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1. [Chapter 1](#) by Syldana

Chapter 1 by Syldana

The smoke coiled through the air, thick and black, as it billowed continuously high into the sky, blotting out the light from the twin suns that burned dispassionately above the tiny planet they kept endless watch over. A tiny planet that was now nothing more than a smoldering ruin. Standing on a towering mountain ridge, looking out over the vast spectacle of devastation with a surveying eye, Raditz grinned. The former inhabitants had given them a good fight, the most satisfying in a long, long while, and he was not ashamed to admit that he'd needed it. And he wasn't the only one.

His eyes swiveled up to the figure standing straight and proud on another ledge just above the one he was currently occupying. Dark obsidian eyes gazed out across the desolated landscape just as his own had, their surface gleaming with all the fires of hell that blazed furiously below, their inky depths black, cold and inscrutable. Raditz felt his breath catch in his throat as he took in the imposing magnificence of the Saiyajin prince. He was not tall or burly like Nappa or himself; his body was smaller, sleeker, and more graceful in movement, a deceptive shell to the astonishing level of power housed within his compact frame. Though it could not be truly discerned without a scouter, that incredible power infused the man's aura, radiating out from his every pore, permeating his stance, his bearing, his every motion, proclaiming to the entire universe that here was power, here was true majesty, the royal Prince of the Saiyajin. Once again, Raditz beheld his splendor and beauty with the awe he always reserved only for him, only for Vegeta.

The prince was garbed in a dark body suit and his immaculate white armor that somehow always managed to stay immaculate even after such a battle as this. As usual, he wore the full regalia, with both front and side guard panels, yet was atypically minus the broad shoulder guards that he seemed to have forgone in favor of a large, blood-red cape that was draped over and around his shoulders, almost completely enshrouding his body within its dark folds. It was not a garment suitable for close combat, but Raditz was well aware that Vegeta had fought this past battle with the force of pure ki alone. He didn't quite understand why; it certainly wasn't as fun that way. Maybe the prince just didn't want to get his immaculate white gloves dirty this time.

So beautiful...

Raditz immediately shook his head, giving his long, black mane a quick toss. He had had his single moment of rapturous bliss with the Prince of the Saiyajin; he wasn't likely to be granted another. Still, it was a wondrous memory that thankfully warmed those long, lonely nights when he found his bed painfully empty. Gazing up at him, the large Saiyajin warrior found himself wondering if Vegeta ever thought about that moment, as well.

"I'd say that about does it," Nappa said, suddenly breaking the silence. The big, brawny Saiyan dropped out of the sky to land with a grin before the prince. "Just in time, too. Frieza expects us

back soon."

Raditz frowned darkly, as he now frowned every time the pale tyrant's name was mentioned. Frieza had hurt Vegeta, as no warrior should ever be hurt. Battle was one thing, but what Frieza had done... to touch the Saiyajin prince like that...

A growl formed in the back of his throat, but he was careful not to loose it within hearing range of his two companions. Nappa wouldn't understand, but Vegeta would... and it would not be wise to remind the prince that he knew of Frieza's horrendous transgression.

"I'm not ready to leave just yet," Vegeta said, his tone cold and his expression unreadable.

"No?" the bald Saiyan queried in surprise. They had been on too many similar purging missions; the prince's statement was completely out of the ordinary. "What else is there to do? There's no one left to fight." That only earned a razor-sharp glance from the smaller Saiyajin.

"Are you questioning me, Nappa?" he asked, his voice dripping with lethal venom. The burly man paled considerably, and then quickly shook his head in response. "Good. You will return, Nappa, and inform Frieza of our success here. Tell him that I was injured during the battle, and thus my own return has been slightly delayed."

"Are you hurt, Vegeta-sama?" he questioned anxiously. Raditz merely rolled his eyes at the stupidity of the man. The prince, as usual, responded with a clever quip that sailed right over the big man's bald head.

"Of course. Can't you see that I'm at death's door? Now go, baka, before I decide to take you to hell with me."

A tiny smile quirked the corner of Raditz lips, for he could almost see the rusty wheels slowly turn within the burly warrior's mind. "Umm... okay," he said finally. "What about him?" he asked, casually tossing a nod down toward the long-haired Saiyan.

"Raditz will remain here," the prince stated firmly.

