

Chaos' Heir 421

Chapter 421 Changes

Khan stomped his foot on the bloody puddle a few times before taking a step back and fixing his eyes on that gory scene. The disaster had finally ended, but he couldn't find the strength to celebrate.

As for Jenna, she continued to hold Khan's wrist to show her support. She knew how important the moment was for him, so she remained silent while he stared at the puddle, but her worries eventually took over.

Jenna hesitated for a few seconds before reaching for Khan's chest. She placed her hand at its center to feel his beating heart and closed her eyes to study the flow of mana inside his body.

Anyone could guess that Khan had changed. His long, azure hair was too flashy to ignore, but a lot had happened inside him too, and Jenna was set on finding out what.

"[I know]," Khan announced while Jenna's expression flickered. "[Not now]."

Jenna opened her eyes to study Khan's serious face. She wanted to say many things, but Khan had been clear. Moreover, he didn't need her to be aware of the issue.

Khan tried to ignore the matter, but his senses prevented that. Even looking at the bloody puddle revealed some of the changes that happened after his interaction with the Nak's hand. He wasn't ready to face them now, but they didn't care about him.

The world appeared brighter in Khan's vision. The dome's light reached the intermediate floor since most of the city had crumbled, but that wasn't enough to explain what Khan was seeing.

The faint reflections on the rubble resembled proper artificial lamps, and the same went for the various illuminated areas. Even the puddle of blue blood somehow shone in ways Khan couldn't explain.

The brightness of the area wasn't the only odd feature. Khan also noticed new details and colors. He could see more, even when it came to the rubble, and faint shades covered all of that.

The area was slowly regaining synthetic mana, so the symphony returned, and Khan could see it without closing his eyes. The same went for his surroundings. He could sense the various colors in the back of his mind. He only needed to focus on them to learn more details.

Khan quickly realized that his sensitivity to mana didn't only improve. It had gone through a proper evolution, becoming something closer to his vision or hearing. He had completely added it to his senses, and he couldn't silence it even if he wanted to.

That constant awareness of the symphony of mana could be overwhelming, but Khan strangely found it completely normal. It was a core part of his being, or, at least, the new being he had become.

The new sensitivity made Khan unable to ignore the changes in his body. His breath felt smoother, his muscles brimmed with strength, and a strange vitality filled his whole being. Moreover, his mana was restless, as if it couldn't wait to be unleashed.

Reasonable people would visit a doctor or lock themselves inside a training hall until they made sure that everything was okay. Khan had also already seen how dangerous sudden improvements could be. Yet, he couldn't bear to face those changes now.

Khan eventually forced himself to stop looking at the puddle and inspect the area. Many gazes were on him, but a big part of the audience had resumed helping the injured. The disaster was over, but the salvaging operation had begun, and no one knew how long it would take for Milia 222 to recover.

The disaster didn't only involve buildings and lives. The fourth asteroid was the true center of Milia 222 due to its dock, but everything was gone now. It would probably take months to restore the various illegal delivery channels, and Khan didn't know how things would evolve because of that.

One exception existed inside that mess. The Nele had stashed many resources after Jenna's prediction. They could probably assert some financial dominance in the following period, and Khan rejoiced when he understood that.

Of course, no happiness appeared on Khan's face. His expression remained stern and distant. He could only muster a nod toward Jenna to reassure her before keeping his mind busy with different tasks.

The area was a mess, but Khan understood his general location when he inspected his surroundings. The streets past the hole in the ceiling gave vague directions that Khan could apply to the disaster. He knew where Monica had gone, so he could guess where she had fallen.

Khan began to march through the debris, with Jenna still holding his wrist. Gazes followed him, with Raymond's being the most intense of them. Many were interested in Khan's next move, and that attention slowly wore him off.

The long strands of azure hair didn't help. They kept falling in front of Khan's eyes, and moving them away didn't solve the problem. Khan's patience eventually ran out, so he let go of Jenna and drew his knife to cut that nuisance.

Jenna could only watch as Khan made a mess out of his hair. He didn't follow any pattern or style. He simply cut anything that could cover his vision.

Khan glanced at the azure strands among the rubble after sheathing his knife. He pointed his palm at them before closing his hand into a fist and voicing a suppressed snort. He wanted to destroy any trace of his hair, but he had already left some behind. Besides, Khan preferred not to use his mana before making sure that everything was okay.

Caja came out of the debris in the meantime, and she didn't take long to find Khan and Jenna. Surprise inevitably appeared on her expression at the sight of the azure hair, but Jenna shook her head, and that was enough to leave the two on their own.

Jenna tried her best not to reveal her concern, but Khan could sense it far too clearly. He didn't even need to look at her to feel the emotions that enveloped her. He was aware of everything, but he pretended not to notice it.

Faint traces of familiar mana entered the range of Khan's senses once he resumed his march. The area only had a thin layer of synthetic mana, but that was enough to give him precise directions that he didn't hesitate to follow.

Those sensations grew stronger until a peculiar scene unfolded in the distance. Khan hurried when he noticed Monica lying on a small pile of rubble. She was awake, but her left hand was on a dark-red spot on the right side of her waist.

As Khan got closer, he saw a metal spike stabbed at the center of the dark-red spot, which made him hurry even more. Monica wasn't in critical condition, but seeing her in that state made a mess out of Khan's emotions.

Khan reached Monica in no time and promptly fell to his knees to check her condition. Her mana flowed decently, and the blood loss had stopped, but she still needed to see a doctor.

"What happened to your hair?" Monica weakly muttered as she began to stretch her free arm toward Khan before retracting it.

Khan felt guilty seeing that gesture. Monica was keeping up with the pretenses even in that state, but he was past caring about them.

"Hey," Khan warmly called while seizing Monica's free hand and holding it tightly. "Don't worry about me while you are like this. Why aren't you meditating?"

"I wanted to see if you were okay first," Monica smiled.

The guilt inside Khan grew stronger. He needed to talk to Monica, but that wasn't the right time. Moreover, he had to deal with the other familiar presence standing only a few meters from them.

"I'm fine," Khan reassured while caressing Monica's curls. "Rest now. I'll come back in a second."

"Don't leave me with her," Monica complained.

"She'll take good care of you," Khan promised before turning toward her companion, "Right, Jenna?"

"Leave her to me," Jenna announced while crouching at Monica's side. Luckily for her, the disaster didn't remove her spray, so she could assist Monica without triggering any unwanted reaction.

Khan softly pinched Monica's cheek before beginning to stand up. Yet, she squeezed his hand and pulled it to make him get closer to her again.

"He helped," Monica revealed when Khan put his ear near her mouth. "I might have died if he didn't."

Khan retracted his head to show a confused face, and Monica nodded to double down on her statement. The matter was surprising, but Khan ended up thinking about different topics. That long look at Monica reaffirmed his choice. He wanted to be with her.

"[Go]," Jenna exclaimed before Khan could decide to discuss that troublesome matter now. "[I'll stay with her]."

Khan suppressed the desire to kiss Monica and stood up. He shot one last glance at her before turning toward the second familiar presence. Rodney was sitting among a pile of debris, and his ragged breath hinted at his exhaustion.

The new sensitivity made Khan aware of Rodney's state. He barely had any mana left inside him, and blood had covered the tattoos on his mouth. He appeared on the verge of fainting, but his resolve kept him awake.

Khan walked toward Rodney while studying his options. Many eyes were still on him, but no one would stand in his way. If Khan wanted to, he could kill Rodney and solve that problem once and for all, but he had helped Monica for some reason.

"I know what you are thinking," Rodney laughed as he tried to stabilize his breath. "I can read it in your eyes. So, why don't we get it done already?"

"Why did you help Miss Solodrey?" Khan asked while stopping right before Rodney.

"Miss Solodrey," Rodney scoffed while mustering his remaining strength to stand up and face Khan. "Why don't you drop the act?"

"I won't let you involve her in your politics," Khan wondered.

"Always so emotional," Rodney snickered. "How stupid do you think I am?"

"I'm not the one exhausted in the middle of rubbles," Khan pointed out.

"Exactly," Rodney exclaimed. "I would have never left myself so exposed with you around."

Khan knew that Rodney was telling the truth, but the issue remained, and he promptly voiced it. "Why then? What's your grand plan?"

"There is no plan," Rodney revealed. "I simply happened to be in the area when everything started to fall."

The honest statement left Khan confused. He would expect that behavior from an ally, but Rodney had no reason to help him or Monica.

"Oh, don't look so surprised," Rodney cursed. "I only wanted to make us even. We can go back to hating each other now."

"We aren't even," Khan declared.

"Right," Rodney voiced while reaching for something under his loose hoodie. The gesture alerted Khan since he knew about the gun, but Rodney promptly reassured him. "Easy soldier. We both know that there is no point in doing that."

Khan let Rodney continue until he pulled out a familiar device from under the hoodie. Rodney really had the letter with him, but showing it only worsened his situation.

"You were talking about this, right?" Rodney asked before holding the letter with both hands and slamming it on his rising knee. The attack split the device in half, and Rodney even threw it on the floor afterward.

"I don't have anything on you now," Rodney announced. "Go ahead. Do as you wish."

"What are you even doing?" Khan questioned.

"I've watched you during the fall," Rodney revealed. "I was hopeless, while you were as confident as ever. I hated it."

"We both know how poorly you handle crises," Khan mocked.

"I won't deny it," Rodney shrugged his shoulders. "Still, you showed me that I wasn't so hopeless. I learnt something from you for the second time."

"Get to the point," Khan pressed.

"You are an idiot who can't appreciate his species," Rodney exclaimed. "I won't even talk about your background. You had every right to fail and die, but here you are, and here I am."

Rodney lowered his gaze and fell silent. A lot happened in his mind, and Khan gave him the time to sort it out. He wanted to know where that conversation would go.

"I blamed you for my failures," Rodney admitted, "And I planned to use you to regain my status. I'm not so weak. I'll get to the peak of the Global Army through my own strength and make you regret turning your back on humanity."

"Bold words from someone who should be begging for his life," Khan threatened.

"I don't do begging," Rodney chuckled.

"The peak of the Global Army," Khan repeated. "You don't even know how to get out of here with your life."

"That's not so different from where you started," Rodney uttered.

Khan knew that Rodney had changed. He had seen that after the crash, and looking at his eyes now only confirmed that sensation. A burning resolve had been born inside Rodney, and Khan was the reason behind it.

In theory, Rodney had grown more dangerous. Killing him remained the best option. Khan would prevent potential future problems if he ended things now.

However, Khan's sensitivity showed nothing but death. The Nak's hand and the disaster had already killed so many people. He was tired of that scene, and he didn't want to be the one taking another life.

Memories appeared in Khan's vision. His grudge against Rodney was quite deep, but only due to circumstances. Sure, Rodney had tried to kill him twice, but he could justify the first time with panic, and the second had actually been a smart move.

Moreover, Khan ended up improving after the disaster. The audience had paid the price for his growth. Sparing a life wouldn't only be a human act of forgiveness. It would also appease his guilty conscience since part of him felt to deserve problems.

"Go before I change my mind," Khan eventually sighed.

"I knew it," Rodney sneered. "Some honest words, and you get all teary."

"Don't push your luck," Khan threatened.

"Please," Rodney smirked. "You have already made your decision, and letting me leave won't change anything between us."

"You really don't know when to shut up," Khan cursed.

"I was just gloating," Rodney explained. "I finally get a victory out of you."

"You are still stranded here," Khan pointed out.

"Watch me outrank you in a few years," Rodney claimed.

"As if I cared about that," Khan replied before voicing a potential issue. "Wait, how do I know the letter wasn't a copy?"

"You'll have to trust me on that," Rodney joked as he turned to leave. "Goodbye, alien lover."

Khan watched Rodney leave and disappear behind a tall pile of rubble. The latter sat down as soon as he found a hiding spot, but Khan pretended not to sense that. The recent conversation had drained Rodney completely, but that only added value to his words.

The two halves of the letter claimed Khan's attention afterward. He studied them for a bit before stomping his foot a few times to turn everything into unreadable shards. That matter was finally over, but Khan continued to feel guilty.

"You did what?!" Monica suddenly shouted, forcing Khan out of his thoughts. He wanted to turn in her direction, but another familiar presence entered his senses' range and approached him.

That wasn't the end of it. A dozen masses of mana flew through the hole and filled the destroyed intermediate floor with whooshing noises. Khan only had to glance at the ceiling to see multiple spaceships descending into the area, and the smiling figure walking toward him seemed to be the reason behind their arrival.

"I called for help," Raymond announced when he reached Khan. "Luckily, my name can get many things done. They'll set up a medical bay here while the rest of the asteroid undergoes reparations."

"You even want to come out as the savior," Khan commented.

"Not at all," Raymond exclaimed. "Everyone knows you solved the crisis."

"Your crisis," Khan whispered.

"Who's going to believe you?" Raymond chuckled. "Anyway, a piece of the reinforced fabric will magically appear during the reparations, so Luke's mission will end in success. I advise you to stay put and let things calm down. It's better for everyone."

"Better for you," Khan replied.

"Lieutenant Khan," Raymond called, "I must say, the new look suits you. I'd only go for a different hairstyle."

Anger filled Khan, but a loud groan from Monica attracted his attention and prevented any reckless action. The spaceships landed in the meantime, and doctors left them to start assisting the injured.

"I told Luke to stay on the first floor," Raymond revealed while glancing at Monica. "You'll have some privacy."

"Do you expect me to thank you?" Khan asked.

"You have no idea what I expect from you," Raymond chuckled before turning to leave without adding anything else. Khan wanted to say something, but he limited himself to looking at his back.

Eventually, Khan put the matter in the back of his mind and approached Monica, but she welcomed him with harsh words. "I was even worried about you."

"Monica, please," Khan almost begged.

"I need to be alone for a bit," Monica coldly responded. "Jenna will tell you when I'm ready to talk."

"Jenna?" Khan asked while glancing at Jenna crouched next to Monica.

"[I'll stay with her]," Jenna reassured. "[You deal with your condition]."

That odd pair left Khan speechless, but far worse had happened that day, and he wasn't in the mood to argue. He nodded as he turned to leave and ignored the concerned gazes that the two women fixed on his back.

Doctors ran left and right while Khan roamed through the debris. He knew what he had to do but couldn't find the strength to face it. He was afraid of what he would find, but he couldn't delay it any further, especially with Jenna and Monica worried about him.

Khan walked until he found an isolated spot that hid him from the audience. He sat down while a helpless sigh left his mouth. He had too much to think about, but the universe didn't let him focus on that just yet.

Someone approached Khan's isolated location, and he didn't show any surprise when Caja peeked past the debris. Her face expressed motherly concern, and her words carried similar feelings.

"[Do you mind if I sit]?" Caja asked before reaching for a spot next to Khan when he shook his head.

"[What you did was quite brave]," Caja exclaimed as she placed a hand on Khan's chest. "[My species owes you a lot]."

"[What if I told you I caused all of this]?" Khan wondered while his eyes remained on the rubble under him.

"[Young man, you don't have the power to cause such a mess]," Caja reassured.

"[I did something alright]," Khan responded. "[And now people are dead, and my hair is blue]."

"[The color does suit you]," Caja commented while retracting her arm.

"[Because I'm a Nak]?" Khan wondered.

"[Would it be so bad]?" Caja asked.

"[Yes]," Khan stated. "[Yes, it would]."

"[You almost gave your life trying to protect everyone]," Caja declared. "[No matter what you are, you should be proud of yourself]."

"[I'm just happy Jenna is fine]," Khan sighed. "[I'm always the same. If there's death, I improve]."

"[Is that a problem]?" Caja questioned.

"[No]," Khan admitted. "[I simply hate it came from a Nak]."

"[Khan, we often can't choose how to obtain power]," Caja explained, "[But we can decide how to use it]."

"[I know]," Khan replied. "[It's just-]."

"[You aren't a Nak]," Caja interrupted. "[You aren't a human either. You are just you]."

Khan couldn't say anything when he looked at Caja's earnest expression. He eventually mustered a nod, and Caja replied with a smile.

"[I came to check on you]," Caja revealed as she stood up. "[You are stable, but you should face your monsters before returning to Jenna. She'll worry otherwise]."

"[I will]," Khan promised.

"[Also, make sure to get somewhere in the Global Army]," Caja added. "[The Nele need a strong ally]."

Some warmth spread inside Khan. He knew Caja was doing her best to reassure him, and she succeeded. That official acceptance from a Nele's leader meant a lot to him, especially in his state.

When Caja left the hidden spot, Khan slapped his cheeks a few times before taking a deep breath. He could still feel the sensations inherited from the nightmare, but he put them aside for now. He needed to check his condition first.

Chapter 422 Tests

Understanding the attunement percentage during the meditative state was almost impossible, but that type of training still gave an overview of the body's condition. Khan knew his muscles, so he could immediately confirm that they had changed.

Khan couldn't believe his eyes. The amount of mana radiated by his flesh was off the charts. It would have taken him months of training to reach that level, but interacting with the Nak's hand had cut the process short.

The amount of mana in the flesh wasn't even the most significant change. Khan didn't recognize his insides. His muscles had grown denser, tougher, and firmer, and that transformation didn't come from the new energy fused inside them.

'What happened to me?' Khan wondered.

Khan exited the meditative state and opened his eyes to check his body. He pinched his hands, pressed on his abdomen, and pulled his skin in the hope of finding striking differences. As a matter of fact, he noticed the results of the transformation, but everything felt normal.

The situation was beyond odd. Khan would have expected something harsher than his breakthrough to the first level with that transformation, but nothing similar had happened. He felt better than ever and completely comfortable with his new state.

Khan's inspection didn't end there. He snapped his fingers near his ears, studied metal spikes grabbed from the floor, and tried to bend them to check his strength.

It soon became clear that his body had gone through a qualitative change. Khan was stronger, his senses had sharpened, and his sensitivity had joined all of that to give birth to something more powerful.

'This isn't the body of a human,' Khan eventually concluded.

The news wasn't necessarily bad. Humans had flaws and weaknesses. They had to rely on their flexibility and potential to match other species, so Khan's growth would typically be a happy surprise.

However, Khan's issue with his current state didn't involve his abrupt growth. He could even accept the many casualties of the disaster. He simply hated how it took a Nak to trigger that transformation.

'Fucking Raymond,' Khan cursed before closing his eyes again.

Khan wasn't delusional. He knew he had only been a pawn in a bigger game. He could have never predicted the Nak's hand to react in that way, but the issue remained. His mutations had returned, and he had left humanity farther behind.

'[We often can't choose how to obtain power],' Khan repeated Caja's words in his mind as he dived back into his meditative state.

The first attempt at moving mana went well. Actually, it went better than ever. Khan felt in complete control of that energy, even if it radiated a familiar wildness.

Khan opened his eyes and summoned the wave spell. He mustered enough mana for its first-level version but ended up with something stronger. The attack didn't reach the second level but came very close. Repeating the process led to the same results, so Khan dived back into the meditative state to search for explanations.

Khan had made sure to use the usual amount of mana when summoning the wave spell, so its stronger effects could only have two explanations. Either his energy had intensified, or his new body had something to do with the event.

A few more tests followed. Khan summoned the wave spell multiple times and even checked his other arts. Everything worked perfectly and was stronger than before.

'My feelings already stretched past the human spectrum,' Khan eventually understood. 'Now my body does too.'

Khan's body had become a more suitable channel for his emotions, so his spells had improved. Still, that didn't exclude his mana from the equation. The new intensity of his energy played an important role, and Khan was unable to ignore it.

The feelings inherited from the nightmare had left a deep mark. The anger and desperation were easy to handle, but the fear was different. It was a constant worry that Khan couldn't explain or identify. It simply existed in the back of his mind and added fuel to his paranoia.

Khan was no scientist, but he could still find reasonable explanations, especially since the trigger for the transformation was clear. He had evolved according to his mutations. He had distanced himself from humanity to grow closer to a Nak.

A conflict that had bothered Khan since his first days in Ylaco's training camp returned stronger than ever. His similarities with the Nak were something he couldn't escape, especially now. They were part of him, and a lot of his strength came from them.

Khan left the meditative state for the last time and lifted his right hand. Purple-red mana came out of his palm and created a smoke-like trail that stretched upward before dispersing in the air. The new brightness of his energy shone in his eyes, but he retained a stern stance toward it as if he wanted to threaten it.

"You might be similar to the Nak," Khan announced while keeping his eyes on the trail of mana, "But you are nothing like them. You are mine. No, you are me."

The mana remained silent, but Khan didn't expect any reaction. That statement was for himself. He couldn't reject what he was. He could only live with it while he pursued his goals. As for what he would become on that path, he had long since decided not to care about it.

Before Milia 222, Khan would have never managed to find peace so quickly, especially with something involving the Nak. He had matured emotionally, and he owed that to Jenna. Still, she couldn't be at the center of his thoughts now.

