

Sehh'Remma and Roger

Dawning

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Sehh'Remma wandered aimlessly through the very early morning corridors of the ship, noticing no one, deep in thought. Her mind was straining to understand the mixture of feelings that flowed through her. It was made worse by the fact that some of those feelings she could not identify. Those few she could were hope, happiness and, strangely, fear. She felt hopeful but could not determine why. The fear seemed to be a fear of losing something ... but what? Happiness was the only easy one; Roger made her feel happy.

She found herself back in front of the door to Roger's cabin where her journey had begun some time before. Opening the door she entered, closing it again behind her. As she approached the bed she saw Roger with his arms around a female. The fur on the back of her neck stood up and her claws expressed. Suddenly she came to the realization that the female was *herself!* She was actually still in bed and her wanderings had been a dream. She was shocked. Why would she react this way? Her mind was turning this over as the room faded and the dream returned to her subconscious.

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Roger's eyes slowly opened to give him a spectacular view ... of the ceiling in his cabin. Looking down at Sehh'Remma, he smiled and stroked the fur on her cheek with the back of his fingers. Her presence was no surprise today; in fact he would have been surprised if she hadn't been there.

Sehh'Remma stirred awake and looked up at Roger smiling. "Gud...Mrning...Rgr," she said in broken English as she removed the teaching machine's headset from her ears.

"Good morning, Sehh'Remma," he replied slowly. He felt she was doing quite well speaking English after only one session on the machine. He knew she would quickly understand and know how the words should sound; the problem was the machine could not teach her how to make her mouth work to speak them. That would take a bit of time, but not as much as it would take him to learn to speak hers. She would be fluent enough by the time they reached her homeworld to carry on a normal conversation.

Roger gave her a gentle kiss on the head and then got up to get ready for the day. While he set out his clothes she rolled over in the bed and, getting up on hands and knees did a very sensual cat stretch. She could see Roger had noticed her, his normally baggy boxers were getting tighter. She gave him a sly grin and he chuckled while shaking a finger at her.

Roger went into the bathroom and shaved, then began to brush his teeth. Sehh'Remma had awakened in a mischievous mood that morning and decided to have some more fun at poor Roger's expense. She got out of bed and stood where he could

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see her in the mirror. Facing his back and the mirror she then reached up, clasping her hands over her head and stretched again in a way known to females everywhere while slowly twisting to give him a profile view. Then she turned away and bent from the waist to touch the floor while raising her tail high. Roger could only groan and wonder where she had gotten the catnip. He rolled his eyes and was thankful that she had at least waited till he was done shaving to tease him, or he might have slipped and cut his throat.

Finishing with his teeth, Roger got into the shower. Again he marveled at the simplicity of the setup. The stall was surprisingly roomy and used a common everyday shower curtain. While water was limited in space travel, this system nevertheless made it easy to enjoy a hot shower as long as one wanted. The water was re-circulated back to the showerhead after filtering out fur and impurities and being reheated. When the bather was ready to do the final rinse he moved a lever that drained the tank to the reclamation unit and refilled the shower system with fresh water. After the rinse, this water was again filtered and held for the initial use in the next shower. The remaining soap residue was not important since you would be soaping up anyway. It worked something like an automatic dishwasher on Earth. The engineer in him could admire so elegant a solution to the problem in such a minimal system. He was a firm believer in the K.I.S.S. principle.

Sehh'Remma, still in a playful mood, snuck in and pulled back the corner of the shower curtain at the rear, peeking in. She saw Roger had his back to her and an evil grin split her face. She expressed one claw and, crouching low, reached in.

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Roger jumped when he felt something stick him where the person meets the chair and swiftly turning around, found nothing there.

Outside, Sehh'Remma was stifling her laughter. After a few moments she expressed her claw point and, crouching low, reached in again.

"Yeouch!" Again, Roger quickly spun around seeing nothing.

This was a lot of fun, Sehh'Remma thought as she prepared for a third strike.

This time Roger was wary and felt the slight draft as Sehh'Remma pulled back the curtain.

He sprang, grabbing her wrist and pulled her into the shower. Sehh'Remma was crouching low and leaning forward, off balance; so Roger had little trouble pulling her in and grabbing the other wrist. She came to rest in a sitting position against the back wall under the water spray with Roger on his knees straddling her legs, holding her wrists pinned over her head against the wall.

