

A CHAOS STATION STORY >>

HONEYMOON

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Zander Anatolius and Felix Ingesson are two of the hardest working men in the galaxy. They really need a break. So, we've sent them on a honeymoon—and managed to do so without bringing them to further harm.

(If you've read all five books of the [Chaos Station](#) series, you're likely breathing a huge sigh of relief here, as you're more used to people dying. Or at the very least losing limbs. This holiday has been a long time coming.)

We didn't just write this story for the Zed and Felix, though. We wrote it for the readers, the fans who have followed the adventures of Zed and Felix from the very start. For those who have mourned their losses, and cheered their successes. For all the folks who sent us little messages saying: "I cannot believe you did that!" Or: "Hasn't Zed been through enough?" Or, popularly: "OMG, Felix!"

Jenn and I also wrote this one for ourselves. We'd said goodbye to Zed and Felix with the last edit round of *Phase Shift* (Chaos Station #5), and it was hard to let go. Many of our blog posts for the release of *Phase Shift* reflected on how hard it was to say goodbye to characters we'd given life to through five novels and a small collection of short stories. So "Honeymoon" is our last hurrah—a chance for us to just play with the guys, our dear fictional friends; to enjoy their love and everlasting happiness; to share their last adventure with our readers.

We hope you enjoy this last journey with Zed and Felix.

Best,

Kelly & Jenn

Visit our website at: <http://chaosstation.com> for more short stories, excerpts and deleted scenes.

HONEYMOON

A Chaos Station story

Chapter One

Aboard the drift cruiser Biswas, 2270

“Bingo!” the old blue-haired lady beside Zed chirped, thrusting her hand over her head to get the caller’s attention. “Ha! Eat it, sucker!”

That last bit was directed at Zed, and it was so unnecessary. He’d never wanted this bingo excursion to turn into some sort of competition, but the lady had somehow decided they should be archrivals or something. Just because he’d won every game so far...

It wasn’t like he was going to keep the money—he sure as hell didn’t need it, and this was all for fun. He was going to donate the winnings to charity. Sharing that with his seat-mate didn’t endear him, though—if anything, she’d gotten more belligerent at the news.

Whatever. He’d had enough. Maybe Flick was done napping and they could find some real fun. He pushed away from the table. “Thanks for the games, ladies.”

There were a few murmurs from the other ladies, but his archrival shot him a glare. “That’s right. You run away now. Buh-bye.” Then, under her breath, “Sucker.”

Zed barely managed to refrain from rolling his eyes as he left the bingo hall and started back toward the suite aboard the pleasure cruiser *Biswas* that he was sharing with Flick. His husband.

It was still hard to believe, that after all their history and everything they’d been through—particularly over the past year—they’d actually managed to walk down the aisle and say their vows without some galactic emergency looming over them. Everything was quiet, though Zed didn’t dare make that observation out loud for fear of tempting fate, and for what seemed like the first time since their reunion, he and Flick had a chance to just...breathe. And be husbands. Before leaving Alpha Station on their drift cruise, they spent the first two days of their honeymoon wrapped up in each other in bed. Or in the shower. Or on the floor. Or the couch. And there’d been that one time hard up against the wall...

It was *awesome*.

The drift ship *Biswas* was an enormous hulk of human engineering, but Zed kind of liked the size. He didn’t mind that they had to walk for fifteen minutes and traverse about three decks, at least, to get to any of the activities on board. Being off the beaten path was great—it meant their cabin was quiet, and he could almost pretend they were spending time planetside somewhere. A drift cruise hadn’t been his first choice for their honeymoon, but Zed didn’t think he’d get Flick down to the surface of a planet again for a long time, not after their last trip like that had ended in a crash landing and being stranded.

He was cool with compromise, though. That’s what marriage was all about, right?

The door flashed green as he approached, recognizing the ID stored in his wallet, but it didn’t open until Zed pressed his hand against the doorjamb and it read the lines on his palm. He stepped inside, quietly, in case Flick was still asleep.

Turned out, he needn’t have worried.

Zed froze on the threshold of the suite’s living room, the smile curving his lips dropping away as he took in the...carnage. That was really the only word to describe what he was seeing. He couldn’t even make sense of it—all the dismembered bits and pieces scattered around the room in a horrible, graphic puzzle. With Flick sitting in the middle of it all.

“What did you do?” Zed gasped.

“Huh?” Flick looked up at him, his eyes still with that distance that said he’d been truly absorbed in a task. “I’ve never seen one of these before. It’s a ’factor—kind of. Like that little

one I made for Elias, to make 3D maps?” Zed vaguely remembered something like that—it had been a gift for the captain of their ship, the *Chaos*. “Except, it makes even bigger, more complex things. And super high quality. Look!” Flick held up a silk shirt in the vibrant cool colors that Zed preferred. It had the sheen of expensive smart-fiber tech, rather than the dullness Flick’s shirts usually sported after a couple of days. Flick was *hard* on clothing.

But...no, that sheen wasn’t just from the quality SFT. “Are those crystals?”

“Yeah! Isn’t it cool? There was a huge selection of customizations available, more than I’d seen with other ’factors.”

“So you took it apart.”

“I had to.” Flick beamed at him and...damn, it was really hard to be exasperated or annoyed when he looked so goddamned pleased with himself.

Zed eyed the mounds of indistinguishable crap strewn around Flick’s legs. “Are you going to be able to put it back together?”

Flick made a dismissive noise. “Yes. Of course.”

“Flick...”

“Probably,” he amended. “At least I made you a shirt first, right?”

Putting the ’factor back together was neither the challenge, nor the point. Now that he’d seen the inner workings, Felix could improve it. Would improve it. The difference between any small matter printer was in the memory and extrusion models—what it could make, in how many different forms. The larger the apparatus, the more variety, therefore smaller ’factors tended toward specialization.

The giftfactor was the most complicated small printer Felix had ever seen. Designed to manufacture souvenirs and tokens, it pushed the limits of what was possible with a limited extrusion models. Now he knew why—and with parts from the neighboring snackfactor, his refurbished model would be able to make clothing, flags, souvenir towels, crystal solar system models, sparkly retro postcards and donuts.

It would also brew coffee.

Felix tightened the last screw, flipped open the control panel and connected it to the holo hovering over his bracelet. His upgrades required a few programming tweaks. Qek’s input would have been invaluable here. As he waited for the interface to update, he indulged in a moment of... Could you be homesick for a person?

Qek would be delighted by such a concept. Nessa would find it wonderfully mushy. Elias would tease him mercilessly—which was why he didn’t miss Elias at all. Nope. Not one little bit. Besides, why would he miss his crew and his ship when he had everything he’d ever wanted right here. Speaking of which...where was Zed?

His neck crackled like snack nuts when he looked up from the display. Also, he couldn’t feel his legs. What he wouldn’t give for a good work bench. Ah, there was Zed. On the bed. Asleep. The sonorous buzz Felix had mistaken for the ’factor coming to life was in fact Zed snoring.

Not trusting his legs to work until blood flow had been restored, Felix crawled across the floor of the suite, wincing as something dug into one of his knees. A screw. He tossed it into his new pile of spare parts and continued across the floor until he got to the bed. There he tried a reverse slither, up instead of down, and succeeded in pulling most of the quilt off the side before he got onto the bed. Zed laid supine, face pointing toward the ceiling, arms and legs perfectly aligned—as if he’d only meant to lie there for a second and then drifted off.

His new shirt was amazing. Bright but not too garish—besides, if anyone could pull off color, it was Zed—and perfectly tailored to his build. He looked sexy in the shirt. Of course, Zed could work a webbed cargo restraint or a trash chute liner. He also redefined the word sexy. Made it something fuller, deeper, more meaningful.

Felix could look at him and get hard. Instantly. Hell, he didn't even have to look at Zed to get hard. A lingering whiff of his cologne could do that. Or a stray thought. The memory of what they'd been up to that morning. Zed in the shower—and how even water needed to caress his skin, defining every ripple of muscle and strong curve. The color of his eyes when he smiled, when he laughed, when he said *I love you* (or thought it). When he came.

More often than not, however, when Felix looked at Zed, he didn't immediately think with his cock. His heart took over the show—beating more furiously for a handful of seconds before falling back into a strong rhythm designed to keep him apace with Zed's love.

Zed awoke with a forehead wrinkle, a snuffle and flickering eyelids. He rolled his head toward Felix, who hadn't gotten much beyond kneeling on the side of the bed.

"Have I told you how creepy it is when you watch me sleep?" he said.

"Nope. Because you love it. Admit it—if you woke up and I wasn't there staring at you, you'd wonder where I was."

"I'd just assume you were off making trouble somewhere."

Felix huffed softly. "Shirt looks good. How does it feel?"

Zed shifted his shoulders a little. "Not the best choice for sleeping. I think the crystals have pressed a new constellation into the back of my shoulders."

"Better take it off then."

Grinning, Felix reached for the shirt buttons. Zed captured his fingers and brought them to his lips. "You just want me to take my shirt off."

"Well, yeah. I could offer you back rub or something. But really, I just want to have sex."

Or he could give a whole speech about how he felt bad for getting lost in another project while they were on their honeymoon, but Zed already knew that. He could feel it through the connection between Felix's crystal arm and the small chip of resonance in the back of his neck. The quiet loop of feedback formed an undercurrent to most of their conversations.