"How come? I should be the one💎💎"

"Are you questioning me again?" Vegeta asked softly, instantly bringing Nappa to an abrupt halt.

"No, Vegeta-sama," he replied fearfully, somehow managing to do it verbally this time.

"Then get back to your damned pod and carry out your orders." The prince turned away; an obvious dismissal that even Nappa couldn't mistake for anything else. The bald Saiyan bowed once, and then wordlessly took to the air, heading straight for the landing craters.

Raditz silently contemplated the prince, unsure as to what the smaller man had in mind, and what his own role was going to be. One thing was certain, though; Vegeta did have a plan. Not that the prince didn't act on the spur of the moment sometimes, it was just Raditz's experience that the prince usually had some well-thought-out design behind every action he took. And to cross Frieza, as Vegeta was now veritably risking, was something the sharp-witted Prince of the Saiyajin would not do without a good plan💎💎" or a good reason. Raditz kept his mouth shut and his gaze attentive; he would find out soon enough.

"We'll stay here tonight," the prince said finally, though his eyes never strayed from the burning horizon. "We'll set up camp near the space pods." Raditz recalled the area where they had landed; a large, dense forest a few miles from the first city they had leveled.

"Do we hunt?" he asked, flashing Vegeta a quick, feral grin. The prince, however, never turned from his motionless vigil to see it.

"No," he replied softly, after a moment of silent reflection. "I doubt there will be time."

Raditz had no idea what the prince had meant by that, and was still pondering the possibilities of why there would be no time to hunt as he wordlessly prepared their camp. It was a warm-weathered planet; there was no need for shelter, so the large Saiyajin merely built a fire in a small clearing less than a click away from their ships, and then spread a couple of blankets on the ground beside it. Hn. Crude, but it would do for one night... unless Vegeta said otherwise. He still did not know what his prince had planned for the evening.

The thought did flicker through his mind that perhaps Vegeta intended an intimate encounter between the two of them, yet Raditz knew such a thought was entirely wishful in nature. Still, it did weave some rather appealing fantasies as he finished his preparations and settled down on one of the blankets to await his return.

It was several long minutes before Vegeta arrived with more supplies from his own ship, landing with his normal degree of elegance before him. Raditz started to rise, but the prince waved him back with a dismissive head shake. Then he set the small bundle he was holding down beside the other makeshift pallet and slowly lowered his body to the ground, as if wearied from the day's events. The smaller man heaved a quiet sigh and then pulled his long cloak tighter around his body, as if feeling a sudden chill.

Raditz studied his visage attentively, for it was quite unusual to see him appear so fatigued. In fact, his eyes narrowed on him keenly. "Vegeta looked more than weary. He looked downright exhausted. His features seemed pale, fixed and drawn, as if he was not only tired, but concentrating intently on something or as if he was concealing a great deal of pain.

The larger Saiyan's eyes broadened considerably. The prince had been joking about being injured, hadn't he? Now Raditz was not so sure that Nappa's concern had been totally unwarranted. Vegeta swiped a gloved fist across his brow, which was liberally dotted with tiny beads of perspiration, and then lifted his gaze to regard him. Raditz felt his breath hitch. There was no mistaking it now; the prince's onyx eyes were oddly alight with the bright, fevered gleam of pain. Their sharp, penetrating depths considered him carefully for several pensive moments.

"Whom do you serve?" he asked finally, quietly, intently, as if it was the most important question in the universe.

Raditz blinked, immediately taken aback. "I serve you, Ouji-sama," he returned instantly, fervently.

"Do you?" he countered, still inspecting the larger Saiyan's face scrupulously. "Your pledge was given to my father."

"My pledge was given to protect the Royal House of Vegeta," he replied with a frown, his expression openly reflecting his views on the apparent questioning of his honor. "That is you, Ouji-sama."



"Yes, but do you serve me? Or do you now serve Frieza?"

A growl rumbled forth, low and angry in his throat. "How can you even ask me that?!" he spat out with a hiss. "I am Saiyajin and I serve my prince! Say the word and we will leave that bastard's service without ever looking back!"

The prince studied his countenance once again, searching his features with an almost

painstaking deliberation, before finally glancing away to stare into the dancing fire. "Hn. If we left Frieza's service that is all we would be doing," he commented softly. "He would never let us go."