"So you want to play, do you?" he snarled ferociously. "Well, now it's my turn." Roger leaned forward and tenderly kissed her.

Sehh'Remma could have easily thrown him off, but at the moment she had little desire to do so, allowing herself to remain "trapped".

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As the kiss lingered Roger's hands slid down her arms and around her waist. Sehh'Remma's arms followed suit and were soon wrapped around the man's wet, bare hide. The only sound was that of the water spraying from the showerhead.

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Forty-five minutes later found them standing outside the shower drying off. Roger, since he had no fur, finished quickly and then turned to begin helping Sehh'Remma. This was something intimate to her kind, but she found that she did not mind Roger's help.

Returning to the bedroom Roger brushed his hair and then noted Sehh'Remma's dried fur was sticking out in all directions. He went over to where she was standing next to the bed, facing away from him, and, taking a long-bristle brush, he began to stroke her back with it. If drying another's fur was intimate, care of another's fur was considered ultimately sensual; she momentarily stiffened, then her tension melted away with his first brush-strokes. Sehh'Remma quickly stretched out on the bed and allowed him to continue his ministrations. First a stroke with the brush followed closely by a stroke with his other hand; then the brush, then the hand. Slowly he worked his way down her back, tail, legs and then her neck, shoulders and arms; with that finished she rolled over and, in a show of absolute trust, presented her front side to him.

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Now clean, groomed and suitably dressed, they left the cabin, walking hand in hand to the ship's mess to have breakfast.

Having worked up an appetite, they each got a big breakfast; then went to a table and dug in. They were joined a short while later by Rrsh'Dhana and her father, Rrsh'Ghanar.

The four of them engaged in small talk during which Sehh'Remma tried some of the new English words she had learned in her first session with the machine. Both Rrsh'Dhana and her father could see Sehh'Remma still had a long way to go, but Roger was very supportive of her attempts.

With the meal finished, Roger made arrangements with Sehh'Remma to meet for lunch. They had taken advantage of Rrsh'Dhana's presence to make sure each had understood the arrangement before they left, once again, hand in hand.

<<"They both have it bad, don't they?">> Rrsh'Dhana absently asked her father as they watched the pair leave.

<<"Yes, they certainly do,">> Rrsh'Ghanar replied. <<"I hope things continue to go well for them.">>

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They walked the short distance to the Engineering Office. Roger opened the door and turned to Sehh'Remma. He raised her hand and kissed it, then pulled her gently to him and gave her a more proper kiss.

At the sound of the door opening one of the engineers looked up, and upon seeing Sehh'Remma and Roger standing there hand in hand, he placed his hand on his companion's shoulder and nodded towards the door. They watched the tableau being played out and began to feel ashamed. The joke they had pulled on Roger didn't seem so funny anymore.

The kiss broke and Sehh'Remma backed away, their hands touching until their fingers could no longer reach, then she turned and proceeded down the corridor to her cabin to change into her uniform and report for her duty shift.

Roger entered engineering and closed the door behind him. "How about you take the first set of readings this morning?" one of them asked. "I still need to talk to my friend a bit."

"Sure." Roger picked up a data pad and headed to the engine room as the two engineers spoke quietly together in their own language.

The engineer coming on duty normally took readings at the start of each shift; the data pad would then be plugged into a socket on another computer where it would compare the readings to those on the monitor console to check for discrepancies. When he returned, the going off-shift engineer had left and they started the day's lessons.

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Rrsh'Ghanar looked up from his desk when he heard the door open. The off-duty engineer entered and stood before his desk looking very remorseful.

<"What can I do for you?"> He asked.

<"Sir, as I am now off-duty, I have volunteered to bring an apology on behalf of my friend and myself for our actions. We just saw Sehh'Remma and Roger, and now realize how strong their feelings are for each other. Our joke could have destroyed that. Love is hard enough to find without someone doing what we did. We have discussed it and I have accepted the responsibility to apologize to you. Our joke was never meant to include yourself or Rrsh'Dhana. We have decided to apologize to Rrsh'Dhana, Sehh'Remma and Roger when they are at lunch.">

Rrsh'Ghanar looked at the sorrowful figure before him, <"You did not know of their feelings for each other when you did it. Next time however, make sure you have

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gathered all the facts beforehand. Your apology is accepted by me, but you still have them to contend with.”>

The engineer gave a slight nod.