Solving the internal conflict put Khan in front of his current problems. The inherited fear wasn't something he could fix, so he ignored it for now, but many issues remained.

Raymond was still around. Khan didn't know his plan, but he could guess it had succeeded, and he didn't dare to imagine what to expect next.

Khan had let Rodney go, but the latter was too canny and resourceful to ignore. Khan needed to check on him to avoid getting caught by surprise by eventual ploys.

The whole fourth asteroid was a mess, and Khan wanted to help with the reconstruction and rescue operation. He felt guilty for multiple reasons, but his desire to give a hand went past that. It was the right thing to do for someone who knew the pain of the battlefield.

A meeting with Luke and the others was mandatory. Khan had to provide an update and see where things would lead. In theory, the mission was over, but Luke might still require Khan's services for the time being.

Khan even wanted to speak with Milia 222's various species. Many had witnessed his transformation, and only meetings could reveal what those aliens thought about it. Also, it was the duty of a real ambassador to take care of his political network.

Last but not least, Khan needed to talk with Monica. The fact that Jenna had gone with her reassured him, but he still wanted to handle the issue face-to-face. He also couldn't wait for that matter to end since he craved some relaxing intimacy with her.

'One step at a time,' Khan reminded himself. He knew who his priority was. He only hoped she was ready to meet him.

Khan stood up, and an annoying sensation hit his back. His hair was still too long there, so he drew his knife to cut it, but seeing his weapon after calming down made him notice the charred spots on its surface.

'Great,' Khan cursed as he inspected the knife. The weapon was still intact, but he couldn't ignore the damage inflicted by the sizzling shield. Replacing it was the intelligent choice since money wasn't a problem.

Khan sighed before cutting the remaining long strands and sheathing his knife. Part of him didn't want to leave the calm of his hiding spot since many new tasks were waiting for him, but a stronger urge guided his steps and made him jump in the open.

Many gazes fell on Khan, but the new scenery claimed his attention and eased his return to the world. Multiple spaceships had landed, and various teams were handling the construction of simple tents for the medical bay.

New ships were also descending through the vast hole to bring provisions and other useful items, and Khan lost himself in the melody of their engines. He only needed to look at them to hear the symphony, and, for the first time, he allowed himself to appreciate the effects of his transformation.

Ordinary humans couldn't even imagine what Khan was seeing. The various engines resembled small stars that sent faint flares in multiple directions. Meanwhile, an even fainter sea enveloped the whole scene and immersed it in a layer that highlighted every detail.

That was Khan's new normality, and he felt born for it. The mutations had probably always wanted to push him into that realm, but Khan knew that he could appreciate it thanks to events unrelated to the Nak. Sure, part of that came from those aliens, but its entirety was only his to claim.

'Right,' Khan thought as he recalled a specific event, 'I did my first real flight.'

Khan shook his head to avoid smiling at that memory, but his mood improved anyway. Flying had been terrific, and the event had also confirmed an important detail. His training with Luke's program had worked. It wasn't official, but he was a pilot.

The construction of the medical bay proceeded quickly, and Khan strolled among it to go back to where he had left Monica and Jenna. The return of synthetic mana in the area even made it easier for him to spot their familiar presence, so he kept walking until he arrived at a makeshift tent.

The tent was nothing more than grey fabric connected to four metal pillars that created a rectangular structure. It had no ceiling, but it provided some privacy, which was enough for a medical bay built among the debris.

Khan had seen many familiar faces during his stroll, but he had ignored them to focus on his priorities. Sadly, reaching the tent didn't bring him face-to-face to his destination. Jenna was still inside, which meant that he had to wait outside.

The area didn't lack short hills, and Khan chose one nearby as his waiting spot. Sitting in that relatively exposed place only made more eyes fall on him, but he didn't care. His stay on Milia 222 had made him used to that treatment anyway.

Khan had not been away for long. His tests had lasted less than half an hour, and the stroll had barely occupied a few minutes, so he expected Jenna and Monica to take their time inside the tent. However, the human doctor soon left the structure, and Jenna was with her.

Jenna and the doctor talked briefly before splitting to go in different directions. Jenna moved toward Khan at that point, and she showed a bright smile when she noticed that his mood had improved.

"[How is Monica]?" Khan asked before Jenna could start teasing him.

"[She is stable]," Jenna announced as she climbed the short hill of debris to reach Khan. "[The doctor removed the shard and patched her up. She is asleep now, but she is in no danger whatsoever]."

"[That's good]," Khan sighed. "[Letting her rest is for the best]."

"[She didn't want to]," Jenna giggled as she sat next to Khan and hugged his arm, "[The doctor had to give her something to make her stay put]."

"[Injuries can't quell her temper]," Khan chuckled as he accepted Jenna's head on his shoulder. Her warmth felt comforting among that mess.

"[It's a pity]," Jenna complained.

"[What]?" Khan wondered.

"[You aren't all guilt-ridden]," Jenna pouted. "[I hoped to comfort you with more than a kiss]."

"[That would only make things worse]," Khan shook his head.

"[Why don't we test that out]?" Jenna asked, turning her head to show her shameless smile.

Khan could only laugh again, but some seriousness eventually arrived. He lifted his free arm to reach Jenna's face, and warm words left his mouth. "[Thank you for before]."

Jenna lost herself in Khan's serious face. Her feelings had worsened after the kiss, but something made her hold back now.

"[Don't think that a single kiss can make up for what you did]," Jenna scoffed. "[Though I'll forgive you if you take me properly]."

Khan snickered before laying his head on Jenna's. The gesture surprised her, but she welcomed it happily. The sexual tension between them would probably never go away, but their feelings went far beyond that, and they knew they could rely on each other.

"[Hey, Khan]," Jenna called after the two spent a few seconds resting on each other.

"[No]," Khan promptly replied.

"[I wasn't talking about that]," Jenna continued.

"[What is it]?" Khan asked.

"[I told Monica what happened]," Jenna revealed.

"[I figured as much]," Khan admitted. After all, he had heard Monica's shout while he was talking with Raymond.

Fear followed Khan's words and made him turn toward its source. Jenna seemed terrified about something, and he could only caress her hair as he waited for her to explain what had happened.

"[I told her everything]," Jenna eventually explained. "[I told her about our moment and your changes]."

"[Jenna]," Khan called.

"[I'm scared, Khan]," Jenna cried. "[You won't be mine anymore once I let you go]."

Khan understood Jenna's feelings perfectly. She wasn't only talking about Monica. The mission was basically over. The time for goodbyes had almost arrived, which would inevitably lead to their separation.

"[You are truly impossible]," Khan sighed, reaching for Jenna's shoulder to pull her on him.

Caressing Jenna's back never felt sadder. She shook whenever Khan touched her, but her reaction didn't hide anything naughty. Her mind had reached an extreme emotional state, and her body could only suffer under it.

"[Part of me will always be yours]," Khan announced among his cuddles. "[You know my heart, and I know yours. Mere distance can't break our bond]."

A sob resounded while Jenna snuggled in Khan's neck and wrapped her arms around it. She wasn't ready to say goodbye, and Khan probably wasn't either, but he had to say those words now.

"[You convinced me to pursue my own happiness]," Khan continued. "[No matter what I end up doing. You'll always be part of that]."

"[But I won't be there to annoy you]," Jenna complained.

"[You'll get the chance to do that again]," Khan reassured. "[Caja wants me to become a strong ally. I can't disappoint her, and I also need to check on you]."

Jenna lifted her head and showed her teary eyes before voicing a question. "[Caja said that]?"

"[She did]," Khan confirmed. "[She came to talk before. She sounded worried about you]."

"[She is the best]," Jenna sniffed before leaving Khan's neck to rub her eyes.

"[She indeed is]," Khan agreed, "[And you'll have to take her place one day]."

Jenna nodded before wearing a shameless smile that Khan knew far too well. She lost herself in her thoughts, and Khan eventually questioned her. "[What is your dirty mind thinking about now]?"

"[I imagined a political union]," Jenna revealed as she brought her gaze back to Khan. "[The leader of the Nele united in marriage with a human ambassador. It was a nice picture]."

"[I'm sure it was]," Khan sighed, "[But I know a picture which isn't too bad either]."

"[Tell me]," Jenna voiced.

"[A naughty Nele and a hopeless soldier spending nights before a lake]," Khan responded.

"[You forgot that they were naked]," Jenna giggled, "[And you didn't even talk about the nights in various beds]."

"[Or days in the bath]," Khan added, and the two stared at each other before exploding into a laugh.

"[I actually offered myself as a lover]," Jenna revealed once she managed to suppress her laugh, "[But Monica almost tore apart the bandages when she heard that]."

"[What did you expect]?" Khan chuckled.

"[I had to try]," Jenna claimed before taking a deep breath and mustering the entirety of her resolve to stand up. "[I made her promise to have another meeting. Maybe we'll get to sleep as three for once]."

Khan opened his mouth but closed it almost immediately. That topic always left him speechless for a second, and Jenna couldn't help but giggle seeing that her joke worked.

"[I'll reach Caja to see if I can help]," Jenna stated as she began to descend the short hill. "[You do what you have to]."

Khan nodded before recalling something important and conveying his doubt. "[Wait, what did she say about me]?"

"[Let me see]," Jenna pretended not to remember to keep Khan on edge. "[It was something like]: I can't stop him if he wants to visit me."

"[I see]," Khan smirked. "[Thanks, Jenna, for everything]."

"[You and I aren't done yet]," Jenna declared through her smile before hurrying toward her companions.

Khan stared at Jenna's back for a bit before standing up and heading toward Monica's tent. The place had a nurse standing before its entrance, but an earnest look from Khan was enough to grant him access.

The entrance was nothing more than a zipper that created an opening in the grey fabric once pulled down. Khan entered the tent under the nurse's curious gaze, but the outside world vanished after he closed the passage and noticed Monica.

Monica was lying under the sheets of a simple bed, and a screen behind her monitored her condition. Khan didn't understand the numbers and symbols on the device, but his senses confirmed Jenna's version of the story. Monica was fine. She only needed to rest.

'She isn't even snoring,' Khan thought as he approached the bed. 'She must have been exhausted.'

Monica's sleeping face was truly enchanting. Khan's vision enhanced her beauty and filled him with the urge to hold her. Still, when he was about to reach for her hand, he retracted his arm and opted to sit on the floor. He would touch her only after they had their conversation.

A snore resounded inside the tent as soon as Khan sat down, and a laugh escaped his mouth. He quickly suppressed it, but a smile remained on his face. He couldn't wait for Monica to wake up.

A cab picked Raymond up while the medical bay continued to take life. The vehicle was oddly big. It would resemble a cargo ship if it weren't for its luxurious design and materials, and its passengers' area featured far more than mere seats.

Raymond showed no surprise when he found a beautiful, scarred woman waiting for him inside the ship. He simply sat down and adjusted his suit before showing his palm.

The woman hurriedly pulled a bottle from under her seat and filled a glass before placing it on Raymond's palm. The latter sniffed the booze slowly until he eventually took a short sip from it.

"Lieutenant Khan didn't disappoint, sir," The woman exclaimed in her usual cold tone.

"He sure didn't," Raymond agreed. "It's a pity the experiment ended so soon."

"Lieutenant Khan might have inherited interesting traits," The woman pointed out. "Sir, is it wise to let him go without performing any test?"

"He is exactly where I want him to be," Raymond stated. "Christal, a broken and torn hand would have never given satisfying results. I'd rather sacrifice it to open a new path."

"Sir?" Christal asked.

"I want to use the Nak to elevate humanity," Raymond explained, "And Lieutenant Khan might be an example of what I strive to achieve. His growth might give me the answers I need."

Christal fell silent and let Raymond enjoy his drink, but the latter went back to business immediately.

"Did you bring it?" Raymond asked.

"Yes, sir," Christal announced before reaching the end of the vast passengers' area to pull out a long metal staff.

Christal tinkered with the staff for a few seconds until an azure line lit up at its center. The woman placed the device on the car's floor at that point, and a series of holograms shot out of it.

A screen took life, and the holograms inside it shook until they stabilized to create the torso of a man. His face didn't appear among those images, but his military uniform was impossible to miss. He was a member of the Global Army.

"What is it, Raymond?" A deep voice came out of the holograms.

"It works," Raymond exclaimed. "I brought it back to life. I'm afraid most of the fourth asteroid paid the price."

"I told you not to use the fourth asteroid," The man scolded. "Don't tell me that it destroyed the dock."

"You'll have to schedule a few meetings with your smugglers," Raymond chuckled.

"Dammit, Raymond," The man cursed. "Why can't you do as you are asked to?"

"I would consider your opinion if you dared to step on the field," Raymond declared.

The man fell silent before changing the topic. "What about the sample?"

"Lost," Raymond stated. "Lieutenant Khan absorbed what was left of it."

"Bret's son?" The man asked. "Then, you were right."

"As if that's surprising," Raymond sneered. "Anyway, Lieutenant Khan has been instrumental in defeating the threat. He should get a proper reward."

"What do you suggest?" The man questioned.

"Promote him," Raymond replied. "He is wasted as a lieutenant anyway."

"Are you out of your mind?" The man almost shouted. "He is a kid, and he got promoted no longer than a year ago. The others will suspect something."

"The entire fourth asteroid might have fallen prey to the sample without him," Raymond uttered.

"The Global Army rewards heroic deeds. It would be suspicious not to give him a promotion."

"You'd still need to find a superior willing to approve it," The man responded.

"He made a good impression on Colonel Norrett during Onia's tournament," Raymond announced.

"I'm sure he won't refuse after hearing what happened today."

"Right," The man exclaimed. "This kid has connections that would make Majors jealous."

"Another thing," Raymond continued. "He can pilot ships. Why doesn't he have a license yet?"

Chapter 423 Making up

Raymond's call continued until he went over every important detail, and an annoyed snort left his mouth when the holograms disappeared. His drink was empty by then, but Christal promptly refilled it.

"Speak," Raymond said while bringing the glass to his mouth.

"I'm confused, sir," Christal revealed.

"About?" Raymond questioned.

"Is it wise to withhold information?" Christal wondered. "He is your best connection in the Global Army."

"He is also blind like the rest of those idiots," Raymond sighed. "His addiction to power is dangerous. Fulfilling it would make me disposable in his eyes."

"Still," Christal continued, "He has the resources you need. You would save a lot of money with his involvement in more projects."

"Freedom and secrecy have a price I'm willing to pay," Raymond announced. "Besides, he would only misinterpret a complete report."

"There are other ways, sir," Christal pointed out.

"Patience, Christal," Raymond scolded. "Bret managed to create a stable host. I can't let savages get in the way of such monumental achievement."

"What about his family?" Christal asked.

"They have been more than clear multiple times," Raymond stated. "They don't want anything to do with Khan after what happened to his mother. Though, his growth might force their hand."

"Shouldn't you step in before it's too late?" Christal wondered. "Even you won't be able to do anything if his family gets involved."

"The kid has nightmares, Christal," Raymond declared. "I've seen it in his eyes. Now, I respect Bret, admire him even, but his ability alone couldn't fix the issue altogether."

"How is he stable then?" Christal asked.

"I suspect there are multiple explanations," Raymond exclaimed. "Bret surely did something, but the kid's experiences must have something to do too. Maybe that's why we have always failed. Our approach to the issue was too human."

"You want him to continue learning from other alien species," Christal understood. "It's risky."

"The Nak gave us mana for a reason," Raymond stated. "We have been in risky territory since then."

Khan remained inside Monica's tent, unaware of the incredible conversation inside Raymond's ship. Snores reached his ears and improved his mood, but an unmovable barrier prevented him from experiencing actual happiness.

The conversation with Jenna had left a bitter taste in Khan's mouth, but some laughs had managed to appear among it. Yet, the situation didn't change. The fourth asteroid was still a mess of debris and corpses, and he had yet to hear from Monica.

Minutes went by until they transformed into hours. Khan would typically meditate to make time flow faster, but he avoided that due to his new condition. He was stable, but he didn't want to risk it with Monica nearby.

Moreover, as stable as Khan was, he had still gone through a significant improvement. Resuming his training wasn't wise, especially since he had already seen what could happen if his mana went rogue.

The wait was tedious, and the fear inherited from the nightmare only worsened the experience. Khan couldn't help but focus on that alien feeling since he didn't have anything else to do, and the lack of answers or explanations annoyed him beyond reason.

Khan had grown used to hopeless feelings. His desperations had been a part of him for almost fourteen years, and the Slums had given birth to a paranoia he couldn't ignore. However, that deep fear was somewhat different, and not only in terms of intensity.

The environment didn't help Khan's mood either. His new sensitivity made him aware of events happening far outside the tent, which were far from happy. The faint groans, screams, and sobs that reached his ears fused with his sensitivity to depict a grim scenery. The disaster was still out there, and he couldn't do anything about it.

A tremor eventually ran through the synthetic mana, and Khan's eyes lit up. A cute groan replaced the snores, and Khan stood up to be there for the opening of Monica's eyes.

Monica appeared confused when she saw Khan's worried face. She instinctively wore a smile at his sight, but inspecting the environment reminded her of where she was, which drained away any happiness from her face.

Khan waited a few seconds while a series of words flowed through his mind. He could come up with many lines, but Monica already knew what had happened, and he didn't know where she stood.

"You came," Monica whispered while Khan was still immersed in his internal conflict.

"Of course," Khan exclaimed and tried to reach for Monica's hand, only to retract his arm again.

Monica noticed that gesture and diverted her eyes. She was aware of the elephant in the room, but she had to find the right words before addressing it.

"You know," Monica eventually spoke, "I imagined my first relationship far differently."

"Was it better or worse than ours?" Khan asked.

"Some parts were better," Monica revealed. "I expected my man to have many pursuers, but I never thought they'd be so dangerous."

"I think wealthy women would be more dangerous than Jenna," Khan admitted.

"Probably," Monica guessed, "But that would be cheating, at least. With you, I'm stuck accepting the unthinkable."

Khan remained silent. He had made it really hard for Monica due to his friendship with Jenna, and he wouldn't blame her if the kiss had depleted her patience.

"How did I even get myself in this situation?" Monica cursed and lifted her arms to cover her face, but the gesture made her injury send waves of pain.

Khan stepped forward at the sight of Monica's suffering expression, but he held back from touching her once again. Monica didn't miss that, and Khan's hesitation pushed her to reveal her stance.

"I'm so pathetic," Monica complained as a smile appeared on her face. "I can't even handle keeping you on edge."

"Wait," Khan voiced when he realized something, "Aren't you mad?"

"Of course I'm mad!" Monica shouted before letting out a groan. "I'm livid. Jenna kissed you. How could I be okay with that?"

"That's my girl," Khan smirked. "I would have called the doctor otherwise."

"Hey," Monica called, "Were you worried I'd break up with you?"

Khan nodded, and Monica revealed a playful smile followed by a few words. "I can finally tease you about something."

"Don't get too used to it," Khan scoffed.

"It will be my get-out-of-jail-free card for the next few years," Monica joked. "I'll finally take the reins of this relationship."

"Few years?" Khan repeated, and Monica's eyes widened since she knew she had let out more than planned.

"I'm tired now," Monica lied while closing her eyes and turning her head away from Khan. "You can leave my tent."

Khan ignored the lie and leaned on the small bed to continue teasing Monica. "Did you already plan our next years together?"

"Where do you think you are going?!" Monica snapped when she saw Khan trying to sit on the bed, but her violent reaction made her injury hurt again.

"Don't push yourself," Khan scolded as he reached for Monica's cheek.

The careful and affectionate touch made Monica calm down and melted Khan's internal conflict. His worry vanished as the two looked at each other. They had long since reached an understanding, and the exchange of glances confirmed that everything was fine between them.

Monica moved her eyes to Khan's left side. She lifted her arm to touch his naked torso before tracing his muscles with her fingers. She seemed to search for something, but the area didn't even have marks.

"She really told you everything," Khan commented.

"Let me look at your hair," Monica requested, and Khan complied. He left the bed and bent over so that Monica could reach his hair without effort.

Warmth spread from Khan's head while Monica's fingers ran through his hair. She was actually quite cold, but the feelings radiated by her gesture made him experience her affection.

"You made a mess," Monica complained at the sight of that uneven hairstyle.

Khan lifted his face, and his eyes ended in Monica's. The two exchanged another meaningful glance that ended when Monica tightened her grip on Khan's hair. That gesture triggered a kiss that made them both forget about their problems.

The first kiss with the new sensitivity was beyond terrific. Khan couldn't even put the emotions he experienced into words. He felt light after getting rid of his guilt, and that opened the path for wilder urges.

The faint moan that escaped Monica's mouth when the kiss grew too passionate forced Khan to think about his situation. He wanted to do far more. He desired to get even closer to Monica, but she was still injured. That wasn't the time to think about his needs.

