realized that the man who was standing in front of her was absurdly relaxed, just as if she had met his expectations.

For a second, she felt sympathy for Captain Jack, who had gotten himself into a game that went far beyond his power.

In a crazy way, she felt relieved that her agenda had gone up in smoke. The lines were drawn. Zavir knew she had let Captain Jack use her. She owed him nothing. She was free.

But that wasn’t exactly right. Her mother was still down there on Earth. How many more days, exactly, until her birthday? Panic flooded her body. She started to tremble. Captain Jack wasn’t the only one up to his neck in trouble.

She looked at Zavir. Was he a man who could help her? She took a deep breath. “Fine,” she said, trying to calm the uncontrollable trembling in her limbs. “So, I am the diversionary maneuver.” Another thought came to the surface. How had Jack been so sure that Zavir Tharok would choose her as his prey? “I suggest we work together and teach Captain Jack a lesson.”

Was that amusement flashing in his eyes? Probably yes, but even so, Sally didn’t have the feeling that Zavir was laughing at her. Rather, she thought he was laughing about the stupidity of the man who thought he could fool Zavir.

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“COME,” Zavir said, pointing with his head at the sofa when they

arrived back in Zavir's quarters. "Tell me what you think we should do."

He was curious, but the tone in his voice made it clear that he really didn't need her.

She followed him to the luxuriously upholstered furniture and was engulfed in the soft arrangement of pillows and blankets. Contrary to her, Zavir sat down elegantly and crossed his arms in front of his chest. He looked at her expectantly.

"If I am the diversion, then the logical question is what I was supposed to distract you from," Sally offered bravely. She couldn't tell if Zavir was listening or not. He didn't even blink. "When I ... was on my way to one of the escape pods earlier, I heard a woman speaking to Captain Jack." He raised an eyebrow and Sally understood immediately what he meant. "I was hiding, and she didn't know that anyone was listening. She identified herself with the code name, Hornet, and gave the code word. Captain Jack gave me a similar code name and word to use in the event that I needed to contact him."

"Where is your transmitter?" he asked. Sally hesitated, lifted her hair up and took the tiny earring off. Jack had given it to her. Zavir studied it for a second. "You have to ...," Sally began, but Zavir interrupted her.

"You have to activate it first. I know," he said. "I am going to turn it over to our technicians. Maybe it can be of use to us." Was there anything he didn't know? If she wanted his help saving her mother, then she needed to find a way to be of use to him!

"Their conversation was about me and that I had made contact with you, and that we ..." She felt the heat spreading through her body.

"None of that is news to me," Zavir said. "I told you, you should sleep with me, so your scientists could get my semen." He paused.

Sally was convinced she was fighting a losing battle. “Do you know who the woman is, and what she is planning next?”

Now they were at the point that worried Sally the most. If she had understood the conversation correctly, then Zavir’s first officer was working with Captain Jack and the woman. But would Zavir believe her? She had no proof. She would have to play her cards very wisely now, or just be completely honest with him. Which was the better choice? “She didn’t say anything about what would happen next, but I did hear something that may have escaped your notice.”

“What would that be?” She could see he didn’t believe her, but he was too clever and experienced to reject the idea altogether.

“One of your men is cooperating with the enemy behind your back.” There, she had said it – and had completely forgotten to demand a reward in exchange for the truth. Her gut felt as if it was turning to liquid and the relief was so great that she didn’t recognize the feeling at first.

His jaw tightened, but that was the only sign of his inner turmoil.

“She said that your first officer,” she closed her eyes, recalling the scene in her head, so she could repeat the exact words to him. “She said that she had ensured that the first officer would adhere to their agreement.”

He couldn’t sit still any longer. Sally watched him pace back and forth like an impatient predator. At some point, he stopped and looked at her. “Fine. That makes things a little more complicated.” He clenched his teeth and Sally had the impression that he was looking forward to the confrontation. The scales, which were so prominent on his upper body, rustled. “In that case, it will be my great pleasure to prove to your Captain Jack, and to my first officer, that you cannot cross Zavir without paying a price. Come here.” He said the last words in guttural voice that was used to giving orders. Sally realized the hairs on the back of her neck were standing on end.

She stood up and went over to him. He looked down at her from his impressive height. "I owe you a favor, Sally Smith. What do you want in exchange for your tip?"

Sally's throat tightened. For some strange reason, it hurt that he had reduced their relationship, or whatever it was, to a businesslike exchange of service and reward. "I need help to get my mother away from Earth. She will turn fifty in a few days and that means certain death for her."

He snorted scornfully. "I will never understand humans. I had heard that you liquidate your elders to make more room for young people, but I will never understand why you do it."

"Because there is no other way," Sally responded automatically with what she had heard for years. "There isn't enough to eat, and living space is limited, as well."

"Nonsense!" he hissed. The fury, which had been simmering just below the surface, ever since he had found out about his officer's betrayal, finally spilled over. "There is a time for being young, conquering the world and for fighting. And there is a time when the old ones stand by the young whippersnappers, offering counsel and wisdom. No wonder your development is stagnated."

"It is how it is, and I can hardly do anything about it," Sally countered. She felt like she was being pushed into a corner. Too much had happened in a short time, and she was tired to the bone. "So will you help me or not?"

"I will try," he said, finally. "I cannot promise more than that. Where is your mother, and where do you want to go with her if you are not going to stay on Earth?"

Sally hadn't thought about that part yet. "I don't know," she said, discouraged. When had her life entered this downward spiral of trouble?

"Fine. We will take it one step at a time. You ...," he tilted his

head to the side, “will stay in my quarters, for now. Do you understand? I will take care of the woman and Virtis.” That must have been the first officer’s name. “Then we’ll go from there.” He took his pants off and pulled out a freshly ironed uniform from his armoire. She didn’t know if she should laugh, because he had just left his clothing lying on the floor where he had taken it off, or if she should keep staring furtively at his firm and muscular ass.

“Do you like what you see?” Embarrassed, she drew her hungry eyes from his sexy behind and met his eyes in the mirror on the inside of the armoire door. “One more thing,” he added, as his fingers deftly working the buttons on the high collar of his jacket. “If I say that you need to stay here, then I mean it. No expeditions. Do you understand?”

She nodded and wondered how she was going to survive until he returned. Patience had never been her strong suit.

## THE TRUTH\_



SHE WAS JUST DREAMING about her mother, who was being picked up by the workers from the ministry, when a determined knock woke her from her dream with a start. “Come in,” she croaked and sat up. Her tongue felt like sandpaper, and her eyelids were sticky.

The door opened. It took a moment for Sally to recognize the woman who was coming in, as Melanie. She had spoken to her briefly last night. She had fainted, Sally remembered, and the dragon man who had been assigned to her had carried her off. Had that really only happened a few hours ago?

“I just wanted to see how you are doing,” Melanie said shyly and came a little closer. “May I come in?” Without waiting for an answer, she had already crossed half the distance to the bed. The doors closed with a soft hiss.

“What time is it, anyway? I didn’t sleep half the night,” Sally said and rubbed the sleep from her eyes.

“Me, neither,” Melanie grinned and wiggled her eyebrows suggestively. Damn, that’s not how Sally had meant it. “How are you?



I mean, after you collapsed at the table yesterday, I really wanted to come check on you, but ...”