"You're so romantic," Zed murmured. He kissed Felix's fingertips and an extra layer of *love* zinged across their connection.

"So, about the giftfactor..." In other words: *I'm sorry I got lost in a project and then forgot to notice how sexy you looked in the shirt I made for you and then let you fall asleep while I cleaned up my mess. And I love you. Always and forever. And I can't promise never to do this again. Do you still love me?*

"I married Felix Ingesson, didn't I?"

"For some strange reason." Felix extracted his fingers from Zed's hold and went back to pulling open buttons. Zed grabbed his fingers again. "Much as I want to get naked with you right now, we don't have time."

"We don't?"

"We have about ten minutes to get ready for our spa appointment."

"Spa appointment?"

"We talked about it yesterday."

All Felix remembered about yesterday was wondering if he could combine all the 'factors in their room into one monster machine. And the sex they'd had in the shower. "Does getting ready involve having a shower?"

“Probably a good idea. It’s only polite to get clean before most spa treatments.”

Felix could feel his eyes narrowing. “What sort of treatments are we getting?” He vaguely recalled the conversation now. Something about blackheads (apparently his pores weren’t meant to look like this) and hot stones (to melt stress away from points of tension—which actually sounded pretty good).

Mostly, he remembered Zed’s desire to share something he enjoyed with the man he loved.

“Bisilius mineral wraps followed by an energy scrub and Swedish massage,” Zed said.

“What does all that mean?”

Zed’s grin had a slightly evil cast to it. “You’ll see.”

Chapter Two

Bisilius minerals looked a lot like mud and the tiny little woman with the great big smile wanted to smear it all over his naked self.

“And then we’ll wrap you in pompao leaves to seal it in,” she said as she continued stirring her cauldron of brown slop.

Felix glanced up from the mesmerizing turn of the flattened spoon thing. “You want to wrap me in mud and leaves like...like droppings left on the forest floor.”

“Droppings?” Zed’s lips twitched.

“I was trying to be polite.”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“We do actually offer a Kontaran faeces wrap.” The little woman smiled a little wider and it was scary. She had way too many teeth and her lips were all kinds of stretchy. Who had a mouth like that? Also, people actually paid to be wrapped in shit?

Felix touched the back of Zed’s hand. Before he could even form a mental word to go along with the combination of uncertainty and mild disgust whirling through his head, reassurance flooded down the line from Zed. And a hint of a plea. Zed wanted to do this. Together. Hold hands while someone smeared mud over their bodies and wrapped them up like a filthy cigar. Apparently it would be soothing and bonding and their skin would be extra super touchable afterwards. They’d slide together with less friction—if they didn’t simply get off on touching one another.

Damn, now he was half-hard.

Scary mouth, whose name was actually Daphne, was pointing toward a set of shelving tucked into an alcove. “You can leave your clothes in there. Lie face up and I’ll see you gentleman in a few minutes.”

As soon as the door closed, Zed turned to him and said, “I love you.”

A surprised chuckle turned Felix’s scowl into something else entirely and Zed’s immediate grin made it difficult for him to reclaim any expression of intensity. Pulling a sigh up from his toes, Felix gave up. “Nothing says love like being willing to let someone wrap you up in mud.”

Zed’s grin lasted all the way through undressing, lying side by side on the two hovering treatment tables, and arranging the plastic-y SFT towel over their manly bits. He then reached over to grab Felix’s hand.

Felix left off studying the ceiling—patterned with tiny lights representing the starscape as viewed from the drift’s current location—and rolled his head toward Zed. “These table things are a lot more comfortable than hover stretchers.”

“I thought you might freak out when you saw them,” Zed said.

“I thought I might too, but this room couldn’t look any less like a medical facility if it tried.”

Zed squeezed his fingers.

“How about you?” Felix asked. If anyone had a store of medical nightmares, it would be Zed.

“I’m good.”

Felix grinned. “Very good.”

Daphne knocked, entered and grinned scarily. “Right, let’s get you gentlemen wrapped!” Her gaze landed on Felix’s crystalline arm. “Is that synthetic skin?”

“No. And I think we should leave it out of the mud cocoon.” While the mud probably wouldn’t harm the resonance substance, the idea of having his second most sensitive appendage

wrapped in something other than SFT brought about a return of the uncertainty and disgust. Speaking of appendages... “Are you going to be smearing mud all over our, er...” He gestured toward his dick.

Daphne’s eyebrows jumped upward. “I can if you like, but genital skin can be quite sensitive. I don’t recommend it.”

Next to him, he could hear Zed laughing.

“What?” Oh, he wasn’t... “You know what, forget I asked and pay no attention to Zed. He’s got a filthy mind.”

Daphne gave her mud another stir. “Okay, who’s first?”

Zed nodded toward Felix. “Him.”

“Me?”

“First on, first off.”

“Me.”

The mud was warm. Rather than compare the warmth to unholy substances, Felix tried to lose himself in the constellations across the ceiling. Daphne began at his feet and worked her way upward, slathering the mud over his skin with firm, no nonsense strokes. When she reached his groin, she tucked the little cloth in around his junk and continued on up over his hips. While grateful she hadn’t handled him, Felix did wonder if it was too late to ask if he could use the bathroom.

“We have a product that might soften these scars if skin resurfacing isn’t an option for you,” she noted as she began smearing mud across his torso.

A lot of scars crisscrossed Felix’s skin. With space—or the ships and stations in space—being rigorously climate controlled, the story of his imprisonment was usually hidden beneath long sleeved SFTs, which saved him a lot of pointed looks and unasked questions. That Daphne hadn’t offered sympathy, or wanted to know exactly why he had so many scars, or why he hadn’t had them treated, raised his opinion of her. Daphne was cool. She could smile as widely as she wanted.

He opened his mouth to tell her the scars didn’t matter, then wondered if maybe that’d been Zed’s purpose in bringing him here. To have his scars treated, his skin softened. He glanced over at Zed and saw the answer to that in Zed’s steady steel-blue gaze. No touch required. Zed’s thoughts were as loud as if he’d shouted them. Felix was Felix, no matter what shape or form he took. Scars, no scars. Weird crystal arm; tendency to be irrational and dumb.

“I’m good,” Felix said.

Another attendant came in to do the wrapping. At first sight, Felix forgot his full bladder. Why hadn’t Jamal been doing the mud smearing? He was hot with a capital H. Tall, broad shouldered, skin a shade darker than Elias’s and happy, happy eyes. Felix grinned just looking at them. Also, the man had amazing hands. Huge, warm and...huge and warm. Being smeared with mud of dubious origin suddenly seemed a small price to pay in order to be manhandled by such beauty.

Unfortunately—or maybe fortunately—Jamal wasn’t gay. Not even a little bit. He did not flirt, he did not touch teasingly. He simply wrapped Felix’s muddy self up with quiet efficiency—and it was restful, relaxing and really kinda nice. Maybe spa treatments weren’t the evil waste of time Felix had assumed they might be—except he really could use a bathroom.

“Is there any, er, caffeine in this mix? Or something like it,” Zed asked.

Felix would turn to look at him, but Jamal had just started wrapping his face. Yes, he had mud caked around his nostrils and eye sockets and while it wasn't the most pleasant part of the job, he had his pores to think of.

"Hmm," Daphne answered. "Not that I'm aware of. Most of our product is from the tide pools on Bisilius. Oh, there is a bean in here, though. From Gao Four. It's meant to improve circulation."

"That might be it." Zed sounded a little strained.

"Are you experiencing a burning or itching?" Daphne asked.

"No."

"You didn't list any allergies on the intake form. Is there something we might have missed?"

"No."

"Well, let me know if you're uncomfortable at any time! We can get you into the shower right away."

"Okay."

Small, tight answers. Zed was concentrating on something. Thinking hard. Oh... Oh! Caffeine! Was he thinking *not hard*?

Felix snickered.

"Shut up, Flick."

Jamal finished wrapping Zed and the attendants left the room with a reminder that they could be summoned at any time. Not only did the hover tables have embedded equipment to monitor their heart rate, but the door panel was voice activated.

"How's it hangin'?" Felix asked. The hardening mud around his mouth meant very word sounded short.

"Don't even," Zed returned.

"Jamal had amazing hands, didn't he?"

"Flick."

"Big. I really like big hands. Warm, too."

Zed answered with a low growl.

"I didn't get a look at Daphne's tits,"—he'd been too distracted by her sea monster smile—
"but I did notice they hung kinda low when she was working on my shoulders. Did you get a good brush?"

Zed liked breasts.

"Can't say I noticed," he said, sounding a little breathless now.

"Was it hard to stay—"

"Seriously. You need to stop."

"Just let it pop, Zed. Your dick isn't covered in mud. Just lie there with an antenna pointed toward heaven and enjoy the free—"

"I hate you."

"Love you too."

Felix might have been content to lie there and think about Zed's interesting reaction to caffeine for the half hour they were slated to be wrapped. But his bladder had other ideas. "I need to take a leak."

"You were supposed to go before they started."

"Yeah, well, I was all distracted by the mud and stuff."

"Can't you hold it?"

"Do you think the sheet I'm lying on is medical grade SFT?"

“You did not just ask me that.”

“Okay, fine, I won’t piss on the treatment table, but I really need to go.” Felix used his free arm to lever himself upward. Sitting, or folding oneself while wrapped up tight, proved difficult. The mud pulled at his skin and some of the broad leaves crinkled and cracked.