Raditz said nothing, for he knew that statement to be only partially true. Frieza didn't give a damn about himself or Nappa; they were completely beneath his notice. No, it was only Prince Vegeta the sadistic monster would never let go... and Vegeta knew it. So why question him now?

"I do not doubt your loyalty to me, Raditz," he said. "I only wanted to be sure. There is..." The prince paused   "faltered actually. "...there is something I would ask of you," he finished quietly, his inflection more subdued than usual.

"Anything, Vegeta-sama," he declared firmly. "You know that."

The prince nodded, then angled his head to regard him once more. "Yes, I do. That is why you are here."



"What would you have me do?"

The smaller Saiyajin merely stared at him in reply, his eyes gaping pits of dark intensity, still burning with an infinite wealth of veiled pain. Then his gaze lowered to the items on the ground beside him.

"Here. You will most likely need these," he said, shoving a small satchel matter-of-factly toward the long-haired Saiyan. "They aren't much, but they were all I could get hold of without courting suspicion."

Beyond curious, Raditz reached over to take it from him, and then drew it open to peer at the contents inside. They were mostly medical supplies: wound cleansers, adhesives, bandage rolls, syringes, several light pain medications, a few surgical instruments, and several packets of strong healing gel. With the exception of one or two of the surgical instruments, it was a typical patch kit. He raised his head from the satchel, concern etched deeply into his brow.



"Are you injured, Ouji-sama?" he inquired as calmly as possible.

"Of course not!" he returned with a snort. "These creatures were a complete joke! They never even  ""

His voice broke off into a harsh grunt of pain, his mask of control instantly shattering, twisting to match the agony that appeared to be tearing through his body. His fingers clutched at the soft ground through the blanket as he shuddered violently.

"Vegeta!" he cried out in alarm, dropping everything and moving at once to his prince's side. His hands gripped the smaller man's shoulders, vainly attempting to stabilize him as an excruciating pain continued to rack his body. The unknown agony rippling through the prince seemed to go on forever, and Raditz found himself nearly on the edge of despair... and then it stopped.

Vegeta sagged limply against him in relief as the pain subsided back to a more tolerable level. Without even a thought, Raditz circled his arms around the trembling figure, holding him closely. "Ouji-sama?" he questioned, anxiety diminishing his voice to a mere whisper.

The prince gasped and panted for air for several troubling moments, and then he slowly drew himself back, lifting his head from the larger Saiyan's broad, armored chest. "There is less time than I thought," he muttered, his inflection low and heavily strained. Obsidian eyes rose to sear acutely into Raditz's own, fiercely ablaze with inestimable pain and need, and an infinite parade of unspoken demands. "Raditz, you must  ""

The prince could not halt the sharp, ravaged cry that burst from his throat. Then he collapsed once more as tumultuous tremors shook him from head to toe, his arms clamping around his middle as his body folded in harrowing agony.

Raditz caught him again, his heart seizing with a terrible fear as his prince spasmed once again with ineffable pain before his horrified eyes. Shimatta! What was wrong?! What should he do?! And then, with a violent wrench of will, he forced the incapacitating panic down.

First order of business: What was wrong? Without the immobilizing terror raging frenziedly behind it, the question appeared far less daunting, and it was something the larger Saiyajin could probably figure out for himself, with a little investigation.

Quickly, but gently, he lowered the prince onto the blanket below him, trying his best ignore the soft, strangled sounds of pain emanating from his throat. Then he reached for the blood-red cape, still completely enshrouding Vegeta's body, and swiftly began to tug it open in deliberate search of the injury that was threatening his charge. He peeled the garment away, tearing it a few times in his haste, and was surprised to discover that the prince had already removed his armor "probably back at the ships. His hands skimmed over the small, muscular body that was still half-curved in a ball of pain, running skillfully over his arms and shoulders, legs and thighs, and then reaching to pry Vegeta's clenching arms away from his torso, knowing that there lay the probable injury.

"Ouji-sama!" he called to him forcefully, when the clenching arms would not budge. "You must let me see!"