“You were probably otherwise occupied. I understand.” She winked. “Was he as good as they say he is?”

Sally blinked. The woman who was sitting down at the edge of the bed in such a confidential manner, had nothing in common with the young girl who had fainted from fear yesterday. A change like that didn’t just happen overnight, even if the night of lovemaking had been a revelation to Melanie.

Something wasn’t quite right here.

Then she noticed it. Melanie was wearing small, round earrings that were exactly like hers. Without thinking, she put her hand up to her left ear, but, of course, the earring wasn’t there anymore. She had given it to Zavir so his people could take a look at it.

Melanie was Hornet.

But before Sally could react, a satisfied smile spread across the woman’s face. “I see you understand, sister,” she said in an acrid tone, under which there seemed to be perverse enjoyment. “So it was you who was eavesdropping last night.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement. “I thought maybe I was mistaken, but well – that’s life.”

“What are you talking about? What do you want from me?”

Melanie was still sitting calmly on the edge of the bed, as if they were having a nice little chat about the weather. “I want you to come with me, you idiot, before total chaos breaks out here.” She glanced at her chronometer. “I want to take you to safety. Trust me.”

“You must be out of your mind,” Sally said, and inconspicuously scooted an inch to the other side of the bed. “Jack assigned you to me, to bring me back – that much I got. What will happen to me down there?”

“Calm down,” Melanie said. “I admit it wasn’t smart of Jack not to

tell you anything about me. But I am definitely not here to just drop you off on Earth like a package and leave you to your fate. Quite the opposite, in fact. Jack impressed on me a hundred times that I need to keep a careful eye on you. He is fond of you. Surely you know that.”

“Of course,” Sally said and didn’t even try to keep the sarcasm out of her voice. “He didn’t tell me the truth about the real reason for this mission, because he cares about me so much.”

“You know how men are,” Melanie said, and brushed a strand of hair from her forehead. She looked so young and innocent. “They think they know what is best for us women, and overlook that we have more sense than they do.”

Sally looked at her, doubtfully. It would have been so easy to take Melanie’s outstretched hand and just go with her. “Come,” Melanie repeated again. There was a hint of impatience in her voice. “We need to hurry if we are going to get out of here in time. How long has it been since you had intercourse with Zavir?” There was something about that last question – maybe it was the factual, almost clinical wording – that told Sally there was more on the line here than met the eye.

“About six hours,” she answered carefully. “Why?” Then she understood. There was only a slim chance that she was pregnant – and if not, then Jack and Melanie wanted to be sure that Zavir’s sperm were still alive when the doctors extracted them from her.

No. She would not go with her. She had enough of being used and of being pushed back and forth like a marionette without a will of its own.

Something in her face must have given her away, because the next thing she saw was a small and extremely fierce-looking laser pistol in Melanie’s hand.

How had she managed to smuggle it on board? “You will get up now, get dressed and come with me,” she ordered calmly, and pressed

the barrel of the weapon up against Sally's unprotected throat for a moment. It felt cold against Sally's skin.

She stood up slowly. "Hurry up," Melanie ordered, when she saw Sally dawdling. "Don't think I will hesitate to injure you, if it will make you hurry up. I promised to deliver the dragon lord's semen, but nobody told me I couldn't damage the vessel."

One look at Melanie's face was enough for Sally to know that her opponent was serious. "Why are you doing this?" she asked, as she pulled her clothes on.

"You aren't trying to distract me, are you, by getting me to talk?" She laughed, but then turned serious. "For the same reason you are. But in my case, it is not my mother, but my father I am trying to save." Sally froze. The prospect of saving her mother's life didn't exist anymore. "Contrary to you, I was clever enough to insist on the contract being fulfilled before I went to work."

All of a sudden, her fingers trembled and she seemed to be twice as clumsy. There was a dark joy behind the woman's words, and it scared Sally. She fastened the last button through its intended hole and looked at Melanie.

Her mother was dead. Or, if she wasn't dead yet, she would be soon, because Jack had no intention of keeping his part of the bargain. He had just as little intention of keeping Sally alive, once she had fulfilled her purpose. That purpose was one thing: to deliver breeding material for a new race of half human, half dragon-like warriors. She could see it in Melanie's mean smile, and in her eyes that were looking down at Sally in scorn, even though she was barely taller than she was.

Something clicked in Sally's head. Jack, Melanie, Zavir – now the time had come when she had to decide who she really was. Was she still the Sally Smith who believed everything she heard and did as she was told? She put her hand in her pants' pocket and raised her head

defiantly. “What are you waiting for? Let’s go.” She walked past Melanie to the door, which opened on its own.

“I am warning you,” the woman said right behind her. A careful glance behind her told her that Melanie was holding the pistol in her hand, cleverly concealed in the loose sleeve of her sweater. “We are going straight to the hangar. One move to try to run away or to signal to someone that you need help – and you are dead. Do you understand?”

“Of course,” Sally said. Her heart was not beating nearly as fast or loud as she had expected. Instead, she felt a strange calm. Her fingers felt Zavir’s dragon scale, still in her pocket. Too bad she wouldn’t be close enough to Melanie to injure her with the sharp little thing.

She turned into the hallway leading directly to the hangar with the rescue pods. They ran into a few men along the way, but all of them just nodded to them in greeting. Except for one. “Miss Smith? Shouldn’t you be in the Captain’s quarters?” The man had frowned, as if he couldn’t reconcile what he was seeing with the way things were.

Sally was sweating and her heart started to race as she searched for an answer that would put the dragon shifter at ease. Melanie beat her to it. “Sally isn’t feeling well,” she explained in a voice filled with a sweet smile. “She needs to move a little, to clear her head. Please don’t worry. I will make sure nothing happens to the Captain’s new companion.”

Liar.

“Okay,” the man said, and continued on, without giving them a second look. There went her last hope of being able to stop Melanie, after all. “Captain’s companion? Didn’t you exaggerate a little?” Anything that helped her postpone the inevitable was good.

“You really are naïve. I cannot believe Jack chose you and not me

for this assignment,” her tormentor remarked. “Didn’t you do even a little bit of research about what happens when you mate with a dragon shifter?”

No. She had trusted blindly that Captain Jack would tell her anything she needed to know. Not only was she a lousy spy, she had also been far too trusting. “You are right,” she admitted and slowed down a little. Would it be too obvious if she tripped and tried to pull Melanie to the ground so she could take the pistol from her? Forget it, a voice of reason said in her head. The voice was probably right. Melanie seemed to be thoroughly trained. She had thought it was malnourishment, but in reality, she just had a wiry build. “I was naïve. But now you have the chance to clue me in. What does it mean to be the wife of a dragon shifter?”

“Not wife, but companion,” Melanie corrected. They turned left. Only a few more feet and they would be passing the alcove where Sally had hidden last night. They hadn’t run into anyone else in the last few minutes. Where were all of the men who lived on this ship? Didn’t they have any maintenance technicians, or engineers who needed to be working on something here?

Obviously not.

“Zavir Tharok comes from a strange line of dragon shifters who can only mate and procreate with a few women. Their scales, and to a lesser degree, their blood, contains a substance that is deadly – except to the woman they take as their *companion*. You can count yourself lucky that he held himself back during sex. One small wound, and you would be dead.”

