

## Part 9. Naltag



**Per decided to visit** Jeremiah's room.

Until the child came home, Naltag planned to explore his private space. The exploring wouldn't take long, seeing as how the dorms were built small, and it went against ordinance to decorate or fill them with what Da sneered at as "stu".

Jeremiah was allowed a standard issue blanket (folded neatly on top of his cot), two compound uniforms (pressed by Marme and hanging on his wall), and one historical novel.

Naltag picked up the tome from the metal nightstand. It featured black plastic binding, with the title *New American Ordinance*. Before opening the cover, per heard Jeremiah greet his Marme. She commanded him to steam before dinner. Steaming was an efficient way of cleansing the body, and it helped with ailments, or so Da had insisted. Naltag was familiar with the washroom, and had turned on the steamer with a wave of a hand. A warm current converted water into steam, steam which then descended into the washroom like fog. On a small metal ledge sat a squishy bar. Its purpose was unknown. Naltag made a note to ask Jeremiah about the mysterious object.

Dinner ended, and the child retired to his dorm. Naltag remained cloaked in the main room, watching Marme at work in the kitchen. Kilah cleared the mess from the table, bringing everything to her mother. Marme angled the serve wear underneath a yellow light, and the food cleared away like magic. Da made no move to aid his wife. Instead, he kept his seat at the table. His eyes stuck on Marme, and Naltag assumed he was watching her to ensure her work was done properly. When Marme quietly informed him she was finished, Da let her by the arm to their dorm.

He bade Kilah good night, a raw passion momentarily painting his lined face. His grip on Marme tightened, but she didn't cry out. Their dorm room closed, and Naltag ceased recording.

Jeremiah was through steaming by now. The child was relaxed, ready for bed. Perfect time to approach without scaring him o' again.

Naltag opened the holo pad on per's forearm. Only two quipu le .

Having felt the cloak's ill effects before, the child knew immediately when per had entered the room. He bolted up right in his cot, sweeping his eyes around. He couldn't see Naltag, but he still tried. Somehow, his gaze fell in the vicinity of where per was, and it held.

The child was focusing on the emissions from the cloak to find per. Naltag was again overwhelmed by the confirmation of per's choice.

"Was assignation more agreeable?"

Naltag wanted to put the child at ease right o'. It worked, and the question stopped Jeremiah from screaming for his parents.

"I'm acclimatin'."

Gone was the child's curiosity. He was guarded, hostile even. Naltag thought on how to quickly win the child back. Gi's? No, this compound had an ordinance against gi's. If anything, the o'er of a gi' would push the child away for good.

Knowledge and truth were highly favored by archivers. The child would want to know, to see.

"Today I will message the people of my world. You can 'company me."

Jeremiah's expression changed. "Where?"

"Topside."

The child shied again, this time from excited to disappointed. "Not allowed. My tillin' days ended. Topside rotation not for months."

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