Khan interrupted the kiss and turned his head to calm down, but Monica's wet lips ended on his cheek and made him face her again. A layer of shyness enveloped her expression, but she felt thrilled underneath all of that.

"You need to recover," Khan whispered before giving Monica a quick kiss.

"Are you worried about me?" Monica asked.

"You have no idea," Khan admitted, "And I can't wait for you to regain your strength."

"Something tells me that you aren't thinking about my well-being," Monica giggled as she wrapped her arms around Khan's neck.

"I told you," Khan teased. "You should have been uglier."

"Not a chance," Monica replied. "Though I like seeing you so desperate. I deserve some payback."

"Please," Khan joked. "You'd be already naked if it weren't for your wound."

"I wouldn't-!" Monica began to complain before turning his shout into a familiar curse. "You are a scoundrel."

"Yes, and I'm your problem to handle," Khan stated, and Monica couldn't help but smile when he used her words against her.

"Make room for me now," Khan requested. "I want to stay here for a while."

Khan's straightforward request surprised Monica and made her forget any possible joke. She moved to her left, but the bed was small, so the available space remained narrow.

No complaints came from Khan as he climbed on the bed and stretched himself to occupy as little space as possible. Monica wanted to turn to give him more room, but he shook his head and kept her down since he didn't want to make her uncomfortable.

"You can't be comfortable like this," Monica pointed out while Khan adjusted himself and placed an arm under her neck. "We can call a doctor and bring another-."

"Monica," Khan interrupted Monica while carefully reaching for her waist, "I've never been better."

Monica didn't know what to say. Khan had basically left three-quarters of the bed to her and was even avoiding touching the bandages under the sheets. It couldn't be good for him to rest in that position, but the peaceful expression on his face said otherwise.

"You are so unfair," Monica complained when Khan rubbed his face into her curls. "I'm forced to rest now."

"Sleep," Khan voiced. "I'll watch over you."

"You didn't even bother to clean yourself first," Monica snorted while snuggling closer to Khan.

Khan couldn't possibly fall asleep due to the new vitality that had invaded his body, but that position brought him peace. The outside world was still a mess, but calm reigned on that bed.

"I did plan our next years together," Monica revealed after spending a few minutes in that position. "Though, plan isn't the right word."

Khan pulled himself out of Monica's curls and waited for her to look at him before asking a question. "And?"

"Promise not to tease me about it," Monica almost begged.

"I won't lie to you," Khan chuckled.

Monica pouted, but the short kiss that followed made her spill the bean. "I have connections, you know? I'm sure I can find a post where we can be together."

"Do you mean after leaving Milia 222?" Khan wondered. "And here I thought you were in your rebellious phase."

"Idiot," Monica scolded before showing her timid face. "Don't you want to be together?"

"Of course," Khan reassured. "I just didn't think about what's next yet."

"We can go over that together," Monica suggested. "Maybe at dinner."

"Are you trying to bribe me, Miss Solodrey?" Khan joked.

"If that's what it takes to make you shut up," Monica scoffed.

"Sure, sure," Khan laughed while leaving a kiss on Monica's forehead to melt her annoyance. "Let's make plans together once this mission ends."

"Really?" Monica asked as her expression lit up.

"Really," Khan confirmed.

A beautiful smile bloomed on Monica's face before she started a passionate kiss. The answer seemed to have eased her worries, and she couldn't wait for her next mission with Khan to begin.

"You really should rest now," Khan declared once the kiss ended. "I might stop caring about your wound if we keep going."

"Will you be here the whole time?" Monica asked.

"Yes," Khan reassured. "I'll be right here when you wake up."

Monica's smile grew even happier, and she did her best to get closer to Khan before closing her eyes. She wanted to recover as fast as possible, but another doubt hindered her peaceful rest.

"Khan," Monica called while Khan's shoulder partially hid her face.

"What is it?" Khan questioned.

"I don't care about the color of your hair," Monica announced. "I only want you to feel able to talk to me."

Khan didn't answer right away. He could guess that Monica was talking about something discussed with Jenna, but he wasn't ready to explain his whole story to her. The day would come, but that wasn't it.

"That's what I also want," Khan admitted.

"That's good," Monica exclaimed. "No hurry. I only wanted you to know that."

"Monica," Khan continued.

"What is it?" Monica asked.

"I don't care about the color of your underwear," Khan exclaimed, but a loud complaint resounded in the tent before he could continue the joke.

Chapter 424 Harbor

Khan didn't sleep. He simply couldn't. His body was full of energy, and getting used to his new state took time. His sensitivity made the world too loud, and the inherited fear grew stronger whenever he closed his eyes.

Nevertheless, Monica's sleeping face brought peace, and her snores always made Khan smile. That small bed was a safe place where he could ignore the outside world, and the problems inside it felt almost reassuring.

Khan knew that things wouldn't be easy with Monica. The two of them had actually briefly discussed the issue already. Her status prevented them from having a normal relationship, and much of their future remained unclear.

Monica couldn't ignore her family, and Khan was problematic on his own. On the surface, their relationship was doomed to fail, but that added value to their situation. The fact that two people from such opposite worlds could end up together was incredible, almost special.

Of course, many could point out that Khan had already experienced something similar. Liiza had come from an actual different world, but the situation had been different there. Khan and Liiza shared a lot in terms of character and background, while Monica only had faint traits that touched that realm.

Comparing Monica to Cora also felt natural, but Khan knew the truth. Cora was perfect, which was a problem. To quote Jenna, Monica had toxic sides that matched Khan or at least made him laugh.

Also, as troublesome as that relationship could be, Khan couldn't find the strength to worry too much. He had faced disasters and worse. The problems coming from a wealthy family felt laughable in comparison.

Those and more topics ran through Khan's mind while he was on the bed. He couldn't help but immerse himself in his thoughts in that situation. Strangely enough, the future didn't look too grim.

A disaster had unfolded, but Khan had survived. A Nak had given him power, but he had also found clues that might eventually lead to answers. Moreover, his stance had never been firmer. For once, he wanted to advance without compromising on what he truly desired.

Khan spent hours in that condition, but Monica's awakening made the wait worth it. The two spoke for a bit, exchanged intimate moments, and conversed again before accepting that Khan couldn't remain inside the tent until Monica's injuries healed.

"No nasty business with the Nele," Monica warned.

"I will be a good boy and wait until I can bring the nasty business to you," Khan casually teased.

"You better!" Monica continued. "It's about time I had some monopoly over you."

"When am I going to get some monopoly?" Khan teased while leaning on the bed to bend over Monica.

"Scoundrel," Monica pouted while wrapping her arms around Khan's neck. "You already have that."

"You know what I'm talking about," Khan joked as he traced Monica's curves and reached for her waist without touching the bandages.

"Idiot," Monica scolded. "Can't you wait until I get better?"

"I could barely wait the first time I kissed you," Khan responded.

Monica's expression broke into a smile. She adored being at the center of Khan's attention and finding ways to refuse him turned out to be difficult. After all, she didn't exactly dislike what they did under the sheets.

"How did I let myself be captured by such a scoundrel?" Monica mocked herself before diverting her gaze. "I get so worked up even when I know you are joking."

"And how would you know that?" Khan pressed on.

"Khan," Monica called while bringing her gaze back to Khan. Her shyness appeared, but she forced herself to finish the line. "You could have pushed me many times. I know you are waiting for me to be ready."

Khan smirked, but his eyes caught something strange. Monica's stare deepened and gained a specific meaning that left Khan speechless. Her expression hinted at the fact that she was ready.

"You have to be grateful for your injury," Khan joked.

"Get out of my tent," Monica giggled while pulling Khan down to deliver a quick kiss, "But don't be away for too long."

"I'll check up on you often," Khan promised.

"And don't exhaust yourself," Monica warned. "You must take care of me, remember?"

"How could I forget my spoiled, wealthy woman?" Khan wondered.

"That's right," Monica exclaimed. "And I expect the spoiling to increase."

"So needy," Khan pretended to complain before leaving another kiss on Monica's lips. The two slowly separated at that point, and they avoided adding more words to the intimate interaction.

A different scenery welcomed Khan when he exited the tent. He had kept track of the changes in his surroundings, but seeing everything with his own eyes sent a completely different vibe, especially since the symphony had joined his vision.

Khan had spent more than half a day inside the tent. The medical bay had long since taken form, and the clearing operations had begun.

New ships equipped with big metal arms or tractor beams had descended into the intermediate floor to take care of the largest boulders. Meanwhile, various teams scoured the debris to search for survivors or valuable goods.

Khan already had a plan. He briefly inspected the area before heading toward familiar traces of mana. The walk brought him to a group of Nele led by Piran, and the team didn't hesitate to make him part of the operation.

The Nele had sharp sensitivity, so they had an easier time looking for survivors. Khan's arrival only quickened the searching operations, and a grim scene eventually unfolded in his eyes.

Khan and the others had done their best during the fall, but everything had been a mess. Saving everyone had been impossible, and the corpse dug out of the rubble proved that.

Tinges of mana leaked out of the dead Nele. The latter had only been a first-level warrior, but his condition didn't reveal anything else. The boulders had smashed his face and limbs, leaving only a shadow of what he had once been.

Piran nodded at his companions while Khan stared at the corpse. The Nele hurried toward their dead friend and stripped him naked to salvage what they could. A ship even arrived afterward to take him away.

The Nele's behavior seemed heartless, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. Their species didn't have a home, so salvaging resources was a priority, especially after the disaster. Clothes couldn't do much, but they were better than nothing.

"[Give me that]," Piran requested before the team could disperse to store the goods.

The Nele addressed by Piran reached him to hand out the loose jumper in her hands. Piran briefly studied it before lifting it toward Khan. The latter had yet to wear anything on his torso, so the gift was fitting.

Khan wanted to refuse. He didn't lack clothes. He only had to ask one of the doctors to get something, but the gesture meant a lot, so he snapped out of his stare and seized the jumper. An exchange of nods with Piran followed before Khan wiped his face and wore his new clothes.

The salvaging operation resumed immediately after. Khan worked with Piran, Jenna, Maban, Caja, and many other Nele to save as many people as possible. Some turned out to be alive under the rubble, but the corpses remained more numerous.

Khan was relentless in the excavation. He pursued any trail of mana he sensed and moved away boulders that weighed as much as him on his own. His stamina seemed bottomless, and he made full use of it.

Eventually, an entire day went by, and then another. Khan took breaks only when someone delivered food or during his visits to Monica, but he kept digging otherwise. Soon, the Nele's salvaging operation ended, so Khan moved to another species.

"[You know I can cut your hair in the meantime]," Jenna joked while Khan made his way toward a group of Fuveall and humans working together to clear a quadrant.

"[I promised Monica she could handle it]," Khan revealed. "[She is getting more possessive than you]."

"[And you like it]," Jenna teased.

"[She is recovering faster than I expected]," Khan changed the topic. "[It won't be long before she can leave the tent]."

"[I need to make my move quickly then]," Jenna giggled while grabbing Khan's arm.

"[You made plenty of moves]," Khan rebuked. "[I'm too busy helping anyway]."

Jenna didn't answer and reached for Khan's chest. She checked on him only to discover that he was fine. He had worked non-stop for almost two days but could still keep going. That stamina was not human.

"[Don't push yourself too hard]," Jenna sighed when she retracted her arm. "[This death isn't your fault]."

"[I only want to help]," Khan reassured. "[I'll rest properly once the situation is stable]."

Jenna could argue that the fourth asteroid had already started to recover. The dock and most of the lower floors were still a mess, but the operation had picked up the pace. Everything was working smoothly now that the forces from the central pillar had the time to sort things out, but she knew that her words wouldn't stop Khan.

"[I'll call Monica if you keep being so stubborn]," Jenna scoffed.

"[Since when do you need her help]?" Khan laughed.

"[I don't]," Jenna cheerfully exclaimed while tightening her hug on Khan's arm. "[I'm simply working toward that shared night]."

"[Women are going to be my doom]," Khan commented.

"[They already are]," Jenna mocked.

Khan smiled while focusing on Jenna. She appeared emotionally stable, but her affection toward him didn't disappear. It was actually stronger than ever, but she seemed to have gotten a handle on it.

"[How are you instead]?" Khan decided to ask.

"[I still want to put you down and force you to take me]," Jenna announced.

"[Straight to the naughty topics]," Khan voiced.

"[You were thinking about them]," Jenna snickered before reaching for Khan's ear to whisper tempting words. "[I know how you react whenever you feel my chest]."

"[I'm not making it out of Milia 222 alive]," Khan cursed.

"[You could convince Monica to have that shared night]," Jenna temped again. "[Anyway, our moment gave me perspective. I'm far stabler now]."

Khan could sense the unspoken truth in Jenna's influence over the synthetic mana. The kiss had brought some fulfillment to Jenna's urges. Her emotions were still crazy intense, but she could point them in a constructive direction now.

"[You are the best]," Khan couldn't refrain from expressing his gratitude.

"[No, I'm impossible]," Jenna corrected, and the two ended up sharing a laugh.

Khan didn't know any of the humans, but Ta-ei was among the Fuveall's teams, so fitting in wasn't an issue. Those groups were using scanners and ships to inspect the debris, but Khan and Jenna's senses quickened the clearing operation and led to a few successful rescues.

The atmosphere among those teams was tenser compared to what Khan had experienced with the Nele. Many had witnessed his feats against the Nak's hand, and his azure hair didn't let anyone forget them. Somehow, he felt more alien than anyone else.

Khan couldn't blame those teams. He would also be scared of himself. Part of him already was, but the issue had no solution, so he ignored it to focus on rescuing people.

"[The forces on Merth 290 won't care about Milia 222's events]," Ta-ei whispered when she and Khan found themselves moving away rubble in a relatively isolated spot.

"[I thought the streets had ears]," Khan joked.

"[The streets are tiles and shards now]," Ta-ei pointed out.

Khan glanced at Ta-ei. Her line could have multiple meanings, but Khan's stance wouldn't change anyway, so his answer remained the same.

"[I just want to help]," Khan explained before diving back into the rubble.

Milia 222's population showed its resilience during the clearing operations. The fourth asteroid took the shape of a giant beast working for the sole purpose of restoring normality.

The differences and hostilities among factions vanished to leave room for cooperation. Crews banded together under the leadership of various crime lords or emissaries from the central pillar. Everyone had the same orders. The fourth asteroid had to resume its functions as soon as possible.

As much as the leaders wanted to fix the dock, other aspects of the asteroid came first. Rescuing people was obvious, but the looting often dethroned that task.

The intermediate floor was a secret area even for most criminal organizations, and the goods hidden inside it were worth stealing. Paths opened in the crumbled passages and rooms once enough rubble disappeared, and many teams didn't hesitate to explore them to retrieve anything valuable.

Khan didn't care about the riches hidden underneath the debris, but he had to face the issue once he tried to help the Orlats. They were the most distrustful bunch, and Awiza didn't take long to make Khan aware of their stance.

A small team of Orlats led by Awiza approached Khan while he was busy moving piles of metal tiles. He could feel the mass of mana hidden under him, and the scene in his sensitivity didn't look good. He would probably find another corpse, but he continued to dig anyway.

"This quadrant is under our jurisdiction," Awiza announced once her team reached Khan.

"[I'm only trying to help]," Khan responded in the Orlats' language without stopping digging.

"You must leave," Awiza threatened.

Khan felt forced to stop at those words and turning to look at the alien team made their stance clear. Awiza had three second-level warriors behind her and a few first-level warriors. She was ready to remove Khan by force if needed.

The Orlats were among the most heartless factions during the clearing operation, but Khan could see how Awiza's stance went beyond the desire to monopolize the looting.

Things had been rough with the Orlats after Luke decided to deploy the team. He might have paid everyone back, but that didn't change what he had done, and Awiza had probably gotten the short end of the stick due to her involvement.

"[Look]," Khan opted for a diplomatic approach, "[I'll hand over anything valuable I find. I just want to rescue as many people as possible]."

"[You can't be trusted]," Awiza stated, finally accepting that the conversation would happen in her language. "[Leave now]."

The Orlats behind Awiza reached for their weapons after her words. The negotiations were over, and no one would blame Khan if he decided to leave. Still, he had other plans.

A tinge of anger rose inside Khan. He had never liked the limits of politics in the first place, but Awiza was actively trying to stop him from saving lives.

Khan knew the disaster wasn't his fault, but he still wanted to make things right. His desire came from his knowledge of the suffering Milia 222's population was enduring. He wanted to spare them from that pain and was willing to fight for that.

The Orlats began to lift their weapons when Khan straightened his position, but their stance and mana reeked of fear. Only Awiza could retain her calm, but she couldn't hide her worry, which spoke loudly to someone like Khan.

The news of Khan's fight against the third-level warrior had spread through the dock, and he could guess that the video had reached many channels controlled by Orlats. Awiza and her team probably knew about his battle prowess, and the events with the Nak's hand were bound to have deepened his fame.

Khan moved his eyes among the Orlats, and a tremor ran through them whenever they experienced his pressure. Awiza wore a straight face, but her worry intensified during that stalemate. She didn't expect Khan to be so stubborn about the matter, but there he was.

Fighting to get the chance to rescue people sounded contradictory. Khan had even decided to spare Rodney. He didn't want to force his way through that blockade, but leaving wasn't an option either.

Khan lifted his arm slowly to avoid abrupt reactions from the Orlats. The aliens studied his movements and eventually followed the direction pointed by his fingers. A small hill appeared in their vision, but the place didn't explain the reason behind Khan's gesture.

"[What]?" Awiza asked since Khan didn't bother to speak.

"[There is a big mass of mana under that rubble]," Khan revealed. "[It probably is a ship's tank. I believe you'd be interested in seizing it]."

Awiza kept her cold eyes on Khan, but the Orlats around her exchanged glances, revealing their interest. Containers of synthetic mana were pretty valuable right now, and the possibility of finding an entire ship was tempting.

Khan and Awiza remained locked in a stare until she nodded at one of the second-level warriors in her team. The latter showed a confused expression that Awiza's short order cleared. "[Check it]."

The second-level warrior hurried toward the hill and began to move away the debris under Khan and the team's watchful gazes. The process was slow and messy, but an engine eventually came to light and made Awiza send the rest of her companions to the location.

Soon, a broken ship came out of the hill of debris. The vehicle was useless in its current state, but many of its pieces were salvageable. Moreover, its tank had strangely survived the disaster, keeping the synthetic mana in its insides safe.

Awiza glared at Khan before reaching for the ship to inspect it. The finding was precious, but that wasn't the point. The Orlats would have retrieved the broken ship anyway. Khan had simply made sure that Awiza's team got it.

The Orlats' internal issues and fights were no secret to Milia 222. Khan could see Awiza rethinking her initial stance now that a better opportunity had appeared. She showed a cold face when she turned to look at Khan, but her emotions had already reassured him.

Awiza left the wrecked ship to return to Khan, and an offer left her mouth when she got close enough. "[I want something valuable every hour]."

"[I'll point out anything valuable around the traces of survivors]," Khan stated. "[That's the deal]."

"[You don't set the terms]," Awiza responded.

"[I can always find an Orlats who accepts them]," Khan voiced before gazing at the rubble in the distance. "[It won't be hard until I explain how much it's hidden under all of this]."

Awiza didn't like Khan's stance. She preferred his fake flattery over that conceited character. Yet, his offer remained good, and he was right. Someone else would benefit from Khan's senses if she refused him.

Two more days went by without anything significant happening. No one tried to obstruct Khan's efforts anymore, so he focused on saving people and helping out wherever possible.

Of course, as time passed, the number of survivors diminished. Khan spent hours digging out maimed corpses, and the few still alive were in terrible shapes that didn't promise anything good.

The depressing scene was nothing new to Khan. He actually felt glad that he could finally do something valuable during a disaster. The deaths far outnumbered the survivors, but he had helped a lot, and that was enough.

The almost four days of relentless work finally made Khan discover his new limits. He would typically ignore them, but Jenna and Monica never left him off the hook for too long, so a sleeping session ended in his schedule sooner than expected.

Khan finished digging out another corpse before accepting that his time had come. He would have his first night of sleep after the transformation, and he couldn't avoid choosing Monica's tent as the location of his rest.

'It should be fine,' Khan thought as he headed toward Monica's tent. He would have preferred to sleep in an isolated area since his nightmares could have become dangerous, but refusing Monica and Jenna when they worked together was impossible.

"Lieutenant Khan!" Someone called when Monica's tent entered Khan's vision.

Khan turned to see a man hurrying in his direction. The latter was quite young, only a few years older than him, but he was still a first-level warrior. Also, his uniform put him among the central pillar's forces.

"Yes?" Khan asked since he didn't recognize the man.

"We found something during the excavation," The man explained when he stopped before Khan. "Mister Cobsend told us to give it to you."

The man put his backpack down to pull out a metal folder, and Khan guessed what it was even before seizing it. Pressing a button made the narrow lid slide open, and the scent that invaded the synthetic mana confirmed Khan's hunch.

