

Lacuna Blue

By Mantrid Brizon

Chapter Twenty: Stabilizer

Sitting in the lounge, their ships safely in a warp bubble, George cuddles with May atop a bench, watching the cyan and pink swirls dancing along the walls and ceiling. They are already a day into their flight back to Lagos Depot. Sitting at one corner, Donovan plays poker with Catalina, the dark-skinned, dreadlocked slave girl he'd chosen. Rather than brutalize and rape her, as she must have expected would happen to her, Donovan treats her with the utmost respect, rescuing her because he felt bad for a fellow dark-skinned human.

"Damn." Donovan murmurs, setting down his hand.
"You, girl, have some serious luck."

"Don't I know it." Catalina quips.

"I'm lucky this is just a friendly game." He continues.

"That's okay, Mr. Craig. Maybe next time we'll play strip poker? Make it more interesting?" She chuckles.

"Not for me and my fat ass." He says with a smirk, dealing a new hand.

Catalina giggles, taking her cards. The door to the lounge slides open and Prat strolls in, his companion by his side.

“See?” He turns to her.

“Wow!” She exclaims.

“Yeah... Ain’t it pretty?” He releases a happy sigh.

“Aren’t you the romantic.” George murmurs.

“No, I... Ju-... Shut up.” Prat mutters.

The group inside simply chuckle. To everyone’s surprise, Prat is even sweeter to Marissa, the white furred bunny Voeldahn whom he had chosen. Dotting on her like a lovesick schoolboy, it took her barely a day to relax around him. Now, with her more comfortable that he was not out to use and abuse her, he gives her a tour of the ship, eager to learn about her. The fact that the freelance slavers had a policy preventing either girl from being raped or abused before sale made them mentally sound enough to adapt to the situation more readily.

Taking a seat at the corner opposite Donovan and Catalina, nearest the windows, Prat and Marissa sit and look at the shimmering colors of the warp bubble. Looking at the two girls and the men who share their company, George’s heart feels a warmth; he’s thankful that his crew can continue to surprise him. Catalina and Marissa are far luckier than they could ever possibly imagine. If it were any

other group, both women would probably be begging for respite or even the release of death at this very moment.

Looking to May, she can see the warmth in his eyes. Resting a hand on his chest, she leans in and kisses him lovingly. The pair nuzzle each other, their arms wrapped around one another. Donovan clears his throat, distracting the couple, but doing so in an effort to halt the stares of both newcomers. They glance away before the couple notices. Neither is used to seeing such a mixed-race pairing; humans have such a low population by comparison to the Voeldahn that they often don't intermarry.

Turning back to peer through the windows, George stares at the beauty of the warp bubble as May strokes his cheek softly with her claws.

"I wonder what James is doing right now." He comments.

"Yeah, why didn't that ass hole ride with us?" Prat asks loudly.

"Prat!" Marissa nudges him in the chest.

"Ow." Prat rubs his ribs, grinning at the slender girl.

"It's fine. Mr. Kahb asked a valid question. My ass hole brother likes luxury. He always has and he probably always will." George begins.

"His girly-ass choice of ship was a dead giveaway." Donovan quips.

“Indeed. Who am I to deny his request to fly back with Mr. Cost and Mr. Irving aboard the Animus? That’d make me an even bigger ass hole.” George smirks.

As the ships launch and turn toward space, James escorts Erica toward a private cabin, issued him by captain Irving. Though not physically touching Erica, she still trembles as she walks through the halls of the fancy yacht, her heart pounding. What will her new master do? Will he rape her? Perhaps torture her? Living for several weeks in that cage, she had all of that time to imagine a wretched fate. It did not help that while being dragged to the cell, the vile Maria and Silva taunted her with every possibility.

Opening the door and presenting the room to her, Erica steps inside. Wearing only a blanket he had requested, as there were no clothes for any of the slaves upon their collection, she knows that she is ripe for his picking. Her muscles tighten, her body becoming a fearful stone as the door slides closed behind her. Sitting at a desk, James draws his blaster and visibly locks it within a drawer, disarming himself in front of her.

“You should take a shower. Clean up. Relax. I’ll requisition you some clothing and order us dinner.” James calmly speaks.

Her brow furls, perplexed by his calm and unexpectedly polite behavior. He turns his head to her, staring directly into her big, brown eyes. Erica’s arms relax,

her body loosening. The blanket that covers her frame slides away. With her body now visible to him for a second time, she is amazed that he doesn't turn his eyes downward. Turning her head and glancing over her shoulder, she looks at the only other adequately sized door. Looking back, James waves her through, a little grin on his face.

Stepping through the door, the pale-skinned human enters an unusually ornate bathroom. Walking into a stand-up shower, she washes herself for the first time in nearly a month. After taking the time to enjoy herself for the first time in ages, she steps out of the shower, wrapping a towel around her chest. Emerging from the bathroom, she is surprised by what she sees. Not only had James found and laid out two outfits, a simple pair of pants and a shirt, alongside red silk pajamas, there is a portable tray with a plate of food.

