Regalia

by Aladayle

Summary

You're a rare breed of saiyan: an assassin. You are calm, professional--and you're used to putting on masks to get to your target. However, your latest will be the most difficult you've yet faced in your career. If you are smart and quick on your feet, you may just get to the end of this in one piece.

But despite your best efforts, the intrigues of the Cold family court are never avoided for very long.

Once you're in, you're in for life. As an assassin, as a soldier...as a lady.
"Lord Cooler, you wished to see me?"

Your eyes went over his posture like clockwork, like you always did when meeting someone intending to hire you. Stood straight--holds himself in high regard, strict personal code. Arms crossed, eyes narrow, annoyance at having to be here--no, annoyance at being kept waiting. Apology, what can I do for you, put at ease.

"I'm sorry for the wait." Pause for effect, wait for snarky remark.

"Yes. Well, I could've been forgotten here and found out, and then it would've been your fault."


"To whose existence do I owe your presence here?"

"I'm sure you can guess."

Mind game. Wants me to say it first, so he can feel as if it is my idea. Guilt? No. Hesitation to act. Careful. Methodical.

"In my line of work, my lord, I prefer not to guess."

"You're an intelligent woman, then." Cooler paused, "My brother, Frieza, is your target."

You nodded. "Difficult. But not impossible. Physically untouchable, it would be a suicide mission, and we discourage those. But you, of course, have already thought of that."

He nodded, and went on with a wry sort of smile. "Ironic that you should say he is untouchable."

"That is my in, then, as we in the business would say," you replied, "He is looking for a blanket, is he?"

"Certainly." Cooler drew up an odd-looking device you couldn't place for a minute, it looked almost like a mechanical pen. Click, inhale...exhale smoke?

Ah, yes, a vapor device. Wishes to avoid the health ramifications of smoking, yet wants the relaxation. Moving on.

"Is there a certain time frame you wish this to be completed in?" Professional, put client at ease by looking and sounding competent and confident.

"It does not much matter to me when it is done by. It will likely take some time for you to gain enough of his trust so as to have the opportunity. However, there is also the risk of his getting bored of you, so I would say the timetable for ideal chance is somewhere between one and two years. You may have possibly longer than that to work if you cater to his..." here Cooler wrinkled his nose before taking another deep inhale from the vaping device, and didn't speak again until he'd exhaled, "...bizarre power fetish."

Brief statement to acknowledge receipt of information, otherwise ignore statement. Clear
discomfort, feign ignorance.

"We were not under the impression that he cared much for blankets, but I am confident this will not be an issue."

"Do you know why he is the favorite?" Cooler asked.

"His strength?"

"It's..." another inhale. There was then a sudden scent of strawberries and lime as the cloud about him drifted in your direction.

He prefers fruity flavors. Doesn't indulge in sweets very often. Reaffirmed earlier hypothesis that he is very strait-laced.

Sometimes you wondered why this analyzing seemed to happen almost constantly, but then you'd remember the extensive study you'd done during your apprenticeship. Any detail could be the thing that helps you eliminate the target, any little discovered habit could help. You'd been doing it so long you had notes on just about everyone, and it had become a hobby of sorts.

Another cloud of vapor started to form around him as he exhaled. "...it's because he's just like my father. Now, the agreed-upon amount has already been placed in your account. Are there any more questions?"

"None, my lord. You've given me everything that I need."

This job had you excited, raring to go.

Immortality in life was one thing, but immortality after death was quite another. You would succeed, and everyone would remember you as the woman who took down the most infamous intergalactic ruler...and they'd remember it long after you died. Who cared if you'd have to use poison? A clean kill was still a clean kill. The problem would be getting it onto the ship, but that wouldn't come until later and there was no point in fretting over it.

You applied for and received a job in Frieza's army, specifically on board his main ship (thanks, of course, to Cooler's connections) under the name "Lima." As you were changing into your new underarmor suit you were mulling over what you'd been told about Frieza's preferences.

Legs. He was a definite fan of a woman with nice legs, you thought, as you finished getting on the underarmor suit before pulling on your armor as well. Your legs were exposed; the suit you'd been given was of the variation that put one in mind of a one-piece bathing suit with attached sleeves. If he liked them that much, then this was sure to rile him up.

Not that it disgusted you--a job was a job, and you did what it took to get it done.

The second thing you found was that he seemed to have taken a liking to keeping saiyan women around for his needs. Aside from being warm, they tended to have sexual appetites close to or (in the case of the last one he'd had) equal to his. He'd gone through seven or eight of them by now and you'd actually spoken to one--quite by accident, of course. It wasn't YOUR fault, was it, that the news of your taking this position in his army had gotten out, now was it? You'd asked if he'd make any moves when she stopped to 'congratulate' you. She laughed and said that it was a matter not of if, but when.

You told yourself you were not to show first interest; you were to let him do it first. To do
otherwise might cause problems. He'd not let on about it, but you knew he'd probably wonder about it if you outright went after him. Maybe he'd mentally settle at first for his reputation preceding him, and later move to doubts about your real motives; that was the last thing you needed.

Your research had revealed that he also liked to be surprised with his next blanket. Once his preference got out, he'd be "sent" a woman shortly after he got bored of the last one; though she'd be merely "sent" in the sense that she was, like you, put on the ship as an average soldier. After that, they'd wait; and he'd make a move.

It was easy to figure out why; female saiyans were strong but not strong enough to be a threat to him; they tended to not be afraid of him--and it was through this they provoked him into taking the control he desperately craved over everything. Most importantly, it kept them in the place he thought they should be: beneath him, literally and figuratively.

Megalomaniacal, arrogant, but very careful, you thought. Oh yes. This would definitely be the target of a lifetime.
You hate even thinking the word, but you have to take a risk.

Work was...work.

Your job aboard the ship basically equated to guard duty, and occasionally, dealing with drunks in the ship bar. (Privately you thought that your becoming his blanket must be expected and they didn't want to rely on you for something important only to have Frieza monopolize all your time later...a good move, you thought). Now and again you found yourself astonished that it was big enough to have one. Most of them were fairly easy to figure out. They didn't like being there but they did it and lived for "the weekend" as some people might put it.

Frieza, though...

You'd waited, like you told yourself was wise, but nothing had happened.

And it had been three weeks.

He'd gone by you a time or two in the corridors, but had given you no more than a sideways glance each time. You thought of these as you noted him coming up the hallway yet again, and determined yourself to observe everything you possibly could about his behavior. Any little thing could be helpful, after all.

A forward-looking glance, a slight glare in his eyes...he was either angry about something or extremely focused, but there was little to go on elsewhere. Wait--there was something. A twitch in the tip of his tail.

He wasn't angry. He was irritated. Which for him, readily progressed in a rapid way.

You made a slight bow as he passed, but he made no reply and in fact did not even look at you.

This was not progressing at all the way you'd thought. True, you hadn't expected to do this overnight. The year or so Cooler had given you was what you used as a base as to the minimum of how long it would take for you to get the opportunity. But you had thought that by now Frieza would at least have...

Well, at the very least, you would be seeing him later in the afternoon.

Of late, you'd been told, Frieza had been personally aiding in breaking in some new personnel on board, by giving what he called "training demonstrations." It sounded interesting enough, but you gathered that he had the inclination to beat a few heads in and see who was worth keeping and who wasn't. It was a roundabout way to go about the process in your opinion, but yours was of course not the view that mattered.
The minion dodged, but a second later was struck across the face. He tried to strike, but Frieza knocked him back. Then there was a kick, a ki blast, both of which missed--horribly.

He'd done better than the last few, at least.

Frieza, on the other hand...his abilities were more than impressive. He was quick, and the force behind--

You shook your head as the minion fell to the floor.

"Those of you who aren't prepared to take a hit like that can resign your commissions now," Frieza said. His posture changed as he landed--his hands moved behind his back, fists touching. Standing straight. Wanting to look taller, and if not taller, then at least more official and intimidating. And that look on his face, it was serious and amused all at once. Perhaps he just wanted to scare off the cowards.

None of the others moved, although you were reasonably certain there'd be a few...terminal resignations.

One did not leave this army, after all.

"I feel like one more will do the trick," he said suddenly, "Do I have any more volunteers?"

Much as you hated to do it, you knew that you had to, if for no other reason than to engage his attention. Even a few minutes would buy you some time.

You stepped forward.

"Ah. The new monkey. Lima, wasn't it?"

Insult. Wanted to let you know your place. The usual fare with him.

"Are you sure?" he asked. The smirk on his face was unreadable--it didn't reach his eyes. There was no other movement in his body. No tilt to the head, no wave of the tail...

He wasn't giving you a damn thing.

"I am," you replied evenly.

"Go."

You leapt at him, but he reached up and stopped you mid-flight. His hand clenched around your fist.

"You're too slow."

You drew back, feigning outrage at the sudden smirk on his face, the impish elation in his eyes, then moved into a rapid series of kicks. The fight sped up after that, and your heart was racing as he deflected each blow you sent his way.

He seemed pleased. Good. Good, this was working. This must have been his intention.

Frieza simply took your next round of attacks--punches--and deflected them while keeping his eyes firmly on your face. It was...uncomfortable, to say the least.

Watching for weakness, no doubt. Wants to see if you break down. Intending to start his offensive
When he started to move, you saw it coming and dodged, then kicked him in the shoulder. He turned back--
--and chuckled.
Gloating. Or was he happy about this? You stopped, because clearly he had something to say.
"You seem determined to get everything you can out of this fight."
"I am," you replied, giving him your own smirk, this one defiant, "I had to see it for myself."
Tail momentarily twitched.
You had a live one.
"Had to see what, exactly?" Frieza's head had tilted forward ever-so-slightly. Interest.
"Your power, in person."
A half-grin.
"I had heard of your strength, of course," you went on, not daring to look away from him, "The other saiyans talk of you often."
"And what do they say?"
"That you are a challenge beyond compare."
He floated off the ground, and you went up, up, nearly to the ceiling to follow him, fist clenched. His hands were once more behind his back. Kick, or tail strike...the trouble was, you couldn't see which was more likely.
"And what have you observed thus far?"
Smugness was dripping from every word. This was the moment, this was what you'd been waiting for--your in.
"Why should I tell you?"
His eyes narrowed and a devious smile danced across his face.
Success. Pain incoming, prepare for--
His fist met your jaw and an explosion of pain radiated around your face. You struck back at him, but he blocked it, and dealt you another blow in the same place. You fell back and would have hit the ground if Frieza hadn't darted forward and grabbed you by the ankle.
"Because if you don't, my demonstration may turn very painful for you."
"Then do it," you challenged. It was almost painful, speaking like this, but you were running on a hunch here. Either he would act as you suspected, or you would get beaten down and made a bit stronger in the end. Either way, you would be benefiting from this little exercise.
"So eager," he said, slowly descending.
Your jaw throbbed as you gave the next reply. "Either fight me or not. Enough of this showboating."

Tail waving, eyes virtually glittering.

Jackpot.

"I will do as I please," Frieza replied. His grip suddenly loosened and you fell twenty feet square onto your face. Blood spattered a bit and began to run from your nose. You turned over, but before you could sit up, he landed next to you and placed one foot directly on your knee.

He looked up at your face, and then to the small crowd watching.

"Something you all should learn," he said, "I enjoy a challenge as much as any other. What I cannot bear is a smart mouth."

Crunch.

You grunted slightly as the pressure on your knee grew unbearable--and broke as Frieza raised his leg and stomped on your knee, the resounding crack of which had half those watching cringing. You gave a cry of pain and saw his face light up, his lips curl, you could almost feel the satisfaction he got from hearing it...

"Pain doesn't scare me." You looked up at him. Crossed arms, smirking back...he was enjoying himself.

It didn't matter that something was broken, what mattered was that you'd gotten through. You'd focused his attentions squarely on yourself.

"Good." He looked up and to the watching minions, "This session is over. I think you all understand now. Those wishing to resign, see me later."

You struggled to your feet, aided only slightly by flight, as the rest filed out. Frieza remained, and as you were heading for the door, he spoke one last time.

"You have a gift for defiance."

"Thank you."

"That was not a compliment. I expect obedience."

Really, you wanted to ask, then why do you look like the cat who ate the canary?

"Blind obedience is no fun for anyone," you replied.

"Speak in that tone to me again and I will show you exactly--"

"Then do it."

It was a horrible risk. You'd been doing so well, but you wanted to be sure of this. Privately you were shaming yourself for being so reckless. What if he decided just to outright kill you? What would you do then?

He seemed startled.

Breathe, you told yourself, as you went out the doorway and heard the door whoosh shut behind
you. That was the key. You had to remain calm here.

For the first time in a long time you were scared. But the seconds ticked by, and as you entered the medical bay he still hadn't shown up.

It was, you decided, a tentative victory.
In Black and Red

Chapter Summary

You see your chance...and go for it.

In Black and Red

A month passed in relative calm. Frieza made no moves on you, although he did seem to pass by you in the hall quite frequently.

You knew you were making progress, but it was more in the sense of nothing bad having happened rather than anything good happening. He had not sent you away or killed you, therefore you knew he was tolerating you.

You went back to your plotting.

The previous pattern had been for him to make a move. But perhaps, you thought--as you had before--that he had decided to change up the routine. It pissed you off when targets did this--the patterns, schedules, likes, dislikes, that had for so long been the same, suddenly changing.

And what was worse was that despite your best efforts, you never noticed more than little things in Frieza's general person. A slight narrow of the eyes indicating the impending doom of a minion, a smirk to indicate his pleasure at something...they were such bare clues! You'd taken down nobleman before, and while some of them had made a practice of hiding their tells, of trying to be sure that their bodies did not betray their emotional states, there was nearly always something.

But with Frieza...

...he was practically unreadable. But then, you had had this conversation with yourself several times before. It would do you no good to muse on how thoroughly he was evading your scrutiny. That would lead to frustration, then to sloppy thinking, and then to a fatal error.

Your mentor had been a firm believer in expecting the absolute worst, and preparing for it when possible. You tried to be more optimistic, but in this line of work such an attitude was difficult to maintain.

You didn't want a fatal error.

A few days later, after the ship had stopped at a station to collect some soldiers and let others off for leave, you got the news through gossip that Frieza had invited one of the station's escorts ("Escort my ass, he hired a whore" had been what you were told) to his quarters later in the evening.

You simply...made certain she would not be there--not by killing her, of course. That sort of thing lead to talk. No, you simply bribed her; as it turned out she was not at all eager to submit herself to the demands of Lord Frieza. His reputation, she told you, preceded him. It wasn't that he wasn't a good lover, he was just rough.
You'd laughed, and bid her adieu.

Then you began to prepare.

You'd weaseled your way into guarding his quarter doors that evening, thanks to the offer of a bottle of particularly strong booze to the minion who had been there. And then, as the evening wore on (and his usual time for coming back approached), you entered, composing what you'd say.

Not everything here had to be perfect, but it was best to--

The doors opened and closed. You took a deep breath.

"I don't recall ordering that you be here."

Frieza's voice was even. Calm. You turned towards him to find that his expression was, frustratingly, the same.

"The idiot at the door was gone. I was checking to be sure that no one had tampered with anything in here." You used a professional tone and bowed briefly once you were done speaking.

Nothing.

"And everything is fine."

You nodded and headed for the door--but before you could get there, he asked in a somewhat more sharp tone, "Where is she?"

"Where is who?"

"Don't play games with me, monkey." His tone was more dangerous now, but there was something about his eyes. They seemed to be searching over you. Maybe...? "You were seen speaking to her."

"She asked about you, and I told her that I knew nothing. That's all."

He was angry, but you weren't dead.

"Really...and yet, she isn't here. I don't think a woman would do something so foolish if there weren't some influence at work."

His back was turned, so you watched his tail. Nothing.

"You know," he said a second later, "I do not appreciate being studied like a museum exhibit."

You contrived to look confused. "Excuse me?"

Frieza turned towards you with an iron glare, "And I don't think much of those who get in the way of what I am after."

"Everyone already knows this."

"Everyone, you say...and yet, here you are, and here she isn't." He began to walk towards you. "Either you have a death wish, or..."

"Or what?"

"...or you are making a very bold move."
"It's funny how you're making all these assumptions," you replied.

Time to put Plan A into action.

You huffed and headed for the door--and were nearly there when you felt a hand on your tail. Then a squeeze.

"It's trained," you said, twitching the end of it, "No pain at all."

His grip got tighter, and you felt a sudden whisper in your left ear. "I think we can dispense with the game now."

"What game?" you narrowed your eyes and looked back suspiciously at him.

"You must know why you're here. You applied for it."

"I don't recall doing any such thing." You tried to tug away, but Frieza wouldn't let you go. "The pay is better here than on one of the planet stations, is it a crime to like money?"

There was a dark chuckle.

You struggled again, but found yourself pressed against the door.

"Defy me any further and I'll rip it out." He seemed confident that you wouldn't, but nonetheless your right arm was tugged uncomfortably behind your back.

"What are you doing?" You were faking the outrage, but inwardly rejoicing. This was your in. You were in.

And judging from the bulge you were feeling from Frieza's southern region, he soon would be as well.

You shifted between the door, and him, and for a second he drew back. Was he going to--?

There was a distinct lack of touch for just a second, but that was all you needed to bolt. Not out of the room, of course, but across it. The door was hardly a suitable place for what he was obviously planning anyway.

Frieza was after you immediately afterward, and you could hear him laugh when you rushed through the only open door and into--his bedroom.

"If you wanted inside," he said, suddenly behind you again, "You could've asked."

You turned to face him, and for a brief instant, you have everything you need written all over his face. He's looking very pleased, with himself if the smirk is any indication. There's a wicked glint in his eyes, too; the look of one who expects to get what they want in the immediate future, one way or another. His eyes were narrowing, and--

"What did I say about being studied, monkey?"

There was amusement, laced with malice.

"I don't c--"

Frieza struck you across the face and you stumbled, disoriented just long enough for him to shove you against the bed and push your face down into the sheets.
Your nose was bleeding profusely and leaving a slowly growing mess on the sheets, but there were other things to think about. Frieza had tugged the bottom half of your underarmor suit down just far enough to get at what he wanted.

"I wanted company tonight," he said, leaning over you, "And seeing as how you ran her off, I'll have to make do with you."

You struggled, but he wasn't letting you up.

And a second later you groaned as he pushed hard, fast--and into you, dry as a bone.

"Get--off me--"

He didn't respond, and indeed didn't seem to care that you weren't ready in the first place. He must really like women who resist--no, what he liked was forcing women who resisted. Like you'd been told. He liked breaking them in, making them want it, making--

The thrusting was doing you no good at all, but for him...

There were little groans as he continued the steady assault, and you added in little ones of your own. If nothing else, the sound of reluctant pleasure might...

Nope. He didn't respond to the sound at all. How desperate was he to get some if he was this closed-off?

After several minutes, the ache receded; the act had gotten you ready.

If anything Frieza only moved into and out of you even faster. There were no jeers about enjoying yourself, there was no taunting, there was just rough thrusting, driving into you deeply and receding again.

Then you felt his hand on your tail again. There was no pleasure, or pain, really, but there's a definite feeling of pressure. He's pulled at it, almost as if using it like a rein.

"Stop--"

No answer.

Nails were dug into the side of your head as the grip of Frieza's other hand on your hair began to tighten even further. Pain blossomed from the area and you forced out a few whimpers.

Increased pace. He liked that. He liked your pain.

And so, as you listened to his breathing behind you, you could tell the end was near. His pace became absolutely unbearable, and for a scant few seconds you begin to feel the first steps of your own climb.

A climb which, ultimately, was denied.

You felt him tighten and seize within you, releasing a flood of liquid heat...and that was that.

It was over.

Frieza withdrew from you, and stepped back to watch you adjust your underarmor suit, not bothering to replace his own; clearly he'd meant to sleep once this was over.
And despite all the ringing pain in your head and lower back, and the tingle of unsatisfactory sex...you'd never felt so secure. You'd gotten in.

He was as good as dead.
You're sent back to Planet Vegeta for a brief period, with promises of being recalled shortly.

I know, I know, it's a little fast after the last chapter. But I had a sudden bit of inspiration. >_<

What was immediately clear was that Frieza was a selfish lover.

After that first time, he seemed to show interest every other night or so, and each time he wouldn't even bother getting you ready before going in for his own pleasure. You learned quickly to lube up before going to his quarters.

But that, of course, was when Frieza actually summoned you. He also liked to ambush you in other places, and very quickly you found yourself noting closely how much of a fetish he seemed to have for forcing the sex. Perhaps that was why women tended to be dropped after awhile? They'd started to cooperate more with it, and...hrm. But no, he would keep them for slightly longer periods of time. Maybe he enjoyed cooperation, but not as much as resistance.

If he grew bored after a while such as in the case of the woman beginning to give in, or if she happened to simply enjoy that kind of sex, then you knew you couldn't let that happen.

So you continued to fight him, and continued to find yourself exploited, bent over his bed or in his bathroom or any number of private places he deemed suitable for "teaching you your place."

The odd thing about all of this was, when Frieza was not making use of you, he was actually reasonably cordial, and dispensed a favor or two here and there. You had orders, and he treated you like any other soldier...until he didn't, and then you were back to being a grunt to order around again. But a grunt who was giving him what he wanted, so you found yourself shortly in possession of your own quarters.

Prick probably just wanted to be able to slip in whenever he wanted without worrying about other eyes watching you.

Once more, you'd been summoned, and once more, you'd made sure to lube yourself up.

The door closed behind you and you took a deep breath. Frieza was standing across the room and looking out the window and into space.
"Reluctant, (y/n)?"

You refused to answer.

"Good. I would expect nothing less."

"I don't know why you're so smug," you replied, "This happens every time you get a new saiyan woman on board."

He seemed to chuckle at that. "Can I not be smug that I get my way every time?"

You didn't answer.

"What you think hardly matters anyway."

"It matters plenty."

"It is not what you think that I value, but do continue with that attitude," Frieza couldn't help but laugh before turning towards you, "I'm sending you back to Planet Vegeta. Not for very long, of course."

You forced a look of relief. "Why? Is your family coming to visit?"

He stopped in place, and gave you a glare, but replied, "I don't see how it is your business, even if they are."

You made no move to apologize. He didn't seem upset by it; if anything it made him look even more self-satisfied. Probable intent to make you regret your decision to say that in a few minutes.

"In any case," he replied, "I will recall you within a week. Wait for orders to return."

It was true, then. In any case it would be best that you and Cooler not meet, Frieza might take any gesture of politeness as a sign that the two of you were seeing each other. Or assume that his brother wanted to steal you away...

It was best not to rule out any possibilities. As hard as he was to read, you felt as if you could make vague predictions of his future behavior...the key word being vague.

"Do you have a particular day in mind?" you asked.

"Why?" his eyes narrowed further. "Are you planning something?"


"No," you huffed slightly. "Give me some credit. I'm not as stupid as all that."

"As I was saying," Frieza turned back around, voice suddenly calm again, "Go to your immediate superior and request the next week off as shore leave. It will be approved. Go home, and wait for a summons."

"Fine." You turned to leave, and--as you expected, felt a hand on your tail. He knew it would not hurt you, but it would keep you there regardless.

You, or rather, Lima, came from a relatively nice neighborhood on Planet Vegeta--or what a saiyan would call an "elite row."
It was a backstory you'd set up after your "father" had hired you. He was not a saiyan, but a humanoid, blue-skinned Brenchman by the name of Ital. He was the owner of a high-end liquor store who had found his shop's business with the palace subverted by some up-and-coming brewer, whose existence you ended. In lieu of payment you extracted a contractual agreement that he would provide a combination cover-story/home base for your persona "Lima." You were, per instructions, a young saiyan who was less brutal than others and who did some work at his shop from time to time and whom he had informally adopted.

It helped that you found some small joy in work that other saiyans called "bean-counting and box-shoving." It was simple, easy work. This went there, that went here, old man Romein wants his two bottles of Blood-Moon whiskey, that sort of thing.

It was orderly and chaotic, as only retail can be.

"Lima!"

You shook yourself out of your thoughts and came out from the backroom with a box in your hands. "Give me one minute, father. New shipment of wine." You put the six bottles on their appointed shelf and then came back to the front of the shop.

Just inside the door, and flanked by two silent guards, was an Arcosian. At first, you thought he was Lord Cooler. He looked reasonably similar, but there were obvious mistakes. The gem was a darker color, the skin was lighter, and he was much more...built.

"Pleased to meet you, mister..."

"Siberius."

The voice was even-toned. Not too deep. Not a man of violence, most likely.

"Lima. Can I help you find anything?"

"That's what I was trying to do," Ital started, noticing that Siberius's eyes were no longer on him, but you. "I believe he wants a bottle of the Brench wine we just got a shipment of."

"Yes, I would have ordered it straight from Brench," Siberius spoke, and every word fell with perfect eloquence. Nobleman? Brought up well, at least. "But you see, they'd sold out and the last shipment of it came here."

You went back to the shelf it was on, gesturing to him to follow you. "How many bottles were you after?"

"All of them."

"You must be entertaining in the near future. It's very fine wine."

"The sort you woo a business partner with." He seemed to smile. "And in any case it's a wine I enjoy even outside of functions or meetings."

"We have a total of six bottles," you said, once you'd reached the shelf.

"As I said. All of them."

"We thank you for your generous business, then." You gathered the bottles into several bags and headed back to the front counter.
"If you don't mind me saying so," Siberius began again, "You're very well-spoken for a saiyan."

"I was brought up by Ital," you replied, "He was very strict about manners, when they counted."

"I don't imagine that you have much call to use them, working as a soldier. Your father said you were home on a short bit of shore leave?"

"Correct," you replied, "On Lord Frieza's ship."

"I'm so sorry to hear that."

"Why sorry?"

"Knowing Lord Frieza's...taste...in women..."

You shook your head, and forced a look of mild discomfort. "He is easy to deal with, at least."

He spoke again after paying for the wine. "Still, we have a saying on Arcos...the frozen tundra is no place for a delicate flower to bloom."

Ladykiller. Fancies himself good at picking up women, no doubt, due to his manner of speaking.

"I'm far from delicate, but I thank you for your concern," you replied. Why had he brought it up? Who knew. The Arcosians were well-known for being enthusiastic gossips, perhaps he had wanted to get the news straight from you. "Why do you mention it, though? Am I on the society pages?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"I see." You shrugged. "In any case--"

"Personally, I think you deserve better."

"I would prefer not to be the cause of you losing your hide," you started, careful to keep an amiable tone. He'd spent a lot of money, and contract or no, Ital would be very unhappy if you lost him any business.

"I have nothing to fear from Frieza, but...thank you for your concern." He spoke, pausing as you handed the bags to him. And then, before you could take your hand back, kissed it.

And then he was gone.

"Well that wasn't very bright of him," Ital shook his head, "Bravado, just like you saiyan. Nothing to fear from Frieza? Ha. Everyone has something to fear from him."

You ignored him, and simply went back to work. In any case, this Siberius's doings were not your concern.

But you were sure he'd be happy if he knew that you would not suffer for too long under Frieza's demands.
Chapter Summary

An unexpected meeting at a masquerade leads to a single disturbing sentence.

Name the Face

You were recalled a few days later, just as Frieza had said, and you went right back into the same schedule as before.

At the very least, he was predictable. You were confident that with a few more months of work, you would be beyond doubt, and the poison would be delivered.

It was designed specifically for Arcosians and was the product of a war some years back, though to be fair, poison was a misnomer. What it really was was a heavily modified flu virus that caused a spike in body temperature, fluid retention, and difficulty breathing within a day of the dose being administered. Cause of death could range greatly, and was almost always different from victim to victim.

It was also very expensive. Your mentor was arranging for the purchase of the necessary batch...but of course, it was well worth it to be sure.

But that would have to wait, for Frieza himself would be absent for several days.

"A masquerade?"

"It would be a good idea to attend, don't you think, my dear?" Your mentor's silhouette looked at you from the encrypted transmission.

"Why?"

"A test of your skills, of course. Go in and attempt to identify Frieza."

"Masquerade, friend. I highly doubt that I'll be able to identify him in all of that nonsense. What's the theme?"

"Arcosia's natural world...so to put it simply, the elements and anything organic that isn't them."

You sighed. Sometimes you'd swear that Corg was trying to get you killed...true, he'd been the best you knew of, but still...

"What's your real reason for wanting me to go?"

"It will help you get a clearer idea of Arcosian custom. What you might be able to sneak in, how they behave in groups..."

"I could get that on the extranet."
"Not without getting on some kind of governmental list, you can't. These are the kinds of things that you have to witness...and you need to be thinking about how to administer the...medicine...when the time comes."

You sighed. "Alright. Alright. Thank you for letting me know about this." An exclusive masquerade for the powerful, and the noble...you'd heard that the court was very much into these sorts of things, but it had never occurred to you before now to attempt to go to one. Maybe you were too singular.

The highest bother now was the ocean of hair relaxant you'd have to indulge in to hide your saiyan heritage. The tail was a mere nothing in comparison.

The trip was short, as the chosen venue for the masquerade was one of Frieza's recent planetary acquisitions in the system neigboring planet Vegeta's. The palace of the former king was now the gathering place of hundreds of his people...and, oddly enough, you noted that having horns did not seem to have any effect on their ability to hide their faces. There were tree costumes aplenty, little white foxes, some deerlike creatures, and here and there, flowers.

Your costume fell into the last category. The arctic bell was a white-petaled flower that inhabited a sort of in-between section of the Arcosian tundra. It was small, but put out deep roots, and while it could be withered by winter frost, was near-impossible to fully exterminate. Your dark hair was set with clear crystal shards, to imitate the approaching frost.

You admired, briefly, the blaze of colors, and moved to an upper balcony to watch the crowd below. From behind the ivory pillar you observed it all.

It was beautiful, really. The finery was glittering, and the crowd moved in such symmetry, to the sound of some upbeat and yet still gentle tune that the orchestra across the room was producing.

Someone was coming down the stairs on the north side of the room. A man, you guessed, from the blazing tunic he was wearing. It was fiery, red with golden accents to mimic the activity of a healthy sun. The cape that adorned the back was purely of black, you guessed as a way of showing the black void of space.

It was a part of nature, but none of the others had chosen the sun for a design. Such conceit, you thought, to paint oneself as the sun.

Perhaps this was--

"Does the lady not wish to dance?"

You turned around and bowed briefly to the man before you. You could see horns jutting out from each side of his head, but otherwise it would've been hard to tell what he was. His outfit was like a waterfall of white and blue--the shirt and pants were a sort of so-white-you-can-barely-tell-it's-blue color, while the cape that covered it all was a fluttering series of blue and white ruffles. From the top of his head there were tendrils of imitation ice branching off in different directions...almost like a tree, really.

He looked so ethereal, so haunting. Neither the mask that covered his eyes and left them in shadows nor the expertly applied white facepaint tinged with icy blush helped the general impression. He looked like some winter spirit of pure ice, though the effect was slightly dimished due to his shorter height.

"I just like to admire the general splendour," you replied, "I didn't come here with a partner
anyway."

"Such a pity." He chuckled and the sound prompted a smile. Clearly, the Arcosians were accustomed to using their charms...and all you could think was that this would not help you with Frieza at all. He was an aberration to the norms you were beginning to see.

"Why?"

"It's rude, you know, to stand back and not participate," the masked Arcosian said, "There are partners aplenty for you to choose from."

"Even not being one of your people?"

"More so. We may seem a standoffish and private people, but we find those outside our own race very...exotic, and often alluring."

"And you are not shy about declaring such things?" Keeping it even, pleasant, light. That was the key to this.

"Isn't that the point of a masquerade? Not to know the face? To be able to be open, and converse more easily?"

"Such pretty words," you said, giving a light laugh, "You nobleman are so well-practiced in speech."

"We try. Now if you would rather not dance, perhaps I could interest you in a drink?"

"I can agree with that." You were still on alert, of course. It was just...a lower-intensity mode at the moment. There was no reason why you could not enjoy yourself right now, while observing your new companion.

Perhaps you would be lucky enough to be rid of him soon. If not, well, you would be able to erase any suspicions that might be raised about you. It would be best to keep a partner nearby, right?

You allowed the stranger to lead you back down the stairs and towards the refreshment tables, where there were a large variety of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Your companion then looked back at you.

"What strikes your fancy?"

"Oh..." you began with hesitation, and feigned ignorance, "...I'm afraid I don't know much of wine."

"Then we should avoid the wine. We've got some very nice rum here, too, and...oh, my. Maybe scotch is something you would prefer?"

"I've had it before, but...not too much, please."

Your companion gestured to the server, and the glass was half-filled before being handed to you.

"You're spoiling me," you said, after taking a few sips. "I haven't had scotch like this in a long time." And really, you hadn't. That was another note...the Arcosians went to all lengths and spared no expenses relating to events like this. All the better to impress the outsiders, you would guess.

What an arrogant, vain, and yet still charming, people they were. Mostly. Out of the corner of your eye, you noted a non-Arcosian in a fluffy, foxlike costume being pressed to dance with a larger
Arcosian, refusing, and then accepting a moment later when he was offered a glass of what you assumed was wine.

Alcohol played a prime role in socialization, it seemed. Were you getting into something by accepting the scotch? It was a bit late for that, though, and absently you sipped at it. It didn't seem to taste off...

"I'm glad it has proved a novelty. They pride themselves on supplying the best when these masquerades are arranged, particularly when other races are present."

"Is that just the nobles that behave this way?"

"No, even the lesser ranks behave like this. We are superior, and we must look it."

"Is that so?" you gave him a smile, and he offered one in return. "Superior, and no doubt just a tiny bit arrogant."

"Can you blame us? Look at this place. The wine, the finery...and you wonder why we are so proud of what we have at our fingertips?"

"I don't wonder," you replied, "But certainly, it is made clear at every opportunity. Why not let behavior be what leaves the impression?" Vanity, that's what they were guilty of. Vanity oozed from every pore of this man and pride was not far behind, with lavish greed a distant third. At least there was that.

"We prefer to make the first impression as good as possible, before a word is even spoken."

And yet their people were now becoming known for the exploits of the PTO.

"Fair enough."

You danced twice with this gentleman of ice, and noted a few other dancers--mainly, the sun-dressed one, who danced every time and was never without a partner--before allowing yourself to be lead down one of the hallways branching off from the main room.

"The gardens here are beautiful, you know," he said, "Perhaps I could persuade you to take a look."

Your companion stopped you in an alcove with a large bay window that overlooked an admittedly very nice section of the grounds. There was order, but there weren't uniform lines of trees in strict rows, or exactly a certain number of flower beds for each side of the path cutting thr--

There were hands on your shoulders.

Your companion was touching you.

"Are all Arcosians as flirtatious as you?" you asked.

"Many of us, I would not say most, though."

You felt his tail curl around the front of your legs.

"You don't have to worry, you know." he was leaning forward, ever so slightly, to whisper in your ear.

"You have me alone, and I've consumed alcohol. Any woman would worry."
"True." There was a chuckle. "How can I put you at ease, then?"

"Well, I--"

"Oh..." his voice turned wicked at that, but he went on with a smile, "I think I know how to reassure you."

"How?"

His next words were barely audible, and yet all the louder for it.

"Frieza doesn't have to know."
Name the Face, Part 2

Chapter Summary

You make a deal, and the mystery man gives you a key piece of information...for which you must pay a price.

Name the Face, Part 2

You stiffened beneath your companion's hands, and he squeezed at your shoulders in response. He'd felt it.

"I don't know what you're talking about." You thought a flat denial was best--to say nothing would be almost an admission...

"I think you do."

You began to search rapidly for solutions to this problem. Kill him...no, you couldn't just go and do that. You could get rid of a body, but you had been seen going off with him alone. The ideal time to be rid of him would be later, when he--

"But I reiterate...Frieza does not need to know."

"If you know who I am, then you know I'm not an idiot." You spoke in a deathly calm tone. "And neither are you. What is your price?"

Your companion said nothing, but took your hand and lead you further down the hall.

How long had he known? How much did he know? What was he--?

After leading you up a flight of stairs, he then made his way towards the fifth door on the right side of the hallway there. In passing, you saw several couples, Arcosians and non-Arcosians, mostly. None of them seemed eager to question the sight of a man and a woman together.

The door was opened, and keeping your eye on your companion the whole time, you entered the room.

It was a small set of quarters--but nice all the same. Through an open frame in the back, you could see the bedroom.

So that was what he intended.

"You could have said," you glanced up at him.

"The chase is better when the prey is unaware. You of all people should know that."

"Why are you so willing," you asked suddenly, "To stay quiet on a matter of such obvious importance, over something as easy to get as a woman?"

"Some of us would like to further your goal," he replied.
It was a ruse, then? You supposed it was a reasonable enough one. The couples you had passed would say nothing, you guessed, for fear of being spoken of themselves. But you could be wrong...

There were too many variables here.

"In what way?" you finally asked.

"Information," he replied, "I can answer you one question about Frieza. The question you've been asking yourself, no doubt, since you first undertook this contract."

You glanced back at the door.

"And what question do you think that is?"

He smirked through the mask, the face-paint, and the white lipstick; it was a disturbing expression. The kind of smug confidence that would put out such an expression...but then again, maybe he just thought that what he seemed so eager to share was the truth.

"So tell me, then."

"Let your hair down first."

"...excuse me?"

"I intend to get something in return for my information...and I will not hand it over, only to have you run out."

"And my hair being down will prevent that?"

"Discretion would forbid it."

"And the window?"

"That would...lack elegance. Now...your hair."

"You had better not be wasting my time," you replied, reaching up to take your hair down. It swept over your shoulders and down your back, scattering a few of the crystalline studs to the floor.

"His weakness."

"And how do you know his weakness?"

"Ah, ah, ah...one question only."

"I didn't even get to ask it. You provided it for me." You could see nothing under that mask and the makeup, but his posture was predatory. He seemed confident that he was in the victorious place here.

"It is all that matters to you right now. It is the only relevant piece of information you require--the thing that will get you away from that upstart little imp forever."

That sounded like something Cooler would say.

But no. No, Cooler was taller. And much less charming. A begrudging thought, but it was there all the same. And your...companion, here, he was drawing the flowing, fluttering cape close about him. Afraid? No. No, he was laughing under his breath. You could hear it.
"It is not funny."

"Perhaps now you could step out of your shoes. I doubt a woman of your kind is comfortable in them anyway."

"You know," you replied, doing as asked before kicking the shoes aside, "...I see little point in this. Why not fall to it right away, like any other man would?"

"To slow down is to savor," he replied, "To take time to enjoy, to revel in every little sight."

"It's a one-night stand, if that. A trade. A transaction. Why treat it like more than that?" This was mere indulgence of your curiosity. He seemed to want to enjoy every moment leading up to the act as much as the act itself. Perhaps the Arcosians on the whole were just that sort of people. Considering their long lifespans, you supposed that you could see why. They could afford to take time.

"I have already answered that." He glanced momentarily at your shoes and then back to you, "There is a reason he grew bored of the women that came before you."

"Yes...he got tired of having the same one over and over."

"And none of them knew why." He chuckled, "But I know him better than that."

"Then why is it?"

"Your gloves."

You removed your gloves, and lay them aside on the nearest table.

"You have beautiful skin." There was a pause, another slight grin, and then he went on, "They didn't worship him, like he felt he deserved."

"But he enjoys forcing the issue. Why would he--"

"Does your dress have buttons?"

"Eight of them. In the back."

He moved behind you to locate the buttons, and when he had, let his hand wander through your hair.

"You must have some fascination with it, to be petting it like that."

"It's a novelty that my people do not have. I don't see it too terribly often. Now..."

"Yes, you were answering my unasked question." So far, what he was telling seemed to make sense. Frieza did seem the sort to want to be the center of a woman's universe. It could easily be exploited.

"All you have to do is take what he does with you..."

Two buttons.

"...and beg for more of it."

"Beg him?" You wouldn't have thought of that yourself. And that was the worst of it--this was
something that you should've already thought to do. Something you should've tried, instead of studying and waiting for the right moment. You were secure with Frieza, you thought, but was he really pleased with your company?

Another two.

"Yes. Think of it...the expression on his face, the ego you will stroke by you, a saiyan, prideful and haughty, begging for him to grant you pain."

A repugnant notion, but...

"Beg for him to use you like a slave, to call you terrible names..." The fifth and sixth buttons were undone, and you felt your companion's cold hands stroking your bare back as he spread the fabric outward, exposing your shoulders.

You shivered. 'Filthy monkey' came to mind when he said that. But that was the only thought of Frieza that surfaced. You were holding your arms up to prevent the dress from falling, and were glad you didn't have to look at your companion.

"...telling him that he is what you want, and it pains you to pretend that you do not want him."

The last two buttons.

"And then..."

You took in a deep breath as he reached forward and tugged your arms to your sides. The dress began to slide downward. "...give him the ecstasy, the agony, he wishes to see. Beg, and beg some more...plead for release...and you will have the mother of all opportunities."

The dress fell to the floor.

"I will have aroused his suspicion." you said, crossing your arms to cover the front of your slip.

Your companion moved in front of you. "I am sure you can persuade him."

There were a thousand things going through your head. What if he was wrong? What if that didn't work? You could figure something out, but to have taken to bed for information, to find it useless--

"I'm sure." Your voice came out half-strangled. Information and intent aside, you still felt...bare, vulnerable, beneath that gaze. You were almost nude, and his gaze was now locked on your body, as far as you could tell.

That mask, that empty stare...

...that wild appearance of untamed ice...

Who was he? How did he know so much about Frieza? And specifically, these intimate details? You could ask...but you know he would only scold you for asking, and then if he did answer, would only lie. And beneath all that makeup, you could tell nothing anyway. Still, you could study him, as you did everyone else. There must be something you could tell of him...some little detail that would help you figure it out.

"And now, my dear," he said, "My part is completed."

"Where?" you asked. No matter your doubts, the information was solid enough. You had gone this far, and there was little point in trying to escape it now. Besides...you'd made an agreement, and
you intended to honor it.

Your companion lead you one final time, to the bedroom that lay beyond the door frame at the far side of the room. He backed you against it and then reached down to lift you onto it. Your head now rested against the pillows at the top.

He was shedding nothing but the costumed shirt he'd been wearing. There were no shoes, and it was obvious the cape was going to stay.

You shut your eyes and waited, taking in a sharp breath when you felt his hand tracing up the outside of your right leg, pushing the slip up bit by bit. He would go in for it soon, and this would all be over in a few minutes.

"Look at me," he said.

You opened your eyes and looked up. He was leaning over you, and you noted his chest--bioplates, like Frieza, with a gem of dark aqua-blue--before meeting his shadowed gaze.

Further up he pushed the slip, until it exposed your breasts, at which point he seemed to smile. "These," he said, grabbing them gently, and then continuing the motion, almost in a kneading fashion, "Are something else I enjoy."

You felt a burn beginning in the apex of your thighs. Was he...actually trying to get you ready for it?

The stunned look on your face caught his notice. "Does it surprise you that I do?"

"No."

There was a pinch, and your body revolted against your attempt to keep it still by squirming.

"They're sensitive...and give a world of pleasure to those that have them."

The kneading stopped, and he leaned closer.

And before you knew it, his lips were on yours.

His tongue invaded your mouth and you allowed it, reaching up to the back of his neck to keep him where he was.

Already he was a better lover than Frieza, and he hadn't even gotten to the actual lovemaking yet. It sent a thrill through your body like you hadn't had in ages.

But once you parted for air, you looked up, noting that the makeup he had been wearing had smeared; you could see a corner of the black lips, and off to the side of his face there was a splash of dark pink.

The stripes, you thought. It couldn't be Frieza, though, it just couldn't...he loved himself too much to aid in his own demise.

But before you could think more on it, your companion moved his attention to your neck. A nip there, a touch of the tongue there...

Oh, gods...

Your body squirmed again, but he held you in place, continuing to lavish all the best little places of
your neck with attention. The burn was getting unbearable, now, and when he happen to brush over a spot that forced a shot of pleasure over your entire body, he raised his head.

A thousand things might have been said, but in the end you were both silent. The question of wanting to continue raised itself when your eyes met again, and was readily accepted. You were finding yourself eager to go on, but were not of the sort to beg needlessly for anything. True, you owed him, but you would not lay here and make a fool of yourself.

Your companion smirked regardless, and reached down to your underwear, slithering beneath the pair easily and letting his fingers rest on your button briefly...before sliding lower.

You bit back a groan and took a deep breath as his hand came up glistening, and had to stifle a gasp when he tore your underwear away and brought your knees up.

Your heart was racing.

"Why?"

You couldn't stop yourself. The question just slipped out.

You heard a ruffle of clothing and puzzlement over not hearing a zipper was the last thought you had before you felt his the head of his length against your entrance.

"Because," he said, "Saiyan or not...you are still a woman."

A real casanova, then.

And once again he flouted your expectations. Instead of moving in all at once, your companion thursted in slowly, inch by inch, invading your folds until you were completely full of him.

The groan escaped despite your best efforts, and you squeezed at his sides with your knees, then reached up a second later to pull him down. He had wanted you, and now he had you, and you were burning for him.

Your lips danced together as he began to thrust, and jolts of pleasure surged through your body. It had never felt like this before. Every push was maddening, and more and more you found your logical mind floating off, getting lost in a shroud of ardor. For this moment, you were not an assassin, you were a woman desiring to be pushed mercilessly, slowly, to the end.

As you wrapped your arms around his back, the cape fell from his shoulders, though still covering both of you and trapping the heat that continued to blaze.

He lifted one of your legs a bit higher, to angle even deeper, and the second moan escaped. He'd dragged over a spot that weakened your knees, that brought you to the heights and then dropped you once he moved away from it.

"There it is."

Your companion moved over the spot again, and you choked back the sound--though a little whimper followed soon that you could not hold back.

"Go on," he whispered, "Let it out."

"Or..." you paused through the next slow thrust, and went on, "...what?"

"If you don't," he said, masked face not two inches from yours, "Well, my dear, it's very simple..."
You shivered when his breath drifted over your ear a second later.
"...I'm going to force it out of you."

But oh, how you wanted that...

He was playing you like an instrument. And you were loving it.
"You want me to beg, don't you, like you said...that I should, for..." Again, you were suspicious. If not for the gem color you'd assume that he was Frieza.

He continued, slowly. "The thought had crossed my mind."

But he didn't press you any further to beg. Nor did you offer it.

The slow thrusts grew no faster as time went on. His hands wandered over your neck, your chest, and finally south to your now very damp button.

He grinned, and pressed against it.

You gasped.

The knot in your stomach was torturous enough, but at his touch it seemed to burst into a ravenous heat.

You tried to buck against him.

"What do you want?" he asked suddenly. "Hmm?"

Another touch and pinch, another thrust and groan...

Rather suddenly, he pulled you up. You were perched atop him now--still in his grip, but your faces were once more a mere few inches apart. This time, however, you saw something that had up until this point been shrouded--his eyes. Red, as you guessed...

He embraced and kissed you, and you returned it, bouncing slightly as he made another thrust into you.

You were both reduced to mere sounds, but there were no words as the end approached for both of you. And as it did, his nails raked down your back, his breath ghosted over your neck...

Your outcries heightened in pitch more and more, and finally, clinging tightly to him and letting one final yelp of pleasure escape, orgasm ripped through your body and left you shaking on top of him.

Not that it stopped him, of course. His face was buried in your neck, and closer he pulled you, faster, at a pace that--

His own end hit, and you felt him expand briefly as he emptied himself into you.

And finally, as the afterglow began to fade, your mind returned to its previous state. You began to chide yourself for letting things go as far as they had, for giving in to your basest instincts. But it had been in the pursuit of information.

"Now..." he grinned, nipping briefly at your neck, "...now that you have what you require, I believe you should be going."
"Yes. I should."

Understatement of the year.

"But don't let the secrecy of this little tryst fool you..." he whispered, "...I will be sure to see you again."

You bit your lip to avoid asking 'when.'

"After all...I have to ensure that you succeed."
You've created a monster. But the end is closer than you think...or is it?

Subspace

You were loathe to admit it, but you were beginning to think that proposing the idea had been a mistake.

Your last summons from Frieza had gone, unfortunately, exactly according to plan. Though he'd seemed surprised at the idea of your wanting him to cause you pain, he'd eagerly complied--and after one session, declared that he'd not expected it to be so much fun.

You'd come away from the encounter with a broken arm and marks on your neck from nearly being choked out...but his suspicion was, as far as you knew, at nil. He thought nothing of you now, except as a vehicle to sate some more perverse pleasurable urges. He thought you were just some eager little saiyan whore, begging at his feet for him to do any number of terrible things to you.

It seemed that the stranger was right. Frieza loved it. He loved inflicting intimate pain. His ego swelled when you not only took the injuries but asked for more.

The sessions were long and brutal, and 'aftercare' was not a word in his vocabulary. When he was done, you were promptly ejected from his quarters with barely any time to redress, much less tend your wounds. But you endured it.

And it made things that much sweeter when, a few weeks later, you received an encoded message from Planet Vegeta: "It's ready."

Finally. Finally!

You'd plotted, and schemed, and all your plans would come to fruition very, very soon. You applied for a temporary three-day leave and waited.

The morning after a particularly grueling night with Frieza, you found that your short leave had been granted. Your father was obviously extremely ill, and bedridden...et cetera, et cetera. You'd really laid all the details thick on the request form, but had forgotten half of them in the excitement of packing for this trip.

You barely noticed when the doors to your quarters opened.

But you certainly noticed when a set of hands settled onto your hips.

"I leave in an hour," you said quickly, "Not that I object to your attention, my lord."

"You leave when I allow it," Frieza replied. "Did you think that I would let you go without saying goodbye?"
"I was under the impression that that display last night was your goodbye."

"I'm simply horrible at parting ways." He chuckled, and stroked at your neck, where the evening before he'd put any number of little bruises. "But at least you will not be gone for very long."

"My lord...with talk like that, one might think you were going to miss me."

"Ah, but I will," he whispered, "It's hard to find a woman who takes pain as well as you."

"Did you come just to tease me?" you asked. "Or for a quick one?"

"I have places to be," Frieza replied, "Or I would gladly indulge you. There is one thing, however..."

"What, my lord?"

"What were you going to Planet Vegeta for?"

"My father is ill. He needs someone to keep things sorted."

"I fail to see how three days is enough to tend a bedridden man."

"That was how long it was until the nurse could arrive," you replied quickly.

"I must have misheard you." His voice was saccharine sweet, and it wasn't until you felt those dark lips on your neck that you realized he was behaving a bit too sweetly. Before your suspicions could even race for theories as to why, he spoke again, "I could have sworn you said something about going to Planet Vegeta to retrieve something."

"What?"

"That was what the message said, after all." Frieza's hand was moving up to your throat; he could feel your racing pulse now. "Wasn't it? Oh, but wait, the message wasn't about that...it was to tell you that what you're going after is ready."

"I don't--"

"Appule may be an idiot in many things, but he excels in one particular area. He can crack any encoded message that he comes across. What's the word for his kind? Savant? Yes, he is a savant."

You were unmoved from what you suddenly saw as the central concern, but you dared not bring it up. It resulted in your complete silence. Why were you still alive, if he had discovered the truth?

"Have you nothing to say in your defense? Any justification to offer?"

"It was merely a prized bottle of wine. The Brench have it for every occasion, and some keep a bottle of their most valuable in case of death, to be used at a funeral. He was unsure if he would live, so wanted me to retrieve it."

"Ah, Lima," Frieza said, still in that same sweet tone, "You are a terrible liar. Do you think that that last message was the only one Appule cracked the code on?"

You went rigid.

"Medicine, hmm?"
He knew, to some degree. And again, you wondered why you were still alive.

"It wouldn't be for me, by chance...would it?"

You started to speak, but were cut short.

"Don't answer that, monkey. I know it was."

"My lord--"

"What was the price, hmm?"

You struggled in his grip, but found yourself bent over the edge of the bed.

"What is my head worth?"

You'd have been lying if you said that you weren't scared as hell as he tugged down the bottom half of your underarmour suit. And even more so when you felt not the familiar bulge, but the tip of his tail at your dry entrance. You whipped around to face him, hopefully to stop him (what delusion fear gave you!), but once more you were pushed down. The only difference now was that you were on your back.

Four inches was all it took.

You gave the number.

"Well, well...that is a very generous sum, isn't it? But of course, one would expect no less when it comes to me."

You yelped when he fed your entrance another few inches of his tail. It was already too much--more than you were used to, and the pain was beginning to creep in. You had no doubt that he'd go as far as he had to...and possibly kill you like this, if the mood struck him.

"Now listen, monkey, and listen carefully." He moved over you and placed both hands at your throat. "Because I'm only going to say this once."

You nodded.

"Why did you take this assignment? Were you upset at me, perhaps, for annexing your planet?"

"No," You replied honestly, "It's just business."

"Is that so? You had no rebellious thoughts, no inclinations of vengeance?"

"Vengeance clouds the mind," you replied calmly, "Rebellion is the last thing I care about."

"No desire for revenge of any kind?"

Another inch. You cringed, and shook your head. This was a situation you'd trained for (well, not with the tail in you, you hadn't expected that one). Nothing but the barest information.

"I am just a target then?"

"It was strictly business," you repeated.

He seemed to pause and think.
"Go ahead and ask, monkey."

"Ask what?"

"Why you're still alive."

"Why am I?" You'd like to keep breathing, after all.

The tail drew out of you. "Because that is your payment."

"My...payment...?" He was hiring you? No. No, this was some kind of game for him.

"And if you redeem yourself, well, you'll be able to keep your little fee."

Who could this target be, for him to be so forgiving? Perhaps the one who hired you in the first place?

"Who is it you want gone?" you asked.

For once you could read every little twitch of his face. His eyes were dancing in mirth, the corners of his lips were tugged upward in an expression of smug and eager victory. He had you right where he wanted you, he knew you had no choice but to accept this job, and he was reveling in every glorious second of it.

"My father."

Oh, you were so screwed...
"What can you tell me about him that would be relevant?" you asked.

"He's very...gregarious." Frieza seemed to almost wince at that. He didn't like to think about it, whatever it was that had just run across his mind. "You'll find him very easy to get along with."

"I would think that he'd hate saiyans."

"Oh, he does. But he's always willing to overlook things he doesn't like if the person in question is useful."

You nodded. "Even so...he's a King. Not easy to get close to. No matter how friendly he may be, I'm sure he's no fool."

"Of course not, Lima." Frieza smirked, "But if you're as good as you say you are, then I'm sure you'll have no trouble catching his attention."

"What makes you say that? We're very unlikely to meet under normal circumstances," you replied. "And I doubt that he would want to be somewhere that you've already been."

"You'd be surprised," came the dry reply.

You decided it was best not to ask questions. At least on that head, anyway.

"In any case," Frieza began again, "He already knows of the wine shop you work in."

"He does?"

"My...sources...tell me that he's had wine retrieved from it several times by one servant or another."

"This does not exactly help to catch his eye--if he never comes down himself, how--?"

"I'm sure you'll think of something."

"I don't understand what you mean by that." Which was bull, of course. You understood perfectly.

"I'm paying you for this. You find the how and the when. And if you need extra help, I can give it."

But you would prefer not to, you thought. Slipping in to the King's service would likely not work as easily as it had here, with Frieza. The screening process would be far more strict, wouldn't it...

"A transfer, of course, would look suspicious."
"I'm surprised you've given it that much thought." Frieza laughed, and in that laugh you found something that you quickly filed away for later: he didn't seem to think you knew what you were doing. He was expecting you to fail.

But it made sense.

If you failed, he had lost nothing and would (you were guessing) kill you at some point. If you succeeded, he would take the throne...

Well, he really couldn't lose here, could he?

"It's not something that happens too often, but it does happen."

Your mentor, Corg, gave a wry little smile. "And there is no reason why you can't fulfill both contracts. Cooler is a sensible man. Don't you think he would make a much better leader than either his father or brother?"

"I suppose I could see it that way."

"Think of being responsible for a far more stable kingdom. Right now, it's just a powder keg, really...and I don't fancy being in its midst when the match falls."

You shook your head. "Nor I...but I get the feeling..."

"...that you might be the match?" Corg snickered. "I don't think I need to say it, but I will anyway. Be careful. And don't let your dislike of Frieza deter you from fulfilling the job."

"What would deter me, if anything, would be the blackmail." You crossed your arms. "But you're right. You always are."

So now you had to find a way to take down King Cold. And then, more importantly, keep your neck long enough to finish the job on Frieza. Someone, somewhere must be getting their jollies from watching you scrape through this mess...

Well, you'd hate to disappoint them.

You went back to the wine shop, and began to live as Lima once again. A few days went by in relative peace. Orders to fill, shelves to stock...the occasional joke from Ital now and again about how well you were doing...

You were out at the front counter looking over some sales figures when you started to fully think about it again.

You were still on edge, of course. If Cold did not show up, what would Frieza really expect you to do? Ask for that transfer? No. No, you both knew that that wouldn't work; you'd already dismissed it as a possibility.

It wasn't like you couldn't do it, you knew you could. It would just take time you weren't sure you had...

He was definitely setting you up for failure.

"Lima?"
"Hmm?" You looked up from the datapad and were greeted with--

Siberius!

"I'm afraid we don't have any of that wine you got last time," you said with a small smile, "I'm sorry."

"That's not what I'm here for." He replied, handing you a card. "I was just here to drop that off."

"Oh? Who--"

Before you could say more, he left, and with him went the guards.

You looked down at the card. Aside from giving a set of coordinates, it read:

23:00

Meet me here

Maybe he was delivering a message for Frieza? But that could just as easily have been done through the computer...

You sighed. It could also be a trap...but at the same time...

It didn't have to mean something from Siberius. Perhaps he simply wanted to see you, in the romantic sense. Perhaps you had gained a reputation as being 'easy' or something. It was hard to really pin down.

And if it was a message from Frieza, you didn't want to not show up. That could end badly.

You could end up dead either way.

In the end, you decided to go...fully prepared.

The coordinates turned out to be at one of the PTO bases. The moment you showed up and gave your name, they directed you to a conference room in an out of the way corner of the base, with instructions to speak of it to no one.

You knew this place. This back hallway was rarely used, and you'd often wondered why.

It had to be Frieza. He could've changed his mind, and wanted to get you out of the way. But--no, if he wanted to do that, then he would have done it sooner.

Back and forth it bounced in your head, anxiety lacing every errant thought, until you finally stepped into the room.

It was the last thing you expected.

King Cold was sitting there at the table, smirking like the cat that ate the canary.

Dead. So dead.

All...well, you weren't sure how tall he was, but the ceiling was about fifteen feet high and standing, he'd be more than halfway there.

"We have a lot to discuss."
So very, very dead!

You stepped forward and he leaned down to take your hand and kiss it.

"It's nice to see you...again."
As you maintain your composure, Cold begins to explain.

"Now...to business." Cold sat back in his chair and looked down at you.

"I'm sure." Your mind was racing back to the night of the masquerade. If that was him, how...? He'd been so much shorter then. How was it possible for it to have been him?

"You have been retained for the purpose of ending my life."

"I would ask how you knew, but it seems that everyone knows what I'm doing these days," you replied.

"You're young, that's why. Well-taught, but still young. I don't think most of your contracts would take you outside of the planet, either."

You didn't respond, and instead opted to glance over his face. There was no hiding the look of smugness in his eyes; clearly Cold saw that he had the advantage here. But more importantly, he knew that you knew it.

And yet, there was not the same malevolence as you know would have been in Frieza's expression.

"How would you know?"

"I make it my business to know about those who work for me."

"You've not commissioned me," you said quietly.

"But I have," he said, "You don't think Cooler did that all by himself?"

You were burning to ask, but you didn't. Instead, you asked, "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I want you to understand the gravity of the situation you're in."

"I already know the danger," you replied, "There's no need to club me over the head with it."

"What you seem to ignore is the possibility of turning the situation to your advantage. Given the way you have risen in life, I would think you'd notice a chance to get ahead."

"...the way I...what? You're going to have to clarify."

"You think I would hire you without knowing as much as possible of your background?"

"My background has nothing to do with my work."

"It has everything to do with your work. It is the entire reason you even have your job."
Who had told him? Where did he find this information out?

"Is that so?" you asked. "And what do you know about me?"

"You are a houseless bastard," Cold started calmly, "You are nobody, and grew up with other bastards, playing in a filthy street and scavenging for whatever you could. You survived better than most by doing favors for others, and in so doing drew the attention of an assassin."

You stayed quiet.

"Am I right so far?"

You glanced away. What was the purpose of this discussion, anyway?

"I see that I am." Cold smirked, and went on, "You learned the trade and found that it provided something that you had never had before."

"What is that, pray tell?" You tried to keep your tone respectful. If he was wavering as to what he should do, even a little thing like that could help. You were uncertain, and you absolutely hated being uncertain!

"Security."

You looked back up at him in mild shock. It was bad enough having Cold be so thoroughly informed on your history, but that...

...that was the one thing you'd kept from everyone. In fact--

"You crave security," he said, "For fear of once more becoming that dirty little saiyan who has to pick her way through discarded things just to have a decent meal."

"It is, of course untrue," you replied quickly, lying through your teeth, "But for a moment let us say that it is not. How does this matter?"

"If I cannot appeal to your sense of greed," he replied, "Perhaps I can instead appeal to your most basic need."

"You claim it is security."

"Assist me," Cold continued as if you hadn't said a word, "And you will never have to worry about the source of your needs again."

"I have nothing to worry over now."

"Is it?" he asked, "Correct me if I'm wrong, but you're looking over your shoulder constantly, aren't you? Do you think that you will live long, with that kind of a track record?"

"Why help me if you are this confident I will fail?"

"Because you know how to play my son," he replied, "With a little help, he sees you as a stupid plaything, and nothing more. He sees you as no threat to him at all."

"If I may," you asked suddenly, "Why do you want him gone in the first place? He is said to be your pride and joy, and you want him dead?"

"I thought you assassins did not ask these questions of your clients." Cold raised an eye ridge.
"Forgive me then, I'm sorry for--"

"No, no. We've shared far more than information, after all, what harm would there be in your knowing my motivations?" There it was again, that grin.

"Plenty," you said, "But continue."

"He is growing dangerous," Cold said, "Cooler is willing to wait for the crown. He is patient, and I overlooked him in favor of what Frieza could bring to the empire. But my younger son's usefulness has long since passed. He will not wait."

"My usefulness will no doubt wear off as well," you replied, "You must understand why I would be reluctant to enter into your service."

"Your usefulness is boundless. You have much to offer me besides that pretty face of yours. And you could be more useful still."

"How so?"

"Have you ever seen an assassin's guild?"

"No."

"Let us imagine for a moment that the Arcosians have such a thing. And let us also imagine the benefit you could derive from extended training."

"Let us also imagine the price you will ask for such a thing. You were no fool, after all."

"You will cooperate with Frieza's little scheme," he replied, "I have a job lined up for you, and he will believe that you are getting close to me."

Under you, more like, you thought, before asking, "What job would this be?"