Khan glanced at the intact layer of the reinforced fabric inside the folder before closing the lid. Raymond had been true to his word. Khan only had to contact Luke now.

"Tell me more," Khan requested while picking up his phone. He had completely ignored it in the past days and seeing the many missed calls and messages didn't surprise him.

"We found it among a series of collapsed buildings," The soldier explained. "Mister Cobsend thinks it was a lab."

"And Mister Cobsend is rarely wrong," Khan casually commented while browsing his messages.

"Sir?" The man questioned since Khan didn't seem to take the matter seriously.

"Good job out there," Khan eventually exclaimed while storing his phone. "Can you contact Luke Cobsend for me? I'm ready to see him."

Khan could handle the task by himself, but leaving it to a random soldier would give him more time alone. Still, he soon realized to have underestimated Raymond's planning. A new ship had descended through the hole, and Luke's presence shone clearly in its insides.

"Mister Cobsend-," The man tried to explain the situation.

"I know," Khan interrupted the soldier before glancing at the incoming ship. "Get some rest now."

"Yes, sir!" The man exclaimed before performing a military salute and leaving the area.

Khan suddenly felt tired. Learning about the imminent meeting drained him of his remaining strength and made him sit on the floor. Meanwhile, the ship continued to descend until it landed on an empty spot nearby.

Luke wasn't the only familiar face inside the ship. When its doors opened, Khan saw Master Ivor, Bruce, Francis, and Martha. Half of the team had flown down to check the situation, and their stunned expressions said enough.

Luke and the others had been on the first floor until now. They had only heard reports about the disaster, but seeing the messy medical bay, the giant hole, and the various ships busy with the debris made them understand how tragic everything had been.

Khan saw Luke exchanging a few words with his companions before heading in his direction on his own. The messy scene managed to claim his attention for most of the walk, but that changed once he noticed Khan's new hair.

"What happened to you?" Luke asked once he reached Khan.

"Let me guess," Khan joked. "Your uncle told you to come down here."

"It was a soldier, actually," Luke revealed. "Still, are you okay?"

Luke wasn't only speaking about Khan's hair. The four days of work had made him sweaty, dirty, and had given him dark eye bags. Khan seemed on the verge of collapsing, but he still had the strength to talk business.

"I'm fine," Khan reassured while handing the metal folder. "This is for you."

Luke didn't really accept Khan's reply, but opening the folder moved his attention to different topics. The stolen reinforced fabric was finally in his hands. That could be enough to please his father.

"The connection to the network has gone on and off these days," Luke revealed while closing the folder and crossing his arms to hold it tightly, "Receiving updates from the second asteroid has been a pain, but we did find what we were looking for. There actually was a hidden tunnel."

"The soldier who gave me that confirmed the presence of a lab here," Khan added, making sure to keep everything vague. "I guess you have everything you need."

"I do," Luke exclaimed without hiding his excitement and disbelief. "I need to confirm a few things, but the mission is over."

Khan revealed a faint smile before placing his hands on the floor and lifting his face. The cracked ceiling, the hole, and the streets past them filled his vision, but he could barely see them. Luke's words had officially put an end to the past months of struggle. Khan had done it but felt too tired to appreciate the accomplishment.

Master Ivor and the others reached Luke while Khan remained immersed in his feelings. His hair caught the group's attention, and questions flew in his direction, but he ignored them for now. He wanted to enjoy the moment a bit longer and memorize that unique scenery.

"Before we make everything official," Luke exclaimed. "Khan, have you thought about after Milia 222? Do you have anything in mind?"

Khan felt forced to exit his pensive state at that question. He knew what Luke wanted to say, but he didn't have a precise answer now, especially with Francis on the scene.

"I just want to rest now," Khan stated as he stood up and searched for the Nele. They would take care of him since he couldn't go to Monica's tent anymore.

"Wait, Khan," Luke continued. "You are too valuable to get caught in random jobs. Let me help. I can promise higher pay and the best support."

Luke wanted to secure Khan before he could study different options, but he was too tired even to consider that topic now. Also, a familiar presence entered the area and made him ignore Luke altogether.

Khan turned to his right, and his sharp gesture made the entire group look in the same direction. Surprisingly enough, Monica had left her tent and was on her way to reach Luke and the others.

"You should be in bed," Khan scolded once Monica got close enough.

"Lieutenant Khan, as much as I appreciate the concern, you are not a doctor," Monica politely responded.

"What did the doctor say?" Khan wondered.

"She cleared me for this walk," Monica revealed. "Besides, I couldn't miss this reunion."

"What happened to you?" Francis questioned. Monica was wearing clean clothes, but the talk about the doctor and her slightly uneasy steps revealed her injured state.

"Everyone suffered injuries, Francis," Monica cut the topic short. "So, what were you talking about?"

Martha could read the vibe since she knew more than her companions, and she didn't hesitate to say something that might help Monica and Khan. "Luke was offering Khan another job."

"You don't waste time," Monica giggled while covering her mouth. "Well, I can't blame you. Lieutenant Khan is a valuable asset."

"The asset is going to sleep," Khan commented before voicing short goodbyes. "Luke, Miss Solodrey."

"Though I should say you are late," Monica continued, ignoring Khan's goodbyes.

"What do you mean?" Luke asked.

"I already found an agreement with Lieutenant Khan," Monica exclaimed, and Khan felt forced to interrupt his departure. "He will join me on the Harbor once the mission ends."

"The Harbor?" Luke repeated, glancing at Khan to find answers on his face. Khan was as confused as him, but he pretended to be completely aware of the situation.

"The embassy there needed trainees," Monica explained. "Lieutenant Khan was the obvious choice."

Chapter 425 Mom

'The Harbor,' Khan repeated in his mind while his expression remained the embodiment of confidence. 'Where did I hear that name?'

Khan had to go way back to find the memory he was looking for. That name belonged to a time before most of his many battles. It came from when he still attended lessons, even if he couldn't exactly recall which ones.

'Right, the embassy on that moon,' Khan eventually recalled and forced himself to suppress any abrupt reaction. 'Wait, did she really get me a job there?'

"Wow," Luke exclaimed. "The Harbor is a good place. You must have pulled many strings."

"Luke, we both know I wasn't the one doing the pulling," Monica responded.

"Still, if I may," Luke continued. "That's a lot, even for our families."

"Are you implying that Lieutenant Khan isn't worth the trouble?" Monica wondered while approaching Khan to place a hand on his arm. "I recall you relying a lot on him."

"I wouldn't dare," Luke promptly declared. "I was surprised about your interest in the field. I thought you were avoiding it."

"Milia 222 made me change my mind," Monica revealed, "And my parents couldn't have been happier about that. I'm sure you can understand."

"Of course," Luke laughed. "My father is still trying to convince me to get one of those jobs."

Luke then moved his gaze to Khan before voicing another comment. "It seems that you are already booked."

"I couldn't refuse Miss Solodrey's offer," Khan replied. "Besides, I planned to split ways anyway. She simply found me at the right time."

"Is everything okay?" Luke asked, obviously hinting at the problem with Martha.

"I'd have to use your name every time if I rely on you to accumulate merits," Khan justified his lie. "I want to stand on my own."

"That's commendable, Lieutenant Khan," Master Ivor intervened to prevent awkwardness. "With your record and talents, I'm sure you'll shine anywhere."

"Thank you," Khan nodded. "I'll do my best."

"Well, let me fix you an accommodation at least," Luke offered. "Unless you plan on staying with the Nele while I sort out the last details."

"The Nele are busier than the other species in this period," Khan explained. "I'll accept the accommodation as long as it doesn't interfere with the medical bay."

"Are you planning on remaining down here?" Luke questioned.

"I can help, so I will," Khan made it short. "As for now, I need to rest."

"First, you must come with me," Monica intervened. "We must discuss a few important topics."

Monica didn't need to do anything special to make Khan play along. He immediately came up with an act and delivered it flawlessly. "You are right. I forgot about that."

"I must say," Monica exclaimed while elegantly covering her mouth to hide her smile. "Having you on my payroll is exciting. I guess getting you in front of a drink won't be hard anymore."

"I did join you once," Khan pointed out.

"That hardly counts since I had a lot of competition," Monica rebuked.

"I suppose drinks can improve work talks," Khan gave in.

"I can't wait," Monica giggled while letting go of Khan's arm. "So, shall we go? The doctor didn't give me too much free time."

"Of course," Luke exclaimed. "Focus on resting. I'll handle the rest out here, including Khan's accommodation."

"I wouldn't mind if Lieutenant Khan took a nap in my tent," Monica teased before performing a polite bow and heading toward her tent.

Khan revealed a helpless smile when his companions looked at him, but his prompt departure didn't give them the time to address the matter. Even Francis remained silent since both Khan and Monica were in no condition to talk any further.

'I haven't seen that side of her in a while,' Khan thought as he followed Monica closely.

The elegant but teasing façade that Monica wore in public had gotten Khan out of that conversation, but he remained curious about the topic. The Harbor was an interesting location. Still, Khan thought he would have discussed the matter with Monica before choosing a new mission.

"Hey," Khan called once the two returned inside the privacy of the tent. "What's this Harbor stuff?"

"Shit," Monica cursed before hurrying toward the bed and searching for the phone hidden under the sheets.

"Monica?" Khan called again. "Did you just lie to Luke?"

"It won't be a lie if I get us that job," Monica responded while sitting on the bed and crazily tapping on her phone.

Khan couldn't help but reach Monica to peek at her phone, and his eyes widened when she pressed on a contact labeled "Mom". The options for the call opened, and Monica activated the camera to inspect her appearance.

"Are you serious?" Khan asked, knowing that he couldn't leave the tent now. Luke and the others might get suspicious if he did.

"It's never too early to request a job in the Harbor," Monica explained as she ruffled her hair and wiped the corners of her eyes while tilting the screen left and right.

"I get that," Khan said while sitting on the bed and wrapping an arm around Monica's waist, "But we didn't even talk. I thought we had to choose our next job together."

"I had to improvise," Monica cursed while her inspection moved to her clothes. "Luke can be very persuasive, and Francis was also there. I had to come up with something they couldn't join without the right motivations or preparations."

That answer made sense, but the issue remained. Khan wanted to be with Monica, but he couldn't accept a random mission because the situation demanded it. After all, the matter involved his future.

"Stop for a second," Khan requested, pulling Monica closer to make her interrupt the inspection. "I don't know much about this Harbor, and-."

"Don't mess up my clothes!" Monica snapped, interrupting Khan's line. "I won't hear the end of it if I don't look remotely decent."

"But-" Khan tried to speak again.

"The Harbor is a literal embassy," Monica interrupted again. "It's perfect for accumulating real experience and connections."

The explanations left Khan speechless for a second, but that still wasn't enough. Everything was happening too quickly, and it was reasonable to ask for a short conversation on the topic.

"Monica," Khan called for the third time, but Monica cut him short again.

"What? Don't you trust me?" Monica almost shouted. "Do you think I would jeopardize your future over a lie to Luke?"

"It's not that," Khan responded.

"What then?" Monica asked. "You want to become an ambassador, right? The Harbor can give you that and more."

"Are you certain?" Khan wondered.

"So much for trusting me," Monica scoffed. "You are no academic. You have no higher qualification. Someone like you wouldn't even dream of getting a job in the Harbor."

Khan frowned. Monica's words were a bit offensive, and he could even sense her anger. His exhaustion didn't help with the situation, so an irritated tone ended up joining his following question.

"Are you angry or something?" Khan asked.

"Of course!" Monica shouted. "I have to call my mother. How can I not be angry?"

The faint irritation rising inside Khan vanished when he understood the true target of Monica's anger. She was just anxious about facing her mother.

"Dammit," Monica cursed when she glanced at her reflection in the phone. She threw the device on the bed and grabbed Khan's jumper to pull him closer before trapping his neck into a tight hug.

Khan didn't expect that sudden gesture. He was still thinking about the Harbor when he found himself immersed in a passionate kiss. Monica was out of breath when their mouths separated, but she didn't hesitate to reach for his lips again.

A few short kisses followed before Monica let go of Khan's neck and reached for his hair and right cheek. She appeared conflicted and sorry, so Khan revealed an understanding smile.

"Sorry if I sounded mean," Monica whimpered. "Trust me for now. I really need to call my mother before rumors start to spread."

Khan sensed Monica's honesty, so he put the matter aside. "Alright."

"Out of my bed now," Monica ordered, raising her voice again. "Don't try anything funny while my mother is on the phone."

"It might be my chance to know her," Khan teased, but Monica pushed him out of the bed before he could wear his smirk.

"Not a sound," Monica warned before going over her clothes again and finally starting on the call.

Holograms came out of the phone to create a small screen. The quality wasn't the best due to the poor connection, but the images were stable. A ringing noise started to resound inside the tent, and Monica's anxiety intensified whenever she heard it.

The ringing eventually stopped, and a beautiful woman who looked to be in her thirties appeared on the screen. She had Monica's hair and the same dark skin, but her eyes were brown, and her face radiated evident aloofness.

"Monica, dear, what is it?" The woman asked before her voice gained scolding tones. "Don't tell me that you show yourself around in that state."

"I'm fine, Mom," Monica snorted. "Thank you for asking."

"Being in a medical bay doesn't justify your appearance," The woman pressed on. "You are a woman of the Solodrey family. You should know better."

"Everything is a mess around here," Monica explained. "Avoiding dust is the best I can do."

"At least do something for your hair," The mother complained. "How can you hope to get Luke otherwise?"

"I don't plan on getting anyone," Monica coldly stated. "I've been clear about that."

"So stubborn," The mother sighed. "Francis might be a strange kid, but you had Luke Cobsend and Bruce Eerly within your reach. How could you not consider them?"

"I won't get a boyfriend just because you say so," Monica declared.

"I hope you made a good impression on Mister Raymond, at least," The woman voiced.

"Mom, he is three times my age!" Monica complained.

"He is still in his prime," The woman pointed out. "You shouldn't miss these opportunities. You won't be young and beautiful forever."

"Can we avoid this topic?" Monica questioned.

"Sure, dear," The mother agreed. "So, why did you call me?"

"I wanted to ask," Monica announced, "How are our connections with the Harbor?"

"The Harbor?" The mother repeated. "Did you finally gain some interest in interplanetary politics?"

"Sort of," Monica kept it vague.

"Well, finding a spot for you won't be a problem," The woman revealed. "I just need to make a call."

"It's not only for me," Monica uttered. "There is this soldier, Lieutenant Khan. I want to bring him with me."

"The kid from Onia's tournament?" The mother asked. "Why would you need my help? You can hire him as part of your guards."

"I want him to become a trainee on the Harbor," Monica explained.

"What?!" The mother exclaimed. "Why?"

"You should see him, Mom," Monica replied. "He is a natural with alien species. We might groom an ambassador if we give him this chance."

"He has no qualifications," The mother contradicted. "He wouldn't know what to do in the Harbor."

"That's why trainee," Monica argued. "He'll go there to learn the job."

"He'll be behind everyone else," The mother stated, "And no one knows whether he will catch up. Also, we can't be sure he'll work for our family after getting our help."

"Mom, you know me," Monica exclaimed. "I wouldn't ask if I wasn't sure."

Monica's mother remained silent for a few seconds before heaving a deep sigh and giving her answer. "You have never shown any interest in anyone. Are you sure there isn't something more with this Lieutenant Khan?"

"Please," Monica sneered. "I admit that he is cute, but he is nothing more than a soldier. We are in different leagues."

"At least you still remember your place," The mother stated. "Well, Luke Cobsend holds him in high regard, and new rumors about his feats are coming in. It's never bad to gamble on these talents."

"So, will you help me?" Monica asked as her eyes lit up.

"You can give him the good news already," The mother declared. "Still, he won't get any privileged treatment. His superior might very well kick him out before the end of the term if he isn't up to the task."

"Thank you, Mom," Monica said, ignoring the warning. "I think I'll rest now. I want my injury to heal so I can get a bath."

"There should be beauty salons on the second asteroid," The woman revealed. "I'll send you a few names."

"Sure," Monica kept her replies short. "Bye, Mom."

"And wear something decent," The mother resumed the scolding. "You should be able to find-."

Khan never heard the rest of the scolding since Monica closed the call and threw her phone toward the pillow. A helpless sigh left her mouth, and a worried expression appeared on her face when she turned toward Khan.

"I know you had to say those things," Khan reassured while straightening his position. "Though I must admit that your mother looks great."

"I don't want to hear it," Monica complained as she lay down and covered her ears.

"Her comments on the Harbor are also quite reassuring," Khan continued while approaching the bed. "That place sounds great."

"So, it's fine when my mother says it," Monica scolded.

"You heard me then," Khan smirked as he climbed on the bed to place himself on top of Monica. "What was that talk about Luke and Bruce?"

"What?" Monica asked. "Are you jealous?"

"Yes," Khan admitted without showing any shame. "I want you to show off only for me."

Monica couldn't oppose Khan when he was so straightforward. She reached for his hair, and the two kissed. Khan's exhaustion and Monica's injury seemed to disappear as the intimate moment went on, but reason eventually prevailed and made them stop.

"Your mother doesn't understand anything," Khan whispered when the kiss ended. "Your hair looks amazing."

"You are saying this only to make me lower my guard," Monica giggled. "I know your scoundrel mind."

"Someone should also tell your mother that you look better without clothes," Khan teased, and Monica delivered a soft slap to his cheek.

"Don't put my mother in those lines," Monica pouted.

"You sure like slapping me," Khan chuckled.

"You always deserve them," Monica claimed.

"Because you say so?" Khan wondered.

"Exactly," Monica replied before diverting her gaze and deciding to address the previous topic.

"Anyway, I had no intention of getting close to Luke or Bruce. My mother simply has her own plans."

"I didn't doubt you," Khan reassured while carefully lying down to place his head on Monica's chest. "I only wish we could be honest about our relationship. I trust you, but jealousy isn't exactly reasonable."

Khan wasn't speaking about that feeling from a human perspective. His irritation had grown stronger when Monica's mother talked about Luke, and similar reactions were bound to happen in the future. Khan didn't even want to imagine what he could do if he saw someone hitting on Monica in the open.

"Jenna knows," Monica pointed out while caressing Khan's head. "Martha is on our side too. We must keep our relationship a secret, but we can be honest with them."

"I'm starting to get tired of secrets," Khan exclaimed while rubbing his face on Monica's chest.

Monica giggled and lightly pulled Khan's hair to stop him, but the gesture only made him climb back to her face to deliver another kiss. The two seemed unable to stay away from each other, and they both couldn't wait to get better.

"Still, it's annoying," Monica announced when the two took a break from their intimate moment.

"What is?" Khan asked.

"The only trustworthy people are women," Monica continued, "Women who like you a lot. It's not fair at all."

"I might be able to fix that," Khan revealed. "I can add one man to the bunch."

"Wait," Monica uttered, slightly pushing Khan away to stare at his entire expression. "Are you talking about telling someone else about us?"

"Yes," Khan confirmed and supported himself on one arm to pick up his phone with the other. "I actually planned to call him once the mission ended."

"Wait, wait!" Monica called. "Can you really trust him?"

"With my life," Khan declared, and a serious expression made its way to his face.

Monica didn't expect such a strong reaction, and curiosity inevitably formed inside her. She remained a bit hesitant, but Khan's seriousness also captivated her. She wanted to know the person who could make Khan behave like that.

"Don't feel forced to accept," Khan added, understanding that Monica could have a hard time in the matter. "It was just an idea."

"No," Monica promptly exclaimed as a trace of shyness enveloped her face. "I want to know the important people in your life."

Khan's seriousness melted before Monica's honesty. He couldn't refrain from reaching for the pillow and taking Monica into his arms. Her pure intentions fueled his affection in ways he didn't expect.

"Can I adjust my hair first?" Monica asked. "I want to make a good impression."

"You have never looked more beautiful," Khan praised.

"Liar," Monica whispered before gaining a pleading tone. "Don't tease me about this."

Khan didn't answer. His intense gaze was enough to trigger an affectionate kiss. The two remained locked in that intimate gesture for a while, and Khan started a call when it ended.

Chapter 426 Girlfriend

"Son of a forgettable woman!" George shouted once the call stabilized. "Did anyone teach you that you don't have to wait months to call me?"

"I forget I have a phone half of the time," Khan laughed. "Life sure is treating you well."

The holograms coming out of Khan's phone showed a nice scene. George was sitting on a comfortable armchair with a half-full glass lying on the right armrest. His face had gotten slimmer and his hair shorter, but that new look suited him and depicted a perfectly healthy man.

"You look like shit instead," George commented. "Do you even sleep anymore?"

"The last few days have been a mess," Khan explained. "I was actually on my way to bed when I thought about calling you."

"That bad, huh?" George guessed.

"Usual mess," Khan kept it short, "But I'm good. I might have learnt to look at the positive side."