Sally’s thoughts raced around in her head. She closed her hand around the scale and thought about the pain that had gripped her and then left again. If what Melanie was telling her was true, then Zavir Tharok had chosen her to be his companion.

That knowledge burned like fire in her heart. She had survived

the dragon lord's poison. She and Zavir were connected in a way that went beyond the physical attraction she felt. Someone – no, not just anyone, but one of the mightiest dragon shifters in the universe – had chosen her to bear his children. To grow old with him. To live at his side.

What did Zavir see in her that she had never seen in herself?

It didn't matter anymore.

They arrived at the entrance to the hangar. Melanie pressed the pistol into her back. "Why are you so quiet suddenly?" She sounded suspicious. Damn it! Hopefully, she wouldn't realize what Sally had realized.

A small amount of the dragon lord's poison was flowing in her veins. As such, she was more than just a vessel for the scientists from Earth. They would subject her to any test they could think of, and produce some kind of horrific weapon from her blood.

On the other hand, ... Sally turned around and ignored Melanie's hissed warning. She fished the scale from her pocket and held it up in front of Melanie's face.

Melanie took a step back instinctively.

She squinted. When she realized what Sally was holding in her hand, she whistled softly.

"You overlooked something," Sally said calmly. "Jack is a bastard. He ordered me to steal a scale from Zavir. He didn't tell you anything about that, now, did he?" She forced her mouth into a sneering smile. "He put my life on the line, that bastard. He planned everything so carefully. But," she laid all her cards on the table and stepped closer to Melanie, "he didn't think of one thing, meaning the fact that his plan might work too well."

The satisfaction of seeing all the color drain from Melanie's face was enormous. But Sally hadn't arrived at the end of her improvised speech yet. "Do you finally get what has happened? Do you under-

stand who is standing in front of you, and whose life you are endangering with your ridiculously tiny laser pistol?" She stuck the dragon scale into her wrist intentionally.

A small red dot appeared, and then the wound closed again.

"That can't be," Melanie stammered. She blinked. "Let me see. You ... that isn't possible."

"That isn't possible," Sally mimicked with a high, child-like voice. "If I were you, I would get out of here. Now. You really don't think Zavr will let you leave here unharmed if you lay a single finger on his companion or his child, do you?"

Melanie lowered the weapon and gave Sally a hate-filled look, but Sally didn't care. She knew she had won.

THE WAY\_



SALLY STEPPED TO THE SIDE. “Get out of here,” she said, nodding at the hangar door. “Please give Jack my love, and tell him that I will be visiting him very soon.” She could hardly believe that such a clear threat was coming out of her mouth.

Behind her, the hangar doors opened with a soft hiss.

“That won’t be necessary,” Melanie said. “You can tell him yourself.”

All of her bravado disappeared with her next breath when she heard Jack’s smooth voice at her back. “Are my two favorite women arguing? Why so angry?”

What had she ever seen in that man?

“Jack,” she said, and turned around. “What are you doing here?” She made it sound like he had just crashed a tea party, uninvited. “It isn’t like you to throw yourself into the fray. Shouldn’t you be a few thousand star-miles away, so you can watch from a safe distance, as others risk their lives for you?”

Jack came over to her and put his arm around her waist, which



Melanie acknowledged with a dark look. "I see you have found out why you are really here," he said.

"Let me go," Sally hissed. "You don't understand what is going on here. Melanie was just about to leave," she pointed to one of the rescue pods. "You should go with her if you value your life."

"That is exactly what I am planning to do." He smiled. "But not without you, my darling. You have just become my most treasured possession." He caressed her cheek. She pushed his hand away.

"Careful, careful," Jack cautioned and grabbed her wrist. "You have something poisonous in your fingers and we don't want anything to happen to your beloved Jack, do we?"

She hesitated for a fraction of a second too long. Melanie took the scale away from her, while Jack held her wrist tightly. "You wouldn't believe how dear you are to me," he mumbled and buried his face in her hair. Sally wanted to vomit. "Humanity will celebrate me as the man who catapulted them into the next millennium." Suddenly, the mask of geniality disappeared. "Enough talk. I don't know how long my cloaking device will work, so we should be on our way. I lay the world at your feet, darling."

He pulled her with him roughly and no matter how much she resisted, how much she dug her heels into the floor, he and Melanie were stronger. She raged and screamed until it was too much for the two of them. They communicated with a short nod – they really must have already known each other for a long time, in order to be able to communicate with each other like that – and each grabbed one of her arms.

They picked her up between the two of them, and simply carried her towards Jack's small and maneuverable space ship.

Damn it, how had he managed to circumvent the security measures on Zavir's ship and dock here?

She heard the doors to Jack's space ship open. A man's voice

came from within, deep and growling. At first, she thought it was Zavir, who had managed to sneak on board the ship. But no. A figure came into view. It was a man who resembled her Zavir in build, but his torso was covered in tattoos that flowed into each other in a mysterious way. They almost seemed to have a life of their own. Something flashed in the strange man's eyes. Was he trying to tell her something? At the moment when she thought everything was lost, all hell broke loose, just as Melanie had said it would.

Only, it wasn't the hell her enemy had meant. Sally was sure that Melanie had been talking about an attack on Zavir's ship.

The silhouette of a man appeared in the hangar door. He stood there, broad-shouldered and confident.

Sally's heart beat so hard she thought it would burst.

He changed without warning. Melanie and Jack were still occupied with dragging Sally up the steps into the ship. They couldn't see what was happening behind their backs. The man with the strange tattoos was the only one who seemed to sense that something wasn't right. His shoulders tensed and his head jerked up.

Zavir roared. It was the only warning Melanie got before he was upon them in his dragon form. He flung the woman to the side like a little doll. Sally was grateful for the size and height of the hangar. Zavir was the largest creature she had ever seen in her life.

Then, before she could stare any longer at the blue-gold shimmering dragon, someone threw her on the ground. It was the stranger.

He shielded her with his body as a burst of fire hit the stern of the ship. Within a fraction of a second, the man was back on his feet, lifting her up, just as Zavir had done. He carried her towards the hangar's exit. She raised her head in time to see a very pale Jack looking at what remained of his ship. The dragon's claws scraped on the floor as the mighty beast went towards him.

The sound echoed in Sally's head for a long time.

The tattooed man carried her a few more feet into the hallway before he put her down, leaning her against the wall like a package. “Can you stand?” he asked and answered his own question. “Well, that will do. You must be braver than you look, otherwise you wouldn’t be a suitable partner for Zavir.”

“Who are you?” It was absurd, but the only thing Sally could think about right now was that a complete stranger had helped her.

“Allow me to introduce myself. Ar’Van. Bounty hunter and huntsman for hire. At your service.” He bowed slightly, which seemed to suit him, despite his wild appearance.

“Did ... Zavir hire you?”

“He can tell you all about it himself,” Ar’Van replied. “I am discreet and as tight-lipped as a grave.” It was an unfortunate choice of words, because the silence in the hangar was deafening, and much worse than the screams had been. Sally felt queasy.

The next thing she saw were green eyes looking at her with worry. She blinked and felt around her with her hand. She was lying on something soft, and it smelled almost familiar. Her fingers ran into hard muscles. “Zavir,” she said.

