

## Part 25. Jeremiah

Warm.

Everything was so warm.

Eva kept laughing, and Jeremiah didn't know what was so funny.

"Let's go."

But she didn't want to go. Eva warned that they had to stay. It was all he needed to hear. It didn't matter that it was the thirty-first time.

Nothing in the whole compound could get him to leave the field.

Green hills rolled on in an endless display. Jeremiah could remember a time when a few splashes of green could be spied in the dirt, like the errant hairs on his father's head.

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"You're sick," Da said.

"I'm not sick."

"Didn't suppose so," Eva said.

Her hair rippled in the wind. Against the backdrop of the cerulean sky and the carpet of grass, she appeared more perfect than ever. Her red dress hung off all the right lines. Red. How did she know to wear his favorite color?

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Eva's lips were red, too. She licked them, and Jeremiah imagined what else they might do. What nature intended for her to do.

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As of hearing his thoughts, the wind blew over either again, harder this time. Teasingly, the hem of her silken dress shimmied up, exposing first coltish knees, then smooth thighs. He dared not look away, as he had every right to look.

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Eva agreed, moving her legs apart, exposing herself fully. There was a darkness there, and it could take him to a great place. All the videos said so.

Eva agreed, moving her legs apart, exposing herself fully. There was a darkness there, and it could take him to a great place. All the videos said so.

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She leaned forward, and he watched bountiful breasts tumble from her dress. Which wasn't right. The evil he knew didn't have breasts. She was a child like him and couldn't-----.

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Euphoria overrode reason.

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Jeremiah could have stayed outside forever, with her, with her in the deepest of ways.

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Suddenly, the delicious sensation ceased, and a cold draft blew over his lower half. Warmth. He would never be warm, that warm, again.

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He couldn't see. Something blocked his vision, but his eyes were open. Was he blind? Panicked, he clawed at his face, ripping off a panel of tech.

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The first thing he saw was Kilah. She smiled and waved. He tried to smile back, but the muscles were responding to his commands.

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What a dream, he thought. That's when he noticed he wasn't waking in his caught at all. His caught was a hard panel chair, complicated by a harness system along the bottom.

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An enticing set of tubes led out from the device, Anna shutter passed through Jeremiah at the sight of them. The field, the warmth, it crashed through his mind for a flash, but the cold room returned in a hurry.

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Far from his blue-ringed field, this room was filled with glaring white walls and carts of tech. A reflective strip along the ceiling meant the room was being watched by a multitude of cameras. Soon someone would come in and take Kilah away, maybe lock her in a room all her own.

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The thought animated him. Jeremiah is delirium broke momentarily, and he ripped Tech patches from his arm. Instantly he felt lighter.

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Each patch on his arms and throat had been saturating him with sedatives and opiates. And he tried to get up, he found he could hardly move.

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Seeing this, Kilah moved to help him. Her short arms and small fountain of strength lifted him from his lacquered prison.

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Bwap Bwap

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Sirens echoed around the small space as Jeremiah left the chair. At the noise, Jeremiah felt ready to go anywhere his sister let him.

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But there was only one exit, and the dissipating panel had nothing to activate from inside of the cell. Jeremiah beat one limp hand on the barrier, getting shocked for his trouble. They were trapped.

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He couldn't stop tears leaking from his eyes. He supposed it wouldn't do to be captured while half-naked. Jeremiah grabbed for a blanket from the floor, missed it, tried again, and fell down. Kilah picked up both him and the blanket, tucking the fabric so it wouldn't fall off his slim hips.

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"Come." She tugged at his useless arm, a dead limb if there ever was one.

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Where, he wanted to say, but his mouth refuse to work. A rock the size of a workman's motor blocked his throat, and it hurt to swallow his spit.

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Jeremiah allowed himself to be tugged. It took forever to move him from one spot to another. Minutes passed, or seconds, but he was sure the barrier would come down, revealing an Enforcer.

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"Up." Kilah pointed at a grate near the ceiling, or where a grate had been.

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Now it was a big hole, and it was open. Naltag waited there, tensile cable in hand.

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"Can't abandon," Jeremiah whispered through the pain in this throat.

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"Sick."

"Sick."

"Sick."

"No, you ain't."

"No, you ain't."

"No, you ain't."

He was too weak to stop Kilah from tying the cable around his waist.

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He was too weak to stop Kilah from tying the cable around his waist.

One tug, and Naltag pulled them both up. Before reaching the opening, the cell wall dissipated, and in swept two Enforcers.

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Naltag snatched the children through the opening and replaced the gate before they could be seen. The Enforcers didn't know what to make of the empty room. They searched every corner, even though there was nowhere in the sparse room for a soul to hide.

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"Let's move," Naltag said.

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No sooner had they crawled from the opening than a laser rebounded off the walls. They avoided the deadly shot, but another one quickly followed. The second ray grazed Jeremiah arm.

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It was like a sharp bite piercing his flesh, the pain nearly as potent as his separation from the warm. He thought his arm might fall off. The heat was unbearable, and it was spreading down the length of his upper arm. His instinct was to press his hands to the injury, but Naltag batted him away.

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"Don't touch it! The burn could take your hands with it."

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He positioned Jeremiah in front, pushing him along. The combination of agony and harsh movements caused Jeremiah to fade from consciousness.

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Kilah's question faded into the background of his awareness:

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"Where to now?"

"Where to now?"

"Where to now?"

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