

Part 17. Naltag



Naltag had followed the archiver's assistant once before. Per remembered which dormitory was hers. As the only woman permitted to assignation, Eva was unique to the compound, and therefore, worthy of study.

The first visit, Naltag hadn't stayed for long. The dynamic between Eva and her parents was nearly identical to that of Jeremiah's: a deferment of freewill Naltag had rarely seen on other planets. The one difference with Eva's familial unit was her place in its structure. While Jeremiah enjoyed mild roaming privileges, being cooked for and cleaned up a er, Eva's sole allowance outside of the dorm was her time spent at the archiver's. Upon arrival back home, she donned a Marme's tunic, and commenced household duties. She moved de ly about the dorm, avoiding eye contact with her father, and never speaking unless spoken to.

When Naltag observed Eva a second time, she lounged in her Marme tunic (a dull pink shapeless sack), shut up in her room. Her eyes closely centered on an interface. Naltag heard an on-screen voice intone:

"To Please a Man: Part One. Another aspect of foreplay includes role-playing. To begin, select a pre-selected costume. Make sure to paint your face according to manual standards."

The narrator's instructions continued, citing pictorial representations. Eva's Marme entered the room, prompting Naltag to move to an empty corner. She resembled Jeremiah's Marme, not in looks, but in the tired expression which twisted her face. Her tunic was streaked with grease and bleach stains. Naltag imagined the haggard Marme painted up in a lustful costume, and couldn't.

She asked her daughter about her studies. Eva expressed concerns over fulfilling her duties, to which her mother responded by pulling out phallic training tools. The girl shook her head, but her Marme nodded, plopping a phallus onto Eva's open palm. The head shaking increased in intensity.

"Practice is needed to please Quentin. I'll start. Now watch, girl." Marme's open mouth hovered near the tool.

Naltag gathered per's things and quietly slipped from the room.

The news would dishearten Jeremiah. Naltag looked forward to recording the child's response. The boy kept things locked up, likely a result of conditioning. Perhaps this would be the thing to break through ordinance.

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Actually, Jeremiah took the information rather well. Naltag found the response o -putting. Jeremiah was aware of required training, and told Naltag of the male equivalent. From fi een and onward, boys were allowed access to training videos of a similar variety.

They watched simulated procreation for training, and recreation. Jeremiah sounded wistful in describing the age limit and video use. Males were not required to use props, as Eva was, but it was encouraged. One issue Jeremiah took contention with was Eva's age, as the usual training for females began at fourteen. Yet, hers was occurring two years early.

Naltag wanted to know why she would be chosen for early training.

As the answer dawned on Jeremiah, Naltag could tell the child disliked his own conclusion:

"She's been pre-assigned." To elaborate, he added, "Be married soon."

"What's normal marrying age?"

Jeremiah knotted up his blanket, unknotted it. He chewed his cheek and wouldn't look at Naltag.

"Sixteen," he finally mumbled.

Naltag asked more questions, with each answer being harder to extract. Lately, Jeremiah tired easily, and though he didn't say it, Eva's betrothal affected him.

One of his answers stood out: "Women need not know of carnal desires until it becomes their duty to fulfill them."

The sentence flowed, unbroken by compound-jargon. Jeremiah seemed oblivious to the meaning. Like other ordinances, he merely repeated them.

"What say you to Eva's betrothal?" Naltag inquired.

"Naught." Jeremiah sustained the steady calm per admired.

Though calm had its purpose, per recognized it also as a shield.

"Naught to say over losing a friend?"

Jeremiah settled his head on a pillow, drawing in a deep breath. "Ain't my friend."

The words rang of a lie, and a cutting one. Then Naltag understood.

In the compound, women were caregivers and fulfilled carnal desires, but were never friends.

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