"It will likely not surprise you to learn that I have an extensive collection of women," he replied amiably, "I believe saiyan's would call them a 'harem.'"

"That is correct."

"They are permitted to lead relatively normal lives, with the exception of sex. In that, they are required to be faithful...to me, of course. But you can naturally understand that they would be admired by others, who may wish to steal them away from me."

"Or help them escape?"

"These women have no reason to want to escape. And if they wish their service ended, they have only to ask."

You doubted it was that simple. Perhaps he had them on contracts?

"In any case, they require guards. I prefer to hire women for the job...for obvious reasons."

"You want me to be a harem guard."

"Frieza won't buy that that is all you will be for a second. His suspicion will remain where it is."

"What is the plan to get back to eliminating him?"
"At some point, you will be summoned, along with several of these women, to my ship, when Frieza will be visiting me. I will take ill swiftly afterwards, and you will slip off to tell Frieza that your mission is almost complete."

And then you would poison him. It was a sound enough plan, you supposed. There was a lot of chance for things to go wrong, but Cold seemed to have this all figured out.

"And after he is gone?"

"You get your reward," Cold replied, "A comfortable position in life, and the ability to continue doing the work you seem so fond of."

Well...

...it wasn't as if you had a choice.
You say goodbye to Frieza, and head off to Arcos. But it seems that you're getting into yet more trouble than you expected.

A quick note on my Arcosian headcanon before you read this chapter, and in case you didn't read the other fics where I discuss their aging. I see them as being like the Elder Scrolls elves--that is, they can live to be more than six or seven hundred years old. Not immortal, but very long-lived.

You sent Frieza a one-word message after that. "In."

The trip to Arcos would take nearly two weeks, and you would, according to the itinerary, make three stops on the way there--all security-related, of course. The first and second were quick, and you were there only long enough to have the necessary checks done and to then be sent on your way again.

The third was at a station directly orbiting the planet, and you were required to stay overnight and pass through an ungodly amount of scanners.

The poison was causing you no small amount of grief. It was a miracle they hadn't found it--it wasn't that you weren't confident about the hiding place, it was just...merely having it on your person at all was too much. You'd moved it from the little vial and into a tubelike wire, then built it into the earpiece of your scouter. The vial would have fit, but...it would be much more difficult to keep hiding it, only to have it discovered and thus making very dangerous accusations come to light. You could explain away an errant tube much easier.

Your mentor had gone silent, but that was to be expected. You were only glad that his lessons of always expecting the worst had sunk in as well as they had.

Cold's handling of the situation had rattled you, though. You had expected many things, but not that. First, for him to have been behind your being hired to kill Frieza in the first place, going so far as to aid you, but of course taking advantage of you in the process...

He did it all so effortlessly, gliding from manipulation to manipulation and staying well away, mostly, from the center of the danger.

And he was not afraid of you. He seemed certain you would behave as he wished you to.

But likely as not, you thought, he had a backup plan. A King did not stay a King long without
plotting and planning, after all. Your research on him had revealed that he was north of two hundred and fifty and had held his crown since he was around fifty years old.

What an accomplishment it would be to take down such a man...

...and yet, what a shame...

You landed, and were made to go through another round of security checks before being allowed to leave the station.

You reported to the barracks on the next base over, and were met by a dark-haired woman with bluish horns. "Are you currently fertile?"

"...what?"

"Are you capable of menstruating?"

"Yes. Why wouldn't I be?"

"I have to alert the others you'll be working with and around, then." she replied, "Sorry for asking, it's just that whenever a new girl shows up there's this ripple effect. Everyone else's cycle comes early, I guess it's some kind of biological buggery about trying to be fertile the soonest."

"It's fine. Do I have an assignment yet?"

"Yes, of course you do. Everyone working in this base had their purpose set before they even got here."

"If I were one of his women, I would think that sounded rather ominous."

She laughed, "I wouldn't worry about it."

"...what do you mean?" You were curious, and at the same time eager for information. You wanted to be sure that the trap you were in would not be even worse than you currently imagined it to be.

"It's not as if you're going to be seeing Frieza again anytime soon."

"Oh." You went red, on purpose, but felt inwardly relieved. "You've heard about that."

"We like to know the background of our employees. In any case, off that subject. Your assignment is what you asked about."

"Yes," you said quickly, "Will I be guarding a particular few, or will it be a particular area in general?"

"A particular few," she replied, with a slight smile. "Have you heard of the Angels?"

"...Angels?" No. You hadn't. And you did not at all like that you hadn't.

"They're...what you might consider elite around here."

"Aren't they his women, like any other?" An ignorant question, but it was one that anyone might ask, and therefore you had to say it.

"They were soldiers, primarily, before they caught his attention. He's stationed the six of them here, and while they still get the odd assignment every now and again, their primary purpose
is...well, I'm sure you can imagine."

"They can't have been too happy about that."

"Perhaps not in a lot of ways..." the dark-haired woman shrugged, "But they're away from the lower ranks who'd constantly paw at them and act like boorish fools. I think they consider it a fair enough trade."

"I'm curious, is there a reason I would get assigned to them?"

"I have no idea. The King handles the assignment of all staff as it pertains to those six, and justifies his choices to no one."

"No guesses?"

"No guesses," she shrugged.

"One more question before I head off," you said, "Where will I be sleeping?" There was no way you'd lay your head down anywhere you were sleeping alone without going over it first. Not the way these contracts had gone. You wouldn't be surprised if there were a poisonous bug in your sheets, or a bomb in your pillow, even...

"Here, of course. You'll have to pick a room--they're not big, all that's in them is a bed and a desk. A window, if you're lucky."

Practically every inch of the room that was to be your own was checked carefully. You reminded yourself to repeat this process at least twice a day, and then headed off once again, this time to meet your charges.

You were allowed into the large ivory building after a quick check of your paperwork by four guards at the front door.

The place was...

Well, it was gorgeous. Rich white ivory, soothing blue and purple gold-trimmed marble...well, well, these women lived quite luxuriously, didn't they?

On your left, through some arches, was a courtyard with several benches and places to enjoy the outdoors. There were few trees, but a small pond, and a walkway beside it. You saw two guards here, but no one else.

On your right, you were passing several rooms. The first looked like a receiving room of some kind. There were chairs, and one table. Nothing of note. It was not overly beautified, so you thought it must not be often used.

The second seemed to a common room, but it was empty, save for a few tables, and a large computer console in the corner.

The third and fourth doors were closed.

The fifth--

"Excuse me? Kanin?"

You walked into the room, and found yourself feeling...very much dwarfed.
"Oh, you aren't Kanin. Who are you?" The one who spoke was an enormous, in the vertical sense anyway, woman with red skin. She seemed to be wearing a lengthy blue dress, and it wasn't until she rose to greet you that you realized...she had a tail where her legs were supposed to be.

One of the Nagaa, you thought.

"Lima," you said automatically.

"Oh, yes, the new guard. My name is Gavi." She gave a smile.

"Pleased to meet you," you said, "I was told there were six of you. Where are the others?"

"Well," Gavi replied, "Two of them are with the King, and the other three are off conquering some planet for him. You just have little old me to worry about."

"There are several guards here already. To assign another must mean you are quite valuable to the King." Flattery never hurt, after all. If you got along with them it would make all of this go much smoother.

"Certainly. Now...you are a saiyan, I see."

"Yes, I am." You bowed briefly as she moved closer.

"And seeing as how there are so many guards, perhaps you would not be averse to a quick spar?"

She was eager to fight you. Perhaps the rest would be as well. But then again, this could be some trick to test you...

It would be unwise to refuse, however.

"I wouldn't mind at all."

"Ow."

"I could have told you that was a bad idea." The doctor shook his head as you climbed out of the healing tank. "First day on the job and you get the hell beaten out of you by the woman you're supposed to be guarding."

"I thought it would be fine," you replied, getting redressed, "What all did she break? How long have I been out?"

"Several of your bones...your clavicle, too. She said it would be good luck."

"Good luck nothing!" You'd goofed. Bigtime. You'd sorely underestimated Gavi, and had found yourself facing a speedy snake-woman who was faster (in your opinion) than she should be. "I've lost this job before I even started it!"

"Oh, no, you're fine." This time it was not the doctor who spoke, but his nurse.

"...what?"

"I said you're fine. They fight all their guards."

"I fail to see how this translates to me keeping my job," you replied, "Please, enlighten me."
"Well," he replied, "You're there to watch their back. And you have to be strong enough to take care of threats who might strike when their guard is down."

"I still don't understand." Gods, this was humiliating!

"She's the strongest of the Angels, and you lasted a whole hour against her. And besides, she wanted you stronger."

You'd almost forgotten about that! Saiyans got stronger every time they were near death and came back...and the list of broken bones (which you were now looking over) seemed to be strategic in nature. Blood loss, but also, pain blackout...

"Am I good to go?" you asked.

"Yeah, you're fine. You report in tomorrow at ten, and this time she's promised not to spar with you again."

"That's too bad," you replied, "It was an interesting fight."

"Before you go...you'll have some gut pain for a few days. Nothing we can do about it, I'm afraid."

"So I'll have pain. No big deal." You shrugged.

No big deal.

You were thoroughly in control and firm of purpose.

You were going to be here only long enough to gain Frieza's confidence that you were working on getting rid of his father. And once that was done, you would have his father's confidence as well.

They would both be gone.

"I am in control," you said to yourself as you left the medical bay.

But oh, how wrong you were...
Trapped

Chapter Summary

Cold gives you a warning, and you meet the Queen.

Trapped

Five days passed. The gut pain you were warned about faded.

Later in the day that you noticed this, three of the women who had been off returned: Julis, Ansel, and Ilura.

They greeted you in much the same way Gavi had, but by her warning did not spar with you, or make any attempts to do so. Within another three days, they began to ignore you, as they did with the other guards.

Their manner of living was still higher than you might have imagined it to be, despite the living accommodations. It seemed that most of their wardrobe consisted largely of fine silks, or other fabrics that from time to time were mentioned as being favorites.

After another week, the two other women, Ardae and Mila, returned as well. You stood at the door as two other guards entered ahead of the blue- and grey-skinned (respectively) women entered, followed shortly by...

You kept your eyes on the others as the familiar shadow of King Cold moved into the room.

"You kept them away for such a long time, your highness." Gavi's tone was light, airy, and above all, flirtatious. "I was beginning to wonder if you were keeping them."

"They were beginning to miss home," he replied, in a rich tone that called you back to the night of the masquerade, "And besides, the Queen is to visit soon."

"Oh!" Ansel spoke now, "You'll of course want time with your wife."

Until now you had heard very little of this Queen of his--Yuki, her name was--other than she visited the harem herself now and again. To that end you imagined it was to show the women their place; there was no wife you'd ever heard of who held anything but contempt for the extramarital affairs of her husband. And well you could imagine that a Queen would be vengeful...

How glad you were that you would not be joining them.

"I will not be here, when she first arrives, but I will join her shortly afterwards," he said.

"And if she should come here?" Gavi asked.

"I leave that to you. You know her mind well enough."

What could that mean? Did the Queen have some arrangement with these women? They seemed to be the highest of those Cold chose to spend his time with, so perhaps they had some understanding...
or another with her.

The conversation continued, straying first to Ardae and Mila's new gowns, and then to the planet that the other three had been working on. Cold congratulated them, mentioned that he was quite happy with their work and promised reward for it.

After an hour or two another guard came to relieve you for lunch.

Meal periods, among the guards at least, were staggered, so that no more than four of the sixteen assigned guards were out for a meal at a time, and so when you came to the dining area reserved for the servants and guards, there were three others waiting.

"The King is here, then?" one asked.

"Yes," you replied, "He brought Ardae and Mila back with him. They said that the Queen would visit soon."

"Oh boy," the second said, laughing, "That'll be a trip."

"How?" you asked, "I've heard very little about the Queen. What is she like?"

"It depends," the third said.

"On what?"

"On how polite you are with her," the first said, "No amount of description would be able to best meeting her yourself, and I assure you that you will, if she is really going to visit."

You nodded, and said no more, though you went on thinking about the quickest route to ending this contract. When Frieza would visit--that was your prime concern. This job had gone on no longer than some of your others, but it was becoming too convoluted for your taste, and you were too far from home. The addition of the Queen was putting yet another concern onto the list of people who could wreck everything.

On leaving lunch, you found that Cold's guards (two of whom stood outside the room that he and the women were in) had received orders to let no one in.

Thankfully this was a situation you'd been told might happen, and so you reported the situation to your superior, who then assigned you to do a patrol of the building instead.

You walked about its many corridors, and looked into many of its rooms. Library here, bathing area there, spaces for arts and various crafts...

The women were well cared for, it seemed. You spoke to the servants you encountered as well, and made comments on the matter, and they replied in confirmation. Those women, several of them said, that Cold favored with his attentions, wanted for nothing.

You joked with an older one cleaning up the dining area that Gavi and the others used, when you had a similar conversation with her. "I suppose it would not be quite so nice if they attempted, at any point, to refuse him."

"Certainly not," came the reply, "There have been a few who tried."

"And what happened to them? I've heard him say that if any of them wished to be released, they would be."
"Only under certain circumstances," she replied, "For example, if they are approaching middle-age for their race, and wish to be married and have children."

"And how does that work?"

"She is given choices, choices the King approves of--he would not want her marrying an enemy of his, naturally!--and married off."

"And he ceases his attentions?"

"Only when they are fertile."

"So," you said, "They are never free of him."

"In some of the cases, they can be. Absence often causes the King to become bored of them."

"But in others?"

"They attempted to repel him, and that was that."

That was that.

"I see," you replied, "Well, I apologize for taking up your time."

"The company was nice," she replied with a slight smile.

For several hours, you spent your time going over the lesser-used passages, checking in obvious and not-so-obvious hiding places, places you yourself would have used, had you been here to do what you were trying to prevent. There were no attackers found, and save for a servant who had fallen asleep on the job, no troubles to speak of.

Your patrol then moved to the expansive courtyard, and it was there that you began to think again.

You could only hope that Cold was bored of you, from what she had said. As cunning, as manipulative, as ingenious as he had been throughout the entirety of your contracts, if he were anything but you had no doubt that eliminating him would get harder. Your plan had been to cooperate with him as far as Frieza's demise, but then to eliminate him once the heat had died down. But what if he located the poison? Frieza knew that you had had it, so wouldn't it be safe to assume that Cold did as well?

There could be no yielding to the fear, however. You had been in tight spots before, had always prevailed, and there was no reason to, provided you did not commit some grievous error, believe it would be anything otherwise now.

You would win. Both Cold and Frieza would die.

"Lima."

You stiffened when, as you looked over one section of the courtyard pond and the shady tree beside it, you heard Cold's voice.

You turned to meet him, and bowed. "Your highness."

"You did not report back."

"Your guards would not let me in," you replied, "They said you'd ordered no one else to enter the
room while you were there."

He walked forward, motioning to you to follow, and you did, though his shadow fell over you as you walked on his left side.

"I also heard that Gavi nearly killed you."

"It was nothing," you replied, "A friendly spar. She just got overenthusiastic, was all."

"Indeed. It was not my intent for her to go as far as that."

"Sire?"

He looked down at you, gaze as frosty as his name. "It was on my orders that she challenged you."

"Why?" you asked, feigning ignorance, "I don't understand. As a saiyan, I'm happy to fight her, but--"

"--but," he cut you off, "Your loyalty is in question."

You stopped.

"And I wanted you to know, (y/n), that you are being watched by six far stronger than you."

"Why not have me killed, then, if I'm so weak and treacherous?"

"You are subtle," he replied, "And useful, in many ways."

You said nothing.

"In any case, it was only a warning, and I hope you will heed it. There is no need for your life to end here, when it could very easily continue."

Did he...no. No, he could not mean it that way. You refused to believe that he did.

"You questioned the servants," he added a moment later.

"I was learning about this place."

"Really, now," Cold replied, "Why ask others about me? Why not ask me yourself?"

"That would be an awkward line of questioning, don't you think?" You wanted nothing more right now than for him to leave. But far from it, he seemed to stick close to you. As you continued your patrol about the courtyard, he followed.

"You seem to dislike questioning anyone for anything."

"The direct approach is rarely subtle."

There was silence only for a moment before you heard his voice, slow and evil. "Then let me be the direct one."

As you passed into a clump of bushes, behind a pair of weeping willows on the north side of the pond, Cold grabbed you by the front of your armor and lifted you swiftly to eye level--so quickly, in fact, that you were struck by a wave of dizziness.

"You are here because I desire you to be, and because of your potential usefulness in ridding me of
that spoiled, stupid brat of mine. If I ever get so much as a hint that you intend to betray me, what
Gavi will do to you will be the least of your worries. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

"Y-yes," you choked out, yelping slightly when he dropped you a second later.

"Now," his tone shifted to a much more friendly one, and he continued walking, "You have very
little to worry over here anyway. Don't you agree?"

"I have a job to do," you replied, rising with trembling legs to follow him, "That is what matters."

"You really do have to slow down and take some joy in life, you know. Or did your mentor not
make note of that?"

You said nothing. Cold knew about your mentor. What else did he know of?

"I was taught to take the job seriously," you replied, "And that's what I'm doing. I will indulge only
so far as will make Frieza comfortable in believing that I am under your sway."

He chuckled.

Amusement...or was it anger, masked as such?

"I have a question for you, Lima."

"What?"

"How does your...order...look on those who go back on a contract?"

"Poorly," you replied, "It is not done." And that was all you would say. Such a step would be the
greatest dishonor for an assassin--a contract was a contract was a contract, to the ending of either
your life or your target's, and to break it was to make a mockery of the art.

Or so your mentor had said.

"I see."

Another guard approached down the path ahead, and so Cold left you, with all the confusion you
had been, and still were, mired in.

Not even a week later, as you were discussing sparring technique with Julis and Gavi, you received
a notification on your scouter.

The Queen had arrived on the planet and would be making a trip to the harem. You relayed this
message to Julis and Gavi.

"She hasn't been here in a while," Gavi replied, "I thought she'd taken a dislike to us."

Yuki didn't already dislike them? Why would she visit, if not to give them a 'lesson'? Would one of
them die?

"How is she, personality-wise? Compared to the King," you asked, "Is she more or less strict about
formalities than he is?"

"More and less," Julis laughed. "Just behave as you do with Cold."
"I see."

They were so casual about the Queen, but it was put out of your power to ask more, as your superior called for you over the scouter.

The next few hours were lost to security checks, to questions of the Queen's first wave of guards, and to calling in more soldiers to reinforce those already present. You remained, in the end, with Gavi and the other five women, and as you listened through the scouter, you heard her imperious voice giving orders as she approached those who stood at the front door.

"She's on her way," you said to them.

"Go and greet her," Ardae said, "Let her in, I mean."

"Shouldn't a servant do that?"

"You won't get into any trouble. Go!"

Sighing, you stepped outside the room. Right in time, too--because as you took your stiff, steel-spined position, the Queen moved up the hallway.

And what a sight she was.

Queen Yuki was a little over six feet tall. Her skin was purple, exactly like Cooler's, and much like he, and Frieza, and Cold, she had white bioplates. The biogems were the final touch--they were an almost candy-like pink.

She wore armor like King Cold, and a cape also, though she had a dark blue skirt that fell to about her ankles rather than the black underarmor suit bottom he seemed to favor.

When she and the four guards behind her approached you, you bowed, and saluted once you had risen.

Yuki made no response. Instead, she looked you up and down, and walked through the door beside you once it opened.

Well. At least you would not have to watch what you said around her. Perhaps she deemed you unworthy of acknowledging.

One of her guards remained outside with you, but he said nothing, and for two hours you both stood in silence. You were occupying yourself with attempting to listen in to the conversation that Yuki seemed to have stricken up with Gavi and the others.

"...majesty, we..."

"...no more than..."

Small snatches, nothing that you could really go on. But they broke the monotony of the job, and there was no telling when you might actually find something of use among the strings of words, so you continued to listen.

"...hope, pleased that..."

"...hardly time..."

"...birthday present?"
Puzzlingly, you heard giggling from the room, though whose it was was not clear.

After a half-hour more of straining your ears to their furthest, you saw Yuki emerge from the room, followed by Ansel and Ilura.

And that was that.

You asked Gavi about this, but she would say nothing on the subject save that the Queen would take some of Cold's women now and again, and later return them.

Torment, you wondered? Torture for daring to share his bed?

It was hard to say.

Whatever it was, though, you were determined to avoid drawing her ire, in whatever fashion it came in.
Heightened State

Chapter Summary

All you want is out. But rushing...maaaaaaay have been the wrong thing to do.

Heightened State

You'd never been in quite this position before.

Sure, a few times the targets had found out your purpose, tried to get you to turn coat, and had offered you many things. And there were even a few threats. But there was never the sense of both. Never the sense of bribery and potential death in equal amounts, like it was a game being played.

It was...creepy, too.

You'd never felt so surrounded as you did here, among these six women who served him in that way.

Outwardly, you remained perfectly calm.

Inwardly, you had never been more panicked. You checked your room over three times a day, and tried to install a surveillance bug. It seemed to worked for a bit, but failed after only four hours of recording.

When you got back that evening you found it smashed on the floor.

Your room was being watched.

You began to fidget with your scouter more and more often, to be sure that the poison had not dislodged. Would it be enough, when Frieza got there? What about Cold? He was rather a large man, would the dose be big enough to split between he and his son? No. No. Dose did not matter. It was a virus after all--modified, but still a virus. One little exposure was all it took.

You decided, finally, to test it. A tiny drop was all it took. It would allay your fears considerably, if you could but see that it worked.

You chose the target, a young green and black-hued Arcosian. She was new to being a servant, and was very free in speaking to most everyone. The easiest, you thought.

Guilt over killing an innocent bystander did not even occur to you. As your mentor had once said, 'You have no conscience. You feel no remorse. You do what your job demands without time for sentiment.'

You offered in your spare time to train her, on the off chance that one of the male soldiers elsewhere tried to assault her, and she (disbelieving that something of that kind could happen to her) accepted with some doubt. She seemed to enjoy the time, and in a strange way, the saiyan part of you was thrilled as well.

On the third evening of training, you put your plan into action. You got out a little of the poison
and mixed it into a bit of water, then soaked the fingertips (and by extension, your nails) of your right hand in the mixture. The remaining solution was dumped into the toilet and flushed.

Showtime.

"Alright," she said, "I'm ready again."

"Good," you replied, "I'm going to turn away. I want you to grab me by the shoulder. Pretend you're some brute who wants to take advantage of me. I'll show you how to respond."

"It'll hurt, won't it?" She took a deep breath.

"Yeah. But it'll be fine, don't worry. I promise not to break anything."

"Well...okay."

You turned and stood quietly, watching the door and crossing your arms.

"Hey," her voice came, in a shoddy imitation of the brute she was pretending to be, "How about I show you a good time?"

Her hand grabbed uncertainly at your shoulder.

"I'm not interested," you said.

"I bet I can make you interested."

"Well..." you turned, and struck suddenly with your right hand. Your nails drug down the side of her face--

--two long scratches appeared, and inwardly, you rejoiced.

"Oh my gods," you said, as she cringed and reached up to touch the wound. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to break the skin!"

"It's...it's fine. It stings a lot, though." Judging from her face, though...

You immediately ended the session and tended the wound yourself, cautioning her against going to the infirmary.

"They'd probably say you're wasting their time," you said.

"I know," she said, "And gods forbid if you catch anything, they're no help there either. They just say to go lay down and drink fluids."

"You get sick a lot?"

"Yeah," she replied, "S'why I do the cleaning work. Don't want to get anyone else sick if I can help it."

You parted with a smile, and waited.

The next day you went to knock on her door, to see if she were up to (you said) fighting again, but she replied that no, she wasn't.

"Why not? Bit shy after what happened?"
"No," came the stuffy reply, "I've got a fever. Probably coming down with something."

"You want me to bring you anything?"

"No, I'm fine in here. Got what I need, I just need to wait it out."

As did you.

She died two days later. The official cause of death was ruled to be a severe case of influenza.

You knew that Cold was keeping an eye on you, but there seemed to be no backlash for this incident in the coming week, or even the week after that. And so, once more, you began to relax. It had worked.

You thought over it again. It might be a little quick, but if you managed to do it...perhaps there would be an excellent opportunity to flout Cold's plan. You just wanted out of this situation. You wanted out of this harem, out of this collection that you were desperate not to become a part of.

Part of you whispered that it would not be so bad. They lived very well here. You could continue your work.

The other part, the sensible part, refuted this by saying that you had already been played the fool, and he was due to receive your vengeance. You would not be so easily made a mockery of.

He was due for a visit in two days. You decided to put the plan into action sooner rather than later. Reaching into the earpiece of your scouter, you hunted for the end of the--ah, there it was!

But to your horror, as you grabbed the tied-up end of the tube, you crushed it. There was a drip, and when you pushed a nail against the tube, to stop the flow so you could create another knot when you pulled it out, it tore entirely.

It leaked out in a tiny river, and before you could stop it, the sample was all gone.

You pulled the scouter off the side of your head and looked down into it. The foam that surrounded the earpiece was a little wet...maybe...

You could fix this. There was--there was a way to fix this! You could still salvage it!

A minute later you were in the communal bathroom, hurriedly looking through one of the medicine cabinets for something, ANYTHING, you could put the mildly-soaked foam into. You settled on a pillbox, which you filled with water and set the foam and tube in.

This was panic. This was not good. You weren't supposed to be sitting in a bathroom stall worrying that you were losing the only thing that could get you out of this predicament.

No. No. You weren't going to panic.

You were NOT going to panic!

Taking a deep breath, you removed the tube from the foam, and burned the latter with a tiny ki ball. The ashes you flushed. The former, you placed inside the box and filled it halfway with water.

It would all be fine.
You filed a request for a new scouter and worked that day without the slightest question from Gavi or the others about looking nervous, although some of the other guards thought you were overeager whenever the women would ask for something. You went to fetch it, you went to open the door, you did anything asked of you without giving anyone else a chance to answer their requests.

It was, needless to say, an exhausting day. Mentally, you were spent, but you checked over your room regardless.

Bed, clean, free of any bugs or bombs or anything of the sort. Blankets, double-checked. Desk, surface gone over, clean. No presence of anything.

Desk drawers...
...nothing in the bottom two drawers, as expected.

The top one held your pillbox. You moved the lid, wondering if you'd need to put more water--
Oh, no.

Oh no, no, no.

It was dry.

And empty.

Someone had to know. Someone HAD to have...

You checked the rest of your drawer. Empty. The datapad, the hair tie, all of it was gone.

Oh gods.

You were dead without that poison.

A sitting duck.

You didn't sleep that night. It took until the wee hours of the morning to even begin to come up with a plan to get through the rest of this mess. There was a way, you were sure. You just had to do a little more research, and you'd find something.

You would. You had to.

"You look terrible."

It was the first thing said to you when you relieved the current guard, and it came from Gavi.
"I didn't sleep well," you replied, "But thank you for being concerned."

"It's what we're here for." she smiled at you.

Smiling.

She knew something, didn't she?

Maybe Cold had found out and told them.

So you waited for them to do something all day, watched them carefully, noted every errant twitch and aside from noticing that Julis was sporting some new nail polish--absolutely nothing happened that you could note.

Lunch, normal. Teatime, normal.


You wished someone would just DO something!

"He'll be here soon."

Wait.

He'll be here soon.

Bloody hell, you'd forgotten all about Cold's visit!

You took a deep breath to try and calm your racing heart, but it and other such breaths did nothing to help. Cold could just be coming to visit the ladies again, or...or he could be along to kill you.

He might not be...

But what if he was?

Alright. Calm down. You need to get ahold of yourself.

"Did he say when?" you asked.

"After the evening meal," Gavi replied, "Probably just wants a chat."

"Right," Julis giggled. "A chat. The Queen's busy, so...

That brought a fresh wave of fears. Oh, yes, certainly, a chat to let you know just how little time you had left. Or on how short his patience was running.

No. No, probably just to see the women. That was the more sensible thing. Your desk could've just been some servant or the other mucking up and tossing everything unlabeled out. You didn't have to immediately jump to the worst case scenario.

The fact that you even needed to think that was probably a bad sign.

You were never so glad to get off your shift as you were when your relief showed up. He, too, had something to say about your looking bad, and suggested a few shots to ensure that you slept soundly tonight.

You laughed, agreed with the sentiment and left the room.
Misery. This whole job had been nothing but misery from beginning to...wherever the hell you were now. What would your mentor do?

He wouldn't be in this scrape, you thought. He'd be out and done by now. He wouldn't have waited as long as you had, trying to ensure that you were safe before moving! He would have had fifty backup plans.

You took a deep breath.

This would be over soon.

It would be over soon. To bed, to sleep...

You gave a quick bow, automatically, when, on your way out, you passed Cold. Then you stopped. "They weren't expecting you for another hour, your highness. Should I--?"

"No, no," he said quickly, "And besides, I am not here to see them, anyway."

"No?" you asked.

"It is a quick matter, and I'm sure you won't be kept long."

"What do you need?" You made no eye contact. You were sure that you'd give him some hint if you did so.

"I've heard that you requisitioned a new scouter, you see." He motioned to you to follow him.

Shit.

Shit. This was the end, wasn't it?

"Yes, I did," you replied, "The old one snapped in half."

"What were you doing to the old one? They're meant to be durable."

"I'd...forgotten something, and slapped my head, like you do when you realize you've forgotten something, and, well...crack."

"One so disciplined as yourself? You'd think that you would know how to handle a scouter by now."

"We all have our off days."

The two of you, and his guards, exited the building. Now he was leading you...wait...

"I suppose that is true," he replied, "And I would believe you, if it were not for some other, extenuating circumstances."

"What circumstances might those be, your highness?"

"The young lady you were training. I'm unaware of her name, but I heard about her death. Perhaps that is what has you so upset?"

Where was he going?
"She was a fast friend," you replied, "Yes, I was upset. I guess...you get used to losing people in this business."

"Indeed," Cold said, "But...there was something else I needed to...oh, yes!"

What? He sounded far too delighted for it to mean anything good.

"The contents of your drawer. Not the scouter, of course."

As long as he didn't mean--

"The servants might have thought it was nothing more than an ordinary junk-holder, if two of them had not fallen ill within a day of touching it. A third and a fourth as well..."

"My friend did have a tendency of coming down with bugs very quickly, perhaps she passed it to me, and--"

"Yes. Let us ask ourselves about that, shall we?"

You had walked past several palaces at this point, but now Cold was turning toward one of them. He went up several of the steps before turning to look back at you.

"You can't mean--" you started. Several passing Arcosians were eyeing you, doubtfully. A few others, disapprovingly.

"I do. We are going to finish this discussion."

And you didn't even know where this was. Wonderful.

Up the stairs you followed him, eyelids drooping and mind alternating between sluggishness or breakneck speed. Why take you here...?

"Let us ask ourselves how you obtained this from her, and managed to pass it to a curious little container..."

"I like to keep a bit of water for waking myself up in the morning, I assure you--"

"--that there was no ill intent."

You looked at him incredulously.

"Is that what you were planning to say? Do you expect me to believe that, honestly?"

This palace was different on the inside. The flooring, the chandeliers, it was much more intricate, more detailed, than the one you had served in. And, of course, full of Arcosians. Only rarely did you see someone of another race, and only as a servant or as a guard.

Up another staircase you went.

"It is the truth, your highness."

"There is just one little problem with that," Cold replied, "An ordinary flu virus I could understand. Unless your immune system is severely compromised, well..."

"Well, what?"
"There is no reason for you to have been exposed to that, and lived to tell about it this long."

"I have a strong immune system, your highness." If he was going to kill you, you just wished he would go ahead and DO IT already!

"I see."

You walked in silence down corridors, and up several more flights of stairs. You felt ready to drop. To just give up, to hell with letting go of contracts.

This was too much.

"We both know that you're lying," Cold said, giving you a self-satisfied and utterly evil grin, "Drop the pretense. I know what you did. You did that yourself, didn't you. That was where you were keeping it. That girl was practice, wasn't she?"

"I did not--"

"Wasn't she?"

You stopped behind Cold, who himself had stopped in front of one final door.

"I would appeal to your sense of self-preservation, if not your greed," he said, "I would like you to think long, long and hard, about the decisions you are considering."

Quiet once more.

"You have before you an opportunity, like none of your race could possibly imagine. And all you have to do is cooperate."

"I intend to."

"Good!" he replied, "Then you will have nothing to worry over."

The door opened, and you followed him in.

It was...a set of quarters, and once more your mind strayed to the night of the masquerade. The room was covered in things of value, paintings, rugs...and through the door at the other end...

Queen Yuki.

"My dear," Cold said, stepping to your side, "We have a guest."

The Queen grinned.
Everything is moving too quickly. You're sure you're failing...but at how many things?

And then the Queen giggled and rushed forward.

You were so confused.

And exhausted.

"I knew it was her the moment I saw her."

The Queen raised your chin, and your eyes met. A second later her hand shot forward and ran its fingers through your hair.

"And what do you think?"

"She's perfect!" There was a grin as her purple fingers ran through your hair again and again. "But she looks like she's about to drop."

"She's had a long day," Cold said, "Feed her up and let her rest. She'll be fine."

You started to speak, but felt yourself unable to come up with anything to really say. What could you say, with all of this to take in? You were being treated like a...

...like a gift...

Or a present. A birthday present.

You'd been thinking for what had felt like only a second. But when you looked up again, Cold was gone, and you were alone with the Queen. Yuki.

You knew little enough about her. Noble family, a friend of the King's since childhood. Inseparable, even.

She was taller than you, but at least she wasn't as tall as Cold. She was more like...

"Come, come, dear. Let's get you something to eat."

She pulled you forward and into a side-room where a dinner was set up, and quietly, you took a seat across from the one she took.

"You look so nervous," she said, "But that's to be expected, I suppose."

You hardly knew what to think. There was the food...possibly poisoned? No. No, King Cold wouldn't risk it, if his wife was...unless he wanted her gone also? No. No, he seemed to be very
affectionate with her. And he hadn't said anything to you about it.

"Now, tell me, what is your name?"

"(Y/n)," you said, giving her a slight smile.

"Wonderful," she replied, "I am Queen Yuki, but of course you already know that. I'm sure the women you've been guarding have talked about me at great length."

"Yes, they speak very well of you." The food was good, there were no odd tastes or unfamiliar powdery textures. Perhaps this was just an odd way of trying to get you to see their point of view of things. That everything except for Frieza was very well-ordered. But no, what point would there be in that?

"I'm so glad to hear that. I hear them speak a lot of my husband, but that's to be expected. He spends a lot more time with them than I do, after all."

You nodded. Was she complaining? Was she complimenting? It was hard to read her. That smile seemed to give off no other indication than idle pleasantry.

"Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Pardon me?"

"The food. Is it good?"

"Oh! Yes, of course it is, thank you. I'm very sorry, your majesty, it's just that today has been very long. I'm afraid my sleepiness is getting in the way of things. I assure you I'm usually much more chatty."

"That shall be fixed in the morning," she replied, "A good night's sleep is all you need. Then we can proceed from that point."

Maybe Cold had wanted you as a sort of companion for his wife...? Asking where this would lead, though, that could end badly. You didn't want her to get the idea that you weren't enthusiastic, and asking too much about that might--

"Are you otherwise well? Besides the being tired part?"

"Yes," you replied, nodding.

It was in light conversation like this that you continued, until the meal was finished and servants came in to clear the table. You rose and were looking towards the door when Yuki spoke up.

"Where are you going?"

"I assumed you had some duty for me to take care of in the morning. I was going to go back to the barracks."

"Oh, no, you're staying the night," she replied, "Didn't the King tell you?"

"I'm sorry, no. He didn't say anything about it. Where will I be sleeping, then?"

There was too much to worry about. Why were you to stay the night? Did Cold suspect you of being a flight risk? Did he want you someplace where he could keep an eye on you? Why would he put you in a room with his wife?
Yuki lead you into a small side room where a bed was made up, and gestured to it. "I will see you in the morning," she replied, "And do be ready for a long day."

You slept very soundly that night, after a cursory examination of every crack of the room you had access to. No cameras that you could see. No hidden poisons, or messages, or anything like that. It just appeared to be a tiny, tiny spare bedroom.

It was not Yuki who woke you, however, it was a servant, who hustled you into the bathroom, and then once you were done cleaning up for the day, rushed you right back out. Then you were lead up to the Queen herself, who was seated in front of a mirrored vanity.

Nearby was a rack of dresses in a variety of colors and styles.

"Ah, good. We need to get started. (Y/n), here, take a seat."

Wait...

But despite your misgivings, there was nothing for it. You had to do as she asked, or risk her getting upset. And if she did that, Cold would likely get involved, and the entire mess would be very unpleasant. And then again...

The same servant who had been so interested in hurrying you from one place to the next had now taken on the duty of retrieving the dresses. Yuki dismissed many of them as not looking fit for you, or being the wrong color, or not setting right with your eyes. What finally was settled on was a maroon satin dress with off-the-shoulder straps, but before you were told to change into it...

You were stripped nearly bare.

This was turning into a farce. Cold was obviously not taking you seriously.

The dress was preceded by a slip that seemed to push up your breasts. Once everything was on and straightened out (and the small lump betraying the belt you kept your tail in underneath the dress was covered up), you were told to sit down in front of the vanity.

You watched yourself in the mirror. Yuki was brushing your hair while the servant seemed to occupy her time with putting makeup on your face.

"If I may--" you started.

"You may not." The response was so cheerful, and yet, so firm. She would not allow you to move from the seat until she was done with you, and whenever you tried to speak, gave similarly curt replies.

Lunch came.

You ate as politely as you possibly could, considering the obviously expensive gown that had been put on you. There was no question about it, you definitely were not in a way to be the guard here. But if that wasn't it, then why exactly were you here?

"You're looking lovely," Yuki said, smiling at you as you took a drink of water, "I have to say, some of my best work."

"I would agree," you replied, "But I have nothing to compare it to."

"That is a compliment, surely."
"Yes," you said quickly, "Yes, it is. I didn't mean for it to sound otherwise. I wish I knew to what honor I owed such work."

"All in due time." She gave a slight grin, "But for now, might I safely assume that I have your gratitude for a job well done?"

"Yes," you replied, "Thank you very much."

A little of Frieza's presumption in her, you thought, despite how much she resembled Cooler. Or rather, how much he resembled her.

Another servant entered shortly afterwards.

"Majesty, I hate to interrupt, but--"

"But what is it?" she asked, "It had better be important."

"The King wants to know if your engagement for tonight is still on."

"It is," she replied, "Thank you. You can go now."

"Yes, your majesty." And with that, he was gone.

Engagement? Probably a dinner party of some kind. Perhaps she meant to take you along with her. Maybe this was still part of the guard job after all, but you were being expected to look less obvious.

There was no other explanation that made sense to you.

You watched the first servant carefully as she cleaned up the table. You were left with your teacup and nothing else on the table before you.

"It is always pleasant to have another woman around," Yuki replied.

"Is that why you speak with the others?" you asked, "They are all very well spoken, and seem to well know how to get along with you."

"Such an observer you are. That would be one of the reasons, yes."

The lingering, unasked question hung on the edge of your lips. What about you? What did she think of you? It was hard to say if she would be pleased or offended by either of those questions, and so you remained silent.

She was, or at least seemed, incredibly open. There seemed never to be a moment where she wasn't smiling. But then, she was in her own element here. A Queen was easy to keep happy when she was getting what she wanted.

You listened to her questions and gave your answers, but asked very few of your own--and when you did, it was something regarding the meal, or the room, or some observation on her wit or taste. Several hours passed in this manner.

"You're such a flatterer," she finally said, after you gave a lavish praise of the room's decor, "I can see why he brought you to me. I wasn't expecting a...a saiyan to be so charming."

"We can, when we want to be," you replied, "When the situation calls for it."
"You mean to say you're also vulgar?"

"No. Well, when I'm around other saiyans, you understand, I have to pretend to be vulgar, otherwise--"

"Please. If they don't like you then it hardly matters as long as you're happy. And how could you not be?"

You gave a smile, and inclined your head.

"You are a bit of an oddity," she went on, "But I'm glad you are, otherwise you wouldn't be here."

"You're enjoying my company that much?"

"Of course I am. My husband keeps many women about, but I'm sure you understand that once in a while a new face is a wonderful thing."

So she would get bored, was that it? That was an interesting view to take of the women he kept, but it made sense. It was better to befriend them. It would let Yuki keep an eye on him, as well as furnish her with someone to hold conversation with when she grew bored of others.

You filed it away like everything else, but you were unsure if it would matter in the end. No. It didn't matter.

You had a job to do. Right now things didn't look so good. But that was what this was for. What she was for.

Keeping your cover up until such a time as you could get rid of both Cold and Frieza.

And then you'd never have to think about this perverse situation ever again.

You wouldn't have to wear another stupid gown. You wouldn't have to--

"...and the King does make jokes like that now and again."

"Yes," you replied quickly, "He can be humorous when the mood strikes him."

"And it does strike him rather often. Though...he does like to surprise people, and they don't find it quite as funny."

If she only knew.

After listening to her talk a bit longer about Cold, a small dinner was brought in, and the two of you ate as you had at lunch.

And then, without warning, she left.

You were glad to be alone, but at the same time...

This was all just...too much. Gowns, and makeup, and meals with the Queen? You weren't a guard at all at this point. You'd settled that much, but again, the question arose, if not that, then what were you?

Sighing, you finished off the last of the tea from dinner, and stood to pace about the room. The servant was still there, watching you a little anxiously, but saying nothing.
There had to be a source of the poison somewhere...somewhere you could access it easily enough. Maybe from someone you could finish off quickly. No, no, if they were selling it here they'd know the risks. They weren't as foolish as you.

If you'd just kept your cool, everything would have been fine. But you hadn't, and now you were a sitting duck.

No.

This was salvageable. There would be a sharp lesson to learn once you returned home, but this would all work out in the end.

It would all be fine.

The door opened, and you turned to look, supposing it to be Yuki.

You were wrong. Instead, it was...

"Siberius?" you asked, "If you're looking for the Queen..."

"She'll be along," he replied, "And really, I think you can stop addressing me as such. We both know that's not my real name."

Cold? No. No, that wasn't possible. You knew he'd been that masked man from the masquerade, but Siberius, too?

But he grinned, the expression you knew by now so well, and said, "Perhaps you're not quite as skilled as I thought you were."

"We've...there's been no information shared regarding the ability...we had no idea that you...that Arcosians could change like--"

"Well, we can. Now, come along."

"Where?"

"You'll find out when we get there."

It wasn't like you had a choice. You followed him out the door and down the hall, studying his skin and gem color. It all corresponded to that which you knew to be Cold's.

Fooled again. He had fooled you once again.

This was becoming unbearable.

He stopped at the fifth door on the left, and in fact the last room at the end of the hall, and lead you into it.

"You do look rather fetching," he said, once you had stepped inside behind him.

"Your wife chose the dress."

"Doesn't she have lovely taste?"

"Of course she does."
You turned nervously towards him, expecting--yes, there it was, hungry, searching...he intended to, didn't he?

"You have nothing to sell me this time," you replied.

"I beg to differ," he answered, "You did lose what you brought with you. I can provide more of that."

"You?" you asked, surprised.

"Who do you think had it produced in the first place?" He smirked, stepping forward and reaching up to your face. "In case you were thinking of using it on me, double-crossing me, that sort of thing..."

"But you'd still be vulnerable to it."

"No," he replied, "I wouldn't. I'm fully immune to it. You aren't going to get at me with it."

"But Frieza, I could."

"Now you're catching on."

It would be fine.

It was going to be fine.

You would be able to kill him.

"Cooperate," Cold said, voice husking, "And you will find that what was gone from your drawer has been replaced with an updated version."

"How do I know you aren't lying?"

"You don't."

You took a deep breath. If it was going to happen, at least he wasn't in his usual form...

He was leaning down, eyes half-shut, when the door opened again.

"You bastard!"

"'Tis not what it appears." Cold took a defensive, and yet somehow still bored-sounding, tone, "Yuki, be reasonable--"

"I've been reasonable enough! You think I'm going to just let you get away with this?"

Well, if you weren't screwed already...
A Successful Marriage

Chapter Summary

You don't even want to think about it anymore. This is just too much.

Chapter Notes

Please observe the newly added tags.

A Successful Marriage

"Back away from her right now." Yuki stormed forward, making a shooing gesture at Cold. "She's mine."

"I was only warming her up, dear."

"The hell you were! I did not spend all day gussying her up just for you to swan right in and seduce the one that you brought for me to enjoy!"

Wait...wait, what was going on? You'd had the guess of birthday present, but it sounded almost like Yuki intended to...

Oh, no.

Oh no, no, no.

"Sit down," she said again, "Across the room, where I don't have to worry about you putting your hands all over what's mine."

...he wasn't leaving.

Cold was not leaving.

Yuki turned back to you, smiling somewhat sympathetically. 

Over her shoulder, you could see Cold in his other form, going through a cabinet on the wall and pulling out a bottle of wine as well as a glass.

"No, no, look at me."

Yuki grabbed your chin and turned your eyes back in her direction.

"I always do like you women who have no idea what to do with me. You have no idea what's going on, do you?"

"I--" you started to speak, but again, you could think of nothing to say. You weren't willing to
admit to it so easily, but there was nothing else to say either. Though you were unsure of Yuki's strength, there was no second-guessing Cold's...

He was even stronger than Frieza.

You couldn't even begin to think of how to get out of this situation.

"Now, be a good girl," Yuki said, "And be sure to make some noise for me."

Before you could even protest, she turned you around and marched you straight over to the wall a few feet away before pushing you against it.

You started to take a step back, but she leaned forward to stop you from moving...before reaching down and beginning to hike up your gown.

Her tail, it was probably going to be with her tail, with Cold all the way across the room watching. You'd been in a threesome or two before, but this was a little more than you'd expected from her.

Yuki leaned back just long enough to push your gown up so she could lean against the mass of fabric.

You stiffened when one of her hands wandered under the fabric, under the slip, and...

...under your underwear, which she tore open. She touched at your button briefly, and scoffed. "You didn't do a very good job of getting her ready."

"You didn't give me time to do anything," Cold replied. There was the sound of wine being poured into a glass.

He was just going to sit there drinking and watch Yuki, and you...

You bit your tongue to stay silent when her other hand wandered up and pulled at the front of your gown; tugging the fabric of both it and the slip until one of your breasts was exposed.

"At least you had the sense to pick one that wasn't absurdly huge in the chest department," she said.

"I know you well enough to not make amateur mistakes like that." There was a laugh. "Oh, you were worried about her readiness. Go after her neck, she enjoys that."

You took in a sharp breath when you felt Yuki's lips on your neck and several of her fingers breaching you.

There was a giggle near your ear.

Grope here, stroke there....lips on the side of the neck, then on the ear...

You shut your eyes. Alright. You could get through this. It was another woman. There was nothing for you to worry about.

"Alright, now. There we are." Yuki pulled her hand away from your now-dampened southern area, and you felt her fumbling with the front of her own skirt.

What was that about? Her tail was already...

Oh.
Just when you felt there was nothing else that could surprise you, just when you felt that you had everything all figured out.

That didn't feel like her tail against your entrance.

"You know," Yuki said, "Most of the time I get a remark about preferring men to women before I have to bring this out."

"The...thought had crossed my mind," you said quietly.

"It's a good thing we Arcosians are both, isn't it? Because then I wouldn't have near as much fun as I do."

You took a deep breath when she raised the hand at your breast to your neck and pushed you down. You were now bent over, leaning against the wall for all your support.

Yuki pushed in to the hilt, all at once. And in the interest of keeping your skin, you cried out. That had hurt a little more than you expected it to.

"Oh, very nice."

You shifted a little bit, and she began a series of swift thrusts that drove out any possibility of your protesting beyond a syllable. She hit deeply every time, and never fully drew out.

"Why not take her to bed?" came Cold's voice. "It would make for a nicer view."

"Next time, maybe."

Next...time...?

"It would also be more comfortable."

"Oh, who cares about that," Yuki said quickly. "But--"

You found yourself pulled back up by your hair and pressed closely to the wall. Her armor was now rather uncomfortably pushing into your skin.

"You're upsetting her, (y/n)," came Cold's voice, "Give her a bit more."

"I don't need help," Yuki snapped at him quickly. "I bet I could finish her faster than you ever could."

"I'll have to take you up on that later."

Once more breath drifted over your neck, once more a hand groped at your chest while its double moved down to your button. When you gave off a moan, she giggled once again.

"So that's where it is."

Your eyes stayed clamped shut as the onslaught continued. She thrusted deeply, perhaps a little slowly, but never quite stopping. The hand that slithered over your hood again and again, however, could not have been faster.

Someone else. You just had to picture someone else. The building pleasure in your loins was moving to its peak, and you didn't want to imagine either of them being responsible for it.
Your breathing grew more and more labored the longer it went on, and you let out the little moans that seemed to encourage her.

"You first," she whispered, heatedly.

Once...twice...a third and a fourth time more she thrusted, until finally, on the fifth--

It struck quickly, and you gave off a moan that more resembled a scream than anything else.

Yuki pulled you back to lean against her, and held you tightly, thrusting still rapidly until a burst of wet heat flooded into you.

Her end.

"Well?" Cold's voice drifted up from the back of the room.

"Wonderful," Yuki said, groping at your exposed breast absently, "The mammalians are always worth it."

"Then...?"

"I want to keep her."

"That is what I brought her here for." There was a chuckle. "I've been punished enough by this exercise, don't you think?"

He'd been punished enough?

"Yes," Yuki replied, "Next time, you can join us."

"Next time."

"Expect it to be soon."

"Whatever you wish, my love. You know I love nothing better than sharing with you."

He'd been forgiven and would be allowed to...the next time...

For a split-second you wanted nothing more than to simply leave. To hell with all the jobs.

But then your sense returned. It was now, more than ever, necessary to complete the contract.

You wouldn't need to take another for a while anyway. There would be time to reflect on the failures and miseries of this one when it was all over.
A Dangerous Game

Chapter Summary

If you never have sex again it will be too soon.

A Dangerous Game

The next night, Yuki held to her word.

The night after that as well.

And the next. And the next.

Each day had been the same, being dressed up so you could be the evening's entertainment, an event that could last a mere few minutes or a staggering few hours, as the last time had been.

You still weren't being allowed to go back to the barracks, in fact, you were barely allowed to leave the hallway where Yuki's room was.

A time or two, they even insisted on sleeping with you there between them, as if you were some kind of live hot water bottle.

By the time two weeks had passed, you were nearly ready to give up the whole shebang. To hell with the contracts. To hell with getting rid of an unstable prince, to hell with the money, even, you just wanted out of there.

You pretended to still be asleep when you felt one of them--Cold, he was on the left side--rising.

They'd had you stay again the previous night, and you were more than tired out; you were completely exhausted, and in the interest of hopefully getting more sleep, you remained still.

"Going already?" Yuki asked. "And we were just getting so comfortable together, the three of us."

"I know," came the reply, "But you know how it is, my dear."

"If you insist...but don't be long, alright?"

"I will try, but I can make no promises."

You heard the sound of his getting dressed, and then the door.

Yuki curled back up to you. "Wake up, Lima."

You shifted. It had been your name for so long, (y/n) was beginning to seem like a distant memory.

"Or maybe you require stimulation to wake up?" There was a giggle. A soft hand strayed over your bare side, and fingertips trailed up your ribcage.

"I'm awake," you replied quietly, turning towards Yuki, "What are you going to want today?"
"Nothing much," she said, stroking your face, "You were such a good sport with my husband...I think you deserve a bit of a break today. Pick something out to wear, maybe have a stroll in the garden before lunch?"

"Of course."

You had a small breakfast, and chose a dark blue gown that bared your shoulders. Yuki oversaw the application of your makeup, and so forth, and you were released.

You were given glances by many a servant as you walked down the halls and out into the courtyard, but finally, there was solitude.

The spring flowers were just beginning to bud, so there was plenty of green and many little bits of other colors peeping out. You walked down a short stone path, and then up another, before chancing on a fountain with an edge just large enough to sit on.

You were alone.

For the first time in a long time, you were alone.

You took a seat, and stared absently at the mysterious presence of a pot of pink-and-white amaryllis right next to the fountain. Why were they there? Why...

Why were you here?

Because you were stuck here. Because Frieza had found you out.

Because there was no other choice.

And now, with a lack of poison, you were likely never going to leave the planet again.

There was no way out.

You were going to be stuck here until they grew bored of you, stuck between them as their plaything whenever and wherever they were pleased to have you.

Deep breath.

No tears. No. No tears.

Denying did it no good. The tears came anyway, and you sat with your head in your hands, trying and failing to keep them from falling further.

How were you supposed to get out of this? You'd tried to be sure of yourself, had taken what seemed like every precaution...

...and...and still...

"What am I going to do?"

There was a touch at your shoulder, and you looked up--eyes red and mascara running.

Frieza.

"If you've come to gloat--" you started off with a defensive tone, but then shifted quickly to shame, "--go ahead. Just get it over with. I have nothing left to lose."
Frieza took a seat beside you, on the edge of the fountain, and was speaking in a surprisingly gentle tone. "I didn't come to gloat."

"I suppose you want another round, then."

"Not right now," he replied, "You don't look very well."

"You must know what's been going on," you said, wiping away the remaining tears, "I don't need to go into specifics."

"No. You don't." Frieza gave only a slight laugh before going on, "They're passing you back and forth, aren't they?"

You just nodded.

"I might not know how that feels, but I can understand the annoyance at never being allowed to rest. They want nothing if it does not go exactly according to their...plans. And you, like me, play nothing more than a part in their eyes."

Silence.

"You are nothing but a pawn to them."

"I could have guessed, but..." you shook your head, and kept your eyes on the water. It was better not to make eye contact, with the state you were in.

"You think you're stuck? That you have nothing left to lose--or rather, for them to take?"

"That is the long and the short of it, yes."

"Nothing left to lose," Frieza said, opening his hand, "But, I think, everything to gain, and I believe you needed something of this nature."

He was holding a small vial of green liquid.

Your eyes widened. "This is--but--how?"

"I might be watched most of the time, but I have an easier time getting these things than you."

"What will it cost me?"

"Nothing that I can get now, and nothing that you haven't already given me," Frieza replied. He placed the vial in your palm and then closed your hand around it. "You were mine before, and you will be mine again. Your master will not brook disappointment."

"Of course not," you said quickly, standing when you heard footsteps approaching, "Thank you, my Lord."

"Thank me later." He stood as well, and virtually purred his last words into your ear, "When you're begging for more."

You began to walk away, tucking the vial into your sleeve as you went. Maybe this wasn't as hopeless as it had first looked. You'd have to seriously inspect the contents of that vial, but you were going to get very, very lucky pretty soon if they were what Frieza had been hinting that they were.
Straight back to that hallway you went, back to the Queen's room, where she was herself still seated. You took a rag, wet it, and started to clean your face up as you were heading back towards her.

Yuki gave a cheerful smile when you approached. "Did you get what you needed outdoors?"

"Yes," you replied. The vial was pulled from your sleeve and set on the table in front of her. "Everything is going according to plan, my queen."
Chapter Summary

In the present, Yuki congratulates you on keeping to the plan you've both carefully laid out. She remembers your real first meeting—which was rather lucky...for her, at any rate.

Everyone's Fool, Part 1

*The Queen's POV*

"Oh, very good, Lima. Very good indeed. I thought it might happen, but this soon?"

"You can't be too overconfident," she replied, "But what am I saying, you know that already."

"Can't you just be confident?" I gave her a little grin.

"My queen, if anything in my life, I have learned never to be too overconfident. Your son has, several times, nearly brought me to the point that I thought I was a goner."

"Stop worrying. Here. Sit, eat."

"Cake? This early in the day?"

"I'm a Queen, I can eat it whenever I want," I replied, "You really do need to learn to enjoy yourself. That's always been your problem, you know."

"I grew up on the streets," you replied, "I've learned never to relax. It's hazardous to one's health."

"I shall have to break you of that mindset, then. But not right now. Right now, it serves us both."

"Then why mention it?"

"To make you ask questions, Lima. As I told you the first time we met." I grinned.

Oh, yes...I certainly remember *that*.

I had a plan, even then.

*The Past, still Yuki's POV***

I waited, calmly, as Corg was lead into the room.

"And what," he asked, "Does a Queen want with a man of my talent?"

"I am told that you employ a great number of rapscallions," I said. "For your various purposes."

"That is true. What, did one of them steal something from you?"
"No," I replied, "I merely want to...employ...one of them. A pretty face, good figure...that sort of thing."

"You won't find many available, considering the poverty level," Corg replied.

"But do you know of any?"

"I do. Would you prefer her to be intelligent, or just smart enough to follow orders?"

"Intelligent," I said, "Or at least willing to learn."

"I can think of one that fits the bill. Tell me, is there anything of value that you do not wear at all times?"

---

*The Past, Your POV*

Corg had asked for the ruby, and you were going after it.

Or, more specifically, you were going after the necklace that the gem was in. That was better than simply trying to prise the damn thing out.

The woman, he had told you, was some kind of visiting Arcosian noble, part of the retinue of King Cold, who was Lord Frieza's father. Rubies were hard to come by on Planet Vegeta, and this one would fetch a handsome price, a cut of which you'd naturally get.

A little extra money. You could use a bit of that. Maybe then you wouldn't have to worry about where the next job was coming from. At least, not for a while.

Maybe you could get into something that actually made regular money...there was always--

Ah, there she was.

You'd followed the woman and her servants at a slight distance for most of the day. The necklace was around her neck most of the time, but once or twice you saw her remove it to eat.

You wondered why--was the thing hard to clean?

Time went on.

As the afternoon passed, she visited several tiny shops, stopped to give a child a flower, and, oddly made a stop at Bena's smithy.

She came out with some kind of little emblem.

By the time that was done, it was well toward dinnertime. You followed them to a restaurant in a somewhat nicer part of the city, and the woman chose, along with her servants, to eat outside.

The necklace came off and was put aside on a tray, which was then set on the empty seat next to her.

Bingo. You grinned at the sight, and (glad of the potted shrubs just behind the table), sank to your knees and crawled under the table behind them. That no one saw you was a miracle; you feigned looked for something on the ground, however, to mislead anyone who might lay eyes on you.

Closer. Closer still.
You reached out...

Your hand closed around the necklace.

As you were pulling your hand back, however, there was a slap. The woman's tail struck the top of your hand, and you dropped the necklace back onto the chair.

"Well!" came her voice, "And what do we have here? A thief?"

Her purple tail coiled itself around your wrist, and your blood ran cold.

"And here she is," she went on, raising you forcefully up by the wrist, "The one bold enough to try to take my beloved little necklace. Shame on her! What shall I do with her, ladies?"
Chapter Summary

You go over the plans you and the Queen have made. She reflects on the ongoing success of a years-old plot, and her first tryst with you.

**Everyone's Fool, Part Two**

Yuki indulged in your body for several hours and kept you close afterwards.

"You have been a very good little actress," she whispered, "That look of fear when I came into the room, when you were already there with Cold! Pretending so well that you were afraid of me!"

You gave a little smile.

"Your tears have fooled even Frieza. I never thought anyone could pull that one off."

"It is easy to play afraid and alone with him," you answered. "He assumes everyone is like that around him to begin with. If you're beneath him, anyway."

"And what of my husband?"

You laughed. "Pretend to be a shy, blushing maiden and he thinks you're putty in his hands. He's even easier."

"Yes," Yuki's tone grew a little harsher, "I can certainly agree with that. If he didn't insist on poaching my women..."

"I thought you enjoyed sharing."

"I do," she replied, "But his...seductive tendencies that have them all gigglily for him, and forgetting about me, his proclivity to tearing their gowns, his insistence on--no, no, I'm not going to go into that, or I'll be complaining all night." The main point, of course, was that for every time Cold was with her, or with her and another woman, he was alone with the other women another ten times.

You shifted a little, and curled closer.

"You feel more secure with me, that much is obvious," Yuki said, stroking your hair.

"It would be hard not to."

"Yes," she replied gently, moving her hand to your face. "After all, everything you are, you owe to me. I've brought you up from what you were. I've given you everything you could ever possibly need."

"I know."

"Do you trust me?"
"Yes," you replied genuinely, looking her straight in the eye, "I trust you."

Completely.

Yuki gave a look that was something between a grin and a smirk, though as you moved your head down to rest on her chest, you did not see it.

You trusted her.

And she could not be more pleased. Her plan had come nearly to fruition.

*The Past*

You had been strongly encouraged to walk along behind the woman; her servants, or rather, guards as they turned out, stood on either side of you the entire time.

It was awkward, to say the least. They were all dressed in finery, or armor, and you were in clothes that needed a wash and boots that needed fixing up.

As they headed back toward the base, they were questioned about you only once. All the woman had to say was "thief" (she said more, of course, but that was the only word you heard) and they asked no further questions.

You were lead down a longer street and then into one of the base's buildings. A few hallways and doorways later, you were in what looked like a set of quarters.

The woman, and her servants, sat down, and you were directed to sit nearby.

"The bathroom," she said, pointing, "Is over there. I expect you to get cleaned up, the tub is more than adequate."

"But why?" You thought you were dead for sure, but she just wanted you to bathe?

"Do as she says," one of the guards answered for her, "Why does not matter."

You shuffled into the bathroom, and stood looking at the thing before you, confused.

How were you supposed to get clean in that?

The tub was...and the faucet was up on its front. You knew how to use a shower stall but this was entirely foreign. How were they supposed to get clean in this thing? After glancing back to be sure you weren't being watched, you stripped down and got into it. The water was turned on...

You sat on your haunches, tail out behind you, and stuck your head under the water so you could start washing your hair. The shampoo smelled weird, like flowers and oranges, but it was decent. In a few minutes you'd gotten your hair entirely clean.

"Haven't you filled it yet?"

She walked right into the room, and you had no chance to cover up. You looked up with your hair covering your face, and pulled the black curtain open so you could see her. "Filled what?"

"The tub--why are you still running the water?!"

"I was washing my hair."
"...how, exactly?"

"Sticking my head under the faucet, how else? I don't know how you all use this thing!"

"You're supposed to...oh, nevermind. I'll do it." She leaned over the side, took a round wad of what looked like rubber and stuck it into the hole just under the faucet. The water began to pool up a moment later.

"How am I supposed to get clean in this? I'll be sitting in--"

"Use the washcloths. I assume you DO know how to use that?"

"...yeah, I do."

You stopped the water once it got up to about the bottom of your ribcage, uncomfortable with the idea of it being any higher. She seemed to watch you do this, but said nothing more on the subject.

The bath did not last long after that.

You reached for your clothes, but she shook her head. "I am not having you in dirty clothes when you've only just gotten clean!"

"I can't just go naked," you said. Unless, you thought, that had been her intention the whole time. "Look, if you're going to punish me for trying to steal from you, just go ahead and do it."

She handed you a towel, which you wrapped around yourself.

