

Disintegration

Chapter 5

Wet. Cold. Alone.

These three words best described Sasha's situation. She found herself in some sort of dark container with water going up to her waist. A cocktail of emotions swirled in the woman's mind as her entire world shifted, and she was suddenly sent tumbling towards the only opening.

As Sasha fell from the container and screamed, white light blinded her. Then something surprisingly soft and scaly broke her fall as she face-planted into it. Water ran down her back during the aftermath. Once the human regained her bearings, she scrambled to her feet and discovered that she was now standing in the open palm of a massive reptilian creature.

The alien stared down at her with a familiar pair of amber eyes. [Greetings!] hissed the reptilian, albeit a feminine human voice emitted from some nearby speakers.

Meanwhile, Sasha's jaw went agape at the sight. Without armor, the gargantuan creature looked like a miniature Godzilla with bronze scales and small spike-like structures sprouting from her head. The view inspired the human to frantically look around at what could best be described as the interior of an enormous tent. Death practically surrounded her on all sides, whether it be from a clawed hand acting as a platform or the ground dozens of feet below her.

[There's no need to be afraid,] claimed the creature, [I don't intend to hurt you. Otherwise, you wouldn't be alive.]

These words made Sasha slightly shudder. "Who... are you? What are you? Why are you doing this?!"

The creature cocked her head to the side. [Sorry. I didn't pick that up. I'd need to let you speak through that receiver first.] The alien paused to point at a bizarre-looking microphone sitting in the center of a large desk. [I have a few things to say before we can have a proper conversation, though. Firstly, my name is Ishtar. You can say Battlemaster Ishtar if you want to be formal about it, or Ishtar Makari if I like you. Although you're a prisoner of war, you're going to be receiving special treatment for lack of a better term due to your... physical characteristics.]

Sasha recoiled at these words. "Excuse me?"

The human never received a response to her question as Ishtar gradually lowered her to the desk. With much hesitation, Sasha stepped off the alien's hand and began approaching the microphone, but she abruptly stopped in place.

She stood still as if she was paralyzed. "This can't be happening."

A poke of a clawed finger forced the human to stumble forward. [Say that again, but closer to the receiver, please.]

Not really knowing what to do otherwise, Sasha began walking. Soon, she was standing next to the microphone. The white device had a very curvy design complemented by blinking orange lights, and it appeared to be wireless. Sasha stayed silent as she stared at it.

[Don't worry. I don't bite. Hard.]

The human took a deep breath as she prepared to speak directly into the microphone...

"We... were just trying to kill each other."

[...And?]

"I tried to shoot you..."

The massive alien let out a chortle that shook Sasha to the core of her being. [I would have done the same thing in your position! There's nothing wrong with defending yourself or your people, even if your peashooter proved to be worthless. Then again, I'm not sure if I would be brave enough to confront someone that made me look like a mere insect in comparison.]

Sasha blinked several times and raised an eyebrow. "You're acting friendly, but you killed those that I would consider my friends. My comrades..."

[Such is the nature of war, my dear. No hard feelings. Your kind also managed to strike down some of my brethren, but I'd rather not allow that to result in unpleasant interactions with you from this point forward.]

"...But why?"

The alien flicked a serpentine tongue from her muzzle. [Why what?]

"Why are you doing this to us?!"

Something about the distress in Sasha's voice made Ishtar narrow her eyes. [Isn't it obvious? We're conquering you. As for why I captured you specifically, that's an entirely different matter. To answer your question, though, my people considered your planet valuable enough to take for ourselves. That's all. Hopefully, this entire process will be quick and painless... right?]

At the sight of Ishtar's sharp fangs and narrowed eyes, Sasha was reduced to meekly nodding rather than responding.

[Good. But truth be told, I don't know all of the answers as to why we're invading. I just follow orders. All I know is that humans themselves could be useful to the Hegemony due to your small sizes and unique technology. That's why we're not merely killing all of you by bombing you from orbit.]

"The Hegemony...?"

The alien did a combination of puffing air from her nostrils and sneering. [Right. You're just a warrior. So, you genuinely don't know anything about all of this, do you? Just that giant aliens invaded a few days ago, I suppose... regardless, we are known as the Zenari Hegemony.]

"Wait, hold on..." said Sasha as she motioned with her hands, "You're invading us for our technology?"

[Correct. Or... at least, that's what I was told.]

The human's face scrunched up. "That doesn't make any sense."