“Sally,” he answered just as seriously, but she could see the smile pulling at his mouth. He helped her sit up. Hesitantly, she felt his face, and then his chest, as if her hands had to be convinced that he was unhurt just as her eyes needed to see it.

“Where are we?” she asked. “I mean, are we still near Earth, or ...”

He shook his head. “No. We are on our way to Zevkoria.”

“My mother ...,” she said and felt the memory of Jack’s double and triple betrayal eating away at her like acid.

“I am sorry, but your mother isn’t alive anymore. It is probably of little comfort, but the traitors are dead, too.” He probably meant that

she was too tender-hearted to be able to feel any satisfaction from the death of another human.

“That’s good,” she answered shortly. And it was true. The thought of Melanie and Jack, alive and celebrating, would have been unbearable.

“What will happen to us now?” she asked and accepted his outstretched hand. Until now, he had given her space. If she slid over to him now and snuggled into his arms, then she assumed more than just a touch would follow.

“We will see,” he answered.

That wasn’t the answer Sally had counted on.

Of course, she hadn’t expected any declarations or assertions of love, but on the other hand, he was the man who had made her his companion and thus had saved her life in a twisted way. “I suggest we get to know each other a little better first.”

“Maybe you should have thought of that sooner,” Sally said. He shrugged and laughed.

“I keep forgetting how little you humans live by instinct,” he said. “The first time I saw you, I knew. I want her or nobody else.”

“Is that a dragon shifter phenomenon?”

“It is a Zavir phenomenon.” Against her will, Sally had to laugh. She would have never expected an awe-inspiring man like him to have such a dry humor. “Seriously, Sally. I knew you belonged with me as soon as I saw you. Maybe you think I made you my companion out of sympathy, or because I urgently needed descendants, but I am telling you, that isn’t the case. The dragon in me recognized you and I have no reason to doubt his abilities.”

Finally, she took his hand. “There are so many things I don’t know about you yet. What does your home planet look like? What does being your companion mean for me? How do your people live?”

“You have enough time to learn everything you need to know,” he assured her.

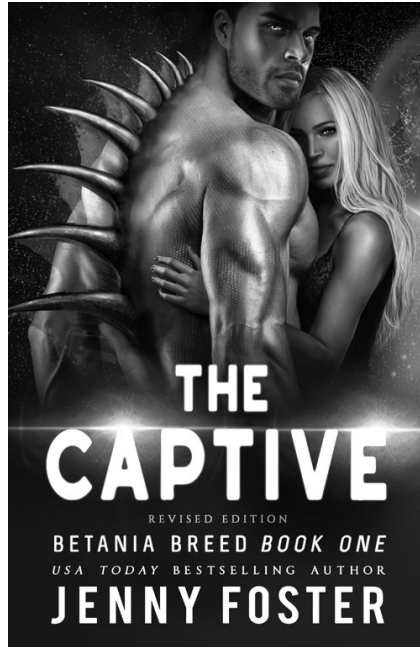
“What if I am not your companion, after all? If I don’t want to be?”

“Is it that you don’t want to be, or does the thought of being my companion scare you?” He pulled her to him and leaned his head down to her. Their lips almost touched. When he spoke, his breath tickled her lips. “I promise you, there is nothing you need to be afraid of. If you really want to leave – well, then I will fight for you. Tell me that you don’t feel the connection between us, and I will let you go. Immediately.” He leaned back and exuded an immense calm, as if he already knew how she would decide.

She looked at Zavir. “My heart has already decided,” she whispered. “I am going with you.”

He smiled and Sally knew he had to have the last word. “To the end of the world and beyond.”

THE END



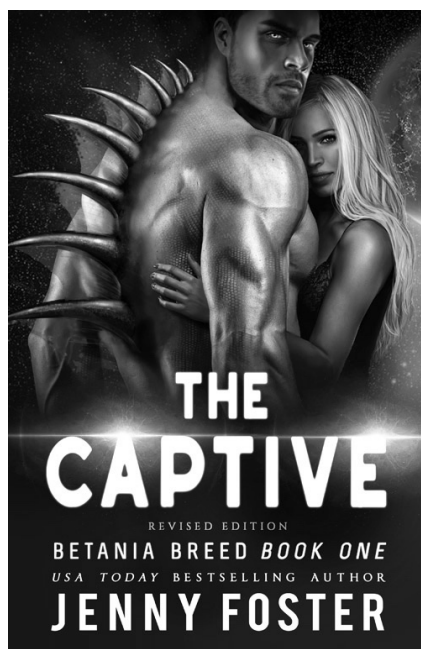
Dear Readers,

Thank you for accompanying Sally and Zavir on part of their journey. I hope you enjoyed reading about them!

If so, allow me to carry you off to another Sci-Fi world. I would like to invite you to read my steamy Alien Romance Novel “The Captive.”

You can read the preview chapters on the next page.

SNEAK PEEK VOLUME I: THE  
CAPTIVE\_



**Cassie Burnett**

I'm one of the few people who has yet to give up the fight against the Sethari.

I would rather die than surrender to the aliens who have enslaved us humans for more than one hundred years.

Then the unthinkable happens: a different race of aliens' land on Earth and offer a trade to the humans. In exchange for healthy women, they will destroy the tyrants.

The leader of the aliens claims me as his to bear him healthy, viable children.

He's strong. Powerful. Terrifying.

I saw how he destroyed the Sethari, and I'm prepared for anything, except this one thing—that this merciless warrior, with his strange eyes and scaly skin, would awaken feelings inside me.

### **Reading Sample:**

*The battle is over.*

The Sethari, who plundered and enslaved us for the past one hundred years and reduced the human race to a fraction of its original number, have been destroyed. I should be happy and celebrating with the others who are now free and living their lives on their own terms. The whole world is vibrating in a happy frenzy, but my fellow female sufferers and I are not taking part in these pompous celebrations. We're captives, spoils of war, breeding machines for the alien lifeforms who finished off the Sethari. Nobody asked us if we were ready for a journey to a strange world. Nobody even asked us if we desired children, much less if we wanted to mate with aliens. All of this was decided for us by the powers that be.

They told us humanity would survive because of our obedience.

I'm lined up in a row with 167 other healthy, young women,



waiting for the president to shake my hand and thank me personally. I would love to ask him why his wife, with her large hairdo and stark face, isn't taking my place. Where was he, when people like me had to hide behind the scenes so they wouldn't be executed? In World War II, they called people like him a collaborator, someone who would betray his fellow citizens, just to hang on to his little piece of authority. He's nothing but a game piece who was put into play by the Sethari in order to drive the last little bit of resistance out of us. This man, who's supposedly the most powerful person in the world (and the President of the World Federation), has signed countless death warrants just to save his own skin. The minute he saw a way to get rid of the tyrants, he jumped on the chance. I do have to give the president, with his gray hair and those cold, calculating blue eyes, credit: as soon as the Qua'Hathri made contact with him, he was ready to throw the Sethari to the lions.

Not that I have any sympathy for them—they took advantage of the human race for over one hundred years. They're energy vampires, and I don't mean that metaphorically. The Sethari imprisoned the humans like livestock and extracted energy from them. They needed this energy in order to survive. And Mr. President, who's approaching me now, supplied them with a constant stream of replacements.