"I am of the opinion," she replied amiably, "That you can hardly blame someone on the street for their thievery, if they have no other options."

"Well, I didn't." You really didn't, honestly. You weren't as strong as some of the others, and without strength there was very little else you could do to make a living that wasn't unsavory. "Rubies are hard to find here."

"In any case...what I've brought you here for is to offer you an opportunity."

"An opportunity?"

"Yes." She motioned to you to follow her back into the other room, and somewhat nervously you followed.

You were lead into the bedroom, and she gestured to you to sit down on the bed.

You did, and she sat in a chair some distance from that side of the bed. "What do you know of the assassin's trade?"

"I know it's lucrative," you replied, "I know aside from being a soldier it's a damn good way to make money."

"Here is my offer," the woman went on, "I will pay your way; you will become an assassin. And in return..."

You looked up.

"You will owe me a favor. A target, later on."
"Why not just hire one yourself?"

"I like to help the less fortunate," she grinned. "There are a few...things more than that to discuss. But I assure you, if you do as you're told, there will be nothing to worry about."

"Why me?"

"It could very well have been anyone else. You just got lucky."

That was understandable, you supposed. But that still didn't explain why she was trotting all this out so quickly.

"You can't possibly trust me this much this fast," you said, "Something's up."

"Very clever girl," came the reply. "I don't know you from the next monkey. Why would I trust you?"

"Because you think I have no other option but to do what you say?"

She gave a little smile.

"You think," you went on, "That because I'm doing so badly I'll jump at any opportunity to do better?"

Silence.

Well...she wasn't wrong, if that's what she was thinking. You wanted nothing more than to get off the streets, than to at least have a roof over your head and food at regular intervals. You wanted security.

"You said it," she replied, "Not me."

You looked away. There was a bowl of fruit on the bedtable, and your growling stomach reminded you of its emptiness.

"My poor little drowned monkey," she said, "Regardless of what is decided, I think today at least I will let you relax."

"Why? That doesn't benefit you at all."

"It benefits me plenty." There was a grin.

You went quiet when she got onto the bed behind you. Hands were placed on your bare shoulders.

"And you did attempt thievery," she whispered in your ear. A stray hand wandered south to the edge of the towel you wore. "I think you will be repaying me quite handsomely for my generous offer."

"I could be a whore for all you know," you replied.

"If you were a whore, you would be eating on a regular basis. Look how thin you are."

"Is that it, then? This is what you want in return for my trying to steal from you?"

"And as a way to seal the deal, as it were," she replied, "If you don't mind, that is."
You didn't. You wanted more than anything to believe her offer was genuine. Even if it involved...sex...at this point, you were willing to give it a try. You'd held out as long as you could, but in the end there was nothing for it.

At least she was a reptile, and a woman at that. You wouldn't be worrying about another mouth to feed this way, at least.

Lips on your neck. You stayed silent, even as one of her hands moved over your tail, with the other going down to touch your nether region. Your button was brushed, and you gave a little shiver.

"I'm just warming you up, mind," she said, "I don't like starting dry."

Her tail, you thought. It would be with her tail.

You kept your eye on that bowl of fruit, and tried to remember what you were doing this for.

The towel was tugged away, and her hands moved back up to your breasts. They weren't large, but she still seemed to have a fascination with them; she groped eagerly.

You squirmed.

She continued, giggling slightly.

It set your body tingling with slight pleasure, but you remained silent.

It went on like that for several minutes. When she touched your nethers again, her hand came up damp, and she grinned.

You were wondering what to do. If you did badly, would she rescind her offer? But inaction wouldn't help either...

"Lay back," she said, suddenly, "Head on the pillows."

You obeyed, and avoided her gaze when she moved over you, bringing your knees up and spreading your legs as she looked down. Her skirt was pulled up, and she was fiddling with something underneath it.

She wanted to make this deal, and yet she wanted to fuck you as well? What kind of woman was she?

You felt something brush over your entrance, then above it; it was solid and dragged your dampness up and over your button.

"What's your name?" you asked suddenly.

"Does it matter?"

"...I just wanted to know."

"Yuki," she said, "Poor little monkey. Are you afraid of me?"

"No," you lied.

"Good. Because you shouldn't be," she said, "Behave, and I will take very good care of you."

Every kind of pride was revolted at that idea. But again, the emptiness of your stomach reminded
you--there were worse things you could be doing. This was one woman. It was nothing.

You bit back a groan when she thrusted into you. "Your tail is--"

"That's not my tail," she purred.

"Then what is it?"

She laughed. "What do you think?"

Before you could answer, she started to move. You groaned again; the sensation of being stretched was stealing uneasily over you. Though considering your inexperience...it was, perhaps, not so much a surprise.

"Am I too much for you?"

You didn't answer.

Yuki continued to thrust, and gradually, you felt warmth beginning to blaze. A spot of pleasure was here, and then there, and then began to rise and spread from your abdomen to the rest of your body. You gave a slight moan when she moved deeper than before, and she gave you a smirk.

"Tell me, my little monkey," she said, "How many men have you had in your bed?"

"Several," you lied.

Yuki gave a groan and buried herself in you.

You yelped.

She continued, pace rapidly quickening; breath was on your face, fast and heated.

Before you could so much as give another moan, you felt Yuki's release. There was a pulse, and then two more--but she kept going.

"I thought--" you started.

Her hand instantly shot over your mouth.

Within your lower abdomen, you felt an uneasy climb. Each thrust she gave you pushed you closer, and closer still. But through her hand you could say nothing--there were only little mewls of pleasure, and even those barely made it through.

Closer...closer...

Expected, but still a surprise, it hit you. You gave a muffled cry, and a flash of fire moved through your body, seizing everything it touched--and then leaving gradually. It ebbed so slowly, and left you exhausted, but glowing.

Her hand moved away, and you looked up into her shining eyes.

---

*The Past. A Few Days Later, Yuki's POV.*

"And here my Queen is again." Corg laughed as I entered the room. "We should really stop meeting like this, you know, or your husband will get suspicious."
"Just you let me worry about that."

"Tell me," he replied quickly, "Did you get what you were looking for?"

"Certainly," I said. "It is astounding, really, how easily those in desperate times can be taken in."

"She trusts you?" He sounded incredulous.

"Yes and no. She is cooperating. But days and weeks of not having to scrounge for food will earn everything I want from her."

"Are you quite sure about that?"

"When these young things leave the street," I answered, "They will do anything not to go back. Played right, I will have my ally. And you will have your student."

"I see."

"Before I forget," I looked into the bag I'd brought with me, "I believe I owe you for referring her to me. And for the cost of training her."

"A steep price."

"Indeed." I raised the ruby bracelet from my bag. "I believe that will be sufficient."

"It certainly will." He grinned.

"Thank you, Corg. I will let you know when the next stage of my plan is to be set into motion. It will take time; several years, at least. Be sure she is ready."

"You are playing a dangerous game, you know."

"It is a game I will win," I replied, "You can expect a handsome reward when all is done."

He nodded, and showed me out.

I will have her trust. I will use it, and her, like a weapon.

And I will order this kingdom properly, without the violent outbursts of my younger son, or the inefficient plotting of my husband.

The best part of all?

There's no way I can fail.
All you seem to know for certain right now is that you didn't do it. But who did?

Cold returned some weeks later, and you were once more subjected to being dressed up and trotted out for his amusement.

Sometimes it was him, sometimes her, sometimes both; any or all of them were possible when evening fell.

Only after several days of this did he hand over the vial of blue poison he'd mentioned, as well as a secure box to lock the vial in. And then he proceeded to make you pay for it again.

When he left, Yuki would comfort you.

She assured you it was not for nothing.

She told you it would be over soon.

Between her, and the study of the oddly locked box (you found it took you several hours to get the hang of it, and even then, it took another few just to get used to doing it quickly).

But like she said, it would be over soon.

You sat in the chair, looking at yourself in the mirror as you always did when Yuki was styling your hair.

"When will he be by tonight?" You asked.

"Oh, he's not coming tonight. He's arranging that meeting you were told about."

The meeting...oh, yes. You went over the plan in your head again. It seemed easy enough. Frieza would come for a visit. You'd be expected to head up to the ship. Cold would pretend to take ill, and you would go to Frieza and report that you'd held up your end of the bargain.

Both would die.

"When will Frieza be here?"

"Oh, not too long from now," Yuki replied amiably, "Though, I've asked Cooler home as well. It would be nice to have a happy family again, at least for a little while."

You went quiet.

Family was a sore subject. You couldn't even ever remember having a parent, or siblings.
But she didn't need to hear that.

"And speaking of which," she said, "I suppose when all this is done, you're going to want a man who can give you a bundle of children?"

"I don't know," you replied, "I don't think I'd be a good mother."

"Silly girl," Yuki said, finishing your hair, "You would be a wonderful mother, just...not right now. We'll find you someone."

"And you'll still want my company."

"Of course I will!" Yuki directed your gaze to the mirror. "Now, about tonight..."

She went on for several minutes, confirming the plan again, and ensuring you knew what you were to do.

A servant arrived a few hours later to say that first Frieza, and then Cooler, had arrived. Cold was currently speaking to them via the video messaging system, but would be heading up in a ship to see them shortly.

And you were told to wait until you were summoned.

This was it. The final leg of the mission.

The end of all the misery.

The completion of the hardest job you'd ever taken.

You were left alone for several days after that.

The Queen, Yuki, was having her 'happy family' time, as expected, and you were calmly awaiting her return. There seemed to be very little to do other than enjoy the luxury that you had been afforded.

Peace. Finally, some peace.

The first day you slept nearly the entire day. But the second, you began to think over the whole thing. Falling in with Yuki, and getting through so many doubts and so much danger.

You were lucky.

The second day, you woke early and checked the console in Yuki's room. After going through a few messages she'd sent you about how wonderful it was to have the boys around (and a note about how happy you would be when you had your own), and replying, you sat back.

The idea of a family was still foreign to you--and what man could you trust enough to father your children, anyway?

No. It was best you not even think about it. There were things you could not have, things you could not risk considering, and that was one of them.

You shook the thought off. It would do no good to dwell on the subject.

It was when you were sitting up that you noticed a new message notification popping onto the
screen of the console.

You clicked on it.

Instantly, a video began to play. You recognized the scene immediately--footage from your first meeting with the Queen. You watched it and noted only one peculiar thing about it: the verification code in the corner. VG for Vegeta, followed by a series of numbers pertaining to province, street, and then, finally, the specific camera that had taken the footage.

It had been a new system that King Vegeta had put into place to keep a better eye on things. Or rather, new security that was demanded by King Cold for the sake of his people's safety if they had reason to visit the planet.

Your mentor had even allowed one to be installed; this was at King Vegeta's behest, of course. Assassins did not take commissions on the King and were kept on retainer for the purpose of discovering ambitious members of court. The cameras, such as they were, retained the evidence of this. It could not be edited, that would trip the verification code and remove it from the video entirely. At most, you could interrupt the feed. Noticeable, but not quite as much so as trying to doctor the video entirely.

The next video seemed to mirror your thoughts, at the beginning.

In the corner--VG, and then, a series of numbers. Province, street, and specific camera.

Corg entered, and you glanced at him carefully. It'd been a while since you'd last seen him.

Yuki was seated in front of his desk, and soon, the two fell into conversation.

"And what," he asked, "Does a Queen want with a man of my talent?"

He was always far more polite with royalty.

"I am told that you employ a great number of rapscallions," Yuki said. "For your various purposes."

"That is true. What, did one of them steal something from you?"

Wait...

"No," she replied, "I merely want to...employ...one of them. A pretty face, good figure...that sort of thing."

...what?

You watched in growing horror as they went on to discuss you; they spoke of you in terms you wouldn't use of a dog, and worse.

You wanted to disbelieve it. You wanted to think it false.

But the verification code sat there like a warning light, telling you that it wasn't.

Any attempts to alter the video would have resulted in its removal.

It was virtually mocking you.

The Queen was using you. Your mentor had all but sold you out to her.
The two people you trusted in all the universe had conspired to reduce you to nothing but a warm hole that would kill at its owner's demand.

You had taken a very careful nap in the late morning of the fourth day to avoid messing up the hairstyle that one of the servants helped you with and were awakened by a grinning Yuki.

"Mmm? What?" you blinked and rubbed at your eyes. Face up, until this was figured out.

"You did it! The plan was to get them both at once, but..."

"Right. Well, you know..." you yawned, hoping she'd go on, "...being careful and all that."

"You must've needed that nap," Yuki said. "Why did you choose to get rid of only my husband first?"

Your blood ran cold for a split-second. He was dead? This was entirely unexpected--and completely dangerous.

"Extra security," You replied quickly, "Frieza's especially paranoid right now, and I couldn't make it onto his ship."

"And?"

You looked, confused, at her.

"Which did you use on him?"

"I--"

"No matter," Yuki answered, waving her hand absently. "I want you to stay here for the time being. It might be...dangerous, for you to leave."

And before you could ask her more, she left. It was sound advice; you were fairly certain you'd be suspected. You were surprised that you weren't already in some cell locked up for it already.

It's what you would've done.

You racked your mind for the answers. Unless you'd developed the ability to kill while sleepwalking (which you very much doubted), you hadn't done it.

So who had?

A day passed before you had the thought that you should check on your poison supply; both the green one that Frieza had given you, and the blue one that Cold had given you.

After getting a pair of appropriate gloves on, you checked the space between the headboard of your bed and the mattress. After a little digging, you found the edge of the fitted sheet. The box was just underneath it and with some finagling, you were seated with it in your hands.

You opened it quickly.

And to your complete shock--the green vial was half-empty.

"Impossible," you found yourself saying.
How had...who had...?

You took a deep breath.

"Think," you said.

Another assassin, possibly? Yes, that would be it. That had to be it. And namely (since the box was of Arcosian design) you suspected one of them of doing the deed. Perhaps the Queen had gotten impatient with you? No. No, if that were the case, she would likely have done something by now.

But she had told you to stay here for the time being...so that might be something.

You shut and locked the box, then put it away again.

Too many variables.

Yuki and your mentor could no longer be trusted. Your poison had been found for the second time.

All you could do was play the game until Frieza was dead. And then...then, who knew?

But you'd have to move quickly at that point, either way.

You shook your head. It stung, still, to think that you had been chosen with that intent. A good-looking weapon.

There was still some slight appreciation for the comforts you now enjoyed, but after seeing that video you'd begun to wonder what would happen when you did fulfill your mission. What if she simply had you killed?

She wouldn't, one tiny corner of your mind said.

You went back to the console, thankful she wasn't there, but still pondering the situation; you would attempt to access the video again, simply to retain the sick feeling in your stomach and the revulsion of both people.

As you were musing over that, and attempting to open the message again, something popped onto the screen in a tiny window.

It was a set of coordinates...and a time, later in the evening. You wrote these numbers down on a tiny slip of paper and slipped it into your bra.

And just as quickly as the numbers had appeared, it was gone.

It had to be from someone who knew you were in here. From someone who was watching you.

That thought was even less palatable than the one previous. Paranoia was one thing, coincidence you could understand, but you certainly didn't trust such a coincidence. The video, and the coordinates, were too close together for comfort.

And yet, despite your suspicion, you found yourself heading for the coordinates after sunset. Yuki was still not back; you assumed she must be in some sort of mourning.

The numbers lead you to a wooded park connected to the back outer yard of the palace you'd been residing in; they took you straight to a clearing in the woods behind it, in fact.
You were as ready as you could be, considering your lack of a scouter.

Poisoned dagger up your sleeve, in case your opponent turned out to be too strong for you.

"So," said an even voice behind you, "You've actually shown."

You drew the dagger and whipped around, only to stop, breathless, as you found that one was pointed just above your jugular, and--

Held by Lord Cooler.

Your eyes widened. In the darkness, it would be nearly impossible to identify him unless you looked him in the face. Black spandex, with full sleeves and complete covering of the legs, black armor with a dark grey trim, and an odd bunching of spandex fabric around his neck that gave off the idea of a turtleneck.

If this wasn't the crown of all...
**The Arrangement**

Chapter Summary

In which you find that the Queen's perversion extends farther than you suspected.

What purpose could this possibly serve?

---

"You're slow," Cooler said evenly, "I'm surprised."

"Don't waste my time mocking me," you replied, taking a step back to speak, "Tell me what you want. Why you're here."

"I suppose you are eager to get on with things, considering."

"And don't think you can blackmail me, either. You already know what's going on. You have nothing to hold over my head, nothing to goad me into--"

"I am merely here to make--"

"An offer? A deal? No, thank you. I've had quite enough of those already."

"And you've been burned by everyone. Haven't you?"

"I'm not going to ask how you know," you replied, "Because that would be a fruitless endeavor."

"Smart girl."

"Again. Why are you here?"

"If you'll let me finish this time," Cooler lowered his knife, and gestured to you to lower yours, "I was going to make you an offer, yes."

"There is nothing you could offer me," you replied, "Except, perhaps, for my part in all of this nonsense to be done, once and for all."

"You are in danger, and you feel it, don't you?"

You didn't respond.

"I will not waste time by teasing you," Cooler said, "My father, perhaps, or my brother, might do so, but that is not how I operate."

No response.

"What do you want?" you asked.

"What I want," he replied, "Is to know where I stand."
"Where you stand?"

"Are there any plots against me?" he asked. "Did anyone speak to you about getting rid of me?"

"No," you said, meeting his steely gaze calmly. "Not Frieza, and not your mother or father."

"Things will go very ill for you if I find that you're lying," Cooler sneered.

"I'm not," you said.

"And who paid you to kill my father?"

"No one paid me."

He looked doubtful, but only for a second or two. "It was my brother, wasn't it?"

You didn't respond.

"Now tell me," Cooler said, "And again, I would like to remind you, on pain of death, that I do not like lying. Has my mother hired you?"

"She has."

"To kill who?"

You took a deep breath. "Not you."

"I see." Cooler seemed to relax. "Then what my mother has hinted at is true."

Silence. What did he mean by that?

"She would like us...to get along," he added, not making eye contact. "And I would like her to get along, preferably underwater with a swarm of piranhas."

"What is your issue with her?" you asked.

"She wants my brother dead, that is the issue," Cooler replied, "And he has to live."

"Why does he...?"

"Suffice it to say, we have...someone. We'll call him an oracle. We recently discovered a planet of psychics who were wholly uncooperative; their last attack was on this man, and, let us say, the ability to see the future has had a terrible effect on his sanity."

You waited.

"But his predictions have all been accurate, down to the tiniest detail. His abilities are unquestionable. And recently, he made...well, another, and this time unprompted, prediction. He foretold that if my brother died, the universe would be destroyed."

"Why would you believe that?"

"We would not, if we had not also had an accompanying threat mentioned. A threat which my father has spoken of, many times, to both my brother and I. A threat that none of his people would ever have cause to hear of."

"I...I see. And what do you have to gain by telling me all of this?"
"I was hoping I could appeal to your...community spirit. But barring that, well," he turned his back on you, "Whatever you fear from my brother can be dealt with in time. As for my mother, well, she will have to be taken care of much sooner. I suspect you won't have any objections."

"No," you said honestly, "I wouldn't mind at all."

As had happened what felt like so many times before, you gave in. There was nothing you could really do this time, not without some kind of help. The Queen would not let you out of her reach; it was certain that she intended to keep you.

Wait...

"You said she wants us to get along. Why?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Cooler huffed, nose wrinkling in disgust, "Has she made any mention to you of having a family?"

"Yes, but I don't see how that's--"

Your stomach turned as you realized what Yuki intended.

"You can't be serious," you said faintly.
Jocasta

Chapter Summary

You go back and hear the Queen's full plan. It disgusts you, really, and you aren't at all sure what her goal is anymore.

Jocasta

You went back. Cooler's final warning had been not to trust Yuki, but that much you had figured out already.

She wanted grandchildren, he said.

What a horrible way of going about getting them.

But, of course, it was a good time to be trying for them. June was wearing away, and July was just around the corner. You would be fertile, then.

But not mindless.

During your training, you had the good fortune to be able to arrange a surgery to remove not only one of your ovaries, but also its Fallopian tube. This might have caused problems for most mammalian women, but for a saiyan woman it was a way of reducing the effects of July's breeding season on the body. Your libido would spike, but not as much as it would for a normal saiyan woman.

It was much easier than trying to keep suppressants on hand.

You woke late and Yuki had rather a pleasant breakfast with you. It was not until you were done, and simply sipping on the remains of your coffee, that she began to speak on Cooler.

"I've been thinking," she said, "About your situation."

"Oh?"

"I presume what you are worried about is the man who would father your children. Whether he would be a good choice, or not--that sort of thing. But thinking on it, even as long-lived as you saiyans are, it is still best to take every advantage you can get when it comes to your window of fertility."

"I can understand that," you said, "But--forgive me--I don't think now is a good time to have children."

"It's never a good time to have children," Yuki replied quickly. "You will certainly not have to worry about being stuck with caring for it all on your own."

"I just--"
"And let me make it absolutely clear—you are to come away from the season pregnant, and that is an order."

"Of course," you spoke as compliantly as you could, "I simply wonder where this enthusiasm has come from, is all."

"You will be taking away one of my babies," she replied, "And dangerous as my Frieza is, he is still my baby."

"A baby you intend to replace?"

"In a manner of speaking." She gave you a smile.

"Why not simply father the child yourself?"

"That would...look a little suspicious, don't you think?" Yuki asked, "Fathering a child so soon after my husband's untimely demise?"

"Has it not happened before?"

"It has, but...well, most other species are fertile all through the year. If you were to be birthing soon as it was, there would be no issue. But it is well known that you saiyan women are only fertile once a year. It would be obvious that you conceived now, and not months ago."

"You could not say that you took solace in lust?"

"I am supposed to be in mourning," Yuki replied, "This includes a minimum of one year of celibacy."

"I see. And you have chosen the father? Some servant, or soldier?"

"Oh, good heavens, no! How uncouth an idea."

"You seem to forget that I myself lived on the streets. That seems more uncouth than—"

"Hush," Yuki said, "I know my business better than you do anyway. I wouldn't choose someone unrelated to me at any rate, in that case it would hardly be like a new baby in the family at all."

You contrived to look confused, despite knowing what was coming.

"The man I've chosen for you is my elder son."

"C...Cooler?" you asked, fighting to show some degree of shock. "The first of many questions is, why him?"

"He's related to me, and he does what he's told. He's a good son," Yuki gave a little smile.

"And...he...doesn't mind that you've...been at me first?" That pretty much the whole rest of the family had, as well?

"Why would that matter?"

"Some...men might balk at that sort of thing, is all."

"If you were going to marry him, perhaps," she replied, "But you aren't a prospect of his, so I sincerely doubt it will matter."
"What...ah, what is the...plan?" you asked.

"I will arrange a...let's see, a vacation for Cooler," Yuki answered, "I will send you there, let us say, as his company."

"Are there no other women he prefers?" you asked, "Again, I am not protesting. I am trying to cover all the angles."

This woman, you could hardly believe what you were hearing...

"None, sadly. He will have a palace whore now and again, but only very rarely. I have heard him say that he would rather not share himself with a woman he is not fond of."

That sounded almost romantic. But at the back of that thought was another; why did Yuki know this about her son? Why did she take such an interest in his sexual behavior?

"He may be reluctant to...well, you know, then," You replied, "I would venture to guess that he is not fond of me."

"That can be fixed, of course." she gave a smile, "You'll be spending quite a lot of time with him, after all. He will chafe at being forced to be so close to someone he does not like, and you will be able to bond over what a terrible, controlling woman I am."

"And that," you said, following her twisted logic, "Will lead to sex."

"Exactly."

"I am not sure how quickly this can be accomplished," you replied, "I would have to study his character a bit, get some idea of his likes and dislikes, his--"

"I can provide you all of that. You won't be going for another week and a half."

"What about Frieza?" you asked suddenly, "Suppose he decides he does not like having his toys taken away?"

"Oh, I've gotten him another of those already. He may be angry at first, but he will forget you soon enough."

If you were a lesser woman, you thought, that might almost have hurt. But she was right--and Frieza tended to get bored with women quickly anyway. There was always the risk, but...

You took a deep breath. "Where will we be going?"

"A little place by the sea," Yuki replied, "Over the water bungalows--a tiny house on the water, you might say--onsen, that sort of thing. You will hardly have cause to be fully clothed at all there."

She laughed, and a little reluctantly, you joined her.

"One more thing," you said nervously, "And then I will leave the matter be."

"No. No more questions."

"But Frieza--when am I--"

"You will handle that in due time," Yuki answered. Her tone was suddenly imperious, and she lifted your chin, "Do as I tell you, (y/n). There will be nothing to worry about as long as you follow
my instructions to the letter."
This vacation is far too stressful.

*??? Location, Prison, 3rd person POV*

"Is he awake?"

"Awake, and raving," said the guard, "I don't know what you'll get out of him. Some idiot gave him a joint of meat and he's been having a fit ever since."

"Let me in to see him."

The guard nodded.

The man, spiky haired and sealed in ki-blocking cuffs and a jacket, looked up with wild eyes. "And what do you want?"

"I want to know what you told the guards a short while ago. About my brother."

"And what's in it for me? Huh? Are you going to experiment on me some more if I don't?"

"No one has experimented on you, Bardock."

"Don't use my name," he cringed. "Don't...don't use my name."

Twitching, rocking, and almost what Cooler would call weeping, followed. But there were no tears.

"Why not?"

"Don't use my name."

That line of thought was going nowhere, so Cooler went on. "Tell me about my brother. Would you like something more to eat?"

There was a glitter in the man's eyes. "Since I can get nothing else. Nothing else."

"What do you see when you think of my brother?"

"Death."

Well that much was obvious.

"Death if he lives, but if he dies now, more. So much more. Too many. The universe explodes--thousand directions..."
There was a cringe. Bardock's arms struggled terribly in his straitjacket.

"And when will he die?"

"I don't know. Years. Years. Not now."

"Do you know who will kill him?"

Bardock shook his head, but continued rocking.

"I don't guess that it matters who it is, as long as it happens at the proper time. Thank you."

As Cooler was getting up to leave, and calling for the guard to bring Bardock more food, something else popped out.

"Your brother...your brother should listen, listen very carefully."

"To who?"

"The cat. The cat must be obeyed." Bardock slammed his head into the wall, almost as if punishing himself for the very thought.

Cooler went on.

The guard came in, and removed the saiyan's strait-jacket.

"Please...the cuffs."

"You know I can't do that."

"The cuffs!"

"I can't--"

Bardock leapt, suddenly, knocking the guard over, and bashing him in the nose with the edges of the ki-cuffs. The guard started to yell, and scrambled up--but was dragged back down. Even without his ki, the saiyan was more than capable of strangling the guard with the links of the cuffs--which he did in short order.

The guard's pockets. Pockets.

Keys? Yes, yes, keys!

One key. The key.

Cuffs off. Free. Free, he was free!

He drew his bare hands back up to his throat, light shining ominously in his palms.

Grinning, yes, he was happy.

"I'll see you soon, Gine."

*Your POV*

You felt ever more unsure as you approached the planet. Yuki was sending you along with some
almost too casual clothing. Your legs would be exposed, and your chest, well--the shirts seemed all to be a little tight.

She'd made you try everything on in front of her.

"What if he doesn't like them?" you'd asked.

"Oh, he will."

You tried to calm down.

There was just--just so much, so very, very much, to worry about right now. Getting through this, just the very idea of pregnancy, getting rid of Yuki...

...and then, what would happen with Frieza after all of this was done. Would you be able to get away?

Your small ship landed.

Out you stepped, feeling fairly keenly the sun on your skin. You were lead to a little building that was on a part of the island that had three security checkpoints, just to get through it.

Your papers were accepted, though you didn't fail to notice the snickering from a few of the guards.

Despite the removal of your ovary, and thus, the lessening of your heat as it was, you were still prone to overheating in this season. You went to your tiny room (Yuki had told you you wouldn't be spending much time there, of course) to look over it. Nothing special.

After examining the rest of the building, you changed into something lighter; a sundress that reached to just above your knees.

When you left it, you were feeling much less overheated.

You were heading into the kitchen for something to eat when you accidentally ran into someone.

"I'm so sorry--" you said, glancing up to see not Cooler, but an Arcosian of a red and yellow persuasion. "--and who are you?"

"Rime, my lady," came the reply, "I am what you would call, perhaps, the butler of this place."

"I'm sorry, I wasn't...I wasn't expecting anyone to be here. The Queen didn't tell me that there'd be servants."

"Perhaps she expected you to know this already? This is not some public resort, you know, this is for the royal family's use only."

"And they have a butler, instead of a few lesser servants?"

"I am merely here to be sure that anything you need is given to you," he replied, "Information on luxuries, the food..."

"...privacy?"

"That as well. You will have plenty of that."
You looked away.

"You must be something, to have Lord Cooler's attention," Rime added with a little smile.

"I suppose," you replied. "When will he be arriving?"

"In an hour or so."

You just nodded.

"Dinner will be served in several hours," Rime added, when you had turned to leave.

No doubt, it would be mandatory for you and Cooler to eat together.

This was already painful.

After giving the building a once over (and looking into what Rime called the onsen, and the infinity pool outside), you came back indoors and headed for the master bathroom.

Everything was huge here. Everything was...excessive, and over-the-top, and, well, you couldn't say it was entirely unexpected. This was for the use of the royal family, of course it would be luxurious!

It was just...

You shook the thought off as you disrobed and got into the shower.

It, too, was huge--you guessed from the size that it was built with Cold in mind. The stool just outside the stall (which you needed to reach the shower knobs), you guessed was put there with Yuki in mind.

You grabbed it, and started the shower.

Perfect, wonderful hot water cascaded down, and you spent several minutes just enjoying it before starting to lather up.

The shower door opened.

It was Cooler.

You took in a sharp breath when he stepped in, and moved close.

He was right on you.

_He was right on you._

"We don't have a lot of time," he whispered, leaning closely so you could hear him over the water.

"R-right," you stammered.

"There are at least three cameras in every room. Every move you make, she is going to see."

You nodded, to show that you understood.

"And," he leaned just a little bit closer, "Everything you say, she is going to hear."
"So--"

"So the only place safe to talk in is right here. Do you get that?"

"Yes."

Right there.

"Good." He stepped back, and the awkward shower continued. You both were lathered up now, and looking anywhere but at each other. "She'll expect us to eat together."

"And something else, I imagine."

"Not tonight, at least."

"I think we have about three or four days before she may start calling and inquiring about why we haven't."

Your nose wrinkled, but you kept your tone low. "That's disgusting."

"I know. In the meantime, it would likely be a good idea if we...looked at each other. That--lingering glance from behind, sort of thing, that tends to show interest."

"That will get her hopes up. But, tell me, won't our both being in here...um...look..."

"Too quick?" he asked. "Let me worry about that."

Silence. Rinsing off.

"How are we supposed to get her into--?"

"Once we start to make it appear as though we are doing...what we are expected to do," he went on, leaning closely again, "We start getting affectionate. Overly so."

It didn't take a genius to figure out where that would lead.

Yuki was a jealous woman, after all.

"A good plan," you said quietly.

He didn't answer.
Big Brother

Chapter Summary

Just knowing you're being watched makes everything worse.

Big Brother

The next few days passed mostly in silence.

You ate with Cooler at every meal, and despite knowing what was going on, and following his little plan to the letter, the meals were always awkward. He was contriving to look as if he felt the same way--at least, that was what he told you in the next shower meeting.

But you began to wonder, and frequently, whether it was just as genuine a puzzlement as yours.

That confusion, however, was nothing to the fear.

The idea that Yuki could be watching, would be watching, tracking every errant twitch you made, was terrifying. You'd had a watch kept on you before, but never to this degree.

So you did the only thing that you felt you could--you followed Cooler's suggestions.

When he walked away, you'd watched him go, let your eyes linger on, for example, the defined muscle in his arms, or the length of his tail. And when you found yourself walking away from him, you could almost feel his gaze on you, although where it was you tried not to think.

It was all an act, after all.

On the morning of the fourth day, when the heat both internal and external seemed to be at its worst, you received a message from Yuki on your scouter. Among other things, it relayed that you should put on one of the bathing suits and enjoy the pool. Cooler, it went on, was outside, sunning himself by it--it was the perfect opportunity to catch his eye!

Sighing, you went into the small bedroom, and checked the closet where you'd put the bathing suits she'd sent you here with.

All two-piece suits.

You couldn't really be surprised at that, now could you?

One more message, just as you were reaching up to take the scouter off.

"Get the black one."

The black one?

You were wondering which one she meant, as you didn't see any; the moment you thought that, however, you saw it wedged between several others.
It had no shoulder straps. Instead, to keep it in place, there was a silver ring in the front that you could assume was meant to rest rather snugly between your breasts. The bottom half was much the same; the rings were placed differently on it, though--instead, they were situated on the outer side, on the upper curve of your hips.

Another message.

"Now get out there! Make sure your hips and tail are moving, really sashay, that'll get his attention! Oh, and don't forget to get good and wet in the pool, too. ;)"

You sighed and took off the scouter, then glanced in the mirror.

At least she knew what looked good on you.

Deep breath.

You headed outside, walking as Yuki'd told you to.

Cooler, from his poolside chair, glanced up from the datapad he seemed to have been perusing. But he said nothing.

At the very least, the water would feel good.

No diving board. You took a seat on the edge, and let your feet dangle into the (oh god, so icy!) water, until it felt comfortable enough to slip into.

Ahhh, much better...

And for a while, you were able to relax.

But the comfort of the water could not last forever, and you were sure Yuki would have fits if you stayed in too long without Cooler there next to you. So you left the water, took the small towel that the (uncomfortably and rather suddenly present) Rime was offering to you.

"I take it you don't often swim," you heard Cooler say.

"I do, just...not in one of these."

"The bathing suit?"

"No, saiyans, ah, we tend to favor...well...nothing at all." At least this part of things was easy to play. How could you be anything but utterly embarrassed over this?

"I can see why. If you're going to be damp, you may as well save the bother of needing to dry out clothes."

"I wouldn't dream of it here," you said, "The water's too cold for that."

"Really? It felt fine to me earlier."

"Well...your body temperature's not several degrees higher, is it?"

Cooler seemed to laugh, and it being rather a contagious one, you joined in.

There was a break for an early lunch, and then, later, an early dinner as well.
And yet, Yuki still wanted you out by the pool. The temperature had dropped somewhat, though it was still rather humid; and the water was as cold as ever.

After some rather stilted conversation with Rime regarding the sunset, he mentioned having something to check up on for breakfast the next morning, and left.

"Do you dive?" Cooler asked suddenly.

"Once in a while," you replied, "Why? Do you?"

From poolside, something was thrown into the water. You looked down to see--a ring on the pool's floor. It seemed to have a weight attached to it.

"Fetch, monkey."

"Don't call me that."

"Would you prefer your name? I might remember how to use it, if you do well."

"Where did you even get these? I didn't see you with them before."

He didn't answer. Sighing, you dived to the bottom of the pool to retrieve the ring. You'd barely gotten your head above the water before another ring came flying in. After retrieving a few more, you feigned anger and shouted, "Enough is enough! It's cold as hell and I am not here for your amusement!"

But when you turned, Cooler was there, in the water with you.

"Odd that I keep getting told otherwise."

Your face flushed and you moved back in the water. He followed, until your back struck the other side of the pool's edge.

He leaned in, and whispered against your neck, "Follow my lead and let's get this over with. I know you know how to fake it."

Silence.

Cooler's voice raised and he moved a little away from you in the water. "You do have a nice face, though I suppose that's not what was in mind when you put this--" He gestured downward, at your bathing suit. "--on. This...this, indecency, I suppose you're trying to tempt me with it?"

"No," you protested.

"I suppose you both think you're terribly clever."

"I never--"

"But if it's expected," his tone shifted to a more amused one, "It may be best to cooperate, simply to see why you were chosen."

"Well it certainly wasn't because I liked you."

"When has that ever mattered?"

Cooler moved closer, all amusement gone from his voice. He reached down, ostensibly to make it
look as if he was fiddling with the bottom half of your bathing suit. His hand, however, stayed on your leg, hidden from the outdoor camera by his elbow, and his tail that draped over his shoulder.

"Don't touch me th--"

You felt a tap on your leg, and produced a false moan.


Another tap. You repeated the sound, and moved an arm around him.

After a few minutes of this, Cooler's arm moved away, and he pressed closer. Your legs spread, so your knees gripped at his sides.

He moved up, and against you, and you gave a gasp.

And so you both proceeded into what amounted to very little more than rough grinding over your lower abdomen. Over a few minutes, it grew swifter, as did your cries--which were joined shortly by his, which though rare, seemed genuine enough.

Your head had bowed slightly as this all continued, but suddenly, your chin was lifted by the tip of his tail.

Cooler mouthed a single word as he continued the grinding.

'Now.'

You clenched at his back suddenly, and with both arms, and gave out a final moan.

His last sound was little more than a grunt--but it was enough.

You spoke, breathing heavily, as you reached down to readjust of the bottom half of your swimsuit.

"Do you see now?"

"I do see." His breathing was similarly labored, and he watched you leave the pool.

*Cooler's POV*

I left the water a moment later, grabbing the towel she'd used earlier and slinging it over my lap as I sat back down on the chair.

Not even a minute later, I got a message on the datapad.

"Very good, son! She'll be feeling that for a while. But listen, follow her in and sleep next to her. Cuddling after this sort of thing tends to ensure it'll happen again."

I replied with a simple 'alright' and moved into the house.

What a disgusting woman. Every time I think my opinion of her can get no lower, she finds a shovel and digs the hole deeper.

I can only imagine what she's put (y/n) through. We shall both be glad to be rid of her.

I didn't find (y/n) in her small room, but I did in the master bedroom.

Ugh.
It seemed that she was either already asleep, or close to it. And warm.

Very, very warm.
You talk with both Cooler and Yuki, and neither discussion is particularly pleasant for you.

You shifted as you woke, and yawned a second later.
You couldn't turn over.
Eyes open. Another yawn. You noticed that Cooler's arm was draped over your side, and his tail was coiled around your leg.
If you were tired before, you were wide awake now. Oh no. Oh no, no, no.
You'd gone to bed in the most modest nightgown you could find, which wasn't saying much; it was essentially a strapless nightie. Being this close, this hot, this--
That must be it. Heat.
"Wake up," you said, trying to move Cooler's arm. "Come on, wake up!"
He started to curl closer, but a second later, jolted upright. You turned towards him--
Apologies began to be babbled, though a second later his eyes moved downward over your body.
Silence.
"I'm sorry," he finally said clearly, "Truly. She wanted me to join you, and...I must've responded to your body heat as I slept. You're just...you're warm. I think you've gotten warmer since we got here."
"It's fine," you assured him. "I'm just glad you woke up. I need a shower."
Cooler took the hint, thankfully, and followed you into the bathroom.
Water on...lukewarm. You needed to cool off; between your own temperature and that of the heat outside, things were getting entirely too muggy.
"Does it have to be a cold shower?" you heard him grumbling.
"If you want me to remain a sane person, yes," you snarked, "And it's not because of the time of year, either--well, my time of year, anyway. It's just this heat wave, how do you stand it?"
"I want a warmer shower, is how I stand it."
"You don't feel it at all?"
"No. In fact I think it's the perfect temperature."

"I don't agree." You grumbled, "The sooner we get this done, the sooner I can get back to an environment where the highest temperature is whatever I want it to be."

"For a girl from the streets, you certainly are finicky," Cooler mused.

"I don't expect much. That is one of the things I reserve the right to want."

"What are the others?"

"Does it matter?"

"Knowing more about you would help this illusion that we are getting along, yes."

He had you there.

"The ability to make my own choices about what happens to me, not having to worry about food..."

"These are all such basic things," Cooler said, laughing briefly, "Do you not have any ambitions?"

Not really. You wanted a roof over your head, food in your stomach, and to not have people like Yuki, Cold, or Frieza pawing at your body. You wanted it to be your own.

"One or two," you lied, "But nothing spectacular."

"You should be thinking of what you will do once all of this is over."

You could agree with that, somewhat, at least. With all of the fuss, and the getting into this situation so quickly, you were running in survival mode every waking moment.

"I suppose you have an offer to make," you replied, "Didn't I already tell you? I don't want to be made any more offers. I'm not getting suckered into anything else."

"And paranoia will get you nowhere."

"Paranoia has kept me alive."

"Alive, yes, but...living?"

"I am not going to debate--"

Rather suddenly, Cooler pressed closer to you; you felt your breath catch in your throat. Instinct scrambled and nagged at you to--no, no. Neither of you wanted that.

"What are you--"

Cooler jerked his head in the direction of the bathroom door. Someone had opened it, and walked in. Over the patter of the cool shower...it was small chance that they would hear. Best to be safe.

But why the hell was Rime out there? It had to be him. No one else would be that stupid or pry that much, unless Yuki had decided to pay a visit.

You knew what Cooler would do next, and begrudgingly whispered, "Just don't slip in."

That bulge from yesterday was wearying enough of a thought without having to worry about it going anywhere.
Sex is a bad idea right now.

As Cooler began the same grinding motions he used before, you repeated the thought in your mind. Hand on your side, the other on your opposing hip...

The second there were footsteps, and the sound of the door shutting, you reached back to shove Cooler off of you.

"I'll warn him," he said quietly, "As best I can, anyway, to see that that doesn't happen again."

"Please do," you answered quickly.

At the end of the second week, and sweating like crazy (Cooler had begun to sleep next to you at night, and what with the blankets he favored, you always woke up soaked) as you sat looking at the screen--there was a call from Yuki.

"And how are the two of you doing?" the tone was hopeful, but the situation was just hammered in more. She couldn't even be decent for two minutes? No hello? No niceties at all?

"Oh...well...you know," you contrived to blush, which wasn't hard considering the humid air. "We're...we're, you know, he is a lot like..."

"Like me? Or his father?"

Every time you thought this could not get more perverse the hole kept getting deeper.

"Why do you ask? You're watching the whole time anyway, aren't you?"

"I would like to hear it from your mouth," she replied.

"More like his father. In the beginning."

Like that night at the masquerade. The memory slipped through your head pleasantly, but you turned your attention back to Yuki almost immediately.

"That is nice to hear," she gave you a little smile. "My boy is a seducer, then? Good. He will have little trouble when it is time to send him courting, then."

"Whoever she is will be a very happy woman," you affirmed. "I've never met a man more considerate."

"Considerate?"

She looked angry, but only briefly. "He teased you yesterday, I would not call that considerate."

"It is better than I've had from others. A bit of teasing is nothing to a broken arm or pelvis."

"I...suppose..." And now she looked, and sounded, confused. Progress? Maybe.

Maybe.

"Oh, and one more thing." Her tone was neither angry nor happy, but it still unsettled you. "I'm sorry to hear about the shower."

"The shower?"
"Yes. It seems one of the pipes burst overnight," she replied, "It doesn't look as if you'll be having showers for the time being, from what Rime says."

"But the cold showers are the only way I'm getting through this," you half-pleaded, "It's not my body heat, it's the rest of the heat that worries me."

"Then you can take a cool bath in the tub. You'll just have less time to do it in."

"Of course."

Two more weeks. You could make it two more weeks. Or less. She might show up at any point between now and then.

"When will I see you again?" you found yourself asking.

"Oh, I'll pop in at some point. I know you miss me. Pretend he's me, if you must."

You just nodded to that.

Two more weeks.

That wasn't so far away.

*Cooler's POV*

I am fortunate.

If I lacked self-control, this might be more difficult. Thankfully, I have it in spades.

She is intelligent, and can control those base urges that would likely have a normal saiyan woman assaulting me every time she possibly could. If she is desperate, then at least she controls how others perceive it from her.

The expression those dark eyes have when they study me or look for a way into my head so she can predict what I will do next, it's...indescribable.

She wants to stay ahead of the game.

She's looking for a way out.

Well...

Two more weeks, and it will be over for all of us.
When it comes down to it, there are no other options.

Not Our Way

The thought that Yuki might have a suspicion that something was up only heightened when, a few days later, the pool was closed to the both of you as well.

She again apologized for it, and suggested that you and Cooler would likely do better entertaining each other without it anyway.

"But we've already..." You protested weakly, "I forget how many times, but surely it's enough?"

"I simply want to be sure," came the reply, "Really, I don't know what's gotten into you. You've been in the bed of many a stranger--what's one more?"

"I just...I don't know."

"You don't need to know. You just have to spread your legs and let your body do the talking."

You went quiet.

"Or..."

You could see the wheels turning.

"It's just that I don't want to get attached to him," you said quickly, "A month is only a month, but all the same, well..."

"A noble thought," Yuki replied, still eyeing you a little doubtfully, "And I do appreciate it, believe me. But as it stands, you will not see him again afterwards. Indulge in infatuation, if you must, you will forget him soon enough when you return to me."

"You jest, my Queen."

"Would you rather I threatened you with death?"

"No, but--"

"Then silence all this prattling."

You nodded, and lowered your head.

The conversation after that was light and airy; she had shifted gears once again, no doubt to put you off. She mentioned talking to Cooler, and shortly afterwards the conversation ended.

The day passed away silently after that. For once, you ate dinner alone. It seemed that Cooler had
been held up in conversation with his mother for several hours, and from what Rime said, he would be out of it soon.

You told him you were going to bed early, and headed back to the master bedroom.

It was all ridiculous, and perverse, and you wanted nothing more than an end to it all. Yuki dead, that was all you cared about.

You changed into one of the nighties, and then--ah, lucky!--you found a thin robe to put on over it.

The mirror showed you nothing more than you expected. You looked good like this, but the most overwhelming thought was how to avoid having to wear them ever again. If silk ever touched your skin as long as you lived, it would be too soon.

As you sat down at the vanity to brush your hair, the bedroom door opened.

You saw Cooler in the mirror, but kept your eyes on yourself afterward.

"I see she finally let you go." you said.

"Finally," he said, approaching, "I could sleep all night."

"As could I. What do you say to doing just that?"

And suddenly, his hands were on your shoulders. You stiffened, and looked at him, in the mirror.

He leaned over, whispering, "She is watching."

"I know that." You lowered your voice and covered your mouth, feigning a yawn. "Does she want to watch to be sure that we're actually doing it?"

"The short answer is, yes. She does."

"She watched the other times, can't we just...?"

"I'm afraid not."

You sighed.

"I dislike this just as much as you, if not more," he went on, "Once should be enough to satisfy her."

You shut your eyes.

"I don't want to look at you, and you need to pull out once we...get there," you said, and then lowered your hand, "Before I can agree."

He stood up straight just as you got up.

You took a deep breath and walked past him, towards the bed. Just once. That was all it would take, just once.

Cooler followed, and stood silent behind you.

You opened the robe and let it drop, and were halfway through getting the nightie off when he reached down to help you. He pulled it over your head and tossed it aside.
More deep breathing.

You'd almost prefer it if Cooler was forcing you, but...he wasn't. He was waiting, patiently, for you to get yourself ready.

When you clambered up onto the bed and knelt, he got up behind you.

So much hesitation. You imagined Yuki was getting rather impatient in that sick little head of hers, as slowly as you and Cooler were moving.

You looked away when you felt his hands on your tail, stroking up along it until he reached the point where it met your back. Well-known among saiyans (and those who took them as lovers) was the erogenous zone there that his hand was now working over; you'd read that it had something to do with the nerves there. A precious few could get off simply by stimulating the area.

At least he was not touching you elsewhere.

"Am I doing this right?" came Cooler's voice over your shoulder.

"Yes," you replied quietly.

He continued, but after several minutes, moved his hand to your other hip and pulled you into his lap. Or rather, over it; your legs spread as he pulled you up. He reached down to raise you ever so slightly, and a moment later you felt his sex testing at the entrance of your own.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

You nodded.

Cooler edged into you slowly, and you could feel him taking a sharp breath when he bottomed out within you. "You're so warm..."

"What?"

He didn't answer; instead, he started Thrusting.

Your heat surged and you gave a groan. Even just starting, pleasure was bursting in. You couldn't stop yourself--the mewls tumbled from your lips at each movement.

Cooler, however, seemed to be controlling himself much better. You barely heard a grunt from him, much less anything else, and kept up the robotic movement. But as you began to relax, to sink in, he sped up.

You gave another set of moans as your breasts began to bounce from the exercise, and clenched at his legs as he continued to spear into you. Gods, you'd barely started, how were you already...?

Pleasure seeped in from every angle as instinct took over. You began to bounce on your own, taking him as deeply as you could. Satisfying that urge within that the heat and your body were screaming at you to obey was all you could think right now. It was better than the alternative, though...

His hands rested on your hips now, and his pace became absolutely maddening; it was erratic, but fast, and so very, very deep. Gods, no one had gone that far in you before, it felt like an invasion with every ki blast being instead a shock of ecstasy.

More quickly than you would have thought, you felt the end approaching. You continued your
blissful groans, and clenched at his wrists. The tension continued to build, and build, and the knot coiled tighter and tighter still, until finally--

A shock of euphoria; it persisted for several seconds and had you been able to think of more than your loins, you'd have been ashamed at what came next.

His name.

As you hit that maddening high, Cooler's name issued from your throat.

Your inner walls clamped down on him, and you felt him swell in response. You lingered in the bliss, but too long.

Too long.

You heard him grunt, felt the warm triple pulse within, and stopped cold.

"Did you just...finish?"

Oh no. Oh no, no, no.
You're angry beyond belief. But it's a delicate game, showing that anger.

Division

You tried to relax, you really did.

But your heart was racing; you'd felt that pulse, you knew what it meant.

Cooler had finished inside you.

And it was July.

You were as good as pregnant.

No, no, no, no, no.

No.

This was disaster. This would ruin everything.

You looked down just in time for Cooler to pull out.

White spots, on the bed. You were leaking what he'd left behind. If that wasn't proof, nothing was.

"Let go of me," you snapped, shoving his hands away from your hips. You pulled the pillow in front of you forward, to cover your chest.

"It's not as if I meant to!"

"You--" you wanted to scream, to shout at him, but your thoughts turned to the camera. It was off to one side of the bed, and you knew, knew, Yuki would be watching, and listening to you. You couldn't just shout at him about this.

But then, what..."

"Well that doesn't change a damn thing, now does it?!" you screeched, "You didn't last long enough for me to get anywhere."

For a moment, utter confusion.

And then it dawned on him.

"Then what was that scream?"

"I was close. And then--then you had to ruin it!"

"I already said it wasn't intentional."
"Just--just stay away from me. I can't even look at you right now."

You got out of the bed and grabbed your nightie and robe before hastily redressing. You'd barely taken a step when you felt a hand on your tail.

"It's trained," you groaned.

"I have not the talent of holding it together once I've started," he said evenly, "But that does not mean I am incapable of--"

"No," you smacked his hand away, "And I mean it. The sooner I can stop pretending you're good at this, the better!"

"And earlier was..."

"You were lucky. Now drop it."

"Where are you going, exactly?"

"To have a bath." You sighed. "You can go another round by yourself if you want."

"Do you think this is a game?"

You didn't answer him.

Your bath went...well enough, though by the time it was over you were more exhausted than anything. That horrible tension, that awful fear, had you in such a state that it was a chore just getting it done and over with.

What were you going to do if you actually were?

You were going to get rid of it, said the sensible side of your brain.

That only mildly calmed you down, and as you approached the master bedroom you felt the urge to put it off until tomorrow rising. There was no point in panicking tonight. There was, however, a point to keeping yourself steady. You couldn't let something as small as this scare you off the track. Not when you were this close. You could let your emotions run wild--later.

Cooler was sitting up, waiting for you. On clean sheets.

"Mother called," he said, "And she had quite a bit to say."

"I don't care," you replied. You crawled into bed, under the sheet, and shut your eyes.

"Of course you don't." There was a pause; he joined you under the sheets and curled close--ignoring completely the flinch you gave off. His breath moved over your ear a second later.

You shuddered. Not in a good way, either.

"You think you're the only one who's worried?"

You put your hand under your head, half-blocking your mouth with your exposed thumb and palm. "You aren't the one who'd have to carry it."

"Who says you'll have to?" He seemed to scoff. "It's easily fixable."
You went quiet.

"I have a few...morning after...medications," he whispered, stroking over your cheek to hide the movement of his lips, "No need to worry."

"I know," you said, voice still a little muted, "You can stop telling me not to worry."

"What has you so rattled?"

"I'm not telling you," you said a little bitterly. "It's not like you'd understand."

"Fine, be emotional," he sighed. "Goodnight."

---

You slept well, at least, and in contrast to the vast unsteadiness his touch caused the previous night, this morning, it was almost nice. You felt warm, and secure, and...

No.

Cooler woke, and whispered that he'd be back in a moment. He got up and left, shattering the illusion completely.

Off your game. You were off your game.

No, you'd been off it, and for a while now, too.

This was just the latest misstep. Suppose you were pregnant? Suppose all attempts to amend the issue failed? Suppose--

Cooler returned just as you were sitting up.

You looked up, feeling a little surprised when he sat next to you.

In full view of the camera, he kissed you. Shattered calm turned to puzzlement, and then panic, and then back to a moderate calm again when you felt something rather like a pill being pushed into your mouth.

You kept it there without question, and pushed him back after letting it go on for a minute. "You kiss horribly, and in the morning, too--ugh, why do you think I want your morning breath all over my lips?"

You rushed to the bathroom, ostensibly to rinse your mouth out, but the second you filled your hands with water, you drank it all, to be sure the pill went down.

It could be anything. It could be a fertility drug for all you knew. But all you could do was trust him. He'd not lied to you yet, that you knew of.

---

*Cooler's POV*

It seemed to scare her beyond reason. I suppose I can see why--the idea of falling pregnant in this situation would frighten anyone. But the fact remains that despite all this, despite my giving her that pill (what a pain in the tail that was to smuggle in), she seems more agitated than before. It's been several days, and she is only just now beginning to relax.

It must be the season and the stress of all this finally getting to her.
I've tried holding her, I've tried saying comforting things--I've tried everything.

I'm glad we've only got a week left. The sooner I can stop saying these things to her, the less likely it will be that I will believe them.

It's not that I'm worried I will.

I fear, really, that I am...

Well, at any rate, I have more than just her to think about. More than just my mother, and ending her threat to all of us. A most alarming report reached me on my scouter's secure channel, via my contacts in the guild.

My father's grave lies empty.
Miso Soup

Chapter Summary

The end is near...for Yuki, you hope.

Miso Soup

The last week of July was now at hand, and your heat was thankfully coming to an end. Your body temperature was slowly returning to normal, and your libido was finally calming down.

You and Cooler managed to find ways to falsify the sex in the bed itself, which tended to feature you on top with the blanket pulled up in odd ways.

Several times, you could feel his excitement, but as he never entered, you were able to let the anxiety go.

...much as, several times, you wanted so badly to get onto it.

In those moments, you dragged the anxiety out and reveled in it--you could not indulge, not when you were so close to being out of the window of danger. You didn't doubt that he felt the same way. It was natural, after a month of pretending,

Finally, Yuki sent a message that she would be coming to retrieve you the next day.

You were both relieved and nervous. To have borne through this so far, and to come to this point...

The night before, as had become the habit, you joined Cooler in the master bedroom, and he curled up very closely behind you when you lay down.

Once more blocking the view to your mouths, you were both able to talk--albeit in tones not much louder than a whisper.

"Will you hear my offer this time?"

"Why not," you said quietly, "I am in a good mood."

"It is only what you have wanted for a long time: to be free of this mess. I know you well enough to know that you will run as far as possible as quickly as you can, and not look back."

"You make it sound so pretty," you replied, "Yes, that is exactly what I want."

"I may also safely guess, I believe, that you never wish to see any of us again."

"You aren't so bad, but the rest, certainly."

"But if I may inject one thought into your head, it would be this. Remember that we Arcosians are not all a bad lot."

That seemed such a completely random thought. You were hardly certain of what to think about it.
Gradually, sleep took you.

You woke early, at Cooler's prompting, and while feigning post-wakeup cuddling, went over the plan again. It had to be done perfectly, otherwise, well--as Cooler said himself, Arcosians, especially in his family, were hard to kill and you did not want any nasty surprises coming back to bite you. He had managed to slip a special knife into the sleeve of your gown; it was tipped with a fast-acting poison. He would have one, though when you asked how he planned to hide it, there was only a response of, "You can't expect to know all my secrets."

There was an announcement from Rime as the lunch table was being cleared.

"She will be here shortly," he said, fixing a quiet look on you, "Her ship has already landed."

"Thank you, Rime," you replied, giving him a little smile, "You have been such a wonderful help while I've been here."

"I live to be of help." He returned your smile, "Especially to the ladies. It has been a pleasure."

Cooler scoffed when Rime took your hand and kissed it.

"As it has been for me," you replied.

Cooler was right. They were not all bad.

There was another announcement about an hour later, and after that, Rime seemed to make himself scarce.

Yuki was arriving.

You stood in the room just off the main hallway by the front door, taking slow, deep breaths. Cooler stood beside you.

You tensed when you heard the door open, and there was a squeeze at your shoulder.

Yuki appeared, grinning at the sight of you, and you (feeling ill-suited to do so, but doing it anyway) returned the expression. She rushed forward and placed her hands on your stomach. "Ah, there is my future grandbaby! I can't wait to see how well you round out (y/n), you are going to look so ripe!"

"You like that look?"

"Of course!" there was another smile, and she gave you a hug. "I'm so glad that you saw things my way."

"I never doubted you--"

Cooler moved toward the door, but over his shoulder, was glancing back.

She pulled back to interrupt you. "Yes you did. It was difficult for you to see the need to bed my son when there were better opportunities to conceive. But you listened, that is the important part."

"Will you not have something to eat?" you asked, "We've already eaten, but..."

"No, no, I've already dined as well. We need to be--"
There was a sudden gasp.

Cooler had moved almost instantaneously. His knife (you guessed, anyway) went straight into and through her spinal cord, severing it completely.

You'd noticed just in time to bring your own knife out. Yours was plunged into the left side of her chest. Your target was her pulmonary artery--vital, as the poison chosen was especially heinous to one's lungs. There was a crunch from both sides as bone was shattered.

You looked up at Cooler to avoid having to see Yuki's face, which was shifting from anger, to horror.

Both you and Cooler's knives were pushed deeper, simply to be sure, but her body, between you, was slackened. You moved aside, and Cooler, who had been holding her up, let her drop to the ground.

A slight groan as Yuki hit the ground was all the noise you heard from her.

The pool of redness seeped from underneath her and spread, slowly but surely. If she were not already dead, that sort of a loss would no doubt make sure of it.

No breathing.

It was over.

*Cooler's POV*

(Y/n) came along when my ship came to retrieve me. She seemed to think better of me, which makes it almost a shame...but I digress. My heart has been but lightly touched, as they say. She is intelligent, but I do not mean to waste time worrying over what might have been. A month and a half's attachment is, well, not any kind of work at all on a relationship. I can judge very little of her solely from that.

There is a sense of panic about the empire that I have kept her guarded from. News, especially, that she did not need to hear, as she was anxious enough.

A test a few days ago confirmed her worst fears.

She's pregnant.

Somehow, the morning after pill had failed.

With this news, I instructed her only to wait for me to obtain the abortion pills. I would, I explained, allow her to leave once it had been taken care of, and went straight to the console in my quarters.

I opened a secure channel to one of my more...medically inclined sources.

And as I was in the initial stages of connection, everything went black.

*???????????

I woke up, unable to move.
It was cold, and unable to power up. Attempts to lift my hands were fruitless, as were the ones to get a better look at the floating table I had been placed on. For some reason, on my side...

My hands were placed in front of me.

Ki cuffs. I was wearing ki cuffs.

But why couldn't I move?

A single light illuminated the darkness overhead, and had I been able to, I would have shot up and away in fear.

In front of me, a few feet from the edge of the table, was my father. He seemed to be looking behind me.

"He will wake up soon, doctor. I want you to be ready to go."

"Yes, your highness."

The doctor seemed to be spreading something cool and damp on my back.

I cringed, or at least, tried.

My father looked down at me, and a terrible grin spread over his face. "Good to see that you are awake, Cooler."

I tried to speak. But my voice would not come.

"I will not test you by asking redundant questions, bar one. You poisoned and burned me--and you had the arrogance to think that that would be enough? Did you really think that I was not planning for such an eventuality?"

I could not respond.

"Your arrogance from your education in the guild is appalling. If I had been you, there would be an empty throne. But there is not. You failed."

I tried to speak. Again, useless.

"I know why you did what you did," my father went on, "And I can understand desiring to keep Frieza alive as a result. What I cannot excuse is the haphazard way you went about orchestrating my hopeful demise. Sloppy work is what ends kingdoms."

Silence.

"I said to myself, I will not kill him. But then, if I do not, he still deserves some sort of punishment. Not until I heard some special news did I know what to do."

Would he never stop talking?

"Frieza birthed an egg recently, and only a few days ago, it hatched. He has an heir now. I have an heir now. You--" he grabbed me by the face, "You are unnecessary as a productor of future members of the royal family."

There was an odd sensation at my back. Something was sticking through my skin.
"As a result, there are some...organs, shall we say...that you no longer require the use of."

The sensation moved upward.

"You will neither birth nor father any more children than the one soon to vacate (y/n)'s womb."

A horrible shifting feeling, just under the skin of my back.

"Those pills you were going to order? They are already on the desk in that tiny room you gave her on your ship."
It should be an easy decision, but it's not.

Twelve Pills

You woke up.

The guest quarters on this ship were nice, at least. And your freedom would soon be at hand.

As you lay there, you thought that it made logical sense that Cooler would want to be sure you weren't pregnant before you left. What nobleman of any kind would want to think that he had a potential child somewhere, outside his sphere of influence?

To allow that would be to openly ask for some sort of rebellion.

Sighing, you sat up and got ready for the day...

...only to bolt for the bathroom the second you stood to full height. The bile rose and what was left of your midnight snack came up and into the toilet that you barely made it to in time.

Of course. If the pain in your lower gut wasn't hint enough, the sickness would be. It had been three weeks since you'd left the planet with Cooler, and you were coming up on the fifth of this...

...pregnancy.

You were pregnant.

When you stopped heaving, you looked down at your gut, and placed both your hands on it.

You'd never thought too hard about having them. When you were on the street, it was obviously a poor choice--so you refrained from having any kind of sex during July. And once you started your assassin training, it was more of the same. Only then, you were able to afford to have an ovary removed so that you could actually use your brain during the season.

But actually thinking about having them...

You looked at your hands.

Where had this thought come from?

You stood up and headed back into your bedroom.

There was a small bottle on your bed table.

"It's just not a good idea," you said to yourself as you reached for it, "You're not going to be able to have any children."
There was a cold feeling in the pit of your stomach as you opened the bottle and the acrid medicinal scent wafted out.

No children.

You shut the bottle again, and looked at the note.

It was neatly printed, and said:

*Here is the medication you requested.*

Easy.

You looked at the bottle.

**TAKE FOUR NOW, AND DISSOLVE THEM UNDER THE TONGUE. REPEAT THIS PROCESS AFTER 3 HOURS, AND ONCE MORE AFTER ANOTHER 3 HOURS.**

Easy.