<“Is there anything else you need to discuss?”>

<“No, Sir.”>

<“Very well, I will speak to the Captain on your behalf.”>

<“Thank you, Sir.”>

The engineer departed, the weight on his shoulders only slightly lessened.

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Rrsh'Dhana and Sehh'Remma approached the mess at almost the same time but from opposite directions. Rrsh'Dhana entered a few steps ahead of Sehh'Remma and both femmes got themselves tea and found a free table. Rrsh'Dhana gave Sehh'Remma an appraising look over.

<“I meant to tell you this morning; your fur is especially well groomed today. Any particular reason?”>

Sehh'Remma's facial fur fluffed out, showing her embarrassment.

<“I should thank Roger for that,”> she said softly.

Rrsh'Dhana gave a knowing nod and her mind drifted back to when she received the same attention from Anthony. Her smile faded a bit and she suddenly felt lonely, but she pushed the feeling aside. Sehh'Remma had not noticed the passing cloud.

<“Yes, it's wonderful to just lie there and have someone groom you. Anthony's touch was so gentle.”> Rrsh'Dhana's voice was almost wistful. Then she asked, <“So what do you think of humans, now that you have had a few days to observe them?”>

<“Well, they are different. Different from us but also different from what we were led to believe by the Wrragh'Wi. They are not vicious killers. Their lack of fur and tail is fascinating, and I have so many questions.”>

<“You will learn more about them in time. The more you interact the more you will learn. Speaking of interacting, what do you think of Roger?”>

The question caused Sehh'Remma to remember her dream of earlier that morning, and the confusion that came with it.

<“Roger is polite, kind, gentle, and has a sense of humor if he allows it to escape. He proved that when we turned the tables on the engineers. I haven't been around him enough to form any real opinions yet.”>

<“Not around him enough? You've shared his bed for the last three nights, and have spent most of your off duty time together!”>

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<“I know. I like being with him. I can just be myself when we're together. I can ... trust him. But this all confuses me; he's an alien, yet it feels good to be with him.”>

Rrsh'Dhana's suspicion was confirmed; neither of the lovers could see it, but to everyone else it was as plain as the cups that sat on the table in front of them at this very moment. Sehh'Remma and Roger were oblivious to the fact that they were falling in love.

Break time ended and Sehh'Remma had to return to her duty station, but she asked Rrsh'Dhana if she might join herself and Roger for lunch. Rrsh'Dhana replied that she would be delighted, and then Sehh'Remma departed.

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Sehh'Remma had learned all the theories of FTL travel in school. The one on her mind right now was that at the speed of light time would stop. Well it seemed like it might be true the way the clock was crawling towards lunch-time.

It was one of the slow days and she had nothing to keep her occupied, so her mind kept returning to lunch when she could be with Roger again.

This waiting was making her tense and she stretched in her seat rubbing her neck to relax the knotted muscles. The action brought back the memory of that morning. She was anticipating the same treatment tomorrow morning and ... *every morning there after as well.*

When had she set foot on this road? No longer was the question '*Should I share Roger's bed tonight?*' But '*Where else would I be?*' and why did the thought of not being there bother her so?

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They had started on a new sub-system today and the learning curve was a steep one for Roger. He had been so focused that he had not even noticed that he had worked through break.

“Hey, Roger, are you going to work through lunch, too?”

“Huh?” Roger looked at the clock on the wall and noted the time. “Thanks, I'm going to have lunch with Sehh'Remma today.”

The engineer watched him leave then went to the comm unit.

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Roger, being a bit late, entered the ship's mess to find Sehh'Remma and Rrsh'Dhana already seated at a table. He gave a small nod then went to get his own food before returning to join them.

The conversation during the meal was light, consisting mainly of small talk between friends with no real subject. Roger noticed that Sehh'Remma appeared not to be paying much attention, like her mind was elsewhere and her slight frown made him wonder what was bothering her. He was a bit surprised to discover the feeling he had was not so much curiosity, but deep concern. He wanted to try to help with her problem but before he could ask about it the engineers approached the table.

Their manner was very formal and they gave a slight bow of respect to its occupants. One began to speak to Sehh'Remma and Rrsh'Dhana in their own language, and when he finished the other spoke to Roger in English.

"Roger; we have come to offer an apology to you and Sehh'Remma for the joke we played on you earlier." They alternated between the two, each using a different language, so that both would be able to understand what was being said.