A lavish meal of medium-rare steak, sunny-side up eggs, and what appears to be caviar sit on a cream-colored plate lined with gold leaf. Golden colored utensils sit beside it, and several options of drinks, including water, milk, red wine and orange juice.

"I didn't know what you'd like. I'm sorry if you aren't a fan of steak or eggs, but I haven't met a person yet who won't eat caviar." James says calmly, still seated at the desk.

"Oh... Where's your food?" She sheepishly asks.

James rotates the chair, turning his side to face her and revealing a nearly identical plate on the desk, just out of her view. A glass of red wine and another of water sit near his golden utensils.

“Oh...” She murmurs, sitting down. “Are these for me?” She asks, looking to the clothes.

“Indeed, they are. I assumed you’d rather have night clothes for sleeping.” He answers.

“Why are you doing this? Why are you helping me?” She asks.

“I... You stood out, and so I chose you.”

Though his answer is somewhat cryptic, looking into James’ eyes, he appears sincere. Gesturing with his hands toward the food and the clothing, Erica subtly nods. Rising from the bed, she is surprised when James gives her the privacy of turning away, though he immediately begins eating his food. Dressing in the night clothes, the pair sit in near silence as they eat their meals. Once she is finished, James takes her tray, leaving her alone in the room while he tends to the dishes, returning them to the ship’s kitchen.

Returning only minutes later, James sits with her atop the bed, using a controller to activate a wall-mounted holoscreen. Flipping through the ship’s stored programming, he picks a drama series and begins to watch. Turning his head, he pats the space beside him. Erica scoots closer. Glancing apprehensively at her new master, he extends an arm, offering her the remote.

“Would you like to change it?”

She shakes her head. Keeping some distance, they sit in awkward silence. James seems quite content to have her company, while Erica is elated to simply be allowed her dignity. After hours of watching the holoscreen, James yawns and stretches. He takes off his shoes and most of his clothing, standing in only his underwear. Her fear returning at the sight of him in his boxers, she finds herself once again relieved when he climbs into bed, burrowing under the covers. Lying on his back, he turns his head to her.

“Sorry, but there’s only one bed in all of these cabins. We’ll have to share for the moment.”

“That’s alright.” She murmurs.

“You should try to get some sleep, eventually.” He says as he rolls over, his back facing her.

Falling asleep rather quickly, Erica sits up and watches James for some time. Though he has yet to touch her inappropriately, she worries that all isn’t well with James. So calm and polite, and with dashing good looks, he is everything that she would’ve wanted in a man, where she not tricked into becoming a slave by Maria. Had she met him at a coffee shop or while strolling around town, she’d have fallen for him in an instant, but considering his business and his bizarre, uncharacteristically nice behavior, she is left apprehensive.

Her eyelids growing heavy, she lies back atop the covers, still trying to watch her new master. As she begins to drift off, James jolts subtly, mumbling in his sleep. Now paying close attention to the resting man, she can hear him as he talks in his sleep.

“Mmnnn. Nnn. No. Stah-. Stop screaming. Nnh... I’m sorry...” He mumbles in his sleep.

Listening further, it’s obvious that her new master has a troubled conscience. Perhaps he isn’t such a bad man after all? As he shifts and pleads with the beings in his mind, she cannot help but pity the lost soul. However, the realization also gives her hope. A plan formulates in her mind, her lips curling into a sinister grin. If this is what she must do for her continued survival and well-being, she’ll placate her new master. After all, why shouldn’t she use him for her own ends, if that’s what it takes?

Curling up to him, James jolts slightly as her hands rest upon his body. Blinking, he turns to her.

“I-I’m sorry. I... I can’t sleep... I... Can you hold me? Please?” She asks her master sweetly.

With a little grin, James rolls over and extends an arm toward her. Sliding underneath the covers, Erica cannot believe how easy it was. Holding her in his arms as if she

were his estranged wife, he tucks an arm beneath her D-cup breasts and snuggles with the woman. Cuddling with her, he falls asleep even faster than before. Resting peacefully, Erica strokes his forearm with her fingers. If she can continue to appease him, she may find herself actually enjoying her life with these people. James has considerable wealth and power at his disposal.

The thought almost makes her chuckle, but realizing the faction that possesses her, she forces herself to remain pessimistically optimistic. Closing her eyes, she feels a strange comfort lying with her captor. She's taken aback by the bizarreness of it all, but with tired eyes, she would rather face it in the morning. After a deep and peaceful sleep, she awakens to James, arm still around her as she lay on her back. With his fingers tucked beneath her side, she is pulled exceptionally close to him.

Looking to James as he sleeps, she watches him with curiosity. Soon, he opens his eyes. Turning his head to yawn, he stretches and rises from the bed. Excusing himself to wash, he takes a moment to place an order of food with the crew of the Animus beforehand. Loyal Slavers, who are eager to please their powerful and often insidious captains, work feverishly to keep them happy. James collects his clothes and takes a moment to shower and brush his teeth. He returns from the bathroom in time for their breakfast to arrive.