“You’re supposed to be relaxing.”

“How relaxed are you?”

Trying not to pop wood was like the exact opposite of being relaxed.

“Point taken,” Zed hissed.

“If I can just get my legs on the floor...” Felix pushed himself to the side of the table and tried to swing a leg over. His whole body followed and before he knew it, he was sliding toward the floor. “Oh shit.”

His table was obviously wired with a ‘guest has left the surface’ alarm. Either that or the floor had an impact sensor. After a brusque knock, Daphne pushed the door open and stuck her head in. “Is everything—”

“I’m fine,” Felix said from the floor.

Daphne tore her gaze away from Zed’s table with visible effort and bent to help Felix up off the floor. The leaves wrapped around his muck-caked self crackled as he fought his way upright, progress hampered by the fact Daphne seemed to have trouble averting her eyes from table number two. Zed had obviously lost the battle with biology, chemistry, or whatever caused his body’s unique reaction to caffeine. The SFT cover over his crotch swung like a flag from his upright pole.

Curious, Felix glanced up at the ceiling. Zed’s dick pointed to a spot just left of Tau Centauri. Or the Hub—the center of the galaxy as defined by the Guardians. “Ah, Zed, I think the Guardians are calling.”

“I swear to God, Felix, if you don’t shut up...”

“I’m sure guys pop wood all the time in here. Right?” Felix turned to wink at Daphne, who gestured toward his own crotch. Looking down Felix noted he’d left his own wrap on the floor with a couple of leaves. He was swinging in the non-existent breeze. “Well, then.” At least he wasn’t hard. Any more time wasted and he might embarrass himself in a different manner, however. “Bathroom?”

The lovely Jamal did not return to help them peel off the leaves or wash off the mud. Daphne assisted with the former and left them to their own devices for the later after informing them they had half an hour until their hot stone massage.

Did she mean half an hour to deflate Zed’s erection?

Probably.

“C’mon, you.” Felix led Zed into the massive shower room and pushed him under the waterfall cascading from ceiling to floor at one end.

“Ow, ow...” Zed cupped his hands over his dick.

“You protect precious while I get the mud out of our crevices.”

Armed with soap and an intimate knowledge of Zed’s anatomy, Felix washed every centimeter of skin. Zed protested the caresses at first. “Not helping.” “Jesus, I think I’m harder.” “Fliiiiick.” Then he simply gave in and started moaning. Felix helped himself to a little more soap, got to his knees and washed Zed’s galaxy-indicating tent pole again. Then he sucked it—long and hard, working another soapy finger into a favorite crevice.

Zed came twice. His dick barely wilted in between.

The hot stone massage was more fun than being smeared with mud and wrapped with alien leaves. Felix's masseuse even worked on his neck and jaw a little. Two blowjobs in twenty minutes left an ache.

Chapter Three

Zed felt wonderfully relaxed and shiny as they walked back to their suite. It had been quite a while since he'd indulged in so much pampering—he'd forgotten his skin could even get so smooth. And Flick's cheeks seemed to be even more rosy than usual...though that could have been residual embarrassment.

"You left them a good tip, right?"

Zed chuckled. "I left them a very good tip. They deserved it."

"It's your fault." Flick grinned. "I think you scarred poor Daphne for life."

"Yeah, yeah." Zed rolled his eyes good-naturedly.

"No offense, but if you head back to the spa to get rebuffered-up, or...whatever," Flick said with a vague wave, "I'm not going."

Zed stopped and grabbed Flick's hands. Their connection snapped into place, like a metaphysical hug. "Promise you'll go with me once a year."

Flick groaned. "Why?"

"Because you look really glowy right now. I think you liked it more than you want to admit."

Flick scoffed. "Dream on, Anatolius." His eyes changed focus, to something behind Zed's back, on the wall. "Oh hey. What's a fantasy suite?"

Zed turned to check out the holo ad floating on the wall. He took a step forward, knowing most ads like this were activated by proximity and focus. An image of a sultry and scantily clad woman appeared where the placeholder text had been. She seemed to look right at Zed as she sucked on her index finger. And...okay, he was only human. There was a twinge down below. But just a twinge because he wasn't *that* super human.

"Looking for something special to share with your loved one? Eager to have a solo night to blow your mind...and other things?" The woman switched to a slender, shirtless man wearing a dog collar, eyeliner, and gloss on his plump lips. "Every fantasy you could dream of is at your fingertips in our Xanadu Suites. Customize your night of magic to fulfill all of your sexual dreams and desires."

The picture switched to a scene aboard some kind of old-time sailing ship, featuring men and women showing a lot of skin. "See how hot the deep blue sea actually is."

Another switch, this time to a scarf-laden tent strewn with pillows. "Enjoy a night of scorching passion with your harem of men and women in the endless desert." The next switch showed a picture of the suite, Zed assumed, without the holos in place. It looked kind of plain—until it transformed into a lush rainforest, complete with a loin-cloth clad hunk swinging through the trees. "Your wish is our command. Make your dreams a reality today."

"Wow," Flick said as the holo faded to black.

"That was...detailed. And very cool. But—"

A new holo popped up, a spinning question mark. "You recently viewed the ad for Xanadu Suites. Additional information has been sent to your wallet. Do you have any questions about our services?"

"No, we're good." Flick tugged on Zed's arm and they stepped away from the wall. The question mark holo blinked out of view, switching back to the generic, text-only ad.

As they started down the hall in the direction of their suite again, Zed glanced at Flick. "It was kind of cool."

Flick grunted.

“The ship looked interesting.”

“It could be fun, I guess.” But Flick didn’t sound too sure about that.

Zed was still thinking about it as they keyed open the door to their suite. He kind of wanted to test out one of the Xanadu Suites, because when would they ever have another opportunity? But he didn’t have any real desire to have sex on a pirate ship or in a make-believe treehouse. Maybe he wasn’t adventurous enough.

“Do you have any sexual fantasies?” he asked as he flopped onto the couch next to Flick.

“Uh…” Flick frowned. “Why? I don’t want you to surprise me with one of those suites, Zed. They’re weird.”

“I won’t. That ad got me thinking, though. About fantasies, and if I’ve got any, and what yours are. We’ve never really talked about it.”

“Cause I don’t have any.”

“Are you sure?”

“Plain old sex is good enough for me.”

“But…it would be kind of fun to play, right?”

Flick shifted on the couch so one leg was bent and he was facing Zed. “Maybe I should be asking *you* if you have any secret fantasies.”

“I don’t know if they’re secret, or if they’re even really fantasies.” Zed’s ears grew warm. “Mostly, they’re thoughts and I’m pretty happy for them to stay as thoughts.”

“Oh?” Flick grinned his mischievous, playful grin. “You’ve got to tell me now.”

“Remember…thoughts. Okay?” Zed took a deep breath. “Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to have your cock inside me and another one in my mouth.”

“It would probably be hot. But that’s definitely not happening. I don’t share.”

Zed lifted his hands in surrender. “And that’s fine. Thoughts only.”

“You’ve got more, right?”

“Um…yeah. Sometimes I think about fucking you in public.” He couldn’t quite stop the growl in his voice.

“Jesus, Zed. Really?”

“Yeah. Like, not full on in a crowd or anything, but…in a dark booth in a restaurant where someone *might* see us. Or somewhere we can see people but they can’t see us.”

Zed didn’t need his enhanced senses to know that Flick’s pupils had dilated slightly and his breathing had sped up. “Okay…that one? That one could be fun. Next time we’re on Alpha Station, you could commandeer one of the Anatolius Industries offices that overlook the promenade. One of the low-level ones.”

“The ones with one-way glass, looking out?” Zed had to adjust himself. “Why is that so fucking hot?”

“Because it’s forbidden.” Flick’s eyes twinkled, and Zed didn’t miss that he’d adjusted himself in his pants, too—and his hand was still resting on his cock. “What else?”

“Watching you get yourself off.”

Flick pressed his palm hard against the ridge in his pants. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. I’d be sitting across the room. Or maybe…maybe tied to the bed.”

“You’d want that?”

“Just my hands. And ties I could break if I needed to.”

Flick nodded. “Very doable.”

“Really?”

“You brought a couple of ties with you, right?”

Zed's eyes widened. "Wait...now? You want to..."

Holy shit.

"Is that one of those thoughts you want to stay a thought?"

Yes. No. Maybe? "I don't know."

Flick knee-walked over the cushions of the couch to get closer to Zed. "You've already come twice today, and I haven't once," he said, his voice low. "I really want to."

Zed's mouth went dry. Flick in seduction mode didn't happen often—it didn't have to, since they were both usually raring to go with a single look. But...damn, Flick knew what to say. How to say it, too, in a low, gravelly voice that was raspy with desire.

"I kind of love the idea of kneeling between your legs, looking down at you, and watching your cock get harder and harder—" Flick broke off. "This sounds stupid."

"No! No, it's good. Keep going."

"Are you sure? I feel like I'm in a bad holo."

"Christ, Flick, you've got me almost ready to blow by just talking to me, so no, I think you're doing it just right."

"Either that or you have really cheesy taste."

Flick.

Flick smacked his shoulder. "C'mon, bedroom. Let's see if we can make this work."