[It confuses me as well.] said Ishtar as she blew air from her nostrils. [Apparently, humanity has developed an alternative path of technology when compared to others.]

"And you couldn't have just used... oh, I don't know... diplomacy, espionage, or trading to get what you want rather than invading?!"

The zenari stared at her with unblinking eyes. [Why would we? You are weak, and we are strong. Therefore, it's more optimal for the Hegemony to take what it needs rather than negotiating with a potential liability. Then there's the matter of adequately assimilating your species into the Hegemony... which may prove to be a problem with the size differences.]

"What?" asked Sasha as she recoiled. "You're going to turn us into your species...?"

Ishtar shook her head. [No. When I say assimilation, I don't mean in the physical sense. It's more like you would learn our ways... and some other things. You'll see. Anyway, we're getting off-topic.]

"What do you want from me?"

[You ask too many questions, little one.] The alien paused to form a grimace. [I was about to get to that. You caught my interest for being a female warrior of some variety in an otherwise patriarchal species. Despite this, you must obviously have extensive knowledge about properly rearing and taking care of human hatchlings, so you are far more useful to me than a male prisoner... if that makes any sense. A human female would be a good source of information to put it more simply.]

The human in question clenched her fists. "Wait... you kidnapped me to ask about human babies? You're kidding, right?"

[I'm not japing you, little one. I hate japers.]

"My name is Sasha!"

Ishtar moved her massive tail, and the human heard a faint whooshing sound. [Then I shall refer to you by your true name, Sasha. But tell me... do you have any hatchlings of your own?]

"Uh... no. I don't even want to have kids!"

[What?] asked the alien as she perked her head up. [Why in the heavens would you not want to have hatchlings to call your own? It's the most important thing a woman can do for her people!]

In response, the human shook her head. "Why does that matter?" After asking this, she began to tremble. "What do you even plan on doing with me?"

[Oh... it's simple, really.] said Ishtar as she started tapping her claws on the table. [This entire invasion should be over once the various human nations surrender within the upcoming day equivalents. Hopefully. From there, you'll become my servant. The only unknown factor, really, is whether there will be interference from others...]

A horrified expression appeared on Sasha's face. "You're going to make me your slave?!"

[No, no, you'll just be my personal servant!] replied Ishtar as she glanced to the side. [You'll have certain rights. I'll make sure you're treated well... just as long as you help me take care of Suko and do nothing to defy me. This will only be a temporary arrangement with the ongoing invasion, so no hard feelings.]

"No hard feelings!?" Sasha shook her head in disbelief. "And who the hell is Suko?"

Suddenly, odd yet faint laughter echoed throughout the vicinity. It almost sounded like a child. Sasha internally questioned her sanity as she scanned the region, yet all she saw was Ishtar gradually looking at the ground while chortling. Ishtar's head eventually disappeared as the alien stood from her chair and kneeled to the ground, and all that remained of the zenari from Sasha's perspective was a scaly tail wagging and swishing in the air.

[Come here, you silly little thing!]

Sasha raised an eyebrow at these words. What was happening rapidly dawned on her once the alien appeared again, albeit she was holding a human boy in her hands. If Sasha had to take a guess, he was just a toddler, or at least not much older than that based on his small size alongside his outfit. Meanwhile, the pupils of Ishtar's eyes went wide as she stared at the boy with her tongue slightly stuck out, creating a cute little blep.

[This one is named Suko!] Ishtar stopped speaking to start stroking his back with a clawed finger. [I am treating him like one within my own clutch since I'm not sure what happened to his caretakers.] A crooked frown then graced the alien's face for a moment. [However, I have encountered... difficulties. I am afraid that my size could be a danger to him, and if he cries, I am unsure of whatever he needs or wants. That's where you come in!]

"Oh, for the love of God!" said Sasha as she practically facepalmed. "You must be out of your fucking mind! I don't care if you're a big, sexist, rancid, lizard, alien... thing. I'm not going to become some kind of fucking babysitter, and god knows why you thought it was a good idea to take some poor kid under your wing!"

The pupils of Ishtar's eyes narrowed. [...Rancid?]

"I'm still hoping this is some kind of bizarre dream. Oh, and just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I know anything about kids!"

Ishtar's face contorted, and her tail stopped wagging. [So... you're useless to me.]

The human saw something far colder in her eyes as it replaced a friendly demeanor. A chill went down her spine as the air was seemingly sucked out of the room and replaced by something tense. "Well... I... I have a younger brother."

