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Steve walked toward the security hangar with Kyle in tow, though he was virtually dragging the taller man along.

"Come on, man, you agreed to her terms when she bailed you out. Don't make us late on our first day," Steve scolded, tugging Kyle's arm in a futile effort to speed up their pace. "You heard me leave a message to let her know we were running behind."

Kyle opened his mouth, but his first attempt at a reply was swallowed by a yawn. He rubbed his face with both hands once the yawn worked its way out of his mouth. There was a hint of another yawn trying to sneak out, but Kyle was able to stifle it before answering, "Dude, I'm so tired" and stopping in his tracks.

Steve turned to give him an exasperated look. "Then maybe you shouldn't have kept us at that new place so late last night." He covered his own yawn. "You know I had to stay to make sure you didn't get into any more trouble."

Kyle turned bloodshot eyes toward his friend and grinned. "Only trouble I was tryin' to get into was that blonde at the bar." His grin edged into a frown as he nudged Steve's shoulder. "What happened to my wingman?"

Steve gave him a somber look. "He was doing his *job*. Trust me, you did *not* want a piece of that 'blonde'."

"Why not? She seemed into me."

"Which is probably exactly what would have happened if you'd left with her. Just...just let it go, man. Last night is over," Steve answered as he turned and began walking toward the hangar again, motioning Kyle to follow.

He took a few steps before noticing he was walking alone. A glance over his shoulder showed him Kyle still standing in place, with his arms now crossed. Steve huffed out an irritated breath, shaking his head before covering the distance between them. As he slowed to a stop in front of his friend, he tossed his arms wide and snapped out a sharp "*What?*"

Kyle spent a moment glaring back at him before responding, "What d'ya mean, you were doing your job?"

“You *really* don’t want me to answer that, man, trust me on this. I ever do wrong by you, hmm?” Kyle gave his head a little shake but remained in place, arms still crossed. Steve resigned himself to what came next, giving his shoulders a quick shrug and his head a bob to one side at the same time. “Remember, I tried.”

He took a deep breath. “How tight you strap on those booze goggles last night?”

“Dunno, three or four,” Kyle answered. He paused and considered it before admitting, “Maybe a five, why? I could still tell she was pretty.”

“More like an eight, but yeah, I’ll grant he was kinda pretty,” Steve admitted, watching the confusion creep into Kyle’s expression. He smirked and asked his next question. “Remember the ladies I was talking to?” Kyle gave him a slow nod, his confusion still evident on his face.

“Well, we were having a nice chat when one of them pointed at you and told me to watch. When I asked her ‘watch what?’, she giggled and said ‘That guy getting ready to leave with Ronnie’”.

“Yeah, her name was Roni. She was ready to take me back to her place when you dragged my ass outta there.”

“Oh yeah, but he was getting ready to take you home and introduce you to ‘Big Ron’. Both ladies told me the same thing, so I figure I actually *saved* your ass.” Kyle switched over to a dumbfounded look, which frustrated Steve to no end and caused him to dig his comm out of his pocket. Kyle curiously watched as he swiped his finger across the screen, tapped it, and handed it to him without another word.

“What’s that?” he asked, squinting at the images on the screen. Steve watched Kyle’s expression go from curiosity to realization before he made an *ack* sound and tossed the device back toward him. Steve erupted in laughter and snatched his comm out of the air while Kyle yelled, “What the hell, man?! That ain’t funny!”

Steve quelled his laughter long enough to gasp out, “It is from here!” before he doubled over and had to put his hands on his knees to keep from falling over. Irritation grew inside Kyle, but Steve’s laughter was contagious. A few seconds later, Kyle joined him and felt the irritation wash away as he laughed at the situation that his buddy had saved him from. “Ok, you get the ‘Wingman of the Year’ award.”

Steve brought himself back under control. “Glad you finally recognized it. Ready to head to work?” His eyes widened when he looked at his chrono. Kyle noticed his expression and grabbed Steve’s wrist to look at it.

“Ah, shit! Let’s go!” he shouted and started running, waving for Steve to catch up. Steve swore and followed him, huffing and thinking dark thoughts about runners with long legs. They slowed

to a walk when their destination came into view, giving themselves time to catch their breaths before going inside. As they entered the security bay, Steve saw Rilum leaving his office and waved at him.

“Morning, Chief.”

He turned toward the pair, lifting a hand to Steve in response. “Rodgers,” he said with a head bob, before dropping his hand when he saw Kyle. “Jenkins,” Rilum said flatly.

“I told you he doesn’t like me,” Kyle said in a low voice.

“Probably because he knows you,” Steve replied, stepping toward Rilum to keep his widening grin hidden from Kyle. “Chief, you know where Captain Watson is? We’re supposed to meet her here but are running late,” he said, jerking a thumb back at Kyle.