At first there was no response, but then Vegeta's eyes opened a fraction to focus on his visage through the fury of his pain. Then his eyes closed tightly again, and he nodded, once. Raditz tried again, and this time easily drew the prince's arms to his sides. Then his hands were moving once more, roaming down the front of his body suit, looking for

Raditz's eyes widened in shock. What...? His palms smoothed over the prince's abdomen, over the large, protruding bulge that had taken full command of his belly. What the hell was that? What could possibly cause such a reaction? It was certainly not like any injury that he'd ever seen before. Hn. It almost looked like Vegeta was...

The large Saiyajin instantly froze.

But... it couldn't be... those were only stories... right? Every Saiyan on Vegetasei had heard the stories, but no one had truly believed them. They were just rumors, really, that had been passed down through generations of obnoxious children too young to be true warriors in their own right. Although, the severe lack of proportion between the sexes had certainly been true enough, still, the idea that a few of the elite families had actually altered their genes to allow their males to breed...

Had they truly been so afraid of their precious bloodlines dying out? Before the destruction, there had still been plenty of females available...

Raditz gave pause.

...yet not near enough with elite blood. And definitely not enough with royal blood.

A snarl of sheer disgust curled the corner of his lip. The fools had actually chosen to alter their own children rather than accept the blood of the lower classes among their more noble ranks? It was still impossible to believe... and yet the evidence of that vain and selfish perversion was right there, a pile of quivering agony before his very eyes. Oh, Vegeta-sama... what have they done to you?

The Prince of all Saiyajin was with child.

And that's when it struck him, hard, just whose child this had to be. Raditz felt his face blanch, growing cold and stark with abominable dread. No... nononononononono... It could not be... it could not be...

Vegeta growled, loudly, harshly, as his eyes slitted open once again, this time to shoot hot, murderous daggers at him. "Do not gawk at me, kisama!" he roared in a hoarse mixture of outrage and pain. "I am your prince, and you are here only to serve me! So move your big, rotund ass and get this damned thing out of me!"

Raditz openly flinched at the blistering admonition, and then forced his paralyzed body to move and adhere to his prince's grating command. His hands reached for the satchel of medical supplies, drawing it to him once more. His eyes again perused the contents within...

The long-haired Saiyajin froze. Kuso... he didn't know the first thing about childbirth! Especially that of an altered Saiyan male! He simply stared at the instruments as his vision blurred, panic stealing over his mind once more.

Vejiita growled again, the sound hardly more than a tortured groan. "Baka!" he rasped out painfully. "It cannot come out on its own! You have to cut it out! Cut it out and then patch me up! It's as simple as that!"

Raditz blinked. As simple as that? That was a major surgical operation! Kuso! If he should screw it up...

Another agonizing moan broke through the prince's clenched teeth, and the full reality of the situation finally sank into the larger Saiyan's immobilized skull. The child within Vegeta's smaller-than-average body wanted out, was trying to get out, and if it wasn't removed very soon, and carefully, the prince was going to die. The surgery was not a risk💎💎"it was his only chance!

His hand dipped into the bag without another thought. There was no more time for thought. The painkillers, a syringe, a scalpel, some bandages, the healing gel and so forth💎💎"one by one he lined them up on the blanket beside the ailing prince. Then he quickly filled the syringe with the liquid painkiller, his brow furrowing with a frown at the mildness of its potency. It would not do much but take the edge off the prince's pain. It would have to do, for it was all he had. Raditz injected the soothing liquid into Vegeta's arm, directly into his bloodstream. As he waited for the drug to take effect, he rent the prince's body suit down the middle, tearing it wide open, exposing the swelled flesh of Vegeta's abdomen. He used a bit of the wound cleanser and a bandage to clean and sanitize his hands and the area as best he could. Then he broke the airtight seal of the scalpel, and carefully withdrew the tiny blade. Slowly he brought the blade toward the prince's stomach... and abruptly faltered.

Sweat was dripping down his back, down his brow and temple, and the large hand holding the scalpel was trembling far too violently for the task at hand. Shimatta...

"Do it!" Vegeta's voice was nothing more than a strangled hiss, his breathing just quick gasps between low, anguished moans. "Get this thing out now, Raditz, or I am going blast you straight to hell!"

The large Saiyajin took an enormous breath of courage, and then nodded. The blade was resolutely lowered...