Zed owned a lot of ties. Why he'd brought them on vacation was beyond Felix, but sorting through them for one he could twist without damaging the material gave them both a chance to recirculate a little blood. Would be a pity to get Zed all fastened to the bed so they could look at each other and explode. Zed wanted a show. Also, he was going to be incapacitated. Felix had no idea why that made his cock swell every time he thought of it, but it did.

"How about this one?"

"Any of them. Just pick a couple."

"But this one's got little light receptors in it. They'll break if—"

Zed yanked the tie out of Felix's hands. "I can buy another one."

"Why do you have so many ties, anyway? We never go to things where we have to wear ties."

Zed gave him an odd look. "Do you want to go to things where we wear ties?"

"No."

The odd look flashed toward the ceiling as Zed lifted his chin and sighed.

"What?"

Zed was all composed when he looked back down. Even had a smile tugging at one side of his mouth. "You are the most frustrating man in the galaxy."

"Damn straight. Now let's tie you to the bed with a scrap of silk that cost the lives of three thousand rare worms on Bereta and the fingers of some poor little slave girl who had to sew in all those receptors by hand."

"I don't know why I haven't come already."

Snickering, Felix followed Zed up the bed as he scooted backward until he was nested into a pile of pillows against the headboard. Felix climbed astride Zed's hips and sat looking down at his lover. His H-word. Husband. Jesus, he was married. To Zed. His best friend. Zed smiled up at him and one of those timeless moments passed where they simply looked and smiled and existed. Happy. In love. In need of nothing but the presence of the other.

“Is it weird I could just sit and look at you and love you and it makes me this happy?”

Zed’s smile widened. “When you put it like that, maybe?”

“Ass.” Leaning forward, Felix kissed Zed’s wonderfully full lips. Quickly and efficiently, pulling away before Zed could entice him into something deeper. The tease had begun. “Right, arm up.”

Zed pressed his right wrist to the headboard and frowned at the smooth expanse of SFT. “What are you going to tie me to?”

“Hmm.” The headboard was one of those upholstered arrangements hotels often used to preserve the wall behind the bed from head prints and chipped plaster. Even hover beds moved rhythmically when put to the test.

Abandoning his perch on Zed’s lap, Felix shuffled forward on his knees and pulled at the headboard to see if he could get his fingers behind it. No go. Nothing above it or below it, either, and the mattress frame rested on moveable slides rather than legs. He’d need three ties a side to fasten Zed to the frame, and then he’d be lying flat rather than propped up.

“Maybe we could try the couch?”

“Nothing to tie you to there, either,” Felix grumbled. He’d already thought of that. Pulling the tie straight between his hands, he scanned the suite for other possibilities. “We could use the shower, I suppose. That seems kind of clinical, though. I mean, who wants to stand up in a shower, tied to the head, while someone jacks off in front of him?”

Maybe Zed would?

Before Felix could blush, Zed muttered, “Yeah, no.”

“We could pile up some cushions on the floor in front of the kitchenette. I could tie you to the little cupboard door handles.”

Zed glanced through the open doors of the bedroom. Felix followed his gaze. Parts from his experiments still lined the counter. Even without the mess, the place didn’t scream romance, though. Or fantasy. But—

“Maybe this was a bad idea.” Zed sounded all discouraged.

Felix cupped Zed’s cheeks and gave him another quick kiss. “I’ve got a plan.”

Ten minutes later, he had two hooks made out of recycled ’factor parts screwed into the headboard. Felix yanked on them one more time to test the hold, then settled back onto the bed with a grin. “How’s that?”

“We’re going to end up paying to replace nearly everything in this suite, aren’t we?”

“For the cost of one of your ties.”

Chuckling, Zed settled back into his nest of pillows and stretched one of his arms toward the new hook. Felix had positioned them so that Zed could rest his wrists on them. Seemed kinder than letting his arms dangle from ties.

“Perfect,” he said. Then he wrapped the tie around Zed’s wrist, threaded it through the hook, wrapped it all around again and sat back. “How’s that?”

Zed gave an experimental tug. “Good. Not too tight, not too loose.”

Once he had Zed all tied up, Felix crawled back down the bed to kneel between Zed’s spread legs. Though still dressed, Zed had a deliciously ruffled look. His hair was all mussed from the massage and his skin still glowed pink beneath his perpetual tan. The collar of his shirt was open an extra button, and Felix could smell the oils they’d used at the spa and a hint of the mud. He leaned forward to cup the soft mound of Zed’s resting cock through his pants. “How’re we doing here? Any life left?”

Zed raised his hips. “For you? Always.”

Kneeling back, Felix pulled his own shirt over his head, tossed it aside and reached for his belt.

“Slower. Do a tease sort of thing.”

A tease sort of thing? Felix’s skin itched as a shiver crept across his chest. “Not sure I’m the right guy to do a strip tease.”

“You can do it.”

Blowing out a breath, Felix thought sexy thoughts—which meant thinking about Zed, and not getting his clothes off as quickly as possible so they could fuck. He cupped his own slightly chubby cock and squeezed, breathing out as a fold of material dug into the sensitive head. Then he eased his belt open and shimmied his hips as he plucked at the fastening tabs on his pants. You could probably cook an egg on his cheeks by the time he was done, but Zed’s heavy lidded look made his embarrassment worthwhile. As did the bulge at Zed’s crotch.

Felix pushed his pants down over his hips, then left them there, figuring a state of half-undress might add to the whole ambience or whatever. Then he licked his palm and gripped his erection.

Zed let out a breathy groan and tugged at his bound wrists.

Felix squeezed his cock, which pulsed against his palm. His balls were already tight and tucked. “I don’t know why you look so damned good tied to the bed like that. I wouldn’t have thought it was my thing,” he said.

“Don’t know why not. You love having your way with me.”

Felix began a slow and steady stroke. He tipped his head back and groaned softly, needing to voice his pleasure at even the feel of his own hand. Also, because if he met Zed’s gaze, he’d spill his load. His balls were all tingly and prickly. He smoothed his crystalline hand over his stomach, then up toward his pecs. Zed’s breath caught.

Dipping his chin, Felix noted Zed’s attention was split between his cock and his wandering hand. He reached up to pinch a nipple. Zed’s lips parted in a quiet gasp.

“You like that, huh?” Felix rocked his hips forward into his fist in a show of fucking his hand.

“God, yes.” Zed sucked in a quick breath, only to lose it in another gasp.

Felix rolled his nipple and damn if it didn’t feel good—and make the situation in his balls all the more urgent. Zed tugging against his restraints only ratcheted up the tension. Knowing Zed wanted to touch him, but couldn’t. Touching Zed would be against the unwritten rules too, he supposed, though the straining fabric over Zed’s crotch called to him.

“How hard are you?” Felix asked.

“Really fucking hard.”

Felix teased out the length of his cock in one long stroke before twisting his hand off the end in a move he liked, that Zed always properly emulated when jacking him. “As hard as this? Are your balls aching?” He tweaked his other nipple. “Wish it was you touching me.”

Zed whined and yanked at his wrists. The headboard squeaked.

Felix started stroking himself toward the finish line, hips bucking as he thrust into the warm grip of his fingers. He’d tried jerking off with both hands, the human one and the resonance one. He preferred the human one. The calluses on his palm added some interesting friction, and skin was skin. He could use a little more slick, though. Where’d they put the lube?

Ah, fuck it, by the time he crawled off the bed and found it, he could be done here and he really wanted to be done. Felix wasn’t one for keeping a climax waiting, especially not when it was his hand on his cock.

He spat in his hand and pulled at his cock again, quickly working back up to speed. Then he reached down to tug at his sac, pressing the cool thumb of his crystal hand between his balls. Another roll and tug, two more strokes, and he was about there, holding off now by will power alone. Slitting his eyes open, he prepared to deliver one more taunt to Zed, get him fully riled up.

He didn't have to. Zed sat panting, shaking—no, trembling. His hips jerking up and down as he sought the friction. His arms smacked against the headboard like cargo ties being tested by fast acceleration. His face, though—the naked want, the frustration. The absolute need tempered with the knowledge he was helpless.

An urgent thrill shot down Felix's spine...and that was it. He came—suddenly and sharply, his cry oddly hoarse as he shot. He pumped harder with his newly wet hand and another jet spurted across the bed. Another, and then another. It felt as if he was trying to empty himself of three or four built up orgasms. It almost hurt. It felt fucking fantastic.

Over the sound of his own harsh breaths and throaty cries, he could hear Zed groaning and the headboard squeaking. Then a sharp crack cut through their little concert. Felix looked up. Zed had pulled one arm free. The hook still dangled from his wrist, but the headboard was toast. Same for the wall behind it. In fact...Felix tilted his head.

"I think I can see our neighbors through that hole." Which meant anyone on the other side of the wall had a great view of him milking his own cock. "Shit and double shit. Put something in the hole!"

He wasn't ready for exhibitionism. Not on top of a mind blowing orgasm. Or with Zed half tethered to the wall and the cost of damages rising every second. Zed turned to shove a pillow toward the hole and a second ominous crack reverberated through the room.

"Wait!" Felix held up his sticky hand.

Too late. The headboard swung like a pendulum, the lower half disappearing behind the bed with a great thump. Shoved away from its moorings by the falling headboard, the bed rocked backward. Zed yelled once before he dropped from sight, slipping off the top end of the bed. The remaining hook held his arm up for about a second before it tore loose from the wall. A mournful wail rose from the gap Zed had dropped into, a gap widening by the nanosecond as Felix rode the untethered bed back across the room. Something crunched behind him. Felix turned, afraid of what he might see. He'd put a serious dent in the bedroom door frame, but, thankfully, the doorway was just narrow enough to stop the bed from passing through.