Now that I'm seeing him in person for the first time, the anger I feel inside brings tears to my eyes. The huge screens on almost every street corner, of which he regularly spoke to us with his effusive words, don't do him justice. His tailored suit hides a small potbelly beneath. Knowing he had it well enough to gain a belly, while my siblings and I had to dig through the trash to find food, makes my heart race. I ball my fists and try to calm down. But the only thing I see is his self-satisfied expression. Later, he'll be able to proclaim to

the world via Livestream how he saved humanity from complete destruction.

His wife is standing two steps behind him, just like any good and virtuous woman should. The looks she's giving her husband's companion aren't quite so virtuous, though. His name is Khazaar Drasurq, the warlord of the Qua'Hathri. In some ways, I understand why she's drooling over him. He's handsome in a strange sort of way, and I'm sure she watched onscreen as he fought the Sethari to destruction. I have to admit that I can't take my eyes off of him, either. The memory of this tall warrior beheading one Sethari after another with his gleaming sword is still fresh in my mind. He reminds me of a medieval warlord who isn't afraid to ride out onto the battlefield himself and dive headfirst into the fight.

Despite all the progress technology has made over the last two thousand years, the Sethari were basically invincible. That is, until Khazaar Drasurq and his warriors arrived. Their swords, daggers, and lances (made from Qua'Hathri steel), enabled them to pierce the Sethari's rubber-like skin. The sight of his tall figure with a waving cloak has probably burned itself into the mind of every woman on this planet. For my part, I'll never forget how he lunged toward the surging crowd of Sethari, his face an expression of fearlessness and an absolute desire to win. At that moment, I disregarded the rumors of his ancestors, who are said to have been dragons. Even the ridges along his spine—which are said to spike like a razor's blade when you irritate him—didn't interest me. However, that changed the moment our president sold me to him and his warriors.

The president and his entourage have almost made it to me. I try to tune him out and look at Khazaar instead. Despite the scales that cover his pale skin and his strange eyes, he appears very masculine. Human traits dominate his appearance. His eyes brush over me and then stop for a moment. His golden-yellow irises are shaped like slits,

just like a cats' eyes—well, like a cats' eyes were, I should say, since most pets have been exterminated by now. I like his hair best. It falls in dark waves onto his shoulders, shimmering in blue-black and seeming as if it would be silky to the touch. While he's staring at me, his scent wafts over and wraps around me, and, immediately, I want to close my eyes and bathe in it. To me, he smells like milk and honey, like marzipan and butter croissants—things I haven't eaten since I was a child. His scent relaxes me, probably because it's tied to the last beautiful memories I have of my parents. I inhale inconspicuously, and sense something rough under the sweet overtones. A hint of musk brushes my olfactory receptor and increases my heart rate. If they all smell as good as this warlord, then the sex might not be as bad as I feared. I might even be able to forget the fact that the other women and I are nothing but breeding vessels for the children of the Qua'Hathri.

The president exchanges a few pleasantries with the blonde next to me, and then he's standing in front of me, holding out his hand. I take it, gazing into his eyes and smiling. In the resistance, I learned how to incapacitate enemies by applying targeted pressure to sensitive body parts. Even though I only use a fraction of my strength, the most powerful man in the world falls to his knees before me. That does me good, makes my heart sing with just a fraction of recompense, even if it isn't particularly smart. His bodyguards, who don't even deserve that designation, have been standing in the background and smirking, until now. Now they surround me and have their weapons trained on me. Since I'm not a Sethari, I don't have rubber-like skin that can deflect bullets. A thought flashes through my mind. Maybe dying wouldn't be so bad after all. If I died, that would nix the plans of the man who's now sweating under the strain. But if I were dead, then they would just find another woman who would have to go to the Qua'Hathri, so I let him go and take a step back. I'm still

smiling, but this time, it's a smile of pure satisfaction. He will remember me. Of that I'm certain.

Khazaar has watched all of this unfold without intervening. Do I see a smile dart across his otherwise impassable features? Only after the president has regained his feet, supported by his wife and surrounded by his concerned bodyguards, does Khazaar speak up. He steps very close to me, and I have to lean my head back to look him in the eyes. The women on my left and right shrink back in fear of the huge commander, but I force myself to stay right where I am. Even though my heart's beating much too fast, and my knees are trembling, I'm not afraid of dying. In his strange eyes, I see something like appreciation, and in the way his gaze wanders briefly over the sweating president, I recognize contempt for the man.

"Why did you do that?" His deep voice sounds pleasant and calm, almost as if he already knew the answer. Something scratches very carefully at the barrier I've built around my spirit. It feels like a polite knock, like a request for access. But I'm definitely not ready to grant anyone else access to my thoughts. Instead, I send my spirit out, just like I've learned and knock on his. For a split second, his eyes widen, and to my great surprise, he grants me access to his thoughts.

His thoughts are as foreign as his appearance. I'm too excited to feel anything more than a small part of his perceptions. Almost all of his thoughts center on conquering foreign worlds. Killing isn't what excites him. Subjugation is. I understand he spared us humans for only one single reason: we're genetically compatible. The Qua'Hathri are a race on the brink of extinction, just like the humans. He has set out to find appropriate women. Suddenly, he slams the barrier back into place, and with a jolt, I'm back in my body.

The entire episode couldn't have lasted more than a few seconds. To observers, it must have seemed like we were staring into each other's eyes too long. My mouth is dry, and I swallow. Now he knows

my secret. My gift. I curse my lack of self-control and my curiosity, but it doesn't seem like he wants to punish me for it. Quite the opposite. His interest in my gift is obvious.

At that moment, a bodyguard hits me in the back of the knees, and I fall to the ground. "Answer the lord's question right now!" he roars and makes as if to intervene again. The pain is indescribable, but even worse is the humiliation of lying on the floor in front of Khazaar.

Before I can open my mouth to yell at the coward who attacked me from behind, everything begins to happen at once. Without warning, the bodyguard's on the floor. Khazaar's foot rests on his ribcage, and I hear crunching and cracking as ribs break. The man screams, and the warlord takes his foot off of the warrior in one gentle and unbelievably elegant move. In the blink of an eye, a sharp dagger decorated with red gems, gleams at the bodyguard's throat.

Khazaar's voice is barely louder than a whisper, but literally everyone in the hall stiffens at the ice-cold tone it carries. "How dare you touch the bride of the warlord of the Qua'Hathri?" The tip of the dagger pushes into the vulnerable spot under the man's twitching Adam's apple.

"I... am sorry," the man croaks, "my Lord, I didn't know you had chosen her."

He isn't the only one.

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*I'm the bride of a warlord.*

My entire body is in turmoil. I don't know if I should be happy that he selected me as his bride, or if I should be paralyzed with fear. After all, he used the word "bride," which indicates he'll legalize our

relationship. The details of the contract between the Qua'Hathri and the humans were enshrined in secrecy. This is what we do know: for every warrior who fell in the fight against the Sethari, Khazaar demanded a woman who could bear children. We didn't know if we would be sex slaves, lovers, or wives. My hope was that scientists would artificially inseminate us. Having sex with another species was not necessarily on my list of things I absolutely wanted to accomplish before I died.