Vegeta cried out in horrendous agony, shaking Raditz to his very foundation, yet he did not allow his hands to stop, he did not allow the liquid warmth of the royal blood to halt again what he knew

he had to do. He had to finish this, no matter what. He worked as swiftly as he could, through the outer layers, through the inner layers, until he finally reached the tiny treasure buried so deeply inside his beloved prince. Then Raditz reached oh-so-carefully to scoop the small, curled-up ball into his awaiting palm. He used the scalpel one last time to cut the umbilical cord, and the infant was free.



Not pausing for second, Raditz grasped the child around the ankles and held it upside down, forcing the tiny body to uncurl. Abruptly faced with its very first indignity of life, the infant began to howl its displeasure to the world. Raditz could not help the grin that blazed across his countenance.

A spirited brat. But of course, this was Vegeta's brat. Hn. Vegeta's son. The infant boy looked every inch the son of a Saiyan prince. Except...

His grin slowly began to fade.

...except for the odd tone of his skin, too grey in some parts, too pink in others. And the small, ruby lips, such a dark red hue, they almost appeared black. And his calves and forearms were shaped somewhat differently...

Raditz fingered them lightly.

...their texture was rougher, harder, than the rest of the child's skin. The larger Saiyan knew they would one day become a natural armor   "bracers and leg guards. Perhaps later there would be even more to cover the torso, as well, but for now it was difficult say. Raditz sighed. In the whole history of the universe, had there ever been such a child as this?

"A boy, Ouji-sama," he announced matter-of-factly, carefully concealing any adverse emotions. He turned to show the wailing infant to the prince. "Ouji-sama?"

Vegeta's eyes were closed, not seeing his child nor anything else for that matter.

"Ouji-sama!"

Raditz hastily wrapped the child in the prince's discarded cape and gently laid him on the blanket. His cries rang angrily through the twilight air, but the tall warrior had no more time to spare for him at the moment. His fingers flew with anxious speed, piecing Vegeta's abdomen back together as best he could with only a measly patch kit of gel and adhesives. He used the healing gel as liberally as possible as he worked, and then, with gingerly care, covered the temporary adhesive patch with tautly-crafted bandages.

"Vegeta-sama?" he called to him again, quickly wiping the blood from his hands. And then he was cradling the man's ashen face, his fingers digging anxiously into his neck for a pulse. He found it, but it was extremely weak. The prince's cheek was cool and colorless beneath his palm.

"You must hold on, Vegeta," he pleaded softly with the small, unconscious figure. "You are all we have left." All the lingering hope in Raditz's soul was wholly invested in this powerful Saiyajin prince.

Loud, infuriated keening finally drew his attention back to the abandoned infant. "All right, all right," he said, lifting the tiny, wailing creature back into his arms. Black eyes glared at him in unbounded fury for several moderated seconds, and then the angry howl resumed, perhaps even louder than before.

"Hn. It's been a real pleasure meeting you too, brat," he grumbled in wry amusement. He ignored the cries for a time, just long enough to wipe down the ungrateful newborn, and then re-bundle

him in a cleaner part of the red cloak.

"I know, I know... just shut your trap. He's right here." Then Raditz gently settled the child into the crook of Vegeta's arm, nestling him securely against the prince's ribcage. The frenzied howls abruptly halted.

"Thought so," he muttered, greatly relieved at the sudden quiet calm. Then he watched in mute fascination as the brat clumsily reached for the parent before him, only to grasp hold of the torn edge of Vegeta's body suit. A quivering sigh escaped the infant's ruby lips; then his eyes drooped closed and a low, vibrating purr could be heard rumbling softly through the coming night.

~*~*~*~

Faint light trickled in through the murky haze and the dull, throbbing ache of pain, a pain that seemed to encompass his entire body. His mind recoiled automatically from the thought of why that might be; too many times had he awoken in a similarly wretched condition, and the cause was usually always the same. And then the light grew brighter, more insistent, and his eyes fluttered open. The blur of light slowly focused into a vast sky, lightly colored with the rainbow hues of dawn.

Vegeta blinked, then let his eyes drift painstakingly to the right until a thick cluster of trees came into view. A... forest? What planet was this? And where was Frieza? By the intense agony rippling through his flesh, he knew the sadistic bastard had to be around somewhere. His gaze shifted to the right, searching for

Something dark caught his eye; it was there, tucked in warmly beside him, just below his shoulder. A thick, black tuft of... hair. The prince instantly froze, eyes going wide, memory blasting into him full-force. It was several long minutes before his mind began to function again, and then he had to mentally force himself to breathe.