"Did they replace you or something?" George questioned in a surprised tone.

"Fuck you," Khan laughed. "I'm just trying to move on for real this time."

George fell silent. He knew how meaningful that step was for Khan. The process would obviously involve sad times, but he remained happy for his friend.

"Are you forcing yourself?" George wondered.

"Nah," Khan exclaimed while showing an honest smile. "It almost feels natural."

"I'm glad to hear that," George sighed. "You are one stubborn guy. I was afraid it would have taken you years to get there."

"What can I say?" Khan shrugged his shoulders. "You were right. I had to leave."

"Part of me wished I wasn't right," George admitted. "But, hey, at least you don't have problems getting laid."

"It's all women and booze with you," Khan joked.

"You know me," George said with a smug face. "I'm also somehow succeeding at this political stuff. I must be amazing."

"Booze is giving you strength," Khan mocked.

"How do you expect me to survive my parents otherwise?" George scoffed. "They come up with new marriage proposals every month."

"You should accept one of them and settle," Khan suggested. "You are getting too old to fool around."

"You can't have opinions on this topic," George rebuked. "And fooling around is part of my charm."

"It must be hard to find someone who can keep you on a leash," Khan guessed.

"It's only vain women looking for the hero," George commented. "They don't even bother to ask the price I paid for my fame."

"You know how it is," Khan exclaimed. "They have no idea."

"They truly don't," George sighed before focusing on Khan's empty hand. "Don't they have booze there? I thought I could drink with you for once."

"I'm in the middle of a medical bay," Khan revealed. "You'll have to drink for me this time around."

"That's easy," George smirked before he and Khan exploded into a laugh.

"Why medical bay?" George asked after taking a sip from his drink.

"It's too long to explain," Khan stated. "You'll hear rumors soon enough. Just know that I'm fine."

"Oh, that I know very well," George chuckled. "Going to a lawless zone doesn't stop the flow of information, especially about you."

"The life of a celebrity is hard," Khan claimed.

"Not too hard, I suppose," George snickered. "I heard you got with an alien again."

"Wait, that's not true," Khan tried to correct since someone behind him had tightened her grip on his jumper.

"Come on, Khan," George called. "I read that the Nele are complicated, but you don't need to lie to me. Nice catch, my man."

"What catch!" Monica shouted while peeking from behind Khan to appear in the call.

Monica was an expert in social interactions, but some anxiety had gotten to her after learning how important George was to Khan. She had planned to remain hidden behind him until the time for a proper introduction arrived, but the recent exchanges depleted her patience.

"Hello?" George voiced, looking at Khan in the hope of finding explanations. However, Khan only shook his head.

"That slut has nothing to do with Khan!" Monica shouted again while crawling past Khan to appear at the center of George's screen. "I am his girlfriend!"

"She is one of the reasons I called you," Khan added in a far quieter tone. "I wanted you to meet her."

"She is a feisty one," George commented while bringing his glass to his mouth.

"Who is feisty?!" Monica shouted for the third time and crawled even further, but Khan wrapped an arm around her waist to pull her onto his chest.

"You are still injured," Khan said to Monica's ear. "I don't want to see you bedridden again."

Monica turned her face toward Khan before voicing a complaint in a cute tone. "But he thinks that you are with Jenna."

"The entire Global Army probably thinks that," Khan pointed out before wearing a smirk when he saw anger rising inside Monica.

"You never have enough of teasing me," Monica whined.

Khan chuckled and pulled Monica closer. She ended up between his legs, with two arms wrapped around her torso and his head on her left shoulder. She wanted to remain angry, but the affectionate gesture made her too shy for that.

"Man, you have a gift," George exclaimed.

"You shut up!" Monica snapped, but a faint lament escaped her mouth when Khan tightened the hug.

"Tell him that I'm your woman," Monica almost begged when her focus returned to Khan.

"First, you need to correct what you said about Jenna," Khan scolded.

"She is a slut," Monica snorted. "Any woman who likes you is a slut."

"That's a long list," George coughed.

"Shut up!" Monica snapped at George again.

"Monica," Khan called while bending backward a bit to make Monica lay on his chest. She tried her best to avoid Khan's gaze, but her position put her before his scolding eyes.

"But she got naked on your second meeting," Monica complained.

George coughed again, but the glare Monica shot at him prevented the arrival of any comment. Meanwhile, Khan's expression remained firm, eventually forcing Monica to give in.

"Okay, she is nice," Monica cursed before glancing at George, "But she is just a friend. I'm his woman."

George shot a questioning look at Khan, and he wore a complicated expression. Monica didn't miss that silent interaction, and her glare immediately fell on Khan.

"Khan?" Monica questioned.

Khan exploded into a laugh before leaving a kiss on Monica's cheek. The gesture made her blush since George was there, and she hid her face instead of continuing to complain.

George couldn't help but smile when he saw that interaction. Deep feelings invaded his face as he lost himself in the scene. Khan's laugh and his complicity with Monica were heartwarming. His friend seemed happy, and he could only rejoice to learn that.

"She is my girlfriend," Khan announced while Monica kept her face hidden on his chest. "George, this is Monica Solodrey."

Hearing Khan forced Monica to leave his chest to show herself to the holograms. She was still a bit flushed but did her best to stick to that introduction. As for George, he remained speechless, and his face perfectly described his state.

"M-," George stuttered. "Monica Solodrey from the Solodrey family?"

"Yes," Khan confirmed while placing his head on Monica's shoulder to make their cheeks touch.

"She is my feisty girlfriend."

Monica pouted, but a faint smile eventually appeared on her face. She even relaxed a bit since Khan was so close, but looking at George revealed that the topic was far from over.

"Nice to meet you, Miss Solodrey!" George exclaimed in his politest tone. "I'm-."

"I know who you are," Monica interrupted. "I've heard about you, George Ildoo. You don't have the best fame, but you might be worse than that."

"Wait, Miss So-" George tried to speak.

"Some of my girlfriends have very strong opinions about you," Monica interrupted again. "You should know that women talk."

"I'm innocent!" George exclaimed, and Khan couldn't help but laugh at his panicked reaction.

Monica had also worn a confident smile, so George felt cornered. His best friend and Monica had joined forces, and he couldn't say anything to escape that situation.

"Khan, help me out," George eventually pleaded.

"Alright, alright," Khan chuckled. "Monica is just playing around, aren't you?"

"Maybe," Monica snickered, but Khan's gentle tug made her roll her eyes and stop the joke. "I won't do anything. I even hate my girlfriends, so you can speak openly."

George heaved a sigh of relief, and his reaction told Khan which family was stronger. That result wasn't surprising, but it hinted at some of Khan's future problems. Monica was truly important, so he would have to struggle to be with her in the open.

"That was surprising," George exclaimed once he managed to get rid of his tension. "I knew the Solodrey family had a beautiful descendant, but I didn't expect her to be so beautiful."

"It's too late for flattery, Mister Ildoo," Monica sneered.

"I wasn't trying to," George revealed. "Khan always gets the best ones, so everything makes sense now."

Monica didn't know how to take that compliment, but she decided to accept it since it involved Khan. She liked thinking that her beauty had played a part in Khan's interest in her. He had even said the same multiple times.

"Still, did you just get together?" George wondered. "I can't imagine the network remaining silent about your relationship."

"Well," Monica voiced.

"No one knows," Khan explained. "No one can know."

"It's too complicated with my parents," Monica added.

"Oh," George replied. "You sure have a thing for secret relationships."

"I'm getting too good at them," Khan sighed.

"I can see that," George joked. "Getting privacy doesn't seem to be a problem."

"What are you implying?!" Monica shouted.

"Don't listen to this drunkard," Khan intervened to de-escalate the situation.

"As if you didn't drink," George scoffed.

"I wish I could get something here," Khan sighed. "I'll probably have to wait until our date for a drink."

"Don't talk about our date so openly," Monica whispered.

"I can talk about anything with George," Khan responded while nearing Monica's ear, "But you remain too cute when you are shy."

"Scoundrel," Monica scolded.

"Someone else is calling you that," George exclaimed. "The world is learning about your true face."

"Oh, shut up," Khan laughed. "Anyway, I wanted you to know we were a thing."

"He is serious with you then," George teased while glancing at Monica.

"He is lying," Monica snorted. "Two others know about us, and they are both women who like him a lot."

"Hey, I would have told George anyway," Khan contradicted.

"I'm his wise advisor," George uttered.

"He is an idiot like me," Khan corrected, "And my best friend."

"We are the best idiots in the universe," George played along.

Monica had never seen Khan so relaxed. She felt a bit jealous, but she ended up laughing anyway. She didn't expect Khan to have a similar friendship, but the thought slowly reassured her, especially since George was a man.

"So," George announced, "What plans do you have now? Will you stay on Milia 222?"

"Monica got me a job in the Harbor," Khan revealed. "Do you know it?"

"The Harbor?!" George almost shouted. "Damn, she must have fallen hard for you."

"What?!" Monica exclaimed. "I never said that!"

"I seem to understand that it's a good place," Khan commented.

"It's a great place!" George confirmed. "It might be exactly what you need for your future."

"I can't wait then," Khan commented while tilting his head to immerse it in Monica's hair. "I hope finding privacy there won't be too hard."

"Stop teasing me," Monica complained.

"Oh, you are going together," George understood. "Well, you might want to be careful. There will be many important figures there."

"I'm always careful," Khan claimed.

"You do get reckless when it comes to women," George pointed out. "Did you forget when you threw yourself off a cliff?"

"You did what?" Monica questioned.

"I'd do it for you too," Khan reassured.

"That's not the point!" Monica declared.

"I'd avoid cliffs if I were you," George stated.

"Is it always like this with you two?" Monica asked while her eyes darted between Khan and the holograms.

"We usually are drunker," Khan revealed.

"Far drunker," George coughed.

"I have always handled booze better than you," Khan added.

"You have always had other priorities," George rebuked.

"What priorities?" Monica questioned.

"Nothing," Khan and George said at the same time. They tried to divert their gazes afterward, but they eventually exploded into a laugh that made Monica heave a helpless sigh.

"Anyway, I should go," Khan stated. "She is injured, and I haven't slept in four days."

"Of course, man," George responded. "Make sure to have a drink with you next time, and try not to let an entire year pass."

"I'll do my best," Khan promised. "Still, you do look good. I'm happy for you."

"Things couldn't be better for me," George revealed. "So, go to sleep and take care of your lady. When you need me, you know how to find me."

"Thanks, man," Khan exclaimed.

"Anytime," George voiced. "Be good, but not too good."

"Same to you," Khan laughed.

"Miss Solodrey, it was a pleasure," George continued.

"Monica is fine," Monica replied. "Nice to meet you, George. Maybe one day we'll have a drink together."

"I like her," George exclaimed.

"Yeah, she is great," Khan said while hugging Monica tightly to prevent her incoming complaint.

"Well, I'll see you around," George said before the holograms went dark. The phone even retracted them as the call ended.

"Now it's not only Jenna and Martha anymore," Khan announced as he broke the hug and let Monica turn toward him.

Monica opened her mouth to say something, but the words remained stuck in her throat in front of Khan's smiling face. She didn't feel like speaking. She opted to bend forward and let her kiss express how she felt.

Khan understood that the call had meant a lot to Monica. She didn't only like that someone outside of Jenna and Martha knew about them. She was also ecstatic to have become part of a deeper aspect of Khan's life.

The kiss continued until the couple lay on the bed, with Monica on top of Khan. Neither of them wanted to stop there, but she was injured, he was exhausted, and the tent didn't offer much privacy. All the noises from the outside world still reached them.

"Will you sleep here?" Monica asked without hiding her desire to remain with Khan.

"You set me up with that joke about the nap," Khan chuckled and caressed Monica's cheek. "Still, it's safer if I sleep on the floor."

"Not a chance," Monica promptly refused. "I'm far better, so it's my time to take care of you."

"Monica," Khan used his concerned tone, but Monica didn't want to hear any of it.

"You wouldn't refuse Jenna," Monica stated before diverting her gaze and lowering her voice. "I will get naked if I must."

Khan's eyes lit up, but that only made a "Scoundrel!" escape Monica's mouth. The shout led to a laugh followed by a sigh. The old Khan would have found a way to refuse, but he wasn't that person anymore. He knew he couldn't build a proper relationship without allowing people into the dangerous aspects of his life.

"If something happens while I'm asleep," Khan warned, "I want you to run away. Try to save me only after you are safe."

"Khan," Monica giggled, but her laugh didn't last long.

"I'm serious," Khan stated. "I won't sleep here otherwise."

Monica understood that something was going on, so she nodded. Khan relaxed at that point, and affection seeped out of his face when he saw Monica adjusting his arms to nestle on his chest. She had already decided how she wanted to sleep, and Khan didn't even think about rejecting that position.

George remained silent for a while after the call ended. He didn't move from the armchair and let his thoughts flow while he finished his drink.

As a member of a wealthy family, George knew things ordinary students wouldn't learn in their first years in the training camps. Some locations were too famous to remain unknown, and the Harbor was one of them.

That very knowledge made George aware of the risks Khan might face. The Harbor wasn't dangerous, but the people inside it might create problems for him.

Khan would typically be able to handle those issues on his own, but he had a secret relationship to keep alive now. His girlfriend wasn't even someone who could avoid the social environment. Monica was bound to be extremely popular, and Khan would probably struggle in that situation.

'He needs an ally,' George eventually realized and picked up his phone. His first instinct was to call Khan, but he quickly put the idea aside since he knew he would refuse.

'I guess I'll make him a surprise,' George smirked. 'It sure has been too long.'

Chapter 427 Birthday

The first night of sleep after the transformation put Khan into a strange version of the nightmare. His consciousness was awake the whole time, and he could think, but he also felt the same deep emotions experienced when he absorbed the Nak's hand.

Those differences didn't worry Khan. The nightmare didn't actually change. It had only gained a new perspective that matched his current state.

The only meaningful new details Khan could find came from the outside world. His senses had improved even further, and his sensitivity had fused with them, so he could keep better track of his surroundings while asleep.

Those sensations and inputs were faint and muffled, but they gave Khan a vague idea of what was happening. Of course, he couldn't understand much about the areas outside the tent, but he could confirm that the warm figure sleeping with him was still on his chest.

A cracked ceiling welcomed Khan when he opened his eyes, but he quickly glanced at his chest to inspect the mess of curly hair. Monica had slept through his tremors, sweat, and general movements caused by the nightmares, and some snores even escaped her mouth from time to time.

'Such heavy sleep,' Khan smirked. 'Maybe it's for the best.'

Monica voiced a short whimper when Khan caressed her hair, but his careful touch allowed her to remain asleep. She actually grew more relaxed under his cuddles, and he couldn't help but enjoy her reaction.

'Years, huh,' Khan thought while picking up his phone to check the time. His sleep had been far shorter than expected. He had barely been out for six hours but felt full of energy.

The check-up technique confirmed that everything was okay. Khan was completely rested. He had recovered from four days of work in a matter of hours, and his new state was obviously to blame for that.

That realization was good news, and Khan had to push aside the bitterness caused by its source to appreciate it. His new resilience came from a Nak, but he could use that strength to improve faster than ordinary humans, which was ideal considering his goals.

'Raymond fucking Cobsend,' Khan instinctively repeated in his mind. 'He must have many answers, but reaching him is a problem. I can't even force him to tell the truth.'

Khan's problems went beyond that. Even in the remote chance he could reach Raymond and receive answers, he wouldn't be able to confirm their legitimacy. Raymond could lie to his face, and he wouldn't notice it.

That created additional dangers. Khan would risk falling into another ploy if he exposed himself, and Milia 222's crisis had already proven that he couldn't beat Raymond in that field. Going to him would be akin to willingly turning himself into a pawn.

Nevertheless, Khan couldn't give up on his goal. Raymond couldn't offer a viable path, but he had confirmed something that Khan had suspected since his time in Ylaco's training camp.

The higher-ups of the Global Army were bound to know something about the Nak. Maybe many of them were in the dark, but someone had to be part of that conspiracy. Raymond couldn't be the only one.

Those thoughts led Khan to the network. The connection was unstable, but his phone still loaded news if he waited long enough, and various descriptions of the Harbor eventually appeared on the screen.

'This might be a turning point,' Khan thought as information landed in his eyes.

The Harbor was as important as everyone made it out to be. It was an embassy that taught interplanetary politics to wealthy and promising students, but it was also the home to some ambassadors. Moreover, important figures flew by from time to time.

Khan couldn't only push his career further in the Harbor. He could also get the chance to establish meaningful connections. Since most people there came from wealthy families, he might meet someone who knew the truth about the Nak.

'Teachers, ambassadors, and superiors in general,' Khan planned. 'I need to get close to them to learn their secrets. If that fails, I can only hope that promotions will arrive quickly.'

Truth be told, Khan was conflicted about his new destination. On one side, he liked the idea of learning more about interplanetary politics. He had always been curious about the universe, and the embassy was bound to give him a general view of many species.

However, the Harbor featured a major problem that Khan couldn't ignore. He didn't get any worse at lies and pretenses, but he had grown tired of them. He had opted for a new stance even before the transformation, so things didn't look too good.

The idea of spending months and possibly longer wearing a fañshade was troubling, especially since Monica was involved. Khan would have to hold back constantly, and the strict regulations found on the network didn't reassure him.

'I'm getting kicked out for sure,' Khan cursed. 'Unless I can make myself indispensable.'

According to the network, most of the Harbor was closed to the public, which made sense. Khan couldn't even imagine the number of secrets it held. His experience on Milia 222 also made him predict the presence of factions and illegal activities.

That secrecy prevented Khan from coming up with plans, but his rank gave him access to a list of courses and jobs he could join. The Harbor didn't only have academics. It also featured various positions suitable for warriors, which better matched Khan's experience and stance.

Wealth went a long way, but Khan had learnt that military merits could compensate for lack of money or background. His fame could grant him some leeway that he planned to expand after reaching the Harbor. His new senses could help him fortify his position. He only needed to find something that his superiors valued a lot.

Sadly enough, the network didn't describe the Harbor's priorities, and Khan couldn't find them on the general list acquired through his rank. He would have to study the situation after his arrival, but he wasn't worried. After all, he had spent the last months diving into secrets. Milia 222 had been the perfect training camp for his new mission.

'I only need to depart then,' Khan exclaimed in his mind once he stored his phone.

Of course, Khan couldn't simply leave. Luke would surely need to talk to him, and a proper conversation with his other companions sounded necessary. His goal required that.

Khan also wanted to have another heartfelt talk with Martha since their separation was inevitable. The same went for Jenna and the Nele in general, and Khan wouldn't refuse another meeting with the other species.

Moreover, the fourth asteroid was still in a poor state, and Khan wanted to keep helping until things started to improve. If it were for him, he would probably spend a few more months on Milia 222, but something told him that his departure would arrive sooner.

'I guess I can leave that part to Monica,' Khan concluded. 'I should focus on everything else in the meantime.'

A tremor in the synthetic mana eventually reached Khan's senses and forced him to snap out of his thoughts. He turned in time to see Monica opening her eyes and wearing a timid smile. Warmth spread everywhere inside the tent, and it didn't take long before the two fell into an intimate moment.

Milia 222 rarely faced crises, but that didn't make it unprepared. The soldiers in the central pillar couldn't often show their teamwork, but the disaster caused by the Nak's hand gave them a chance that they didn't waste.

Most illegal factions wanted to prioritize the dock to restore the smuggling channels, but the asteroid's layout went against them. Milia 222's soldiers had to start from the intermediate floor due to the danger posed by the debris, and that was only the first step in the clearing operation.

Luckily for the illegal factions, Milia 222's soldiers worked quickly and relentlessly. They also employed various ships that accelerated the clearing operation and built multiple structures to reinforce the intermediate floor.

The city followed. Many buildings had crumbled, destroying the goods in their insides. However, their materials could save a lot of time and money, so the soldiers began to gather everything they could before some criminals stole too many of them.

The illegal factions helped in salvaging those materials. Quickening the restoration of the fourth asteroid would accelerate the reopening of the dock, so they put their differences aside for Milia 222's greater good.

The looting mostly ended after the major criminals added their efforts to the cause, and the restoration sped up again. Khan saw first-hand how areas previously occupied by piles of debris transformed into pillars or actual buildings in a matter of days.

Reconstructing the hole in such a short time was impossible, so the fourth asteroid split into two. Part of its population went on the first floor or used the short-distance teleports once they became fully operational. Instead, the others remained on the intermediate floor to continue to work on the damage.

Raymond didn't show his face again, and Luke went up and down the asteroid to handle various tasks. Soon, more news appeared on the network, including Khan's involvement in defeating the Nak's hand.

Khan kept doing what he did best. His senses were a powerful weapon that many factions learnt to use as the days passed. He helped a lot while debris still occupied the intermediate floor, but his presence became unnecessary as the clearing operations moved to other areas.