Rilum turned his head and shoulders slightly to each side, as close to a human’s head shake as the krax’s neck plates would allow. “I haven’t seen her yet. Have you tried her comm?”

“She didn’t answer, but maybe she didn’t recognize the ID. Would you mind trying her for us?”

Rilum bobbed another short nod to him and started to make a call of his own. He noticed he had a text waiting and read the pop up, then made a call before telling the men, “No answer. If you’re supposed to meet her, I’d say go wait at the ship.”

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Von drifted in a pleasant dimness, feeling light sensations crossing his chest, like gentle kisses were being placed there. A small moan of enjoyment escaped him, then he realized he was close to waking up from the wonderful dream he was having. He kept his eyes closed, trying to stay asleep and enjoy the caress that was now trailing down his stomach to...*mmmmm*. He felt a stiffness growing as the caress became a firm grip, moving along his shaft. He struggled to stay inside the dream, though the grip shifted, enveloping him even as it lifted him from the depths of sleep. A groan rose from his chest as he fought consciousness, but the feelings of pleasure didn’t fade.

He eased his eyes open to find Karen straddling his hips and lowering herself onto him. She began slowly rocking back and forth, giving him a smile when she noticed him watching her. A shudder racked her body and her rocking sped up. Von grabbed her hips, pulling her down more tightly against him. They moved together with short, sharp moves and reached climax quickly, before Karen collapsed onto Von’s chest. She gave him a quick panting kiss before rolling off to his left side and cuddling up against him, laying her leg across him. Von glanced down and grinned.

"What?" Karen asked, puzzled at his grin.

He looked her in the eyes and said, "Nice leg," waggling his eyebrows as he did so.

"Wha...?" she started in confusion, then chuckled at the memory. Stretching it out over Von, she asked, "It is shiny, isn't it?" and laughter poured from both of them at the shared memory of their first "date" at Sal's.

They cuddled like that for a while, just enjoying each other's company. Karen glanced up at Von's face when she felt his chest heave in a deep sigh. He noticed her watching him and she *hmm'd* at him expectantly

"I was just thinking..." he began, before trailing off.

Once he didn't continue after a couple of moments, she asked, "Do you always take this long to think or is this a special occasion?"

Von chuckled at her. "No, just trying to keep my foot out of my mouth. So, I was just thinking that we didn't use any protection last night...and it was so sudden..."

"Yeah, it was that," she offered. "Just so you know, that wasn't my plan."

"No?"

She shook her head against him. "No. I invited you over to tell you I...had feelings for you. The rest was just the right moment and I got caught up in it."

"You regret it?" he asked, looking down at her.

"Oh no, that was wonderful. I didn't know until it was happening, but I definitely wanted it," she assured him. "You?"

She felt him give his head a shake. "I don't regret it a bit. Especially since I'd realized I have feelings for you, too." There was another long pause but he continued before she had to prompt him. "But that skips what I was trying to say...we weren't safe last night."

"Or this morning."

"Or this morning," he acknowledged. "Which was the best way to wake up, by the way." He felt her give a brief laugh into his side in response. Looking at the ceiling, he continued, "There's no good way to ask this, but do we need to be concerned?"

He felt her shake her head at his question. "No, we shouldn't. There was a medical issue when I was younger which the doctors told me might make it hard for me to have kids.

"During my recovery, they said there was damage that made pregnancy highly unlikely, and if it did, there would probably be significant risk involved. Once the docs said I was clear for selective surgery, I had an implant put in that should keep that from happening."

She wasn't expecting the gentle squeeze he gave her. "I'm sorry to hear that."

She shrugged against his side. "Risks of being a fighter pilot, I guess." Deciding the conversation was taking a gloomy turn, she switched topics. "You're safe, right?"

"Huh?" He felt her leg nudge him, just a bit more firmly than was comfortable, and understanding bloomed for him. "Oh, yeah, no, no worries there. Clean bill of health here. Regular screenings and all that."

"You need regular screenings to know you're safe?"

"Oh God, no! I..." He looked back down to see her wicked grin facing him. "You like to do that, don't you?" He watched her flutter her eyelashes at him, that smile still playing on her lips. "The first screening a few years ago would have covered that."

"Good," she said, "because if you'd given me something, you wouldn't like it," she snugged her knee up against him uncomfortably, "when I found out."

He hitched his breath as she spoke, his voice a slightly higher pitch when he replied. "Nope, I'm..." Von cleared his throat, dropping back to his usual baritone as he lightly laughed, "I'm good. While that's a nice leg, you mind lowering it a bit?"