You opened the bottle. Once more, the dry smell hit you.

"It should damn well not be this hard," you growled under your breath. "I haven't got a choice. It's this, or--"

Or what?

"Go on the run with a baby," you answered, "There's no point in that. What the hell kind of a life would any child of mine have?"

You set the bottle down. Twelve yellow pills, that was all it would take.

And it would be over.

Over.

So simple.

Eyes shut.

Eyes open.

"This shouldn't be so damn hard," you said, "The hell am I thinking?"

---

This exercise repeated every morning for the next three days. In that time, you did not see Cooler once.

What could he be thinking? He had to be watching you.

On the fourth morning, you woke up, shifting awkwardly. For once, there was no sickness. The slight pain in your breasts was more pronounced, though--a common symptom, from what you'd read.

In a way, you had to smile as you lay there with your hand over your abdomen.

It had to be tiny. Bean-sized at the most. But it was still developing every moment.
As you had that thought, you turned over, facing the bedtable.

The pill bottle stood there like an ugly alarm, reminding you of...of everything, really.

There could be no more development. There could be no continued nausea, no kicks. No messy, crying infant to hold at the end...

Once more, the feeling of a pit in your stomach.

You got dressed, and ate in silence; the entire time you felt as if the bottle were watching you from a distance. And when you sat on the edge of the bed, the feeling only got stronger.

There was a rise of nausea.

The bottle stood in silence.

Why did it have to be so quiet?

Eyes shut. Eyes open.

And then, suddenly, the sound of a door opening.

The door to your quarters.

You reached for the bottle and opened it again, but by the time you had the pills in your hand the door to your bedroom itself was whooshing open.

Cooler!

"Stop," he said suddenly, on sight of the pills, "I need to speak to you about--something."

"I was about to take them," you said, "I'm sorry it took me so long to get to it."

"Don't." His voice sounded half-desperate for a moment, but he soon regained his calmness and took the spot next to you on the bed. "You haven't taken any of them?"

"No."

"I am asking you," he said, slowly, "To reconsider taking them at all."

"Why?" you asked, "I thought you wanted me to. That was the plan, wasn't it? I take these, you get assurance that I'm not carrying around your child, and..."

"This is why." Cooler turned his back to you. Along his lower back, on the right side of his tail, there was a long scar.

He cringed when you touched it.

"What happened?"

"My father," he said quietly, "My father did that."

"But I thought--"

"That he was dead? So did I. But..." Cooler shook his head and turned back to face you. "He isn't. He didn't want to kill me, but...he wanted me punished."
"What did he do?"
There was a cringe.
"He sterilized me."
"...how?"
"Let us say...some things were removed." He seemed shaky, and you reached out to take his hand.
He squeezed it.
"He gave you the pills, I think hoping that you would take them before I got back."
"I didn't."
You couldn't.
"The only child I will ever have is..." Cooler looked down at your belly. "...the one inside you."
"And you want children."
His face fell.
Was he ashamed to admit it? Or was it like telling a secret for him?
"Yes," he said, "I do."
Silence.
His posture was shifting. The rigidity you'd seen when you first met him was nowhere to be found. He was relaxing.
But why?
"Alright," you said quietly, "I'll..."
"You're agreeing? Without even--?"
"I don't care what you're offering," you said in a low tone, "I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to take them."
"...I see."
"It can be shown," he said, "As long as we are careful, that this child is only of my parentage."
"That is possible?"
"My people can self-fertilize," he said, "And if we...if we...copulate, with someone who has a uterus...within a certain period after doing so, we can pass the embryo into her empty womb."
You nodded.
"You are willing to bear it, and hand it over to me?"
"Yes."
It did not sit well, but--with Cooler, at least, the child would have a shot at a decent life. It would be raised in a noble house, and would never go hungry like you'd had to. It would never have to beg, or scrap over trash simply to find basic necessities.

It would have a good life.

"Yes, I would be."

*Cooler's POV*

...I have never been so glad.

My father's plans have been thwarted. The details can be seen to later, but...

Everything will be fine.
A Sprouting Seed

Chapter Summary

Cooler's problems grow, much like the child you carry.

Chapter Notes

The doctor looks like a normal human, like Raspberry. But they don't know what humans are here, and the DB wiki is no help, so I'm just using "humanoid."

A Sprouting Seed

A reason, of course, had to be invented for your being on his ship, regardless of any disguise.

"I'll have to give you some kind of job," he said, "Father will get suspicious if you're here with no reason."

"A pregnant woman, from out of nowhere, on your ship." You laughed, "I can't imagine why he'd find something wrong with that."

He gave you an odd look, but went on, "What jobs have you held in your time?"

"In the course of the obvious one, and aside from being a 'blanket' as your people would call it," you replied, "I've been a gardener, a secretary, a bookkeeper--a lot of roles that would put me behind a desk, or where I would be seen fairly frequently."

Cooler seemed to stop and think. "How would records suit you?"

"That would suit me just fine." You nodded, "But records? You would trust me with them?"

"It's not as if you will have access to anything especially important, aside from the coming and going of ships. The current title-holder is not very well organized, and could use a boot into something a little less..."

"Dull? Someplace he'd be better supervised?" You gave another little laugh. "Just tell me where to report and I'll get to it."

This was agreed to, and a few more details were hammered out. Then, he changed the subject.

"Now, as for the..." he glanced downward, at your stomach. "An appointment has been arranged for you already, to start off with. From there, you can handle it yourself."

You nodded, and as you were getting up to go, he spoke one more time.

"Thank you."
Cooler hadn't been kidding. When you showed up for your first day of work (thanks to hair relaxant, a new hairstyle, hiding your tail, and a few other little details), it was utter chaos. The system he had devised was with an old program that sorely needed to be changed over to the new, and it took you nearly a week to get it organized. Once things were cleared up, the job went straight into the boredom you'd expected.

Sort of.

Somehow it was oddly calming, to have everything fit into a neat category, to file every request for information, to know where everything was and would be.

And then there was that first doctor's appointment.

The doctor, a humanoid with reddish-brown hair, put you through several tests (blood and otherwise), and seemed pleased with each one.

"You are eating well despite the morning sickness, from what these say. And it looks like your hormone levels are where they should be, too."

"Will the morning sickness stop soon?"

"You're a few weeks off, but I believe so, yes. Once the second trimester begins, it should calm down; if you're lucky it will stop entirely."

You looked down at your belly. "Is there anything I should look out for?"

"That will depend on..." He paused, seeming to struggle with how to ask, "What species is the father?"

"...Arcosian." You went a little red.

"And is he aware of this?"

"Yes," you replied, preparing the reasoning that Cooler had given you, "I wanted a child, and he wanted, well, what most men want."

"I'm not here to judge, if that's what you're worried about," the doctor said a second later, "But perhaps if you try this again, learn more about him first. Off that, however, it looks as though you are handling things well on your own."

"I knew what I was getting into," you replied, "Now, as it pertains to the father, what should I look for?"

"Arcosian mothers generally start to crave sources of protein and iron more. You might find it different, but do try to avoid eating large amounts of anything fattening."

"I'll endeavor to do so, then. Thank you."

__________________________________________________________________________

*Cooler's POV*

The doctor, per my orders, is keeping me updated. The child's progress looks good so far. There are no genetic abnormalities to speak of, at least, that he can see right now.

I'm glad.
(Y/n) and I avoid one another, although I can't help but find it...irritating, when I observe her interacting with one or two of the more flirtatious soldiers. I've no interest in having the mother of my child hang around men of that sort. Suppose those men should have diseases they could pass on to her, should they manage to bed her? That would be injurious to both her health and the baby's. I will have to speak to her about this soon.

It's only another seven or so months that I have to wait until she's out of my life forever.

...forever.

---

*Cooler, 3rd Person*

It was a training day.

Ever since the beginning of this whole debacle, Cooler had begun taking extra time out of every day to do a bit of sparring with his soldiers. It had become blatantly clear that the situation could not go on forever in this nervous balancing act that it had become. When it came to his father, he might actually have to rely on strength.

He'd never been the strong one.

But then he'd discovered his fifth form, and his power level had skyrocketed. Salza, and the rest of the Armored Squadron, had nothing but praise for it, and being eager themselves to get stronger, pitted themselves against him regularly.

Today, however, Salza was his only opponent--and to his credit, he lasted several hours against Cooler before finally conceding.

"Thank you once again, Lord Cooler," he said, giving a (slightly painful) bow. "I believe I have improved greatly, to last this long against you."

Cooler relaxed, and slipped back into his previous form. "I was glad to oblige. It's always nice to have an opponent willing to give me an extended fight."

He watched, carefully, as Salza half-stumbled towards the door, and was heading for the showers when he heard the doors open, and Salza speak.

"Pardon me, your highness. Lord Cooler? Yes, he's in here."

What is my father doing here? Cooler thought, stopping short of the entrance to the showers.

The footsteps were heard crossing the room.

"Father," he said, feigning a pleasant smile as he turned, "My apologies, I wasn't told that you would be making a visit."

"I did not announce one," came the curt reply.

"To what do I owe the honor?"

"Officially, your mother's funeral," he replied, "I came to let you know the date and the time."

"A message would have sufficed." Cooler glanced away.

"Considering your part, I thought you might like to know."
"I am sure I have no idea what you're talking about."

There was a pause.

"I heard your strength had improved," Cold said suddenly.

"It has." Cooler sighed, impatiently.

"I will not sport with your patience by asking to fight you, nor would I ask, if I desired to. What I do want to know is how you obtained this strength."

"Training, like anyone else."

"Cooler, I am in no mood for jokes."

"I would not make jokes about such a subject. I'm not lying, father."

"You are omitting truth." The glare deepened, and Cold's expression hardened further. "I know what you've discovered, Cooler, and I've come to see if you will be reasonable in sharing it."

"Share it? You know how to obtain forms on your ow--"

He was cut short when Cold backhanded him, and stumbling, Cooler nearly fell over. He was leaning heavily against the wall and clutching his jaw when he finally got his footing back.

"I will not tolerate insolence like that from anyone, least of all my own children. You will tell me how you obtained this new form."

"Father, I..."

"Or," Cold replied, "Would you prefer me to release the security footage?"

"Security--"

Oh. Oh, no.

He thought he'd deleted it all. He thought he'd wiped all of the footage from existence. In fact, he'd sent in a logic bomb to take care of the whole issue once his mother passed.

How had Cold gotten this footage?

"The penalties will be less stiff for you than for, say, the saiyan, but there will still be some punishment in store. Deprivation of your title and fortune, to say the least. And then where will your bastard be?"

Cooler cringed.

"You think I don't know about that?" Cold's grin spread across his face in a heinous display. "You think I don't see that you've gotten around what I had in store for you?"

"Father--"

"Give me what I want," he went on, "And you will be able to keep what you have. No more, and no less."

Silence.
"You want this for what?"

"My mother-in-law," Plantain sighed, "I'm getting married soon and she wants copies of my health records."

"Why does she want those?"

"It's for where we're getting married," he said, "Some sort of extreme law where the bride and groom have to have check-ups before the wedding that includes an STD panel to ensure that no one is passing anything they shouldn't."

"What a barbaric law," you replied. You took out some datapads to begin the transfer. "I was wondering why you'd gotten one of those."

"There was an epidemic for the longest time," he replied, "Of a certain disease that disables the immune system, so I think this was a way of attempting to curb the spread of it, at least among the married."

"There are better ways to do that."

He agreed, and thanked you when you handed over the now-filled datapad. After perusing it for a minute he left.

As you were getting back to work, the doors opened again.

You looked up. "Avoca! To what do I owe the pleasure"

The yellow-skinned humanoid with a small tray in his hands gave a smile, "I thought our favorite recordskeeper would like a treat." He set the tray on your desk.

Underneath the lid--

"A chocolate souffle! Now tell me, Avoca, honestly, what is it you're after?" It was small, but oh, you'd heard these were delicious...

"I need the access records of some of my men. Someone's been thieving from a storeroom and I want to find out who," he replied, "That, and I was wondering what you were doing later on to--"

The sound of the doors drew your ire. People all day today! "Wha--" you started almost in anger, but stopped cold when you saw Cooler.

"I need to speak with the recordskeeper on a matter of high security," he said, fixing first the souffle and then Avoca with a glare.

"Yes, my lord." The nervous reply came quickly, as he was scuttling out the door.

"That wasn't very nice," you said.

"Neither is bribery," Cooler replied, "What did he want?"

"He wanted some records so that he might figure out which of his men might be the thief of some storeroom," you replied, "It might take time to get all of them. He was only attempting to see that it was done faster."
"If he's bringing you sweet, that's not all he wants done," came the dry reply.

"Are you jealous or something?"

Cooler looked away. "Men like Avoca have a tendency of collecting notches on their belt, and that tends to lead to disease. I am simply looking out for your health."

"Did you need something? Or did you just come in here to let me know that sleeping around without protection is bad? I've learned that lesson already."

No answer.

"Really, tell me what you want. Avoca's request was a serious one and I need to get to work on it."

"My father's made a visit," he replied, "I want you to keep an eye on the landing bay's records and inform me if he comes again while you are on duty."

"Suppose he comes in an unrelated ship?"

"The officers in the landing bay will make some kind of note of his appearance. They always do."

"That would leave the both of us with very little time to respond."

"But there would still be time. This is my territory, and I know it better than he does."

"Alright. I'll let you know."
Chapter Summary

Things are getting uncomfortable, both for Cooler and for you.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Holding Pattern

Odd things began to happen after that.

It started with the date with Avoca you actually managed to arrange. Fine, if Cooler did not want you actually having sex with anyone--you could understand that. Even with preventative measures, there was still the risk of catching something. It was his child, after all, and you didn't mind giving him a little say.

But that didn't mean that you were going to forego companionship entirely.

So you arranged that date through the message system, and waited for him in the ship's main cafeteria, with a small dinner ready.

He showed, right on time.

"Hey," you said, giving a slight smile.

"Hey," came the easy reply, "Sorry I'm late. The data you got for me gave me what I needed, and I was a little...busy for a bit, exacting his punishment."

"I should hope so. Letting whoever it was get away with it wouldn't have done your reputation as a superior much good. What did you end up doing to him?"

"Reduction of rank, dock in pay...lengthen his training periods...a small number of things. It's a first offense, so I don't wish to be too hard on him."

"Quite the opposite," you said, "You want to heavily discourage this sort of thing. If you aren't harsh enough, he'll think that this punishment isn't so bad, that he can bear with this."

"Which is why I took his pay and rank. The man sets everything about his worth by what he earns and can throw around." Avoca nodded.

"Smart man. I'm sorry I doubted you."

It was with similar promptings that you learned about him over the next hour. He asked several times about you, and you provided answers that had been sorted out a short time previous.

It was easy enough, and you were smiling for the first time in a while.

You excused yourself a few minutes after finishing your food to use the bathroom, feeling...well,
hopeful. In a way, at any rate. It was nice to slip into a name, to wear it, to be normal and not to have them be so suspicious.

It was temporary, but still nice, to have a life for these short periods. It made you look forward to the day that you could actually start making your own life.

There was this child, your body reminded you, with a twinge of nausea. But...but with you, what sort of future might it have? Hormones were making it difficult to continue to agree, but its best option was to stay with Cooler. For you not to be involved.

It could not be a part of your life.

You headed back into the cafeteria, only to see Avoca getting up.

"Something wrong?" you asked.

"Yeah. Someone's messed something up and of course I have to be the one to go fix it. It really bites, sometimes, being an officer."

"Well...it was nice eating with you, at least," you said.

"Same."

And you might have thought it was nothing more than bad luck, had it not been for the next occurrence.

The next date a week later had gone well; you took a trip by the ship's (admittedly beautiful) arboretum, and then had dinner. Avoca saw you back to the doors of your quarters, and gave you a quick kiss on the cheek.

He'd seemed so happy.

Despite the fact that you'd actually laid out to him that there would be no sex, he'd been happy.

It was a pleasant thought to occupy your mind while you gave several blood samples to the doctor.

"I don't expect anything to be different this time," he said, "But it's still best to be sure."

"Right," you said a little weakly. "My head is just...buzzing a little, is all."

"Sit quietly, then. Lean back."

You sighed, obeying.

When he was done taking your blood, he left the room, taking the little vials with him--leaving you, of course, a nutritional bar to eat, to help ease your dizziness and nausea. As you nibbled at it, you heard the receptionist's voice coming up the hallway.

"Yes, my Lord, he will be with you shortly, once you've come in. What? No, no, he's only got one other patient at the moment. It has been rather a quiet day."

Cooler?

For a moment you wondered what reason he would have to come in--but then you remembered his description of the sterilization he'd been subjected to. Arcosians required both sets of hormones for
their bodies to function correctly, so he probably had to come in to have his levels monitored.

Poor bastard.

Cooler passed by the room you were in; its door had been left open. He looked in, you looked out, and your eyes met.

He looked quickly away, but you could see the rigidity of the muscle in his facial expression.

Severe displeasure. But over what?

You finished the nutritional bar just as the doctor returned. "Everything still looks good, but I'm going to recommend vitamins, just in case."

"Better to be safe than sorry, I suppose," you said. "Is there anything else?"

"No, no. Make an appointment at the front desk and aim for about three weeks from now."

He helped you up, and you headed for the waiting room. The receptionist, thankfully, was there.

"Did it go well?" she asked.

You nodded.

"Wonderful! The doctor doesn't get to handle a lot of pregnancies; it's always nice for him to get the chance to."

"Does he like pregnant women, or something?" you asked.

"What? Oh, no, it's not that. It's just that he doesn't see too many of them. Alright, when did he say he wanted you to be here next?"

"About three weeks from now," you replied.

"Alright...I have something on a Wednesday, is that alright?"

"That's good, thanks."

"And there we go! You'll have a message in your inbox about it any moment now, and you'll be sent another the day before the appointment."

You thanked her, and left--just as Cooler was emerging from the back. You felt his eyes on you, and hurried out into the hall.

But a second later, he'd left as well.

"(Y/n)," you heard him say, "Wait."

Sighing, you stopped in place. When he caught up to you, you kept walking.

"I wanted to speak to you about Avoca." his tone was...well, not hard, but unhappy.

"I'm not sleeping with him," you replied, lowering your voice. "I'm doing what you specified."

"That's not the point," He said.

"What? I thought it was. You said you didn't want me bedding down and getting a disease that
would infect the baby, and I'm not."

"(Y/n)--"

"What is it? Do you want me to spend time alone? I'm leaving, but I want to have someone to talk to while I am still here. The baby's not going to catch something just from me talking to people."

"I didn't say that you couldn't talk to people," Cooler's tone was growing exasperated, "I just don't--"

"Tell me, directly, what you mean," You said shortly, "So that I do not misunderstand you."

"What will it take for you to stop seeing other men, period?"

You stopped in utter surprise and looked up at him. Only the vaguest hint of scarlet was on his face, but it was enough.

"You want--"

"I do not want to take his place. It simply...uncomfortable to have the mother of my child seeing...someone else."

"Why is that?"

He didn't answer.

"You can't simply expect me to work and go home and be pregnant, and get nothing else out of this."

"I can," he replied, "You are getting your freedom, the least you can do is--"

"Be your broodmare, and nothing else."

"I would not use terms like that of a lady."

"A lady!" you laughed.

"You are better than you give yourself credit for," he replied curtly.

"Tell me," you said suddenly, tired of his deflection, "And I want an answer this time, why is it so uncomfortable for you to see me with someone else?"

Once more, the faint redness on his face returned.

"If you want to see me, you should say so."

"I don't," Cooler said.

But he was tripping over the words.

*Cooler's POV*

If she were Arcosian, this would not be half as hard as it is.

If she were Arcosian, I would barely leave her side. I--we--would be celebrating this birth. We'd be sorting the rooms, the parties, the birth, the...
I don't want to share it with other people. I don't want *her* sharing it with other men. It is my child!

Having to say that to her was...was harder than it should have been.

It angered me to have to say it at all.

*I do* want to see her. But I can't. I shouldn't.

Maybe it's because of my brother, that this is beginning to hurt. News has started circulating that my brother is...*seeing* King Vegeta's younger sister, Yassa. Regardless of any talks of alliance, my brother has procured himself a saiyan.

If he can have her...

Why can't I have mine?

Chapter End Notes

I chose "Yassa" because "yasai" is vegetables in Japanese. Don't worry, I'm not departing from the Toriyama naming! :)

Thief

Chapter Summary

You have taken hold of something that is not your own.

Thief

*Cooler's POV*

I accessed the doctor's files.

She is now in the third month of pregnancy, and everything is proceeding as it should. I'm glad.

But at the same time...

I'm anxious, and all I want is for this all to be over--one way or another.

The end of the pregnancy can't come soon enough.

*Your POV*

The third month came. The nausea was beginning to subside, finally, and the baby was beginning to grow in earnest.

And naturally, Cooler's...order...to you, to avoid the other men, was repeated what seemed like every other time you saw him.

If he had no plans to take that place himself, why could you not at least have someone of the male persuasion to speak to? If he wanted to take that place, why did he not simply say so? Why did he have to keep reiterating his original point?

If he was shy, he should get over it. That much was obvious.

"But that won't accomplish anything in the long run." you murmured to yourself as you entered the cafeteria for the evening meal. There were several restaurants on board, but it seemed rather pointless to spend extra money on food at the moment, when it could be freely obtained in the 'mess' as they called it.

There was a bit of a crowd, but somehow you still managed to find a booth for two in the corner that was private enough after you got your tray of food. You would be able to observe the rest of the room, and that was what counted the most.

An orange, a bowl of stew, a bottle of water, a square of fudge. You were told that when you wanted more, to just wave one of the mess employees down and let them know.

Suitable enough, like the table, which was actually rather nice, considering the decorative tablecloths that they'd put down.
You shrugged inwardly and started eating, with more gusto than usual.

The noisy chatter continued, until it didn't--there was a brief lull for which you did not bother to look up. Likely as not a fight was about to start.

"And I want no part of that," you said, half-laughing under your breath a moment later.

"You want no part of what?"

Unexpectedly, Cooler's voice sounded off beside the booth.

You looked up in surprise, and gave the best seated bow that you could. "My lord. I wasn't aware that you saw fit to dine with the rest of us."

"I am less inclined to snobbishness than my brother," Cooler laughed, and took the seat across from you.

"To what do I owe the honor?" you asked. Lowering your voice, you added, "Are you here to tell me what you've repeated countless times before?"

"No," he replied, "I merely want to hear from you how things were going."

"Do you not speak to the doctor?"

"I check the files, yes, but..." he paused, "I would rather hear it from you, to get the full picture."

Thinking about it, it made sense. If he asked the doctor, there was no telling who might overhear his inquiries. This was the safest option.

You gave him the news, in hushed tones--the doctor said that the baby was growing admirably, that it was of a good size--that there were no genetic problems, in particular. It would be perfectly healthy upon birth.

"That is good to hear," he replied, "And better than I could have hoped."

"Indeed," you replied, "I would have thought for sure that there would be at least one major problem, and yet--there are none. Except for my exquisite case of boredom, there is nothing to complain about."

"That is hardly my fault," Cooler replied. "I thought you would be fine with it. After all, you can do whatever you please once it is...all done and over with."

"I would have agreed with you before, but..."

"But?"

"But now, being deprived of it, I found that I've changed my mind. I want something. Sex, or romance, one or the other."

"That isn't possible, and you know it."

"You can't at least pretend?" you laughed, and shifted slightly. Your booted feet moved under the table--mistakenly, against his own bare ones. "Sorry."

Cooler looked away with a tinge of red on his face.
He was blushing, merely at touching you?

An inkling of capriciousness crept up, higher and higher, the more he sat there in silence. Food was brought over, and he began to eat, but he did not look at you once.

Was he here for your company, or for news only? It was all so confusing!

But, your mind whispered, but--there would be one certain way to be sure of it. And owing to the tablecloth, nobody need know about it, either.

You crossed your legs, and let the right foot that dangled about where his ankle was, travel up the inside of his leg.

As expected, the red blush spread further over Cooler's face. He met your own faux innocent and teasing eyes in shock, with knife and fork sitting now idly in his hands.

The tip of your boot traveled over, and above, his knee, brushing his thigh, and it was then that he dropped the knife and reached under the table to swat your foot down. For good measure, once it was back on the ground, he held it there with his own.

"I would be very appreciative," Cooler said (and you laughed inwardly, for if he looked as if he would catch fire, he was so red in the face!), "If you would refrain from doing that again."

You noticed, however, that the foot of his that held yours to the floor did not move through the rest of the meal, and was released only when he was getting up to leave.

The dinner rush was long over, and now but a few men remained.

You took his hand to help you get up, and he bore with it.

"Thank you," you said, giving him a smile. "Contrary to what you might think, I actually rather enjoyed that."

In a last devilish act, you moved up on tip-toe to peck him on the cheek, and disappeared with one final grin.

________________________________________

*Cooler's POV*

There she goes.

As impossible as this is, and will be, there she goes, with that--

No. It is not possible.

But the desire she stirred from touching me, the blush that rose when her lips touched my cheek, and the lift I felt when she smiled at me...

...what have I done?
It's not anything like a HABIT, of course.

Bud and Bloom

It's a game.

That was a thought that kept passing through your head.

It was easy to tease Cooler, since he seemed to keep coming around to hear updates from you. For two weeks, it was on every Friday. Then, it was twice weekly for two weeks.

It made one wonder...

Among other things.

But your clothes were getting tighter, and you were going up in underarmor sizes steadily. You applied for and received special allowance to not have to wear the underarmor top; you had to wear instead a shirt of the same general style and design as the top. Essentially, a glorified t-shirt was put on under the armor itself.

Your appetite was kicking up as well, and no matter how much of it you got, you almost always found yourself craving fish or liver.

Four months in, and five or so to go.

There were a lot of ways it could be worse, and it was good that none of those ways were real at the moment.

"Something wrong?"

It was another one of those innocuous lunch meetings, which everyone was beginning to grow suspicious of. Once or twice? Nothing. But this was more than mere coincidence according to the ship's gossip chain.

"What?" Cooler looked at you, somewhat surprised, when you spoke. "What's wrong?"

"No, I was asking you." You pointed at the little vaping pen he was holding. "You've been hitting that pretty hard in the last fifteen minutes or so."

"Stress," he replied.

"You were doing it the first time I met you, too," you gave a little smile.

It was easy to remember. Strawberries and lime before...this time, cherries and chocolate cream.
"You have a good memory."

"It's a curse," you replied, smiling. And, seizing the opportunity, you went on, "You're unforgettable."

Another blush.

It was almost adorable.

_Puff. Puff._

"I keep telling you to stop," he replied, "And you never do."

"Why should I?"

"Because it would ensure we aren't found out." Cooler looked directly at you, and exhaled again.

"We're doing nothing wrong."

"And I would like it to stay that way." His tone went serious, and he took several quick puffs.

"Are you in danger of doing something?" you asked, "Please. You know better. A woman from the streets, who knows no other life but stabbing and running, who--"

"--who wants to escape it, who shows remarkable insight and grace for the lack of a proper education."

"I doubt I'll ever truly escape this life," you replied.

"You don't seem as if you're too eager to try."

"There are no opportunities. Besides, I have too many enemies."

"You should really refrain from speaking so openly about it."

"I know, I know." you sighed, "I've been slipping of late...too much."

"You're lucky it wasn't fatal."

The food arrived, and you both began to eat.

"I'll do what I can to stop it being fatal," you replied, "But if I die, I die."

"You are remarkably calm about the fact. How can you think of it so lightly?"

"I realized," you replied, "In a sort of panicked moment, some months ago, that becoming over-anxious is liable to make more mistakes happen. And thus..."

"I see." Cooler smiled, and you realized it was the first real, genuine one you'd seen out of him.

It looked nice on him.

"Then if things were to be surrounding you at this very moment..."

"I would respond appropriately, baby or not. I'm no fool."

"It's really a pity you never saw the inside of a guild," Cooler hinted, "You would be perfect for it.
And they are quite open to--"

"I don't doubt it." You changed the subject, eager to get away from anything that reminded you of Cold. "There was an ultrasound just yesterday, you know."

"Yes, and?"

"Results inconclusive. Its tail is blocking the view."

"I wouldn't expect anything to be visible anyway." Cooler stopped for a moment as a group of soldiers took the table next to your booth. "The father is Arcosian, after all. The...gender...may not be visible until it's born."

"Won't it have both sets of gender equipment?" you asked.

"Oh, some hybrids are like that," Cooler answered, "But others can entirely favor one gender over another."

"I see."

"Again, these are things that you really should have learned prior to conception."

"There wasn't a lot of time to learn," you replied. Oh, he would bring that up, would he?

Under the table, and blocked to everyone else's view by the cloth, your booted foot again moved up his leg.

"I told you--"

"You did."

The blush spread, and to be sure that the others didn't notice it, Cooler turned his face toward the wall.

"Stop it," he said under his breath.

"Why?"

"Because I'm asking you to. Nicely. Please stop."

You obeyed, and he relaxed. Another six or seven puffs from the vape pen were taken.

A few minutes later, you were done eating. You got up and began to head back to your quarters.

The way he looked at you filled your thoughts. The blushes were more frequent, and while he asked, you'd almost say...he didn't want you to stop.

Maybe he was just as much in need of some companionship as you were. Maybe he wanted a fling, or something, like you did.

Or maybe he just wanted...something, whatever it was. Not that you'd really mind--if he was the only one, you could make do.

You were dialing the pass-code to get into your quarters when you heard his voice.

"(Y/n)?"
There was no one in the hallway.

You were alone.

"I just wanted to--"

"To do what, follow me home?"


"That's bad for you," you pointed out.

"It is not," Cooler replied evenly and stepped directly in front of you, "I make it myself. I know exactly what goes into it."

"I stand corrected, then."

Silence.

"What do you want?" you asked.

"I...was merely going to ask a question that I'd neglected to ask earlier."

"What might that be, exactly?"

"Are you...if you're...feeling well?"

"I feel fine."

Cooler's eyes couldn't seem to stay still. He was fidgety.

"There's something else," you said suspiciously, taking a half-step closer, "But you won't say it."

"I don't--"

The thought, and the urge, came too suddenly for you to resist. The kiss you planted on Cooler's lips was meant to be only a peck, as the last two or three had been. But when it connected, that kiss of yours--he returned it.

You were pressed, as best as he could manage, against the door to your quarters.

It lasted only about ten seconds or so. But it felt like such an eternity longer.

You looked up at his scarlet eyes, and it occurred to you...

...that one of two things had most likely just happened.

Either you had met someone you could love, or you'd made the biggest mistake of your life.

Maybe it was both.
The fifth month dawned, and the baby had begun to move.

That had started only a few days before, and it was always such a strange feeling. It was struggling, alive, and...

...and it was hard not to think of it all the time.

Whatever happened, it wouldn't grow up like you had. It wouldn't virtually starve, or have to hoard food when it found a lot of it. It wouldn't have to fight over the tiniest bit of shelter.

It would be loved, and taken care of.

That was enough to put a smile on your face, at least temporarily. Even if...

You shook your head.

"Are you unwell?"

Cooler's voice rang out when you were in mid-thought.

"Unwell? No. Just thinking, was all. It's been moving a lot lately."

"That's always a good sign," he replied. "Though you might find it hard as the months go on."

"I've only got four to go."

_Puff, puff_

"Yes, well...as I said. You'll find it hard."

"I'm finding the cravings the worst. I've never eaten so much fish and liver in all my life."

"Perhaps a supplement would help."

"I'm taking a multivitamin as it is."

"Then I imagine you'll be eating fish and liver in a lot of different ways." Cooler laughed.

"I guess. Between that and my temperature issue, it's--"

"Temperature issue?"

"I'm getting cold all the time," you said, "It seems like I need wear a sweater constantly to stay
"You should adjust the--"

"I've done it," you replied, "Somehow it ends up being too hot."

"I'll see what I can do."

A few days later, he joined you again.

"Is this a thing now?" you asked.

"I looked into it," Cooler replied, glancing over your question. "Your problems, I mean. I could give you a few things to read--"

"Then do."

He looked briefly awkward. "I think a class would serve you better."

"A class? What kind of class?"

"It's one they usually hold for Arcosian mothers--"

"I am not an Arcosian, if you hadn't noticed," You replied quickly, "What makes you think it will help?"

"You might not derive any benefit from the parts about birthing an egg," he replied, "But it addresses your heat issue, your cravings, and some post-birth concerns."

"With my body, of course."

"No, with the baby."

You went silent. The assumption had been that you would be leaving shortly after the birth. But the idea of not bonding with the baby--

--the class. Yes.

"Alright, fine. Where is it?"

"On Arcos."

"I don't want to be left on that planet for any length of time."

"I need to meet with my brother, planetside, over something for a few weeks. There'll be nothing to worry about," Cooler waved dismissively.

"How can you be so casual about it?"

"My brother has no interest in you now," he added, "And my father is busy elsewhere."

You sighed.

"It will be beneficial for the child, I suppose," you said. "Alright. I'll go."

"Good," Cooler gave another smile.
He'd been doing that a lot more often of late.

*A Few Days Later*

"Alright, now, ladies, if we're all here--"

You stepped into the room just as the teacher was beginning. He looked at you as you looked at the class.

The mothers were not all Arcosian. But for the non-Arcosian mothers, there were apparently Arcosian fathers.

You were the only single person there.

"Will the father be joining us?" the teacher asked you.

You shook your head.

"Well, have a seat, then. I'm glad you weren't too late."

Once you'd sat down, he began again.

First there were congratulations, and questions around the room about how far along you all were.

"We're seven months," one couple said, and another followed with, "We're six months on."

"Roughly five months," you said quietly when it came to you.

Several couples looked at you with pity.

The teacher went on. What he spent the most time on was what to expect for those who would be having eggs, but after a while he began to speak to the mothers who, like you, were not Arcosian.

"You will be giving live birth," he said, "Somehow, the lack of pure Arcosian blood equates to the eggshell being completely unable to even begin forming. "The biggest problem will be the large head of the baby--as an Arcosian's is larger than most mammalians' at birth--so you will want to consult with your OB on the possibility of needing a C-section."

You made a mental note of it.

"Hybrids are hard to predict," he continued, "So once again, remain in constant contact with your doctor. The baby could look like a mix of the two of you, or it could favor you, or the father. There may be extra problems with thermoregulation, and it might need special care for some time after birth. Particularly so if it favors its Arcosian side heavily."

He went on again. There was a break for lunch--which you found entirely unexpected.

Not to mention thoroughly unwelcome.

"No father?" asked one of the Arcosian mothers. "Did he die?"

"No," you replied as you got out your own food, "We're not in contact."

Her partner's nose wrinkled. "I suppose he left you once you gave him the news."

"I haven't been able to find him again," you said.
"Oh, you poor thing," said the one next to her, "Unfortunately that's a habit with some of the younger ones. Get at a mammal once, and after he's had his fun, never speaks to her again. It happens too often for my taste."

"I take it that's not the normal way."

"Oh, of course not!" said the first mother, "When a proper Arcosian fathers a child, he, or she, is responsible for the mother's health and well-being, at the very least."

"Exactly," quipped her partner, "Even if he doesn't love or care for her at all. If he wants to claim the child, he ought to take care of it and the mother."

"But what if it's a bastard?"

"Even then." said another Arcosian father, "It can't be my heir if it's known to be a bastard, but there are still possibilities for it, and besides--it is my duty to provide for my child. And its mother, if she will allow it."

He nuzzled the pregnant humanoid woman he was sitting next to, who gave a giggle in return.

You ate your packed lunch in silence, and sat quiet until the teacher returned.

And that was that for about five lessons over the next week. Each day brought out more invectives against this mysterious deadbeat father they assumed your baby had, and how no Arcosian of good moral standing could do such a thing. One comforted herself with the thought that he had not done this intentionally--he had perhaps enjoyed a night before going on some long journey. He might return, and do everything that was his duty, and if he did he would be thoroughly ashamed that he had already missed so much of the pregnancy!

You merely agreed, and let the matter fall as you made various notes. And when the time came to leave the planet you did it quickly, with several hours to spare as you boarded Cooler's ship.

He didn't bother you at lunch this time.

But when you attempted to return to your quarters, you found them locked and with no mention of your having violated any rules in the console, as was the custom in that situation.

You were accessing your scouter to see if there were any notes about it when you found a message from Cooler that read:

_You've got new quarters. Follow the directions and I'll meet you there--there's something I need to talk to you about._
Chapter Summary

But will he love you tomorrow?

Lover

*Cooler's POV*

Everything is ready.

I've had a few drinks to both steady myself and get my inhibitions down ever so slightly. Hesitation would ruin everything right now.

And I still don't know how to say it!

Maybe I'll have the answer once she's here.

*Your POV*

You arrived, and thankfully your previous room's pass-code worked on this door's console as well. It prompted you to create a new one, and you did so before walking in.

Wow.

The initial room was pretty large. There was a viewscreen on one side, several sofas arranged in a sort of U-shape near it, and a table in between. The bedroom, on the left, had a large bed with---silk? Was that silk? Were these _silk sheets_?

You peeked into the bathroom. In-ground tub, shower...

This looked too much like a luxury hotel suite.

You went back out and tried the door on the other side of the main room. A dining room, food already set out. Oh, my, was the food ever set out...it was a veritable feast! Some sort of a roasted bird, vegetables...and oh, was that a chocolate souffle?

And at the end of the small (but packed) table, with a half-full glass of wine--was Cooler. On one side of the table, on his left side, there was an empty chair.

"(Y/n)," he said, "I--"

"What did I do?" you asked, before he could finish.

"Have a seat. It's nothing _you_ did," he said. "I simply wanted to...discuss something...over dinner."

Everything about him screamed hesitation. You looked at him as you sat down, and studied his face. He was nervous, but what could he possibly have to be nervous about?
Well, there was one thing. But if it was *that*, surely he'd have said something by now.

"I hope everything is to your liking," Cooler said--again, slowly.

You sipped quietly at the water in your glass, and started eating when he did. Several times, he looked as if he wanted to say something, but he always stopped before he did, and his nervousness only got more and more pronounced.

Perhaps that was why he kept pouring himself more wine.

You were both nearly done eating when he finally spoke up again.

"It is difficult for me to say this," Cooler started, almost as if he were being forced, "And I have struggled for longer than I care to admit with it. I am not the sort to express these feelings easily; wearing your heart on your sleeve in my position is, shall we say, frowned upon."

"But?" you asked.

He finished his current glass. Slowly. Then he rubbed his temples.

You waited.

"I've never been in love before. I don't know how to...communicate this very well."

Love?

Did he just admit that he was in love with you?

"You love me?" you asked.

Cooler took a slow, deep breath.

Your eyes met, and your heart fluttered in your chest.

"You came from nothing," he said, "You've fought your way up, overcome so much, and kept going when many people would simply have lain down and given up long ago. You--" he shook his head and looked away, "--your eyes, your hair, your...warmth..."

More wine poured, and then consumed.

You were reddening.

Such a line of compliments--and your beauty, remarked on last of all? That was usually what men commented on first!

"I--I don't know what to say," you said quickly.

"You don't have to say anything." After that last glass of wine, Cooler seemed to have relaxed. "Just--"

"Just what? Listen to you compliment me in ways I've never heard before?"

"Surely someone must have said similar things."

"No. No one in quite the way you have."

"Well, they should, because it's true."
You both paused. You for water, and him for just a little more wine.

"Haven't you had enough?" you asked.

Heart flutter. He'd all but said it. You were supposed to be above these things. You were supposed to be leaving in four months.

But he'd essentially said it to you!

Thoughts of love that had never been possible were springing up and around.

He loved you! Cooler, of all people, was saying that he loved you!

"Is this what you were so nervous about?" you asked, suddenly filled with energy. "Telling me that you loved me?"

"Of course it was," he replied, "You think I just go around telling women I love them like I was reading a report? It's--it's not that simple!"

"It's as simple as you want it to be." You gave a grin.

Your boot rose from the floor, and moved up the inside of his right leg.

"Don't tempt me right now," he said quickly, "Because--"

"Because if you started to want me, you would take advantage of it?"

"..."

His silence was all the answer you needed.

Past his knee.

"(Y/n)--" Cooler stood.

You did the same.

Hormones surging. They'd been doing it for longer than was comfortable. Desire was almost an afterthought, you needed him right now.

He loved you.

He was safe.

You stepped forward, almost in a haze, and his flustered expression was the last thing you saw before you shut your eyes...

...and kissed him.

He returned it.

Oh, gods, did Cooler ever return it. It deepened, and as you reached around him, clinging, both his hands moved up and into your hair, keeping you close, there, lips dancing--

--and then, suddenly, you parted.

He didn't say anything, but he didn't have to. His eyes did all the talking.
You were out the door and heading toward the bedroom across the main area. You were in the bedroom, kicking off your boots.

Cooler was right behind you--literally--watching as you undressed, and taking in every detail.

But when you turned toward him, bare, he gave a genuine smile, and moved forward to kiss you again.

Flush against him, you clung; Cooler backed you again the bed and lifted you onto it.

He wanted you, and you were giving it. For the first time, you were giving it willingly to someone, without it being part of a job. It just felt so good.

You were looking up at him.

Absently, one of his hands moved down to your belly, and you covered it with one of your own.

But then it moved up, to grip gently at your chest, and a grin you couldn't quite identify the meaning of spread across his face when his hand was dampened.

Cooler leaned down, allowing you to wrap your arms around him. Your knees moved to either side, gripping at his hips.

"No," he said in a quiet voice, "You shouldn't be on your back."

In a fluid, but slow movement, he pulled you up, and then turned to lay himself in your place.

You were now straddling Cooler.

As his hands moved southward, to your hips, his interest was rising...among other things.

You moved up--

--and you heard a hiss as you settled down, sank, were full of him.

You rose and fell slowly, but even then your body was responding eagerly. His little movements, helping you roll your hips, pulling you farther so he could go deeper...

He sat up, and your lips met again. You gave a steady succession of bounces, leaning back so your belly didn't get in the way, and he responded by pulling you back each time you came back down.

And then, as you arched your back, you felt something completely unexpected.

Cooler's lips.

On one of your breasts.

The feeling of kisses was one thing, but when that dampness moved to its peak...

You gave a squeak. At the same time as those teeth grazed at the nipple, he'd thrust to fulless inside of you. You groaned, and reached one hand up to the back of his head.

Then, even stranger, a tiny bit of suction. A second later, you felt him swallowing.

Cooler continued; both with the gentle thrusting and this (so far) new enjoyment of your breasts. You'd heard that the Arcosians could enjoy them, but to this degree?
And apart from any weirdness--how insidious a pleasure it was! From that peak, little dregs of bliss wormed their way down to your nethers and shocked at your inner walls, where he was as well.

His name slipped out.

"Cooler..."

He had you, he had you so easily, putty in his hands, but--
--who even cared, with a euphora this good?

He wasn't stopping. The hand that wasn't holding you up, keeping you from falling back, was moved up to your other breast, and groped at it, completely ignoring the wetness that resulted.

You groaned as he kept going--only now, he was thrusting a little faster, and dragging over every good spot you'd ever even dreamed of having.

"Don't stop."

It escaped, but you let it go without even trying to stifle it. You didn't want him to stop.

The gentle motions of suction and swallowing continued, and faster still, he moved.

He was safe. You could give him what you were giving him.

"Cooler..."

Hotter, swifter--deeper--
--a break--
--you yelped as the peak crashed, and spread through your body like a flash. Pleasure rang every fiber with its heated intensity, and then just as suddenly, let them go.

He pulled back from your chest, whispering something about your sweetness. And as your own heat began to die away, his built to its own fevered high--and burst.

No fear this time. No anxiety about the future.

Here, it was simply the two of you and your bodies.

And that was all you required.

You rose so he could withdraw. Once it receded, you found him pulling you close, closer than anyone had ever held you.

"I love you." He slurred, but only a little.

It was your last thought before you fell to sleep.

He loved you.
Perhaps it was too much to hope for.

You slept sounder than you had in years, and your heart was still fluttering even as you attempted to tug it back down to the ground.

A prince! A prince had said that he loved you.

And even though you woke alone, you still woke with a smile on your face.

It was easy enough to understand. He was a prince, after all, and a military leader at that. He likely hadn't meant to stay in the first place, there were a thousand things he had to do, probably.

But you did not see him all day, not even at lunch.

Oh well.

You'd see him at some point.

A week passed before you even caught a glimpse of Cooler, and that was only when you passed him on your way into the lunchroom as he was on his way out.

You sent him a message or two--nothing suspicious, of course, just that you had some information of note that he might like to hear. If there were no other way than that to speak to him at this point, you would do what you had to.

The sixth month was nearly here, and the doctor had seemingly caught on to at least the fact that Cooler had taken an interest in the pregnancy. The suspicion at present was that he thought you were simply Cooler's incubator for a child solely of his lineage. Since the doctor mentioned that he hadn't shared this thought with anyone else, you encouraged it.

"We wished to keep it quiet," you said to him, "You can well imagine the fuss and possible danger."

"Indeed I can," the doctor replied, "You can count on me to remain silent. Are you keeping him updated?"

"Yes, of course I am."

And that was that. The doctor's reputation spoke for itself, and there was no worry in trusting him with this information, fudged as it was.

You walked out of that appointment clutching a small datapad, and with a generally good feeling permeating your mind. After checking the time, decided to head down to the cafeteria. It was
lunchtime. If you hurried, maybe you'd be lucky...

And as it turned out, you were.

You spotted Cooler immediately, and joined him with a smile.

"I have something to show you," you said.

"I'm sorry," he said, finishing several bites of his meal in quick succession, "But you've caught me at a bad time. I was just about to get up."

"But you've barely touched your food, and I had something to show you from the doc--"

He raised a finger to his lips. "You can send it to me," he said in a low tone, "But be sure it's encrypted."

"Is something wrong?"

Something felt off.

"No, no, nothing is wrong," Cooler replied quickly, "There's just been a lot to handle of late."

"But--" you held up the datapad.

"As I said, you can send it. Later."

He got up and left. You stared after him, more confused than ever.

What just happened?

The question repeated itself over and over as the next week passed and the final trimester began, and over that time evolved into another.

What had happened to Cooler?

He'd spent all that time apparently struggling with his feelings, had confessed them, had spent a wonderful night with you--

Maybe that had been it. He hadn't intended to bed you, and now that he had, was having a serious case of regrets.

But if he loved you, what difference did it make if he'd taken you to bed or not?

The next appointment shed even more light. Cooler had begun speaking to the doctor directly, and thus, had already received the updates and ultrasound pictures taken.

On hearing that, you felt your stomach drop.

Two weeks of trying to have lunch with him, see him again, even share news about the baby--and he was electing to get it from the doctor instead.

Had you done something wrong?

Or maybe...the thought crossed your mind somewhat sourly, maybe his confession was only made due to drunkenness. He'd hit the wine rather hard during the dinner you'd shared, after all.
And the only time he'd really said the words, they'd been in a slurred tone.

But more than anything right now, you needed answers. When a request from the bridge came down for some detailed information on a particular planet, you decided to deliver it by hand, in a datapad.

The elevator trip was nothing. You met the guards at the bridge door--

"I'm here with Lord Cooler's information." you said, showing the datapad, and then giving your work number.

They called in on the small intercom.

"What?" came Cooler's voice, "What is it now?"

"(Y/n) from the, ah, data files department--" the soldier struggled like many to remember the name of your exact job, "--has the information on that planet that you requested."

"And why was it not simply sent up in the message system?"

"It did seem like information you would--" the soldier began to speak, but was cut off.

"I do not wish to see anyone extra right now, least of all someone looking to make an impression for their service. Take the datapad and send her back to her station."

Cooler's voice was hard. Harder than you'd thought it could be, after all the eloquence and calm you'd come to expect.

"Oh...alright then." you handed over the datapad to one of the soldiers. "My...my apologies for disturbing you, then."

You walked away and heard no more.

When you got back to your desk a message from Cooler appeared in your scouter's messaging system.

_I will speak to you when I get the chance._

A chance in hell, maybe...

You stopped seeking Cooler out, and took lunch in your own quarters from that point onward.

Less than three months to go.

Whatever game he was playing, whatever his goal had been, you just wanted your part in it to stop. The "did he love you, did he not," game was no longer as fun as it was in the beginning.

No time. This was no time to worry about him anyway. Worrying would only harm the baby.

One night a few days after that whole fiasco, you were working a little later than usual. It seemed like things had gotten a little heavy on the work end lately, which you had to be pretty thankful for. Find this, send that, confirm that other thing...

The doors whooshed open.
"I am working on it, Lieutenant--" you looked up, and were momentarily struck silent.

It was Cooler.

"And what data do you require, my lord?"

"I wanted to speak to you about something else. Not the data."

"My lord, I am on duty," you replied; there was an edge in your voice that you hadn't expected to be there.

"I'm your boss. You're not on duty if I--"

"I do not want to see you," you replied, "Make this quick. What are you here for?"

"I wanted to apologize for--and explain--my behavior."

"What possible explanation could you have?" you asked, "I can understand if you were unhappy about what happened. But why pretend like you wanted things to proceed like that and then shut the door on me? Am I worth that little to you?"

"It's not that, it's--I can't just--"

"You can't what? Show me any affection whatsoever after telling me words I'd waited my whole life to hear? You couldn't give me any consideration after--"

"I made a mistake," he said, "And do not take that the wrong way."

"How many ways can I possibly take you calling that night a mistake?" you burst out.

"I tried to warn myself away from you, but it didn't work. I--please do not assume the worst. I do care for you."

"You have a funny way of showing it!"

"Calm down."

"You tell me the night I remember so fondly was a mistake, you tell me that you tried to warn yourself away from me, and you expect me to stay calm? How can you be so callous?"

"Do you think I enjoy doing this to you?" Cooler asked, as he stepped forward. "Do you think I enjoy dangling love in front of you and having to yank it back?"

"If you don't want to do that, then, and here's a simple solution: don't do it. Your anger was rising, your fists were clenching. How dare he. How dare he.

"I don't have a choice!" he said in a louder tone, "Do you think I'd ever be able to--to keep you around like I want to?"

"Your brother keeps his saiyan around," you said viciously.

"He already has an heir!" Cooler blurted out, "What do I have? I have a bastard with a--"

He stopped short, realizing his mistake.

"With a what?" you asked, in a testy tone.
Silence.

"I want an answer. Please, tell me what makes me so objectionable."

"A nobody," he finished, in a hesitating tone. "You could stay after the baby arrived, but--I couldn't be seen with you, and you couldn't be known as the its mother. That would ruin its future."

You were no one, then. That was it. Not be known as its mother. That would mean little to no access to your own child...and no ability to be what you should.

"I would still care for you, but...I just couldn't..."

"Because I have no title, and nothing worth risking your social standing over. Your brother doesn't care. Why can't you not care? Am I not important enough to you?"

"Please, don't make this difficult--"

"How do you think I feel? You tell me you love me, then you avoid me, and...and now you're saying we could never be together!"

"Publicly. We could still--"

"No," you said firmly, "No. Whatever I am, it must be public. I would even settle for being your mistress, if it came to that."

But that would mean being seen as the child's mother. And he'd already said he was unwilling to do that.

"Then..."

"Then," you looked back up at him,"What happens now?"

"We..." Cooler's eyes were glassy as he gulped, "...we abide by the original plan."

You nodded, and stood, fighting back your own tears. No. No, he was not going to see you cry.

He moved forward before you could stop him, and wrapped you in a hug. "I do care for you. I do. Remember that."

But not enough.

"Can we at least enjoy the time that we have left?" he asked hopefully.

Was he...was he almost in tears, himself? You looked up.

"I can give you that much, at least."

Your anger was fading, against all odds. The sight of a single tear on his face was all it took.

"We have less than three months," you said quietly.

"Then we'd better make the most of the months that we do have."
"So tell me," the doctor said, "How are you feeling?"

"Bloated," you said, "I'm feeling too big. Are we not done with this yet?"

"Not for a while." The doctor chuckled, "Seven months down, two to go. It should get a little bit easier once the baby drops."

"That won't be until the last month," you protested, "I just want this pregnancy over and done with already."

"Don't worry." he went on, "It will be. Before you know it, the baby'll be in your arms."

Briefly.

You shook your head. "Nothing I need to look out for at the moment?"

"No more than usual," he said, "See me again in about a week, and try to relax as much as you can when you're off duty, alright?"

"I'll try," you replied.

As you left, you saw several of the nurses leaving as well. It was near dinnertime, and as you made your next appointment with the receptionist you noted that she was preparing to leave as well.

"Have a good dinner," she said.

"You too," you replied with a smile.

The walk down the corridors to your quarters was at least a short one, if a bit painful on your feet.

The doors opened when you put in the code...

...and you gave a smile.

Cooler was standing in the middle of your living room.

You came forward and hugged him, and he returned the embrace.

"I've been trying to get over here more often," he said, "But...you know how it is."

"Work is keeping you busy, I get it," you replied.

"What did the doctor say?"

"Nothing new, really. He mentioned the baby might need some extra care when it arrives, but that it was easily dealt with. Something about temperature-controlled and enclosed cribs."

"Ah, yes. Thermoregulatory bassinets, as Arcosians call them. Some of the smallest and largest children--it's always one of those extremes--tend to need them. Did he say if the baby was small?"
"A little large, actually."

Cooler gave a smile, and laid a hand on your stomach. "Then it will be tall, like me."

You covered his hand with your own.

"You don't know how much I wish you could--"

"You tell me this all the time now," you said, trying to keep your tone gentle.

Wishing wouldn't make it come true. But saying that would only ruin what mood there was at the moment.

"I know," he said, looking defeated, "I know. But look, I brought you something."

A box was brought out from behind his back, and he handed it to you.

"It's so small," you said, "What are you hiding in this little thing?"

You opened it to find--a cake, drenched in an orange-scented icing. It was small, and you could hold it in one hand.

"It's made with a special brand of Arcosian chocolate," he said, "I wasn't sure what else to get you."

"And you know, like everyone else knows, that women love sweets."

"I thought food would be good for a saiyan, and...yes. You're right."

You were about to eat it when he stopped you.

"I had dinner made ready, if you're hungry."

"I want to eat this."

"I'd rather you eat something decent first, for the baby's sake."

"Of course. But I'm getting on this as soon as I can."

You sat down to eat, and put the cake aside.

Something about that scent, though...

The cake almost seemed to sit there and mock you with its mere existence.

Meat. Vegetable. Bread. You mentally checked off the things you ate, one by one, until you were able to strike at that thing.

"Well?" Cooler laughed, asking the question as he watched you devour the cake. "How is it?"

"It's wonderful," you said, "$A little bitter, but the orange flavor sweetens it out a lot. Can I have another one?"

"I only brought the one, I'm sorry. I'll try and get ahold of another one the next time I come."

You couldn't help but smile. The smallest consideration seemed to have your insides fluttering about, and he did it so naturally, too!
It was hard not to think of what had wrought this change in him. It was something you'd felt both proud and afraid of.

Love.

It was gratifying to think that a prince loved you, but at the same time...

You shouldn't. It was not going to last. There was no point in indulging in something that would not go anywhere.

"(Y/n)?"

You looked up. "I'm sorry, I missed what you said. Could you repeat it?"

"I asked how you've been feeling."

"Big," you replied, "Like I told the doctor. If I get much larger, you'll have to carry me back and forth to my appointments--that's how I'm feeling."

"Perhaps we can get you to feel something else," he said in a quiet tone.

Cooler was gentle, as he had been before, and curled up to you afterwards. Except this time, there was no scent of alcohol, and none of his words were slurred.

"I still can't get over how warm you are," he said.

"I imagine it's the extra blood," you replied, "Not to mention saiyan temperatures are two degrees higher than a normal humanoid's."

"Is that so? No wonder we're getting on so well."

One of his hands moved down to your belly.

"Look how ripe you are."

"Ripe, am I?"

"I can't even begin to tell you how beautiful you are like this."

"And not just because it's your child I'm carrying?"

Cooler shook his head, and patted your stomach. "I just think it suits you, is a--"

He stopped suddenly when the baby suddenly moved.

"Did it just...?"

"It's been doing that a lot lately," you replied, "Must be waking up time for the little thing."

The strangest, and yet most adorable mix of awe, excitement, and wonder crossed Cooler's face at that moment, and he moved downward.

One earhole was pressed to your stomach.

The baby moved again.
"Is it turning flips in there?"

"No," you said, laughing, "It's just moving, is all. It's got a very small environment in there, and I guess it's only just now figuring out that it can move."

"Or that it exists at all," he said. "I don't know how you stand it."

"Do the Arcosian babies not move?"

"If I were the one pregnant," Cooler said, "I would have had the egg by now. But even then...the eggshell is one of the first things formed, so...it might move, but I wouldn't feel it."

"It's actually a nice feeling...most of the time."

"Does it ever hurt?"

"I hurt, but not from the baby," you said, "And from the kicking, no. So far all I've had is a little nausea when the kicks are too high."

"Where are you hurting?"

"My back, mainly. Turns out that's what happens when you have a big weight on your front side."

"Sit up," Cooler said.

"Why?"

"Just do it."

You sat up, and let your legs dangle off the side of the bed. Cooler moved up behind you.

"What are you doing?"

He didn't answer, but a second later you felt his hands on your shoulders, rubbing silently away.

"A massage?"

"Backrub is what I was going for, but if you want to think of it that way, be my guest."

The tension in your shoulders began to fade, even as his hands were moving lower.

"Where did you learn this skill?" you asked.

"I just picked it up. Is your back feeling better?"

"Much better."

You were beginning to relax even more when Cooler's hands moved back. You leaned against him, and he reached forward.

You were nude, of course, but he wasn't groping. He was just...holding you.

And in the smallest voice you'd ever heard from your own throat, three words came.

"I love you."

You loved him.
Cooler pulled you back into bed and under the covers.

"I'll stay until you fall asleep. How about that?" he asked.

"Nice," you murmured.

There were less than two months remaining, and he would not see you anywhere but your quarters...

But this was heaven in four rooms.
The eighth month arrived, and began to pass—quickly.

Cooler seemed to grow a little distant, but not anywhere near as badly as he had done before. There were treats, dinners, and (increasingly rare, due to your size and fatigue) nights spent together. You felt special. Cared for.

Loved.

To intrude on this, however, was word from the doctor. Your last appointment had had him looking a little worried, and before you left, an appointment was made to have your labor induced in a week. You were not quite nine months yet, but if the baby stayed in there much longer, he said, it would begin to endanger your health when it did.

That was a bit jarring, but you accepted it.

A week, and this would all be over, for better or for worse.

"Are you sure about this?" Cooler asked, "What if it's not enough time?"

"That's why the doctor gave it an extra week," you replied, "He said that every extra day the baby spends in the womb is key, but that he doesn't want to risk my health, either. He'll have everything ready in case of an emergency—you know, healing tanks for both the child and I, that sort of thing."

"Right."

Puff, puff

"You should relax," you said.

"What do it look like I'm trying to do?" he snapped, but immediately added, "I'm sorry. This is—I'm worried about you, is all."

"You don't need to be."

"I am anyway. Yes, I want my child, but..."

"But?"

"But I don't want the birth to harm you."

"If it does, I'll be fine," you shrugged. "Worst case scenario, I'll end up with some stretch marks."
"Right," Cooler took another few puffs, and nodded.

You took his free hand.

He squeezed your hand in return, and started to say something, but shook his head. "I have to go."

You gave him a peck on the cheek, and he smiled.

You were getting out of the bath a few days later when there was a burst of pain around your back. It moved around to your front, and you cringed.

Could that be...?

A short time later, it happened again.

You took a deep breath. Alright, the doctor told you what to do. Stay calm, breathe, and let him know---which was exactly what you did next. You sent a message to the doctor, and he told you to come in immediately.

The walk down the hall was agonizing. The second you left your quarters, the pain seemed to increase. In the ten minutes it took you to get there, the frequency of pangs only increased.

This was it.

It was time.

The doctor rushed in about five minutes after you got there, and asked a dozen or so questions. He checked you over, hooked you up to several monitors, and looked carefully at them.

"I could give you something," he said, waving the nurse over with the ultrasound wand and screen, "But I think there's little point in it right now."

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is--are you alright?"

You were shifting, oddly.

"I'm fine, it's just...I think I've..."

"You've what? What is going on now?"

"I think my water just broke."

There was a call for another nurse, and as the seconds and minutes ticked by, the monitors became more and more frantic. You vaguely recalled asking for Cooler, or if he was even aware you'd begun labor, but the doctor kept redirecting your attention to your labor itself.

You pushed like they told you, breathed as instructed, everything--and it seemed like the pain wouldn't stop.

The doctor continued encouraging you, even as he barked orders to be sure that the crib and small healing tanks were ready, to double-check this thing or that...

Breathe. Breathe.
Push.

Push more.

You lay there, looking up at the lights.

Where was Cooler?

"The baby is crowning!" came the doctor's voice. "Come on, you're nearly done! Just a bit more!"

You pushed mightily, and amid the pains and dampness of the birth, you heard--
--the baby wailing.

You smiled, you laughed, you were on the verge of tears.

It was done. It was over with.

"Here you are," the doctor said, "Body temperature is lower than we expected, and this is an important part of birthing."

He handed you the little one, hastily wrapped in a blanket. Ten fingers, six toes, mauve skin, and--well, what a surprise--pink gems, just like its grandmother.

But what a beautiful little thing it was!

Its eyes, red, opened and looked right at you.

"Hi there," you said quietly, stroking at the little face, "What a pretty color you are..."

"If you'd like," intruded the doctor's voice, "You can feed the baby, we'll have to offer supplements anyway, but..."

You weren't listening too closely, but nodded, and shifted the little face down to your breast, where--thankfully--there was no trouble in it latching on.

"Somebody's hungry," you said, again smiling.

The feeling of wanting to laugh and cry all at once wasn't changing. The child ate, greedily, but understandably so, considering what had just happened. And you held close to it.

The baby was taken after you burped it, and for fifteen minutes you were in the healing tank. When you got out again, the baby was cleaned, and returned to you. Thankfully, considerably calmed.

The doors whooshed open.

The nurses greeted--Cooler, and moments later they and the doctor were directed to leave.

The doors shut after them.

"Look," you said, turning the baby so Cooler could see it. "Beautiful, isn't..."

He reached for the baby, and you handed it over to him. "It looks nothing like you," he said. The baby was held close to his own biogem and then he moved to call a nurse.

"Why?" you asked.
"To have it put into the thermoregulatory crib."

Silence.

"So..." you said quietly, "What happens now?"

"You know what happens now."

You took a deep breath, and got out of bed, legs wobbling. "I thought that--"

"You thought..." he looked away, "You thought wrong."

The nurses arrived, and off went the baby.

You started to head after them, but Cooler stopped you.

"Cooler, what--I thought that you--!"

"Love is not enough," he said quietly, "I can't endanger my son's standing in life, nor my ability to provide for him."