Kuso...

Vegeta's eyes wildly swept the surrounding area, but Raditz was nowhere in sight. His gaze was slowly drawn back to the small bundle of warmth snuggled closely against him. It moved, gently wiggling in place; then a tiny fist, tightly clutching the fabric of his clothing, suddenly stretched forward and the faint sound of a soft yawn reached his ears. The prince simply stared at it for a long, long while, unable to move, barely able to breathe.

It had seemed far less... real, when it had been inside him. Yet even then it had moved, punching and kicking like the warrior it would one day become. If it was lucky.

So far he had been lucky"so to speak. No one had discovered the secret he'd been carrying these many, trying months. Though why would they? Even had they noticed the outward changes of his body, the knowledge that a few male Saiyajin had the ability to bear offspring was not widespread. If anyone at all was to notice, it would have been Raditz"Nappa wouldn't notice if he, himself, was pregnant.

Vegeta had taken to wearing the cape months ago, to avoid suspicion. Avoiding medical had taken a lot more effort; he could not let himself become too badly injured. Avoiding Frieza had been near impossible... yet he had somehow managed it, kissing up to the loathsome lizard even more than necessity dictated. If Frieza had found out...

He could not help the shudder of dread that trembled through his aching body.

Frieza could never find out. No one could ever find out. Raditz now knew, but Raditz had held his secrets before... and he could not have managed this alone. This. All because of this.

His hand finally moved, reaching toward the tiny creature that he knew to be half Saiyajin and half monster. He would have aborted the damned thing if he'd only had the means at the time. He'd been lucky, but not that lucky. His fingers clasped on to the tiny wrist, pulling the small fingers away from his body suit, and then lifted the infant into the air to get a better look at it.

The cloak fell away from the tiny figure, whose eyes suddenly popped open at the abrupt movement. Yet it did not cry out. It merely gazed down at him in blinking wonder, and then its little furry tail wrapped around his forearm to secure its awkward position. Black eyes, black hair, hands, feet, furry tail... Saiyajin. The brat was mostly Saiyajin.

A profound relief instantly flooded through him, startling in its severity. There were only a few minor traces that indicated Frieza's... involvement. The prince had had numerous nightmares about what the child could have looked like.

The tail tightened a moment about his arm as the brat continued to stare at him with fathomless eyes. Then again. And again. Slowly, the dangling infant began to move, his little tail rocking him backward and then forward. Very soon he was in full motion, swinging to and fro in Vegeta's grip, a smile creeping over his tiny features in awakening discovery. The prince watched him swing for several curious minutes, before realizing what he was doing.

"Stop that," he scolded softly, immediately halting the movement by lowering the brat onto his chest. "I am your prince, not a recreational toy." Then he smirked at the comment and at the wide-eyed infant, who merely gazed back at him in rapt fascination. Vegeta circled both hands around the small torso, steadying him as the child sat upon his chest.

"Well, brat, what shall I do with you?"

His original plan had been to dispose of the creature once it was born, but that was back when he'd been picturing all those ghastly images of a miniature Frieza. This child... this child was more like a miniature Vegeta. He looked more like himself than Frieza. The Saiyan prince frowned.

"What is that?" he questioned, suddenly, as he finally noticed the unfamiliar aroma pervading his nostrils. "Is that you, brat?" He pulled the infant closer, breathing his scent in deeper. It was sweet and balmy, like a fresh spring morning, only better. Much, much better.

"Damn, you smell good," he murmured, pressing his nose further into the curve of his little neck, nuzzling gently. And his skin was so wonderfully soft...

Vegeta brushed his lips against the infant's chubby, round cheek, cherishing the softness, basking in the smoothness. The child's marvelous scent spoke volumes to him, telling him more about his tiny son than anything else. Most of all, that the boy was his. He was sweet and perfect and beautiful and all HIS.

The prince drew him back so he could peer once more into his son's bright eyes. His own were ablaze with fierce pride and profound delight.

"Of course you do," he said with a proud smirk, "for you are a prince, as well. A Saiyajin prince... and I will never allow any harm to come to you."