"We did not realize what had begun. To have destroyed it because of our thoughtless actions would have been unforgivable. What you have is something of incalculable value. Can you find it within yourself to forgive us?"

Roger wondered what had begun and what it was he had that they were referring to, but set it aside to answer them. "You have my forgiveness, but Sehh'Remma's is hers alone to give."

The engineer bowed more deeply, "Thank you." His companion had just finished talking to Sehh'Remma and, at her response and also one from Rrsh'Dhana, he bowed to them. They moved closer together and after another slight bow of respect to those at the table, departed.

The three watched them leave and then Rrsh'Dhana first spoke to Sehh'Remma in their language, then to Roger in his, verifying that each had been told the same thing and each had chosen to forgive. She also told Roger that they had apologized to her as well since she had inadvertently been involved too.

Sehh'Remma was only half listening, thinking about her recent dream and what the engineer had said.

Roger had forgotten his earlier questions for her, instead pondering the engineer's statements himself.

With lunch period over, they all went their respective ways, two of them deep in their own thoughts.

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Sehh'Remma sat at the table eating dinner alone. Rrsh'Dhana had eaten with her father earlier and there had been a control system failure in Engineering so Roger could not be with her. She knew it was not critical but was serious enough for them to have to reduce speed while the repairs were done. With one system down, a failure of the back-up system would leave them dead in space till repairs could be completed. They were in no real hurry anyway. One of the engineers had come in earlier and left with a tray of food that could be grabbed and eaten on the run.

She was thinking about all that had happened on this trip. New trade agreements, new allies, contact with aliens their people had never encountered before and of course Roger. She was remembering Rrsh'Dhana tell what it was like being with Anthony, how he made her feel and her feelings for him. Suddenly, like driving out of a fog bank everything became clear; she *knew*.

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Roger sat heavily with fatigue. "Glad that's over with," he sighed wearily.

His two companions agreed with him completely. The actuator was a small part that just plugged in, but in order to get to it, a great deal of other equipment had to be removed first. It had taken an hour and a half by Roger's watch to remove it, two minutes to replace the actuator, then another hour and a half to put everything back again.

Roger was tempted to ask if the builders of the ship had stolen the designs from a certain Earth auto manufacturer.

"Well, I did not get to eat with Sehh'Remma tonight, so I will go and meet her now. She should be ending her duty shift in a few minutes. See you guys tomorrow."

They said their "good nights" and Roger started down the corridor to Sehh'Remma's duty station. As he reached the door it opened to reveal her about to leave.

Holding out his arm for her, he said, "I hope your day was better than mine," even though he knew she might not yet be able to understand.

She put her arm through his and together they walked towards the cabins. When they arrived at his she removed her arm and stepped in front of him, "Wait," she said, using one of the few English words she had learned to speak.

Sehh'Remma went down the corridor to her own cabin and went in.

Roger was curious but waited as she had asked. While he did, he went over in his mind the events of the last few days. He felt close to figuring things out, but it seemed there was one more lock on the door before it could be opened, and the knowledge he sought, gained.

Sehh'Remma exited her cabin and closed the door behind her. As she walked the short distance back Roger noted that she carried her off duty outfit, a clean uniform and

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her personal care items. He realized this meant she would not have to leave any more to prepare for the day and looked questioningly at her.

Sehh'Remma smiled and embraced Roger as they had done many times before in his cabin, but this embrace was very different, the feeling it carried with it could not be ignored.

The last lock clicked and the door was flung open, the truth that lie there blinding in its purity. His arms enfolded Sehh'Remma and he returned it in kind.

The embrace lasted only a few moments but seemed like an eternity. What the future held for them he did not know, but for now he would take it one day at a time. He freed one arm and opened the door. Releasing Sehh'Remma he bowed and gave a gesture of welcome, indicating that she should precede him in. Roger entered behind her and closed the door.

Farther down the corridor Rrsh'Dhana watched the scene unfold, a smile on her lips and a tear in her eye. When the door closed she turned and entered her own cabin. She went to her nightstand, opened the drawer and removed a slim rectangular box. Sitting at the small table she opened the box and gazed at her name in flowing script engraved on the silver bracelet contained within. Lifting her head she stared distractedly at the bulkhead, her eyes were not focused on it, but on something unseen and far away. Idly she fingered the bracelet, wondering what Anthony was doing now.