But now, the situation was different. There was complete silence inside the shuttles on the way to the spaceships. Some threw pitying glances my way. Others were obviously resentful I'd been so bold, and that the commander had paid attention to me. When we arrived at the ships, we were herded through endless hallways until we entered some kind of waiting room. There, we were divided by hair color. Each group disappeared behind a door and was received by doctors. They examined us so thoroughly, it almost felt like an insult. They stripped me of my clothes, drew my blood, examined my reproductive organs, and even checked my teeth. I felt like a cow being prepared for sale at the market. The alien who examined me was of the extremely thorough sort but was cold as a fish. He looked good, just like most of the Qua'Hathri I'd come in contact with, up until now.

Every single one of them are tall, muscular, and don't have an ounce of fat on them. I know this because they're running around their spaceship only wearing loose pants. Every man—and they're definitely men through and through; you can practically touch the testosterone in the air—proudly display their scar-riddled torsos. Since their pants are tight around the hips and loose at the bottom, everything just below the waist is definitely *not* left up to our imagination. Unless every single one of them wear padded pants, the rest of their bodies would certainly not leave any woman wanting.

I've never seen so many shades of blue at the same time. From light blue like Khazaar's skin to dark purple, every imaginable shade is represented. The color of their hair and eyes vary, too. The only thing they have in common are the scales on their skin and slit-shaped pupils. One would think that men with such colorful, iridescent skin appear like vain birds of paradise, but far from it. They actually seem exotic, but in a masculine way. Anyone who looks at the Qua'Hathri men immediately realizes they're warriors and can't be messed with.

I was implanted with a translation chip, given new clothes, and allowed to take a bath. Now I'm in the warlord's bed, waiting for his arrival and wondering what will happen to me. I think my actions on Earth have used up all of my energy, because I've never felt this tired in my entire life. My eyes grow heavy, even though the uncertainty of my future should be robbing me of sleep. It's impossible for me to stay awake in this luxurious bed. The soft pillows and heavy blanket are too seductive. I close my eyes.

When I wake up, *he* is standing by the bed, staring at me.

Immediately, I'm wide awake.

His gaze is hard to bear, so I quickly look elsewhere. I shouldn't have done that because my gaze travels to his pants—and stays there. I can't turn away.

Khazaar is wearing the same kind of pants, but his are made of dark fabric interwoven with red. The material appears expensive, but that's not what's drawing my attention. I feel the heat rise in my face and pull the blanket up to my neck. "I fell asleep." I state the obvious and wonder how apologetic my tone must sound. Instead of asking the one question that's weighing heaviest on my mind, I'm making conversation. Next, I think I'll ask him how the weather is out in space so I won't have to hold his unnerving gaze any longer.

"Get up," he says, and I flinch. His harsh tone awakens bad memories—ones I don't want to remember. I feel my body tensing,

and everything inside me switches to resistance. I stare at him defiantly and shake my head.

“No.”

That one word is enough to make his beautifully arched eyebrows move. They pull together into a perfect “V.” His lips twitch momentarily, and for a second, I wonder what it would be like to feel them on my own. Then I tell myself to snap out of it. Why do my hormones dance every time he’s near me? The color of his eyes changes from gold to a fiery orange-red, and the scales on his body extend slightly. The faint crackling sound of his scales burn right through me. I’d almost forgotten he isn’t human, but that sound forcefully reminds me of his origin. I’m relieved I didn’t irritate him to the point where his spikes rise on his back.

He moves closer to the bed and sits on the edge. The mattress creaks under his weight, which makes me blush even more. I’m glad there’s no mirror in here. I would hate to see myself right now.

“Cassie Burnett.” My name drips from his mouth like honey. His scent surrounds me again, and I notice my pulse has calmed. “There is no reason for you to hide yourself from me. You belong to me now.”

“I don’t belong to anyone,” I hiss, and shake off the numbness his scent has spread through me. “I’m not here of my own free will, as I’m sure you know.”

He stares at me in astonishment. “Your president told us something quite different.” His eyes darken. “He assured me each and every one of you considered it an honor to bear children of the Qua’Hathri, and to serve the human race.” He sighs softly. “Well, your president is a cowardly, pompous scumbag, and I should have known better. But now that you’re here ...” The wonderful smell of milk and honey wafts over me. I’m certain he’s purposefully using his scent to lull me into submission.

“That’s not how it works.” I glance around the room, but like



magic, my gaze is drawn back to Khazaar. I can't forget I'm his prisoner, even if he does call me his "bride." I need him to stop with this manipulation; otherwise it won't be long before I'll have no idea which feelings are mine, and which ones he's creating inside me on purpose. While he's definitely handsome, he's still a manipulative alien. I gather all of my courage and look at his beautiful, chiseled face. The keen intelligence in his eyes doesn't make it any easier to talk to him. Or maybe it does? It's worth a try. I inhale deeply. "You want a child from me," I start, but he interrupts immediately.

"Who said *want*?" he growls with a voice that gives me goosebumps. I need a few seconds to process what I just heard. Then it clicks. He doesn't want me at all? I'm relieved, but it's mixed with a familiar feeling of rejection.

I raise my eyebrows in concern, my voice laced with curiosity. "Then what am I doing here?"

He sighs again, this time with a definite tone of impatience. "What do you mean, *here*? Here in my quarters, up here on the ship, here with the Qua'Hathri? Why do you humans always have to express yourselves so vaguely? Please try to ask questions with more precision."

Instead of a heart, he must have a machine in his chest. He sounds as dry as a bookkeeper.

I rephrase my question. "I mean, why did you offer your help in exchange for me and the other women if you don't want me?"

He nods approvingly. "The Qua'Hathri are going extinct." He's silent and looks at me expectantly, as if those words were enough to explain everything.

Now it's my turn to sigh impatiently, and I let him feel my annoyance. "Why don't you search for women who will voluntarily create offspring with you?"

"No woman would voluntarily go with warriors like the

Qua'Hathri." He furrows his brow. "We tried that a few times, but none of them stayed long enough to fulfill their purpose. When our researchers told us humans were genetically compatible, I decided to try for a trade agreement. A life for a life."

The number of women on board equals exactly the number of fallen warriors. That's the deal the president made with the Qua'Hathri.

I stare at him with a quizzical expression. "The thought didn't occur to you that we might have a problem with that?"

"Your supreme ruler, the one you call President, said nothing of the sort. It doesn't matter to us what you want. You are contractually obliged to stay with us."

I snort scornfully. He seems almost human to me, in the way he's sitting on the edge of the bed, explaining his world in which combativeness and conquering rage are more important than anything else. The men on Earth aren't much different. For them, it's mostly about possession and conquest. They just know how to feign love better, that's all. This cool commander, my bridegroom, has no idea how to do that.

For a second, I wonder if I wouldn't be better off on Earth after all. Even before the arrival of the Sethari in the year 3916, things weren't looking good for us. Plagues and pollution had forced humanity to its knees, but after the Sethari arrived, we were in danger of total extinction. What do I have to lose by traveling with this alien to his home? I buried my last relative five years ago, and our supreme ruler—the title almost makes me laugh—would not welcome me back with open arms. I would be lucky if all he did was throw me in jail, instead of giving me a lethal injection for embarrassing and attacking the head of state. So, thanks, but no thanks.

