

Dump One Loser, Gain Six Husbands.

Chapter 3

Anja read the appointment details again. The words mandatory and compulsory were highlighted in a severe, official red. Failure to attend would result in an indefinite freeze on her matching rights and a suspension of some of her newly acquired federal benefits.

They weren't asking. They were telling.

"Mistress," Unit 01's voice chimed in, a flicker of something that might have been urgency in its synthesized tone, "You may wish to view the GalacticNet. Your status change has been... noted."

"Show me," Anja said.

The large window overlooking the garden dimmed, turning into a massive screen. It displayed the landing page of the most popular news network in the Commonwealth. Her own face stared back at her from the headline banner.

ANJA COMPTON, HEIRESS OF HOUSE COMPTON, TERMINATES BETROTHAL. RETURNS TO UNBONDED STATUS.

Below the headline, a 'Trending Topics' sidebar was dominated by her name. AnjaIsFree. ComptonConsortium. NewHopeForAlphaPlus.

The screen began to populate with comments from a live public forum. Thousands of them, scrolling by in a dizzying cascade.

"Finally! I knew Mcdaniel wasn't good enough for her!"

"An untested female from a noble line! This is the biggest news of the year!"

"The matching pool is about to get a lot more interesting..."

"Please, Mistress Compton, if you ever consider new consorts, review my profile. Class A psionic ability, five million credits, and I cook."

Anja stared, dumbfounded. It was one thing to read about the value of females in the abstract. It was another to see this raw, desperate, public thirst for her attention. The old Anja had wasted years crying over one mediocre male who didn't want her, while thousands across the Commonwealth were practically begging for her attention. What a joke.

She accessed the original Anja's memories, searching for context. The Commonwealth was plagued by a low-level genetic corruption that affected all males. It was a slow-acting poison, a consequence of their psionic abilities, that caused irritability, aggression, and eventually, a descent into feral madness. The only cure, the only way to soothe the corruption, was the purifying psionic

energy of a female. Males who lacked a female to purify them were forced to rely on suppressants-agonizing injections with devastating side effects.

The demand was infinite. The supply was critically low.

And an untested female, especially one from a good family, was the ultimate wild card. She could be a useless F-Grade, or she could be a world-changing A-Grade. The uncertainty, the sheer potential, was intoxicating. It was like a lottery where the jackpot was salvation.

"Unit 01," she said, her voice hard. "What's the fastest way to get to the testing center in Capital Prime?"

"The journey by private shuttle would take approximately forty-five minutes, Mistress. However, it appears alternative arrangements have been made."

Before Anja could ask what that meant, a low, powerful thrumming sound vibrated through the floor. It grew rapidly into a deafening roar, the sound of massive engines displacing a huge volume of air. The delicate curtains on her window whipped inward as a powerful downdraft hit the side of the house.

Anja rushed to the window, peering up into the sky.

A ship was descending. It wasn't a sleek, civilian shuttle. It was a beast of a machine, matte black and brutally angular, a military transport vessel designed for assault landings. The official, silver crest of the Eugenics Directorate was emblazoned on its side.

It settled onto the main lawn with a final, ground-shaking whump, its landing struts sinking inches into the perfectly manicured grass. A ramphissed open at its rear. Twelve soldiers marched out in perfect synchronization. They were clad in black tactical armor, their faces hidden behind reflective visors, and they carried heavy-looking plasma rifles. They moved with terrifying efficiency, forming two perfect lines of six leading from the ramp towards the front door of the estate.

A voice, amplified and resonant, boomed from the ship's external speakers. It was deep, respectful, and utterly commanding.

"Mistress Anja Compton. On behalf of the Commonwealth Eugenics Directorate, we are your designated escort to the Capital Prime Testing Center. Please prepare for immediate departure."

Anja stood frozen, her heart hammering against her ribs. This wasn't a taxi. This was a military operation. For her. Was she being escorted to a testing center or to a war zone?

"Mistress, I have taken the liberty of selecting an appropriate outfit for the occasion," Unit 01 said, its voice cutting through her shock. A panel on the wall of her closet slid open, revealing a simple but elegant outfit: dark, well-fitted trousers, a cream-colored silk blouse, and soft leather boots. It was understated, comfortable, but undeniably expensive. "I would advise you to change quickly."

Numbly, Anja did as she was told. She dressed with fumbling fingers, her mind still reeling from the sight of the armored ship on her lawn. This was real. This was happening.

Guided by Unit 01's soft light prompts, she walked through the silent, cavernous halls of the estate to the grand front entrance. She took a deep breath, her hand resting on the cool metal of the door handle. She thought about the comments she had just read—males begging for her attention, showing off their credits and their abilities. And then she thought about Kenny's parting words: "Even if I die, even if I get exiled to a barren mining planet, I will never form a bond with you." A small, bitter smile crossed her lips. He had spent years convincing her she was nothing. In a few minutes, the entire Commonwealth would know the truth.

Then she pulled it open.

The force of the soldiers' collective gaze was a physical thing. They stood perfectly still, rifles held at a parade rest, but she could feel the intensity of their focus. It wasn't threatening. It was... worshipful.

The man at the front of the line, clearly the captain, took a step forward. He was taller than the others, his armor bearing subtle markings of rank. He removed his helmet, revealing a stern, handsome face with a sharp jaw and piercing gray eyes. He held the helmet under his arm and then, to Anja's utter astonishment, he dropped to one knee before her on the stone steps.

"Mistress Compton," he said, his head bowed, "It is an honor. We have prepared a sterilized walkway for your convenience."

As he spoke, a thin, metallic carpet unrolled from the base of the ship's ramp, gliding silently across the lawn to stop at her feet. It was a simple, practical measure to keep her boots from getting damp from the morning dew. It was also the most ridiculously reverent gesture she had ever witnessed.

"Th-thank you, Captain," she managed, her voice barely a whisper.

The captain's head dipped lower. "The honor is all ours, Ma'am."

Feeling as though she were in a dream, Anja stepped onto the walkway. She walked between the two lines of silent, armored sentinels, their visors tracking her every move. The air buzzed with their restrained energy.

She stepped up the ramp and into the ship's interior. It wasn't the spartan, utilitarian hold she expected. It was a VIP cabin, furnished with plush, cream-colored leather chairs, polished chrome accents, and soft, indirect lighting. It looked more like the inside of a private jet than a military transport.

The ramp hissed shut behind her, sealing her inside and cutting off the outside world. A small, silent service droid glided up to her, offering a chilled glass of champagne on a silver tray.

Anja sank into one of the chairs, the leather sighing under her weight. She took the glass, the crystal cool against her trembling fingers. Through the cabin's reinforced viewport, she watched her new home, her new life, shrink below as the ship ascended with breathtaking speed.

A timer appeared on a small screen embedded in the armrest of her chair.

Estimated Time to Arrival: 12 minutes.

She stared at the descending numbers, her heart beating a frantic rhythm against her ribs. There was no going back now.