[And?]

"I used to take care of him..."

[Yet, you previously claimed that you knew nothing about rearing hatchlings. Either you lied, or you immediately realized how stupid it was to defy someone like me. You're only receiving a second chance since you would be difficult to replace if I decided to rid myself of you.]

Sasha found herself at a loss of words as Ishtar stared her down. Following a short moment of silence, the alien lowered the human child onto the desk, allowing him to waddle onto it. Suko looked around the area with wide eyes and blissful ignorance as he randomly walked around, but eventually, the child saw Sasha and moved towards her. Ishtar's unblinking eyes shifted between her and the toddler. With time, the two humans approached one another.

Immediately, Sasha saw some wrinkly clothes on the child's body. More specifically, a red jacket, blue jeans, and tennis shoes... all appropriately sized for him. Oddly enough, Suko appeared remarkably clean despite the state of his outfit.

"Uh... hi." muttered Sasha.

She shuddered when the child responded by approaching her and hugging her leg.

Meanwhile, Ishtar's head beamed up as she held it with both of her hands and created another blep. [Aw! He likes you!] A swooshing sound marked the moment that her tail began wagging again, fanning away the tension lingering in the air. [It's such an amusing coincidence too! I once had two hatchlings, one of which was a young boy, while the other was his rebellious older sister!]

"Fucking hell." said Sasha under her breath.

As for the child, he stepped back and looked up at Sasha as if he was a puppy before saying a single word...

"Hungry."

In response, Ishtar's jaw went agape, and her tail wagged more frantically. She made an odd clicking sound while her eyes went wide. [BY MY ANCESTORS! Did Suko just speak!?!]

Before Sasha could say anything, the alien lunged forward. The sight of the otherwise massive reptilian rapidly moving towards her resulted in Sasha recoiling as she stumbled and fell on her back. Ishtar's voice only grew louder from there...

[What did he say?! Oh, and have him get closer to the microphone!]

"He said that he was hungry!" replied Sasha, guiding Suko until he was also standing next to the device.

[Ah! I should have known...]

"Jewce." said the boy, making the alien beam up again.

Ishtar released a pleased hiss. [Oh my! His little vocalizations sound so cute!] Her smile disappeared as she cocked her head. [However, my translator claims that he said... Jews? What are Jews? Where can I acquire them for my precious little Suko?]

Sasha's face scrunched up. "No, no, he said... juice."

[Juice?]

"You know. Juice. It's a liquid that comes from a fruit, or maybe a vegetable. Then again, the kid seems to be speaking English, which only makes things more complicated since I don't speak much of it..."

Ishtar flicked her tongue at her words. [Oh well. Nonetheless, my species has something similar! The proper term is squeezings. Ah, and I just remembered that you poor little things don't have any suitable accommodations!] The alien paused to stand up and away from the desk. [Allow me to remedy that. I'll return soon. Just take care of Suko in the meantime... and I wouldn't suggest trying anything stupid. Even if you found a way out of the tent, I doubt the others would take kindly to a stray human trespassing within our base of operations.]

Sasha cradled the child closer to herself and looked downwards.

[I'll assume that means you understand. Good. Like I said, I'll be back soon!]

With that, Ishtar removed her headset. She stood up, placed it on her chair, and quickly disabled the holographic screen of her computer with a press of a button. From there, Ishtar walked away with another woosh of her tail, and she exited the tent before zipping a flap back up.

At long last, the two humans were finally alone. Even with Ishtar gone, their titanic surroundings served as an alien environment in and of itself. Sasha simply stood still and silently stared at the entrance, while Suko escaped her clutches and waddled away.

"Does this mean we're some sort of fucking pets now?"

The woman never received an answer to her question as she sighed. Afterward, she began walking and looking around the large desk. From what she was able to see, there were no feasible escape routes, and the ground countless feet beneath her practically guaranteed death or a severe injury if she tried to jump off the desk. The only thing that caught Sasha's attention following a few minutes of explorations was seeing the child peeking over the edge of the desk.

Sasha's eyes almost bulged out of her skull. "Jesus Christ! SUKO!"

Ignoring his name being called, the child proceeded to get on his belly as he looked over the desk. He also used a free hand to swat at and reach for something. It inspired the human woman to break into a full-fledged sprint, but not even the rapid patter of footsteps seemed to faze the child as he stared at something. Ultimately, he was forced away from the edge as Sasha dragged him away by his legs.