~*~*~*~

He slept once more, his perfect little son draped across his chest, snuggled warmly beneath his chin. It was the sudden lack of that warmth that instantly roused him. Then he heard the most horrifying sound◆◆"a small cry of protest from the boy. His eyes snapped open, and

immediately saw his son being lifted away from him. The prince reacted without thought. His hands snatched hold of the infant and yanked him back to his breast, his arms curling tightly, protectively, around the tiny body. A low, angry growl churned dark and dangerous in his throat as he bared his teeth to the intruder who had dared to touch the royal heir.

"Ouji-sama?"

The snarl faded slightly, and Vegeta blinked as the intruder slowly took on a more recognizable shape. Familiar even.

"Raditz?" he queried softly, his inflection shadowed with suspicion.

"Yes, Ouji-sama," he replied. "I was merely going to feed the child. I've managed to scrounge up some milk."

Vegeta's eyes narrowed, studying the large man meticulously for any remaining threat. However, after several contemplating minutes, he saw only Raditz kneeling beside him with a bucket of milk and patiently awaiting his command.

"Where I got it💎💎" don't ask💎💎"you don't wanna know," he went on nervously when the prince didn't respond. "It's fine, though. I tested it. It's perfectly safe. I wasn't exactly sure how to feed it to him, though, but then I thought of this." His hand held up a syringe💎💎"minus the needle. "I thought we could just sort of squirt it into his mouth. Less of a mess that way."

His gaze still wary, Vegeta gave a small grunt, and then cautiously held out his hand. Raditz promptly dropped the milk-filled syringe into his awaiting palm.

The large Saiyajin inwardly winced as he watched the prince lay the infant on the blanket and then painfully push himself up onto his elbow. He would offer his assistance, but he knew that Vegeta would refuse. If he'd had his strength, the prince would have probably ripped his head off when he'd caught him taking the child from him earlier. Raditz had forgotten how protective a Saiyan parent could be with a newborn. Just as the infant had wailed for its parent, already imprinted with Vegeta's scent, so the parent now protected the child, bound by the primal instinct aroused by its sweet, pleasing scent. That scent was just one of the many reasons the Saiyans had encased their offspring in incubators right after birth. Most warriors had been more than glad to shirk the burden and compulsory responsibility of child rearing... and it had been so much easier to send them off into space without such a binding emotional tie.

It appeared that his idea was working, for the infant was consuming the milk with all the appetite of a healthy Saiyajin brat. By the glowing look on Vegeta's proud visage, Raditz knew the prince was pleased. And happy. He had never seen Vegeta happy before.

Raditz heaved a quiet sigh. He didn't know what was going to happen now. They couldn't take the child back to the ship💎💎"back to Frieza. Perhaps they could take the boy and run...

He sighed again and slowly shook his head. Frieza would never allow Vegeta that kind of freedom. The tyrant would come after them.

What are we going to do, Ouji-sama? he wondered silently. I don't see any way out if this. Yet Raditz kept his questions to himself. The prince would inform him in due time. It was not his place to question, however badly it haunted him.

What were they going to do?

~*~*~*~

"Vegeta-sama?"

Roused from a light doze, the prince opened his eyes and looked up into Raditz's visage, instantly noting the dark gravity of his angled features. The long-haired Saiyajin was down on one knee, his hand extended toward him, silently offering a... scouter.

Vegeta felt his heart rise in his throat, painfully thumping faster and faster as the cold, hard reality before him began to take hold. Panic seized him, ruthlessly, mercilessly, and his head started shaking back and forth before he could stop himself. His hands tightened reflexively about the tiny infant snuggled warmly within the crook of his neck. Raditz faltered at the sight of him, his arm falling awkwardly down to his side.

"What would have me tell him, Ouji-sama?"

The prince merely stared at him until his eyes turned glassy; then his lids closed heavily over the fear, over the anguish, and he nodded to the awaiting warrior. He forced a hand away from the soft, warm child, and held it out for the infernal device. He never once opened his eyes as Raditz deposited it wordlessly into palm. Vegeta attached the scouter deftly to his ear.

"Yes?" he managed gruffly, his voice hoarse and low.

"Vegeta," Frieza's voice crooned smoothly into his eardrum. "I heard you were injured. I hope it's nothing too serious."

