

FOR LOVE OF HUMANITY NOT

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The recessed lights in the curved ceiling flickered as Kalin Duval made his way through the murky corridors, heading for his cyclic nightly duty as bartender in the dingy lounge of Asteria. He shook his head in disgust at the ineptitude of the techs—how hard was it to keep the power at a constant level? Of course, if you believed the brochures, this hollowed out rock had been in operation for over 100 years and at least a quarter of that time it was practically deserted. Until the AI war was over, no one felt safe on any facility not protected by the military. Despite the constant fear of destruction, Asteria had survived with minimal maintenance and crew and it was still in operation. It would take a lot of work to get it back in shape, but still...

Turning a corner his left knee locked up again and his off-kilter forward motion spun him into the rough-hewn wall. Crap! He despised techs in general—they could not fix a simple power supply problem or a malfunctioning servo! This close he could see the striations and air pockets in the rock wall of the asteroid. *Too low of a power setting on the mining lasers*, Kalin mused to himself, reaching down to massage his knee joint. *Another mark against dim-witted technicians—they could not do anything right!* Abandoning the gentle massaging that did not seem to be helping he resorted to several solid thumps to the affected area. His knee loosened up and he was on his way again. In the dim light, he passed door after door to so-called ‘luxury suites’ that should have been painted years ago, and would probably wait for years more before seeing any. What a dump!

Entering the lounge from the hallway, he saw Julio talking animatedly with a customer over the chipped and gouged antique bar. Kalin was a little jealous of Julio and his apparent ease with social situations. He had yet to see a creature that did not take to Julio immediately and treat him as a long lost friend. Why couldn’t he get along with people like that? It would sure make a difference in tips. Julio more than doubled his pay with the tips he brought in. Kalin was barely able to survive on the paltry wages and the few tips he earned. He shook his head in grudging admiration as he made his way through the tables to the bar and joined his friend as the customer left with a drink in his hand.

“*Qué pasa?*” Julio saluted nonchalantly, placing yet another large tip in his pocket.

“*Nada, amigo, nada.* What’s up with you?”

“The women, they are beautiful. The tips have been adequate, and my shift is over. Life does not get much better, my friend. How was your day?”

Kalin grinned, his mood lightening immediately. Julio had a way of doing that. He was perpetually in a good mood and it was infectious.

“Same old, same old. Something new would be nice.”

“Speaking of something new,” Julio’s large black eyes bored into Kalin’s. “You’re a little late, my friend. Too much dancing with the *Chiquita’s* after last night’s shift, no?”

“No. You know me better than that. Besides, who’d want anything to do with a cobbled up mess like me?”

“Ah, *mi amigo*, you have much to learn about the ways of women. Your—enhancements—would appeal to many females.”

“Maybe. I have not been in a relationship since the accident—I cannot remember any before that. Sometimes I think I’d like to meet someone, but I’m not so desperate that I’m willing to satisfy some woman’s desire to experience a freak show,” Kalin pulled his sleeve up, exposing more of the robotic replacement arm than was usually visible.

“You are too harsh on yourself, *amigo*. It is not your fault you are this way.”

“No? If I’d been in my right mind, I could have refused their offer to experiment on me,” Kalin jerked his sleeve back in place. “They tell me it was my decision, but I don’t remember anything about the accident. I can’t even remember how I got here!”

“At least you are alive, *amigo*, and you have a life,” Julio evaded the touchy question of Kalin’s origins and gestured at their surroundings before gathering his things to leave.

“If you can call it that,” Kalin snorted in disgust. “If I’d known what it was going to be like, I’m sure I would never have agreed to it. Then I’d be dead, not this freaky thing wandering around a stupid, hollowed out asteroid that’s pretending to be a pleasure palace.”

“You could have done that. But then you would not have had the pleasure of meeting the fabulous Julio.”

“Give me a break,” Kalin tossed the words at the departing back of the Oobleck. His mood took a turn for the worse watching the bi-pedal creature waltz through the bar, using two of the hands on his four arms to wave at patrons while the other two smoothed his abundant black hair away from the green skin of his forehead. Had his life come to this? The highlight of his day was bantering with a green-skinned, five-foot tall creature that thought he was a reincarnation of Casanova, complete with a quasi-Spanish accent. If only he could remember! Surely he was meant for better than this—what was he doing before the accident? Why were there no records or medical charts on him? Supposedly, everything had been destroyed in the fire, but surely someone had the answers. What the hell was he doing out here in the first place? The thing that bothered him the most was his memory gap. He could remember trivia and history going back centuries, yet he could not remember anything specific toward a life. It was if he appeared out of nowhere in the middle of an accident he could not even remember, and he woke up on Asteria. Kalin shook his head and turned to the dirty glasses behind the bar.

It was quiet in the lounge. Occupancy was way down and if things did not pick up soon, he would be looking for more gainful employment. That was not an easy task currently; he was lucky to have employment at all given the way he looked. The AI war had really done a number on this sector and the only work around here was on Asteria. Hell, the only place left inhabitable within 50 parsecs was Asteria—his memory of events before the accident were not complete in regards to himself, but he remembered everything about the war and knew that most of the inhabitable places close to Asteria’s present position had been completely destroyed wiping out

the AI's. People were terrified that the destruction of the androids was not complete and it would start all over again. So terrified that people like him, living with robotic replacement parts so they could function in society, found it tough to be accepted. They looked too much like androids for most peoples' comfort. Especially him, with not only his arms and legs, but other areas with synthetic skin...

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