'He is still here,' Khan cursed in his mind when he saw Monica discussing something with Francis in the distance.

Almost three weeks had passed since the disaster. By then, the clearing operation had moved deeper into the asteroid, and only the people involved with different factions had remained behind. Khan could justify his presence through the Nele, but Monica and Francis were an exception.

Monica's injury was no more. She could have moved to the first floor to reach the rest of the group long ago, but she had chosen to remain behind to stay with Khan. Her social skills had allowed her to devise a reasonable excuse, and Luke and the others didn't ask too many questions since they sort of knew about Khan.

However, Monica's decision pushed Francis to remain behind too. The man didn't lack money, so he had easily obtained a simple habitation to watch over Monica and question her about the Harbor.

Needless to say, Francis' presence had prevented Khan and Monica from seeing each other. They had shared random moments in those weeks, but nothing more than that, and their patience was running dry.

Khan saw Monica picking up her phone, so he imitated her and waited patiently. A message promptly arrived, and a smile appeared on his face when he read its contents.

'He is back at asking me to talk with his father!' Monica said through the message.

'That guy,' Khan cursed again.

Apparently, Francis' parents knew about his obsession with Monica, which played in Khan's favor since they were ignoring his requests to gain access to the Harbor. Still, that wasn't enough to make Francis give up, which left the couple in that stalemate.

'Tell him that we have a date on my bed,' Khan texted before enjoying seeing Monica remaining speechless at his message.

Similar situations had happened multiple times during the previous weeks, so Khan knew that his joke wouldn't go anywhere. He could only tease Monica from afar while waiting for the inevitable departure.

Monica and Francis eventually stopped fighting and retreated to their respective habitations. Monica had also purchased something for herself, and she wasn't the only one. Khan was leaning on the wall of the small flat Luke had gotten for him. He would usually go inside at that point, but the arrival of a familiar presence made him wait outside.

"Still busy brooding?" Luke asked when he crossed the habitation's corner and noticed Khan.

"I don't brood," Khan responded. "I'm simply annoyed."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Luke questioned as he leaned in a spot to Khan's right. "Wealthy women are my field."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Khan lied before changing the topic. "It's getting boring here."

The second line wasn't exactly a lie. Francis' presence had given Khan a lot of free time, which he had occupied by meeting members of other species. However, he only knew the Nele well, and everyone remained busy, so his attempts to build more connections had been short-lived.

"You won't have to worry about that once you reach the Harbor," Luke exclaimed. "I'd be surprised if you could still go on with your personal business there, but you always find a way. I'm sure it won't be any different this time too."

"What are you doing here?" Khan asked, ignoring the obvious hint that Luke had thrown. "I thought you had business to attend to on the second asteroid."

"I attended it," Luke revealed. "I just came back to deliver the news personally."

"News?" Khan repeated while eyeing Luke.

"I've talked with my father," Luke explained. "The mission is over. It's time to go back."

"When?" Khan asked.

"Tomorrow," Luke stated. "The ship is ready and waiting for us on the first asteroid."

"Oh," Khan voiced as his gaze returned to the environment. "It's over then."

"I've already prepared payments and bonuses," Luke declared. "They will go out once we reach Neo Station. If I understand correctly, we'll split ways there."

"Monica knows the details," Khan replied. "I didn't care too much about them."

"Monica?" Luke teased.

"Miss Solodrey," Khan corrected himself. "She is handling the trip to the Harbor. Well, her family is."

"I was joking," Luke chuckled.

Khan didn't need to inspect the synthetic mana to know that Luke's mood was excellent. He had completed the mission and improved his image in his father's mind. Nothing else mattered to him.

"Do you have a mission for Martha yet?" Khan wondered.

"She'll work alongside Master Ivor until I find something more specific," Luke explained. "I still don't know my next move. I'm thinking Earth, but my family might have something else for me."

"Hopefully, it will be safer than this," Khan sighed.

"That's not hard to find," Luke laughed.

Khan nodded, but his face grew cold when he looked at Luke again. The latter sensed that something was off, and he immediately understood the reason for that tension.

"I won't put her in danger," Luke promised, "Not this kind of danger, at least."

"Martha has her path to tread," Khan uttered, "But this doesn't mean that I'd forgive you if something happens to her."

"Do you want me to give her fake jobs?" Luke asked. "We can discuss that."

"I expect you to be loyal," Khan responded. "Treat her with the same respect you use with me."

"I planned to do that in the first place," Luke revealed. "I know my record with her isn't clean, but she remains a good soldier and an old friend. Besides, her debt still exists, and I need her alive and well to get my money back."

'And you want her around to get to me in the future,' Khan thought while moving his gaze back to the environment. Luke wasn't exactly trustworthy, but he remained Martha's best option for now.

"I wish we could have had time for a celebratory dinner or something," Luke announced since Khan remained silent. "Your birthday is also close, isn't it? I seem to remember it was in this period."

"It's in a few days," Khan revealed.

"I can plan something in the ship," Luke suggested. "A small party is easy to organize."

"Don't bother," Khan refused. "I have something in mind already, but I need your gift in advance."

"Sure, what is it?" Luke asked. "Anything you want."

"Get Francis off this floor," Khan requested.

"Ah!" Luke exclaimed as a smile made its way onto his face. "It's better if I don't ask, am I right?"

"You know it," Khan replied.

"Give me a few minutes," Luke stated while leaving the wall. "I promise you won't see his face until tomorrow."

Khan watched Luke heading for Francis' habitation before focusing on his mana. A tinge of energy gathered in his palm, and he blew on it while thinking about a simple request. He had yet to master the Nele's communication method, but Jenna would understand him anyway.

A few hours after the conversation with Luke, Khan found himself in front of a tense scene. He was sitting inside his habitation, and two women stood before him. Jenna wore her teasing smile while Monica appeared beyond pissed, but they remained silent to wait for Khan's explanation.

"We are leaving tomorrow," Khan announced after sorting out his thoughts.

"It arrived," Jenna sighed before sitting on the floor and approaching Khan.

"Where do you think you are going?" Monica snapped, also jumping on the floor to grab Jenna's stretched arm.

Jenna was wearing her spray since the intermediate floor was still a neutral area, and she didn't mind Monica's touch. Yet, the situation involved Khan's departure, so she wouldn't limit herself to jokes.

"I let you touch me because I respect your feelings," Jenna stated, "But Khan is leaving, and we have yet to say goodbye."

"Go ahead," Monica snorted while letting Jenna go. "Hug him and leave."

"We are far past hugs," Jenna sneered. "Such an important event deserves something special, and I know exactly what."

"Don't even think about it," Monica warned.

"Why not?" Jenna wondered. "You aren't giving it to him anyway. I can fill in until you are ready."

"How would?!" Monica shouted before turning toward Khan. "Did you give her strange ideas?"

"Trust me," Khan sighed. "She has always been like this."

"You are so quick on asking for his help," Jenna teased as she approached Monica and slowly placed a hand at the center of her chest. "Let me deal with these insecurities."

"Stop!" Monica retreated. "And I don't have insecurities. I made up my mind already."

"Oh?" Jenna voiced while glancing at Khan. "Did I interrupt something?"

Khan didn't bother to reply since he knew Monica's shout was about to arrive, and she didn't disappoint. "That's none of your business!"

"Khan's well-being is my business," Jenna declared. "Though, if you are ready, I can suggest something together. He likes that fantasy anyway."

"Toge-!" Monica stuttered. "I won't share my man with a witch!"

"What's a witch?" Jenna asked Khan.

"It's her replacement for slut," Khan explained.

"So, you can convince her," Jenna pointed out. "Did you call us here for that?"

"Convince her to do what?" Monica questioned. "Khan?"

"Calm down, you two," Khan requested. "I didn't decide anything. I can't. It won't be fair that way."

Jenna and Monica fell silent and waited for Khan's continuation. Still, they didn't forget to shoot another glare at each other in the meantime.

"Monica, you know how important Jenna is to me," Khan began. "I can't leave like this. Even if it's just talking, I want our goodbyes to be meaningful."

Jenna's face lit up, and she began to turn to show her smug smile, but Khan interrupted her.

"Jenna, you know I'm with Monica," Khan continued. "Our friendship has hurt her more than she lets out. I can't ask for another day from her. Even a minute would be too much."

Jenna and Monica didn't know what to say. Khan's words made perfect sense, but they didn't lead anywhere. Waiting for him to continue also turned out to be pointless since he fell silent.

"So?" Monica and Jenna ended up asking at the same time.

"So, talk it out!" Khan cursed. "Reach a compromise or something. If the decision comes from me, I can't avoid hurting one of you, so find something that you can both accept."

The statement surprised both women, but they soon revealed frowns. They stood on opposite sides and reaching a compromise sounded impossible. Only Khan could put an end to their fight.

"Do you expect to put this on me?" Monica asked without hiding her anger. "Does being your girlfriend mean so little?"

"Monica, you liked my overprotective side," Khan stated. "What would you think of me if I had no problem hurting Jenna?"

Monica opened her mouth to respond, but no words came out. The situation annoyed her, but Khan was right. As much as she wanted Khan to pick her, it would go against his character to directly ignore Jenna's feelings, especially after everything they went through.

"You are leaving tomorrow," Jenna exclaimed. "I won't be able to see you for a long time. How can you not give me one last night?"

Khan noticed how Jenna's affection was growing unstable. She would have never spoken like that otherwise. Yet, he had a suitable answer for her too.

"Jenna, choosing you might compromise my relationship with Monica," Khan explained. "Do you really want to become a threat to my potential happiness?"

The unstable affection immediately went quiet. Jenna's feelings for Khan always put his happiness in first place, even if that meant sacrificing herself. Guilt-tripping him into having another night together went against that.

Silence fell inside the habitation again. Monica had her gaze on the floor since the last line had made her blush, while Jenna was deep into her thoughts in the hope of finding a loophole. Yet, it soon became clear that Khan was right. Only they could find a path that wouldn't hurt anyone.

"Monica," Jenna eventually called while turning toward Monica.

"Witch," Monica exclaimed before correcting herself when she looked at Jenna. "[Jenna]."

"We know how unfair your man is," Jenna announced.

"Indeed," Monica found it easy to agree since Jenna labeled Khan as her man, "But we knew what we were getting into."

"So, how does this work?" Jenna asked.

"Do you have ideas that don't involve sex?" Monica questioned.

"Very few," Jenna teased.

"How surprising," Monica mocked.

"I'm surprised you are so against them," Jenna responded.

"I'm not a sl-, " Monica stated before rephrasing her line. "I'm not a witch."

"You wish you were as bold as me," Jenna sneered.

"You wish Khan chose you," Monica rebuked.

"Don't forget who pushed him into your arms," Jenna scolded.

"He would have come to me on his own," Monica claimed.

"Not if I kept him between my legs," Jenna dared. "I still have time for that."

Monica mustered the entirety of her resolve to push away her shyness and deliver her next line. "I can do that too."

"Khan prefers my legs," Jenna declared.

"But he holds mine," Monica continued.

The bickering was tense. It resembled a bomb ready to explode, and Khan only wanted to remain outside of it. He didn't dare to move out of fear of bringing the focus on him. However, the buzzing of his phone betrayed him.

Two intense gazes snapped at Khan and followed his movements while he reached for his phone. People would kill to have those two pairs of beautiful eyes for themselves, but Khan felt that his life was in danger during the process.

"Don't worry," Khan reassured after checking the message. "It's just Luke with questions for my birthday."

"Birthday?" Monica and Jenna repeated at the same time.

"Right, you don't know," Khan realized. "It's in a few days, so Luke is pestering me about a party on the ship."

Jenna and Monica opened their mouths in surprise before glancing at each other. A meaningful stare unfolded. The two women seemed able to speak without uttering any word, and they even reached a silent understanding in those seconds.

"You got lucky," Monica stated.

"Naked?" Jenna asked.

"No," Monica promptly rejected.

"How pure," Jenna mocked.

"Underwear," Monica snorted.

"Bra?" Jenna wondered.

"On," Monica replied.

"He has done more than seeing them," Jenna pointed out.

"On," Monica remained firm.

"I guess I'll have to hug him tightly," Jenna sighed.

"I decide where your hands go," Monica uttered.

"We'll see about that," Jenna challenged.

Khan felt in danger again. His eyes darted left and right as the bickering went on, but he soon found those intense gazes on him again. Jenna and Monica even began to approach him, and the tension intensified during their crawling.

"What is happening?" Khan asked.

"Take off your clothes," Jenna giggled.

"I'll let this go only this once," Monica warned.

Khan didn't dare to oppose the two women, and it didn't take long before he ended up on his bed. His arms had stopped belonging to him by then since Jenna had taken his left and Monica had claimed his right.

Chapter 428 Surveys

"Did something happen?" Martha couldn't help but ask.

"Why would you say that?" Khan wondered.

"You are making a strange face," Martha pointed out.

"It's just my face," Khan stated.

"I can see something other than idiocy today," Martha explained.

"I'm conflicted," Khan revealed while glancing at the pale-blue dome, "Maybe confused is a better word."

"Did you try sleeping?" Martha suggested. "I heard it's good for your body."

"My body is fine," Khan promised. "I can't say the same for my mind."

"I can see that," Martha smiled while nodding in Monica's direction. "It seems you aren't the only one."

"So it seems," Khan casually voiced while keeping his eyes on the dome.

Martha tilted her head in confusion. Khan always had a joke ready, but he appeared lost in his thoughts.

"Hey," Martha called while softly bumping into Khan. "I thought we agreed on remaining friends."

Khan snapped out of his stare and shook his head before focusing on the area. He was on one of the streets on the first floor, and most of his companions were ahead. Only Martha had remained at his side. The place was crowded, but the two had some privacy.

"Right," Khan exclaimed. "How should I put it? Maybe it's better if I don't say anything at all."

"Good or bad?" Martha asked.

"I swear," Khan sighed. "I have no idea."

Khan instinctively looked at the elegant figure ahead. Monica was discussing something with Luke and Bruce, but she fell silent when she noticed his gaze. She instinctively glared at him, but a warm smile made its way onto her face and forced her to hide it with a fake laugh.

"Are you up to no good again?" Martha asked after inspecting that interaction.

"Sometimes the universe works in mysterious ways," Khan announced.

"I'll take that as a yes," Martha declared.

"The path of a man is filled with dangers," Khan cursed.

"That's the idiot I remember," Martha giggled.

"The idiot needs a vacation," Khan claimed as he searched for Monica again.

The previous night had been exhausting. Jenna and Monica didn't let go of Khan for a second, and they had spent hours bickering or glaring at each other.

On top of that, Jenna had kept challenging Monica, leaving Khan with the tiring task of managing the situation while holding back. George would kill him if he dared to complain, and every inch of his body went against that thought, but he had to admit that surviving the night had been far from easy.

Monica seemed able to feel Khan's gaze. She found the chance to turn to look in his direction, and another glare shot out of her. Still, she wore her warm smile again, perfectly expressing her strange mood.

'She is so going to make me pay for that,' Khan mocked himself. 'At least I have teasing material for ages.'

Khan and Monica still needed to talk properly. Jenna had almost run away after the three woke up, and Khan and Monica had left right afterward since a ship had come to pick them up.

The time to leave Milia 222 had come, so Luke had gathered everyone on the first floor before heading toward the short-distance teleports. The group wasn't in a hurry, but the presence of the others had still prevented any meaningful talk. Remaining behind with Martha was the best Khan could do.

"She really likes you," Martha pointed out when watching that interaction.

"I really like her too," Khan admitted before diverting his gaze once a conversation forced Monica to turn.

"I'm happy for you," Martha exclaimed, "Both of you."

Khan peeked at Martha's smiling face before voicing a question. "Are you sure?"

"Of course," Martha snorted. "Who do you think I am?"

"Women tend to go crazy around me," Khan joked.

"Monica let you off the hook too easily," Martha replied. "Maybe I should talk to her while we fly back to Neo Station."

"You can't be more dangerous than Jenna," Khan played along.

"I don't know," Martha sneered. "Can I?"

"You wouldn't," Khan challenged.

"Jenna taught me the importance of emotions," Martha revealed. "Maybe I should vent just like she did."

"Monica won't get jealous over a few hugs," Khan stated. "Well, not too much."

"I can always lie," Martha snickered. "Who do you think Monica will believe?"

Khan fell silent for a few seconds before admitting defeat. "Alright, name your price."

Martha laughed when she heard Khan's serious tone, and he soon imitated her. Things weren't completely fine between them, but they had long since reached an understanding, and joking so casually felt nice.

"To think that most people don't know how dumb you can be," Martha sighed.

"I try to warn everyone," Khan announced, "But no one believes me."

Martha and Khan fell into a laugh again that the former tried to suppress once it started attracting the crowd's attention. Instead, Khan didn't bother to hold back, and a satisfied smile broadened on his face when the end of the street appeared in his view.

Martha lost herself in that peaceful smile, but she quickly snapped back to reality. Some embarrassment tried to fill her mind since she knew that Khan could sense her emotions, but she already had another topic ready to distract her.

"What about you?" Martha asked while glancing at the messy azure hair. "How are you doing?"

"I'm used to disasters," Khan revealed. "I don't know how good this is, but it's the truth."

"You won't mope around then," Martha joked, even if she felt reassured. She didn't see the battle against the Nak's hand, but Khan's morale seemed strong, and that was enough for her.

Khan and Martha continued joking around until they arrived in front of the hangar. Luke and the others were waiting for them there, so the team regrouped to go through one last inspection.

"Are you sure you have everything?" Luke asked before eyeing Khan. "Didn't you have a backpack?"

"It's down there," Khan revealed while pointing at the destroyed city, "Together with most of the tools bought from the Fuveall."

The disaster had taken the bucket and most of Khan's belongings. Only the fake IDs and the cover for the purchases had survived since he had kept them in his pockets.

"Remember to list anything I need to pay back," Luke exclaimed. "I guess everyone else is fine. We can leave."

Luke turned to enter the hangar, and the others began to follow. Khan was also about to step forward, but the arrival of a familiar presence forced him to speak. "I'll reach you all in a bit."

Luke stopped halfway through the entrance to turn in Khan's direction and question him. "Is there a problem?"

The rest of the team also turned, but Khan didn't need to say anything to explain himself since a purple light soon became visible behind him. The crowd was making way for Maban, who wore a cold face as he advanced through the street.

"Let's reunite on the third asteroid," Luke quickly announced, and Khan nodded before turning to greet his friend. By the time Maban arrived, the entire team had entered the hangar, which gave Khan some necessary privacy.

"[Caja couldn't make it]," Maban announced once he reached Khan.

"[We already talked]," Khan reassured, "[And she has a species to handle]."

"[Things are indeed complicated]," Maban admitted, "[But our future is bright. Jenna made sure of that]."

"[Her prediction sure came in handy]," Khan commented before some sadness joined his tone. "[It's a pity we couldn't do more]."

"[Leave it]," Maban scoffed. "[I won't accept these comments after witnessing your efforts]."

"[When did you become so kind]?" Khan smirked.

Maban scoffed again, and a conflicted expression appeared on his face before he finally decided to wear a faint smile. Some pride even reeked out of him, but sadness quickly replaced it.

"[Jenna couldn't]-," Maban began to say.

"[Don't worry]," Khan interrupted while performing a nod. "[I know why she didn't come. This isn't my first time]."

Maban didn't know how to reply, especially since Khan's face said way too much. The Nele couldn't imagine that something similar had happened with Liiza, but it was clear that Khan was speaking the truth.

"[You]," Maban voiced before stopping to sort out his thoughts.

"[I know]," Khan stated before Maban could resume speaking. "[This never stops being hard]."

A helpless sigh left Khan's mouth as he lost himself in the scenes past Maban. The first floor was mostly intact, but the streets couldn't hide the damage below. The hole, the missing buildings, and the various ships busy salvaging materials depicted a grim scenery, but Khan still smiled when he inspected it.

The mission on Milia 222 had been short compared to Khan's most meaningful experiences. Yet, a lot had happened in those months, and the things he learnt were bound to stay with him.

The matter went beyond mere interaction with multiple alien species. Khan had learnt a new approach to mana, had matured mentally, and had met important people he hoped to find again in the future.

Moreover, Khan had made a promise. No one had dared to speak too much of it or even place responsibilities on him. However, it existed, especially inside his mind. Khan wanted to be a valuable ally for the Nele and eventually help them find a proper home.

When all of that crossed Khan's mind, he couldn't help but find beauty in that grim scene. Milia 222 and its citizens had given him so much that even the disaster caused by the Nak's hand couldn't taint his memories.

"[If mana wills it]," Maban eventually uttered, "[We'll meet again]."

"[Make sure to be safe until then]," Khan requested.

"[Don't forget what you learnt from us]," Maban warned.

"[How could I]?" Khan chuckled while reaching for one of the longer strands of his hair. "[I have a constant reminder of this place]."