"No, Frieza-sama, nothing an isolation chamber can't handle."

"Then why are you so late in returning to me? You know how much I hate that," he pouted.

"Forgive me, Frieza-sama. I admit I was... incapacitated for a time. My men deemed it too risky for me to travel."

"I see... perhaps they don't know you as well as I do. You are a tough little thing, Vegeta... and you wouldn't dare die on me."

"No, Frieza-sama."

"Then get back here, my little Saiyan," he ordered, a hint of coldness snaking into his tone. "I will tolerate no more delays."

"Yes, Frieza-sama," he replied numbly. When there was no more to be heard, he pulled the scouter from his ear and tossed the accursed thing back to Raditz.

"Return to the ships," he commanded tersely. "Prepare them for immediate departure."

Raditz regarded him questioningly for a moment, but then he nodded. "Yes, Ouji-sama." The larger Saiyan hesitated. "Do you... require any assistance?"

The prince shook his head. "Go."

Raditz nodded again and then took off into the sky.

Vegeta just lay there a moment, gazing at absolutely nothing. Then his hands curled around the child, lifting gently, drawing his little body close to face. With painstaking deliberation he pressed his lips to the boy's round cheek, nuzzling him softly, slowly, breathing in his wondrous scent, imprinting it forever in his mind. Then he drew him back to look him over, his fingers trailing his vision, ruffling through the thick, black fuzz of his hair, gliding over his delicate features,

smoothing over his torso and down the pudgy limbs, until finally reaching the infant's furry brown tail. His fingers stroked the downy fur lightly, gently, eliciting a soft purr as the boy gazed down at him with his wide, adoring eyes.

"You will not remember me," he told the boy quietly, "but I will always remember you. You are my son, a prince of the Saiyajin. I would give you that title, that proud heritage, if it were not such a dangerous thing to own... and I could never give you up to him. I am not my father. You are mine, and mine alone... though I must now send you away."

The child merely purred and flashed him a radiant grin. Vegeta allowed his eyes to wander over the boy one final time.

"Farewell, my son," he murmured softly, huskily. "I wish you strength and power, and a better life than us all."

Then Vegeta's arms encircled the child, tightly, pulling him close, as he began to draw upon his power. Slowly, the two of them rose into the air, the prince's ki propelling them gently upward. Vegeta knew that his injured body could not take any painful jolts, so he kept a leisurely pace, holding the infant securely against him, caressing his soft little tail with soothing strokes. Still, the flight was all-too-agonizingly short. As they dropped from the sky toward the pods, a giggle of sheer glee burst out of the child, and a small, wistful smile briefly stirred his father's lips.

He landed beside his own pod, his feet touching down gingerly. He continued to maintain his power around him, for it was all that was holding him up. Raditz was there before him in an instant.

Vegeta peered deeply, intensively, into his dark, obsidian eyes. "Whom do you serve?" he asked him brusquely.

This time, the long-haired warrior did not take offense. "I serve you, Ouji-sama," he declared fervently.

"And what is your vow?"

"To protect the Royal House of Vegeta," he shot back instantly.

"Then do so now," the prince commanded fiercely, "and the reward will be of your choosing."

Vegeta held his gaze in a vice-grip, severe, vehement, and exacting. Then his hands decisively peeled the infant child from his body, and thrust him toward the larger Saiyan. His eyes burned steadily into the man, refusing to even glance at the boy.

"I will tell Frieza that I've given you a month's leave for your outstanding service to me. Find someplace safe, someplace with no value at all to Frieza, and... take your holiday there."

Raditz gazed down at him silently, solemnly, and then stretched forth his hands to grasp hold of the proffered child. Then Vegeta released him, withdrawing his arms, the little furry tail slipping softly from his wrist.

He turned immediately away, toward his awaiting pod, toward his awaiting future. The ache that abruptly infused his being was both sharp and blunt, piercing through his every nerve, his every primal instinct, and it left him feeling utterly hollow... empty.

With deliberate, painstaking care, he settled his injured form into the seat of the pod.

"Raditz," he called out gruffly, painfully shutting his eyes.

"Yes, Ouji-sama?"

"Never tell me where."

There was a silent pause.

"Yes, Ouji-sama."

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