Sharing a meal and surprisingly benign yet pleasant small talk, Erica also washes herself before dressing in her

day clothes. With slippers so generously provided for her feet, they walk down the hardwood floors of the Animus' halls. Spending the day together, James makes a concerted effort to get to know the woman. He asks for her personal preferences; her favorite foods, shows, colors and what she enjoys doing on her free time. Erica never expected James to be so... Charming. His pleasant demeanor and sincere questioning, all of which he returns in kind, eases her mind.

Relaxed enough to act herself, Erica shares the details of her enslavement, and even what she did before. It isn't the most appealing story, nor was her life anything special before her captivity, but James still listens intently. His warmth makes him easier to manipulate. Sitting beside the Slaver at a booth in the dining room of the Animus, they are accompanied by the other Slavers who claim nearby tables. Erica can see James' expression change. Glaring at someone with a seething rage, she turns to see Michael.

Sitting at his own table, a male Voeldahn slave, tethered to his master with a leash like a pet, serves his master food. Sitting beside Michael is a human female, her head shaved and a fresh wound on her scalp, stitched and slowly beginning to scar over. Seeing James' gaze, Michael raises a glass and nods his head to her master. Turning back, James' does the same, but his expression doesn't change. The reality of her situation sinks in. Her devious plans to manipulate her master morph into a genuine gratefulness; she could have easily been Michael's property instead.

“You’re lucky, you know.” James whispers to her, leaning over. “Not all of us are like them. I had to hear that fucking psycho raping that poor girl during a call... And the other things he’s done...”

“... Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why did you pick me?” Erica softly asks.

“... Because... You looked as hopeless as I feel... I wanted one of us to be saved, and it sure as hell wasn’t going to be me.”

Her breath catches in her throat at his answer. It’s all she can do to continue her meal; her gratefulness and pity for the man she should call her ‘master’ is overwhelming. After dinner, they return to their cabin for their second night together. As before, James is courteous, gentle, and extremely relaxed. With her mind thinking back to the poor woman forced to sit with Michael, the glazed look in her eye and the scarring wound on her scalp from impromptu surgery, Erica might as well be free.

Sitting together and watching a show from the collection of stored programming, Erica scoots closer, of her own volition. She leans into James, who so carefully drapes an arm over her shoulders. He pulls her closer, treating her gingerly, as if she were made of glass. The care he takes with her is almost loving and her curiosity grows.

“You’re so gentle.” Erica begins.

“Well, you’re a delicate woman.” James retorts.

“I haven’t felt this comforted since before my parents died last year.” She shares.

“Really?” James looks surprised. “I’m sorry!” He says, holding her tighter.

“Thanks. It was a hovercar accident...” She sighs sorrowfully as she remembers her parents.

“That must have been hard.” James says softly.

“It certainly contributed to this... How I ended up here. James... You’re so caring and sweet... Do... Do you have family?”

“I... Uh...” James voice shakes. “I have my brother.” He says before sniffing. “He runs the whole crew.” A tear streams down his cheek.

Sitting upright, she looks to him as he turns his head away. Lips peeled back and teeth clenched, James suddenly breaks down into tears. Triggered by a simple question, she is left shocked with the overwhelming display of his raw emotions. Collapsing before her very eyes, her heart aches for the gentle and affectionate man who has yet to even touch her without her approval, despite owning her as a slave. Struggling to collect himself, Erica leans in and wraps her arms around him, holding him tightly to comfort him.

After managing to collect himself, he apologizes to her and explains that he has two children that he doesn’t see,

and a wife who cheated on and humiliated him. James regales her with every sordid detail, from the video Kelly sent, their beating at his hands, his imprisonment, status as a fugitive, and the fact that his wife now lives with the same man who had been her lover on that very video. Adding insult to injury, his last communication with his agent revealed that Kelly was pregnant with Jayne's baby.

Erica is left speechless; she only feels worse for him. More than that, she's upset at such a horrible betrayal. All things considered, the passionate and oft strong-willed woman can now understand how James wound up where he is. Overcome by genuine compassion, she scoots closer and rests a hand on his shoulder. Giving a light squeeze, James turns to her and gazes at her with tear filled eyes. Leaning in, he hugs her and snuffles, swaying gently from side to side. Her fingers run along his back, stroking and comforting him.

With the pain in his heart slowly subsiding, James feels a strange and sudden attachment to his slave. Though at first, she was merely a person he could do something good for, but now she's a much more comforting presence. Perhaps this is how George and May feel for each other? Even when breaking the law, committing such terrible crimes, the couple seem to take solace in their love for each other; James now feels as though he can understand them.

"I'm sorry." James snuffles. "I shouldn't be troubling you with this."

"It's okay." She coos. "Everything's going to be alright."