"[It makes you look less human]," Maban commented.

"[Was that a compliment]?" Khan teased.

Maban snorted before stretching his hand and pointing his palm upward. He didn't need to add anything to make Khan join that traditional greeting. The two saluted each other and exchanged a quick look before separating. Maban headed for the central structure while Khan entered the hangar.

Scenes entered Khan's vision, but he barely recorded them as he joined the lines behind the short-distance teleports. The goodbyes were always overwhelming after deep experiences, and they had only intensified due to his transformation.

Memories flowed, and Khan couldn't push them away. His chest grew heavy, tears tried to fill his eyes, and unreasonable anger showed its presence. He didn't want that sharp separation. A childish desire to bring all the Nele with him expanded in his mind, but he kept it at bay.

Khan knew he would miss Jenna. He had gotten so used to having her at his side that the sole thought of leaving the asteroids made him feel empty and lost.

Milia 222's freedom was another feature that Khan would miss. He had basically acted freely on those asteroids. Yet, his new destination would require the very opposite behavior, and he wondered whether he was ready to give up on something that had taken him so long to enjoy.

The overall diversity in species also added fuel to those unreasonable feelings. Milia 222 had fulfilled Khan's curious nature, and he didn't want to leave it until he learnt all of its secrets. Still, higher goals required his presence, so he advanced, even if his eyes didn't look ahead.

Crossing the short-distance teleports only took a few minutes, but they felt like an eternity to Khan. Each step led him closer to his departure and intensified his unreasonable feelings, but he strode forward, and everything stabilized once Monica entered his senses' range.

The world suddenly returned. Khan found himself at the exit of the hangar on the third asteroid. He had just entered the street on the first floor when he noticed his companions waiting on the guardrails nearby.

Seeing Monica pushed unreasonable feelings on her. Khan wanted that intensity to happen because of her. Relationships typically required time to reach those levels, but that didn't apply to Khan's standards. After all, he didn't love like a human.

Monica instinctively smiled before widening her eyes in surprise and diverting her gaze. She couldn't let out anything in public, but she still glanced at Khan again to show a scolding expression.

'I'll probably explode once we are alone,' Khan thought as he approached his companions. 'I hope I won't be too much for her.'

"That was short!" Luke exclaimed once Khan reached the group.

"What did he want?" Bruce asked.

"Nothing much," Khan kept it vague. "He is just a softie."

The answer left Khan's companions confused and surprised. They knew Maban was a big deal among the Nele, so they couldn't believe Khan. Still, no one cared enough to address the matter. Only Monica was relieved when she confirmed that Khan was emotionally fine.

Random talks, questions, and jokes went by as the group made its way through the asteroids, but Khan ignored most of them. His eyes remained on the scenery to commit to memory anything they saw. However, as often happened in those moments, the trip ended up being too short.

Khan didn't even listen to Luke's speech when the luxurious ship's doors opened. He climbed inside and chose a relatively isolated room before closing himself inside. There would be time to socialize, but he was too unstable now, and he couldn't risk exposing himself.

The ship already had various clean sets of clothes, but Khan went for the military uniform prepared for him. He felt tight inside those garments, but that was fine. It was actually necessary to make his mind accept the imminent change in the environment.

After changing, Khan found himself with nothing to do. He still didn't want to train, so he sat on the floor and picked up his phone to browse specific sites. He had done something similar with the Niqols, so he knew exactly where to look.

'Let's start with the Nele,' Khan thought when a questionnaire opened on his screen.

Khan completed the questionnaire before moving to the next one. He had interacted with many alien species, some of which were pretty secretive. He could add points to his profile by adding information and showing his knowledge, so he did exactly that.

Of course, Khan held back some pieces of information. He didn't say anything about the Nele's arts or even mention the Fuveall's connection to a few illegal activities. However, he went all-out with the Orlats and Tors. Khan fell short only with the Bise since he didn't learn much about them.

Chapter 429 Present

Spaceships weren't exceptional when it came to privacy, but Luke had booked something that could solve the issue. Still, the amount of space and comfort offered by the vehicle couldn't prevent Khan from facing a few social events.

Luke held a meal to celebrate the mission's success, and another party followed due to Khan's birthday. The ship didn't lack food and drinks, and everyone wanted to relieve the stress accumulated in the previous months, so those events saw the team exaggerating a few times.

Luckily for Khan, the general respect that the group had for him had deepened. His methods during the mission had been unusual, but his achievements were undeniable, so no one dared to criticize him openly or even hint at insubordination.

Francis mostly remained silent, and the four first-level warriors limited themselves to asking random questions during the stories. Khan didn't have the best relationship with them, but his teacher instinct often kicked in to make him explain a few details. Those soldiers might find his advice useful one day, so he didn't mind sharing his experience.

As for Khan, he couldn't help but compare those joyful occasions to his time on Nitis. The parties on the ship had great booze, food, and seats, but they lacked something important. The absence of true friends who could talk about anything often made Khan distance himself and fall into his thoughts.

Of course, Khan had people close to him on the ship, but Monica wasn't an option. The two could only perform their polite flirting or share a couch when they had the chance.

Things with Luke and Bruce had also improved, but the former was often busy with his phone, and the latter already had his meaningful talk with Khan. They didn't have anything important to say now that the mission was over.

Martha was Khan's only valid option, but she was busy preparing for her next task. Khan helped her when possible, but being on her own was the whole point of her new path, so there was a limit to how much he could do.

Nine days weren't a long time, but they felt endless for Khan since he didn't have much to do. He kept himself busy with studies and other matters, but his boredom eventually forced him to resume training.

The transformation brought changes to Khan's overall strength, and his martial arts reflected those improvements. Everything also felt strangely natural, so Khan didn't have to get used to his new power. He was simply better from the get-go, and his growth didn't apply only to his moves.

Khan didn't know if the transformation was to blame, but he found the execution of the "simulated mental battle" far easier than before. He could almost come up with complex battles, and immersing himself inside them soon became addicting.

It wasn't long before Khan fell prey to a new packed training routine. His new resilience extended the time he could spend immersed in his exercises, and he didn't hesitate to push himself. He still held back on the meditative sessions, but everything else returned stronger than ever.

The nine days went by in a blink afterward. Khan almost missed the pilot announcing the beginning of the landing, and he had to skip the shower to gather near the exit with his group.

"Usual Khan," Luke commented at the sight of the sweaty and slightly smelly Khan. His line triggered a series of laughs, and Khan could only shrug his shoulders to join the joke.

The exit opened right afterward, and the group descended through it to reach the hangar. Khan and Monica exchanged a meaningful gaze when no one looked, but the different environment soon captured his attention.

Neo Station's hangar had a lot in common with Milia 222. The synthetic mana and the vehicles were nothing new for Khan, but he could smell the difference. The symphony was very human, which described the small number of aliens in the area.

"Alright!" Luke announced once everyone left the ship. "I guess this is where we split."

"You are going straight for the teleport, right?" Khan recalled.

"Yes," Luke exclaimed. "I don't plan on staying on Earth, but that's a mandatory stop."

"Good luck with everything then," Khan smiled. "Don't forget to keep me updated on future job opportunities."

"I have twelve ready if you like," Luke teased.

"Come on, Luke," Khan chuckled while stepping to his right to get closer to Monica. "Miss Solodrey has me booked for a while."

"It's time to admit defeat, Luke," Monica joked before placing a hand on Khan's elbow. "Didn't we agree on dropping these formalities?"

"I remember refusing to avoid problems in the Harbor," Khan pointed out.

"Are you implying that someone might get jealous of you?" Monica faked surprise before showing a smile. "Lieutenant Khan, you know you can praise me openly."

"Give it up, Khan," Bruce laughed. "You can't win this one."

"Ivor, help me out here," Khan requested.

"I'm afraid you are on your own, Lieutenant Khan," Master Ivor chuckled. "You should know that Miss Solodrey isn't the type to let the matter slide."

"I give up," Khan sighed while glancing at Monica. "Do you need help unloading, Monica?"

"I've already hired someone for that, Khan," Monica voiced an elegant laugh. "Now, shall we go? We have a few shops to visit."

"I guess this is goodbye," Luke declared while stretching his arm forward. "It was a pleasure, Khan, Monica. Thank you for everything, and good luck in the Harbor."

"Good luck," Bruce added while also stretching his arm forward.

Khan shook the men's hands before nodding at the rest of the group. Francis avoided his gaze while the four first-level warriors performed military salutes. As for Master Ivor, he smiled back at him.

"I'll see you around," Khan uttered when his eyes fell on Martha.

"Same here," Martha replied. "Don't do anything stupid out there."

"And you be safe," Khan added before glancing at Luke. "Take good care of her."

"Khan!" Martha complained due to how embarrassing that comment was, but her shout made the group laugh. Only Luke remained serious enough to nod back at Khan.

"Goodbye then," Khan exclaimed before stepping back to wait for Monica.

Monica performed an elegant bow before turning to lead the way. Khan didn't hesitate to follow her, and a sigh escaped his mouth once his sensitivity confirmed that his companions had stopped looking at them.

"We are alone," Khan whispered. "Well, sort of."

Monica was rather famous, and the hangar had multiple wealthy figures who recognized her. Her elegant clothes didn't help disguise her identity, so many groups looked in her direction in an attempt to understand what was happening.

"I think some of them are for you," Monica revealed since she also noticed those looks. "Your profile has become quite the topic in the last few days."

"I feared as much," Khan sighed. "Things will probably worsen in the Harbor, especially if I use your name in public."

"We have faced Milia 222's disaster together," Monica rebuked. "It would be strange to remain so formal."

"It will cause me a lot of problems," Khan uttered. "There must be more people like Francis there."

"Am I not worth the hassle?" Monica asked, even if she kept her gaze straight.

"I know how to answer," Khan voiced, "But not through words."

Monica fell silent and covered her mouth to hide her shy smile. Meanwhile, her emotions ran wild. She was finally alone with Khan, and some privacy was bound to arrive soon.

"Hey," Monica eventually called. "You have yet to tell me what you want for your birthday."

"I thought I already received my gift," Khan replied. "You and Jenna made me the luckiest nineteen-year-old in the universe."

"Don't talk about that," Monica snapped, raising her voice before lowering it. "Actually, forget it already."

"Impossible," Khan stated. "I can see the scene whenever I close my eyes."

"Should I dig them out for you?" Monica threatened as a blush made its way onto her face.

"I would still recall the sensations of that night," Khan joked. "So much softness."

Monica forced herself to cough to suppress the shout rising through her throat. She couldn't lose her composure in public, but remaining silent only intensified her embarrassment. Still, she ended up smiling when she saw Khan's dreamy face.

The two fell silent, and a middle-aged man with a star on each shoulder eventually approached them to lead the way. Monica had matters to attend to on Neo Station's upper floors, and she needed a guide to help her out.

Khan finally got a chance to inspect Neo Station's true face, but its casinos, shops, and other activities were nothing special compared to Milia 222. He had already seen similar scenes on a far bigger scale, and the mostly human population made everything even plainer.

Still, Monica didn't let that trip be too peaceful. It turned out that her tasks mostly involved the purchase of new clothes, and Khan had the complicated role of giving his opinion.

"The red one," Khan calmly voiced.

"Technically, it's called candy," Monica corrected.

"Pink," Khan stated.

"It's crepe," Monica corrected again.

"The plaid skirt," Khan chose.

"I think I'll buy both," Monica considered while shooting a meaningful glance at Khan. "I really like skirts."

Those and more interactions went by in the hours after the landing. Monica visited six different shops, and Khan had to pretend to remain indifferent while giving his opinions under the middle-aged man's cold stare.

"Are you sure the teleport can handle so many clothes?" Khan whispered once Monica's shopping spree finally came to an end.

"I also lost a lot during the disaster," Monica replied in an equally faint tone before lowering her voice even more, "Including some of your favorite skirts."

"You know I prefer you without them," Khan commented.

"Miss Solodrey," The middle-aged man leading the two suddenly called as he halted his steps. "We are here."

The man lifted his arm to point at the big shop on his right. The place was a beauty salon that handled various activities, and multiple long lines stretched from its entrances.

"This place should do," Monica confirmed. "Let's go, Khan. I've already warned them about our arrival."

"Wait, our?" Khan wondered.

"The messy outlook suits you," Monica joked, "But the Harbor has some of the wealthiest members of our generation. You need to look the part."

"I'll tell them you have arrived," The man stated before ignoring the lines to peek past one of the entrances and summon a waiter.

"What did you get me into?" Khan whispered now that he and Monica were alone.

"Bath, new clothes, and a haircut," Monica explained before glaring at Khan. "Don't you dare to request for women during your bath."

"Wait, can I?" Khan honestly asked, and the anger expanding inside Monica gave him the answer he sought. A smirk tried to follow, but the man returned and interrupted that interaction.

"They are ready for you," The man announced. "You can enter."

"Thank you," Monica said while performing a half-bow and stepping forward.

Khan could only follow Monica and ignore the glares or curious looks from the people in the lines. He expected some complaints, but no one dared to speak.

"Welcome to the Daily Delights," A beautiful woman greeted the two as soon as they entered the shop. "Miss Solodrey, you can follow Carla. She will fulfill all your requests."

A younger woman approached the first and pointed toward a different area of the shop before adding something. "Miss Solodrey, we can begin if you wish."

"I'll be in your hands, Carla," Monica thanked before following the second woman into a deeper area of the shop. The two even crossed a sliding door that prevented Khan from keeping track of them.

"Lieutenant Khan, am I right?" The first woman asked once she and Khan remained alone.

"Indeed," Khan responded while inspecting the place. The room was vast, but it didn't have much. He could only see a few seats and a long transparent desk filled with various beauty products.

"Is this your first time in a beauty salon?" The woman continued.

"Right again," Khan revealed.

"I hope we can give you a memorable experience then," The woman exclaimed. "It would be unbecoming of your feats if we mistreated you."

"I believe Miss Solodrey has already planned everything," Khan changed the topic.

"Yes!" The woman confirmed. "Please, follow me."

The woman led Khan deeper into the shop, in a room full of lockers and doors. The temperature was far higher there, and many young women handed out towels or similar items to the men sitting on various benches.

"You can use an empty locker to store your belongings," The woman explained, "But we'll take your uniform to clean it up. There are baths behind each of these doors. Just choose an empty one."

"Sure," Khan voiced while unbuttoning the upper parts of his uniform.

"Wait!" The woman shouted once she realized what Khan was up to.

"What is it?" Khan asked while turning, uncaring that half of his chest was already in the open.

"There are changing rooms inside the baths," The woman quickly explained while the azure scar captured her attention. "You don't need to undress here."

"But you need my uniform, don't you?" Khan asked.

"There is a drawer inside the changing room that we can open from outside," The woman revealed.

"Oh," Khan exclaimed. "Well, I'm done anyway."

Khan finished removing the upper part of his uniform before moving to his pants. He hung them up in a specific spot on a nearby locker before storing his sheath, knife, phone, and fake ID card. The container asked him to create a temporary password, and he quickly complied.

"How long do I have?" Khan wondered.

"A-" The woman gulped while her eyes traced Khan's firm muscles, "You can stay as long you want."

"I won't take long," Khan stated before heading for one of the doors. He wore nothing but underwear, so his walk attracted a lot of attention, especially from the waitresses. As for the men on the benches, they mostly looked at his azure scar.

Khan ignored everything to enter one of the baths. The luxury waiting for him inside was nothing surprising or spectacular after the trip on Luke's ship. He actually found fewer beauty products there, but he still knew how to use only one.

The changing room turned out to be the big surprise of the place. The area already had a clean uniform with two stars on each shoulder waiting for Khan, and the various drawers offered a wide variety of socks and underwear.

Khan had seen similar stuff on Reebfell and Milia 222, and the sight didn't interest him. He cleaned himself and picked up simple boxers before donning the military uniform and leaving the bath.

The surprises arrived after leaving the bath too. Many waitresses had gathered in front of the door, and a few men had also joined them. Yet, the disappointed expressions followed and pushed Khan to find a way out of the situation.

"Is something the matter?" Khan calmly asked, pretending not to understand what was happening.

"No, no," The woman who had taken care of Khan until now replied while her companions either blushed or diverted their gazes. "Let's move on."

Khan retrieved his stuff and followed the woman into another room that featured multiple clothes. According to her, Monica had already given some instructions, which Khan appreciated since he didn't understand the field.

The woman's eager expression pushed Khan to use the changing room at that time. He tried a few sets of clothes at the waitress' request, but he bought only the bare minimum. The shopping session ended after he purchased two tracksuits and a pair of elegant garments.

"We'll deliver them to the destination appointed by Miss Solodrey," The woman explained before leading Khan into another room.

The last room had a series of seats attended by barbers accompanied by automated carts. The latter had mirrors, scissors, and far more to help with the task, and happy chats enveloped everything to create a joyful scene.

"Miss Solodrey gave her inputs on possible hairstyles," The woman announced while accompanying Khan to his seat. "Do you want to hear them?"

"Sure," Khan casually replied.

"Fringe up, undercut, faux hawk," The woman began to list, but Khan quickly realized how pointless that was.

"Wait, wait," Khan interrupted. "I don't know what those names mean."

"I can show you pictures," The woman suggested.

"Look, you are the expert," Khan stated. "Choose for me."

The woman remained surprised, but she was a professional at her core. She reached for Khan's chin and lifted his head to get a good look at his features.

"Miss Solodrey has good taste," The woman praised. "Undercut it is."

Khan let the woman handle everything. She summoned a barber, and the haircut began. The latter tried to be friendly, but he felt a bit tense, and Khan's short answers eventually killed any conversation.

'I've seen a few people with this hairstyle,' Khan thought while inspecting his hair on his phone's screen.

A short fade had taken control of the sides of Khan's head, and a slightly longer fringe left his forehead uncovered. The hairstyle looked good on him, but he expected it to lose that shape in a matter of weeks.

'Do they expect me to get a haircut every month?' Khan wondered before glancing at the people in the lines.

Khan had already left the shop, but Monica was still inside, which wasn't surprising. He was waiting for her with the middle-aged man, and the situation gave him the time to inspect what the world saw as ordinary people.

Neo Station had a relatively wealthy population, and Khan couldn't find a single messy outfit or hairstyle among the people in line. He couldn't understand why such clean and tidy individuals would need to visit a beauty salon, but there they were.

'Maybe I should step it up in the Harbor,' Khan wondered while storing his phone. 'I need to put alarms for this stuff.'

Khan and the man ended up waiting two entire hours outside the shop, but the latter didn't dare to show his annoyance. He actually seemed used to that treatment. As for Khan, he fought against the instinct of sitting on the floor and let his mind wander through the symphony to kill time.

"Welcome back, Miss Solodrey!" The middle-aged man announced as soon as Monica left the shop. Khan had sensed her arrival and had even prepared a joke for when they would be alone, but he forgot it once he looked at her.

Monica had changed into her military uniform, but her face and hair showed the results of the beauty treatment. Her curls had enlarged and softened, and her skin appeared far smoother.

The partially warrior-like appearance fused with Monica's enhanced beauty left Khan stunned. He found himself staring at Monica while wild thoughts tried to take control of his mind. His state told him that his imminent mission wasn't starting in the best way.

"I didn't think I'd be in there for so long," Monica politely justified herself, "But they had so many interesting services. I couldn't resist."

"It's no problem at all, Miss Solodrey," The man exclaimed. "Do you want another tour? There are other shops on the upper floors."

"No, it's fine," Monica responded. "I've wasted enough of your time already."

"It was a pleasure," The middle-aged man stated.

"You are too kind," Monica giggled. "Still, I must refuse. Lieutenant Khan and I have a ship to get to."

"Of course," The man exclaimed, turning to show a cold expression to Khan. "I'll lead the way."

The guide didn't hesitate to step ahead, leaving Monica and Khan slightly behind. The former could still hear them, but they resorted to whispers to avoid the issue.

"What is it?" Monica asked since she noticed something in Khan's expression. "Did something happen in the salon?"

"No," Khan reassured. "Something happened afterward."

"Afterward?" Monica repeated.

"Let's say they did a good job with you," Khan vaguely explained.

Monica couldn't help but smile and lower her gaze. The urge to grab Khan's hand ran through her, but she held back for obvious reasons, and anger soon replaced those warm feelings.

Khan sensed the changes inside Monica, but he couldn't do much about it. He was also in a difficult situation. His state almost felt nostalgic since he had experienced something similar with Liiza.

The guide led Monica and Khan back to Neo Station's lower areas, and the scanners that often preceded teleports soon unfolded past them. The middle-aged man remained behind while Khan and Monica went through them, and surprising results appeared on the screens once everything ended.

"There must be a mistake," Monica exclaimed when she looked at the screen.

"We can check again, ma'am," The soldier in charge of recording the results responded.

"No need," Khan intervened in an aloof tone. "They are correct."