"For the love of God, kid, you're going to hurt yourself!"

In return, Suko swung his arms, tried to kick his leg, and screamed one word...

"NO!"

Afterward, he screeched like a banshee as he began a renewed struggle for freedom.

It was only cut off by the sound of Ishtar re-entering the tent. Better yet, she was holding a full-fledged RV with both hands and proudly presenting it. She also opened her mouth, but no words came out as she tilted her head to the side and stared at Suko, who was screaming as Sasha dragged him around by his legs. Eventually, the human woman stopped what she was doing and looked at Ishtar like a deer caught in a pair of headlights.

Ishtar said something, but without her headset, it only came across as garbled vocalizations combined with hissing. Then she bared her fangs and approached the desk. As for Sasha, she froze in place and released Suko, who proceeded to crawl away. Meanwhile, the alien delicately placed the RV on the desktop with a slight thud. She made quick work of putting her headset back on and activating her computer, where a flashing orange light indicated that everything was in working order as speakers sprung back to life.

[WHAT WERE YOU DOING TO SUKO?!] she exclaimed with a snarl, startling even the boy as both humans stumbled back. [I leave for just a few minutes to sift through some abandoned buildings, and you're already doing this to each other!?!]

Sasha threw her arms in the air. "The kid was trying to crawl over the edge of the desk! I dragged him away by the legs. What was I supposed to do, let him kill himself?"

As Sasha spoke, Suko moved towards Ishtar with a frown on her face. The sight made her rage seemingly vanish...

[Aw. Is the mean lady making the little one upset?]

After asking this question, the alien lowered her head. She allowed the boy to approach her snout, where she nuzzled him as her nostrils flared. He responded by giving her a hug. Sasha watched on with her jaw agape as the two embraced each other, complete with Ishtar giving him the equivalent of a quick kiss with her serpentine tongue.

Following this, Ishtar formed a crooked smile and looked down at the boy. [Sasha was just trying to protect you. There's no need to be upset!] Ishtar paused as she faced Sasha. [Well, go on then. Take a look inside of your new home!]

Without delay, Sasha approached and opened the door to the RV in a record amount of time. For a moment, things were normal again when she saw the compact interior, which had some brown carpet and old wooden furniture. Things were relatively intact despite Ishtar's handling of the RV. A quick walk down a hall allowed her to see a kitchen, a bathroom, and even a private bedroom that came complete with a bed and other essential commodities.

[Is it acceptable?] asked a soft and booming voice from outside.

A peek out the window revealed Ishtar looming over the vehicle as she tried to look inside.

With a few simple clicks of a latch, Sasha opened the window to the kitchen. "Some stuff is messed up, but I guess this will work once I clean it up and fix a few things..."

[Excellent.]

Upon saying this, the alien gently guided Suko inside. Meanwhile, Sasha sifted through the kitchen cabinets and discovered some dusty cups and plates. Adding to this, she found some canned food, bottled water, and other long-lasting consumables.

As Sasha turned to face the window, she saw a single reptilian eye peeking inside. "Uh... the only problem is that we don't have much food. I mean... who did this RV belong to, anyway?"

Before the alien responded, she used a clawed finger to shut the RV door before her voice filled the air. [A member of my warpack found the vehicle. He claimed that members of your kind could live inside of it and intended to keep it as a souvenir... up until I confiscated it. Regardless, I should be able to remedy the food problem by tomorrow once I have more time to scavenge for things. I entrust you to properly feed and take care of Suko for now, and hopefully, having a proper home will prevent those... issues... that you were having with him before.]

After hearing his name, Sasha looked at a small living room adjoining the kitchen. Suko was already in the process of spreading himself across a couch as he drifted to sleep. The woman only joined him for the sake of sitting on what appeared to be a recliner facing an old television set, and it seemed to be over a decade old based on its large size, wooden frame, and dust coating its glass screen.

[For now, goodnight, my little hatchlings! I need to grab something to eat before sleeping after such a long day. Hopefully, we can all eat brunch equivalent together tomorrow morning!]

Accompanying these words, Ishtar stuck out her tongue. As she stood up, she waved with a clawed hand while wiggling her fingers. It wasn't long until the zenari disappeared from Sasha's view and exited the tent with a few flicks of her tail. Once the alien was gone, Sasha rested her head in her hands as the reality of her situation finally dawned on her... for she was now nothing more than a prisoner under the most bizarre circumstances possible.