"So you're just going to ship me off to--"

"--to wherever you want to go. You're free to leave, there's a pod waiting for you in the docking bay."

"Cooler, I...why, I..."

"Do you think I want to do this?" he asked, "Do you think I enjoy the idea of hurting you?"

"Don't you dare say you love me," you replied, glaring.

"Do you want--"

"And don't talk to me about the baby, either. If you wanted to fix this, you could. But you won't."

"Fix what? Your low standing in life? It would ruin the baby's chance at any sort of good upbringing!"

"You could still do something," you said, "You're one of the most powerful people this side of the galaxy, and you can't simply tell them to deal with it?"

"No, I can't."

He started to reach forward, but you shoved his hands away.

"I don't want your pity," you sneered, "And keep what you call love. I'm better off without it. just--don't let our child down like you did me."

"(Y/n)--"

You were out the door before he could say anything else.

To hell with him. To hell with them all.

But even so, when you reached the docking bay...
As you were waiting for the pod's pre-launch inspection to finish, you looked down the hallway. Nothing.
"Pod's ready."

You got into it. The door shut.

You programmed in a course back to Planet Vegeta, and elected to use the pod's hibernation feature.

It was over.

You were awakened just in time. The landing descent was beginning, and as the atmosphere was breached, you felt the familiar strong gravity taking hold of you.

It was like a hug, you thought. It was welcoming you home.

At least the planet was happy to see you.

You disembarked as soon as you possibly could, gave the required information to the officer of the landing bay, and left.

You launched into flight just outside the station, and headed off to a little-noticed neighborhood out in what could only be called the planet's countryside.

There was a town, but there was barely anything there.

Children in the street. A shop or two, including one that took game and gave credit for its own wares.

Nothing had changed since you'd left. Same dirty street, same rummaged trash cans, same...

You shut your eyes, and headed off again, over a back road. Was it still there? Ah--yes! The long grass from abandoned farmlands had nearly choked the area, but you still managed to spot the little shack.

Every farm area had one. No one remembered what they'd been used for, but no one wanted to pay to demolish them, either, as oddly as they were leaning, and as wide as the gaps between the boards were.

It had been your home, once. And now it would be your home again.

You tore away the grass in front, and cleared up the inside of it as best you could. There would be time later to get some kind of a proper thing to sleep on. It appeared that what you'd slept on before had long since been looted. No matter.

You moved out of the house and walked to the river, about a mile or so off. A bath? No, not just yet, it was a little too cold out for that. You could catch some game and use that credit to get time in one of the shop owners' bathtubs, if they still offered that.

The water was cold, bitingly so, but also refreshing.

A fish swam by, and then another.
And another.

You were hungry anyway.

Removing your gloves (would have to remember to sell them later, along with your boots, they'd fetch a small amount of credit at the very least...) was even chillier.

"Ouch," you growled.

But patience won over numbness, thankfully. You snagged two rather large fish, and satisfied with your haul, began to make the journey back.

Alone.

You took a deep breath as you neared the little shack, and opened the door with your elbow. It fell back into place when you went inside.

_Creak_

And there you sat. The fish you prepared individually, holding them in one hand and producing a _ki_ ball to cook them slowly. The second seemed to go faster than the first.

You ate around the bones as best you could at first, and only when it became necessary did you begin to thoroughly debone them. By the time you were done eating, there was fish blood smeared all over your hands.

Tomorrow, you'd have to do a better job of this. If you could find something to hold water in, it would be easier. There'd have to be something somewhere...and if necessary, one unattended for even a short period of time would do.

_Creak_

That damned wind!

But as soon as you thought that, a voice sounded off, rich and smooth.

Familiar.

"So this is where you ended up."
Sorry, folks, guess I just got on a roll here...at least it's a short one.

I listened to the Sicilian Pastorale while writing this. Due to including a certain phrase (unintentionally referencing the movie) it seemed fitting.

Doubt

*Cooler's POV*

This isn't how I wanted things to go.

I didn't want her to leave like that.

...

I didn't want her to leave at all. But I didn't have a choice in the matter.

She'll be fine, as resourceful as she is. I'm sure that in time, she'll forget me.

Those were the thoughts I kept as I entered the room where they were holding my child. Blood had been drawn, and I made a request.

"Draw some from me as well," I said.

"My lord?" one of the nurses asked.

"I want to be sure that the baby is mine."

I'd seen the baby's biogems--just like my mother's, and I had to know. Was it mine, or was it hers? Had (y/n) been deceiving me the entire time?

Maybe she'd planned this all along. Maybe my mother had--

Well, she might have done anything. I'm not even sure.

But (y/n)? I thought she was better than that. My mother had intended to have a new child in the family, perhaps she wanted to be sure that I wouldn't fail to deliver.

I was awakened from these thoughts some time later by, again, one of the nurses.

"My lord?" she said. "We have the results."

"And?"

"It's yours for certain."

I let out the breath I'd been holding. "Good."
"If we may, what did you decide for the name?"

I thought for a moment. He'd been born reasonably quickly...

...hrm...

"Brisk," I said suddenly. "Yes, that's the name. Brisk."

They handed him to me, and I smiled.

*Your POV*

In all your life, you'd never been so afraid as you were right then and there.

Looking down on you was--

--King Cold.

"I--"

You started, stumbled over your words, and began to back away.

He was neither the cheerful, seductive man you met at the masquerade, nor the almost jovial lover you knew while you were with Yuki.

This called you back to the day he lifted you up by the collar and told you what would happen if you crossed him.

This was the anger of the king, the wrath of a predator with prey squarely in its sights. He observed everything; your messy state, your bloody hands, the remains of the makeshift meal.

The fear in your eyes.

And when he spoke, it was with severe intent.

"I am going to make you an offer you will not refuse," he said.

"And--" you stepped away again, and your back met the wall, "What makes you think I won't refuse it?"

"I have a dozen guards surrounding this miserable little shack. With a single word, they will drag you out and arrest you for the murder of the queen."

"How did--?"

"Let us say that I have video evidence," he replied. Smugness lit up his face as he went on, "And let us also say that it was handed over to me."

No. No, he couldn't mean--only two people had access to--

"I--he--" the words would not form. You couldn't string enough together for a sentence; your mouth was useless.

"You will have it much harder than he has," the amused tone went on, "He is still needed. But you, on the other hand...well, my dear, it is my offer against your--very likely--death. No one will defend you. No one will save you."
You tried against to back away, but the wall shifted ever so slightly behind you. Had Cooler been the one to...? No. No. He wouldn't have done that to you, he loved you, surely he wouldn't have! He wouldn't have turned you in to save his own--

You looked away. Through the gaps in the walls, you could see that Cold was not lying. There were two guards that you could see clearly on one side, and three on the other.

"Do you doubt that?"

"No, I--why are you here?"

"I came because I hoped you would be reasonable," he replied, "Because you have been useful thus far, and you can be more useful still."

"...there must be...others..." your voice was weak.

"Look at me."

You trembled.

"Look at me, (y/n)."

His tone was commanding, and you looked up into his sharp, questioning eyes.

And finally, you summoned the courage to ask the question that you dreaded to even think of.

The question that would seal everything.

The question that was the end of all hope.

"What's your offer?"
Prejudice and Pride

Chapter Summary

Cooler is visited by Frieza, and you take what has to be the world's most uncomfortable bath.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for any fuckups. Glitched all to hell as I was trying to post.

Prejudice and Pride

*Cooler's POV*

I slept fitfully that night, but despite that somehow still woke up early. I was glad of it, however--I wanted to see how Brisk was doing, so I headed down to the medical bay as soon as I was able.

As the doors were about to open, I heard her voice.

"The reports you requested are in the datapad here. Yes, everything you require--"

I walked in, and looked around--but she wasn't there. A little further back, I could see a nurse, holding Brisk and feeding him from a bottle. From a nearby console, (y/n)'s voice was coming.

"What's going on?" I asked. "Why are you playing her voice?"

"Oh, Lord Cooler, you startled me!" she laughed, and began to reply, "We tried to give Brisk a bottle, but the poor thing wouldn't take it. The nurse from the last shift remembered that the mother's--the saiyan's, I mean, and for lack of a better term, carrier--voice could serve as a great comfort to the child, and that if the voice heard during the feeding she gave was heard again, well...you get the idea. Regardless, it worked, but we've got to be careful, the little one tries to latch onto us every chance it gets."

"I see," I gave a smile as I looked down at the little face. Ideally, of course, there would be no need for the formula, but...

The intercom buzzed on.

"Lord Cooler, you requested notification of approaching ships. Your brother's is approaching and he's requesting permission to come aboard."

I sighed. "Go ahead, tell him it's fine."

I took Brisk into my own arms after the feeding and burping had concluded, and the nurse left.

"You're going to meet your uncle," I said, "Let's hope he's going to be civil."
I was far from ready when Frieza did enter the room.

"Well, well, well! And there it is. Congratulations on having such a large baby, brother." Frieza's grin spread across his face in a way that begged the question of how many shots it took to get there.

"Thank you," I said a bit awkwardly.

"You might want to hold its head a bit higher, though."

"Who made you the expert on newborns?"

"I've had one myself, I'll have you know, and I hope to have another soon."

"Excuse me?"

Frieza took Brisk from me, and held the child carefully in his own arms. "I came not only to....what is it doing?"

Brisk's little lips were dampening the front of the chest part of Frieza's armor.

"Trying to nurse, obviously."

"Don't you have a woman for that?"

"I let her go." I looked down at the baby to avoid his eyes.

"You let her go?"

The astonishment in his voice surprised me. "Yes. What other option did I have?"

"Keep her? I'm quite surprised at you, Cooler. I thought you liked her."

"Of course I liked her. But she's gone now, and I don't know where she is. What else could I have done?"

"Marry her, maybe?"

"You know I couldn't do that."

"Says who? Father?" Frieza laughed, "You've deprived the child of a mother just because you're a little uncomfortable with how people will look at it?"

"It's Brisk's future you're talking about." I glared. "And since when do you care about things like that?"

"Since I noticed how much better a child functions with two parents who pay attention to it," came the cutting reply.

"What?"

"As I was trying to say a moment ago, I came to not only congratulate you, but also inform you that I've gotten engaged."

"Engaged? I wasn't aware that father had sent you courting."

"I didn't go courting for this one, at least not in the traditional Arcosian sense," he replied, "I used
the diplomatic skills you always told me I had none of and organized a little treaty with Planet Vegeta. Yassa and I are to be married as soon as the arrangements are complete."

"You...you what? You're marrying a saiyan? Are you insane? I can understand keeping one to warm your bed, but to actually--" My eyes widened.

"We're quite happy together, I'll have you know," he replied, "And I would prefer for my next child not to be a bastard."

"She's pregnant? You impregnated a princess and--"

"And I'm making an honest woman out of the little minx, which is more than I can say for you."

He left, after finding a few more things wrong with how Brisk was being handled, and I was left justifying myself against my own mind.

Yassa is a different thing entirely. She's royalty, and the Arcosian people will accept that more easily than they would someone like (y/n).

It's nothing she could control. I just couldn't have done it. As much as I cared for her, I couldn't have married her.

I would have if I'd been able to, but she's a saiyan, I--

*Your POV*

--have no choice in the matter at all.

That was clear from the moment you saw the expression in Cold's malicious red eyes, and confirmed when he called to the guards.

You followed him out of the shack, back to the base, into a large ship in the docking area.

You kept your head down, and studied your hands. By now the fish blood had dried, and it was flaking off in bits as you walked. The gloves had been left inside the shack, and you hadn't thought to grab them.

Clean. That's what you needed to do, you needed to clean them. It was better than thinking about whatever Cold was planning next.

He hadn't even told you his offer yet, and that was worse than hearing it and going all this way. If he'd just tell you, you could start thinking what to do next, prepare yourself, even, for whatever it was...

You were tired, and still hungry, too, when you finally stopped.

The room was simply enormous, even by the standards of the PTO; it was easy to surmise that this was because the ship was Cold's, specifically. It was all bigger, the seats, the consoles, the keypads at the doors, the windows--everything, and that was merely in size.

Everything--chairs, tables, trim, lamps, cabinets--was oppressively ostentatious.

Your stomach growled.

"We have a lot to discuss," Cold said, not turning around to face you, "I had a bath ready for my
own use, but I think it would do you good to have one."
"I--"

"And that is not a gesture of friendliness. Go and bathe; you stink of fish. Through there."

He pointed to a doorway at the far end of the room, and you walked quietly through it.

You entered it at the low end, and didn't see the bed until you looked around for the bathroom door. That was even larger than any you'd yet seen--fifteen feet long at least, and dressed in the kind of silk you'd seen on Yuki's bed.

You shut your eyes when you reached the bathroom door.

Deep breath.

You entered the bathroom, and while your eye was first caught by the almost minimalistic shower, the next held your attention.

The tub, more like an inground pool than an actual tub for bathing, was large enough that you wondered briefly how impossibly long it must have taken for the water to fill it, particularly towards the deeper end that he likely favored. There were seats cut into the sides in various places and at varying heights.

You took a seat at the shallow end near the steps, after taking a bar of soap and a couple of washcloths from the nearby table. Your actual bathing was soon done, and you were now merely letting your mind run rampant as to the reason for all of this.

What did he mean by all of this?

Why was he refusing to--

The door opened, and from the sound of the footsteps, you could tell it was him. You took a lower seat, so only your shoulders and above would be exposed.

"Hiding, are we?" Cold's voice sounded off.

He walked around the bath, and you avoided looking at him then; he took the seat at the far end, for which you were very grateful.

You took a deep breath.

You looked at him.

He sat on one of the higher seats in the deep end and thankfully, the water covered his waist. He seemed fully relaxed, and had his arms resting up on the outer edges of the floor, around the side of the sunken tub, as if to complete the image of being a giant of a man.

Had he meant to join you the whole time...? Likely as not.

"And now, to business," Cold said. Again, he fixed you with those eyes.

"You conduct business while bathing?"

He ignored the question, and went on. "My offer. You're going to hear it, and you're going to agree to it."
"I thought I already had."

There was a dark chuckle. "I recall making it to you once before."

"I still don't understand why," you said in a quiet voice.

"I've yet to...employ...an assassin in that manner," he replied, "And perhaps I would like to finish what my wife started."

"...what?"

"As I've said before, the assassin's guild of Arcos is always open to those who show an aptitude for the profession. An endorsement always helps, of course."

"I see."

"And after that, you would enjoy the same lifestyle as the others...so long as you remained loyal."

"Being loyal didn't help me before."

"My wife was treacherous," Cold said, chuckling again. "She had no intentions of keeping you on after you'd served your purpose. And as for Cooler..."

You lowered your head.

"Perhaps it is best to remain silent on that head."

Why wouldn't he just be quiet...?

"The initial program of the guild will take you about six months to complete," Cold went on, "And there will be periodic training for some time afterwards. You seem to have had a fair education on the subject so far, so I expect you to do well."

You nodded.

"Are you going to speak? I recall a conversation requires input from both sides."

"You seem to have worked everything out on your own."

"I expect responses," Cold replied in a low, almost angry tone. "You are making this more difficult than it has to be."

You refused to apologize. No, he wouldn't get that out of you. But you had to say something...

"What else can I make it? I don't want to be here."

"None of my women start out wanting to be here," his tone rose into absolute and blissful malice, "They have the choice of making their service very light, or very short. Which will it be for you? Your pride or your life?"

You started trembling. His eyes didn't stay on your face; they traveled down, and...

"Well?"

"I'm...I'm here, aren't I? Isn't that enough for you?"

"I want to hear you say it."
You shut your eyes, and went on trembling. No one who mattered knew you were here. And no one else would dare to pry into the King's affairs, least of all over someone like you.

You were lost.

"I'm not an idiot," you replied, "Of course I want to live."

"I thought I could make you see reason."

You leaned against the edge of the tub and looked away again. You knew you couldn't avoid it forever, especially knowing what was to come next, but...

...thinking about something, anything else...

"Then we are in agreement."

"Yes," you said quietly.

The sound of moving water.

Cold was crossing the tub, half-striding in your direction.

"As long as you remember that," he said.

He neared, almost crouching to stay eye-level with you.

You covered your chest with one arm.

"You have no secrets from me," he said, getting nearer still. "Put down your arm. There is no reason why you should not enjoy this."

"But I'm--you're--you're too--"

"Less so than you might think. All the same, you should turn around."

Shaking, and barely able to stand on the seat you were on only a few minutes before, you obeyed.

"I thought you were meant to take a year to...mourn, when your spouse dies."

"That is normally the case," he said, "But wouldn't you know it? My wife committed treason. I have no such obligations to her memory."

Oh.

One massive hand laid itself on your right shoulder and pushed down, leaving you hunched over the edge of the tub. It drifted down your damp back, and one of its nails trailed down your spine until it came to your tail.

It toyed with the spot where the furry appendage met your back, and you felt the expectant warmth.

You shut your eyes, and clenched at one of the washcloths you'd used. Breathe. That was the key here, to breathe. He was going to do it--you were letting him do it--and all you could do was take it.

That was it.

Cold's enormous tail curved around you, threading its tip between your breasts and pushing the
washcloth right out of your hands.

"You're not going to ruin my possessions," he said, "If you must cling to anything, make it that."

You gave up on the washcloth and wrapped your arms about the end of his tail. This was going to hurt, if he wasn't getting you ready it would be even worse...

There were a few moments of silence as he went on stimulating that little area of nerves, and then--your heart leapt into your throat--you felt it.

The tip.

It started out almost small, but broadened quickly. He moved slowly but steadily inward, and the discomfort escalated.

Not as bad as you thought. Getting bad. Worse. Full. Fuller than you'd ever dreamed of being.

Cold gave one more push, and you felt a deep pressure in your abdomen.

You took a deep and uncomfortable breath.

"Good," you heard him whisper, no doubt to himself, "Good, she can take it all."

Your nails dug into his tail when he pulled halfway out.

"You're very warm," he half-hissed, pushing back in a moment later. "Has anyone ever told you that?"

"Once or twice."

You groaned as Cold began a slow series of thrusts.

The pain began to recede, although the pressure was ever-present. You clung tighter to his tail as your heat began to build.

*It will be over soon.*

He kept going, with one hand at your hip. The other moved away from your back, and up to your breasts.

You kept your head down as he started groping at it--and as expected, his hand was dampened.

"Poor thing," Cold said, almost cooing, "All full of nourishment and nothing to impart it to."

Again, you bit your tongue.

Despite the wetness, the pawing of your breast continued; he seemed almost enthralled by the novelty.

After several minutes, you heard him groan.

*It will be over soon.*

Faster.

"Slow down," you said in a small voice.
Cold ignored you. In a rush of dripping water, he stood, and pulled you up with him. He was out, at least, and you breathed in relief.

Hands on your hips, nails half-digging in.

He positioned himself--

--and let you fall back down onto him.

You yelped, still clinging to his tail, as he started at you again.

Faster, and faster still, sweat, pressure, heat, nails on your chest, a groan forced from your throat...

You strangled the scream that tried to pass your lips a moment later as, most unexpectedly, your climax struck. Pleasure flooded for only a moment before the strain of clamping down on him began to ache.

You were pulled flush against him--

--there was a pulse within you, and then several more.

And then, finally, it was over.

Cold lifted you off, sat you back down in the water, and then returned to his end of the bath.

You shifted more than a little uncomfortably. The ache was still present, but thanks to the water it was at least beginning to recede.

A few minutes passed in silence.

You looked up, just as he was looking in your direction.

There was a grin.

"Didn't I tell you?"

Yes. He had.

Whatever you could get, you would take; it was better than crying yourself to sleep at night.

But you'd be doing that tonight anyway.
Cooler learns more of Frieza's bride-to-be, and you go through the guild.

**A Wandering Crow**

*Cooler's POV*

Four months later, I was able to see my brother again, as well as his intended bride.

I had seen a picture of her before; she was a short-haired, thickset woman—not overweight, but what I would call "healthy." Our kind would say she had egg-bearing hips.

She had hair that seemed to have been tamed, and was wearing the usual armor. On her wrist was the customary cuff, with a purple stone. But most noticeable of all was the prideful way she walked, the dignity with which she carried herself.

It was...uncomfortably familiar.

"And this," Frieza said, "Is my brother."

I made my greetings. She gave a grin and did the same.

"I've heard quite a lot about you," I said.

"I'm sure," she replied. "And I of you."

"I'm sure," she replied. "And I of you."

"Is the child well?"

"Very well," she replied, "He's going to be chasing his brother around before we know it, I'm sure. And what of your boy?"

"He's equally well," I answered, "Rolling over and holding his head up and such. It won't be long before he can sit up on his own."

It was at this point that Frieza (after giving me a suspicious look) wandered off to have words with one of the guards. I turned to Yassa and spoke.

"If I may," I asked, "How did you meet him? He used to go on about his dislike for you saiyanas."

"I happened to burst in on my brother speaking to him. I was shooed out, of course...but, well..."

"And then what happened?"

"Yassa laughed, "July happened. It might have ended there, if I hadn't also been submitting myself as a sparring partner."

"My brother never spars."
"He does if you know how to ask," she replied, "He seems to enjoy having a partner who can take the pain of repeated broken bones, especially if they keep coming back for more of it. And I, well, I was getting stronger. We were both benefiting."

Ahhh. *That* explained it.

"Not to be...rude, but he has been through such a cycle before."

"With other women? I know. We managed to find something in common, which I suppose helped us a great deal."

"And what was that?"

"We're both under the shadow of an elder brother."

*Your POV*

You had no idea how long you'd been there.

The compound's buildings had no windows, and whenever you left any of the them, it was usually in some nebulous twilight. The daytime emergences were marked by instructions on how to remain out of sight in broad daylight.

There were teachers for everything. The three dialects of Arcosian, poisons, stealth, strategy, traps, locks, and of course, the obvious weapons class.

Arcosian was a beautiful language, lovely to learn, to hear, and to speak. It rolled off the tongue like an elegant waterfall--and thankfully, was easy enough once you'd got through the basics. It also helped that while in the classroom, none of the students were permitted to speak any language other than Arcosian.

Poisons were the second subject; it was supplemented by a very thorough teaching on Arcosian plants and general herbology. There were many plants that were fatal to one race or another, and you, along with the others, became very well acquainted with, for example, the telltale red leaves of one plant particularly toxic to the liver of most races, or the blue pollen of a flower that could completely shut down the lungs.

Stealth was the most difficult, though more so for the others than for you. Many of the Arcosians could disguise their predominantly white colors, but their bright red eyes were often their downfall. Your own darker ones were your saving grace.

It was here that you began to realize that the number of your classmates was dropping. And not until your first test did you realize why.

The Stealth class involved attempting to kill a target in varying ways, with varying means of difficulty. In the mornings, for example, with simulated sunlight streaming through a false window, you were assigned to end what the instructor termed as "a volunteer," without the use of any aids whatsoever, weapons or otherwise. This person you were targeting was in a bedroom at the other end of the compound and you were expected to get there (of course) without being seen.

You were permitted to use flight, and so, you started out that way. But soon, you were forced to virtually crawl on the rooftops--legs spread carefully as you crushed yourself, floating, an inch above the shingles--where there was the least chance of being seen. There would certainly be jokes about the dirty deal you'd done with it later...
An intersection.

You took a glance down. There were four guards in hooded cloaks, walking about, looking up suspiciously now and again.

Deep breath.

One rounded a corner, and you struck. A single ki beam was sent through his throat, nullifying his ability to speak. He fell--and the others rushed around the corner. One by one, they also fell, and in the same way as their comrade.

A red snow evening, it looked like.

On. Once more you had to repeat the exercise with the guards. Unexpectedly, a fifth emerged from a building, and you waited until he discovered the bodies nearest him before striking.

That moment of surprise, of shock, right before one would call for help...

You shook your head.

The room, you accessed by going into the door the fifth guard had come out of. The lights were shut off a moment later, and thankfully, there was no sound of rushing. Perhaps you were alone?

Yes. As you ascended the stairs, it became clearer and clearer that you were.

The last door.

You waited and thought for a moment.

You had no tools...so removing the hinges and taking out the door was not a possibility. Neither was simply using ki to cut a hole in the door or melting the hinges, there would be related sounds...

You looked through the keyhole, and had a realization.

A fireplace. You'd seen one in one of the other, empty rooms on the floor below, and you rushed back to it as fast as you could. The fireplaces were connected, but only to the ones above and below them. When you got to the room, you shimmied up into the fireplace and began making the cramped flight.

Closer, closer...ah. Yes.

You would have to go in feet first.

You climbed a little higher, and wiggled your way down.

There was a small sound of falling soot, but nothing more.

And there, there your target lay, sleeping, unconcernedly, as if nothing was wrong in the world.

Only after you ended his life and lifted the covers did you realize he was one of your classmates.

Nobody else questioned the disappearance of classmates, and so, you followed suit. And when you were instructed a week later to take a day off, to rest and recuperate, you knew what to expect--just not when.
You didn't sleep that day. But unlike before, you were far better equipped to handle it.

Floorboards were loosened in the hallway, but it was not that that tripped your senses. It was the sound of the doorknob being tested.

Yes...that was it. Your room had no fireplace, after all. The door was the only option.

You took a seat at the desk which was on the same wall as the door, crossed your arms, and put your head down.

The seconds ticked by, and turned into minutes. Your eyelids were drooping when you finally heard the doorknob slowly turning.

A single blast to his upper leg was all it took. The good old femoral artery always served.

Strategy, and then locks, as well. The former was a seemingly never-ending instruction of tactics, tactics which you were tasked to use in various console simulations--one right after the other, and sometimes multiples at once.

This way, but not that. If you did this, that would...

...if you stay here, your son is safe...

You shook your head.

It kept occurring to you, over and over.

And you kept pushing it back.

The locks class was the best place to avoid those troublesome thoughts. What seemed like every lock imaginable was shoved at you at one point or another, and you were expected to use every tool from wooden toothpicks to actual lockpicking tools to work.

Some of the classes were thought to be outdated or unnecessary. But the head of the guild, you were told, insisted that the old methods still be taught.

You accepted the fact. But it didn't stop you wondering which classes were meant.

Oddest of all, once you thought you could handle no more during the course of the week--a final class was added.

Calligraphy.

"You will be expected to write many things, I expect," said the instructor on the first day, "But none will be as important as this."

A single phrase flashed onto the screen at the front of the room.

**I SERVE THE KING**

"The assassins never take a job that would end the King," the instructor went on, "And you may consider us, if you make the cut, a branch of his army. The ones called when things go wrong. You will now write this phrase."

The remaining classmates, and you, obeyed.
"One hundred times a day."

"Why?" someone asked.

"I refer you to the phrase itself. We should never let ourselves forget it. We serve the King."

He motioned to everyone to repeat it.

"I serve the King."

Perhaps if you said it enough, it would make things easier.
Graceful Rooms

Chapter Summary

Cooler speaks with Frieza again; you leave assassin training for your new life.

*Cooler's POV*

I spoke several more times with Yassa. Puzzled as she might be by my brother's attention, she has nonetheless accepted it. From what I could gather, he would be a suitable mate for a saiyan anyway; he is strong beyond anything they can comprehend. She gets to leave that planet, and be far away from the supposed burden of being the second-born.

As if there is anything burdensome about that. She and Frieza think they have it rough? While they dally about there are others who aren't able to make the same choices.

I started the console and contacted my brother. A moment later, he answered.

"This had better be important," he replied, "I am not working right now."

"I merely want to question you about something. It won't take long," I replied, "What is this I hear about your complaints about being in my shadow?"

"Because I am."

"That's a load of nonsense, and you know it. You know you're the favorite--who gets all the praise and the glory? Who gets all the new planets he wants?"

"Who has father constantly in his business telling him to do this or that?" Frieza snapped at him. "Who has his every decision questioned and gone over?"

"That would be me." I replied.

"Why did you do that?" Frieza's voice shifted into a stuffy, nasal one, "Cooler wouldn't have done that. Why can't you actually get control of yourself, like Cooler? Why can't you be more like him?"

"There's no way he tells you that--"

"You're lucky enough to not have father trying to decide your entire life," Frieza replied, "Because you must do exactly as he wishes you to do. What do I get? Conquer this planet. Meet these people. He even tried to arrange for me to meet some Arcosian noblewomen, as if I was interested in having him choose who I'm to spend my life with!"

"Why do you even care? It's a woman to produce your heir, nothing more than that. You could have had someone you actually wanted on the side."
"Because if I am to have a wife, I would rather her be more than a useless social-climbing egg-laying machine!"

"I never pegged you as romantic, brother."

"I don't give a damn about romance, it's choice I want!" he shouted, and seethed for a moment before calming down. "And it's choice I will have."

I looked away. A moment later, after some apparent consideration, he spoke again.

"I have had the increasing suspicion that this is exactly what father wants."

"What do you mean?"

Frieza paused before speaking, "We've done a lot of arguing since the news of my engagement broke. You have abandoned your woman--"

"I did no such thing."

"--and I have elected to do the opposite with mine," Frieza went on, "He's made no major fuss about Yassa, that I can yet see. I expected him to do anything--except ignore her."

"What is he hoping to accomplish by this?"

"A feud between us, of course. If we fight one another, we will neither time nor inclination to fight him."

"It would be unwise to fight him."

"Of course you would say that." Frieza laughed. "I would agree--but only at the moment."

I paused as a new thought crossed my mind. "Is this why you chose her? To have a sparring partner? To get strong enough to fight father?"

"I think you have a wild imagination, brother. I need no training partner to get stronger."

"Then you are trying to--"

"Perhaps you should try the same."

*Your POV*

Your child was safe and would not have the childhood you did.

It was a strong thought during the last two months of your training, a thought that could keep you sane.

Your child would grow into wealth, and would never have to struggle.

It was the only thing to think.

But things were becoming so absurd, it was hard to keep to that sometimes.

Harp lessons. Someone, somewhere, was having a laugh at your expense.

*Harp lessons.*
These had come once the other classes had scaled back a little. You were expected to put the skills gained in them to use in various little exercises, but the period of instruction itself for each was growing shorter by the week. The other students had talked of the rule in the guild, the obligation to learn and master an instrument of their choosing, and you sighed at the lack of choice you were now under.

Cold must be laughing like a damn demon.

But you learned to play what you were given, and made no complaints. That was what you settled on.

No one would see that you were upset, or hurting, but when you went to bed at night you allowed yourself to cry as much as you pleased.

Why?

It was always the question. Why was it that no matter how hard you tried, or how thoroughly you schemed, you could never come out on top?

You trusted. Perhaps that was the problem.

You trusted Corg, and he had stabbed you in the back. The same went with Yuki. And then Cooler.

Not to mention you kept coming up against people who'd been in the business of intrigue far longer than you...

It wasn't just trust, it was plain bad luck.

The day of your release came.

You'd been ruminating over everything over the last few days. You'd received your new armor set and were told to wait in the entryway to be "picked up."

An hour passed before someone finally did show up for you, with guards flanking her.

...Gavi?

The red snakewoman noticed the look of surprise on your face immediately, and gave a smile in reply. "Come now, is it really that much of a surprise?"

"A little," you replied quietly, "I thought guards, maybe, or...I don't know what I expected, really."

You shook your head and rose with your bags to follow her.

"I made the offer, and of course the King accepted," she added as you passed through the doors, "He's probably going to want to see you soon, but he gives anyone new to our little group a rest before they're asked to...well, I think you know."

You gave a nod. A short time later, you were boarding a small ship that would take you back to the Ivory Palace.

"You'll get used to it in time," Gavi said, once you were alone, "And then it will seem as natural as anything."

"I know."
She studied you for a moment, and then after a period of thought, spoke again. "You probably didn't think you'd wind up here, did you?"

"No," you replied honestly, "I didn't. I thought I was worth...more than simple concubinage."

"Let me tell you something he told me once." Gavi gave a weak, almost sad, smile, "When my planet was taken over by the PTO years ago."

You looked up.

"You are worth only what someone is willing to pay for you."

There was a pause, and you broke it, eager for anything but silence, or to ask what your supposed price was.

"Do any of you love him?"

"No," came the reply, "But he makes us happy...enough. And that's all we can really strive for. Enough."
**Chapter Summary**

Easier, harder. They're all relative when it comes to how things are now.

**Chapter Notes**

There are no conditions to which a person cannot grow accustomed, especially if he sees that everyone around him lives in the same way. - Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

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**Altered**

*Cooler's POV*

I went in to see Brisk today, and one of the nursemaids I have watching him looked up at me as soon as I entered.

"I have good news, my lord," she said as she rocked him.

"Yes? And what is it?"

"First off, that we are starting him on soft foods--mashed, that is. It's going well. And secondly, that we've no need to play *her* voice any longer in order to calm him down or get him to eat."

"I...see."

"And thankfully, he's stopped attempting to nurse from us as well."

"That's good."

Except it wasn't.

There was a pit forming in my stomach as she handed me my son, and I looked down at his eager little eyes.

He'd forgotten his mother. I wouldn't have to worry about him asking uncomfortable questions as he got older. I wouldn't have to tell him about his mother in any capacity.

It was like she'd never been there at all, at least where he was concerned.

The discomfort deepened, and I handed Brisk back to her. I thanked her for the updates, and left the room.

This is the part where I should feel relieved.

This is the bit where I am supposed to be glad that my son doesn't recall his mother in the least.
The pit began to ache.

...

I want her back.

*Your POV*

In the three months since you'd come to the Ivory Palace, you'd gotten...well, used to it was a strong term.

Resigned, more like.

There were servants, and guards.

Things you'd never had before.

Your wardrobe was fairly small, but you were assured that it would grow over time, as would (and this was told you with giggles attached) your collection of jewelry.

Every morning, you dressed joined the other Angels for breakfast, and you would be brought whatever the cook had made for the morning. One or two things might be added or removed depending on personal preference, of course.

Then, if no visit from Cold was planned, and none of you had been assigned any actual work (which was fairly often), you would spend the day as you chose. Gardening? Practice at your instrument? Reading? Sparring? The list, and possibilities, seemed nearly endless. Lunch and then dinner would be had later, and then sometime after dark you'd get to bed.

If a visit was planned, however, details would be obtained on which of the group Cold wanted to see. It was usually at least two, sometimes even three--and being new, you would always be included in the groups. Then, you would be dressed by several of the servants, and either sent to a waiting room in the palace if he was coming there for a visit, or sent out to the landing bay to meet his ship. From the waiting room, it would be to a prepared bedroom, usually a short walk.

He was fond of talking to the lot of you, after all.

The night was predictably full of whatever Cold desired it to be, and you quickly learned several unsavory things from the others on how best to please him.

Those times were long. And tiring.

But you were able to bear with it, somehow.

Once or twice you were given a planet to clear.

A few more times than that you were given the opportunity to actually use the skills that the Assassin's Guild had taught you. They were mostly minor nobles, but once or twice guards--all were, however, accused of some sort of treachery, large or small.

Or, a thought occurred to you in your private moments: real or imagined.

The ones provably treasonous you reasoned as deserving it. The ones you were unsure of--well, it was mercy. You saw that they died quickly, and peacefully.
It was easier.

Every day, it was getting easier.

So when a visit from Cold was announced, and you were named as the only invitee, you prepared as best you could. The other Angels helped you pick out a suitable dress, aided you with relaxing your hair, and once more, propounded the tips and hints about his "best" spots.

You took a deep breath as you stepped into the waiting area and took a seat.

Chin up. He liked a smile.

Always look enthusiastic, they'd said. Even if it was only mildly so, he preferred it that way.

The door whooshed open and you gave him the smile you'd tried to perfect.

Thankfully, it was returned.

"Ready and waiting, are we?"

"As always," you said in a soft tone. As he approached, you rose.

"No, no," he gestured, "Sit back down, we've something to discuss."

"I haven't done something wrong, have I?"

"Of course not." He took a seat in a chair across from you, "I'm here to inform you of your new assignment."

"Someone else trying to steal your crown or cause you trouble?" you asked.

"I should hope not," Cold replied, "Lord Winter has been one of my strongest supporters." He handed you a datapad.

There was a picture and some text. The man in question was an obviously elderly Arcosian, with white biogems and dark grey skin. Lord of such and such provinces, a man of obvious wealth, property and possessed of longstanding reputation with the royal family. It seemed that he was a general for both Cold's father and grandfather in various wars, and after an injury in the last great war, (there was a note here about how healing tanks had existed, but despite his leg wound he'd passed them up to give others worse off a fair chance at living) retired and took on new duties. Thankfully, surgeons had been able to save his leg, but he never walked the same afterwards.

"He looks like a truly noble man in print," you said, "But what is my job and how does he relate to it?"

"I suspect treason from somewhere in his household. Whether it is from him directly, or his daughter, or merely some servants..."

"And you can't simply kill him, because if you turn out to be wrong, he could be the source of a lot of trouble."

"Exactly," Cold said, "He told me in our last little talk that he had received some threats, and that he was employing his own guards, but requested aid from me, if I could spare it."

"Aid? From you? Why?"
"His loyalty to the crown has earned him special privilege, you might say," Cold replied, "I'll assign him you as a personal bodyguard."

"And I will be expected to watch for trouble as well." You nodded. It made sense. An assassin for a bodyguard would be good...

"You will find Lord Winter pleasant enough, I expect." Cold went on--he rose, and gestured to you to do the same, and follow him.

You did so, of course.

"How does he treat others?"

"His female servants call him a sweet old man, if that is any indication. It is either his true face, or a cunning mask. Either way, I want you to treat this matter with subtlety."

"Understood," you replied.

You walked in silence for a short period, until you reached the customary bedroom.

"You will find him as nice and unpretending as you have me," Cold said, once the door had closed behind you.


Maybe.

But as you obeyed his next gesture--which told you to undress, one thought crossed your mind.

He was honest about what you were to him, and told you no lies, made no false promises about the future.

He'd never lied to you.
And A Dollar Short

Chapter Summary

Cooler finds out many things. But how does this woman know it?

Chapter Notes

This is a Reader-free chapter.

And A Dollar Short

*Cooler's POV*

I started with the pod she'd used to leave in. On looking its number and itinerary up, I traced it to Planet Vegeta.

I couldn't understand why she would go--there were so many better places she could have chosen. Why go back there?

But either way, it was there I had to go.

When I arrived, I questioned the guards. The one who had been on duty those months ago happened to be on duty at this point, thankfully.

"There was a saiyan. She wasn't in a group--"

"I mean, we see a lot of saiyans here...most of them noisy." The guard, a bald humanoid, paused. "There was this one, though...alone, and awfully quiet."

"Which way'd she go?"

"I can bring up the footage from that day." He went to the console and did exactly that, and I was suddenly thankful that we never got rid of any of our security footage. We might say that we did, but it was preserved, one way or another. "The most I could get you is a direction though, if she was flying."

"That's enough."

I sat waiting there as he found the day's footage, and began to fast-forward through it. Midway through, I stopped him. "That's the one, there."

The guard switch through multiple cameras as (y/n) moved.

Her head was down, and except for a brief chat with the guard she was quiet. Then, she left the building.
The guard kept following her as best he could until she took flight--at which point the cameras could no longer follow her.

"What's in that direction?" I asked.

"Oh...rural town. Not a good neighborhood if you know what I mean. Lots of empty farmlands past a town that was maybe four hundred in the old days. There's about a hundred or so now, last time I looked, I'm probably out of date on all that."

Was it where she'd lived, I wondered? If she wanted so badly to get out of poverty, why would she return?

"Oh, and fair warning, Lord Cooler," said the other guard, "If you want information, you'd better take some money or gems or something along. Heck, even food would be good."

"Why's that?"

"Little pitchers have big ears, but they also have big stomachs. Kids see a lot out there and they don't get fed that well."

I nodded, and thanked them, then headed to the station's general store. A bag of MRE bars was the best I could do for food, but I thought it would be enough. There were a few rings, which I also bought. Gold had a value everywhere, after all.

"I'm trying to find someone," I said, "Do you think the saiyan will recognize the MRE bars?"

"Sure," he replied, "Even if they're not soldiers, they will. Occasionally we'll have a few scavenge through the trash when we throw the older ones out. And out there they figure out real fast what packaged food from the base looks like."

I nodded.

There was a lump in my throat that I ignored. I took to flight, and headed in the direction that (y/n) had gone.

Perhaps she had gone home, I thought. Perhaps it was familiarity she sought.

From above I could see the abandoned farmland that the guard had referred to, but I headed down to the small town first.

Everything was dirty, for starters. I cringed at the sight.

How could *this* be her home?

I got suspicious looks as I walked along, mostly by the men--some older, some younger, but none of them energetic or happy. At least, it looked that way. Everyone looked exhausted or aged.

I looked back and forth. How could I even begin to ask these people about her?

I passed a streetcorner and glanced into an alley between two buildings--and I saw her.

I rushed over, but found myself disappointed. This woman was as like to her as anyone could possibly be, but the scantily-clad body, covered in scars, was not hers.

"Looking for a date, handsome?" She gave a roguish but unsatisfied grin, and brought up a cigarette to light.
"No," I replied. My nose wrinkled as I went on, "I'm looking for someone. It's just that for a moment I thought you were her."

"Is that so? If you'd like me to be her..."

"No," I said quickly, "I think she came back here. Can you tell me if you've seen her?"

"What's the name and what's it worth to you?"

"(Y/n)="

Her eyes widened, but only briefly.

"--and how do I know if you aren't going to simply take what I have and leave? It's been almost a year."

"You picked the ass end of the ass end of this planet. It's bad here, so..." she replied, flicking a bit of ash off her cigarette, "I could do that, yeah. But if you come back with more, that would benefit me. I'm not in position where I have to steal to survive."

"But you're selling your body."

"I do what I have to in order to survive, and if you have a problem with that you can piss off."

"No, I don't. Now tell me, where is she?"

"I know where she lived," the woman said, "And I might have seen her, too. What do you want to try first?"

"Where she lived." Some masochistic part of me wanted to see it all. She was resourceful, surely she would have been...better off than some here.

She held out her hand.

I took out one of the rings and handed it over.

"Follow me."

She rose into flight and headed towards the empty farmlands.

I followed, and asked, "How do you know her?"

"I know of her," came the reply, "But I never spoke to her."

"But then how--"

"She was easy to keep an eye on." the tone was sharp.

I remained silent until she landed. "She might not be here now, but she did live here once before. If she'd come anywhere it'd be here."

I could barely believe it.

It was no better than a wood shack. It was leaning, there were cracks in the walls. It looked like a strong wind would blow it over.

"She lived...here?"
She deserved better.

I opened the door. On the ground was a red patch, small bones, and--gloves. I picked them up, remembering that she'd worn them the day she'd left. I turned to go and the woman was looking up curiously.

"I'm surprised anything like those were left."

I just nodded. "Back to town. I need to know if anyone saw her."

She got another ring for this, of course.

I ended up needing to bribe her once again. Buying cigarettes for a whore was definitely not the highlight of my day--but that wasn't the most painful part of the day.

"Now we're getting somewhere. I saw her, briefly, but I only got a glimpse. Try--wait a second."

Just after lighting up a cigarette, she stepped out into the street as a group of kids were passing by. "Scallion! Onio! Get over here, I need to ask you something."

Two boys came over from the group, who stopped to watch.

"What d'you want?" the taller one asked.

He couldn't have been more than eight, I thought.

"Scallion, this guy's here looking for some girl I saw about a year ago. Said she looks like me."

"How'm I supposed to know?"

The woman looked at me and took a drag from the cigarette. "Well? How's he supposed to know?"

I took a few of the MRE bars out.

"Those taste like shit," Scallion said, "But they're food I guess."

"Did you see her?" I asked.

"I did," said Onio quietly. "I don't remember seeing her come but she left with some big guy. I can't forget that guy."

Some big guy.

My heart skipped a beat. I handed both of them an MRE bar, and both began eating.

"What did he look like?"

"He was like you only he was really big and...hang on." Onio knelt and in the dirt started drawing a picture, with his jaws moving rapidly.

"Don't eat so fast," Scallion said, giving him a smack in the head, "You'll throw up."

"Okay, okay." He continued drawing, and when he finished, stood up.

There was no mistaking it. It was badly drawn, but obvious. The horns--those awful horns gave it away.
"How did she look?"

"Look?" Onio paused. "She walked like this."

He feigned the walk, with his head down and eyes shut.

So I now knew that she had left with him, unwillingly.

"And he walked like this." Onio turned back around and walked with his head high, and smirking.

"Thank you, that's all I needed. Here." There were at least a dozen more bars in the bag I was carrying, which I handed over to Scallion.

He let Onio take another one out before going back to the group and sharing it out with them as well.

"Sweet kids," said the woman, "Not a lot of them stick together out here."

"No? Why not?"

"If you find something you try to keep it to yourself. The kids surprise you once in a while, but it's mainly to stop the adults from taking advantage of their age."

"Where are their parents?"

The woman laughed. "What parents? They don't have any. The parents are either dead or didn't want them and dumped them out here."

"Why out here?"

"Maybe they figure it's a good place to do so. Lots of places to hide, game to hunt, it'll be good for them. Big crock of shit, in other words."

"I don't see how they could simply abandon their children."

"Because they don't want them. Because they look too much like their fathers, maybe." She finished the cigarette.

"Thank you," I said.

Getting back onto the base was comforting, but not anywhere near enough so.

My (y/n) had come back here, come home, seeking...well, I wasn't sure, but there had to be something in it for her.

She'd stayed in that tiny shack. Eaten in it.

And then my father had found her, and...I didn't even want to think what he would put her through.

My gods, what have I done?
All Of Us

Chapter Summary

You meet Lord Winter and learn a few things about the Arcosian people.

All Of Us

That night was both tiring and left you feeling empty. Cold made no attempts to change his form to make things more comfortable for you; in fact, he seemed to prefer it this way. Your small size made the deed more difficult, but heightened the reward.

Emotionally, it might get easier, but it was always a physical chore to deal with that tower of his.

But you slept it off anyway...

...what else was there to do?

The next morning you received more details on this Lord Winter, and later in the day you left the Ivory Palace to meet him in one of his own homes.

You were shown into a meeting room, and given some tea. A few minutes later, he arrived.

He arrived in a large hovering chair--unlike Frieza's, it was open, and his legs hung over the side; his feet rested on a small platform that protruded from the chair's bottom.

You rose and gave a bow.

If it wasn't a uniform he was wearing, it was certainly polished enough to look like one. Buttoned on one side, the shirt went down to about his knees. There were pants as well, in the same dark color.

His age showed more in his eyes than his face, where there were a few wrinkles. But his scales were far more dull a grey than the picture had portrayed.

"So you are (y/n)?" he asked, "I am Lord Winter."

"A pleasure to meet you, my lord. I look forward to my time in your service."

He seemed to nod, and sat up straight.

He was taller than he looked at first glance--just under six feet, you'd guess. That thought occurred when you stood back up.

"I'm sure the King has told you about my particular problem."

"The King stated that you received threats, though he didn't say of what variety. Perhaps he felt that you could explain it best?" You sipped quietly at your cup of tea, and looked up as a servant entered and brought Winter one as well.
"They're not written threats," Winter said. He added a few cubes of sugar to his tea, and went on, "But there have been certain...unsettling acts performed that have me on edge."

"Such as?"

"My chair going missing, for example. I can walk, you see, but not very well, and not very far."

"Your war wound," you nodded.

"In its place, someone left..." he paused, and seemed to struggle. "A knife."

"Vulgar, but the intent is obvious."

"I could tell you about the other occurrences," he replied, "My pills going missing, not being where I know I put them, or finding myself menaced or followed at a distance when I am out and about--there are numerous events that would make any man think himself as being either insane or in danger. I am of sound mind, if not sound body, and I'm ready to have others vouch for my sanity if you doubt me."

"I do not doubt you. Why should I?"

"At my age," Winter replied, "Many would call me paranoid or say that I was worrying over nothing. Certainly my daughter thinks so."

"Your daughter?"

"Perma. She's told me that I'm simply starting to forget things, and if it kept up I would have to step down from duties. I'm determined to show her otherwise."

A blind man could see the obvious suspicious behavior there. But it might be nothing more than Perma attempting to hasten his decline in hopes of getting at his wealth and title. People tended to do so quickly when relieved of useful activity, after all.

But you would have to reserve full judgment until you had actually met her.

"I see," you replied, "Let me be the first to assure you that I do believe you, and I will take your concerns with the utmost seriousness."

Winter gave a smile. "The King does have good judgment when he lends help in these matters. I am glad to have help from the both of you."

You gave a slight bow. "I am glad to serve."

"My other guards will instruct you more fully on the scheduling and other such details," he replied, "But I can safely say that you will have shifts that have you doing patrols about my home. When company arrives you will be expected to join me."

You nodded.

He seemed relieved and took a sip from his teacup. "But if you should happen to have the time, I would not say no to company at the morning or mid-day meals."

"My lord?"

"How often does a man of my age get to have so lovely a face around?"
You went red, but he let the awkward feeling pass by, and in another minute he was asking how you liked Arcosia in general.

It was only a compliment, you thought. It meant nothing.

The schedule was engaging, at the very least.

You had two patrols a week; most of your time would be spent in or near a room where Winter happened to be. The other guards joked that they liked to give women the posts nearest him, confirming Winter’s own apparent hopes.

"He simply likes having female company, is all," said the Arcosian captain of the guard, "His wife passed away some years ago. We're hoping he'll take a death wife soon."

"A death wife?" you were getting ready for a shift, and found yourself curiously distracted.

"It's a thing the very elderly indulge in," he replied, "If they have no spouse to handle their end-of-life situation, I mean. He's not dying, but he's nearly a thousand years old and his daughter's not tending to his care like she used to."

"What does a death wife do?"

"She'll handle the wifely things, of course. It can be uncomfortable for relatives to handle some of the more embarrassing and often saddening parts of their elderly relative's physical care, which is why the declining elder in question often marries a young wife. It's her job to coordinate his care, direct the aides he will have, and so forth. It relieves the family of a burden, and gives the young woman an income for the rest of her husband's life, not to mention she receives a small inheritance afterwards."

"I see," you replied.

"And the girl who gets Winter will be very lucky in that respect," he said, "If Perma doesn't screw it up for her."

"You don't think much of his daughter, do you?"

"No one does," the captain replied, "Many of the guards are relied on to coordinate his care, at some points."

So she didn't really want to care for him, either. Was she simply not able to cope with his physical difficulties? Was his care that overwhelming? Or was she simply a terrible daughter?

You finished putting on your armor, and thanked the captain for his long explanation of the particulars.

You learned something new about this culture every day.

"He's in the dining room, by the way, having a dinner meeting." the captain said, "One of the two guards is at the end of his shift now."

"Alright."

You headed down the hall and toward the dining room, where the guard at the door let you in.

Perhaps this assignment would be less troublesome than your last.
Whoreson, Part 1

Chapter Summary

Cooler learns far more than he ever wanted to know.

Chapter Notes

Another Reader-free chapter. She'll be back next chapter!

Whoreson

*Cooler's POV*

I went back to my ship and went over everything again. Even though that wasn't in the least helpful--thinking of what had to be happening to her. She deserves better than being my father's whore.

I tried to put that out of my mind.

My mind was scattered in a thousand directions, and yet, under it all, was the desire to have her back again.

How could I have been so foolish?

How could I have--?

I went over what little video footage of her was in my files, seeking...what, I wasn't sure. I was angry, I wanted to do something, even the score for her in some small way, but--

And then I stumbled onto the video of my mother's rendezvous with her mentor, and I knew what to do.

I sat in the same room that (y/n) had met me in.

How long ago that seemed.

Her mentor, Corg, walked in, and sat across from me.

"Back again?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "I'm here to ask a few questions."

"Lord Cooler, I hope you realize that I am an assassin. Not a seller of information."

"I want to know more about one of your assassins, is all. I can pay you well for it, of course. I'm
"Sure you wouldn't object to that."

"Perhaps not," he replied, and leaned forward, arms on the table, "Who is it, and what about them do you want to know?"

"(Y/n)." I paused, and took a puff from the vape pen. Perhaps I've been hitting it a little hard lately... "I want to know everything that you know about her."

"And what purpose does this serve? Did she run afoul of your people? Is she hiding here?"

I ignored those questions, and brought out a large ruby.

"No questions asked, I see," Corg replied.

"No questions answered." I glared. "What family does she have, for starters?"

He took the ruby. "Are you sure you want to know that?"

"Yes. Of course I do."

Corg gave a smirk.

I didn't like it. Not one bit.

"Because I get the feeling that--"

"Her family. Now."

The smirk widened. "Her mother is a whore."

I had been about to take another puff, but I stopped.

Cold.

Corg was turning the ruby end over end, fingerling and gazing at it. "Is that not what you wanted to hear, Lord Cooler?"

"I am not displeased. I merely thought she would have come from..."

"Better beginnings? No. Hardly. The opposite, the extreme opposite in fact." He paused briefly, and then went on. "If you have taken her in and she has run away from you, I can help you find her."

The smug look on his face set my stomach churning.

"Can you now?"

"Most saiyan, women especially, are easy to figure out here. They choose isolated locations, often to avoid being brutalized by men. And I can show you where she lived."

"I already know where she lived. It was horrid."

"And she was not there? Hmm. Like her mother, that girl. Tricky. But I always find what I'm looking for."

What was he even doing right now?
"And whatever she has done to displease you, she will be returned to you. Kicking and screaming if necessary."

"...you're her father," I said, somewhat breathlessly.

"Astute observation, Lord Cooler. Yes. I am her father. I wanted a child, and I made certain I would have one."

He looked down at my hands, one of which was fiddling with a pen on the desk.

The pen got further study, but only briefly.

"You made certain..."

The smugness shifted.

"...but why father a child if you did not intend to care for it?"

"If it survived out there, I reasoned, it was a worthy child."

I took a breath. I never thought I'd find anyone with as poisonously similar a view, that was as close to my own father's.

"And did you know the mother would abandon it--her?"

"Of course she would. The woman was soft-hearted, but not to a strong degree. Who would want to care for the child of a man who had forced himself on her?"

"You are very free with this information," I said suddenly. I pressed the button on the pen. Its end emerged. Click. Then it was gone.

"I am."

"Why?"

"You wanted to know, and you paid well." He called out suddenly, and a servant appeared at the door. "Bring us something to eat."

"Do you really think you have that much to say about her?" My hands wanted to clench into fists. But I stopped myself.

It was clear now, so very disturbingly, achingly clear.

No one wanted her. And here he was, smirking and practically laughing about it. Acting like it was nothing, what he'd done, what he'd helped to do.

A bowl of fruit was brought in one uncomfortable minute later. I chose one I recognized--something like an orange, which I peeled and began to pull apart.

"I do."

I was pushing too far. I wanted to know all, but I was afraid to.

"Why would she not simply abort?"

"She did not feel she could do that to a child, I suppose. She cared for (y/n) for...I want to say,
almost until the child was two years of age."

I thought of the little gaggle of children. Perhaps her mother had sent her with such a group. But--by then she would have remembered her mother, wondered why--!

"I kept an eye on her. She lived and survived. Very well, I might say."

"Considering you neglected your duties."

"Duties?" Corg asked, "She was a means to an end, and she served me well enough. Now it seems you have made her your problem. Did she fight you?"

I squeezed my hand into a fist so quickly that the remains of the fruit were cut in half. "Stop talking."

"That is what I am aiming for."

I was about to ask--but a burning sensation on my tongue, in my mouth, down my throat--confirmed it.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH!"

I recognized that burning sensation from a poison--one of the most common used against Arcosians, and thus, one the guild set to accustom us Arcosian students to. Or at least give us a resistance, so we could buy time.

And we learned to calculate that time very well.

I had about two minutes before the nausea would start. Then I would have maybe another four before vomiting. Ten before extreme pain, and fifteen before unconsciousness.

So I had twelve minutes, max.

I only needed five.

I jumped over the table.
Chapter Summary

Cooler deals his variety of justice, and a discovery is made.

Whoreson, Part 2

*Cooler's POV*

One punch. Two.

Blood was scattered from his nose and ran down his face, onto his clothes--

"How dare you. How DARE YOU!"

"Do what?" Corg laughed, sputtering a bit.

"Harm a woman like that. Leave a child on the streets without any family. Children are--"

"Why are you so angered by this? She's your problem, not your...oh. Oh, I see..."

More laughter.

"It's not funny! SHE DESERVED BETTER!"

"Apparently not, if she's run away from you! Did you abuse her?"

"NO!" My anger rose, and I smashed his head against the wall. "I would never do something like that to her."

More sputtering; the blood flow hadn't begun to slow down yet. Corg looked up at me with knowing, smug eyes.

"You poor bastard, you've fallen in love with her!"

I didn't attempt to deny it, but struck him again.

The burning in my gut intensified. But I ignored it.

The beating continued. There was blood all over my hands, but it wasn't enough.

"Tell me...tell me, what happened...?"

"I sent her away."

More laughter. "And now you regret it?"

He groaned when he took in a breath. I was fairly certain I'd broken some of his ribs...

"Will killing me make losing her easier?"
"No," I said grimly.

The nausea was beginning to rise. Soon, I'd be sick.

I raised my hand as I stood to my full height, and drew a small horde of tiny ki balls out.

"Do you know what I call this attack?" I asked, smirking, "The sprung trap."

Each ki ball punctured an area of his body. Arms, legs, chest, neck, back--deeply, but not immediately fatal.

No, this would be painful, slow, agonizing to the last moment.

Corg wouldn't be able to move from the pain, or even call out.

He'd just lay there, bleeding...and dying alone.

I waited only half a minute before rushing out of the room. Each of his servants earned a ki blast of their own--not deep or immediately dangerous, but dangerous enough that they would need to waste time taking care of their own wounds before they could get to Corg.

I barely made it back to the ship in time. I was sick twice before I did, and that only made the burning feeling worse.

But I made it all the same.

The ache hadn't faded when I got out of the healing tank, however--I had avenged her in some small way, but things were not perfect.

She was still with my father. He could have done anything--had her killed, or put into the harems.

I felt drained.

I'd lost her. I might never see her again. And it's all my fault.

I woke and ate and slept and woke again.

I want to keep busy. I have to keep strong for my...our...son.

I have royal duties to do; they are tedious, but the distraction will be welcome.

Time spent with the toadying lords of Arcos should be enough to distract me.

*Your POV*

He was too kind. That was the issue.

A week in saw your first breakfast with the man. You'd tried to avoid it as long as possible, but found that your superior was all but ordering it.

"It won't hurt you," he said, "And we all have to do it anyway, not just the women."

"What, why?"

"Nevermind that, just go ahead. He doesn't like eating alone."
It was part of the job, you could suppose, and you'd done worse things.

You came into the smaller dining room, where Winter seemed to be waiting for you.

What kind of man had meals with his guards?

Perhaps he was studying you. That had to be it--he wanted to get to know his guards, he wanted to see what made them tick.

Yes.

A servant pulled the chair out for you, before you could do it yourself.

"Thank you," you said quietly.

"You look as if you've never had a seat held for you."

"I am no lady," you said in a demure tone, "And it is usually ladies for whom seats are held in such a way."

He did not reply to that.

The food came out a moment later--small scrambled egg whites, some unidentifiable herb and vegetable mix, and a pair of what you assumed were sausages.

"I would have had something more of meat," Winter said, "But my doctor has refused to allow it."

"Strict with you, is he?"

"At my age, I can't understand it."

"My lord, I believe he means well enough. It would be a sore thing to have you survive whatever is going on, only to die from a clogged artery.

"It won't be a clogged artery that kills me, I'll guarantee that," he replied. "It'll be old age, if it's the last thing I do."

"You have already lived a generous lifespan. I couldn't fathom living a thousand years."

"Almost a thousand years. I'm not at a millenium yet." Winter laughed. "Don't your people live a fairly long life?"

"I don't know," you said, "I don't know much of them, to be honest."

"That's a shame. You should be read up on such things."

"I never saw the need, or had the opportunity, really. Before this point in time, I mean."

"You were not well off, I assume?"

You shook your head, and thought for a moment. How to word this, to best avoid suspicion...?

"I was not. I rose through my own ability, but despite that, his highness--" You had to mentally choke out the next part, "--did me a kindness I cannot repay."

"He has a tendency to do that with young women," Winter gave a little half smile, "He likes to play the white knight, like a lot of men his age."
You merely nodded. To even attempt to speak right now was a hazard.

"But enough about the King. Tell me about yourself."

"What do you want to know, my lord?"

"Whatever you wish to say."

You paused. "I'm...sorry, I've never been asked to talk about myself before." Endear yourself to him, that was the idea here.

By the end of the meal he knew your preference in certain foods, your love of orange chocolate, and a few small details on your taste in fashion.

And he paid attention, every moment. It was almost unnerving.

You weren't that interesting.

He had to be watching you for any sign of...something. You just had to figure out if he knew anything, and what he did know if so.

"Take a patrol in the gardens," he said when you stood up. "I'm expecting a few noble visitors later on and I want to be certain there's no one hiding about in shaded spots. We intend to have a walk outdoors."

"Yes, my lord."

*Brisk's POV, 3rd Person*

Nanny had taken Brisk out into the garden, to get him a little bit of sunlight. She'd used a lot of words he didn't understand. "Papa is going to see some people, but he will come back to see you later."

That was too many words.

It was a warm day, and she'd sat down against the brick wall, inside a shaded and more private area, after walking around with him a while. After a few minutes of talking (and one snack for him) she had gotten quiet. She was leaning against the brick more.

He wanted to sleep, too. But it felt nice out here. The grass under his hands and feet felt good to touch.

Tried to stand...

His legs wobbled.

He sat down, and decided to crawl instead.

There was a flower by the bench, and it was moving. He made for it.

No. There was something on it.

It flapped parts of its body, and moved in his direction--landing right on his nose briefly, before taking off.
A new friend!

"Abwwaaaa..."

He followed it, crawling, but it floated up and out of sight.

The next thing he saw was a section of flowers, and their colors were so enthralling that he ambled forward to look at them. Were they good to eat?

He took some of them and shoved their petals in his mouth.

Yuck!

He spit them back out as best he could, and went on. There had to be something good in here. Colorful things were supposed to be good things.

The dirt looked funny. He leaned down and gummed at it, but it tasted bad too.

Onward!

He moved, awkwardly, slowly, down the little path, but made progress nonetheless. Leaves from several bushes fell prey to his curiosity, but still he found nothing good to eat.

"Eeeebaaaaa..."

Something red. He saw something bright red. Maybe this time it would be good?

It had a lot of round shapes. And there were a lot of them on the leaves. He took one and shoved it straight in his mouth. It was sweet, and good. And very soft to chew.

He grabbed more, and continued eating, moving along the row of low bushes to get at the reddest ones.

A few minutes later, Brisk sat up, gurgling. He was full now, and his hands were sticky. He wanted to go to sleep.

Where was nanny?

He looked around.

Nanny was not here.

He made some noises to see if she was playing hide with him.

No.

More noises.

He was by himself.

She was not coming.

Gurgling.

Gasping, and crying.

She still didn't come.
More crying. He didn't like being by himself. Where was nanny? Where was papa?