"Everything okay over there?"

There was a face pressed to the hole. Felix quickly covered his limp dick. "We're fine. Nothing to worry about. Just, um, working out."

"Riiight."

"You wanna plug the hole from your side, or should we?"

"I'm putting something up now. Seen enough of your exercise to last me a lifetime, buddy."

Felix got off the end of the bed, paused to pull his pants up, and went to help Zed up off the floor. Then they assessed the damage. He'd bent the 'factor parts beyond recognition to fashion his hooks. Zed's ties were ruined. The wall behind the headboard had two holes in it. One large—now blocked with a cushion—one small and also apparently blocked.

The bed looked okay, or would be once they picked up the door and hung it back in the frame.

Felix turned back to Zed who wore a slightly constipated expression. "You look like you don't know whether to laugh or cry."

"I'm thinking about doing both," Zed said, his lips twitching toward the former.

“We can’t be the only guests who have trashed a room.”

Shaking his head, Zed slid back down the wall to sit on the floor. “Probably not, but this is pretty epic, even for us.”

Felix sat next to him. “Pfft, please. There is no hull breach, marauding aliens or evil doctors in this scenario. Also, we haven’t crash landed anywhere. It’s just a little hole in the wall.”

“You know, I’m wondering if this is why fantasy suites exist.”

Felix laughed. “Maybe.” He leaned in to nuzzle Zed’s neck. “Did you have fun before we trashed the place?”

Zed turned so their lips could meet in a passing kiss. “Yeah. How ‘bout you.”

“I did. And we’re going to do it again. We’ll just plan it better next time.”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“What do you think Brennan would say if we sent a ripcomm asking him to install hooks over the bed in our apartment before we got back?”

Zed snorted, then chuckled, then laughed.

Chapter Four

Zed insisted on breakfast out the next morning, mostly so he wouldn't have to watch the workers going in and out of the bedroom, feeling a flush rise in his cheeks every time. It had been embarrassing enough to have to report the damage to the concierge—they couldn't let it go untended, especially since it affected the nice people next door—but the sidelong looks from the two women patching the wall were more than he could take.

Luckily, the breakfast place had everything from sweet and spicy oatmeal to eggs and bacon to some sort of dish that was supposed to be a human-safe version of an ashushk specialty. In other words, not something Flick could complain about. He wasn't normally one to care much about what he ate, but if the opportunity arose and they had time for it, he liked to try new stuff.

"Sure you don't want some coffee? Perhaps some tea?"

Flick's eyes twinkled at the server's question. Unlike a lot of restaurants, this place employed actual people as wait staff rather than depending on bots. For the personal touch, Zed supposed. Though he could do without the questioning of his order.

"I'm good with juice, thank you," he said evenly, adding a smile to emphasize he was really okay with the pineapple juice sitting on the table in front of him. As the server left, Zed lowered a glare on Flick. "Don't say a word."

As always, Flick ignored him. "So a trace amount of caffeine through the skin results in a boner that won't quit until you've come twice. What does drinking a cup of coffee do?"

Zed shifted in his seat, remembering the first—and last—full cup of coffee he'd had after Project Dreamweaver. "Use your imagination."

"I think you're supposed to contact a doctor if your erection lasts for more than four hours."

"Ha ha. Eat your breakfast, Mr. Comedian." Zed scooped up the last of his eggs benedict and ate it, then laid his utensils across his plate. "What do you want to do today?"

"Let's rent one of the fantasy suites."

Zed's eyes widened. "Seriously?"

"Yeah. Seriously. I've been thinking about it a lot. I had fun last night, but it'd be even better if we don't have to worry about breaking things. And besides, when are we going to have a chance to do this again?"

"Fair point." Zed pulled out his wallet and flipped through screens until he found what he was looking for. "The Transcendent Ecstasy suite is available."

"That's the most expensive, right?"

"Might as well do it right." With the press of a finger, Zed booked it. "Finish your breakfast."

"Maybe we should take some to-go coffee with us. You know...for fun."

Zed scowled. "It's not too late to get divorced."

"Oh, don't kid yourself." Flick chuckled. "It's been too late our entire lives."

The Transcendent Ecstasy Suite was...a bit underwhelming.

Flick took a few steps past the threshold and spun, slowly, taking in the whole lot of nothing in the room. The walls were white and bare, and other than the massive and comfortable-looking bed in the center of the room, there was nothing.

Flick turned a sardonically raised eyebrow on Zed. "I think we might've gotten conned."

Zed stepped over the threshold and let the door close fully behind him. As soon as it clicked shut, the room exploded into color. Instead of standing in the middle of an institutional room, they stood in the midst of a rainforest, surrounded by a riot of flowers. Every color in the rainbow flickered around them—and some Zed couldn't identify.

"That's more like it," Flick said with a smile and a nod.

"Please approach the bed," a pleasant female voice said. It came from no single direction.

Shooting a look at Flick, Zed grabbed his husband's human hand and followed the directions. Light flared around them and a female dressed in a flowing white toga-like dress appeared. She hovered about a foot off the ground, and the perfection of her skin and the light from within gave away that she was nothing more than an artificial construct.

"Welcome to Xanadu Suites. You have selected the Transcendent Ecstasy Suite, our most luxurious and immersive experience. With our holographic and biofeedback technology, we will transform this suite into a fantasy location to help you achieve the transcendent heights of your desire."

Flick wagged his brows. "Can't wait to experience a transcendent height of my desire."

Zed shushed him as their hostess continued. "Please select a category to explore. Historical, Modern, Futuristic, Fantasy, Alien."

"Uh..." Zed shared a look with Flick. Historical might be okay. He didn't really want to have to bend and twist his brain to do futuristic or fantasy, though. And alien? With his luck, that would put a giant bug-like stin in the center of the room. "Modern."

"Good choice," Flick murmured.

"Modern," the hostess confirmed. "Please select a subcategory. Reunited After War, Stranded on a Deserted Planet..."

Zed shared a look with Flick.

"Colony Life, Station Life, Star-Crossed Lovers..."

Flick was frowning.

"Non-Specific Erotic—"

"Yep. Let's go with that one," Flick said.

"Non-Specific Erotic Fantasy," the hostess confirmed. "First option: The Club With No Name."

The hostess suddenly disappeared and the room dimmed, the forest replaced by a night-time scene. Before them was a bar that looked like it was a few dozen feet away. It couldn't be...but damn. Whoever had created this illusion had been *good*. Zed could feel the coolness of the night air and hear the soft sound of nocturnal creatures in the distance.

"The Club With No Name," began a male voice, low and gruff, "has a particular reputation." The image moved closer, slowly, and Zed could almost convince himself *he* was moving. *So weird*. "It's said that within its walls, any sort of pleasure can be found. Tame, exotic—anything is fair game." Suddenly they were inside the club, watching a man and woman gyrate on a stage, covered with only enough fabric to leave the barest bit to the imagination. "They say that this is the place to go if you want to watch—or be watched. Or...both." The dancers stopped and looked directly at him and Flick, their faces open and sultrily welcoming. The man stroked his black-leather covered cock, making it clear he was hard, and the woman slipped fingers into her red lace panties.

"Are you game?" the announcer asked.

"Please state Yes, Not My Taste, or Next Selection," their hostess said.

"Next Selection," Flick said.

“But that...” Zed pressed his palm against the ridge in his pants.

“Yeah, I know. But maybe there’s something better.”

“Second option: Project Creamweaver.”

Zed’s gaze snapped to Flick’s. No...they wouldn’t...

The room changed to a space field, black with tiny pricks of light. “The galaxy is dangerous and deadly,” the announcer intoned in his deep and growly voice. “It takes dangerous and deadly people to keep it safe. And the most dangerous and deadly of them all belong to Project Creamweaver.”

Suddenly they were in a bunk room, with four other men in various stages of undress. Most were shirtless, but wearing camo pants. One wore only tiny booty shorts, not something the military would ever issue.

“Meet the men of the Project. Dagger, the weapons specialist.” The image focused on a darkly handsome man leaning against one of the bunks, his arms crossed. “Blake, the martial artist.” A short blonde guy, the one wearing the booty shorts, ran through a couple of showy kicks. “Spice, demo expert.” A lanky redhead winked in their direction. “And finally, Zane, the leader.” A tall, broad, dark-haired man looked at them, calmly, coolly, the intricate tattoo on his left wrist just barely visible.

“Holy shit,” Zed whispered.

“Their special abilities keep the galaxy safe, but no one knows what they have to do to keep up their energy.”

“I’m feeling kinda low,” Blake said. “I need to be fucked!” He sloughed off his shorts and stuck his ass in the air. Spice, the redhead, leaped into action, shoving his face in Blake’s buttocks and proceeding to rim him like a pro, if the moans and squeals were any indication. A second later, he slid his porn-star sized cock into Blake’s ass. Zed hoped there was a scene or two cut where Spice actually applied lube or more spit or *something*.

“Fuck me harder! I need more power!” Blake screamed.