Monica snapped toward Khan, but his expression spoke clearly. He had expected something similar to happen.

'Sixty-nine percent attunement with mana,' Khan read on the screen. 'I'm almost a third-level warrior.'

The soldier was confused to see that reaction, but he understood the reason behind it when he looked at other information on his device. His eyes widened in shock when he read Khan's age. Those results were truly unbelievable.

"Is the teleport ready?" Khan asked since he sensed the changes happening inside the soldier.

"Y-," The soldier stuttered. "Yes! Everything is ready."

"We should go then," Khan announced, and Monica nodded in agreement when he looked at her.

The walk toward the familiar oval room was silent, and the same went for the accumulation of synthetic mana in the machine. The teleport activated, and the scenery instantly changed.

"Welcome to Aegis Station, Miss Monica," A woman in her forties shouted as soon as Monica opened her eyes. "Lieutenant Khan, it's a pleasure to meet you. I've heard many good things about you."

Khan only needed a glance to gain a complete view of the woman. She was a slender and tall third-level warrior with long brown hair and dark skin. Her eyes were also dark, and her stance reminded him of Master Ivor.

"Master Amelia!" Monica exclaimed while stepping out of the teleport to greet the woman. "I didn't know you'd receive us."

"Your mother insisted when she heard you wanted to fly to the Harbor," Master Amelia explained. "Miss Monica, why didn't you teleport directly there?"

"My mother should have read the reports about my mission," Monica politely replied. "A relaxing trip is necessary after such a mandatory assignment."

"I understand," Master Amelia stated.

"The academic year isn't due for another month either," Monica added. "I thought it was wise to prepare accordingly before reaching the Harbor."

"I expected nothing less from you," Master Amelia smiled. "I've already loaded the ship with books and files suitable for the Harbor. I'm sure you have already memorized those topics, but reviewing them can't hurt."

"Thank you," Monica voiced. "Part of my luggage is also on its way. I believe it should arrive within the hour."

"I already have a team ready to pick it up," Master Amelia stated.

"Perfect," Monica uttered before stepping to her left to make room for Khan.

"Master Amelia," Khan announced after stepping out of the teleport and performing a military salute. "It's nice to meet you."

"You are surprisingly young," Master Amelia commented, "And good-looking."

"Ma'am?" Khan wondered.

"I hope you don't mind this old woman," Master Amelia teased. "I dreamed of meeting a man like you when I was Miss Monica's age."

Khan showed a polite smile, but coldness spread inside his mind. He could sense that Master Amelia had ill intentions. She didn't want to hurt him, but her jokes had deeper meanings.

"Master Amelia, be polite," Monica scolded. "Lieutenant Khan isn't only a war hero. He is also my guest."

"About that," Master Amelia said. "Lieutenant Khan must feel very lucky about this chance. I hope he understands what it means to receive the help of the Solodrey family."

"Master Amelia!" Monica raised her voice. "This behavior is unacceptable."

Master Amelia's eyes darted left and right to search for twitches in Khan's smiling expression, but his pretense remained perfect. She eventually gave up on that probing, but she didn't hold back from voicing one last comment.

"I hope you don't mind my protective behavior, Lieutenant Khan," Master Amelia announced while turning to leave the teleport area. "Miss Monica is like a daughter to me, but she is too kind. She might convey the wrong idea, especially to men beneath her."

"Master Amelia, you are dismissed," Monica coldly ordered. "I also forbid you access to the ship. If my mother has complaints, she can call me."

"As you wish, Miss Monica," Master Amelia halted her steps and turned again. "Lieutenant Khan, it was a pleasure."

Master Amelia left the teleport area afterward, and an awkward tension fell on the scene. The scientists and soldiers behind the consoles pretended to have missed the drama, but they couldn't avoid peeking at Khan and Monica from time to time.

"The Solodrey family's hospitality has worsened in the last years," Monica exclaimed, trying to hide the irritation in her tone.

"She was nice," Khan commented. "I hope my fellow trainees will be as kind as her."

Monica tried to find the truth in Khan's expression, but he limited himself to his polite smile. His poker face was as perfect as ever, which pushed Monica to hurry in the following tasks to obtain some privacy as soon as possible.

Aegis Station was nothing like Neo Station. It was far smaller since the quadrant didn't have any major destination that lacked teleports. It only featured a few hangars, a couple of training halls, and multiple habitations meant for the soldiers stationed there.

Master Amelia had already left, but a team of soldiers had remained behind to guide Khan and Monica through the space station. The two quickly reached the hangar, and it didn't take long before they arrived at a relatively big ship.

Khan recognized the vehicle. It was another comfort-oriented ship similar to what Luke had booked for Milia 222. It was smaller, but that made sense considering the lower number of crew members.

"Departure is in a few hours, Miss Solodrey," One of the soldiers revealed while the rest of the team glared at Khan. "You can enter to check whether the ship suits your needs."

"I'm sure it will be fine," Monica almost dropped her elegant behavior since her patience was reaching its limits. The soldiers had glared at Khan the whole time, and that behavior was getting on her nerves.

A door on the ship's side opened, and a metal staircase came out of it. Monica didn't hesitate to approach it, and a soldier stepped forward to hinder Khan's path when he tried to follow her.

"Miss Solodrey can inspect the ship," The soldier warned. "You don't have clearance."

Khan's face felt stiff. His polite smile had never left his expression, and that didn't change even after the soldier's rude warning. Still, Monica wasn't the type to let the matter slide.

"Alan, am I right?" Monica called from the first step of the staircase.

"Yes, Miss Solodrey," The soldier confirmed.

"Leave right now," Monica ordered. "This ship will fly without you."

"Miss Solodrey, your mother-," Alan tried to explain.

"I'll bring the topic directly to my mother," Monica interrupted. "You are dismissed."

"Yes, ma'am," Alan nodded and began to turn, but Monica called for him again.

"One last thing," Monica said. "How many people does this ship need to fly?"

"The pilot, co-pilot, and three more soldiers for safety measures," Alan revealed.

"I suspect the safety measures are for Lieutenant Khan," Monica said gently. "Let's make it two since you have been so rude."

"Miss Solodrey," Alan tried to complain, but Monica interrupted him once again.

"Alan, you have served my family for many years," Monica announced without dropping her smile. "I'm sure you can explain my decision to my mother. Now that I think about it, I don't want to talk to her."

"But," Alan attempted again, but Monica didn't want to hear reasons.

"That's an order, Alan," Monica declared as her smile finally vanished. "And don't bother choosing your best soldiers. Lieutenant Khan has defeated a third-level warrior. You simply aren't up to the task."

The team only had first and second-level warriors who showed disbelief at Monica's words. It didn't help that Khan continued to wear his fake smile. The scene went from tense to chilling, forcing Alan to agree to Monica's requests.

Khan eventually followed Monica inside the ship, which featured everything it promised. Its seats were comfortable, its rooms relatively spacious, and its services up to the highest standards.

"Eric and Stacy, do I recall correctly?" Monica asked when the two soldiers that would accompany her on the trip entered the ship.

"Correct, Miss Solodrey," The two soldiers said simultaneously.

"I believe you have orders from my mother," Monica guessed. "I'm sorry to say that you aren't as important as Alan or Master Amelia. I can get you fired if I want."

The two soldiers couldn't help but gulp under that blatant threat. Monica was right. They had orders to keep track of Khan, but Monica's mother wasn't there to confirm whether they did their job.

"We understand each other then," Monica stated before checking her surroundings. The group was in the ship's central corridor, which divided the vehicle into two parts.

"There are rooms on both sides of the ship," Monica announced as she reached one of the seats behind her. "You will take the rooms near the pilot's cabin while Lieutenant Khan and I will settle on the other side. This corridor will be a neutral zone, but you can't cross this seat."

Monica's requests were unreasonable, but she had already made herself clear, so the two soldiers could only nod in agreement.

"Excellent," Monica exclaimed while revealing one of her elegant expressions. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have matters to handle with Lieutenant Khan."

Monica didn't hesitate to head for the back of the ship, and Khan followed her closely. Truth be told, he had also been on the verge of snapping, but seeing Monica so annoyed dispersed his anger and made him eager to have some time alone with her.

The two crossed the corridor, and Monica waited until the door closed to launch a loud curse.

"Those bastards! How can they treat you like that?!"

Monica's venting didn't stop there. She turned toward the closed door and threw a kick at it. The metal endured the blow, but she didn't try to break it in the first place.

"My mother this, my mother that," Monica continued. "Even Master Amelia insulted you. I'm so pissed!"

Monica began to walk up and down the short corridor that led to the remaining room until she grew calm enough to focus on Khan.

"I'm so sorry," Monica almost cried as she reached for Khan's arms. "I had no idea they would-! Is everything okay?"

Due to Monica's annoyance, Khan's fake smile wanted to turn into one of his usual smirks, but the arrival of some privacy transformed his feelings once again. She was there, more beautiful than ever, and her concern was genuine. An explosion was almost inevitable.

"Khan?" Monica called again once Khan's expression grew entranced.

Khan lifted his right arm to reach for Monica's cheek, and she instinctively gripped her hand around his wrist. He also lowered his head to make their foreheads touch, and her anger dispersed during that affectionate gesture.

"Did I ever tell you how beautiful you are?" Khan whispered. "I also can't get enough of seeing you all worked up."

"They mistreated you because of me," Monica complained.

"You are totally worth the hassle," Khan replied before delivering a quick kiss.

"I'm sorry I told them about the third-level warrior," Monica whimpered before another kiss landed on her lips.

"I don't care," Khan managed to say among the kisses, and the two immediately abandoned the topic.

Soon, Monica found herself on Khan. Her arms were on his neck, and her legs were on his waist. She could barely hold back after the day they had, and Khan was in far worse condition.

"It's safer to wait until they deliver our luggage," Monica pointed out, but Khan ignored the warning.

The rooms on the ship had beds dug inside the metal walls, which didn't suit two people who wanted to do more than sleep. Khan had to settle for a relatively spacious couch nearby, and the kisses took a break when he placed Monica on it.

The couple exchanged a long, meaningful gaze. Monica and Khan knew a change in their relationship was imminent, but they let that moment last as long as possible to savor it in its entirety and confirm that they were sure about their decision.

Monica was also too timid to make the first step, but her face said enough, and Khan had the perfect line ready. "I think there is no kicking me out today."

The phrase would typically bring out Monica's timid side, but she was too into the moment to even think about being shy or refusing. She could only muster one line before letting her feelings take over. "I think I found your birthday present."

Chapter 430 Shoes

Cute snores welcomed Khan's awakening, but he couldn't see anything when he opened his eyes. He had to straighten his back to get out of the nest of curly hair and regain access to his vision.

Monica whimpered but didn't wake up. Khan could sit and rub his eyes before falling prey to the sweet sight. Monica had her legs on his lap, a simple blanket covered her body, and her expression embodied peace.

'I won't be able to hold back anymore.' Khan cursed, even if a smile remained on his face.

Khan and Monica had taken a significant step forward. The event had been joyous, and Khan almost couldn't believe how good it had felt.

The restraints that Khan had to put on himself for many months could be the reason behind that pleasant surprise. He could also blame the transformation for his enhanced sensations. Still, he liked to believe that Monica had something to do with that. After all, she had done a lot during that intimate moment.

'You can't stop getting cuter, can you?' Khan cursed again as he ran his fingers over the leg peeking out of the blanket.

Monica whimpered under that touch, and a pleased expression soon joined her peace. That reaction almost pushed Khan to wake her up, but he forced himself to divert his gaze and rest his head on the couch's back.

'Jenna was right,' Khan thought, recalling all the comments Jenna made about Monica and that topic. 'We definitely are compatible. Now what?'

The day had given Khan a taste of the rudeness he could face in the Harbor. Monica's underlings were only worried about his potential relationship with her, but his destination was bound to have people who disliked his background.

Khan had already faced similar problems, especially during his time in Ylaco, but he had changed a lot since then. Dealing with Monica's underlings had proven how he struggled to pretend now. He could show a poker face, but someone would eventually find a crack in it, and he couldn't imagine what would happen afterward.

Things would even worsen from now on. Monica was an emotional trigger that grew stronger as Khan got closer to her, and his own instabilities would eventually resurface. He would probably snap at some point, and the issue had no reasonable solution.

'Maybe, it's for the best,' Khan guessed. 'I need to build a network of people who respect the real me anyway. Surviving until then is the only issue.'

The results of the scanners flashed in Khan's mind once that topic returned. The transformation had pushed his attunement with mana to sixty-nine percent. He only needed one point to become a third-level warrior.

Khan was still holding back from making the meditative sessions a core part of his training schedule, but it seemed that the time had come. Finding something that would turn him into a necessary aspect of the Harbor would take time. Instead, his new star was right around the corner, and he might need it to avoid eventual punishments.

Checking the phone revealed that Khan had only slept for a few hours. The ship had probably set off by then, putting the arrival in the Harbor a couple weeks from now. The trip would be pretty long, but time sounded short when Khan thought about his many tasks.

The training was obvious, but Khan planned to take a look at the books left behind by Master Amelia. The new state of his relationship also hinted at busy times, so Khan could already predict that his sleep would be rare and short.

The odd position enforced by the couch eventually made Monica wake up. She opened her eyes only to feel Khan's caresses on her leg. Turning in his direction also put her before his warm expression, and she couldn't help but reach for it.

Monica straightened her back while holding the blanket on her torso. The two exchanged a kiss before Monica moved to his collarbone and shoulder to leave wet marks that expressed her affection.

"How are you feeling?" Khan asked.

"Great," Monica reassured while leaving another kiss on Khan's shoulder. "Maybe a bit lightheaded."

"It would be strange otherwise," Khan teased. "We didn't exactly hold back, especially you."

"I'm glad this area is soundproof," Monica giggled. Her shyness couldn't come out after her last barrier had crumbled. She had opened herself completely, so she couldn't feel any tension or shame with Khan.

That reaction shocked Khan a bit. He didn't expect things to evolve so quickly, but seeing Monica in that state added fuel to the wild urges he had just fulfilled. He was ready to take her into his arms, but his emotions froze when her fingers touched the tattoo.

Khan followed Monica's movements closely. She stared at the tattoo while tracing its lines with her forefinger. Her touch expressed curiosity, but it also carried a great deal of care.

"It's incredible how this survived all your battles," Monica commented while keeping her eyes on the tattoo.

"It's made out of mana," Khan shortly explained, "And it's part of me."

"Jenna mentioned something about it," Monica revealed. "It's connected to your ex, Liiza, isn't it?"

"It is," Khan confirmed as a sad smile made its way onto his face. "Humans don't love like Niqols, so one of their shamans wanted to test my feelings."

"Test?" Monica repeated. "Was it dangerous?"

"I would have needed special surgery if I failed," Khan stated. "Still, everything went well, and now it's there forever."

"I see," Monica whispered. "Does it have a meaning?"

Khan didn't want to spoil the moment, but lying to Monica wasn't an option either. Yet, he hesitated anyway. He didn't look forward to hurting Monica.

"In the human language," Khan announced, "Eternal love."

Monica had never lifted her gaze, but Khan could still notice the tremor running through her eyes. He also sensed her emotions, but something odd happened there. Sadness spread inside her, but her relationship wasn't the target of that feeling.

"So much pain," Monica voiced as she caressed the tattoo. "You fought for them, killed for them, but you still lost in the end. It's so unfair."

Khan frowned. He expected Monica to hurt or at least snap, but she didn't do anything remotely similar. She only felt sorry for him.

"And now my family is treating you like shit," Monica continued. "It's so depressing and irritating."

Monica finally lifted her gaze, and she felt surprised to see Khan's frown. She couldn't understand what was happening, and Khan's silence eventually made her pout. "What?"

"Aren't you jealous?" Khan bluntly asked.

"Of course I am," Monica snorted, "But not about your ex. I just wish you had more marks about me."

Shock ran through Khan again. The moody Monica was showing a surprisingly understanding and calm behavior when it came to another woman. The scene was almost unbelievable.

"Idiot," Monica snorted again while laying her head on Khan's shoulder. "I can only imagine how important she was to you. I have big shoes to fill."

Khan knew that Monica and Jenna had spoken after the kiss, but it took him that answer to understand how deeply their talk had gone. He could even guess what Jenna's feelings had made her hint at, which wasn't what he wanted.

"You don't have to fill anything," Khan called while moving his shoulder away to reach for Monica's face. "You just have to be you."

"But I have an annoying family," Monica cried, "And it's because of me that we can't be together openly."

"Fuck your family," Khan stated as he held Monica's face with both hands. "As for everything else, we'll figure something out together."

"Really?" Monica almost begged.

"Really," Khan promised.

Monica's face lit up. A wave of life invaded her and pushed her arms around Khan's neck. He pulled her closer, and the two exchanged a kiss before she snuggled on his neck.

"So, how many tattoos are you getting for me?" Monica questioned.

"Are we starting with the demands already?" Khan chuckled.

"I think three is a good number," Monica continued before laughing when Khan pushed her down to lie on top of her.

"I know a better way to leave marks on me," Khan whispered, knowing that he had already gone over a similar topic with Liiza. Still, instead of the usual sorrow, he found himself appreciating how Monica had reached the same realm.

Monica's timid side flashed on her face before she lost herself in Khan's expression. She instinctively pulled him closer while spreading her legs to cling them to his waist, and words became useless afterward.

As Khan predicted, the two weeks of flight ended up being quite packed. Studying the books on the ship, training, and Monica occupied most of his time, leaving him barely any minute to sleep or rest.

Khan's new vitality came in handy, especially since things only escalated with Monica. She grew bolder and more confident inside the privacy of the ship, which pushed Khan to be even more open about his desire.

Monica couldn't refuse Khan, and he didn't even try to hold back when she used one of her meaningful looks. Their passion became impossible to contain, and Khan could only be thankful that the ship had enough condoms.

Luckily for the couple, the soldiers had left Monica's belongings in the corridor at the ship's center, so the trip went by without any awkward interaction. Khan studied, trained, and let his passion run freely until the pilot gave the inevitable announcement.

"Miss Solodrey, you can activate the external cameras if you want to inspect the landing," The pilot said through the ship's speakers.

Monica groaned while rubbing her face on Khan's bare chest. They were on the ship's floor, where they had assembled a makeshift bed. Three bags acted as pillows while two sheets separated them from the cold metal and covered their bodies.

"You go," Monica whimpered. "I'm not getting up."

"It's your turn," Khan pointed out.

"It's not," Monica rebuked.

"Because you say so?" Khan asked.

"Because I say so," Monica confirmed.

"And here I hoped I could get a good spectacle," Khan teased.

Monica had closed her eyes, but they snapped open to look at Khan's intense gaze. She could see herself at the center of his attention, and she knew that complying would deepen his stare.

"Scoundrel," Monica whispered. "You are lucky I'm the best girlfriend in the world."

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," Khan joked before grunting. Monica had bitten his chest, and she pushed on it to leave the sheets and stand up.

The desire to add another joke or complaint left Khan. He fell prey to the sight that unfolded in his vision and even crossed his arms behind his head to appreciate it fully.

Monica's naked beauty shone under the ship's artificial light. She showed her back to Khan and peeked past her shoulder to display her complicit smile. She loved when he only had eyes for her, and he didn't even try to hide his interest.

The slow walk to an interactive menu on the ship's wall lasted far too little for Khan's tastes, but the screens that popped out suppressed his disappointment.

The external cameras captured an eerie grey moon with giant structures growing on its side. A series of transparent domes occupied almost a quarter of the satellite and revealed the many buildings

hidden underneath. White lights also shone past them, allowing the ship to see many details from a distance.

The place resembled an immense city divided into multiple districts. Its size didn't surprise Khan after his experience on Milia 222, but the heavily human style created a more harmonious picture. The scene was beautiful, and eagerness inevitably spread inside Khan.

The cameras eventually captured a series of ships leaving the dome to approach Monica's vehicle, and the pilot didn't hesitate to make another announcement. "Miss Solodrey, the landing procedures have started."

Monica pressed a label on the interactive menu before replying. "How long until landing?"

"Should be one hour," The pilot responded. "I'm confident I can save us at least twenty minutes."

"Don't worry," Monica reassured. "I need the extra time to make myself presentable."

"As you wish, Miss Solodrey," The pilot confirmed before the communication ended.

Khan lost himself in the scenes on the screens. Seeing the approaching ships with the massive dome in the background created an otherworldly and exciting picture. He had already witnessed similar events, but they never stopped triggering his wonder.

"Hey," Monica called while sitting on Khan's waist and planting her hands on his chest. "You aren't looking at me."

"What a needy woman," Khan sighed as he arched his back to make Monica lose her balance and fall on him.

Monica voiced a short cry, but a giggle followed when she found Khan holding her by her waist. Her head descended on her own, and Khan knew the perfect line to make her fall into a kiss. "Let's use this hour well."