It went on for forever, to him. But then, suddenly, there were footsteps.

Someone else was here. It wasn't papa or nanny.

Whoever it was, they picked him up slowly and carefully. They looked at him with dark eyes, and smiled.

"What are you doing wandering around by yourself?" they asked.

He continued to cry, but less so. The stranger knew how to hold him. And they were warm.

"Hush, hush, it's alright," they said.

He calmed down. The stranger sat down with him on another bench a little farther away, and held him closely.

"You've gotten so big, little one..."

It was making noises he didn't know and wasn't even looking at him. He had to fix that.

"Baawwwbbaaa....bannnnaaaaaa..."

It looked at him. "Is that so?"

Its finger went down, and he grabbed at it. That was also warm.

"Where is your nanny?"

That word. He knew that word.

But she wasn't here.

"I need to--"

His little hand closed around its finger, and the last word went unsaid. The dark eyes looked back down at him, and shut.

He was lifted slightly, and his head was at its shoulder. The stranger was holding him like it was time to burp, but it wasn't.

Then it lowered him again.

"You're beautiful," it said to him, "Look at your little eyes, your little feet. I've never seen anything as wonderful as you before. Does that sound silly?"

Brisk made more noise.

Nonsense, really.

"I thought so."

It sat holding him for a little bit before finally getting up.

"I have to get you back to your father," it said, "Or I'll be in a lot of trouble."
Words he still did not know. But that was not important. What was important was the dark stuff around the stranger's head.

He reached out towards it, and his hand went through it. Soft. It was very soft. He touched it more, and found his hand could close around it. Wow, that felt even better!

There was a little pull, but after that, he let go and instead ran his hands through the dark stuff.

On they walked.

It was nice to be held.

But it ended too fast. He wanted more of it!

"Captain!" rang out the stranger's voice suddenly. "Captain Salza. I'm glad I found you."

"What is the problem?"

Hey! That man was blue!

"I found Lord Cooler's son wandering about the gardens alone. I didn't see the nanny--" The stranger was holding him out to the other person.

"It's alright," came the other's reply. "I'll see that he gets back quickly. Come on, little tyke. Your father won't be happy you got lost."

Brisk looked at the stranger one more time. But they were already gone.
Here And Now

Chapter Summary

Where was this before?

Here And Now

It was wonderful to see the baby again.

To hold him, to see those little eyes stare at you, to feel him grabbing at your finger, and even your hair. He was so light, but so much bigger than he was when you'd last seen him.

But there'd been too much worry about being seen with him. Cooler had made it clear what his position on that matter was, and as for Cold--well, you didn't want to begin to think what kind of trouble he would make for you.

What would he say? 'Don't you remember? That's not your son.'

Or something like that.

You didn't meet Perma until you'd been there another few weeks, and when you finally did, it was a very short one.

During a patrol down a particular corridor in Winter's home with the captain of the guard, he stopped you suddenly.

"Lady Perma," he whispered to you, as he saw her rounding the corner far ahead, "She's hard to read. She could like you or hate you, so be careful."

Utmost politeness, then.

The two of you moved closer to, and then finally passed her. You turned your head and bowed it slightly, "Good afternoon, my lady."

It gave you a better look. She was as tall as her father, and dressed in an obviously expensive and well-decorated silk gown. Emerald skin, white gems.

Very pretty, and elegant in every motion.

She made no response to you, and walked on.

Once the two of you rounded the corner she had come from, the captain said, "That was fairly tame. She's reacted badly to some of the others, so...maybe she'll like you."

"Does she tolerate female guards well in general?"

"Either or. Really, I never know how she will take anyone's presence. It seems that of late she has grown more and more upset at imaginary slights, but then at times she will show odd kindnesses.
Usually to those who've been slighted in some way."

Really, now...

That was definitely something to keep an eye on.

Winter's schedule was rather full for the next week, but due to patrols and various other little things, you weren't scheduled to be present for most of his meetings.

Until Friday.

Security that day was beefed up all around; you would be working a double shift, starting early in the morning and ending at night. A solid sixteen hours--but it was necessary.

One of the royals was visiting later in the day, that's what was said. You assumed it'd be Cold, or Frieza. The idea of it being him crossed your mind, but you thought that he would be too busy with whatever it was he was doing now to conduct visits like this one.

It seemed only one moment that you were having breakfast, and then only a blink later, you were heading to join Winter in one of his company rooms at noon. It was unsettling, to say the least.

Where was the time going anymore?

Deep breath.

"Ah, good," Winter spoke when he saw you entering. "I was hoping you would be here."

"My lord?" you questioned.

"A pretty face will no doubt help me in negotiation; it'll keep my visitors tonight distracted."

You turned red, and noticed that the other guard already there was half-smiling. "You must have other, more beautiful female guards around."

"Nonsense," Winter replied, "If I had the time, I would tell you exactly to what extent, but sadly, we haven't any of it to spare."

The first visitor was some lesser nobleman working under Winter, who came to ask for a delay on the collection of some taxes or the other. This, he said, was due to a flood in his holdings. Winter managed to talk him into paying the amount himself over the next few months. Then, he could keep what would be collected from the people.

The second was also noble, and wasn't very memorable aside from Winter's sighs about "This poor bastard who can't make any decisions on his own." He wanted guidance on some issue or other, and seemed more focused on being told what to do than deciding it himself.

When he left, you gave Winter a smile. "You handled him very well."

"Indeed," the guard on Winter's other side spoke up.

"I wish he'd do something on his own," Winter rubbed the bridge of his nose, "Does he think being helpless will get my attention? Does he think living by my word will make me more lenient towards his asinine handling of his own lands?"

"He seeks your wisdom, of which you have plenty. At least he knows who to go to." you smiled,
and found that he smiled back at you.

"Can't he go to someone else?"

Another guard peeked in at that moment. "My lord, your next--"

"Yes," Winter sat up straight at that, "Send the prince in."

Three guards entered, positioning themselves in various places around the other end of the table.

Then...

Your heart skipped an uncomfortable beat.

It was fatal. Your eyes met.

Cooler.

It was Cooler.

You looked straight on as he came closer, and avoided his gaze; you could feel it on you as he situated himself at the end of the table. His chair came to a stop, and that was when Winter spoke.

"It is good to see your royal highness again," Winter said, "I haven't had the pleasure in a long time."

"Indeed not," came Cooler's unsteady voice.

*Cooler's POV*

She was standing there, right there, right in front of me, and I could do nothing!

All of my worries about the fear of her being dead were melted away. She was here--and no matter how things were, I would be able to fix this. As long as she was still alive, I could remedy the situation.

But for now, I had to speak to Winter. I went on, but with (y/n) still dominating my thoughts.

"I won't take up much of your time," I said.

"You can take up as much of it as you like."

The talks went on. I brought up some military questions--most of my Arcosian soldiers and engineers came from his holdings. He wanted to know how I felt about building a military school; I wanted to know how funding for it would be raised and distributed as time went on. That discussion went on for quite some time before I moved on to questions about our business dealings.

On and on and on.

She was right there.

I wanted to hold her, to tell her what an awful fool I'd been, to say that I'd learned my lesson, to assure her I would never be so false again.

Toward the end of the evening, and after a short dinner, there was an apparent shift change.
Two guards came in to replace (y/n) and her counterpart.

Thankfully, our meeting was coming to an end. We would be talking more, but tomorrow.

"Again, sir," Lord Winter said, "I thank you for deigning to visit personally."

"There is no need to thank me," I replied, "Truly, the pleasure is mine. I'm glad to see that you have employed a large number of new guards."

"Ah, of course. Nothing less for a royal visit, sir."

He followed my stare to (y/n).

"Taking notice of the new guard, I see," Winter chuckled, "I did the same. One of my finest guards, and she's only been here a short time."

"Did you hire her directly?"

I regretted the question immediately, but not as much as what I heard next.

"No, she is, how you say, on loan from your father. Because of some recent trouble, you understand. Talented, sharp, and of course beautiful--but that's to be expected from one of your father's Angels."

My heart sank even lower.

Angels.

Angels.

That bastard, that--

He'd--

I wanted to run out the door after her, but I had to wait. An hour passed in impatience before I could get up.

My heart was racing. I took a walk around the palace, made mention to the guards of enjoying the architecture as my excuse, and went on looking for her.

I was about to give up when I saw her leave the kitchens, and at a distance, I followed.

I would never let her go again.

I would hold her, keep her safe.

She stopped after a long walk at a door in the servants' living quarters, and it was there that I made my approach.

"(Y/n)--"

On seeing me, she paled completely, and began to hurriedly type in the door code.

"I'm sorry, my lord, I'm not on duty right now."

She turned to face me as I approached.
"I'm sorry," the words fell out, ran away, with others swiftly following, "I'm sorry about forcing you to leave, if you'd--if you'd let me make it up to you, if you'd only come back--"

"You know I can't do that, my lord."

She backed away, pressing herself against the door.

"Come back," I said desperately, "Brisk needs you."

She paused, and looked confused. "Who?"

"My--our son. I know you saw him in the gardens the other day, I know you had to have felt something on doing so. Don't you want to be his mother?"

"He cannot be my son," she said in a low tone, "You made that clear."

"Don't remind me of what I said then. It was a mistake, a horrible mistake, and I never should have said anything I said then."

I stepped closer. She raised her hands, and tried to move away--but I took her by the wrists and held her against the door. By the gods, was she warm...

...she was close, closer than she'd been in nearly a year, and...

"Let go," she said, struggling. "I can't, and you know I can't!"

"I can protect you--"

"You don't understand, do you?" she called out. "Your father would find out, and I'd be dead in no time. Don't say you could protect me. He knows, and finds out everything. I'm not--nowhere is safe from him."

More struggling. I tightened my grip.

I was not about to lose her again, not when I was so close!

"You're hurting me."

"I'm not going to let you go like this," I said, "I lost you once, and I won't do it again."

"You don't have input on this matter," she replied, "Your father does. Your father controls everything, and--let go!"

Footsteps.

"My lord, please, let go of me."

"I already said, I won't--"

"Is there a problem?"

It was the hard tone of someone who knew there was.

I looked back at one of Winter's guards, feeling immediate defeat. I had to be careful, or father really would find out...

"No," I said quietly, "There's not."
I left.

I had to find a way to get her back. For her sake, and for our son’s.
Chapter Summary

Winter is much too good to be true.

Chapter Notes

Siberius appears. His name is kept the same to make your mental image NOT be of Cold's gigantic form. Instead, it will be the smaller, normal-sized Arcosian that Siberius is.

Kindness

Crying yourself to sleep did not even begin to describe what happened after you finally laid down.

Cooler wanted you back.

Why did this have to happen now? What took him so long?

Did he regret betraying you?

...had he betrayed you at all?

You shook your head.

Whether or not he had didn't matter in the slightest. He'd cut you loose, left you to the wolves, and only now, months later, was he deciding he wanted you back.

Only when he was feeling the consequences and emotional damage was it worth braving any kind of retribution. Only when he hurt did anything matter to him.

No matter how much you might want to go back, it was not worth the risk.

You showed up for work again, mid-morning, and found that your presence was once more requested by Winter. He had, apparently, woken late and was having a similiarly late breakfast.

Good. A distraction was good.

When you entered the room, however, the serious look on Winter's face started the worry up.

"Sit down," he said, "There's something I need to speak to you about."

"Whatever I did, I--" you stammered as you proceeded to sit, "--I assure you, I--"

"It's nothing you did," Winter cut you off, "I was informed before I came in that the prince...did
you a bit of violence last night."
"It was a misunderstanding," you said quickly, "Nothing worth notice."

"Was he attempting to force himself on you?"

"No," you replied. This was going to get you in so much trouble...

"Then why was he holding you against a door?"

"It's not worth going over."

"It is to me," he said emphatically, "I am not the sort of man who allows this to be done to women-or men--in my employ, even if the one in question is royal. Now tell me, did he give a reason for doing what he did?"

"I--" you stammered again, but went on, "--I resembled a woman he apparently valued, and dismissed. He regretted doing so, and..."

"And he thought that he had found her again, and was rather insistent that you were this woman he cherished?"

"Yes."

Lip bite. Praying he bought it.

Winter thought for a minute or two. You ate quietly, and did not make eye contact.

"I intend to speak to him about this," he said.

"Please don't," you said, "I would rather you not go to the trouble. It's not worth it."

"If I allow this to go by without saying anything, I will show all of my guards that they are not worth defending. They will not feel safe when dealing with the royal family."

"It's not worth the fuss."

"You are," Winter said suddenly and clearly, "You deserve to feel safe in your place of employment."

But fear crept in, regardless of Winter's care--and smile.

Now you would have to speak to Cold about the matter.

You sent a message to Cold the moment you could. His only reply was a time and the phrase "Oakfrost."

Oakfrost...that was a restaurant specializing in mainly fish and sushi dishes in the middle-class area. The time was mid-afternoon, on towards evening, the next day.

Almost too fast for your liking, the day wore into the next and the time to leave for this meeting arrived.

You left Winter's home, and headed out.

This couldn't be all you said to him. You had to invent a few things to say, that were not simply an
attempt to put him off of Cooler. He might already know, even, but that thought only made the anxiety worse.

You arrived at Oakfrost, and got a table in relative quickness. As you were looking over the menu, you felt a tap at your shoulder.

You looked back...

"Siberius," you said, nodding.

"Funny that we should meet here, after so long." He gave you a discomfiting smile, and sat down beside you. "Now tell me, what reason can you give for crossing my path so conveniently again?"

You kept your eyes on the menu. "Have you heard about your son's visit?"

"Indeed I did. I also hear that Lord Winter is taking him to task for approaching you. Tell me, did you invite him to do so?"

When the waiter came, Siberius ordered for the both of you, before turning back for your answer.

"No," you said, "I saw him at the meeting Lord Winter had with him and made every effort to avoid him afterwards. He approached me--"

"No," you said, "I saw him at the meeting Lord Winter had with him and made every effort to avoid him afterwards. He approached me--"

Your voice grew momentarily panicked. Before you could go on, he cut you off.

"I believe you."

"You do?"

"Yes. I do. You know better than to do something so foolish, after all. I do not welcome idiots in to my little circle of happy women, after all. But is this all you wanted to tell me? Or--" his arm slipped about your shoulders and pulled you in close, "--did you simply miss me that much?"

"I--it's not just--"

He chuckled, and let go.

Your breathing returned to normal a second later.

"Winter's manners are almost over the top," You said, "I suspect him, but...I hesitate to say more. His guards I haven't seen anything out of, so I am giving a tentative report that they're likely not the culprits."

"What of his daughter?"

"I've only seen her up close once. The other times, she's...she wears this permanent look on her face, like she's eaten a box of lemons. Aside from a constant nasty look, I haven't seen much to arouse suspicion from her."

"I see."

Siberius was silent for the rest of the meal, which he picked up the check for.

"Come," he said, "I think I know how to help you along."

You got up and left with him, feeling a little more relaxed.
He believed you.

He actually believed you.

What a relief...

You were lead down the sidewalk and toward a park. Siberius choose a spot towards the back of it--a bench rested between two shady willow trees, and in front of a creek so small it looked like the after-effects of melting snow rather than any constant water flow.

"Sit," he said.

You obeyed.

"Perhaps I should have tried this earlier," he said, turning your face towards his own, "But I wanted you to be established there before I gave you any additional assistance."

There was a stroke at your cheek. His lips briefly met your forehead.

"What are you doing?" you asked.

"This is going to hurt," he whispered, "I wanted to apologize ahead of time."

You were pushed back a foot, nearly to the edge of the bench.

He raised his hand--

--and backhanded you.

You fell, groaning, onto the ground; you clutched at your stinging face and looked up in fear.

Would he do it again?

No.

No, he was reaching down to help you back up.

"As I said, it's going to hurt," Siberius said, "Nothing will be broken, but you will have an ugly bruise on your face. You'll make your excuses to the guards--say that you were harassed by someone on the street, for example--but whoever is there plotting against me will not buy it for a second."

"And they might approach me to make some sort of proposal?"

"You catch on fast," He grinned.

"What about Winter?"

"Cover it up with makeup when you must see him. I'm sure the guards will understand your not wanting to show another bruise to him."

You nodded, and stood. He stood with you.

"Go on," He said, "Head back, before you're missed."

*King Cold's POV*
I have her.

The poor thing was so frightened that I would react to her apparent encounter with Cooler that I could do nothing but believe her.

A source confirmed it. She was trying to get away from him, when she could very easily have decided otherwise.

I have her.

Now I can no longer doubt her loyalty.

Perhaps I should reward her for it.
You finally speak to Perma.

Loyalty

The bruise came into bloom the next day, and you began to use different bathrooms to apply and reapply the makeup to cover it up over the course of the next few days.

He'd certainly done a job on that strike. Your jaw felt a bit weird, but...

Well, he'd intended to do something, and he'd done it.

"Winter wants to see you again."

One of the female guards approached you in the bathroom, and you glanced up--makeup job half-complete.

"I hope no one's told him about this."

"Oh, no," she said, "We're not going to make more trouble for you. You gave that guy that hassled you a good punch in return, right?"

"Right," you lied, "He'll be feeling it for much longer than I'll be feeling this."

"Good. Well, finish up and get into the kitchens, then. He's already wondering why you're taking so long."

"Am I his guard, or his companion?"

"Both, for all I know."

"Both?" you glanced up, "Oh, boy, what am I getting myself into?"

"I wouldn't worry much," she said, laughing, "He's like this with a lot of the women that work for him. He doesn't expect anything out of you except company, and after a while he'll leave you be."

"What, does he get bored?"

"No, but by that point most of the women he speaks to have gotten themselves boyfriends, or something."

"I don't have one of those, but I do have a definite tie..."

"You're just being paranoid, I think. The King knows Winter's not going to try anything with you. He wouldn't have sent you here if he thought something would happen."

"I...guess so." You sighed, and finished the cover up. "Well, there we go. Wish me luck."
You took a seat, and noted that Winter had rather a sober look on his face.

"Are you well, my lord?"

"Not especially." He gave a slight groan. "Last night it seems that some bright spark wanted to poison me. But if that's what they wanted, it was done very poorly."

"Did they leave a container or something?"

"Oh, no. They simply added it to the top of my soup and failed to mix it at all. The soup is...it's a light tan color, and the poison, well...bright green."

"They're sending more signals," you said quietly, "When will you be getting a taster?"

"The guards have begun on a rotation, and I'll instruct you on how to do it today," Winter replied, "I did it once, and I would prefer not to do it again, but..."

"But it's necessary, my lord. You're a good man, and we don't want to lose you."

"Do you speak for the guards or yourself?"

His smile was nice, and you felt your cheeks beginning to burn red.

When the food came, he directed you as to how best to cut various breakfast items to taste for him. Once you had tasted his food, and nothing resulted, you both began eating your own meals.

"By the way," Winter said, after finishing his eggs, "I spoke to the prince."

"And?"

"And he's apologized for behaving in the way he did. I wanted him to apologize to you directly, but he seemed to feel that it would be too painful to do so."

"A poor excuse."

"Perhaps," Winter said, "But he made a decent case for it. He thought you might find it traumatizing in some way to see him again, after what he did."

"To hear that he apologized is enough...even if it wasn't directed at me."

"You expect too little of people, my dear."

"I learned early on to avoid expecting much."

"Even from the royals?"

The door to the kitchens opened; you heard it shut again a moment later.

There were footsteps approaching.

"I know little of the others. The King...he can be difficult, but he's the King. It's to be expected."

"Indeed," came a female voice behind you.

"Good morning, Perma," Winter said, "Did you sleep well?"
"Well enough," came the calm reply. There was a pause, and then, "Why are you still eating with your guards? Can you not find someone your own rank to do so with?"

"I like to get to know my guards. And most of those my age are not eager to leave their homes this early in the morning."

"This early? It's nearly ten."

"Too early for men and women who make it to my age with little to do." He waved it off. "Will you be staying in for the day? I've heard the weather's going to be nasty."

"No, no, I have too much to do. Enjoy your breakfast."

You looked up in time to make eye contact with Perma. She did not make her usual face, oddly--and left without another word.

Winter gave a sigh. "I keep telling her that we should spend more time together, but...she never listens."

"She must be impatient, if you'll forgive me for saying so."

"Sometimes I wonder," he said sadly.

You both went back to your food.

A few days more passed. The bruise was not fading, exactly, but it was beginning to heal properly.

It was a wry thought; would Cold want to backhand you again?

The makeup was out, and you glanced into the mirror--this was one of the nicer bathrooms, but there was little time to enjoy it.

Foundation first.

You reached for the bottle and scrambled; you'd nearly knocked it over. Thankfully, you managed to save it, although the blush brush turned over and began to roll away.

A curse under your breath.

As you grabbed the brush, the door opened.

"Excuse me--"

There was a pause.

"--what, pray tell, is the help doing using this bathroom?"

You turned to look at Perma, exposing the bruise.

"...I'm sorry, my lady. Allow me to finish covering it up and I'll be out of your way in just a minute."

But Perma, instead of head for one of the stalls, came towards you.

"I imagine the prince did that," she said.
"No," you replied, "And please--don't tell your father. I don't want any trouble to be made over this."

"Who did it?"

You looked away. "I can't say, my lady."

To show fear, you set your hands trembling.

"I see," Perma said, "It does not surprise me in the least that the King would do such a thing. Did you not service him well enough?"

You opened your mouth to speak, but she cut you off.

"Or was it because of what his son did?"

"I don't know."

You looked back at the mirror.

"That's how they are, those royals. They think women like you are their property. They think the whole universe belongs to them."

"I wouldn't know. He doesn't talk to me about those things."

Perma started to run water in the sink next to the one you were using.

"And what of your son?"

Blood running cold, yet heart running rampant.

"I...have no son."

"Are you being blackmailed into saying that?" she looked at you.

"No. No, of course not. Truly, I..."

"The King wouldn't like his toy to be the mother of that boy, I imagine."

You went silent.

"Tell me...what would you do to get him back?"
A difficult choice, it seems. But in the end--simple.

This was it.

The traitor. It was her.

"Anything," you said, "As long as he isn't endangered by it."

"Of course, I wouldn't ask you to do anything of that sort." Perma turned the faucet to a higher speed, to further drown out the conversation, "I can well understand that worry."

"I thought you had no children?"

Your shaking hands moved up to your scouter, and fiddled with it absently. One of your fingers twirled around a lock of your hair.

"No," Perma said, noting your apparent nervousness with tolerance, "I will not have them right now, not with things the way they are. I worry too much for their safety in this political climate to want to have them."

"Then--?"

"I must know that I can trust you," she replied. "Surely you can understand that."

"Of course." You went on speaking, voice wavering--yes, or no? It was hard to say. Your desperation could be real, or imagined.

The important part was that she not know.

"What do you need me to do, to prove it?"

"Deliver something for me. Without ratting, as you would say."

"And if I don't?"

"Then," Perma gave a smile, "Two lives will be in danger."

"Two lives..."

"Yours. And your son's."

Perma instructed you to meet her again once your workday ended, and you did so in the kitchens. It was about nine in the evening, and growing dark outside.
You came into the room, still fiddling with your scouter.

Hopefully, this would work.

"Trouble?" she asked, pointing at the scouter.

"Yes," you replied, "I need to get a new model. We're...they're quite expensive, as, I'm sure you know, and the King is reluctant to let us upgrade them."

"He will lavish you with silks and jewels but not upgrade your equipment?"

"We so rarely need it," you replied, quietly.

"Of course, I forgot. I imagine, also, that he feels he spends enough on your luxuries and would rather you pay for these things on your own."

"I don't know. And I don't ask. He doesn't like it when we ask questions."

"What an absolute--"

"If I may," you began, "What has made you dislike him so much?"

"What doesn't?" she sat back with a teacup. "He spends all of his time letting everyone know they are beneath him. Rankwise, we may be--but I have done nothing to deserve the snub that I got."

"And what else?" you egged her on; her anger was obviously rising.

"Grabbing planets, never content with what he has--he is going to run this empire into an--" she stopped to take a long sip of tea.

"But the empire is stable, from what I've heard."

"Not for long," Perma said. "Not at the rate he's expanding it."

You could understand that part. But snubbing her?

When had Cold done that?

She was about his age, maybe a little younger...perhaps she had been a rival of Yuki's?

Was that the snub?

She wanted to be Queen, perhaps, and was angry that the chance had been ripped from her.

But there had to be something else...

No. It didn't matter. Her motives were her own, but her actions were what you needed to pay attention to.

"At any rate," you replied, as a waiter passed by, "I thank you for joining me. It's lovely to talk to you; I've had no chance to do so before."

"Of course." Her tone passed from venom to sugar, and suddenly, she produced a wrapped little box. "I know this is out of the way, but would you mind dropping this off for me?"

"I'd be pleased. A gift for a beau, perhaps?"
"Maybe."

More people passed by.

Perma's smile widened, and her tone grew even more sugary sweet.

"I'm sure he'll love it."

VIDEO CAPTURE COMPLETE.

SHARE?

YES/NO

The screen of your scouter blinked.

All you had to do was say yes or no out loud, and you'd be taken to a menu of options. Then you would speak the number of the contact you wished to send the video capture too.

It would be that easy.

But for your son's sake...

Perma could be lying. Cooler had spies, Cold had spies--but surely, so would she?

It could be the nanny...a guard...

It could be anyone.

You took a deep breath.

"Yes."

The contact list came up.

You could add a message once you'd left the package.

Brisk would be safest if he stayed with his father, you thought. The idea of helping to rebel, to overthrow Cold, to get out from under him permanently--was an attractive one. And the idea of holding your son again, that was even better.

But what would happen in the long term?

Suppose she succeeded.

You would never be able to consider him one hundred percent safe. And while that might be the case here as well--it would be even worse if the crown changed hands. He would be, possibly, the heir. But--no, you would be his mother, so that could not be.

Suppose Perma was untruthful. Suppose her promises evaporated into nothing?

You looked down at the package.

Though...

...if they did, that would, again, not be the life for him. Safe and happy he would not be for long, if
he was brought into the web of violence that rebellion so often brought. You wouldn't be able to keep an eye on him constantly, and Perma might hold him hostage further...

Your thoughts were running too wild.

You spoke Cold's contact number.

ADD MESSAGE? YES/NO

"Yes."

ADD ATTACHMENT?

"Yes."

The screen brought up the last few videos you'd taken, and you named the earlier one to also attach. The one from the bathroom.

The "keyboard" flashed up onto the screen.

Whenever there were no people beside you, you added letters, one at a time.

This wasn't real.

Until you sent it.

You could change your mind.

Brisk came to mind again.

Sweet and innocent, beautiful...and with his life ahead of him.

A flash of green on the icon of the number. It meant that Cold was--

--he was available.

Breathless, almost, you continued to speak the letters whenever you had the chance.

You passed onto the street where the address lay.

5151 was the house number.

You started at 5103...5105, 5109...

The message was now complete.

...5141, 5143...

Send it, and you've completed your job.

That's all.

But what if...?

No.

The battle went on. The desire to hold him had to be balanced with the reality of the situation.
What life could you provide for him, in a rebellion or on the run?

5151.

An average, small house. You knocked, and the door was answered by a green Arcosian with blue gems. "Yes?"

"Yes, hello," you said, "Someone has given you a gift. I hope it's a happy birthday."

Slight scowl.

"It's not my birthday. But I'll take it.

Cold's icon was still tinted green.

Just say it.

Just do it.

As you walked back down the sidewalk, you took a deep, wavering breath.

"Send."

*King Cold's AU*

A message appeared on my screen from (y/n).

*Threat to eldest princes family.*

But before I could question that, a video appeared.

And then another.

Such scant evidence...

...but it was all I needed for reason.

Oh, my dear (y/n)...what a reward this will earn you.
You made the choice. Now you will take what comes.

Consequence

Nothing happened when you returned to Winter's place.
You had a snack before heading to bed in your little room.
Hopefully, that would be the end of that.
Not that you were all that eager to return to Cold.
The groping, the shoving...always being on your knees, or bent over...
Soon enough, you would be going back. And that would be that until he had some other job for you to do.
Back to the pains, the wine, the...
You shook your head.
It was time for sleep.

When you came to see the captain of the guard the next morning, he didn't look happy.
"Bad news," he said, "And I do mean really bad news."
"What happened?" You took a seat in front of his desk.
"...It's about Lady Perma--his daughter. She's been confined to her room."
"For what? What happened?"
"It was discovered that she was the one making those attempts on her father's life."
"I wouldn't call them attempts; they never worked."
"Apparently she had a lot of real attempts mixed in, but somehow or the other he kept narrowly evading things. Ordering this meal instead of that, or the poisoned meal being thrown out, or...it's a long list. And frankly, since you showed up, the attempts have been getting fewer and farther between."
"One extra person surely didn't put her off."
"Apparently it did. I don't know her reasoning. And there's a lot of other stuff she's been found to--I can't tell you about them, but let us say that Lord Winter is not...he's not taking this well. Not at
"Does he believe the charges? Has she been charged?"

"Honestly, I'm not sure. He's barely spoken about it, he's mostly been quiet. And she will be charged within another day or so, from what I've been able to find."

"If she still has any spies here, he--"

"Already way ahead of you," he said, "Speaking of which. I want you to head on out to see him for breakfast now, and make sure you taste his food for him. Stick to him all day."

"Yes, sir."

You could almost feel Winter's mood when you walked into the kitchens. At his usual table, he had food, but...

...he didn't even look mildly interested in it.

You sat down.

"Good morning, my lord."

He looked up. "I would say 'good morning' in return, but I would be lying. It's been a terrible morning."

"I heard everything from the captain," you said, "I'm so sorry to hear about your daughter."

"No, no. You don't need to be sorry about that. It's me who should be sorry."

"About what? You've done nothing wrong!" You gave what you hoped was a reassuring smile.

"I have to have, for her to want to do something like this to me. Did I not do something for her? Was there anything I didn't give her? And that's not even touching what they've found about her..."

"...her what?" you asked, delicately.

"Plots against the crown. It's--this isn't the daughter I raised. This isn't the woman I hoped she would grow into. She's--""

He shook his head as one of the servants came by with a few pastries.

"I don't want any. Hell, I don't even want my breakfast," Winter said. "I can't. Not today."

"My lord, you have to eat."

"Why?"

He looked up at you with that terrible despair in his eyes. His hands were clenched in his lap.

Everything he thought he knew was a lie. The person he seemed to love most in the world was no longer the shining light he thought they were.

You knew what that was like.

"Because," you began to sample his food, and pushed the plate back at him when you'd done so,
"There are people who care about you still, even if your daughter does not. And we would be devastated if anything happened to you."

He looked up.

"Your guards, me, and--I can't speak for the servants, as I don't know them, but..." you took a deep breath. "We're here for you."

You reached forward and took one of his hands in your own.

"What did I do to deserve this?" he asked; his tone and breath wavering.

"Nothing," you said, "She made these choices. She decided to do it, because...I don't know. But your daughter made these choices, and it doesn't reflect on you."

"It will," Winter replied miserably. "The King--"

"--will do nothing to you because of what she did."

You let his hand go, and nodded your head at his plate.

Winter took a few bites. Each time, his hand shook a little bit more.

You scooted your chair closer--and not a moment too soon.

The tears were immediate, and you opened your arms to him. He reached out, clinging to you, sobbing his heart out.

And you held him, whispering things to soothe him as best you could.

"I'm here," you said quietly.

"Why...why did she...do...why did she...?"

It repeated, that question, over and over.

Until Winter's tears finally ceased.

You did as the captain requested, and stuck close to Winter the entire day. He required prompting to eat lunch, to go out and have his afternoon walk, and even to take his pills. You went with him on the walk, and you got him the water yourself for the pills--and watched him take them.

"Still hurts," he said quietly--meaning, of course, his bad leg. "But the therapists keep telling me it's good to keep active."

"It is, my lord. If you don't use the muscle, it will deteriorate. Besides, I think a view of your lovely flower garden was good for you."

"It pales in comparison to your own."

"Please, my lord."

You turned red, and stammered a little. "F-flattery is--"

"I am speaking the truth," he replied, "And not merely because of your beauty. Might I ask--will you join me for dinner?"
"Of course."

This time, you were not in some little corner of the kitchens with Winter. This time, you were in one of the main dining halls. The table was small, compared to some of the others, but still very nice.

It would make things easier for you when it came to tasting his food, at least.

"I think you will enjoy yourself," he said, "My chefs do a wonderful job."

"More so than at breakfast? And that has been wonderful thus far."

"Even more so, as unbelievable as that may seem." he gave a weak laugh. "Even if most of my food in the evening tends toward the soft variety."

As servants began to bring out the food itself, you glanced over them carefully.

Nothing.

The first course of dinner was soup, served in individual bowls that could be refilled. You sampled his, and then waited a minute. Then the two of you finished your bowls.

Next, there was a small plate of fish.

And then, the main course.

It looked delicious, to say the least.

Pork roast, the servants said. It had stewed overnight, and was joined by onions and carrots. The broth alone--

--gods, was that heavenly.

"It looks wonderful," you said to Winter.

"Yes. Any excuse to give me something that's been cooked in water, I suppose."

"Not water, my lord, broth." You gave him a smile, which he returned.

"I suppose you're right."

A servant dipped out a sizable helping for each of you, and moved off a moment later.

"Go ahead, take your bit," Winter said, "Just be careful of the onions."

"Are you fond of onions, my lord?"

"Only a little."

"Then it shouldn't matter if I do."

"Young lady--"

"I thought I was your guard." You took the spoon, and took a bit of his soup, avoiding the onion. You drank the broth first, and ate the pork itself slowly.
"Well?"
"Very good."

Your lips were tingling. The food was hot, wasn't--
--the tingling turned into burning.

You drank some of your wine, but that only made it worse.

"Are you alright?"
"I--"

Pain. Pain up and down your throat, and in your stomach.

"My lord, I think..."

Heart racing. Lips--no longer burning, or even tingling, but they felt oddly numb.

"I think it was..."

You groaned, and gave a huge cough. Nausea rose, but only briefly. The pain intensified, and you clutched at your stomach.

"Guards!" Winter called out, and the two at the door came running. "Get the doctor. NOW. I don't care if he's at a meeting or in the lab--get him--"

He leaned towards you, and reached up, touching your lips.

"They're swelling up."

But all they felt to you was numb. As your heart rate continued to climb--at least, that was how it felt, with every pound in your chest getting stronger and harder--breathing began to get harder.

You gasped.

And harder.

You tried to stand--
--and stumbled down before you could take a step.

Hands at throat.

"I can't breathe," you forced out, "I--"

Couldn't catch your breath.

Shouting.

Swimming vision.

Darkness.

Message received
*Doctor's POV*

The first rule of poisonings is to never put the patient in the healing tank until you know what you're dealing with.

And I'm glad I obeyed that rule.

They brought (y/n) in and we managed to get the swelling down, but the poison is wreaking havoc all over her body. The pork was brought in, tested, and found to be virtually soaking in...

Gods, this stuff is rare, and so expensive that only the most wealthy assassins use it. I don't even want to think its name.

It triggered an anaphylactoid reaction. There was swelling, and severe trouble in her heart and lungs.

But what makes it worst of all is that this is one of those poisons that prompted the entire "no healing tank until prior checking's been completed" rule.

This is one of those poisons that is actually aided in its course by the healing tank. If I put her in there, it would hijack the water and spread much more quickly.

I'll be able to keep her breathing, and her heart beating. I can give her IV medications all over town to aid in recovery, but...

In the end, aside from that, I just have to wait for the poison to finish passing through her body.

And hope.
Mort D'espoir

Chapter Summary

One wrong turn of phrase and your entire world crashes down again.

Mort D'espoir

*King Cold's POV*

I was updated on (y/n) not an hour after she was apparently poisoned. A check of her inbox showed me a message that, despite it being encrypted and having no obvious sender, I knew was authored by Perma.

Why she would bother to use such a poison is beyond me.

But the more important item of business is her trial. I doubt, sincerely, that she will be executed as punishment. Banishment, the stripping of her title and wealth—that, I believe, is a far worse punishment than execution. Death is instant, the loss of a life of ease is another for one brought up to it.

Now, if she attempts to return...that will mean execution.

(Y/n) was in terrible condition for several days, and Winter's doctors seemed unsure of whether or not she would even make it in that time.

But, in the end—as I thought—she began to recover. She'll be waking up soon, no doubt ravenous.

Winter's apologies to me were...amusing, to say the least. He went on about nearly costing me one of my Angels, and how ashamed he was that this had happened on his watch.

Silly man. It seems that (y/n) has endeared herself to him greatly, although at his age, a pretty face and a willingness to serve is all it can take to induce such feelings.

Hmm.

Perhaps I can turn this to my advantage.

I contacted Winter, and allowed him to go on with his apologies before interrupting him.

"I will not hold you up for long," I said, "I wanted to speak to you about (y/n)."

"Yes, and again, your majesty, I am--"

"I know. I've observed of late that the two of you get along fairly well."

The look of panic on his face was priceless, but he wiped it away and went on.

"Yes, of course. She's been a treasure, begging your pardon. I didn't mean to give the wrong impression."
"I'm not upset," I replied. "On the contrary, I'd actually like to encourage this attachment."

"Your majesty?"

"I'm sure we can work something out on this head that we will both find agreeable."

*Your POV*

It was a struggle just to open your eyes.

And when you did, you had to blink several times to clear the bleariness away.

"Uggh..."

You moved your arms, and felt little stabs of pain. There was an IV inserted into the soft skin on the inside of your elbow, and the movement jiggled it.

You remembered eating the pork, and collapsing...

How long had you been here?

You looked around--and paled when you noticed that you had a visitor.

Cooler was sitting across the room; when he realized you were awake, he came to sit beside you.

"I thought you were--you nearly died," he said.

"But here I am."

You took a deep breath. The monitor began beeping quickly, as your heart rate began to tick upward.

If Cold knew he was here--

"It's alright," he replied, "I just--if you'd come with me, I could've protected you."

"If I had come with you, your father would have gotten me," you replied, "And you know that."

"No," came the quick reply, "I know I could have stopped it."

He stopped and looked away.

"It was Perma, wasn't it, who was responsible?"

He nodded. "Father discovered that right away."

"As I figured. At least it didn't get to Winter."

"He was feeling terrible about you being poisoned on his account," Cooler said quietly.

"It was my job to protect him. And I did."

"But what about your son? What if you had--"

You gave him a quiet stare.
"What I found," he said a moment later, somewhat rattled by your look, "Is that she said she offered you the hand of friendship. What did she promise you?"

"What do you think?" you looked away. "She promised me my son. It tempted me, but--"

"Your son."

His tone shifted.

"But I was offering you the same thing, and you declined to accept it."

"I turned your offer down for nearly the same reason as hers. Except that with her offer, Brisk's life would be in danger. I wasn't willing to risk it."

"And my offer?"

"My own. If I die, which is very likely should I choose you, I will lose every chance to see him again."

"But did you even consider what taking her offer would mean? What about me? Did you think about me?"

"I--"

"I want to know. Did you, or did you not, think about me at any point in all of this?"

"No," you said, "I--I thought it wouldn't work, in any case--"

"Are there any circumstances in which you would come back to me?"

You looked up at him.

It wasn't that you didn't want to.

It was that it was impossible to. Cold would find you, anywhere you went. If you left things as they were--

"I--no," your voice was shaking. "As things are now, no."

Cooler didn't seem to hear any word but the one he wished least to hear.

He got up.

"Cooler--"

"Then," he said slowly, "There is no chance of reconciliation."

And with that, he left.

The nurse came in shortly afterwards to give you food. You didn't eat much of it at first, but she pressed you to take more until you relented and cleaned the plate. It was all soft food, easy to digest.

"You're very lucky, you know," she said, "Lord Winter has got his best working on you."

You just nodded.
She left, and you turned on your side.

You were never going to see Brisk again.

That day in the garden, that tiny piece of happiness you felt, that was all you would ever get. His lightness, the strength in his grip, those eyes...the smile he'd given you...

It was...

The tears came, quick and fast. You tugged a pillow from the large pile under your head, and clutched at it, holding tight.

Your baby was safe. Your baby was happy.

Why did it have to hurt this much?

Why? Why, why why, why, why?!

You woke unexpectedly, some time later.

Cried yourself to sleep again. This was becoming such a bad joke...

The scouter, which had been laid on the bedside table, was giving off a ringing sound.

You grabbed it, and put it on.

"Hello?" you asked, weakly.

"(Y/n)? Good to see you're up."

It was Cold again, in the tone he used when he wanted something. It was rich, polite, nice...

"How are you?"

"Well enough," you said, "The nurse gave me food, but it's all..."

"Terribly boring, I'd imagine. But they have to do that when you get poisoned, you know."

"Yes, I know. Is there something you need me to do?"

"Yes, my dear." Again, the suave tone. "Before you return to me, there is one more thing."

"What is that?"

"Lord Winter will have one final request to make of you. You will grant it."

"Of course my lord, but what--?"

"You will, won't you?"

"Yes, majesty."

You could almost see him there, grinning at the sound of those words. He loved to hear them so.

"That's a good girl. He should be in within another day or so."
And with that, he was gone.

You were alone again. The scouter you placed back on the table.

*Beep...beep...beep...*

The heart monitor was normal again, slow and steady.

You clung once more to the pillow.

Winter did not come until the next day, and he arrived shortly after your pitiful lunch.

"Are you well?" he asked.

"Well enough," you said quietly, "The food is dull, but they tell me that I am recovering."

"They told me as much. And they said that you could take a turn in the little garden, if you were feeling up to it."

You took a deep breath. "If you wish for the company, my lord."

There was a long little jacket to go on over your rather thick hospital gown, and a small pair of shoes. Once you got them on, one of Winter's guards offered you his arm.

You took it, and Winter--on foot himself, lead you out.

The garden's flowers were blooming, and he pointed this out, chatting about how you had felt and what your progress had been, little things like that. But he kept glancing side to side as you walked, as if looking for something.

And then, finally, he seemed to find it.

A bench, overshadowed by a tree and flanked by flowerbeds.

The guard helped you to sit down on it, and Winter sat beside you.

"The King must have already told you," he said, "But..."

"You had a request for me, he said."

Fiddling with something in his pocket.

What was...?

"I suppose he wanted you to be surprised," he went on, "Our King can be a capricious one. But here, I have his blessing."

He had no idea.

"Well..."

"Is something wrong, my lord? Are you--"

"I'm fine," Winter said dismissively, "I am not here to worry you. I'm...just trying to find the right words."
You waited, as he drew a box from his pocket.

"I was wondering if..."

He started to open it.

"...you would consent to marry me?"
Chapter Summary

He told you, didn't he? There was no chance, he said. Things are worse, but...this is all you can do.

Fiancée

*King Cold's POV*

It was a good idea, I told myself.

With Perma's treason, and with her not being a part of someone else's household via marriage—or rather, still being in her father's household—I could very easily take a large chunk of their estate, lands and money alike, as what my father affectionately called "a treason tax."

But I sat and thought, and noting how well the old man took to my little (y/n), well...it came to me. Why should I go through all that--the debating, the possible counteroffers, the courts which will take months to decide everything--when I can simply offer him the hand of a courtesan? And, through her, I can get everything he owns; it will be hers after he dies in name only.

How funny that Cooler's refusal to keep her gained me so much.

After having that thought, however, I had to think of...other things.

I heard that he had visited her, and I noticed myself that she seemed unusually muted when I talked to her. I can only assume that something happened, something...unhappy, as it were.

I'd like to keep it that way.

I contacted Cooler, and when he showed up onscreen, studied him for a few moments. He looked tired, and more--hard, perhaps, is the right word--than usual.

"Good afternoon, father."

"You don't look well."

"My son is not sleeping well in the nights."

"Don't you have a nanny for that?"

"I've...wanted to spend more time with him, is all. Make sure he doesn't see me as some stranger. Is it a crime to want my child to know me?"

"No need to be hostile," I said, "I've been going over a few things of late, and I've come to a conclusion about some things you've been neglecting."

"I have not neglected my duties." Cooler shook his head.
"Your work, perhaps," I nodded, and then gave him a more serious look, "But there are other things
you need to do. I'm having a talk with some of the lords--"

"Father, this is unnecessary--"

"And I will be contacting them about some of their sons and daughters. It's high time you gave that
child a second parent."

"My child has no second parent, and it will stay that way." Cooler's voice was sudden low,
almost...dangerous, and edged with venom.

"Regardless of that," I said, "You still need to do your part to help me out. You must marry,
Cooler. I will be arranging for you to meet some of these--"

"I am incapable of fathering or bearing children, father, as I am sure you remember. They will not
want me."

"I'm sure they can be persuaded. Not everyone wants children, after all."

"Father--"

"This is not optional, Cooler."

"I reserve the right to refuse access to my son to them, regardless."

"Fair enough," I replied, "As long as you snag someone actually worth marrying."

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*Your POV*

He will have a request for you, and you will grant it, Cold had said.

Was this what he meant? What if--what if this was spontaneous? No, no, a proposal like this, so
suddenly, it had to mean that Cold had sanctioned it.

"I--" You stumbled over your words. What if...

You took a moment to take a deep breath.

The box had been opened to reveal a stunning cuff, silver, with a white stone.

"I...yes, of course."

What other response could you give him? If you refused, and it turned out that Cold had wanted
this to happen...

Once again, fear ruled the day.

Winter pushed back the sleeve of your jacket, and attached the cuff as delicately as he could. "I
realize this is unexpected."

"It's...it's alright," you said quietly, "It was only a surprise in that...why would you even want to
marry me? Even though I'm just going to be a..."

Death wife just sounded so terrible. He wasn't in the best shape, but he was still in good health.

"You will be a wife, regardless." He smiled, and when you lowered your head, lifted your chin.
"And I hope I will be able to make you happy."

You gave a weak smile in reply. Winter's hand moved down to the one of yours that he'd put the cuff on--the right hand.

"I don't ask that you love me," he said in his gentle voice, "But I do ask that you like me. I ask you to...

"I can do that easily, my lord," you replied.

"Let me finish, my dear."

"Will you give an old man company?"

"Yes."

Holding to the guard's arm, you were helped back to your room by him. Winter followed, and explained that when you left the hospital, you would be leaving to join him in his home.

You nodded--and noted that as he left, the two guards he was with stayed behind. Two more met him outside.

A nervous look at one of the guards.

"Why are you still here?"

"You're to be his wife. He wants you to be safe. We'll be tasting your food, and...well, being guards in general, I suppose," came the reply.

You gave a sigh.

Food tasters, guards...

You didn't need these things, really.

After the lunch, which they tasted, you went back to sleep. The ringing of your scouter woke you some two or three hours later.

Yawning, you answered.

"(Y/n)?" It was Cold's voice.

"Oh, your majesty. Hello, I'm sorry I sound odd. I just woke up."

"It doesn't matter, you can go right back to sleep after this. Did Winter come there to see you?"

"Yes."

"And what did you say to his request?"

"I said yes," you replied, "He gave me a cuff..."

He sounded so incredibly pleased by this. "Good, good. I was rather worried you might refuse him. Now, I expect your recovery to be a quick one. The wedding will not take very long to arrange, you know, and by the end of the month you should be Lady Winter."
"So quickly? But--"

"The weddings of this sort are usually very small. And he has no living family, so the list will be even smaller."

"I see. Truly, though--he has no one?"

"No one. He had three elder brothers, all of whom perished in battle, and none of whom lived to father children of their own. His parents were both only children themselves."

"So..."

"So, (y/n), you will be well taken care of. See that you take care of him, too."

"Yes, majesty."

The next day, a servant of Winter's arrived--a maid in waiting of some sort. She introduced herself and said that she was there to fetch things and help you on with your clothing, when the time came. And various other little things, of course.

"I can get into clothes well enough on my own. Meaning no offense."

"My lord will be dressing his young wife in beautiful things," she said, "And beautiful things have many buttons, and intricacies. I think he was perhaps worried that you would still be a little weak from not eating as you should and thus find dressing a bit difficult."

"Is this normal for him?"

"Oh, yes. He will dote on you, but...worry, also."

Worry.

Well, he wasn't the only one.
Chapter Summary

He is not the person you hoped you would marry, but he's a gentleman, at least.

Mourning Gown

*King Cold's POV*

Privately, I've considered getting rid of both my sons, but that would only multiply my workload and vastly increase my headaches. I can't trust them not to try and kill me, but I can trust them to do their work.

...generally. Cooler has been neglecting work of late, and I've heard tell that Salza is picking up the slack. I'll be speaking to him soon if that doesn't change; as it is I have other things to worry about.

I've already had to triple my caffeine intake, to say nothing of the wine.

It's been a constant battle of staying up, and winding down just enough to get a few hours' sleep. Wake, consume, go through the day, consuming multiple times, take wine to slow everything down again.

I am so very, very tired.

*Your POV*

The doors were opened, and you began to walk.

At the end of the aisle stood--wait, stood?--Lord Winter.

Through the thin black veil, you weren't entirely sure he couldn't see your look of complete surprise.

Either way, he smiled at you.

Most of those in attendance, that you passed, were his servants and guards, with a few nobles scattered here and there. Twenty, at the most, you might say.

Deep breath.

You couldn't help but think of Cooler. How different would things have been if he'd made his decision earlier? Would you be marrying him now?

An uncomfortable sinking feeling clouded in.

You shook your head. No, today was not about that, about him. He was...he was in the past, as was your child, and neither of them were feasibly accessible. Cooler either did not understand, or did not want to understand, and Brisk would be raised without knowledge of you.
This marriage, this was the closest thing you would get to respectability, to legitimacy—which was the only thing you had left to really hope for.

Despair had been a long time coming. You'd tried to stave it off, but still, it had come.

But to look at Winter, to see him beaming as he was...it was a small ray of sunlight, a silver lining to a dark cloud. He was proud to stand beside you.

You reached your place, and turned towards him, and he moved your veil up and folded it back, exposing your face.

The priest spoke then.

"Please join hands."

Winter extended his hands to you, and you took hold of them.

The priest nodded. "We have gathered today, not to join two souls in this life and the next, as is the fashion for most marriages. Instead, we have gathered to witness a union of companionship until death."

He looked at you.

"Will you wed this man, and keep him unto his death, whether it be by sickness or age?"

"I will."

He looked back to Winter. "Will you take this woman as your wife, and care for her, as she will care for you?"

"I will."

The priest nodded.

"Then by the power vested in me, I now pronounce you..."

Deep breath. Your own.

"...man and wife. You may now kiss the bride, and seal your joining."

Winter's lips met your own, far more gently than you would have thought.

And that was that.

You were now a married woman.

There was a small reception, but it did not last long. The only thing of note, for you, was the fact that Winter remained standing the entire time; albeit he was leaning on a cane for most of the night, while you were on his other arm. When you made noise about his leg, he gave you a laughing reply.

"The doctor has me loaded up on painkillers. I intend to remain upright and wholly vertical today."

"Until you go home, of course," came the voice of one of the guests. There was much laughter.

You'd forgotten about that. Of course it would be expected of you. It wouldn't be the first time you
had to bear it, although--

Your grip tensed ever so slightly.

"Let's not make mention of that right now," Winter said, "We are civilized people, are we not?"

He didn't look back at you, but he *had* to have guessed the meaning of that grip.

"As you wish, my lord."

After a little more chatter, you were told to have a bite to eat from the tasting table.

"When is dinner?" you asked.

"When we get home. It's late in the day as it is," Winter replied, "And to eat a full meal in formalwear is a trial no one should have to go through. It will not be long, my dear, don't worry. Tomorrow will be the true wedding feast."

You moved off to the tasting table and got a plate of various little finger foods--half a sandwich, a few small, skewered fruits, and other dainties. All of them were gone in a hurry.

The maid that had tended you since your poisoning approached you a moment later.

"Excuse me, my lady," she said, giving a slight bow. "But it's time for the dance."

"Dance? I thought--"

Wedding dances were one thing. But Winter, with his age...

...you looked up and in the direction of the apparent dance floor. Winter was looking back, and giving you yet another smile.

He'd been nothing but a gentleman, even now.

What was he hiding?

Despite your suspicions, however, you moved through the crowd and in his direction.

When you reached him, he took you by the hand.

"The doctor is not going to be happy with me in the morning," he said, "But I will dance at my own wedding."

"He must be wetting himself with fear," you laughed.

"Or screaming in frustration."

There was no band to strike up a tune. There were no fellow dancers. There was only the two of you, in the middle of that floor, going round and round in elegant circles.

"Why did you choose me?" you said quietly.

"I didn't," Winter whispered in your ear, "But I am glad you said yes to me."

He hadn't chosen you. That meant that he'd been...

...been told to choose you?
"You looked away.

"No, no," he said, "I will not have my bride hanging her head in shame. What you were does not matter. What you are now does."

"You barely know me." You looked up into his eyes--dull red--and studied his face. There was no mark of deception whatsoever. "You're putting out so much romantic effort for a woman you barely know, a woman of no..."

"What did I say about shame?"

"I have the distinct impression that you enjoy rescuing women," you said, with the first smile you'd managed so far that day.

"You could say that."

When the two of you left, it was "Lady Winter."

When you arrived at his--your--home, the guards addressed you again as Lady Winter.

All through dinner--Lady Winter.

And one final time you heard it, right before retiring for the night.

From the doctor, strangely.

"I'm going to level with you," he said, "His lordship has over-exerted himself today and I'm not entirely sure he won't have some sort of trouble tonight...if you catch my meaning."

"Is that so?"

"We gave him a little--a--a pill to help him, you see," the doctor went on, practically wringing his hands. "And it will exacerbate his already existing trouble."

"Would you prefer I got it over with quickly, then?"

"All I can tell you is not to be in a hurry. That'll send his heart rate skyrocketing. I've got nurses on alert in case anything does happen."

"Why would you give him the pill if it would harm him?"

"At his age, we're not going to deny him the ability to have sex. I can worry all I like, but...when you start denying yourself pleasures of that sort, life begins to lose its luster."

"Tell me what you want me to do, then, precisely. So I don't misunderstand."

"Keep an eye, or feel, out for his heart rate. If it gets too high, slow down."

"I'll do what I can."

You took a deep breath and headed down the hallway, towards your new bedroom. This would not be too hard. The way the doctor put it, you might be in control...and if you were, it would be easy enough to get through this.

When you entered the bedroom, Winter, of course, was the first thing you noticed. He was half-
undressed, still in his pants, and seated on one side of the bed.

You approached it, and reached, somewhat awkwardly, behind you to start unzipping the gown you were in.

He did not attempt to help you, but watched as the dressed was removed and put aside.

Shivering somewhat in the thin slip, you moved onto the bed.

Only to notice an unopened box on his bedtable, which he caught you staring at.

"The pill," Winter laughed and gestured at it when he noted your confusion, "That they think I need."

"My lord?"

He moved back, with three or four pillows supporting his posture. "If you are unwilling..."

"I have a duty, my lord, as your wife."

"A duty that can wait."

"But--"

"At least for tonight. I have to learn about your preferences before I can really call myself your husband, you know."

"My lord," you said, "You will likely make the doctor happy with that statement, but what about yourself?"

"I can always wait," Winter replied, "I haven't the stamina to go at you as I'm sure your previous lover did."

"I could always--"

"No, no, that won't be necessary," he said, "If you're certain about this, tonight--I intend for you to enjoy yourself just as much as I do."

You moved closer, kneeling beside him.

Winter reached a hand up to your face, drawing you closer--until your lips met.

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*Cooler's POV*

The estate was lavish. Fountains, marble--everything that you would expect in a family home. I was met by an entourage; the guards lined the "runway" when my ship landed.

The family approached; the first mother, with anxious parade, was first to speak. After, of course, I had been announced.

"We are glad you have chosen to grace us with your presence, your highness."

I gave a slight nod, and gave my best response.

"I am happy to see that you are so welcoming."
"The honor is ours, truly," chimed in the second mother.

Their daughter was standing behind them. She was nudged forward.

"I am Lady Frigi," she said, curtsying. "It is a pleasure to be considered."

I walked beside her, and we were herded into their home and towards a dinner table.

"You are quite ambitious, I hear," I said to Frigi, once we were seated.

"Oh, yes, your highness," she said brightly, "I'm close to completing an MBA. Within several years I will be running some of the estates."

Family work. That was a warning sign.

"But I will not be too busy to tend to my personal life, of course. One must make time for many obligations."

"Of course."

"She is quite an intelligent girl," said the first of her mothers, "Unfortunately, she has had to be such to make up for her infertility."

"Did you not want children?" I looked at Frigi. The light in her eyes was not the least bit diminished by this mention.

"I was ready to have them for the sake of marriage," she said, "But...I think it will save me a world of trouble in the long run."

A no, then.

The rest of the evening was spent with the mothers talking up their daughter's mind, and her connections through the university that she was still attending. Dinner was an afterthought, almost---they were selling their daughter's virtues as best they could.

And it was utterly disgusting.

She spoke, and looked, and thought, for my benefit, and they did all they could to dwell on how much Frigi would have to offer me.

Is this what I told (y/n) to leave over? Estates, connections, fool nobles with nothing better to do than curry favor?

All I want to do is go home and take care of my son.

But instead, here I am.

This is all I have to actually do now. Get myself married to someone of good standing, regardless of whether she cares for me or not.

But tonight, at least, I can go home and care for my son.

That's all I seem to want to do anymore.
Chapter Summary

Your life is changed--however briefly this might last, it is good.

Proper

You woke with an arm around you, and a tail coiled over and around one of your ankles.

Winter was curled as close to you as he could possibly be.

You lay quietly. Even now, moving your legs seemed a joke.

It was possible of course, but after the previous night...

...there were things you never thought possible in the bedroom, that no man had ever done for you- until now.

Who could've ever thought a tongue could do things like that?

But he had, that man, he had. He'd said it was to get you done first, but first had turned into second when you finally moved back over him, and...gods.

While your head was swimming in a sea of lusty heat, he'd made some joke about his age. He'd been doing this for centuries, could you really think he would learn nothing in all that time?

You'd muttered some weak apologies. He'd cuddled up to you and then you'd both gone to sleep.

As you were thinking back about that, you felt movement beside you.

Winter was awake. He gave an odd laugh, and curled closer to you. "I'm not sure I want to get up. How did you sleep?"

"Straight through the night," you replied. A rarity.

"My servants will be in in about..." he looked at the clock in the corner, and then back at you, "...half an hour to get us up and ready for the day. If you don't want them trying to stay in the bathroom with you while you're bathing, you'll probably want to get that done first."

"How did you know I'd prefer to do it alone?"

"I had a feeling you'd like the privacy, is all."

*King Cold's POV*

I have kept tabs on (y/n) since her marriage, and all seems well there. The old man seems happy with her, and has done nothing but spoil her.

She, on the other hand, has elected to take on some of his charity work. Whether it is because
poverty is personal to her, or she wishes to endear herself to Winter or his people, does not matter. What matters is that she is staying where she is.

It has been three weeks, and she has settled in as well as if she had been through a long courtship. I'm glad--this will be one less thing to worry about.

Winter's daughter, however...

...her, I will have to worry about, in addition to Frieza.

Perma will have found some way, no doubt, to retain at least some of her wealth. There will be ongoing issues with her hiring mercenaries and disrupting whatever she can.

Frieza is not outwardly doing anything, but I've heard he has been training here and there, with his Ginyu Force, and with that monkey woman. I refuse to dignify her by calling her his wife. Though I must applaud Frieza, making certain she bore him a child has linked her to him, and will ensure she stays close. For now.

And then, then there's Cooler.

I don't know whether to be more angry or disappointed in him. He was performing adequately for a while, but his work ethic has gradually declined and now it doesn't resemble anything even remotely sensible.

Salza has alerted me, once again, although he seems more worried about Cooler's well-being than his work. It amounts to the same either way. Cooler has barely left his quarters these last few days, something about his son having a cold or being mildly ill. He won't let the nannies near the child.

He seems to have forgotten who he is and what he is responsible for.

That child should be the least of his worries.

As I approach his quarters, the thought echoes in my mind again.

There was a tinkling crash inside, like something had been pushed over.

And then another. And another.

Whatever is going on is going to end. Now.

I clenched my fist and waved the guards aside.
Frieza has a chat with someone about his father; Cooler learns of your marriage.

*Frieza's POV, 3rd Person*

Frieza glanced around briefly, and then noted the tall, towering figure in the courtyard's corner.

"You don't hide yourself very well, do you?"

"On account of my height, it is hard to do so," a feminine voice flowed from far above his head, "We should hurry."

"Of course. Have you perfected your...transformation yet?"

"I have." The face was grinning, he was sure of it. "It has been a long time since I had the pleasure of using it."

There was a pause, and the tall figure glanced down the hallway on the right side of the courtyard.

"Father is busy right now," Frieza said, "And off-planet, in fact."

"I can never be too careful with him," replied the voice, "Especially now. The saiyan was distracting him so well, too."

"He must have grown suspicious of her. Either way, it puts no hitch in our plans."

"Your plan, you mean. You're the one carrying this out. I'm just the one who's going to clean it up."

"After all is done, what will happen to you? I can't imagine something of this size will sit well."

"I will be very sleepy, for one. You should have some men ready to move me afterwards." There was a laugh.

"Good, good. So long as you make yourself good and hungry beforehand, there shouldn't be a problem."

*Cooler's POV, 3rd Person*

Brisk had gotten better of late. That was a nasty cold that hit him, and Cooler glad it didn't get any worse. He’d been sleeping through the night for the past few days, a thing for which he was very grateful.

Begrudgingly, Cooler went to the console to check up on his work. Salza had handled a lot of
things for him in the last week but there were still some things that needed his attention.

After finishing that tedious bit of business, he began to browse the news of Arcosia--while trying to figure out a suitable reply to the latest inquiry from his would-be fiancee's family. They were pleased he was behaving the gentleman, but they were eager for things to move on. They were suggesting suitable outings, places that would be romantic to ask for her hand in marriage...

...marriage, now, there was something he'd rather not think about.

Idly flipping through the various news types, he happened to land on the society pages. They were filled with blurbs about this engagement or that, the birth of a child in a prominent family, and other such news.

But what caught his eye was the following headline:

*LORD WINTER MARRIES DEATH-WIFE IN SHORT CEREMONY*

Huh, he hadn't been aware of Winter even entertaining the thought...

He reached down to tap the link, and hesitated only briefly. The reason for that soon became evident, though he chided himself for worrying.

But then the new page loaded.

The first picture, and the largest, was of Lord Winter and (y/n). Winter was in his chair, and (y/n) stood beside him, in one of the courtyards. It was a prepared photo, of course. What drew his attention most was not the fresh grief at simply seeing her there, the cuff with Winter's biogem color, or the flattering gown she'd apparently been given.

It was the smile she was giving Winter.

He remembered a time when she gave that smile to him.

His chest tightened.

That was *his* smile.

He got up immediately. She couldn't have just gone off and married him. But she had. She'd said no, and gone off and--but--

She's gone.

As close as she was before, as close as he'd felt he was to still getting her back...

You told her there was no chance.