“As the newest recruits to Project Creamweaver, you’re about to find out just how far each and every one of these men is willing to go to stay powered up and ready for action,” the announcer intoned over Blake’s cries. “You’ll discover just how much effort Dagger, Blake, Spice and their leader Zane put into making sure their abilities will never falter when the dangerous and deadly galaxy needs their dark and deadly powers.”

“Please state Yes, Not My Taste, or Next Selection.”

Zed couldn’t summon words. They were just...gone, stolen from him by what he’d just witnessed. They’d turned Project Dreamweaver into a porno. It was disrespectful, awful—and he realized that if Emma and the rest of them were around, they’d be rolling on the floor laughing, unable to breathe. Assuming Emma would stop yelling about the fact that she and her fellow female comrades had been left out.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t catch that. Please state Yes, Not My Taste, or Next Selection.”

“That was real, right?” Flick whispered.

Zed licked his lips. “Yep.”

“Thank you for your selection! Have a transcendent experience.”

“What? No! Shit!” Zed flailed a hand. “Stop! Not this one!”

“The year is 2260 and the galaxy is proving even more dangerous and deadly than expected—”

There was a fizz and a pop, and the regular lights suddenly flared to full brightness. Zed turned to see Felix holding out his bracelet comm and a grim look on his face. "I had to short it out to stop it. Sorry. That's probably going to be another damage bill."

Zed wrapped Flick up in a tight hug. "So worth it."

Chapter Five

Felix's small fix shorted out every holo projector connected to the Xanadu network, including the one manning the reception desk. Several patrons in various stages of undress were harassing the stand-in, and the temporary receptionist looked something like a wilted rag.

"Maybe we should stick around," Felix said.

Zed had his wallet out, two small holo displays open. "I left a large enough tip to replace every projector, don't worry."

"We should see if Brennan's legal team can do anything about—" He couldn't even say the name. His shoulders pinched together and his scrotum prickled. His dick felt all flinchy. "It's gotta be against some kind of law."

"Already on it." Zed looked more than flinchy.

"You all right?"

"Targeting the Anatolius lawyers on whoever created that holo drama will go a long way toward making me feel better."

Felix grasped Zed's wrist briefly. Just long enough to send his love. Zed didn't answer, but he felt the corresponding surge of deep affection.

Zed continued to tap away at a display while Felix led the way clear of their latest mess. He spotted one of the *Biswas*'s many observation lounges across the concourse and pulled Zed inside. Thankfully, it was deserted. Leaving Zed to finish composing his note to Brennan, Felix went to the shielded windows.

On a less exclusive drift, he might be looking at a wall-sized viewscreen. The *Biswas* was a luxury liner. Every deck had a lounge like this, all lined with polyglass windows. Felix had been a little nervous—and skeptical—about the windows to begin with. And thankful they didn't have one in their suite. Spending the bulk of his life in space was one thing. He'd never been one to take comfort in a view of the void between the stars, however. All that emptiness left him feeling untethered.

Zed liked views. Sunsets, the night sky, horizons, starscapes, nebulae. Felix had once found him staring at a flower. A single yellow bloom. Apparently he'd been meditating. Felix stared out at the stars with the image of a yellow flower in his mind.

He sucked at meditation, but he could do the deep and broody thought thing. He'd agreed to this cruise because they needed a vacation. The past year had been...rough. A graph of crazy highs and lows that defied any sort of scale. Was his inability to relax and enjoy down time killing Zed's vacation? Were all the breakages a symptom of his very own brand of mania?

"Hey." Their connection snapped into place as Zed tucked an arm around his waist and leaned into him before turning his attention toward the view. "Anything interesting out there?"

"I was looking for a yellow flower."

"Huh?"

"Are you having fun, Zed? Are you enjoying the cruise?"

"Sure. Aren't you?"

"I don't know. Maybe?"

Something other than the comforting presence of Zed spilled through the link. Anxiety? Felt a lot like sorrow. Or maybe guilt. Felix probed and got a heavier streak of remorse.

No sorry. I'm with you, he sent.

They didn't use the mental connection to talk often. Usually, a touch was like a check in. A brief exchange of *I'm good, you're good, we're all good*. Sometimes they passed along

impressions. When they were being mushy, they communicated the deep feelings words couldn't cover.

Love, love, love, Zed sent back. His thoughts were more than just words, though. They were those deep feelings—and questions.

Felix turned to slip his arms around Zed's shoulders. He bumped his nose to Zed's and brushed a light kiss across his perfect mouth. "I'm sorry I keep breaking things."

With a dimple poking his left cheek, Zed kissed him back. Lightly, sweetly. "Doesn't matter where we are, Flick. So long as we're together."

Pulling back a little, Felix lifted his chin. "You say that, but I don't know that we necessarily enjoyed being together the last few places we were."

"I disagree. Both of us being there was the only thing that kept us alive. Sane. It's what got us here, to this point. It's why we're standing on the deck of the largest drift cruiser in human history, enjoying our honeymoon." Zed's certainty surged between them. An electric spark. He believed what he was saying. "Now, if you're done brooding, let's go find something else to break."

They ended up in a sports bar. Felix didn't drink. Neither did Zed, really. His unique body chemistry processed alcohol too quickly for him to maintain a buzz for longer than a handful of minutes. The bar served simple food, however. Old-fashioned favorites such as hot wings and nachos, and a wide array of snacks designed to keep people nibbling, drinking and socializing. Then there was the view. More polyglass windows, extending the length of the deck. Presently, half of the screens were acting like holo screens. The one closest to them showed a basketball game.

Watching the station teams fight for possession of the ball was about the most relaxing thing Felix had done in the past couple of days, and he could tell Zed enjoyed his pleasure. He kept touching his hand and grinning as if he'd taken a shot of happy juice.

Neither of them needed alcohol.

"Quit it." Felix moved his hand away. "You're being weird." Zed enjoyed his contrariness too.

"Every time Refall Station scores, your heartrate increases."

"Like I said, weird."

The Refall center plucked the ball from the air, stealing it from Xilos. Felix pumped his fist. A mental finger poked his cerebral cortex, sending a mental echo of the cheer down his spine and out along his limbs. Felix gritted his teeth against the almost pain. "Okay, that was worse than weird. Don't do that again."

"Do what?" Zed had both of his hands full of chips and salsa, as though he'd scooped too much on to one and had tried to catch the waterfall of tomato and onion with the other.

"You poked me in the back of the head. I felt it all the way down my spine."

"I didn't—" Zed gagged and dropped his chips to clutch the back of his neck. "What the...ow, fuck."

Felix had his own problems. His crystalline arm had started to hum. He couldn't tell if the sound was audible, or simply a resonance between him and Zed. He grabbed Zed's wrist and their connection slammed into place with a kick. Choking back bile, Felix let go. Beside him, Zed had his hands over his ears and his eyes closed.

They were probably attracting attention. Without bothering to look, Felix tapped at his bracelet, ready to call for medical assistance. Beneath the platinum band, his left wrist ached. His fingers twitched. And he could hear voices.

Hello, hello! HELLO!

Felix met Zed's steel blue gaze. "Can you hear—"

"Yes," Zed ground out. He dropped his hands and patted the air over the table in a gesture no one but Felix understood. Zed had a lot more practice talking to aliens than he did. He had regular conversations with the Guardians, after all. Used to, anyway.

Now, he was trying to tell the resonance to lower their voices.

Closing his eyes, Felix did the same. *Too loud.*

Hello?

Much better. Most resonance had to be reminded about the volume control. They didn't have ears, and they communicated using resonant frequencies that could damage human systems, including biological ones.

Who/where? Felix sent, keeping his mental questions as simple as possible. The resonance didn't have words, either. He'd found communicating with them in terms of spatial relationships worked well. Like swapping engineering plans.

Here!

They didn't actually say that. They sent coordinates. Close coordinates. Felix looked up at Zed. "They're close by."

"Yeah, they're here for the same reason we are." Meaning the *Biswas*, not him and Zed personally, Felix assumed. Zed checked his wallet. "We're about ten hours from show time."

Drift cruisers looped through space in slow arcs. Because they never entered j-space—a folded envelope of reality forming the shortest distance between two points—they tended to confine their routes to a single system or defined region of space, allowing tourists to visit multiple stations, the rare planet marked as viable, and cruise past local phenomena.

The highlight of this cruise would be a close experience with one of the galaxy's most notable nebulae. Spanning twenty light years across, the Eagle Nebula was visible from as far away as Sol, over six thousand light years distant. They weren't much closer. Cruising through a nebula would be about as exciting as pressing your nose to a photograph. The unique clusters of gas and stars were better viewed from afar. They were close enough for the nebula to fill the view screens on one side of the *Biswas*, though, and tonight the polyglass windows would cycle through spectrums of light enhancement, painting the constellations with pretty colors.

The resonance wanted to view the nebula through human technology.

Honor. Zander Emissary. Fluffy Yellow Partner Unit. With. Meet. Resonate.

They wanted to board the *Biswas* and view the show with the two humans their species revered and adored.

Felix hated being revered and adored. He really liked the resonance, though.

It took a bit of maneuvering to arrange an audience with the captain of the *Biswas*, but Zed's name and his former position as the Guardian's emissary smoothed the way. Captain Guan greeted the news of the resonances' request with aplomb, though whether that was a result of inherent captain-ness or the fact that he helmed one of the most exclusive and passenger-centric drifts in human space, Zed didn't know. The rest of the command crew was disciplined enough not to show much emotion, but Zed caught a few nervous glances shared between colleagues.