"Why did you choose me out of all the others?" This is a question I just have to ask.

“I didn’t,” he replies. “Our computer chose you as the woman who is most compatible with my genes, and with whom I have a ninety-seven percent chance of being successful.” It goes without saying he’s not talking about a successful marriage, but about the successful production of children. “I had already received your genetic profile, I recognized you, and accepted responsibility for you. When that soldier hurt you, I protected my property.” He’s fixated on a spot right above my head, and his scales rustle softly. This gives me a little confidence.

I sit up and square my shoulders. “You can forget the ownership part,” I explain with a firm voice. At least, I hope it sounds firm. “What do you mean, anyway, that you don’t want to? Nobody is forcing you to have sex with me. Definitely not me.” I can’t help myself. I just want to know if he finds me repulsive, or if he just doesn’t want a wife and child—period.

“As the war lord of the Qua’Hathri, I need to lead by example.” He moves in a little closer.

I raise my index finger in warning, even though I feel slightly ridiculous doing so. “No manipulations.” I look into his golden-yellow eyes. If only he would turn on the charm a little ...

“I could force you,” he says with a casual tone I don’t like at all. As if to prove his point, he swings himself up on the bed in one fluid motion and squeezes me between his thighs. His scent robs me of my senses. This time, he doesn’t knock politely. Before I have a chance to raise my barriers, he’s all the way in my head. He shows me images so intense that I can’t tell the difference between reality and imagination anymore. I see myself through his eyes. I’m small and much too thin to really grab his attention.

He’s on top of me, brushing his tongue lightly against my lips, and I feel his heat. His scales are lying flush against his skin, and there aren’t many differences between him and a human man. A small

moan escapes my lips, and I notice my body has taken on a life of its own. Sensually, my hips move against him.

Then, with a jolt, he releases me from his mental hold, and I'm back in reality. My chest rises and falls under the thin nightshirt.

"You see, I would make it easy for you," he says nonchalantly, but I shake my head defiantly. I'm happy he isn't forcing me to do his will, but if he has that kind of power, why isn't he using it? When I ask him, he raises his eyebrows. "Why should I?" He sounds genuinely surprised. "I am Khazaar Drasurq. I don't need to take women against their will. If you don't want me, I release you from my services. I will find a woman who will gladly welcome me in her bed, and who will give me healthy children." He stands up, and I notice again how tall he is. "I will tell the researchers that, contrary to their prognosis, we are not compatible. You can live with the other women until you have found the right partner." Cool and composed, he glances at me, and then he leaves his quarters. Just like that.

I was the bride of an alien warlord.

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*All hell is breaking loose in the women's quarters.*

We're still sorted by hair color, and I'm in a huge sleeping hall with about sixty other blondes. None of them are over forty, and they all appear strong and healthy. My entrance has caused a commotion, and I have to answer many questions. After four hours of cross-examination, things finally calm down. I answered their questions, at least as best I could, because I could see the tension in their faces—fear of the unknown. The more they knew about the Qua'Hathri, the easier it would be for them to come to terms with their fate.

My bed isn't nearly as comfortable as the one in Khazaar's quar-

ters, and I restlessly toss and turn all night. Several women cry and moan in their sleep. I stare at the ceiling and wonder if I made a mistake in rejecting Khazaar. Not because my situation is uncomfortable now, but because I missed an opportunity to get answers.

The spark of an unknown emotion wells up inside me, and I feel the sting of tears hit my eyes. The image in which he'd let me see myself through his eyes rises before me. My body feels unusually soft and small to him, my face with the bright eyes that betray any emotion.

I wonder why I didn't investigate what he was thinking more closely. I answer my question almost immediately. Because the experience was too close, too raw and too in-my-face. I definitely hadn't had the time to discover his feelings. I'd been too busy dealing with the strange experience. Usually it's me who's traveling in someone else's mind—*not* the other way around.

Down on Earth, there weren't many like me, and I'd always tried to keep my gift a secret. In any case, it drains your strength to put yourself in another person's head, because the feelings and thoughts you encounter there are raw and unfiltered. Being able to read thoughts is a secret I didn't even use in the resistance against the Sethari.

Do I dare go one step further? Because what I've never said and never even admitted to myself is something else entirely. I'm not only able to read minds and recognize the feelings of other beings, I can also travel in their thoughts.

Now would be the perfect time to secretly look around unobserved. Do I dare?

I close my eyes and take a deep breath in and out as I relax my body. It's not really easy to forget everything that's stressful in a situation like this, but after a while, I manage. I hear the barely audible

buzzing of the solar engine and feel how my thoughts separate from my body.

In this dream-like state, I begin to wander through the spaceship. The longer I'm in my bodyless state, the more I feel free, although it takes a lot of strength. I explore the corridors, listen to conversations in other chambers without anyone seeing me in my disembodied form. The quarters of the red-haired and dark-haired women look the same as ours.

I venture a few steps further into the belly of the ship. Where are Khazaar's quarters? Should I dare? I imagine his face, hear his voice, and let myself be drawn to him. It can't be far away—I feel the pull that emanates from him like a touch and overcome the distance much quicker than I could on my own feet.

It must be here. Behind this door, he's lying in a restless sleep.

I step through the door to his room and look at him resting on his bed.

He's lying on his stomach. The covers have slid down to his knees, revealing his chiseled body. I can see every defined muscle in his back and feel an overwhelming desire to lie down next to him. When I'm invisible like this, I have the freedom to really be who I am. As if attracted by a magnet, I slip under the covers and enjoy the fact that his scent envelops me once again. He really does smell delicious. Carefully, I breathe the area between his ear and neck, and inhale his scent deep into my lungs. Now I can also touch his hair, and it's just as silky as it appears. His hair tumbles to his shoulders in messy waves. His nostrils flare and his eyelids twitch. He's dreaming, and he seems so vulnerable, it almost breaks my heart.

I don't know a single human who can prevent another from entering his thoughts while dreaming. Should I try it? I would love to know what a Qua'Hathri dreams about.

At that very moment, he opens his eyes.

*End of the Reading Sample.*

Full-Length Alien Alpha Romance Novel. 225 Pages. Warning:  
Intended for mature audiences only.

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“The Captive is not the typical sci-fi romance you read where the characters meet and the whole story revolves around them having sex and fighting with each other just to make up at the end and live happily ever after with two kids who’s names you can’t even pronounce. No, this book has men with hope, monsters with reasons and a girl with a heart.... this books has a **STORYLINE.**” -*Amazon Reviewer*

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## **Paranormal Romance Novel:**

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Ash is a hunter whose human skin conceals a predator within. In his chest beats the heart of a mountain lion, fearless and loyal. When Ash comes to New York to hunt down the man who threatens his clan, he knows his opponent's beautiful daughter Hope is his only weakness. But the last thing he expects happens. Hope awakens the mountain lion lurking beneath his human skin and revives feelings in his human heart that Ash long thought he had forgotten...

More info and excerpt on Jenny's website. Amazon.