He hardly knew what he was doing; rage carried his body up, sent his fist through the console screen, and scattered his blood all over the keyboard. The chair was next, it was smashed and left useless in the floor. The living room--tables sent into splinters of wood and twisted metal. Paintings were taken off the walls and broken in half or worse. And the lamps...

...knocking them over wasn't enough. He grabbed them all over the next minute and smashed them against the wall.

The console screen in this room, gone. The keyboard, smashed to pieces. A wine bottle, broken.
Blood was now flowing liberally from both his hands. His anger, nowhere near sated, was about to carry him into the kitchen—but then, suddenly, the door opened.

Seething, Cooler now faced his father.

"And what, pray tell, prompted this tantrum?"

"You," Cooler growled, "You did this. This is your fault. You took her from me."

"Is this really over a woman?" Cold stepped in, ignoring the glass, metal, and bits of wood. "I did nothing, as did you. The time to claim her is long since passed. But I'm not here to talk about her."

Cooler was about to bolt at him, damn the consequences, but the second he moved his father was in front of him, planting an enormous fist in his gut.

"I came here to see the reason for the neglect of your work, but you've already shown me that."

Cooler gasped in pain, but began, "I have a son to--"

"Cooler, I...no. No, the time for reason has long since passed."

A guard or two passed in behind him, and Cold signed to them to head for the next room over. Brisk's room.

"If you are too mentally ill to do your job, you are too ill to care for your child."

"You can't do this to me!" Cooler shouted, "You've taken everything else--"

"Boy," Cold's voice deepened to a dangerous level, "Listen, and listen good."

The guards emerged. One was holding a sleeping Brisk.

"You will follow my directions or, and I am sure you know I'm a man of my word here, you will never see this brat again."

Cooler looked up with wide, frightened eyes.

"You are not to leave your quarters unless it is to conduct your work or to continue moving your engagement along. Do I make myself clear?"

"You--"

One enormous hand gripped him about the neck. "Do I?"

Cooler looked down, and nodded.

"Good."

Cooler relaxed, but too soon.

He never saw the first punch coming.

*King Cold's POV*

I beat the boy to within an inch of his life, and well he deserved it, too.
And as I left, I met Salza in the hallway.

"Captain Salza, good to see you. It seems that my son has need of the healing tank, but, and this is a strict order, not until twenty minutes from now."

"Yes, your highness."

I went back to my ship, and began a call to Frieza.

"Tell your son to expect his cousin..."
Chapter Summary

Cooler is told the terms of his imprisonment, Frieza adjusts to the new addition to his little family, and you have a talk with Cold.

More Changes

*Cooler's POV*

I could barely breathe without pain by the time father was done with me.

Fist in gut, against jaw, in face...my nose was broken, as were a number of my ribs.

I woke in a healing tank, and when I got out and was dried off, the doctor handed me a datapad. On it were a list of rules my father had lined out.

I was to go straight back to my quarters, and not leave unless I was told to. He would send a morning message allowing me to leave to work, and prompts to visit my "intended." I was to go, do as told, and come back to my quarters as soon as I was done.

Or, and he was clear, I would not see my son again.

Ever.

His final details were the most unsettling. There were two conditions for release, one, if he was personally convinced that I would not become troublesome again, and two, if I was married.

Somehow I doubted that would convince him.

*Frieza's POV*

I received the notice from father at the beginning of the workday, and got word from one of the...minions...that my brother's child had been delivered to my wife about midday.

What is father doing now? I have enough on my plate without having to worry about Cooler's brat as well. I will later need his aid, but I do not intend to repay him by taking care of his child; that is not what I signed up for when I began this plan of mine.

I entered my quarters, and found to my displeasure, that Yassa was holding both Algid and Brisk. Even worse, she was breastfeeding both of them.

"I don't recall that he needed milk," I said.

"He's been crying since he got here," Yassa replied, "It was the only way to quiet him down."

"They're both too old for it anyway,"
"You'll get your share, don't worry."

If there was any left after those two greedy little piglets got done, maybe. They were both half-saiyan, after all, despite all outward appearances.

"My father hasn't bothered you of late, has he?"

"No," she replied, "He's been almost friendly, in fact."

"Friendly?"

She looked up at my suspicious glance, "Asking how the children are, asking how your training is going...he definitely knows what you're doing."

"I know he knows what I'm doing. That's nothing new. Has he visited in person?"

"No."

"Made any calls?"

"Not to me. He speaks frequently to Kuriza, though."

"What does he say?"

"The usual things you would say to children. Asking how he is doing, what he has learned since they last talked, and something about making sure his papa behaves."

"He would ask about that," I said, glare deepening.

She popped both children off her breasts at this point; both of them burped a few moments later.

"I'll be right back," she said, "It's time for their nap."

Brisk was still fussy, but I heard her speaking to the nanny in the next room, and she was back in a few minutes.

"You seem to have calmed down quite considerably," I said to her.

"I'm simply exhausted today, is all. Did you want me more alert?"

"You're going to be a Queen soon. You have to keep on your toes, in and out of the training room."

"Queen? Me?"

"Of course. Do you think I would go to all the trouble of this plan if I did not intend to take his place?"

"What about your elder brother?"

"My brother's life is in shambles," I replied, "And if this keeps up, he will do anything to get back what he's lost."

"Including trading off the crown? You think getting what he want would ease that loss? You honestly think he would settle for not being King?"

"I don't think so. I know so."
And even if he didn't, he would have no choice but to accept it.

*Your POV*

Cold did not contact you too frequently, but today was one of those days.

You dressed as well as you could, and sat quietly in front of the viewscreen as the call was connected.

And then there he was. After the initial niceties and greetings, he changed the topic.

"I've heard you and Lord Winter are getting along very well."

"Yes, majesty. He's been very good to me."

"And there have been no further attempts on his life?"

"No. I have not seen any attempts, either, although I have been looking for it to happen."

"I'm sure Perma will find a way to try again, especially now, considering your position."

"I will do my absolute best to ensure he lives." You paused, and thought for a moment before asking, "And how have you been?"

"Well enough," Cold grinned, an unsettling lecherous expression that blended with amusement and disturbed you. "I can't say the same for the rest of the Angels, however. Your presence is missed."

"I suppose they got used to my taking the attention off of them?"

"What are you implying, my dear?"

"Nothing, majesty. Just that--an evening with you is intense, and they likely grew accustomed to seeing less of you."

"I suppose you're right," Cold replied, "I find myself...looking forward to your return, shall we say. It is easier to look into the eyes of the others, but their bodies don't provide quite the thrill that yours does."

You turned red. Size. It was all to do with size.

"I think Gavi in particular has gotten used to, as you put it, your taking the attention off her. She's been a little ill of late."

"Ill? Has anyone tried to poison her?"

"Not that I can see," said Cold, "But she has begun eating less of a day. Asking her produced only some quip about fasting due to some family reason or other."

"That hardly seems sensible."

"I agree. I would hate to lose her; she's been in my service the longest. But enough about Gavi," he said, waving a hand absently, "There's something else I need to talk to you about."

The rest of the call dealt with an upcoming conference in early July that he expected both you and Winter to attend, and with a flirtatious goodbye, the call ended.
Winter discusses his death with you, Cold talks to Gavi, and Cooler makes a plan to give you something at the conference his father is having.

Do not by any means destroy yourself, for if you live you may yet have good fortune, but all the dead are dead alike. ~Hwin, *The Horse And His Boy*, Chronicles of Narnia

The jokes about Winter's libido were numerous to start with, and only increased in frequency once you responded, with equal laughter, that you were the one who had to keep up with him. It was late June, and despite everything your libido had kicked back up--and yet, Winter's still outdid yours!

The most frequent perpetrators were the female servants in Winter's--your--home, who seemed more than able to tell when Winter had been at you. No one else seemed to speak as candidly, not the tutors and professionals who helped you on with understanding the estate issues, not the lords and ladies you were introduced to, no one, but those servants.

"Is that so?" you'd ask, when the subject came up.

"You're a bit wobbly," they'd say, "He must have done the job very well."

Very well indeed.

Whenever Winter did have a go at you (once a week at the least), you never got away with fewer than two climaxes--three and four were fairly common. There was still the matter of his heart rate to be concerned about, but he seemed more than satisfied with only a single finish, even if he did have to wait for it. But you, you were not allowed to wait. His hands found places on your body that had your knees weak, places you'd never have thought to touch. But he knew them, and went for them. When you told him of the sensitivity of the tail, he experimented until he was almost able to get you off simply from stroking it.

And he did it gently, too. Gods, was he gentle.

He brought your body to such heights, but when you fell...he was there, affectionate, cuddly almost, ready to hold close as the glow gradually dissipated into comfort.

The doctors were not entirely pleased with this development. They scolded you, they scolded him, they tried to tell him it wasn't good for him to do it too often, but Winter's determination to continue sleeping with you remained. He cited his age, he cited your looks, he cited everything possible to get them to leave the issue be.
It was such a minor thing, in such a minor way, but...it was a fight, for your sake.

But sadly, it was a fight that he was losing.

The morning after a particularly long session, he'd had some trouble getting up. By breakfast an hour later, he found it difficult to breathe, and by lunch you'd persuaded him to go straight to the doctor.

You joined said doctor in his office an hour into this appointment, after clearing Winter's schedule for the rest of the evening.

"Shut the door, my lady. I do not have good news for you."

You obeyed, and took a seat. "How is he?"

"Not well. And before I tell you what is wrong, I would like to say this. I might have told you that too much sex is bad for him, but given the care he tells me he's taken to avoid overexerting himself, I don't believe that's what caused this. If anything I think it may have helped his overall health."

"Doctor, tell me what happened." The attempts to calm you down were suspect--were things truly that bad?

"We believe he had a heart attack either early this morning or during the night," the doctor replied, "I don't believe it was caused by the sex, I'm more inclined to think it was some unseen issue we failed to notice."

"But you're so thorough. How could that happen? How could anything be missed?"

"I don't know, myself." He sighed, fingers clenching the bridge of his nose. "Were you engaged in sex with him last night?"

"Yes," you replied.

"And how long did it go on?"

"Several hours. But he wasn't exerting himself like...like you'd think."

"If he is going at it for several hours, he's exerting himself too much, no matter how he's going about it. But go on. Did he complain of anything? Even if it was small?"

"He said his chest hurt a little, but when I tried to put a stop to the, the...you know, he insisted he'd continue."

"But did it go away?"

"He said it did," you replied, "I tried to persuade him, but he wouldn't allow me to call for the guard to alert you. He said it would be a waste of time, and waited until I fell asleep."

"If I didn't know any better I would think he was trying to die," the doctor rubbed at his temples and groaned. "We're doing everything we can for him, and we'll let you know when you're able to see him."

Winter had been moved to the infirmary, and you almost choked when you were allowed in to see him.
He was laying in a hospital bed with more lines in him than a marionette. His eyes were barely open but when you walked in, he smiled.

"I thought you'd be asleep," you said, "You really ought to be resting."

"I wanted to see you," Winter replied. He shifted a little to better look at you, and you took a seat at the end of the bed. "They've told me I've had a heart attack. Is that what they said to you?"

"Yes. Do you doubt them?"

"No, I was just worried they might try to sugarcoat it somehow." He seemed to notice the worry in your face, because he raised a weak hand to your face. "It's their job to worry, you know. Not yours."

"I'm your wife. I'm supposed to worry about you."

"I'm 974 years old, (y/n). I am far past the point of worrying. I...well..."

You covered his hand with your own, and held it there.

"How do I say this?" He gave another weak smile. "I'm not worried about death, my dear. I'm tired, and I welcome it."

"But you have so much to live for," you said.

"I know that I have you, and I have people that depend on me. But when you've lived as long as I have...I've woken up with tubes in my throat more times than I care to think about. I would go to sleep, and have servants that checked on me hourly. The issues have always passed, but...anymore, I don't know that I want them to."

"But--"

"Listen to me, (y/n)." Winter took a deep breath. "And I expect you to let me finish without running for the doctor."

"Alright," you said quietly.

"I thought I lost everything when my first wife died, and for the longest time, I threw myself into my work. Perma...she was so distant, and I could never figure out why. And then you came along, and...well, you didn't make it all better, but you were concerned, you were supportive. You made me feel like I had something else to go on for."

You smiled.

"I didn't care if the King arranged it. I didn't care what you were, the fact that you listened, that you were eager to help me..." he shook his head. "I felt that I could let go."

"Let go?"

"Of life. I can trust any one of my servants with my life, but you, you I could trust with my death. I could trust you to make it comfortable. Who better than an assassin for that, hmm?"
"My lord, really. Are you saying you want me to--?"

"I am saying that you've helped me, and I want you to continue to do so. Come, be the mercenary sort the King seems to think you are."

You lowered your gaze.

"I know you don't want to be where you are," he replied, "But there is something I want to tell you. If you obey him and live, things may yet change. If you disobey, he will have you executed--and dead, nothing can change for the better."

"I could tell you this, my lord."

"I have lived a long, long time. Were I your age, I would look at this more differently."

There was a pause, and he took a deep breath. "Could you tell me something?"

"Whatever you want to hear."

"Tell me how you came into the King's service?"

That was the real shame. You looked away.

"No one will hear you but me, my dear. I want there to be no secrets between us."

You looked back. It hardly mattered if you told him. If what he said was true, he was determined to die anyway.

"You know Prince Cooler's son?" you asked, looking up.

"Of course."

You looked down at his hands, which you took into yours. "I am his mother."

"What?"

"It was arranged by the Queen," you said, "She wanted a child around. Cooler and I...tried to avoid it, but...I fell pregnant anyway. And...then I..."

It was painful, but there was no stopping.

"...I fell in love with him, but it wasn't enough."

"What happened, my dear?"

"We'd agreed that I would leave, but I thought that...he would...he said he loved me, and I thought..."

"You thought he would keep you. But he didn't, did he?"

"I went home. I went...I went back to Planet Vegeta. Back to...poverty. It was comforting, I knew how to handle it, it was better than thinking about my son constantly. But...Cold followed me. He...he offered to have me trained by the assassin's guild, and..."

"It's alright, my dear."

"...and then I became one of his Angels."
"So when I asked you about Cooler's violence..."

"I lied to you. I'm sorry, I didn't want to make this your problem. He'd decided he couldn't live without me, but by then it was far too late, and..."

"And now here you are." Winter squeezed your hands. "I know it will hurt, but...take care of the King, and he will take care of you."

"He doesn't even want me. He wants the idea of me. He wants to show his son that he shouldn't throw things away."

"But he keeps his word."

There was that.

Relative silence. There was the beep of the machinery, the sound of his heartbeat on the monitor...

"How do you want me to do it?"

"You can't get a knife, or poison," Winter replied. His smile turned mischievous. "So here's what I want you to do..."

He took down the oxygen mask, and handed you a pillow.

"Someone will see us," you said quietly. "There must be cameras."

"Not in this room. They don't know it's why I requested this room."

Tears pricked at your eyes. "Are you sure this is what you want? Have you...is this..."

"Yes, this is what I want." He smiled. "My love, you worry too much."

My love?

You shut your eyes, and took his hand.

You held his hand, squeezed it, until he stopped squeezing in return, and the heart monitor flatlined. You drew the pillow back and the peace in his face struck you more than anything else--he had never looked so calm in life.

But he was now, in death.

You stuck the pillow back under his head, and lay down beside him, as best you could. You would sleep, and it would look as if Winter had suffocated by his own hand.

And if anyone questioned it...well, it would not be the first time you were suspected of anything.

By this point you were ready for anything to happen.

*King Cold's POV*

"So you will be sending me to fetch her, then?" Gavi gave a little grin, and looked at me.

"No," I replied, "I'm going to allow her the customary mourning time for a death wife, but after that I will go to see her myself. She can still be Lady Winter from the Ivory Palace, of course, and I will
be taking her to that conference I've mentioned to you."

"Of course." She stroked my face, and lay down beside me. "You should sleep, you know. You look exhausted."

"I don't have time to be exhausted," I replied, "I'll sleep later."

"Come now, I can relax you..."

"I know, my dear, I know. But you know I don't sleep here."

"I thought I could try it, at least."

________________________

*Cooler's POV*

Is this what (y/n) went through?

I want to hold Brisk, see him, talk to him, but I can't. It hurts more than I'd ever thought it could. I want news of him, but no one will give me any.

Gods, how could I have done this to her?

The conference was the thing that I had to think of next--I knew father would bring her with him, he would want things rubbed in. I'd heard of Lord Winter's death, and naturally, I knew damn well he would want to reclaim her. Seeing her, though, that was what I looked forward to.

I printed out a picture of Brisk. No matter how upset I was at her for not being willing to come back with me, I would not let this go on. She should have something to remember him by, even if my decisions have ruined her ability to have him as her son.

I will give this to her at the conference. It won't be perfect, but it'll be something.
Two Notes

Chapter Summary

You're taken back into the fold and attend a conference where you run into Cooler again.

Two Notes

A month, the guards told you. A month was what you'd be given. It hardly seemed adequate, but that was about how long it seemed to take most death wives to organize things such that they could part ways from the family, so it was given as the official mourning period as well.

There was a lot to handle, but it was done. Things transferred into your name, contacts that had to get more acquainted with you, nobles that had to be reminded that you were not weak or stupid for not being an Arcosian.

The month seemed to pass quickly regardless of all the work to be done.

The third week in July, you finally received a message from Cold. You were to return to the Ivory Palace, and continue your duties--both to him and your new title--from there. There was no reason you could not tend things from a more secure place.

More secure, right.

But you made the arrangements and kept yourself busy. Video calls, instructions to the servants in Winter's main home, replies to inquiries from the guards, checks to see that Winter's financials were still in order...

It was easy to ignore that nagging heat between your legs when you had so much to do.

"A conference?" You asked.

"Yes," Cold replied, "It's only a one day event, but I'll still expect you to attend."

"Pardon me for saying this--I'm certainly not objecting--but why am I required? From what I know, this is work-related, is it not?"

"Have you forgotten who you are now?" Cold gave a smile, "Winter's, or should I say, your, lands are where many Arcosian soldiers, engineers, and so on come from, and they aid my armies greatly. It's important for you to be aware of what is going on in the PTO."

"And not that I am objecting--"

"What is it this time?"

"It's July. I--I'm aware of the effect it can have of those around me, and I don't want to cause any trouble."
"And you won't," Cold smirked. "The scent has a way of bringing up the mood, you know. It won't be any problem."

"If you believe that," you replied, "I simply wanted to make sure you were aware of it."

"I am. Now, enough talk about that, I have some things for you to look over. You won't be required to give any reports--there are representatives I've appointed to do that for you, as they did for Winter in the past."

"So smile, look pretty, and learn what I can?"

"Exactly. You're quite smart for a monkey."

Noblemen. There were noblemen everywhere, and the kind of finery that only now could you really see without a great deal of surprise. There were also a number of elite soldiers that were not only from Cold's army, but also from Cooler and Frieza's armies, judging from the emblems they were wearing.

You entered the room with Cold on one side, and Gavi on the other.

"Now, ladies," Cold said, "I expect the both of you to learn what you can here. Gavi, be sure that you keep an eye on the Ginyu Force and Armored Squadron. See if you can make sure they stay separated. Talk to the guards and servants to interfere if you have to."

"Yes, majesty."

You made a similar response, and were allowed to leave his side.

*Gavi's POV*

After directing the Armored Squadron to one corner of the dining room area, I managed to get a few minutes to myself. I was starving, but ate only enough to mildly sate my hunger. Every time my stomach growled, I had to remind myself what this was for.

Once my small meal was over, I rose from my seat and started to head over towards the Armored Squadron again. The Ginyu Force had just entered the room, and--

"You do look nice tonight, you know."

I turned, and gave as good of a bow as I could, considering the difference in our heights. "Lord Frieza," I said. "Thank you for the compliment."

As always, he was flanked by Zarbon and Dodoria. But they stood as ever in silence.

"You're quite welcome," He replied, "By chance, have you seen father lately? I can't seem to locate him, as unlikely as that might sound."

"Not recently," I said, "My apologies. He said something about the gardens, but I don't know if he is there now. It might be worth a try."

"Thank you, regardless."

Frieza turned away, and Dodoria with him.
Zarbon, however, stepped closer to me, and offered his hand.

"You can't possibly want to dance," I replied.

"It would be a pleasure, but no," Zarbon said. He turned his hand over. "I have something Lord Frieza wished you to deliver to one of your...companions."

A folded note.

I took it, thanked him, and moved into the corner to unfold and read it.

*Step two, Ardae. Don't disappoint me.*

Ardae hadn't been invited to the conference, and as I recalled wasn't quite happy about it.

She had just as much right to go, perhaps--and if it hadn't been for (y/n), she probably would have been asked to accompany the King. She was just as fanatical as I've been, if not more, about her loyalty to the King. But no, she had had to stay behind.

This could be a problem.

---

*Your POV*

Your memory was being filled with noble names, with details on so-and-so's soldiers, how well this squadron and that were doing, and various other little details gleaned from talking with the other conference attendees and presentations made by the various unit representatives. There would be a lot to sort out after it was all over, and a lot of thinking to do regarding what needed more attention in Winter's--

"(Y/n)?"

That voice.

You stopped cold and turned around.

Cooler. Dressed in a dark dress uniform with a sort of cape covering one arm, and looking every bit his rank.

You bowed.

"It's good to see you, Lord Cooler."

"I--heard that your husband died. I'm sorry to hear that."

"He was a good man," you said, "But I'm thankful he died in his sleep, without suffering."

"Nobody wants to die like that." Cooler gave a weak smile.

"How is--"

Two Arcosians passed by, followed by their dates.

"--your son?"

"I don't know," Cooler replied, "I...haven't been able to see him."
"That's disappointing," you said, "Surely you will see him soon?"

"I can't say."

His voice was almost...too monotone. He was rattled, that was for certain, but--

"Before I forget," he added quickly, "I have a consolation card regarding your husband's death."

"That's very kind of you, but why not simply have it mailed?"

"I thought it would be better in person."

He handed you a folded up bit of paper, and you unfolded it--almost gasped when you realized what it was.

It was a photograph of Brisk.

"I had it done a short time after he--left," Cooler said, "I know what it's like to lose someone now. I wish I hadn't had to."

You gave a weak smile of your own, and folded the picture back together. You loosened the knot in your sash and then tied it back together--with the picture carefully tucked inside.

Several more people, followed by another small crowd, chattering about another talk being given.

"Thank you."

"Something to have, to remember him by. You should have more, but--"

"It's fine, my lord." Tears pricked at your eyes, but there was an attempt to force them back. You had to stay in control here.

Perhaps he was standing too close.

Perhaps you had been too encouraging.

But you found Cooler taking your hands in his own, and--

A shadow overhead.

"Old salt making you thirsty, my son?"

"No, father," Cooler said quickly, "I was consoling her on the loss of her husband."

"And that is appreciated, but I believe your soldiers need your attention. Shoo."

Cooler moved off, but not before glancing back at you one final time.

"And what," Cold said, turning back to you, "Was that about, exactly?"

"I don't know," you replied, "Perhaps he was lonely. He seemed to want only to talk to me, but--"

"But that could easily become more. See that it does not happen again. His fiancee is here, and I don't want to undermine the connection."

"Fiancee? He's engaged?"
"Yes, a bright young woman from the Frigid family, in fact. A good choice, you understand. She's perfectly intelligent and will be a good addition to the royal family."

Right.

A good addition.

You had told him there'd be no chance. Perhaps he had been forced into it, like you had been into that union with Winter. But this woman was much younger. What if--

No, there could be no repining.

That match was dead in the water. As long as Cold remained alive, he would see to it that the two of you stayed separate.
Chapter Summary

Cold finds the picture and consequences are meted out.

Seed

The rest of the evening passed in relative calm. You and Gavi, back in Cold's quarters, gave him reports of everything you'd heard. He praised the both of you for listening so well. She turned over a note to him, and he read over it.

"I suppose I should have seen this coming." Cold rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Still, Ardae has been with me almost as long as you, Gavi. It's a real shame."

"The only question is, why would Frieza be so obvious?" you looked up.

"Again, she has been with me for a long time. Perhaps he felt that she would still carry a grudge over my conquering of her planet...and cooperate with things."

"A lot of effort for a long shot."

"That is a good point. Still..."

"I don't wish to accuse Gavi. But we have to think about the idea that Frieza may be doing this to possibly implicate her. If he was passing the note to her, he might have seen her as getting in the way of his potential plans. Ardae might simply be a secondary thing--an afterthought."

"All good points. But I'll handle this myself," Cold replied, and his attention turned to Gavi. "Now about getting the note..."

You were sent out of the room a moment later.

As soon as you got back to your room, you untied your sash and retrieved the picture so you could get a proper look at it. As you changed into other clothes, you couldn't help but smile at it. He was adorable, smiling at the camera, or at whoever had taken the picture. He looked to be laughing, almost.

Beautiful boy. Absolutely beautiful little thing, so precious...

...you wished you could hold him again, just one more time. How much would he have grown since the last time you held him? He'd be using at least a few words by this point, wouldn't he?

Where was he, you wondered? Cooler said he hadn't seen him...but...

...what had happened? Had he gotten ill? Was he alright?

If only you knew.

Now in your nightclothes, you lay back.
And with the picture clenched in your hand under the pillow, you fell to sleep.

For three or four days you were mostly left alone. The ship was on its way to some station in a system that was a week or so away, and Cold had decided to keep you and Gavi with him for that period of time.

On the fifth day, you were summoned.

You took a deep breath after you finished reading that message. The last time he'd seen you, just before the conference, you'd stayed on your knees, so perhaps it would be the same way now.

But what if it wasn't?

You replied that you were getting ready, and turned to your wardrobe.

If you left the photo here, he'd be sure to find it. He might have ordered people to inspect your room, after all--if he was looking into Gavi and Ardae, then he might look into you as well, mightn't he?

It would be the perfect time.

So along with the teal gown, you chose also a pair of gloves that reached nearly to your elbows, and stuck the picture into the end of the left one. It would not be too obvious; if he wanted them off, you could take them off.

Then you steeled yourself.

And walked out of your room and down the hall to his.

Tap at the door controls.

"Enter." Came a voice from within.

That voice belonged to a guard, whom you saw as you entered. He glanced once at you, but said nothing more as you passed him by and headed for the bedroom.

Deep breath. Another tap at the door controls.

"Enter."

You walked in and saw Cold on one of the large sofas near the window. He was half-reclined, looking over a datapad in his hands, and flicking at it every few moments to scroll something along. In his other hand was a glass of wine he kept sipping from.

Then he looked up, and smiled.

"(Y/n), good. I was wondering when you'd arrive."

"My apologies, my lord. I wanted to look my best."

"Your attention to that detail is to be commended..." he put the datapad and wine aside aside, and motioned you closer. "...but unnecessary."

His legs were spread as soon as he got the underarmor shorts off, and you moved to your knees.
"Gloves?" he seemed half-amused as you reached up to stroke at the soft scales between his legs. The amusement faded after only a few seconds, and before the scales began to bulge, he reached down and grabbed your wrist.

"I don't want these things on me," he said calmly, "And I'm sure you can understand why."

"Friction, yes."

He didn't let go of your wrist, and reached down to tug the glove off--thankfully not the one with the picture in it.

"And now," he said, "For the other one."

He reached for your other hand, which you pulled back. "Let me do that, my lord. You shouldn't have to work to get at me."

Your flinch was evident, but you noticed his earnest gaze dwelling too long on your face. Had he seen your eyes widen?

As the glove came off your hand, he extended his. "Hand it over."

"My lord?"

"What are you hiding from me, (y/n)?"

"Nothing, my lord, really--"

"Hand. It. OVER." His voice rose in anger, and shaking, you handed him the other glove.

Cold held it up, looked into it--and pulled out the picture.

Heartbeat, off to the races.

He unfolded it.

"And what is this, exactly?"

His voice was hard, and yet even at the same time. He turned the picture around for you to look at.

"I--"

"This is not your child, (y/n). You know that."

"My lord--"

"Where did you get it?"

"Lord Cooler--at the conference," you stammered, "He insisted, I...I couldn't not take it. He was--he--"

Tripping over words. Fear. What would he do? What would he say?

He was silent.

You lowered your head, and continued to stammer such half-finished words. Maybe if you looked, and sounded pathetic, he would at least spare your life--
A hand on your chin.

Lifted.

"Get up."

Cold's voice wasn't hard at all, not in a single way. Instead, it was gentle, and there was an almost kind smile on his face.

The picture had turned to ash in his hand and he brushed it into the floor.

You got to your feet, and Cold rose with you.

"Come with me."

What was he--?

You followed him into the bedroom, and when the doors closed behind you, he spoke again.

"Undress."

"My lord?"

"Now."

It was a soft demand--and having no other choice, you obeyed.

"I've realized something, (y/n)." Cold said, the gentleness in his voice not abating a bit, "And that is that I can hardly be upset at you for something that is not your fault."

Once you were fully nude, he motioned to you to get onto the bed.

No, he couldn't mean--

But you obeyed.

"That you want a child is evident. One was ripped from you, taken without care by someone who cares only for himself. A child not yours. A child not allowed to be yours."

You looked away.

"On your knees."

You turned over, and tried to keep your breathing steady. Heart still racing, though--no changing that. Was he going to...yes, he was, wasn't he?

Then there was a shadow over you. Instinct rushed in from the dark, primal corners of your mind, and you felt the heat between your legs building further.

Even more so when his hands trailed down your back and started to massage at your tail and the place where it met your skin. The heat burst and spread, and you couldn't stop a series of moans passing your lips.

He was silent for a few minutes, silent and working carefully at that stimulation. But he did stop, and then he spoke one final time. A deep, seductive tone came down like a dark, lusty blanket.

"If you want a child, I will give you one."
That was when you felt the tip of his cock against your entrance. Instinct screamed out again, and you began to relax.

Cold leaned down, and you heard him taking a deep inhale. And as he pushed in, you heard it again, barely, over your own deep moan.

Your scent, it was your scent--

--they could smell fertility, couldn't they?

"Yes, I will..."

A hand over your chest. Groping, growling pleasure--he kept pushing, until you were full of him, and you had to bite your tongue not to cry out.

"Lift your hips."

You obeyed.

He drew back, and thrusted in. And then you did cry out for him, finally, and you heard him laugh.

The skin of his abdomen was pressed against your back as he leaned over and began to thrust in earnest. Never too far out of you before going back in again, always deep and moving deeper. Again, instinct rushed in, and you let the pleasure wash over your body.

There was no time to be afraid.

You were deep into the season, deep into the rut, and your body welcomed the sex, craved it, needed it, like nothing else. The whole month you'd lasted without even touching yourself, but now, oh, gods, Cold was touching every good place you had ever even thought of going yourself.

Faster he moved, and the more frequent your cries issued past your lips.

"Oh, gods--"

"You want that, don't you?"

Cold's tone was capricious now. He laughed, and thrust in to the hilt.

"Oh--gods!"

"Don't you?"

Another deep thrust, and the only answer he would accept. He pressed down further and you gave it to him, "Yes."

Again.

"Yes!"

And a third time.

"YES!"

Shame passed over you, but--it was easy to lose yourself here. It was easy to let it take you, let the lust get you through what would otherwise have you in tears.
Faster.

He pumped in and out of you rapidly, and the more you cried out for him the faster he seemed to go. Deep, deeper, almost unpleasantly so at times, but each time no matter how deep sent shockwaves of ecstasy through your body.

Your chest was pressed into the bed; you were on your stomach, and still he loomed over you, rutting away like nobody's business. You felt a slight pain, and realized he was swelling.

"You're going to look so beautiful," he growled, half-out of breath as he moved. Tall as he was, his head was not too high above yours, and so you heard him well, "Ask me why."

"Wh--AAAHH--why?"

More thrusting. More grunting.

"Because you're going to swell," he said, and then he pressed against you harder than he had yet so far, thrusting more and more swiftly, "You'll look good, swollen and round with my seed, my pretty pet."

And then, one final, hilt deep movement.

There was a tightening within your inner walls, and you heard him grunt above...

...and felt the hot triple pulse deep inside you.

He relaxed.

You did anything but.

Inside, he'd finished inside...

And he knew what that meant this time of year.

There was a contented sigh overhead. After a half-minute of luxuriating in that heat, Cold pulled you up, and sat back on his knees. Still inside you, of course.

He embraced you and groped at your breasts absently.

The hand drifted down to your abdomen, and he pressed at it lightly.

"Soon," he said quietly.

Yes. Soon.

*Cooler's POV*

It's been three days.

Usually, I get a message in the morning saying I am allowed to leave my quarters for this reason or that reason. But I haven't gotten that.

In fact, I haven't gotten anything.

No orders to do anything.
No message saying I can leave my quarters.

I don't dare leave without that permission. What if he does something to Brisk?

I have to wait.

I have to wait.

I just have to.
Swell

Chapter Summary

Cold's affection for you is growing, you've been given new quarters, even. Cooler sits in isolation.

Swell

Every night for the rest of July, you'd gotten "invited" to Cold's quarters, and each time you woke five to six hours later, being held close.

It was five weeks later, now, and Cold, having done his job and obtained a positive result from your latest blood test, was strangely affectionate. He'd withdrawn after indulging, pulled you close-likely as not for the heat, but you said nothing of that--and started stroking your hair.

You were staring at the datapad on the bedtable. It had contained the blood test results, and still displayed them now. Some details about the pregnancy hormone were given, and beneath all that gobbledygook were the words: PREGNANCY CONFIRMED.

"You are looking forward to it, aren't you?"

"Yes," you said quietly. "I just didn't expect to be...gifted...with one, is all."

Just the thought of another child was--well, there was no surety in how to feel. The emptiness after letting Brisk go had gone unfulfilled for so long, and then there had been that happy moment in the garden...

...and then things had come to this.

Pain, loneliness, and somewhere in the back, determination.

It couldn't stay like this.

"Did you expect to be left out when I've given children to all the rest?" there was a slight chuckle. "I suppose with your upbringing, and what certain people have put you through, you can hardly be blamed for that mindset. But it will not be the case here."

"No?" you asked.

"No," came the oddly soft reply. His hand moved down to your uncovered belly and softly pressed. "Do you need reassurance that much?"

What was this? Why was he being so nice?

You feigned the sad tone he seemed to want to hear, and replied, "Yes. I...I have what I need now, but I'm still afraid of losing things."

"Then listen carefully, because I will only say this once."
You were pulled flush against him, no chance of escape, the back of your head resting on that warm teal biogem of his.

"As long as I live, no one is going to take this child from you."

That night, Cold kept you there, as he had been doing. Whether he fell asleep unintentionally or not didn't matter. It was somewhere around midnight when he spoke to you, and when you woke again, it was nearly ten.

You were on the point of waking him when you heard the familiar whoosh of his quarters' doors opening in the other room. Then the doors of his bedroom.

"My King--"

Cold jolted awake at the sound of the servant's voice, and let go of you instantly, whipping around to face the man.

But not before checking the time.

"I cannot believe you--" he paused, and began again, "I have slept nearly ten hours. Would you mind telling me why exactly you didn't bother to wake me? I give strict orders to you all to allow me six hours of sleep at the most, and you imbeciles can't even handle that? What is wrong with you?"

"Forgive me, your highness," the servant said, "It's just that--"

"I don't WANT TO HEAR IT!" Cold roared, "Get everything ready for me for the day and if anything goes wrong as a result of your negligence, it will quite literally be your head!"

The servant scurried back out, and then Cold's attention was turned to you.

"It's your fault too, you know," he said, when he caught you looking up at him. "You're too warm."

"You should sleep more."

"I can't afford to sleep as much as you can," came the reply. "Go to the cabinet and fix me a drink."

He gestured to the cabinet across the room, and you moved over to it. Once it was opened, Cold spoke again.

You took a random bottle of wine, and were halfway through pouring it when he added, "And get some caffeine powder in that, too."

Caffeine powder? In wine?

It was tucked away in the drawer, a large jar filled with white powder.

"How much should I add?"

"There's a scale in the first drawer. Fourteen grams, and add it slowly, or it won't dissolve properly."

You added sixteen, and took one of the stirring spoons that seemed specially made for this enormous glass. "Caffeine in wine?"
"It's the only thing that masks that taste," Cold replied.

"It's dissolving slowly," You said, "I did what you said, but--"

"Bring it here anyway," he replied. "At this point, I don't care. I'm exhausted."

You brought the wine, and he chugged it, taking afterwards a deep breath.

The servants came back in, and once you finished dressing, you were dismissed.

Every night you had spent there had seen the morning be exactly the same, with the exception of today's late rise--and gradually, you had been increasing his caffeine dosage. You could only hope he would go right on increasing it himself once you were gone.

You and Gavi were returned to the Ivory Palace six weeks later.

"It'll be nice," Gavi said to you, as servants passed the two of you with your luggage, "Having a little one about the place again, I mean."

"Is that so?"

"The King visits more when there are children," she replied, "You'll find that he views you a little more favorably when you're carrying his child."

"He...has been more affectionate lately."

"It's the thought of what you'll look like in the months to come. He's always like that, the thought of you swelled with a whelp of his making--well, he's proud whenever he can accomplish it. Men tend to be like that. Perhaps more so with you."

"What makes you say that?"

"His child will be your heir."

"I thought bastards couldn't be heirs," you replied, "I'd--heard it before--"

"This is the royal family. They do as they please." Gavi laughed, and then continued, "But, really, there is a precedent. More than one King or Queen has taken such a liberty with a house's remaining heir."

"Why did the heirs not marry?"

"In such cases, the heirs needed the help of the royal family to remain where they were due to moves made against them from other houses. Some wished to marry, but were not willing to make the concessions that other houses demanded of them. Siring a bastard linked that heir to the royals permanently, and secured loyalty. The bastard was legitimized upon birth, but only for the inheritance of the mother's property and title, not the father's."

"This all seems rather convoluted," you replied.

"Nevertheless," Gavi said, "That is what will happen."

Then there was a small smile.

"You'll enjoy being pregnant, I think."
The conversation continued in like manner, and Gavi stopped you before you entered what had been your room.

"You've been moved," she said, "Your room was too small for you and a baby to fit in, so the King's given you a larger set of quarters."

Silence.

"I hope you like what they've done with it in your absence," she said, "We wanted it prepared for you ahead of time."

"What do you mean?"

"The King thought you might like--"

The doors to your quarters opened.

Your jaw dropped. There had been many baby-related items and furniture added. A small swinging chair for aiding in getting the baby to nap, a rocker, and various toys.

In silence, and with a strange lump in your throat, you moved into your bedroom. Rocking chair, crib with mobile, changing table.

This was different, far different, than the last time. The last time you were given no such luxuries, not allowed such things--the child, Brisk, was not to be yours, after all. No rocking chair, no toys, no crib...

You couldn't even enjoy the pregnancy. And even worse, the very day you gave birth, Cooler had sent you away, putting an end to any chance of bonding with Brisk. The closeness, the promises, they had all come to naught in the end.

What he did afterwards had changed nothing. It was too late, far, far too late, for anything he'd done to matter, and he would not defy his father to claim you back in any capacity.

But Cold...

You shook your head. He was only like this because he did not have to marry you, he did not need additional heirs. The fact remained, however, that you were going to be allowed to keep this one.

This one was yours.

You took a seat in the rocking chair, and thought of holding the new child there, of feeding it, playing with it.

"When you bring the child home," Gavi said as she grabbed a blanket and folded it into a bundle, "Just imagine it. You'll sit there, rock it to sleep, and..."

She handed you the bundle. The knot in your throat began to hurt.

"...and I'll have one of my own."

Your voice was soft and low.

Yes.

One of your own.
*Cooler, third person*

He sat there, looking out the window and into space. And he hadn't moved in several hours.

"Lord Cooler," said the elderly female servant, "It's time to eat."

Silence.

"Lord Cooler? Your dinner is ready."

"I don't want it."

The tone was flat and uninterested at best.

"You can't not eat."

"I don't want to eat."

"I'm leaving the food out, regardless."

The servant left soon after--she was not permitted to remain very long, and she had already spent too long trying to get him to eat. But despite that, she stood in the doorway, watching him, for several minutes.

He didn't move.

Not an inch.

Sighing, she turned to leave.
Chapter Summary

Frigi schemes with Cold's help; Frieza has his own plan in mind.

"Thank you for coming."

Frigi sat down and gave a nod. "Is this about Lord Cooler?"

"It is, indeed. I'm sure you've been very anxious to keep his attention, and are wondering what caused the interruption of your courtship."

"I...had wondered, yes. Did I do something wrong?"

"No," Cold replied. Now they were both seated, he gestured to servants, who brought out the expected wine. "What happened was that my son became brainsick. We're unsure yet what caused it, but we had to confine him for everyone's safety, and allow only minimal contact with one person. And before you begin to worry--no, we are sure he was not contagious at the conference; his sickness struck some time after that."

"And how can I be of help now?"

"What you will need to do now is this." Cold took a sip from the glass of wine, and went on. "Go in to see him, being aware that isolation has been extremely taxing on his mental state. He is barely able to talk at all, much less focus on the necessities of his work. Draw him out of his shell, slowly, until he has recovered enough to be able to leave his quarters and return to his responsibilities."

"And then?"

"And then, to marry you, of course. I still intend him to do so."

Frigi gave a nod.

"You can go," Cold replied, "I will send a message to you and your family later today, setting up a visiting schedule, and quarters for you in his palace."

"I thought he was on his ship?"

"We've moved him." It had not been easy, they had had to drug Cooler, and deliver him to a new set of quarters set up to look exactly like those on his ship. The only hangup had been the window, but that had been fixed to include a monitor of continuously changing views of space.

As Frigi left, Cold felt an increasing sense of victory.

Cooler would recover, and marry Frigi, and the nonsense with the saiyan would come to an end. The thing with (y/n) was never more than infatuation in his mind--Cold could see that much from where he stood. Forbidden fruit, combined with the heat of the saiyan breeding season, and the
saiyan's natural flirtatious attitude...

...it was no wonder Cooler had fallen so hard. But that, that would change soon. He had only to wait, to be sure they didn't see each other, until it was far too late for such things to matter. Until Frigi had ensnared him, married him, made him her own and brought an end to thoughts of the saiyan.

(Y/n) would have, also, what Cooler had denied her, what she ached for--a child of her own, and real security. And that would buy her loyalty more than anything else right now.

And charm. Lots of charm. She was so susceptible to it in this uncertain time, when she still felt the fear of abandonment.

All according to plan.

??? POV

"Are you prepared?"

"Yes. I'm starving, madly so, but I am prepared, my lord."

"You are to accompany him, yes?"

"Yes. He wants me kept close; since the saiyan is swelling more and more by the day, he does not wish to use her as much as he used to."

There was a chuckle.

"Either way, you will be there, and you will be hungry--something that will be fixed shortly."

The call indeed, and she looked up. Finally, after years of serving that man, he would be brought to an end. At last, at last it would be over.

"Dearest," Cold said, "Are you sure you're well enough to attend?"

"I am," Gavi replied with a smile, "Don't worry."

"As long as you actually eat at this little feast. I've noticed that you have barely eaten, and you're beginning to lose those curves I love so much."

"I will eat, my love." There was a smile then, and she raised a hand to Cold's cheek. "Trust me."

*Three Weeks Later*

The board was set.

Frieza walked into the feast with his eagerness for a fight barely contained, but he kept his expression wiped clean of any trace of it. His wife, Yassa, walked at his side as he entered the room with his entourage, and leaned over slightly to whisper to him.

"Ready?"

"I have never been more ready for anything in all of my life, my dear," he replied in a whisper, "I
think clearing your schedule tonight would be a good idea."

"Oh?"

"You won't be leaving the bed all night."

There was a little smirk, but no further words.

It was a celebration they walked into—a celebration of the kingdom's founding, a day of excess for all the nobles to enjoy, and Frieza had chosen the day for more than dramatic, fitting purpose. An audience would be most necessary, he had decided, but not to be a showman. No, they had to bear witness.

After the initial finery and the dancing was over, he kept a careful eye on his father, who had left the room of dancing and feasting, and had moved into the throne room where crowds of people still moved about, chattering about this issue or that.

Keep it contained, he thought to himself.

Keep it in.

Wait.

He entered the throne room, having downed the last of his wine and passed the glass off to some random waiter.

Deep breath.

He wasn't nervous, no. No, he simply wanted to steel himself, keep his purpose firmly in mind...

...and, if I admit it...

Frieza looked at Yassa. She now carried what would be the youngest of their children, and the sight of that bump at her abdomen tugged up at the corners of his lips and produced the smallest of smiles.

His.

Attention turned back to the throne itself.

This was all his.

Then he gestured, and she stepped out of the room, but only barely. She struck up a conversation with a random lord around the corner of the throne room's door.

*Good, out of sight.*

Then he approached the throne, parting the crowd as he did so and paying no attention whatsoever to any small sounds of protest the people made.

"Father," he said, glancing briefly at Gavi, who occupied a space far below the raised dais.

"This is the throne of ice, as you have told me so often before," he said, taking a step closer, "But today, I am the cold one."
Chapter Summary

The showdown between Frieza and his father begins, and Cold meets his end in a way he never saw coming.

"Is this a joke?"

Cold leaned forward ever so slightly, his glare focused on Frieza, who seemed unfazed—aside from a clenched fist.

"This is far from a joke, father. Consider this a formal challenge."

Cold stood to full height, and began to walk down the steps in front of his throne. "I never thought you would be this stupid, Frieza. You were the bright one, the better of my two sons, the one I expected great things from."

"And you will get these great things, father." Frieza smirked, and his aura flared up, "Once you have been put on the right side of the ground."

Cold loomed over him, and then, suddenly—everything was chaos. Frieza struck him in the gut, and while Cold stumbled, he didn't fall—and instead, came back with a hard right hook.

The nobles scattered when he lunged at Frieza, who made a swift leap upward.

Cold's hand closed around his tail and he took a hard swing against the ground, breaking the marble of the floor and sending shards of it everywhere.

"You little BRAT!" he screamed as he continued to swing Frieza about like a flail, "I gave you everything, and this is how you repay me?"

He held Frieza up then, smirking at the bloodied nose and cuts all over his torso.

"I'm going to kill you," he went on, "I'm going to kill you, and your wife, and those bastards you spawned with her, before I'll ever give you another chance to do this again."

Silence. Frieza's eyes opened slowly.

Cold reached his other hand up, and charged up a ki blast.

Frieza reached up...

...there was a pause...

...and suddenly a beam of pure redness shot from a fingertip, straight through Cold's armored chest.

The oversized monarch stumbled back; his grip on Frieza's tail loosened. But the younger man
floated there, upside down, and before Cold could retaliate, sent another red beam through his father.

Then another, and another...

...four, five, six, and seven. Seven times.

The few nobles who had remained in the room were transfixed and stood, staring, as Cold began to cough, and produce blood. And then, almost worse, Frieza leapt, striking again--this time at his father's horns.

*Crack*

There was a scream of as both horns were broken from his head and allowed to drop to the floor.

"Move again," Frieza said in a sharp tone, "And I'll take your tail. What a disgrace your corpse will be, should I--"

Cold attempted a desperate last attack, but pain had slowed him, and Frieza caught him--tail coiling suddenly around his father's wrist. A hand raised--and then, from nowhere, a red saucer of energy.

"No. No, you--I WILL NOT--"

Another scream as the disc was flung around Cold; his tail was severed nearly at the base and only barely missing hitting him elsewhere. The saucer fizzled away then; Cold fell, stumbling back against the steps.

"I will not even allow you the dignities of a corpse," Frieza spoke again, venom seeping from every word, "When they come to see you, they will not see the majesty of a fallen king. They will see the disgrace of a fool."

Cold, gasping, continued to scramble away--until his back hit something solid.

He looked up.

"Gavi," he said, his cough bringing up yet more blood, "Gavi--"

The snake woman smiled a toothy smile, and pulled him up and into her arms.

"Help me."

These words, no one but Gavi heard. She held him close, and brought the base of her tail around him in a loose coil.

His expression lightened, but only briefly.

A kiss was planted on his lips, a kiss she would not let him move away from. A struggle turned into muffled screaming; all stood watching as Gavi pulled away from Cold and dropped him to the floor.

A nasty yellow liquid was dripping from his lips, and he clamped his hand over his mouth, eyes wide with pain.

"One of my people had to give up his venom glands to replace the ones you took from me," Gavi said, "They are the mark of our people. A point of pride. And you took them from me."
Cold curled up on the floor, turning away--as his tongue and lips began to blacken.

The coils of his former lover began to wind around his body, bit by bit, but still, he remained silent--

"Stop."

It was Frieza's voice.

"Release him."

Cold looked up, though not in Frieza's direction. Yes, yes, his son would never do it, really, he just wanted to give him a scare, that was all!

His vision was blurring, but still, hope was in his eyes.

A movement about his shoulders.

Frieza was unclasping his cape, and Cold watched in horror as his son walked away with the scarlet silk garment in his hands.

"Proceed," came his voice again, "I liked this cape, you know, I wouldn't want to waste it."

And he did not look back again.

"Gavi, please!"

...was what Cold meant to say. But her venom had done horrors in his gut, had wrung the life from so much of his throat that only vague approximations of the words came out--a twisted cacophony of suffering.

"I've been so hungry, love," Gavi said, her skin pulsing. "I've been starving, love, just for you..."

A space, a space just behind the throne itself, a space no one knew the purpose of--here Gavi moved, still cradling him.

And suddenly, she began to change. Her sweet face contorted and extended into a snout, her body began to swell and grow--and grow, and grow....

Cold could do nothing but watch as his former trusted mistress' body began nearly unrecognizable. She was bigger than he was now, but by how much he had not the capacity to know. Her arms thin, grasping at his face as her coils squished at his body, binding tighter and tighter; her eyes flashing wickedly as the crack of his bones continued, and her mouth, widening--

No.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no!

"NO!!"

Headfirst Cold went into the gaping maw, powerless to do anything.

Frieza took his seat on the throne, as the muffled screaming went on, until it was finally silent.

It would take days upon days for the digestion to happen, and longer still for Gavi to wake up.
But that was not Frieza's concern, for today--he was the master of the world.

No, not the master.

The King.
Cooler has issues with his visitor; you make an attempt, but find it blocked.

*Frigi's POV, 3rd Person*

"Are you feeling well today, my lord?"

No answer.

She was seated beside him, a place she had been trying to get for several hours now. Each time she had tried before, Cooler had shot her a glare, and turned away from her general direction.

The first and second attempts prompted him to speak the same word, "No." The third time she'd tried, he had actually pushed her away--hard enough she stumbled, but not hard enough to make her fall.

Lord Cooler was practically bristling with discomfort at her close proximity to himself, and refused to look at her.

"Your servant has brought food. Are you not hungry?"

Frigi looked down at the tray, noting the fruit in particular. Maybe...?

"Here," she said, "At least have a grape."

She reached out, took his hand, and--

--and in the blink of an eye she was on the ground.

Cooler had shoved her, hard, hard enough that her head grazed the side of the table that the tray sat on.

"Don't touch me," he said robotically.

"I--"

"Don't touch me. Don't touch me."

The older, female Arcosian servant rushed forward to help Frigi up.

"I've been at this for long enough that I should be able to touch him," the woman said when she was up, "Even a little one on the hand and he reacts badly."

"You should've asked first," the servant said.

"Tell her to go, Glacia. It's time for her to go. She should have been gone thirty minutes ago."
"Why?" Frigi asked. She was holding her head, it hardly mattered—but it was something to focus on while she got her things together to leave.

"He has a schedule and he sticks by it. Your visit was—"

"Schedule? SCHEDULE? He's locked up here and he's worried about a schedule?! One would think he'd be thrilled to have some company!"

She stormed out once she had her things together. It was not worth being a princess to go through all of this, and certainly not worth risking her life.

*Your POV*

Three months and twelve days.

The child you carried was now a fetus, rather than an embryo, according to the doctors. It was healthy, it was physically whole, and showed none of the genetic issues that sometimes resulted from hybrid breedings. So far, it looked as if it would take after you, in that it would be Saiyan-presenting. Barring any unforeseen problems, the most dangerous period was over.

But then came the news of Cold's death, and that feeling of security immediately dropped.

You began packing. Whatever might happen—you were reasonably certain that neither of them would accept the child.

Bastard or no, it was Cold's child, and anything could set either of them off. Cooler was—well, you knew him to be the jealous type at best, and Frieza...

...Frieza just didn't like what he thought to be his being marked by others.

A fast ship, a bag packed with a few necessities, and the information on hybrids that would keep the baby in good health later on—and you were ready to go.

The others were packing as well, though for different reasons. Ansul hinted that she wanted to "get, while the getting was good." Ilura made some mention of the son she'd had with Cold, seeing him, getting away from the Ivory Palace, and as for the others...they weren't saying anything.

It was probably better that way.

In one hand was a datapad, containing the details of one of your offers. A Lord Hail, middle-aged, fat, but somewhat pleasant, had sent a proposal of marriage. And this offer, you took along as cover. It would have been a suitable match, considering...he had heirs, but wished to father more children, and you were, well, warm.

And willing enough.

Out the front doors--

"(Y/n), good to see you. Where were you going?"

You looked up to see--Frieza.

"Perhaps I could escort you."

With shaking hands, you handed over the datapad.
"You were planning to marry this fool?"

"He made an offer. I have several of those--"

"This won't do at all," Frieza replied, "Back inside, my dear. Into the lobby."

You obeyed, and folded your hands over your belly as you sat down.

He sat opposite you, and glanced over the datapad's text. "I can't see why you would choose this fool even if you had the option of doing so."

"Your g--"

"I'm going to cut to the point, (y/n). I'm not sure what you intended here, but you cannot simply expect to go off and marry as you please. Your position is still tenuous, after all, no matter the favor bestowed on you by my father."

"You are not your father, I understand that."

"But on that point..." the corners of Frieza's lips tugged upward and into a smirk. "...I would also like to note that you still belong to the crown."

Surprise. He intended it that way, but--

He'd made no secret of it before, that he wanted you back underneath him. He was simply...restating it now. That was all.

"And if you would like to keep what you have, I highly suggest you fall back in line. Am I understood here?"

"Perfectly. What would you have me do?"

The smirk widened; the look told a story that was both long and unsavory. But he spoke up, "I have a certain...business partner, we'll call it, that I want you to..."

"Sweet-talk?"

"He'll need a lot of it, you know. A lot of those beneath me have made the error of questioning whether I am going to be a good king, and I need this...gentleman's...support on the business end of things if I am to rule effectively."

"I will do as you ask, but surely there's someone else you can trust to do whatever you need of this man?"

"The more Arcosians, the better, you might say. Those I trust are not of my kind, and it is my kind I need here."

"A good move." A strategic one, almost.

Perhaps he was simply being lazy, though...

After tossing the datapad with Lord Hail's information on it aside, Frieza handed you another one. "You can find him here."

There was information on his location, it seemed, as well as a few notes on what was desired of him.
"The man must be a brilliant general...most of these are military related."

"In a way," Frieza replied amiably. He stood, and as he walked past you, left you with three more words. "Don't get comfortable."
You are sent into this visit without much of anything to guide you when the shock comes along. Cooler's fractured mind attempts to explain away what he is seeing.

You could still plan escape. That was first and foremost on your mind. You had a little time to do so, and Frieza could not have you watched every second. There was a weakness somewhere, an opportunity of some kind. A guard to bribe, or cut down, a disguise to make use of...

There would be a chance.

There was always a chance.

After taking the time to send messages to those who had sent you offers--adding a nicer touch to Lord Hail's, of course. It was strange, looking at that offer, thinking how you might have been happy enough with him. You'd met him once or twice during your marriage to Winter, and he had joked how Winter had done very well out of this bargain. Comments on your looks, comments on your nature...

...true, he was apparently the lecherous sort (he readily admitted he kept several mistresses) and was overly fond of wine, but it was hinted that if these matters were overlooked, you would receive his house's full support to prevent becoming displaced in the new regime.

It would have been an easier trade than this demand by Frieza.

As you approached the palace he had directed you to, you took a deep breath. What would this gentleman expect of you? What had Frieza promised him?

Once inside, you were directed to an upstairs set of quarters.

Alright, nothing to panic about.

Perhaps your silver tongue could get you through this.

The door was opened, and an older Arcosian woman greeted you.

"His lordship has not had a visitor in some time," she said, "So I must warn you that there will be some...rules to follow to avoid problems."

"Is something wrong with him? What are these rules?" you asked.

"One is that he holds to his schedule religiously, and thus will not deviate from it. If forced to, he becomes very irritable and I can't guarantee how he will behave beyond that. You have been given forty-five minutes, and he will expect you to leave when your time is up."

That seemed simple enough. You nodded and she went on.
"The second thing, and perhaps more important, is that--for your own safety--you are not to touch him."

"Is he germaphobic?" you asked.

"I don't believe that's the case, but he has grown averse to touch of any kind of late."

"Alright," you nodded, "Is that all?"

"One last thing. Please don't expect him to be an easy sort to speak to. He has had people grow impatient with him before, and he does not respond well to that."

Perhaps that was why Frieza had sent you, thinking that eye candy and soft speech would get him what he wanted.

"Thank you for the help...?" you trailed off, waiting for her name.

"Difrost, my lady," she said.

"Then thank you, Difrost."

*Cooler's POV*

I had been told of this a week in advance. It was hardly enough, but it had given me the advance necessary to carve out time, and arrange for tea to be set out. A young woman, Difrost told me. Probably Frigi again--I don't want her here, but I have to allow her in, or...

Not too long. Never too long. I can spare only minimal amounts of my day to unnecessary intrusions. Even father knows this. He knows I don't have time for things like this.

I sat quietly, and waited.

The doors opened, and I looked up.

(Y/n).

I looked back down at the tea tray that had been arranged, and straightened one of the cups that was ever so slightly askew. It was clear to me, exceedingly so, that I was hallucinating.

(Y/n) was not here, not really--she was lost to me. Father would not allow it. If it was mentioned to him that I had seen her, what else would he do?

I must keep this quiet.

She started talking.

"Good afternoon, my...my lord."

A shaky voice? I was hallucinating her being nervous? No, it made sense. The last time we met, she was worried about being found out, she had had to contend with my father.

"My lord?"

Maybe I needed food. My blood sugar might have dropped suddenly.

She made multiple attempts to get me to speak before pausing to sip at her tea, and then she spoke
again. "You look tired, my lord. Have you not...not slept well?"

Sleep. Yes, I needed sleep. This was obviously my body attempting to tell me that I needed rest. And it chose her, because it thought I might listen to her.

Or because she was familiar.

It doesn't matter.

The clock on the wall said that my visitor was five minutes late.

Shuffling. (Y/n) was reaching for the food.

How far would this hallucination go?

I saw those hands suddenly stop, remove their gloves, and lift one of the small cakes.

This was not right. None of this was right. Things had never been seen this way before.

I'm not well.

Several more times she tried to speak to me, but I refuse to entertain delusions of this sort. I will not respond to them, I will not give them that power over me. If I interact with them, it would be giving in to insanity.

I am not well, but I am not insane.

I am not insane. This will pass. It will go away.

It will go away.

It will.

The forty-five minutes passed, and she got up to leave on time.

"I hope to see you again, my lord," she said.

I did not reply, and kept my eyes on the tea tray until she left.

*Your POV*

You'd have been angry that Frieza lied to you, but the shock was too much for you to be. Cooler. You knew good and well it was him, but the change from what you had known was dramatic.

He didn't look at you when you spoke to him. Didn't even respond.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you about this," Difrost spoke to you once you were out of the room, "But the King forbade me from giving you any more details than that."

"What's wrong with him?" you asked. "Why is he...why is he in that condition?"

"He's been almost completely isolated from everything. While the late King was alive, I was only permitted to speak a few sentences at the most to him--per day. I've tried to improve on that since then, to help him, but..."

Near solitary confinement then.
You glanced away.

"I do not know why you've been sent by the new King, but...I hope you can help him more than
the previous girl."

"What happened to her?"

"She...grew impatient with him," Difrost replied, "She had been with him for many days and made
little progress, because when she did gain some ground she pushed too much."

"I'll...try not to do that, then," you said. "Thank you again for informing me."

As you left, you thought through what Frieza had said. He wanted this man's help, he'd said. His
brother's help, it had turned out.

Why not tell you it was Cooler?

Why not give you some sort of help?

Why not--

You shook your head as you arrived back at Winter's estate, and tried to distance the thoughts.

"My lady?"

You were broken out of your mental reverie, and you looked toward the servant who had spoken.
"Yes? What is it?"

"His highness has called. He's...waiting to speak to you."

You took a deep breath, thanked him, and headed on in to the study.

"How is he?" Frieza asked, once you took a seat in front of the computer console.

"He didn't even speak or look at me. That's how he is."

"No need to be rude, my dear."

"How am I suppose to persuade him to help you when he won't even look at me?"

"You keep visiting until he's well enough to resume his duties. Once he is aware he can leave--"

"--no one told him he could leave?!"

"Do you think I'm stupid?" Frieza asked, "Let him out in that condition and there's no telling the
damage he could do. I would rather have Salza continue doing his job until he's well enough to do
it himself."

"How am I to judge that? He may never recover from--I can't help him, if he won't--"

"You can, and you will."

"He needs professional help!" you snapped, "I can't help him, he needs actual psychiat--"

"Are you refusing to try?"

"I can't help him. There must be someone else, anyone else, someone with the ability and
discretion to bring him out of this without making it public."
"Then you should make plans to return to the Ivory Palace."

"What?"

"Either you help him, or you serve me as you served my father."

"You must be joking."

"Do I look like the type to joke?" Frieza asked, "Let me make it simple for your tiny saiyan mind: my brother, or me. Those are your options. If you force the issue, I will take everything from you--including that bastard you're carrying."

He paused--you presumed to observe the shock on your face. And then he spoke once more.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"And what is your decision?"

"Your--Cooler," you said, "Your brother."

"Good girl," Frieza replied with a smirk, "I knew I could count on you."

He disconnected, and you sat back in your chair, hands on your belly, utterly overwhelmed with this whirlwind of events.

It was all too much.

From the baby, to Frieza, to Cooler, to the baby again, to Brisk, your mind flew without perching for very long on any of the subjects.

Another message, this time in email format, arrived.

It was from Frieza, and detailed a schedule for you over the next several months. You were to visit Cooler nearly every day, and to give reports on any progress he made.

Deep breath.

"It'll be alright," you found yourself saying to that slight swell of your belly, "We'll both be alright."

You hoped.
You meet with Cooler again, and he is less than encouraging.

Struggle

*I sat staring at the wall.*

How long had I been in here? How long would it be, before I forgot my son's face entirely?

I wished so badly that it was Brisk's face I would see, but it had not happened. Instead, I had hallucinated his mother, (y/n), dressed in such finery as suited a lady. And she was bleating all the greetings a lady is required to say.

Lady.

*I could have made her a queen, I thought, But I wasn't brave enough.*

And now for that act of cowardice, I had lost everything. How much more would go, before the end?