The resonance were still new enough that the galaxy wasn't quite sure of them yet. They certainly seemed threatening, with their massive crystalline forms adorned with all manner of spikes and skewers—unless you could hear their thoughts.

Then it was difficult to think of them as anything but happy puppies.

A few hours later, Zed and Flick awaited the resonance in the docking area. The four hulking figures transitioned through the airlock, happiness and excitement radiating from them. Beside Zed, Captain Guan remained impressively impassive.

“Welcome to the *Biswas*,” the captain said.

Smiling, Zed translated.

A low hum emanated from the resonance. *Happy. Joy. Gratitude.*

“They thank you for allowing them to board, Captain. They're pretty excited to be here.”

“Of course.” A small smile appeared on Guan's lips. “We've cleared a viewing lounge for your use, if you'll follow me?”

Again, Zed passed along the captain's words. Or thoughts that encompassed the words, anyway. It was weird to be communicating in pure concepts again. With Flick, the thoughts they shared were easily interpreted and simplified into words, but without the basis of a shared language with the resonance, it always took a little more effort to get simple ideas across.

They moved into the corridor and Zed was pleased to see that although there were more crewmembers present and crowd-control measures in place, the *Biswas* had not attempted to keep the presence of the resonance a secret. Passengers lined the corridor. A few had their wallets out to take holos while others just stared, eyes wide.

For their part, the resonance seemed unconcerned with the presence of other humans. Zed's connection with them hummed with a constant stream of greeting, which made him smile. He wondered if someday the resonance would come up with a way to communicate without the shards—through sign language, perhaps.

That would be interesting. And freeing.

The lounge was large and completely empty of other passengers, which suited Zed just fine. As much as he appreciated the resonances' desire to make friends, acting as translator was tiring and felt too much like work. But he was looking forward to socializing with them.

Captain Guan saw them seated in front of the polyglass windows, then retreated with a nod. Tension drained out of Flick, and Zed realized his husband had been looking forward to being a translator about as much as he'd been.

The resonance...grew chairs. No matter how many times Zed saw them rearrange their crystalline bodies into another form, he'd never get used to it. They settled onto the floor in front of the windows, and as one, began to resonate. The vibrations sank into Zed's neck, but whereas before, their connection had been overwhelming, this sensation was gentle, welcoming. With a sigh, Zed sank into one of the chairs next to the resonance. Flick took the other one, and threaded the fingers of his crystalline hand through Zed's. Their link thrummed into place, magnifying the hum from the aliens at their side, but it actually felt kind of good.

Fluffy Yellow Partner Unit limb sufficient?

Smiling, Flick extracted his hand from Zed's and held it up, shifting his fingers into another shape, one of the tools he used occasionally. Without touch, Zed couldn't “hear” what Flick said to the resonance, but he felt the aliens' approval and humor.

“Show off,” he murmured to Flick.

Flick just smiled and leaned against him. The quiet contentment coming from him was something new, and Zed wondered if his husband was even aware that that now seemed to be his

natural state, instead of worry or tension. Zed wasn't sure if their honeymoon was the explanation for the change, or the fact that they'd finally made a decision for themselves, instead of being tossed around by the universe—either way, it didn't matter. It just felt damned good.

The constant hum was almost meditative in nature. Definitely calming. Zed found himself letting go of the nonsense about the stupid porno, letting go of whatever worry he'd had about their ever-increasing damage bills. In the grand scheme, none of that really mattered. He and Flick had fought the universe for their happiness, and they'd won. Happily ever after was bound to come with a few bumps, and a few minor surprises, but that was life.

The lights in the lounge dimmed further, drawing attention to the starscape beyond the window. Slowly, the stars changed from mostly white and yellow to various shades of pink, from magenta all the way to the lightest baby pink. The light and colors seemed to make the nebula dance, teasing out clouds and shapes Zed hadn't seen previously. Over the course of half an hour, the colors transitioned into blue, then green, then purple, orange, yellow, red...it was really quite spectacular. The reverberations from the resonance increased as their pleasure in the show did, and between that and the simple joy of watching pretty lights, Zed hadn't felt so content in ages.

Fluffy Yellow Partner Unit and Zander Emissary resonate strongly. There was a definite sense of approval in the resonances' thoughts.

Thank you, Zed replied. He lifted his arm to wrap it around Flick's shoulders. *He is my reason.* His everything. Zed pressed a kiss to the bouncy blonde curls that had earned Flick his resonance name.

More approval, paired with acceptance, filtered across their link with the aliens. Strange how comforting it felt. For once, Zed decided not to analyze it, and just immerse himself in the moment. He was with new friends, his new husband, enjoying an amazing view.

Life truly didn't get any better.

Chapter Six

So, the nebula show was pretty spectacular. Even pretty. Felix appreciated the fact he lived in a wide and wonderful galaxy, full of mystery and beauty. Sitting with Zed and a unit of resonance throughout the show, though, feeling all of them resonate their feelings about the same thing? Briefly, he wished the rest of the galaxy could get in on this connection thing. It could be weird hearing your lover's thoughts. Being bombarded with impressions of everything from the resonance was wearying. But the thread of belonging woven beneath it all made up for any discomfort. Of being accepted unequivocally as part of the group. Having thoughts thrust into your head because someone was that excited by the process of sharing them with *you*.

If he were the sentimental sort, he'd maybe have to wipe away a tear. Of course, Zed's enigmatic little smile and the gentle brushes of happy, fluffy thought from the resonance meant tears were unnecessary. His thoughts had been received.

On the way back to the docking area, Felix chatted with the smallest of the resonance. The engineer of the unit. Their conversation consisted mostly of an exchange of concepts. Felix knew his arm was limited. He also knew the limit was his imagination, or understanding of the technology. Like when he'd tried to unlock the cargo hatch of the *Chaos* with the touch of a crystalline finger.

According to the engineer—if they understood one another correctly—the idea hadn't been ridiculous. A resonance could have done it. Something about frequency perception and sonic manipulation.

Felix held up a finger and flattened the tip with a thought, making the tool he used most often—a flat head screwdriver. He thinned and lengthened the head, changed the shape, moving through his basic toolbox. He wasn't making an impressive demonstration, though the crew of the *Biswas* seemed interested. Instead, he concentrated on the feeling of the changes. The energy moving through his finger. The source, the purpose. The resonance. Then he paused a transition right in the middle so that his fingertip seemed to shimmer. A bright light sparked upward, then out in a circle of dancing points.

Not what he was trying for.

But beneath, he could feel the change. The vibration.

Resonance, the engineer thought at him. The song of the galaxy.

Nodding, Felix sent back an impression of yellow, which seemed to be the resonances' favorite color, and the way they often expressed happiness.

"Having fun?" Zed was eyeing his bright fingertip with amusement.

Felix touched his fingertip to Zed's cheek and grinned as he felt the resonant feedback as both a mental and physical hum. "Oh yeah. We're going to have fun with this."

He was going to trace every line of musculature on Zed's body with his humming fingertip. Then he'd work on the lock problem. Now, it was time to say goodbye to their guests. The captain of the *Biswas* kept his farewell brief and informal. Felix joined his thoughts to Zed's and sent warmth and contentment and joy. Or, yellow. The resonance ducked back through the airlock.

They'd managed an activity aboard the *Biswas* without destroying anything.

Then Zed did the diplomatic thing and thanked the captain for his hospitality.

Felix added his bit. "I'm sorry about the room."

"The room?" Captain Guan arched a brow.

"Oh, ah, hmm."

Zed touched his wrist and sent both a *what the fuck are you doing* and laughter.

“Your repair crews are very efficient,” Felix said.

The captain’s other brow joined the first.

Zed pulled on Felix’s wrist. “We’ve taken enough of your time, captain. Thank you.”

“Of course, Mr. Anatolius. If there’s anything else I or my crew could do for you, please don’t hesitate to let us know. It’s an honor to have both of you aboard the *Biswas*.”

After a final round of handshakes, they escaped back to their room. The kitchen had been tidied and both ’factors replaced. Felix’s experiment had been left behind, however, with all his pieces and parts laid out next to it on a new desk set against the far wall of the living space. Grinning, Felix clapped his hands together.

“Don’t even think about it,” Zed said.

“What?”

“Those new ’factors are not spare parts. See what’s on that new desk? Those are yours. Just those.”

“Pffft.”

“I’m serious, Flick.”

“Okay. I won’t take apart the snackfactor. But we don’t really need the coffee—”

“Felix.”

Felix dredged up a put upon expression, then wrapped his arms around his bulky husband and squeezed. And, because it felt pretty good there all nestled up against Zed’s chest, he snuggled in. Just a bit.

Zed wrapped his arms around him. “You being cute is weird and not at all distracting.”

“Yeah, but my new magic finger is going to do the trick.”

Felix pressed a kiss to Zed’s chin, then pulled out of his arms, took his hand and led him to the refurbished bedroom. He’d been half afraid the staff might affix permanent hooks to the headboard, thinking their guests required them. Thankfully, the bedroom looked as bland and somewhat cozy as it had from day one. Someone had folded his clothes and put them away, but otherwise, it still felt like their space.

He pushed Zed toward the bed until he sat, then straddled his lap and kissed him.