Karen gave his chest a light kiss as she slid her leg down, then rolled away from him to sit up on the edge of the bed. Von shifted onto his side as he watched her stand and stretch languidly, admiring the play of lean muscles across her back and...other interesting places.

"Enjoying the view?"

He glanced up to see her grinning back over her shoulder at him. A smile spread across his face. "That," he reached out and trailed his fingertips down her spine, drawing a shiver and quiet purr from her, "and thinking about the fact that I have nowhere else to be today."

Karen's grin faded and was replaced by a perplexed look. "Something wrong?" he asked, withdrawing his hand.

She shook her head. "I'm not sure. You mentioned having nowhere to be today and..." Von watched her cast about her room, seeming to search for something. "Have you seen my slate?"

It was his turn to shake his head. "No, but I've been pretty...occupied...since I got here last night."

That apparently triggered her memory and she moved straight to the bottom drawer in her closet. "There it is!" she exclaimed, spinning toward him and thrusting her dataslate into the air triumphantly. She pulled it down in front of her, focusing on it and grumbling "Damnit, Harvey," before tabbing its power on. Her focus switched from the device to Von.

"My slate's alarm normally wakes me up early and I do my daily run first thing. You know, to get my day started. Well, I shut the slate off because I was frustrated with Harvey for..." she explained, waving her hand as part of the explanation. Von nodded his understanding and motioned for her to continue. "So, I just remembered that I'm supposed to meet my two new crewmen this morning. You're welcome to come meet them, if you want, but...oh shit!" she said, looking down at her now active slate.

Von watched her toss the dataslate onto the bed as she bolted into her bathroom. The shower started, so he walked to the bathroom door. "Now I know something's not right. What is it and how can I help?"

"Would you mind grabbing me a flight suit and some skivvies, then put them on the bed for me?" He agreed and she stuck her head out of the shower. "Thanks. I'd invite you to join me, but I'm probably going to be late already. Let me finish up and we can chat while I get ready, okay?"

Von nodded his ascent and turned away to rummage through her room to find the requested items. A short search led him to the clothes, which he laid out on the bed, along with a pair of boots that he set on the floor beside it. He jumped as a sharp pain tweaked his backside and a *smack* sounded, spinning to find Karen wearing a mischievous smile.

"Couldn't resist," she said unapologetically and gave him a quick kiss. "Thanks for grabbing my boots, don't know *where* my mind is today." She pulled on skivvies and asked, "You gonna come by the *Bel* and meet the new guys today?"

"Sure, once I get home, clean up, and change clothes."

"You could shower here," she mentioned, tying her hair back into its typical ponytail.

He shrugged before bending to retrieve his scattering clothing from the floor. "Thanks, but I don't have anything clean with me."

Karen shimmied into her flight suit before motioning to the clothes he was holding. "Those should be clean. It's not like you wore them very long," she noted, giving him a wink.

Von raised his hands in defeat. "Alright, alright. You win."

"Good," she said, cinching her boots tight before moving toward him on her way out. She closed the clasp on her chrono and lifted her face to kiss him when he spoke.

"But you could have just asked me to stay naked until you left, too."

He enjoyed watching her cheeks pink when she froze for a moment, then he pulled her tight and kissed her deeply. She started to respond, only to squeak out an *eek* when he repaid her earlier slap. He drew back from her and moved around the bed before she could react. It was his turn to smile and taunt, "Fair's fair. Better go, before you're late," before fluttering his hand at her in a shooing motion.

Karen growled at him as she picked up her dataslate. He caught a smile lifting the corner of her mouth as she turned to walk out of the bedroom. She grabbed her comm from the living room table and pocketed it before looking back at Von from her apartment door. "See you soon?"

"Yeah, soon," he answered, with an easy smile.

She nodded and left the apartment door to slide closed behind her. Her pace quickened to a fast walk when she approached the hab complex's entrance, then progressed to a steady jog once she hit the street out front. A glance at her chrono showed her that she was cutting it close, so she stepped up to a full run so she could cover the distance to the security hangar before Steve and Kyle were supposed to arrive.

A few minutes later, slowing steps brought her into the security bay. Karen checked the time and gave out a winded "Woohoo" at successfully making it with a minute to spare. She worked to slow her breathing and heart rate back to their resting rate and looked around the empty bay for Steve and Kyle.

"Huh. You'd think they'd be on time for their first day."

She didn't see any security personnel, so she pulled out her comm and saw a couple of missed calls, along with a message. Viewing the short message told her she needed to set the right tone up front, so they understood what being on time meant. She fired off a brief message to Rilum before heading back to the hangar itself. Von would have recognized the grin that played over her lips as she boarded the *Bel Air* and called out to Harvey.

"Wake up, sleepy head! It's time to initiate the new guys."

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