After what felt like forever, I shifted in my seat, and my eyes chanced to move down to the table.

Gloves.

"Difrost," I said to the servant, "Whose are those?"

They had to be hers. Some gift or the other from my father. They were like those I had seen on (y/n)...but she had not been here. She was not allowed here.

"If it please my lord," Difrost said, "Those belong to Lady Winter. She left us an hour ago."

She had been here.

It was a chill worse than any cold weather.

*You*

Cooler's schedule had been altered to include a few doctors, all only allowed in for an hour's appointment. They would come today, and you would come tomorrow, to see that Cooler's progress was ongoing.

"The late King gave him such a cruel punishment," one of the doctors said, "And we're not even sure why."

"The current king is not of the same sort of mindset," you replied quickly, "He wants his brother
up, and ready for duty again."

"And if he displeases his brother, what then?"

"His grace would simply kill his brother if he was that unhappy. He's got no interest in psychological tinkering, if you anger him, he will simply end you and find someone else to do the job."

"You have been a long time in this court, I see," the second doctor laughed, "Our lady is right. His grace must be sure of succeeding, else none of us would be here. We've simply got to be patient."

"That's another thing..."

*Difrost*

Difrost told me that the doctors were going to come in, and they did. They spoke to me at length about my mind, and how I might begin to get better. How I might come back to myself.

But with father around, how is there any better?

Then they gave me medicine, to ease my anxiety. I took them--because I knew if I did not, Difrost would put them into my food, and I could not simply not eat. If I were to do that, all hope of seeing Brisk again would be gone.

My odds now are not good as it is, but...

She told me after they left that (y/n) would return, and persisted in calling her Lady Winter. I prepared, as I had prepared before, and kept the gloves close.

She was real.

She had been here.

After breakfast the next day, (y/n) arrived, right on schedule.

She was wearing a blue silk gown, that accentuated her curves--her chest, especially, but I forced myself not to look at the more tempting bits. That was what Father wanted.

"How are you today, my lord?"

I didn't answer.

She gave a sigh.

Difrost brought us little dainties to eat and I watched as (y/n) devoured all the ones set before her. She might be full of manners now, but she is still a saiyan.

She questioned me several more times. The temperature of the room, the food, my health--there was no end to the tedious questions. What did she hope to gain from all this?

Had I taken my anti-anxiety medications? That was the thing I thought when I clenched again at her gloves and felt my heart begin to race. I tried to comfort myself as I looked at the clock on the wall. Five more minutes. I had to endure for five minutes. I would not show her, would not show my father, that I was this weak.
My hands were shaking.

"You left these."

I finally spoke, and saw her smile, but it brought no comfort. *That was the smile she gave to the old man.*

"Thank you, my lord."

(Y/n) reached forward, and closed her slender fingers around the gloves. It was more touch than I had gotten in a long time, and she was *warm...*

*She's going to get you killed, or hurt, or WORSE, Brisk will get hurt, or...or...* 

Panic. Doom.

"Get out," I choked out, "Now."

Her expression shifted, and the smile faded. Now there was just shock. "My...my lord?"

"Are you trying to get us both killed?"

"My--"

"I don't want to hear it," I snapped, standing suddenly, "I don't know what foul thing father has planned, but I'm not going to be a part of it. Get. Out."

"But, Cooler, I--"

"**GET OUT!**"

My throat complained, but the words were shouted all the same.

"Please--"

"OUT!"

I seized the plate, and the remaining food tumbled off as I raised it, then flung it at her.

She was quick enough that it only got the back of her hand, but the message was clear; she got up and ran for the door.

And I was alone again.

Maybe now Father will be satisfied.
Cooler is told important news, and you visit again.

Elephant In The Room

*Cooler*

(Y/n) tried to come back twice more, and each time ended with shouting and something breaking against the wall.

She missed her next three scheduled visits after that.

Maybe father was satisfied, I told myself. Maybe that's all it was. He wanted to dangle her in front of me, to see if I had learned my lesson. And I had. I had learned it a thousand times over, and I'd have told him that if I could.

But I can't.

The doctors asked if they might occupy her time slot for the rest of the week.

"Since she will not be coming back, I can see no reason why not."

They looked confused.

"Is something wrong? I will not have her back. My father's joke has been played. I am not partaking in it any longer. Whatever he means to do with me, he can do. He's won. You can go and tell him that if you would like."

If not Frigi, maybe someone else. If I cooperated, maybe he would let me have some say in who I would marry.

"My lord..."

One of the doctors started to speak, but seemed to think better of it and went silent.

Another shot him a glare and shook his head.

What were they keeping from me?

I looked at the first one, and said, "Go on."

"My lord, we really can't--"

"What can't you tell me? Did he already do something? Did he harm my son?" I rose to my feet, and stepped closer, "If he has, then--"

The second my hands touched the doctor's collar, he sang like a canary.
"Your father's dead!"

"Excuse me?"

"Your father's dead, my lord. Gone."

I let go of him, and stumbled back.

No, this was just another test. Father was sporting with me, trying to sharpen me up, to get me back into shape mentally.

"You're lying," I accused, "No one can kill him."

Of that I'd been certain. I had tried, and failed, and if I couldn't do it...

"Someone did," the first doctor squeaked.

I thought for a moment. The only one I could think of was...

...of course. It would be that little brother of mine, wouldn't it?

But before I thought too much about that, another idea forced its way forward.

"Why didn't someone tell me?"

"We...we weren't sure how you would handle it, my lord. You're not well enough to leave your quarters yet, and--"

"--and what? I've--I thought--"

I could have had Brisk, I could've had her...

(Y/n).

Panic surged forward. I'd all but thrown her out three separate times, and very nearly injured her at least one of those times.

What must she think of me?

...what if I had already lost her?

I sat back down, and went silent.

It felt like such a long silence. I wondered how this was feeling to her.

If I could still fix this, maybe...

"Is (y/n) going to come back?"

I'd interrupted them, but it didn't matter. I didn't care. I needed to know this now, before anything else.

"If you want her to, she will," the first doctor replied, "She does not wish to upset you any further, if it can be helped."

*You*
The doctors told you that the news of his father's death had somehow reached him, though they added quickly that they weren't sure how, and that Cooler was eager to make up for his behavior.

There was still reason to be cautious, you told yourself, and subconsciously your hand slipped down to the little swell of your belly.

But when you entered his room this time, you saw him seated and waiting for you.

You sat down, and he spoke up.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't know father was dead. I thought..."

"You thought he would get angry at you and take something else," you replied, "I...I can understand."

"That doesn't excuse it."

There was a pause, and he asked, "How have you been?"

"Well enough," you said. "I think the adjustment period is finally over."

"Adjustment for what?"

"The whole...lady thing," you said quietly, "I don't think many nobles care to see a mammal leading House Winter, but...well, that's happened all the same. But I am giving them nothing to call me savage over."

"You were never a savage," Cooler replied, "You make for a beautiful lady."

That prompted a little smile.

"...if I hadn't been a fool...maybe...maybe you would've been more than a lady."

"It's not helpful to talk about the past," you said, "Not like that, anyway. I don't think I would have much enjoyed being queen anyway." Yassa seemed to bear a child at least every year so far. It would be easy to think that Frieza was attempting to sire his own army. Hybrids were strong, after all...

"But I still..."

"No, Cooler. Why don't we talk about something else?"

"Brisk. How is Brisk?"

"Well, but I haven't seen him."

"Do you know where he is?"

"With his cousins, I do know that much. Your brother told me he's quite happy where he is."

He'd also said the boy loved the company of other children his age...though the remark that followed about his lack of siblings had been biting.

The questions went on and on over the rest of your time there, until finally you had to put a stop to it.
"You've learned a lot as it is today," you said, "They don't want you overwhelmed with too much to process at one time. Can you understand that?"

"Yes," Cooler replied quietly. He paused, and then looked directly at you. "But you will come back again, won't you?"

"Of course I will."
Chapter Summary

Cooler begins to recover over the weeks and months, but then unwelcome news reaches his ears.

A Boy Is No One

"The king intends to have you wed to his brother, then?"

The maid Winter had assigned to you months ago was now helping you on with another gown, and chatting as she did so. It had been about a month and a half since Cooler had started talking to you again, and your little condition was (with her aid here) remaining covered up.

"It appears so," you replied, keeping your response tailored to her understanding.

"If you do not mind my asking, why is this?"

"It's alright for you to ask. My guess is he is unsure of my loyalty--after all, I carry his father's bastard, and I'm a mammal." Not to mention, he very well knew the training you'd received. He knew you were dangerous; maybe you weren't dangerous enough to kill him, but you were enough so to be a thorn in his side.

"Yet you are Lady Winter."

"Yet I am. I suppose he wants to keep an eye on me this way."

"I can't imagine his brother will much enjoy the thought of marrying one who carries his father's child."

Your thoughts immediately got too clouded to scold her for being bold enough to make that statement. It was a thought that had come tumbling in, over and over. As she finished buttoning the gown up and went for your gloves, your hands went back to your belly. What would Cooler say, when he learned?

He had hated the thought of Cold being with you at all, this would...

No. No, you would not let that happen. You would make whatever promises you had to in order to make him let the issue be. You would not raise the child alongside Brisk, you would keep them separate, you would not ask him to be a father to the child...whatever you had to do.

Anything to avoid losing a second baby.

"You don't have to do this right now," you said.

You were standing next to Cooler, who was standing in front of the door in his quarters. The exit. "But I want to," he replied.
You gave him your hand, and he squeezed it.

In the back of the room, you saw the three doctors waiting and studying the two of you carefully.

Cooler took a deep breath.

"You can leave," you said, echoing what the doctors had told you to say. "You are allowed to leave."

"I know."

He squeezed your hand again.

The door was open.

"I'm going to the end of the hall," Cooler said aloud, not looking at anyone in particular.

Another squeeze of your hand. He took the step, and cringed--but his foot was set beyond the threshold anyway. Then the second.

And he was out of his quarters. For just a moment, there was the faintest inkling of a smile.

The next step took a while to make too, but less time than it had to leave the room.

Cooler took a deep breath.

"The doctors tell me you decided to save that footage Frieza sent you until you got back from this little outing. Is that true?" you asked.

"Yes," Cooler replied, "I thought...I thought it would give me incentive to push myself. Video of Brisk, as a reward for progress."

"He's eager for you to recover. I imagine he will send more, if you ask."

"I shouldn't have to ask," Cooler said, barely loud enough for you to hear.

"I know, Cooler. I know. But it's--"

"--a sign I am taking interest in other things besides what's in my room. I know."

Each step was difficult to make, and yet, easier than the one before.

*Cooler*

Days and weeks passed, slowly at first, but more quickly as I began to come back to myself.

First one month, then two, they told me. And then three and four. (Y/n)'s visits became less, but the doctors tell me that it is because of her duties. She had many more at the moment, due to something or other about my brother's machinations. She had to ensure that things were running smoothly if the transition to his rule was to remain smooth.

It's still a strange idea.

My (y/n), a lady. My (y/n)...finally in a position for us both to be happy.

If only there weren't that one little problem.
The doctors think I don't know. She must think I'm not aware. All the large dresses and claims to be gaining weight from an easier life will not hide what's happening to her. Nothing can hide the mark of pregnancy.

Father.

That monster, that fiend, he stripped me of my ability to give her children and put one in her himself. Claimed her in a way I will never be able to again.

"Lord Cooler?"

I can't bear the thought of looking at the results of my father's work day in and day out, no matter what she--

"Lord Cooler!"

I looked up.

"What is it?"

"There is a call from your brother waiting. Do you want to...receive it?"

"I suppose I have no choice?"

"He claims to be checking on your progress. If you do not feel able, I can make an excuse..."

"My brother will not accept an excuse." I took a deep breath. He wanted something, or he would not be calling.

I do not need to leave the quarters.

After calming myself sufficiently, I went into the other room and sat down in front of the console screen.

"Hello, brother."

Frieza smirked at me from the screen, and I felt a twinge of worry--but I held it back. He was not shouting, and he was not accusing.

I can handle this.

"Is that how you greet your king? With silence?"

"I am still adjusting," I said quietly, "You can hardly expect me to rattle out the proper congratulations at the moment. And if I recall, I am the elder. I should be the one on the throne--not you."

This was the old me. The me he should expect. This will be enough. I am giving him what he wants, what he likely expects.

"But you're not. Father all but crippled you, and I took the throne by way of battle. Or conquest, however you want to put it."

"You expect me to just accept that?"

"I expect you to be happy with what you have, yes," Frieza replied, "You know you were never
suited for the day-to-day of ruling. Father knew it, I knew it--you enjoyed your work too much, and diplomacy and courtly skills too little."

"I don't recall that you were ever the diplomat."

"My instructors tell me I am a quick study," Frieza laughed. "But in all seriousness..."

"I know."

I paused. He was right, of course, I had always enjoyed my work a little too much. I tended my duties at court, but...

I hated that thought, that he was right, but there it was all the same.

He wouldn't hear me say it, though.

"What do you want?" I asked. "Why did you call, is what I mean."

"I wanted to check on your progress. The doctors tell me about it, of course, but I wanted to see it with my own eyes."

"And what do you see?"

"I see someone who should be getting back to work soon. Salza cannot keep doing your work forever, you know."

"I--"

"I can have a few simple things sent your way, start you off small if necessary--the point is that I need you to get back to where you were. As soon as is possible."

"It is not as easy being King as you thought, is it?"

"Brother, do not test me today. Do not."

"Fine. I will see what the doctors say about all of this, but I assume if it's as simple as you say I can at least accomplish something in the way of work."

It seemed over, but as I was about to end the call, he spoke again.

"Perhaps I can motivate you another way, if this is not enough."

"Are you threatening me?"

"I thought you might like to know about your precious (y/n), is all. I assume you still wish to claim her."

"Of course." The look in his eye...it made me wonder.

"You may find that to be difficult--"

"If this is about her pregnancy, say so!"

I snapped. My fists clenched, my aura flared; energy crackled around me. "Do NOT play games with me about that! I KNOW ABOUT IT!"

"The idea seems to anger you," Frieza observed flatly.
"Of course it angers me!" I spat, "The one thing I can't give her, and he left it there like it was nothing! And she hasn't spoke of it, at all--"

Could I blame her, though?

Would I want to speak of it, if I were her?

"Calm down," Frieza cut in. "This helps nothing."

"You aren't the one who would have to face it, day in and day out. You--I can't bear the thought of my son sharing blood with my father's bastard. The very idea is--"

"Calm down." Frieza said. "You worry over nothing."

"This is not nothing, brother," I said.

"This is not something you need to worry about right now. As the doctors would say--one day at a time."

And then he smiled.
As Long As I Live

Chapter Summary

Your mentor told you once, about things one of your expertise could not have--and now, you will never forget it again.

Chapter Notes

Warning: READ THE NEW TAGS. Read, or don't, accordingly.

As Long As I Live

It was late March, and the weather had not warmed in the slightest.

"Are you sure you are warm enough, my lady?" one of your guards asked. "I know your kind make your own heat, but--"

"I am fine," you answered with a small smile, "Really. If anything I'm overheating right now, with all the layers I have on."

The visit to Cooler had concluded an hour or two earlier, and once again his progress was encouraging. He was working on small things again, and with Salza's help, things were beginning to look up.

For him, at least.

But you put that thought aside, in favor of another one. What was calling your name was the large meal waiting for you at home. The cooks had promised much; steaks bursting with hot seasonings and vegetables slick with glaze and next, a traditional Arcosian dish they called four fin soup--said to be good for the child.

These was only the ones they deigned to mention. Insubordinate, yes, but they were always able to take away any ill will with astounding results.

They flourished in skill, with a stomach that needed such meals as yours, and you, baby weight aside, were beginning to feel the effects of such a wonderful diet. Not even in the Ivory Palace had you had such choice and indulgence, and the weight was piling on.

It was with such thoughts that you found yourself distracted, already able to smell the spices from mere memory alone.

If the weather was not warm, at least your insides would be.

The baby kicked, and you put a hand down to your belly, giving a little smile. He was hungry, too.
"Peace," someone called out up ahead. "Let the gods grant him peace."

"What gods do they favor here?" you asked, "My late lord husband told me of many, but--"

"The fellow is in white," one guard said, "That is the color of death here, as I am sure you already know. There's a crowd following him, likely a funeral procession."

"Lord Berg died a week ago," the other guard mused. "We should cross the street and let them by."

"Peace," called out several of those following the man.

It was then you spotted the casket.

"I thought Arcosians gave their dead to the ice?" you asked.

"They do," said one guard, "But it is custom to take the dead on a last tour of his or her familiar home and neighborhood, so that their friends and family can be made aware of the passing, and pray for the peace of the departed soul. This is an older tradition, you understand, but Lord Berg was well over 800, and a very traditional man."

"Have things changed much in recent years?"

"Some prefer a quiet burial, with notes sent to inform the friends and family of the deceased. Others say that they need no tour of their neighborhood to be at peace, that the burial at an ice chapel is enough. It still persists, either way."

"How did it begin, I wonder..." you mused.

Perhaps due to some poor soul stricken ill who died in a sterile, cold hospital. Perhaps those left behind feared haunting, and thought a last look of one's home and friends would ease the passing better than the simple ceremony would.

The man in white passed you, before you and the guards could cross the street.

"Peace for the departed," the man said. His eyes fell upon you, and you echoed his words.

"Peace for the departed."

The crowd took another step--

--there was sudden movement in your direction, and you drew your arm up defensively.

"An arctic bell, for the presence of new life in the face of the old."

One of those following the man in white had come up to you, and was holding the named flower. It almost sparkled with light, in a strange way.

"A gift, my lady. Enjoy the life you are given, as the departed did."

He extended the flower, you reached out to take it...

"May you be strong in the coming days."

When you took the flower from his hands, you felt the guards on either side of you rush forward, and there was only half a second to wonder why. The flickering light in the man's hand, you realized too late, had been a ki blast, and the ki blast shot forward, straight into your gut.
The man darted back into the crowd, and you heard one of your guards shout at the other to apprehend him.

The world was spinning in slow motion. Dampness, at the wound, you touched it--and drew up bloody hands.

"Catc--"

Pain tore through your body. You doubled over as the dizziness grew worse, and found yourself on the ground just a few moments later.

A guard at your side.

The bleeding wouldn't stop. The blood--gods, the blood--...the attack...

Words.

Water. ...
can only do so much...

A mask over your face.

...everything possible...skull...

The environment, the feel of it, was familiar, but you couldn't place it. Your eyes were shut, and even attempting to open them was a joke. Too heavy. Too tired.

...emptied...

Every limb was like lead.

You tried to move, and groaned from the effort. This was wrong, you were too strong for mere movement to be so hard.

It felt like eons before you finally managed to open your eyes.

You weren't in the healing tank--you were on a small bed near one, and had several leads and IVs going into you.

They had to have put you in there, why would they need...?

Hands on--

--the belly was gone.

The enormous seven-month belly was gone.
"Where is my baby?"

The words came out half-slurred, but a nurse peeked in briefly, before speaking up.

"Doctor! She's awake!"

You called for your baby again. There was no answer.

Where were they hiding your baby?

After a few minutes, the nurse reappeared. "My lady, I--"

"My baby," you snarled, "Now."

She cringed. "He's not--"

"I don't care what condition he's in, I want to see him NOW!"

"You need r--"

"I am not shutting my eyes until I see my baby!"

She went silent. A cold pit was forming, and you were about to reach for her, to shake her, to demand an answer, when you heard another voice.

"Lady Winter, I'm sorry."

No

He stepped forward, cradling something wrapped in blue blankets, which he passed to you.

"We did everything we could, my lady..." the doctor said, "But the blast that struck you tore through him, and..."

You heard no more, and hurriedly uncovered the light, little blue bundle.

The back of his head was tightly bound up, though not enough to hide all of the little one's dark hair. You stroked it, and felt the icy chill of death on the boy's cheek as your hand moved down the tiny face.

His father's nose...

...your ears...

...he was limp, and cold, but you held the little cheek to your own, held the small body with delicacy. He was so little, and...

...and so cold...

...and you sat there, holding him and waiting for the nightmare to end.
Chapter Summary

There are ways to punish those who hurt you, and to reward those who help.

Chapter Notes

I don't normally link things the more serious fics, but I had mood music on repeat for this chapter:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pS-gbqbVd8c

*The Captain Of The Guard*

(Y/n) spent hours holding the baby, but gave him up without protest when the nurses requested him for burial.

She asked to be updated on the funeral, and then I was summoned to her.

"Captain Balmy," she said quietly, "The one to attack me, he is in custody, is he not?"

"That he is, my lady." I shifted.

"And the others in the crowd, they...?"

"We questioned several of them, and they all had the same story. They told us the one responsible had joined them, and talked of the deceased as if he knew him. You must understand that such a thing happens often in processions of the dead. Those in the neighborhood who know him who are not invited to the funeral will still walk with the procession in honor of the deceased, and so when this one joined them, they thought nothing of it."

She nodded.

I studied her eyes, but they were glazed, blank. I could discern nothing from them.

"He is being kept under lock and key to await his trial."

"I want to see him."

"My lady, you may be recovered, but..."

"I want to see this man," she repeated, with a harder edge to her voice. "He robbed me of the one joy that I could call my own. He took the one child I was ever likely to have."
"You are angry," I said, "You are going to want vengeance. If you approach him, now--"

"I will not kill him, Captain. I give you my word."

My lady's dark eyes, however, seemed darker than usual.

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*The Thief*

The jailor was one I had seen before, and one with whom I had become familiar with months ago. Hundreds in bribes, hours with whores chosen specifically to his taste, all leading up to this moment.

His part would come into play. He was due to come on duty soon, and when he did...

The door at the end of the hall opened, and I looked. Were I a mammal, my skin would have paled.

She walked down the hall, followed by her Captain, and stopped directly in front of my cell.

I expected shouting, rage, anger. I expected her to tell her Captain to drag me out and bash me about until I was nothing but a puddle on the floor. Anything but that quiet stare.

"My guards tell me your name is Inclement," she said softly.

"It is."

"I am sure that you have already been questioned, but I intend to question you further. Starting with why."

"Why?"

"Why would you do what you did?"

"There are many people who wanted that to happen," I said, "And many reasons they would want it done."

"And you work for one such person, is that it?"

Where is the anger? I ripped the child away from her--she should be screaming at me! She should be calling for my blood!

"I asked myself," (Y/n) said aloud, "I asked myself, who would want my son gone badly enough to do this thing?"

"And you came up with the answer I gave you."

"Yes."

There was nothing in her eyes. Not hate, not anger, not sorrow.

Nothing.

Just silent watchfulness.

"Whom do you serve?"

"I serve--myself."
"Whom do you serve?" she asked again.

"I serve myself," I forced out.

She stuck a hand through the bars, and lit a ki ball in her palm.

"Whom do you serve?"

"I serve myself!" I shouted, "And no one else!"

"You know better than that." Her voice stayed a monotone, flat; her eyes, emotionless.

"You--"

"Don't you remember the words? Didn't they tell them to you? Didn't you get it hammered into your head hard enough?"

My eyes widened.

"You serve the King, don't you?" she asked, "You are from the guild."

"I am not--"

"You are from the Arcosian Guild of Assassins, and you serve the King," she said.

"And how did you come to that conclusion?"

"It would have to be one of you, to get past my guards. Captain Balmy and his men are all very capable, and have done their jobs too well. I should have heeded his advice when he said to cross the street."

She paused.

The ki beam fizzled away, but she brought her other hand between two other bars. A moment later, there were two ki balls.

"I will let you go to trial," (y/n) said quietly. "You will be sentenced but not executed. If we were on Planet Vegeta, I would have no barrier to your death...but it is not your death I want."

I backed against the wall.

"Hurting me will not bring your son back."

"No," she said softly. "It won't."

The light brightened, I turned away--

---

*The Captain Of The Guard*

--and there was a scream.

The man wailed in agony as the two ki balls tore through the base of his tail and left it a mess on the ground. The wound was half-cauterized, but still leaked blood slowly into a puddle beneath him.

(Y/n) turned away, and spoke to the jailor.
"You have played your part admirably," she said to him, "I thank you, again and again, for telling me of his treachery."

Against a background of pained wails, she went on.

"I believe you said you had two children of your own?"

"Yes, m'lady. Dusk and Dawn."

"In addition to the sum I've promised you," she said, "I hope that you would not be averse if I offered to foster them."

"My ex-husband would not agree to it. He took them far off months ago, and I've not seen them since."

"An abuser, if I recall right. The law did not favor you."

"He was well-connected if not wealthy, m'lady. He had family to intimidate the witnesses, and a...colleague...who had a judge's ear."

She nodded.

"I will end this problem for you. I know of your ex-husband, and I assure you that you will see your children by the end of the month."

"If you can get 'em back, I could think of nothing better for 'em than to be in your house, where I could see them every day. They've probably never even seen one of this size, much less been inside one. He never--they need this kind of security, m'lady. If you can get them, I don't know how much more I could thank you, but I'd find a way to do it."

"I will speak of the details with you later," she said, "But for now, rest assured that you will see your children soon. I will give orders for you to have rooms in the servants' quarters."

I watched this exchange quietly, and followed (y/n) as she left.

"He is a low stationed man. You have done him a great favor," I said.

"He came to you the moment the bribes were offered him," (y/n) said, "Such promptness deserves a great reward."

"And the children?"

"I hold a dim view of those who keep one's children away from the other parent," she replied quietly. "And if I must be honest...I would like to see a happy child about the place."

I nodded.

The woman is desperate to be a mother. Perhaps having some children, any children around, will make bearing the loss a little easier.

Perhaps.

I called the doctors, and ordered one down to the cells to tend to the man's bloody stump.

He will have his day in court, but whatever the verdict, whatever the sentence, his shame will be constantly present now.
Abyss

Chapter Summary

It must vent somewhere, and luckily for you, the King you serve has a solution.

Abyss

*The Court of The Lady*

"We wanted to speak to you, my lady."

"About what?"

(Y/n) looked back at the two lords who sat before her with a glassy stare. "I thought that I had resolved the issues you'd brought to me."

"Some of the issues," one said, "There are others we will need to discuss later, with your betrothed."

"His presence will not mean that my authority--"

The second lord spoke up then. "But he has a son, and you are not like to have any heirs."

"And what does that have to do with any of your problems? I can resolve them well enough on my own."

Her tone was hard to place, the first lord thought. Was she angry, or hurt? These mammals made it hard to tell how they felt at times. It was hard to know how to speak to them, when things were like this.

"We presume his son will be your heir, and thus, that your problems will be his problems."

"And because of that, you intend to cut me out of the process entirely?"

"Pardon our saying so," the first lord said, "But the prince has more experience in dealing with our problems than you. It is not only that you're a mammal, it's that your late Lord husband, may the gods grant him peace, did not have the time to school you as well as many would have liked."

She went quiet, but only for a moment.

"It is within your rights to think along those lines, I suppose."

The talks concluded a short time later, and the lords left, feeling quite good about how they had gone. The Prince Cooler had always been hard to deal with, but after his "captivity" they were quite sure he would be easier to deal with.

To their advantage, of course.
The King In His Castle

My brother continues to recover, and I am glad. There is work here to do that is simply more to his taste than my own. There is bureaucracy that I haven't the patience to deal with, deals that need to be gone over...the list is endless, really.

The lords and ladies of Arcos are, however, the biggest thorn in my side.

I knew there would be those who did not especially like my rule, or means of obtaining it. But this, well...

"Bad news, your grace."

It had started with those words, spoken by Appule of all people.

"You don't usually bring such news yourself. It must be important, for you to risk death."

"It is." Appule saluted as he came within a few feet of Frieza, and stopped there.

"Well?" I asked. "Go ahead. Talk, before I really do kill you."

Appule lowered his voice. "The eight families you asked me to monitor seem to have come together, with the plan of poisoning you."

"Original," I scoffed. "And how did they expect to accomplish that?"

"A single meeting," he said, "A dinner, rather. It seems that each intend to feed you toxins--or poisons--that, on their own, are merely uncomfortable or unpleasant, but together..."

"...can bring me down. I see. I shall have to dispose of them quickly. Thank you, Appule."

The man gave a bow, just as the doors were opening behind him to let in someone else.

"...now get back to your medical duties before I blast you back to the infirmary myself! I don't pay you to bring me notes every time my wife has an appointment!"

Appule ran out, past the soldier who was coming to relieve one of my guards on duty.

I relaxed.

And then I brought up the console screen and initiated a call to (y/n).

"I had not expected the honor, your grace," she said quietly, "What is it I owe that honor to?"

"I need something done," I said, "Someone...taken care of."

"I have visits to your brother scheduled, but I can work around them, I suppose."

"No, no, you'll have to postpone them, this can't wait. And besides, you're still grieving. Do you think my brother wants to see you grieve over father's child?"

"How did he find out?" Her tone was flat, but she kept it respectful.

Was that relief I saw in her eyes? Strange.

"You can hide a lot of things, my dear, but you were too far along for him not to notice. Now, about what I need. I can provide you with a certain poison, and I need you to stick around to be sure..."
that plenty of it is handed out to those I need to be rid of."

"What poison might that be?"

I told her.

"A disguise will also be prudent. I'll be getting some mammalian women to wait upon some of my guests at dinner, and I expect you to be among them. Hiding your tail should be easy enough."

"Of course, your grace."

There was a pause, and unable to stop the thought, I let it out. "You should have chosen me, my dear."

She didn't respond.

"You would still be pregnant," I went on, "Father and I are enough alike in look that I could easily have passed the child off as my own."

"You would have done that?"

I nodded. "But that is not what happened. Sometimes things happen that cannot be avoided. As much as we might like it to be otherwise."

"And now," she said, "Now I have to sit down and tell the squabbling nobles beneath me that I will have no more children."

"Not an enviable task."

No, not at all.
Frieza employs a new woman, and Cooler learns what has happened to you.

*The Whore*

"Do you know why you are here?"

The soldier had asked her that when she was brought into the room and told to bathe, and Lentil shrugged.

"No. I know that you approached me, threw me in a healing pod, and then dragged me out here. I assumed to entertain you and your friends."

"Well," the soldier said, "Good news for you is, that's not it, though I'd certainly like to..."

"Then tell me whose cock I'm here to suck." She felt the urge to smoke, but they had taken her cigarettes. "I don't have all day, and if I get dumped back in the sticks I'd like to have something to show for it."

"Be a good whore and you might not have to go back. I was told to tell you to bathe and put on one of the outfits in the closet in that back bedroom, then come and sit out here in the front room and wait."

"I don't suppose I'll get a meal?"

"Suck the cock well enough, and maybe so."

The soldier gave a throaty laugh and then left.

Lentil went into the bathroom, and for a moment struggled to understand how she was supposed to get clean in the tub--she crouched and washed her hair under its faucet while puzzling--but after accomplishing this, she spotted the shower stall in the corner.

That was a little easier to deal with, and soon enough she was walking out of the bathroom cleaner than she had been in months.

The clothes in the bedroom were of an average size, but they were still too big. Regardless, she put on the ones that best displayed her curves in spite of half-hiding them.

Then she went into the main room, and sat on one of the couches arranged around a table. She was quiet, but fidgety.

Just one, she would be happy with that. That would fix this anxiety for sure. All it would take was a few puffs from one, she wouldn't even have to finish it so long as she could...
It was only twenty more minutes, but it seemed such an eternity longer with that need poking at her constantly. Then the doors *whooshed* open and let in--

"Frieza?"

Lentil was in shock. She had expected many things, but not the same Lord Frieza that had conquered the planet.

"You're speechless, I see," he said with a smile.

"I didn't expect you to have any interest, is all. And your wife..."

"My wife cares little for who I take in my spare time so long as the women I waste it with know that they stand beneath her." Frieza took a seat, and studied her face, "You do seem to have more scars than I thought you would."

"And you know more of me than I thought you would."

Frieza gave a little chuckle there. "I make it my business to know about those with whom I intend to spend my time."

"Whatever you want me to do, I will, so long as your money is good. I don't fuck for free. But if you wanted that, you would probably have gotten some noblewoman, wouldn't you?"

"Aren't you going to ask what I want?"

"I'm a whore," Lentil said casually, "I know what you want, I just don't know in what position you want it. What do you want me to do and what are you paying for it?"

He gave a figure, and her brows raised so high they were very nearly in danger of merging with her hairline.

"For that price you could buy a whole planet of whores."

"For that price, I expect more than one night."

"Are you attempting to buy me? Do you honestly think I would sell myself like a slave to someone like you?"

Frieza did not respond.

Lentil wondered if he knew what she was about to say, but said it anyway, eyes suddenly on the floor. "Because you're right. I would."

"And why is that?" Frieza's tone was oddly gentle.

"Your soldiers must have told you about where they got me."

"Maybe I want to hear it from your own mouth."

"An alley, where I spend half my earnings on vices to comfort myself over the fact that I'd never have more than two changes of clothes...I could keep talking, but I think that's enough. More than enough."

He must, she had decided, want to think he's rescuing me somehow. He wants to feel superior. Why doesn't matter.
"You will be faring much better, since you've accepted my offer," Frieza said, "Though we will need to do something about those scars. You'll need to look like someone else for me, for just a while."

"Who?"

"Her name is (y/n)."

A look of shock passed over Lentil's face--quickly. He saw it, but didn't comment on it, and merely waited for her to respond.

"I suppose you need a decoy or something like that," Lentil said, "Maybe you want this woman, and you only want me because I look like her."

"And maybe I need her to do a few things, and I need you to take her place so no questions are asked."

"If this idea succeeds, and I don't die--what then?"

"That figure and a few perks we can go over later will be all yours. Provided you continue to prove yourself worth them."

Lentil nodded, and when he stood, she did as well.

"I want you now," Frieza said suddenly, stepping closer. "Strip."

There was only a brief stunned pause before she began to obey.

He clicked his tongue a few times. "So disappointing, all these scars...but I imagine the brutes on your planet like to mark women like you."

A hand was raised and atop his index finger, a tiny red ball of ki began to bud.

"The scars can be healed, you know, but they must be reopened for that to happen."

---

*The Isolated Prince, Earlier That Week*

"Lady Winter will not be joining us today."

I had been told that and immediately asked why.

"There was a severe emergency that demanded her attention. We are told," Difrost said softly, "We are told that she will rejoin you after a short time has passed."

"But why? What emergency was so terrible that she can't appoint someone to tend it?"

I don't care what emergency she has, I want to see her.

I wish she wasn't a lady. I wish she was just a soldier under my command again, the way she was before. Things would have been simpler. I wouldn't have to wait for her to see me.

But I told her, didn't I? She didn't have the station.

And now she had the thing that would let us be together.

I decided to check the society pages in the news sites on the extranet to see if there were any recent
stories or pictures of her, and found her almost immediately in a side column.

**LADY WINTER'S ENGAGEMENT TO THE PRINCE TAINTED AFTER ATTACK**

"Yes, it's true," is what Lady Winter had to say when asked about news of her engagement to the reclusive Prince Cooler. When asked when the Prince would confirm the story, she only stated that he "would do so in his own time."

The story, of course, has been corroborated by the King, who continues to say that his brother has made excellent progress and will soon return to his full duties.

*Marring this happy event, however, is the stillbirth of Lady Winter's son and heir, Siberius, post an incident involving a cut-throat who attacked her in the street. Her ladyship plans to hold a traditional Arcosian burial for the child despite his hybrid nature, which many say is presumptuous.*

"Lady Winter also made a statement late last week that she will bear no further children, and that Lord Cooler's son will be named her heir, should his father allow it.

One thing is certain here, if nothing else is--the Lady will have a lot of work to do.

* This one highly doubts anyone will have the gall to say such a thing to her ladyship's face.

An attack.

Her child stillborn, after an attack.

The timing is too close. I would have to be an idiot not to suspect, after the conversation that I had with my brother a short time ago.

I'm relieved, of course, but only a little. Now I have to pick up her pieces and watch her grieve for father's last strike at me. I have to comfort her for something I wish had never existed in the first place.

This should never have happened. But I have to know the truth of this first.

I sat down in front of the console and called my brother up. A soldier answered first, and when I demanded to see my brother, rushed off to fetch him. Several minutes later, Frieza appeared.

"This had better be worth my time, Cooler," he said flatly.

"Did you do it?"

"Do what? I've done a lot of things today."

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. Father's child. Did you kill him? Did you hire that man that attacked (y/n)?" I asked.

"Yes."

"You're not going to deny ending a child's life?"

"Why should I deny it?" Frieza asked. "You did not want it around, I did not want it around. You know who I am and what I've done. Why does this death surprise you so much?"

I paused, and momentarily looked away.
"She will not grieve it in front of you, if that's what you're worried about." he went on, "She will not cry, she will not lament, she will not so much as speak of it, if you don't ask her. But she is broken right now, Cooler, and as I am sure you know from experience, she can be easily lead if you still want her."

"Of course I still want her," I snapped.

"Then you can have her, after she has done a few things for me."

"You--"

"I have no intention of bedding her, much as I would like to. But she's an assassin, Cooler, and I intend to make use of her skills. At the moment she is full of anger, no matter how stony a wall she builds to hide the grief that's causing it. And I have need of that kind of anger."

"What are you going to do?"

"A few people will die, that's all," Frieza replied with a light shrug. "Give me two weeks, and she will be yours again."

"And until then?"

"I have another visitor to send you, someone you'll want to see. And no--not a whore, so don't make any faces at me. Although, speaking of..."

I crossed my arms. "What?"

"...I hear from your personal logs that you met someone interesting in that line of work on Planet Vegeta several years ago."

"Why does a recording that old interest you?" I raised an eye ridge.

"You mentioned a woman in those logs that looked like our dear little (y/n). I'm wondering just how close this resemblance is."

"Exactly like, only with scars."

"Where did you find her?"

I still remembered her, and remembered also the bitter feeling of wishing I had fucked her, simply to imagine I was holding (y/n) again. I told him, while trying not to think too hard about the feelings swirling around in my head.

"Your memory is very precise here. If you're correct, I can have this woman take (y/n)'s place for these two weeks, and save myself a lot of inconvenient questions when people begin to die."

"You can," I said quickly, "But if I find you're trying to pass her off as (y/n) to me, so you can have the woman that's mine--"

"Please, I need your aid too badly to do that," Frieza said.

I didn't think it could possibly be that bad, but he seemed in such a rush to have me well again, that I was beginning to doubt it, myself.

It doesn't matter.
I'll have my (y/n) back soon, and everything will be as it should.
Lentil has recovered from her injuries, Cooler gets his visitor, and you begin with target number one.

*The Whore*

It had hurt, worse than anything Lentil'd yet felt before. Frieza had spent time carefully opening every scar on her body--and there were plenty of them, from head to toe. The pain was everywhere, and she flinched at every touch, but once it was over, once he had fucked her...

...she was very carefully taken to the healing tank. Some time later, she was awake, and allowed out of it.

She flinched when she noticed Frieza standing a few feet away.

"No need to be frightened," he said, "I simply wanted to see the result of my work, is all. Doctor, bring the woman a mirror."

Lentil saw the doctor move, and took the time to look down at her arms and legs. The scars from being grabbed with jagged fingernails, from being burned with ki beams, all the ones from all the ways she had been hurt--gone.

"I..."

Then the doctor reappeared with the hand mirror, and Lentil got a good look at her face. The scars across her face and left cheek, the ones that she had earned from daring to fight (y/n)'s father--gone. Her skin was virtually flawless now.

Her hands were shaking.

"I am perfectly willing to admit," Frieza spoke up, drawing her attention back to him, "That I inflict such wounds myself. I have...different tastes, than most men of my kind. And also unlike those others, I heal the wounds I create."

"You like to hurt. I know your type."

"Pain is such...an interesting reaction in people. Some can't bear it. They scream and they fight to avoid it. Others...well, like saiyans, they tend to fight as well, but they make that fight more satisfying. My wife, for example..."

"She's a saiyan elite," Lentil spoke up, "And no doubt sees a broken arm as a means to an end. We tend to like strong opponents, because if our opponents are stronger than us, it means we can throw ourselves at them until we get stronger."

"Yes, you get that," Frieza smirked, "I spar with her, and she thanks me for breaking her bones, she
"I can't say that I am very strong right now, so I'm afraid that I would only disappoint you there."

"You're a saiyan," Frieza said. "You can always get stronger, no matter how weak you are."

There was a brief pause, and then Lentil spoke again. "This woman I am to replace, the one I look like...will her people not be suspicious, when I do not behave like her?"

"That's been thought of. The doctor here will assist you--you'll appear to come down with some pneumonia, or flu, or some thing or the other of that variety. It will naturally take you two weeks to fully recover. Simply lay in bed, vomit now and again, and complain of headaches, that sort of thing."

*Cooler*

A new visitor, my brother had said. I would get a new visitor, one I wanted to see.

And Difrost, she told me that I should make sure to have everything cleaned up--myself, and the area in the room. She had prompted me to start taking care of more things myself. Not out of laziness on her part, but to encourage self-care and such for me. To show I cared about how my environment reflected on me.

So I sat, waiting that day. She had set out a tray of simple foods (apple slices, a couple of bananas, two cut-in-half sandwiches, yogurt), and told me that my guest would probably want a snack at some point. I wondered, what...

"Hush, hush," I heard from the other side of the door. "It's okay."

There was mumbling I couldn't hear, and a wild hope rose in my heart.

The doors whooshed open and I saw the nanny I knew so well enter, with Brisk in her arms.

"See," the nanny said to him, "Look, it's your papa."

Brisk looked warily at me--it was hard, so HARD, not rush over and pluck him from her arms and hug him. But I couldn't, it would be like what happened with Frigi. Too much too fast, and it could ruin my chances.

"Papa gone," he said.

"Your papa was very sick," the nanny said, "He is not sick anymore."

Still Brisk clung to her. She sat down on the same couch as I was, at the other end.

He looked up. "Papa sick?"

"No," I said, "No, not now. I'm--I'm all better."

He was studying me suspiciously, like I was some stranger. This would pass. It had to. It had to.

"Hungee." he said suddenly looking back at the nanny.

I took a plate from the table and put a sandwich on it. I was reaching for the yogurt when Brisk spoke up and pointed.
"Want 'nana."

"He loves his bananas," the nanny said when I looked at her. "Peel it and cut it in half."

I did just that, and held one of the halves out. He took it and held it with strangely serious care.

"What do we say?" the nanny prompted.

"'nk you."

Difrost brought in more food--for the nanny and I, and I questioned her thoroughly as Brisk worked his way through the banana halves and the sandwich.

"Has he been...developing well?"

"Oh, yes. I think being in with his cousins has been good for him, he's seen behavior of children his own age and is getting properly socialized with them. They'll say a word, he will repeat it, and before I know it they're having a conversation. We've tried to be sure that he's gotten the same amount of attention as his cousins, too."

"We?" I asked.

"The Queen," she replied, "His grace takes up much of her time, but she does not neglect her motherly duties. Nor has she neglected your son in favor of her own children."

"I'm glad to hear that. And he gets along well with them?"

"Quite well. Brisk," she said suddenly, "Tell your papa about Kuriza and Algid. What do you like to play with them?"

"Color. 'N ledgers."

"You've learned some letters?" I asked him. "Which ones?"

"A-B-C," he said quickly.

"That's very good!" I smiled, and looking up, he smiled back.

It was an encouraging step in the right direction. At least he was talking to me, which is more than I can hope for when he meets (y/n) again. Gods, now that will be a challenge, she...

*You*

...should be done with this quickly.

The Arcosian lord, first on the list, was sitting back on his bed and looking through the contents of a ring-box. He looked up when he heard you coming, and smirked.

He had insulted the Queen, Frieza had told you, something about keeping monkeys where they belonged. Oh, sure, he had also aided the rebels, even harbored some of them, but it was easy to see that the greatest sin in the new King's eyes was the slight to his wife. 'Kill him as you see fit,' he had added, 'Quick, slow, however you wish.'

"Who sent you?" the lord asked. He put the ringbox aside.
"His Grace," you said softly, "I don't know why. He didn't tell me, he said that you would know why."

You were wearing a thin, sleeveless gown with a deep v-neck in the front. To tempt him a bit more, you tugged the shoulders off just enough that your breasts were in danger of popping out.

"Turn around," the lord said.

You did so--exposing your tail.

"I see," he piped up. "I believe I understand completely. He wanted to make something up to me, I suppose. Tell me, how long have you been at this job?"

"Several years," you said.

"And you get many takers from my kind?"

"Many, my lord," you replied in a light voice, "They keep saying they like to know that at least one monkey knows her place."

"And do you?" His cock was already beginning to evert from his body, and he was urging it out.

"Of course, my lord." You stopped just in front of him, and dropped the shoulders of the gown, exposing your breasts entirely. By the time you were on your knees, he was fully ready.

"What are you?" he asked.

"An outsider," you replied, stroking at him. Your fingers moved down, to the slit of his feminine area. "A whore that got lucky."

"Judging from the silk you're wearing, I can't but agree. Who did you fuck? The King? Likely as not. He does seem to like his saiyan women."

"It is the warmth," you said. Fingers edged into him, but your thumb stayed out. "His grace agrees with your view, but wanted you to see what we are capable of."

"You are certainly warm..." there was a deep growl from the lord, "...here, now, get up. If the king's going to give me a whore, I'm going to fuck her proper."

Your thumb, you drew back and pushed into him.

"A bit tight," he said, shifting suddenly, "Get up--"

"In a moment," you whispered sweetly, making eye contact.

**BOOM**

The ki beam was fired, and the end for the lord came quickly. Bits of plaster, stone, glass, all came down around you, but it was his red mist that coated you the most. Nothing would be left of his insides. Very little would be left, for them to give to the ice.

The sudden alarms, you paid no attention to. They didn't matter. The job was done.

You simply stood, took the ring-box, and flew out the shiny new hole in the roof.

One down, seven to go.
Wounded Hunter

Chapter Summary

Frieza gave you two orders. Maybe he wanted to know which you would follow. Perhaps he would be pleased.

Chapter Notes

everyone is broken

Wounded Hunter

"Five of them have fallen, your grace, of the eight that we started out with," the nobleman said, "At first we suspected a mere thug, or someone with a grudge, but..."

"Why did you suspect someone with a grudge?" Frieza took a sip from the glass of wine before him.

The second, a woman, said, "The deaths were all bloody ones, horrible ones. One was..."

She looked sick for a moment, and then went on.

"One was blasted straight through, with an energy attack. Another was cut from groin to throat."

There was a pause. The woman took a large gulp of her wine.

"Well?" Frieza asked, "Go on. I want to know what happened to these people."

"Two of them were dissected like--like common experiments," said the man, "Their skin was peeled back. Their--their bones broken..."

"Broken, how? I break my wife's bones on the daily, that does not make her dead."

"Her majesty is a saiyan, and as good as asks you for those wounds. And you always heal her."

"True. But go on--that can't be all."

"Their..." he took a long drink from his glass before speaking again. "...their hearts were removed."

"We have a butcher, then. What about the last one?"

"Well..."

*You*
"What am I?"

"I don't know!"

You backhanded the woman, Arcosian, and narrowed your eyes. "That's funny. You were eager to tell me what I was when I turned up in your employ."

"Everyone does that!" she cried out, "You're a saiyan! You're a mammal!"

"And you are a reptile. What other obvious facts shall I state?"

Silence.

"You have a tail," You said, drawing your hand up. "You have a King."

"That imp on the throne is no king of mine. Is that what this is about?"

"And why is he not your king?" you ignored the remark. For the moment.

"He brought one of your kind home. He's put two children in her. He's made her Queen, the first non-Arcosian queen there's ever been. He has obliterated the traditions of our people, and for what? For what?"

"For what indeed."

You placed your hand on her shoulder. "I can make this as painless as you want it to be. You could die instantly."

"In exchange for what?"

"Tell me what you think of me. What you truly think of me. No bargaining, no flattery. Do that, and I won't do to you what I did to the others. I'm sure you don't want to make your funeral unpleasant for your relatives."

"Why are you doing this?" she cried out, "The King will not--"

"Who do you think ordered you dead?" You asked, "He gave me two options, and I chose the one I found more suitable."

"You're from the GUILD. You're supposed to kill--"

"That was the old king. The new king couldn't care less. A corpse is a corpse, after all."

She looked up at you, calm and clear--still afraid, but resigned. "This isn't going to bring your child back."

"No," you said quietly, "But it'll make me feel a little bit better."

So many screams...of pain, for mercy, in death...

The guild made a point of saying that kills should be clean, but right now...

...if you have to lose everything...

You had Cooler back, though. Likely not Brisk, the boy was too old to know you.
But just young enough to forget you were never there, before

You shook your head, and looked at the next names on the list.

Get through them fast, and enjoy that last one

So much blood...

What was it all for? What did it even mean, anymore?

You looked down at the husk before you. Ribcage, opened, heart, held until it stopped beating, blood coating your front--

--the pounding in your ears, in your head--

They'll be yours, again...

"But how long until they take it all back?"

No. No, that would not happen again. That would never happen again.

You stumbled, then flew, and shivered as the cool night air hit you through the broken window.

*Cooler*

"Nothing can be taken from me if I don't let myself--"

"Cooler," Difrost said, before quickly correcting himself, "My lord. You can't simply avoid attachment altogether."

"It seems to me the best way of avoiding pain," I said quietly, "Every day my son visits, I worry that something will happen. That--that I'll discover this is some cruel joke of my father's. That..."

"It is not a joke. You have your son. You have--the things you lost, you will never lose again. As long as you take steps to be healthy, and do not waste the opportunities that you've been given."

"But I broke down--"

"A breakdown is entirely normal," she said gently, "No one ever recovered from trauma, completely untouched. You must not be so hard on yourself."

"I should be above this," I forced out. "I shouldn't be like this. I was recovering, and then this--"

"Did you not hear what I just said? No one recovers unscathed. Listen to me, now. I've watched you make great strides, and the fact that you are looking in my direction at all, that you are speaking, at all, is wonderful."

I lifted my eyes and met hers. She was so honest, so gentle, so like...

...so like what I wish I had had all this time.

"Now," she pivoted into another subject, "Your brother says that you will have your last visitor again soon. Aren't you looking forward to seeing her again?"

I took a deep breath.
"Yes. Yes, I am."

There was only one thing bothering me.

I could give her Brisk—and given time, he would never know that there was a time without her.

But he would be all I can give her, without help.

The thing that has been stolen from her, stolen twice...

...if I can find a way to remedy that, under my own power, with my own body, I will.
Beauty

Chapter Summary

Cooler thinks about his breakdown, and you come back to see him.

Beauty

*A Few Days Prior*

"He's late," Cooler said. "He's supposed to have been here by now."

Brisk's visits always came at two in the afternoon now.

It was 2:10 now, and he still hadn't shown.

"Perhaps he didn't want to eat his lunch," Difrost said, "Children are like that sometimes. His nanny is very good about making sure that he eats."

2:11.

His heart was already beating a few tics too fast, and before he could stop it, the thought barged in.

What if he's not coming?

"He's coming," Cooler said aloud.

"Yes, of course he is." Difrost said, "Don't worry."

He's not coming

Cooler took a deep breath, and tried to clear his head. But the panic came racing down anyway, while his heart started beating rapidly.

"I...I...he's--"

"Cooler," Difrost said, taking the seat next to him, "Cooler, look at me. Look at me, alright?"

He's not coming, I'm never going to see him again, he's never coming back

He couldn't put it into words--trying to speak only made him feel like he was going to retch. The words wouldn't come out.

Difrost spoke up loudly only long enough to tell the computer in the corner to send a message to the doctors, but then her tone went soft again. "Cooler, it's alright."

He gave up on sitting up. She was safe, she was always safe. So when he collapsed into a nervous heap, the touch of her hand on the side of his head was comforting rather than upsetting.

Neither of them are coming back
I was able to see Brisk several days later, and it calmed my fears considerably. He had come back, and things were as perfect as they could be, considering the situation.

Then, all I had to do was wait for her.

She came back, just as my brother said she would, just as I had hoped she would. Blue gown, white lace...she was beautiful, as beautiful as ever.

She'd come back.

I had to keep repeating that to myself, that she had. It seemed like a dream that she had, after being under my brother's direction for a time--even though it hadn't been a long time. It wasn't unreasonable to think that he still wanted her.

No. No, I couldn't keep thinking that way. I needed to be here, and now.

With her.

---

"Have you been well, my lord?" she asked.

"Not...not entirely. I had a bad day a little bit ago, and..." Cooler shook his head, "Well, that doesn't matter. The issue's been fixed."

"I'm glad to hear it. Difrost is worried about you, you know." You gave him the smile you'd perfected. "And your son..."

"You've--you've spoken to him?"

He looked at Difrost, who nodded from the corner. "She came by while you were asleep yesterday, my lord, when you were napping with your son. The young lord heard that she was here, and wanted to see her, and before she could leave, he stopped her."

"Why would he want to do that?" Cooler asked, fixing her with a puzzled look.

"He knew she had come to see his papa when he was ill," Difrost replied with a little smile, "And so he wanted to know how long she had been seeing him."

"He seemed to think I wanted to steal you from him," you said, evenly, "I've told him that I don't, but...you know how young children are."

Cooler winced, but thankfully Difrost didn't see it--or if she did, she didn't comment on it.

"Please," you said, "I'm not offended by it. He doesn't know me from most strangers. Why wouldn't he suspect me?"

"You've met before, and--" Cooler took a deep breath. "He will get used to you in time, I'm certain. He is like any other child, he can be won over."

You nodded.

Sometimes it was easy to feel like a tool, a computer, a thing without feelings. The better to avoid
feeling things like regret.

That little face, contorted into something like anger, looking so much like Cooler, and yet with a splash of you--that face, telling you to go away...

...when the grief hit, all you had to do was close your eyes and think. You were an assassin, a tool, something to be used against the king's enemies. Did a knife or a weapon have regrets? No.

There could be no tears, either. That would likely set Cooler off.

No, better to let him think all was well.

But the door opened, and little Brisk was lead in--he smiled at his father, climbed into his lap, and gave him a hug.

And then he turned to you, and his little hands clenched at his father's sides.

"Why her here?"

"Brisk, she is helping--"

"Go away." He clenched tighter.

*He was never yours to begin with, and he never will be*, the thought came to your mind. Something Cold had said late one evening, after another round of ensuring you had been well-fertilized.

He wasn't yours, and you would have no others.

You masked your face with a smile, and kept your calm facade. There would be time for grief later, when Cooler could not see.
You find a way to get Brisk to be more friendly; Frieza makes a bizarre request.

Dusk and Dawn were two perfectly sweet children, shy and a little fearful due to their situation, but they seemed to understand what had happened regardless. The 'nice lady' that had brought them back to papa would keep them in her house where they would be safe. And papa was there all the time too, because he worked there.

You did not see them more than once or twice a day--you'd hired a governess for that purpose, after all--but you did see them at least often enough that they didn't seem afraid at the sight of you.

Brisk, on the other hand...

Lengthy discussion with his nanny when the boy was in with Cooler had turned up a few hints, but you weren't sure how well they'd pan out.

"He likes bugs," the woman had said, "The more colorful the better."

"How did you find that out?"

"He likes to go out to the garden fairly often. Once when I was momentarily distracted, he brought this jeweled beetle over and dropped it in my lap. I screamed like I was about four hundred years younger--and he laughed."

"You probably told him off for that."

"Of course!" she said, "But it seemed to spark an interest in the little crawly things...so if you want to catch his attention, something bug-related would do."

So there you were, with that bag tucked under your arm, on your way to another visit with Cooler.

Deep breath.

You stepped into the room, and saw Brisk sitting there, in the middle of the sofa, with Cooler on one side. You took the spot on his other side.

"It's good to see you," Cooler gave you a genuine smile, and then looked down at Brisk.

The little one didn't say anything.

"I thought it was a good idea to bring you something," you said to him, "Because I heard about some stuff you liked."

Still nothing.
"Brisk, you are being very rude," Cooler said. "Turn around and look at (y/n)."

That prompted him to do so, but there was still that defiant, almost angry look in the boy's eyes. You ignored it. He was small, it could not be helped.

Then you pulled out the book from the bag in your lap, and showed it to him.

**BUGS OF ARCOS, A FUN ENCYCLOPEDIA FOR KIDS!**

It had a big red butterfly and several little caterpillars on the cover, and Brisk immediately grabbed it.

"Saw dat ousside," he pointed to the butterfly.

"Open it," you said, "There are lots of others. Maybe you've seen some of them too?"

Brisk did so, and kept his eyes on the pages as he turned them. There were words--but not too many for kids, considering he couldn't read yet anyway it seemed like a good choice--though obviously, it was the pictures that kept his interest. And he kept turning until he saw another he recognized.

"Brisk," Cooler prompted after several minutes of this, "You forgot something."

"What?"

"You're supposed to say thank you when someone gives you a present."

"Oh."

The little one paused and looked up at you, giving you a nicer look than he had in ages. "'nk you."

A step. Such a small step, but a step nonetheless.

*Cooler*

Several weeks passed in this manner. Every other day or so, she would bring Brisk some small treat--a cinnamon roll, or some food he liked, and once or twice, more picture books. At the very least, he wasn't scowling at her, and that's better than what he's been doing.

I just wish it would happen faster. He should be looking forward to seeing her without being given things. She should be holding him when he's sad, or cheering him when he's having a good day.

My fault, again. If I hadn't messed it all up, if I'd only had the bravery to keep her, at the very least, if not marry her. Things would have been far simpler if I'd done that.

She would've been happy, then.

Brisk and I as well. And we'd have had a family here.

But--but we're going to have that now. It'll turn out fine.

I just wish I could give her more.

The thoughts always go like this. I think how well things are going, I think how lucky I am to have this second chance--and it comes right back up, just how I made it necessary for this to happen in the first place. How it's my fault she has to work so hard to gain what should have been hers from
the start.

Things are fine. Things are fine.

Please, let things continue to be good.

I don't know what I'd do if I lost her again.

*You*

Frieza gave you a call some time later, and as usual you relayed Cooler's improvements to him.

"He would rather stay in his rooms and care for his son, I'm sure," you said, "But he knows he can't do that."

"Certainly not," Frieza glared, "Father didn't accept that, and nor will I, but I am not going to do the brainless thing here. He is already putting in small amounts of work, and I need more. Simply do what you have been doing. Open your legs, if you must."

You stayed silent.

"What, are you too fool to do that? Is he no longer attractive?"

"Your grace...it..." you took a moment to choose your words. He had little business inquiring about this, but telling him so would be...unwise. "...I'm no longer a mere soldier, nor a concubine. I am not left alone with him, at any point. It wouldn't be proper."

"To hell with propriety. Nothing motivates a man like a snug place to spend the night, and if he is feeling better merely from seeing and talking to you, fucking you will end all doubt."

A sigh.

"The next time you see him, I expect you will be able to find a way."

He was ordering you to fuck his brother.

What a week this was turning out to be...
For Futures

Chapter Summary

Maybe there's something that can be done.

For Futures

*Cooler*

Time marched on.

There was more of (y/n) getting closer to Brisk, to the point that he actually began to ask, when she wasn't there, when exactly she would be showing up. In the interest of the presents she brought, of course, but it was something. And I reminded him, of course, to always say thank you, to be grateful for what she brought.

"She doesn't have to, but she does," I said to him.

"Why?"

"She wants you to like her."

"Why?"

"She just does. She's going to marry me, so she wants you to like her. Since you'll see her a lot."

"Why?"

"Brisk..." I sighed. "She will be living with me. With us. If you are around someone a lot, it's easier if you like them and they like you."

"Oh..."

A little after that, his nanny came by to take him outside. Since (y/n) had been bringing him those bug books, he'd begun to want to see the bugs more often. He'd go out into the garden, open his book and identify some of them, then try to catch a few (and let them go after, of course, the nanny was careful to make sure he understood that).

Things were improving, and I was glad of it. But the look on her face from those weeks ago, when he had glared at her, not wanting her near...it still haunted my mind. Reminded me of what I had taken from her.

Brisk is getting used to her. So she will get him back.

But the one thing in the world she must want, I can't give her. If only there were something that I could do to help her. If only I could give her what she wanted.

I thought that I might never get the chance--until I found a ray of hope.
"Regenerative technology," the doctor said. "It's very new, and we've had some small successes, but we've got plans to go bigger."

"In what way? What have you been able to do so far?"

"Well," the doctor motioned to me to follow, and went down a hallway. "If you'll allow me to give a quick capsule history of our methods...we of course started with the healing pods, and looked at the methods behind that. The tank itself is vital, as it not only better allows continuous flow of medication, without the--"

"Without relying on the needle and the risk of infection through that vector. I understand."

"Ah, I didn't know how familiar you were with this. It makes sense, however, considering how important the tanks are to your soldiers."

"Indeed. What about organs?" That was one of the failings of the healing tanks. Yes, it could heal your wounds, and restore most damage done--but if half an organ was gone, or the entire thing, there was almost nothing that could be done for it. If a kidney's lower half had been blasted away, the remnant would have to be removed to prevent infection. If half of a lung was gone, it was much the same. If half a heart was gone...that was a death sentence. Perfect genetic replication and restoration wasn't entirely possible with the old models. Or at all.

Yet.

"Could your work restore an organ that had been, say, removed?" I pressed.

"Well--" the doctor stammered for a moment. "We're able to restore the other halves of organs that have been destroyed through one means or another. Our most recent triumph was a liver. It can heal itself of course, but our method did it quicker, and restored it to function with minimal scarring, if at a diminished percentage of function. To restore a removed organ would take--would require a new tank entirely."

He went off on a short scientific lecture at this point, detailing the finer points of what functions the tank would need to have, how advanced it would have to be, analysis of DNA, genetic replication, etc. I actually found it interesting, but my real point--I needed to know.

"But do you believe that you could do it?"

"We...we would have to do more extensive research, make modifications to the healing fluid--I don't know if we could, but given what we've been able to do so far...maybe. That is all I will say for sure. I won't promise something I don't know I could do yet."

"I see."

I took a deep breath.

"From where do you secure your funding?"

"Various sources," the doctor said, "Rich lords, begging your pardon, whose sons and daughters have interest in the sciences and fund us for a while to secure employment for their children. The scientific community, often, and sometimes we get funding from the PTO itself. That funding comes and goes--"

"I have an offer for you, then," I replied. "I have need of this new tech of yours, and in the interest of advancing it, I'll fund your laboratory for the next three years."
"My lord! Such generosity--I thank you, sir, you are making a great contribution to the future of medicine!"

For my own reasons. But let him celebrate.

"What--what is it you want, my lord?"

"I have had my reproductive organs removed," I replied, "I would like them restored. The uterus I am not that attached to, but for health's sake an ovary would be helpful. As for the male organs...at least one testicle. I want to get my future wife pregnant."

"I see, I see. We will certainly do our best."

"And if I manage it, I will fund your laboratory for the next ten years."

The look on his face was stunning; I couldn't help but chuckle.

Hope. Maybe he wouldn't succeed, but maybe he would.

There was a chance, however small.

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