Kissing Zed numbered near the top of Felix’s list of favorite things to do. Sex was awesome. So was sleep. He could lose himself in a good project for hours. Nothing quite compared to the feeling of coming home that swept through him every time he touched his lips to Zed’s, though. Kisses were so intimate. An invitation to taste and share. A confirmation. Connection.

As always, their mental link snapped into being. Felix sent no thoughts, he merely reveled in the feeling of being surrounded by his lover. Then, pulling back, he kissed Zed’s chin and jawline. Moved along to nibble at an earlobe. Nipped and licked at his neck. Beneath him, Zed sighed and moaned. He had his hands wrapped around Felix’s back, his lips fastened to Felix’s neck. The moment was perfect.

And perfect only needed a moment. They were here to play.

“Shirt off,” Felix instructed.

Zed unwrapped his arms and tugged his shirt over his head. Felix ignited the tip of a crystalline finger so it hummed with light and touched it to one of Zed’s nipples, right below the piercing. Zed...keened.

“Is that a good sound or a bad sound?”

“It’s a...” Zed licked his lips and took a breath. “Fuck, I could feel that in my balls. It was good and weird and so fucking good. Do it again.”

Felix shuffled back off Zed's lap. "Lie back."

Zed kicked off his shoes and scooted back along the bed. Felix gestured toward his pants. "Might as well get rid of those too."

"Is this your fantasy? Ordering me about?"

"No. Maybe? You seem to like it." Zed often gave him a look that begged for instruction. Felix treated it like a game, not as a fantasy to indulge. He liked that Zed let him take charge in bed. He liked that Zed trusted him. Touching Zed's knee, he sent a tendril of thought to explain his feeling on the subject.

Zed returned a vague nod. "You don't want to go back to the fantasy suites."

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Do you?" Felix asked.

"I thought I did, but—"

"I could see us maybe having fun in a pirate ship holo or something. But, honestly, Zed? I don't want to have sex with you in a holo suite. I don't need to. You're..." Oh, wow, he hadn't been about to just say that, had he?

"I'm what? Are you blushing?"

"No."

"You are so blushing. Oh my God. Your ears are bright red!"

Growling, Felix bent to pick up the discarded shirt. Zed scooted forward so he sat on the edge of the bed again and grabbed at Felix's hand. "It's cute."

"What is this thing you have with cute today? I'm in no way, shape or form, cute."

Zed's smile broadened to a grin.

"Fine. You're my fantasy, okay? Just you. As you are. All big and muscly and a hero and letting me have my way with you, make love to you..." Could you do yourself an injury blushing?

"C'mere." Zed pulled him in close. "Love you."

Felix did his best impression of a Betan yarl for a second or two, thinking prickly and thorny thoughts. Then he softened and dropped a kiss to Zed's cheek. "Love you too. Now, do you want me to tease you with my magic finger or not?"

"Want." Zed sent a spike of need through the connection.

"Then we better finish getting undressed."

Shoes thumped to the floor and clothing fluttered down on top of them. Then Felix knelt on the bed next to Zed and leaned in for a kiss. Zed tasted of lust and love. Felix added his desire to the mix, and his love. The endless, boundless well of it. His certainty that what they had was everything.

Always and forever.

Sometimes, Flick had the best ideas. And he was absolutely right. They didn't need a fancy room or fantasies. They didn't need to tie each other up or banter dirty talk back and forth—though Zed would be the first to admit it had been hot as fuck. All they needed was each other. Their lips, their hands, their bodies.

He arched into the kiss, looking for some more friction anywhere. Anywhere at all. Flick chuckled against his lips and drew back, smiling. "Impatient."

"Horny," Zed countered.

Still grinning, Flick bent forward to nibble at Zed's neck, trailing toward his chest. The little nips drove Zed mad—they were so good, but not nearly enough. A zing against his nipple ring reminded him of Flick's new trick and he groaned, pressing his head back into the pillow. Flick knew all the buttons to push, all the notes to hit.

Flick's human thumb rubbed the tip of Zed's cock, smearing the drop of liquid there. He looked...kind of like a conquering king, kneeling on the bed beside Zed, intent, focused, and grinning evilly. "You really like that, huh?"

"Really do."

"Awesome." Before Zed knew what he was doing, Flick dragged his magic finger along his cock.

"Shit!" Zed whimpered—he couldn't help it. The touch didn't hurt, far from it. It was just intense. As Flick swept his finger up and down the sensitive skin, Zed swore he got harder. He squirmed and shifted, not really trying to get away, but unable to stay still. It was as though Flick's finger was a vibrator, buzzing along his skin—but reaching inside, too. Resonating with his cock.

It was fucking incredible.

"Are you gonna come?" Flick asked breathlessly.

"Don't—" Zed broke off with a groan. "Don't think so. Not like this." A couple of good strokes, though...

"But it's good?"

"*Fuck*, yes."

"What if I do this?" Flick's finger abandoned Zed's erection to travel further south, and Zed opened his legs further in anticipation and invitation.

His balls were almost too sensitive for the treatment, something Flick must have picked up on because he didn't linger there. Instead, his finger dipped behind Zed's balls and softly stroked, the resonance making Zed bite his lip and moan. He was hardly thinking when he drew his legs up and held them behind his knees, giving Flick all the room he could possibly want.

"Oh yeah." Flick pushed up Zed's knee a little more so he could maneuver in between his legs. "There we go. You need any prep?"

With how often they'd been having sex over the past few days? "Nope, I'm good."

Flick grabbed the lube and slicked himself up, then brushed more against Zed's hole. It was so tempting to let go of one of his legs and have a stroke—he wasn't quite on the cusp of orgasm yet, but it wouldn't take much to get there. Need and want and horniness thrummed through him, though he wasn't sure where his thoughts ended and Flick's began.

The head of Flick's cock pressed against Zed's ass, then slowly, slowly edged inside. God, yes. Zed let his head fall back, reveling in the sensation of being stretched and filled. Their connection snapped into place, even stronger than a moment ago, and Zed let the thoughts and emotions wash over him, taking away the last of his coherent thought.

Too soon, not soon enough, Flick was fully inside of him. He met Flick's gaze for a moment, noting that Flick seemed just as breathless as Zed was.

"Yeah?" Flick asked.

"Yeah."

Flick didn't need any further invitation. He leaned over Zed, his crystalline hand gripping Zed's hip and his human hand braced on the bed, and thrust.

They knew every one of each other's tells now. The signs to speed up, the signs to slow down. When they should slam their bodies together as hard and fast as possible, and when they

should make love slowly, easily. Tonight wasn't a slow and easy night—Flick had gotten Zed too worked up for that. He hooked a hand behind Flick's neck and tugged him down for a sloppy, urgent kiss.

"Harder," he whispered.

"Demanding." Flick pulled out, leaving Zed gasping, and tapped Zed's hip. "Over."

Grinning, Zed got to his hands and knees. Flick slid back home without hesitation, and proceeded to give Zed exactly what he'd asked for. Hard, harder—and with every stroke, Flick hit his prostate, making his whole body light up. Zed's head drooped as he pushed back into each of Flick's thrusts, taking him as deep as he could.

"So good," he slurred.

Flick's only answer was a grunt—but then a hand surrounded Zed's dick, and he couldn't help his shout of surprise. Flick stroked in time with his thrusts, and Zed was almost...almost...

"Fuck!" Colors exploded across his vision as he came, hard, his whole body tensing up. Caught up in his own shudders and waves of climax, he was barely aware of Flick finding his own release.

His arms and legs suddenly gave out, sending them both sprawling to the bed. Flick nuzzled the nape of his neck and chuckled. "Wimp."

"I am officially fucked out," Zed said into the pillow.

After a second, Flick shifted to lie beside him and poked and prodded until Zed rolled onto his back, making room for cuddling. Zed didn't bother to hide his smile, and Flick huffed at him even as he tucked himself against Zed's broader form.

There really wasn't anything better than lying in bed, totally sated—even if there was a bit of a wet spot—with his husband's mop of curls tickling his chest, Zed decided. Not a damned thing. He pressed a kiss to Flick's hair, then let himself drift, enjoying the post-orgasm light show put on by his wacky brain chemistry.

Fifteen minutes or an hour could have passed when Flick suddenly stiffened beside him. Zed jerked fully awake. "What?"

"I figured it out. If I switch out the capacitor, and do a different connection...then reflect that change in the code..."

Zed angled himself up to look at Flick. "What are you talking about?"

"The 'factor. Oh my God, why didn't I see it before? It makes perfect sense. And it would increase the output by..." Flick let his words trail off. "Sorry. I shouldn't—you're right, no more tinkering." Flick rolled on his side, closer to Zed, and closed his eyes.

Zed didn't need their connection to tell him that Flick's mind hadn't stopped spinning, though. He sighed. "Go."

Flick popped up. "Really?"

"I have two stipulations. One—don't blow anything up. Two—use the desk, okay? Save your back."

"Done and done. Okay. I've totally got this." Without a look back, Flick scrambled out of bed and into the living area, still naked. He probably wouldn't notice he was naked, either, until a spark landed somewhere unpleasant.

Sighing happily, Zed tucked his hands under his head and watched colors play across the ceiling. He drifted off to sleep to the sound of Flick's tinkering and low curses—maybe not the most romantic thing to an outsider looking in, but to Zed, it was perfect. It was the essence of the man he'd married, and he wouldn't change it for anything in the galaxy.

THE END

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HONEYMOON

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