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## Sci-Fi Romance Novels:

*Betania Breed Series*



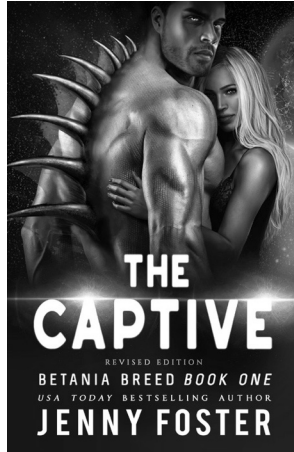
### **The Beast**

*Betania Breed Prequel*

Ar'Van is the most ruthless hunter in the entire universe. His newest mission is to deliver human females to his warlord. During the assignment, a woman awakens his interest: Mia. Usually, he would be able to handle that easily, but the beast inside him—that he was sure he had tamed a long time ago—claims the human for itself...

More info and excerpt on Jenny's website. Listening sample on Bookfunnel. Amazon.

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## **The Captive (Revised Edition)**

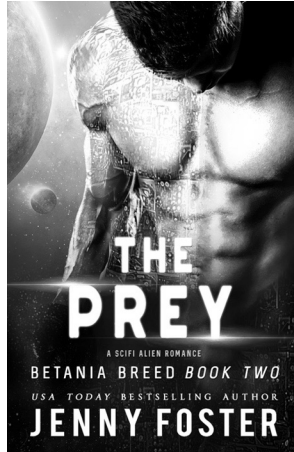
*Betania Breed Book I*

I am one of the few people who hasn't given up the fight against the Sethari yet. I would rather die than surrender to the aliens who have enslaved us humans for more than one hundred years. Then the unthinkable happens: I am awarded to the leader of the aliens, so I can bear him healthy, viable children. I am prepared for anything, except this one thing—that this merciless warrior, with his strange eyes and sharp spikes, would awaken feelings in me...

More info and excerpt on Jenny's website.

Listening sample on Bookfunnel (Original 2018 Release). Audible.

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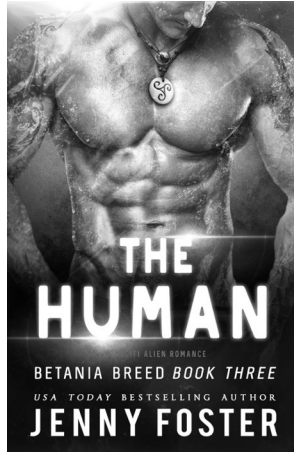
## **The Prey**

### *Betania Breed Book II*

Mara: I am given a special assignment. I am supposed to find a woman who plays an important role in humankind's fight for survival. That wouldn't be a problem, except that my father insists that Johar accompany me. He's a cyborg my father created. Johar is stubborn. He pushes me to the verge of insanity with his superior ways. But worst of all, he seems like more than a machine to me...

More info and excerpt on Jenny's website. Listening sample on Bookfunnel. Amazon.

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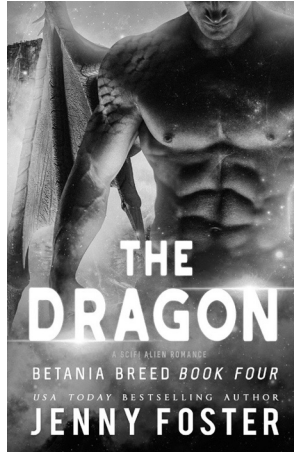
## **The Human**

*Betania Breed Book III*

I was the mightiest warlord of my people, until I dared to contradict my king. Instead of granting me an honorable death in the fight against our enemies, he made me his chamberlain instead. His newest conquest is from Earth. He won her in a poker game, and I am supposed to deliver her safely to his bed. An easy assignment for someone like me. That's what I thought, anyway, until this human woman awakens the predator lurking under my skin...

More info and excerpt on Jenny's website. Listening sample on Bookfunnel. Amazon.

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## **The Dragon**

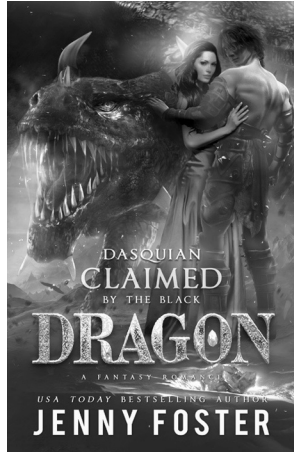
*Betania Breed Book IV*

I am a member of the Black Squad, a special unit that deals with the most dangerous criminals in the universe. Only the best are chosen. I am one of them. My scale-covered skin, adaptability, and fighting strength makes me an emotionless and superior fighter. My new mission leads me to Dassuria where I'm to go undercover to pursue a dangerous dragon lord. At the center of my investigation is a woman who has a lot to hide—but despite her entanglement with the dragon lord, I can't get her out of my head...

More info and excerpt on Jenny's website. Listening sample on Bookfunnel. Amazon.

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**Fantasy Romance Novel:**



## **Dasquian – Claimed by the Black Dragon**

One hundred chosen dragons are awaiting the arrival of their human female companions. I am one of them. As she stands before me, I know that nobody will come between us—be it the dangerous king, a vengeful goddess, or the black creature that was awakened deep within me...

More info and excerpt on Jenny's website. Listening sample on Bookfunnel. Amazon.

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THE AUTHOR\_



Hello,

I am Jenny Foster.

Ever since I can remember, I have loved to write. These days, I concentrate mostly on romantic fantasy stories and sci-fi novels.

Sometimes I still shake my head at myself. Me and sci-fi? “Never,” I would have said, even just a few years ago. I am much too caught up in the here and now for that. Thinking about how big the universe is, and how small we are in comparison, leaves me awestruck. Just the idea of black holes gives me nightmares, especially when I consider the possibility of being swallowed up by one. And yet – something about the idea of aliens just wouldn’t let me go.

And that is how the idea of my first alien novel with an extra-terrestrial was born. It doesn’t matter that this first try is still in the bottom of a drawer, and that it definitely should stay there. Now I am able to develop my aliens into characters that speak to my romantic side: men who just happen to come from a distant galaxy, but who are also as loveable, crazy and passionate as I want them to be (and you, too!)

My other passion in writing is for the creatures who live at the edge of our world. Werewolves, panther shifters and possibly vampires – all of them fascinate me. So, I try to capture them with the

help of my keyboard and bring them to life. However, I gave up trying to tame them a long time ago.

Other than writing, I am passionate about two things: reading and my dog. Sometimes I also bake in order to relax. But I would much rather dive into strange worlds. It never ceases to amaze me how many strange worlds are snoozing in our heads, and I look forward to every book that makes me lose track of time.

My dog makes sure that I don't spend all day in front of my laptop or with my head buried in a book. My day begins and ends with the little black rascal, who also lets me know if I have been writing for too long. Without this clown, my apartment would definitely be cleaner, but I would probably weigh 40 pounds more and wouldn't laugh at least once a day.

Thank you for taking the time to find out more about me. I am most grateful for your support. Big thanks to my ARC readers! You all know who you are.

Lastly, I would like to invite you to sign up for my newsletter. You can unsubscribe any time you want, of course, and I will never pass your information on to others, nor will I ever send you any spam. Instead, you will receive a lot of news about alien men, thrilling fantasy stories and crackling romance novels.

I can't wait to see you there!

Sincerely,

Jenny Foster

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The Alien Mail-Order Bride;

A Sci-Fi Fantasy Romance Short Story;

by Jenny Foster

[www.jenny-foster.com](http://www.jenny-foster.com)

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