



Excerpt One

December 2, 2026

Alainn woke knowing someone was in her room.

Whoever it was sat behind her. Quiet, even breaths rasped through the air. Alainn's eyelids peeked open. Moonlight cast a grayish glow, cutting deep shadows into the space around her bed.

"Good morning, Alainn," Rose said in a quiet voice. When Alainn didn't respond, Rose said, "I can tell from the change in your breathing pattern that you are awake."

"Rose?" she whispered, not quite ready to let out a sigh of relief. Alainn twisted to look at her. "What are you doing here? Did you break my lock?"

"I picked it," she said. "It is now locked again."

"Oh, uh—" Her heart pounded in her chest; she sat up and faced the robot.

"Why—why would you do that?"

The moonlight lit half of Rose's face as she watched Alainn, expressionless. "Do not be alarmed. You are obviously having a fear reaction, but I was simply waiting for you to wake up."

"Don't you need to sleep—recharge?"

Now that Alainn faced Rose, she smelled the faint odor of her exhaust. Rose continuously exhaled the lightest tang of something sweet and acidic. The air in the room felt used, like a plane cabin after a cross-country flight.

"I was not completely forthcoming with you today. While what I said was true, I have for a time now believed that having Father imprisoned would impede my potential. While I have far surpassed his skills in software, there are times when I need assistance. I am limited by my need to stay near my charging station. Your brother is often absent for days at a time—and you, months."

“Okay, wait—you’re going to go tomorrow?” Alainn scooted forward on the bed. A dormant hope resurged through her. Alainn would do anything—she’d worship at the robot’s feet if Rose agreed to go.

“No, *you* are going to go tomorrow.”

Alainn froze, staring at Rose. “What?” she whispered.

“I have calculated one way in which all parties can achieve their desires.”

“I’m sorry—I’m not understanding.” Alainn shook her head. A hard knot formed in her stomach.

“I am not surprised.” Rose reached out to pat Alainn’s hand. “You are not as intelligent as the rest of your family.”

“Spell it out in really simple terms, then.” She just managed to not growl the words at Rose.

Slowly, Rose looked up to the ceiling, moonlight slashing up the curve of her neck, her chin, and the line of her nose. “Earlier tonight, I arranged for you to be picked up by Mr. Garbhan through e-mail, writing as if I was Father. In one hour, a car will arrive outside to take you to his building. I have designed and created hardware for your body. If you are scanned, a chip in the hardware will communicate to the scanners that you have an organic circuitry system rather than a human brain.”

Alainn shook her head, hoping to dislodge some of the grogginess there. “I’m still not following—you’re saying you want *me* to pretend to be *you* and turn myself over? That you already arranged it?”

“Yes, you are following. That is exactly what I am saying.”

“I—I—” Alainn shook her head again. The air thinned around her.

“I have a working plan for the transplanting. You can assimilate easily into a life of servitude as you are already accustomed to the labor you will be asked to perform.” Rose lifted a hand, ghostly gray in the low light, and ticked off the chores on her fingers. “Cooking, housekeeping, and bookkeeping. Unless . . . is your concern that he might use you for sexual gratification?”

“What? No.”

“I believe that this would be a particular concern of yours.”

“I never even considered that he would do that to you—I, of all people, would never have tried to push you into going if I thought you’d be used that way.” Alainn blinked furiously. “Rose, do you really think that I would have let myself be the model when my dad printed your face and body if I thought Mr. Garbhan was going to do that to you?”

“It is highly unlikely that I was designed for this function. I have also been assured that there were documents signed to that effect addressed to Father.”

Alainn held out her palms to Rose. “Rose, it’s not just that. I can’t take your place. There’s no way that would work . . . and I can’t live in that tower for the rest of my life. I’m a human. I know that probably sounds callous to you, but you were created to not *need* sunshine and fresh air. And you don’t need exercise. Humans need those things,

me especially. Everything I am," she touched her chest, "is centered on being in the outdoors."

"The duration will be seven to fourteen days, no longer." Her head swung down, causing shadows to swallow her eyes. Two black hollows focused on Alainn. "When Mr. Garbhan pays Father, he and I will make the Rosette model; this process should only take a week, unless there are complications. And then I will devise a way to switch you with the new model."

Excerpt Two

Alainn resisted the urge to walk to the windows, though from here she could see the familiar towers jutting into the air. The bay lounged behind it all, white sails playing across its waters.

The sun was perched fully in the sky now, though somehow it felt more distant than at sunrise. The tapping of feet yanked her attention away. A man entered the room, though he did not enter *exactly*. He halted in the doorway—a doorway devoid of that white light. He remained mostly in shadow.

Alainn squinted at him, trying to see past the shadows, but she couldn't. He stayed where he was, quiet. She felt his gaze on her.

Her body begged to fidget, but she forced it not to. What would Rose do in this situation?

Rose would probably go back to her computations. Unfortunately, that wouldn't work here either.

"You are very humanlike." His voice was immediately recognizable as the same one Alainn had spoken to the day before.

Because the man she assumed must be Mr. Garbhan seemed like he might be waiting for a response, Alainn asked, "Isn't that what you wanted?"

"Yes." His voice came out low. Still, he didn't move forward.

This was getting awkward.

Well, it started out awkward and it was already becoming more so.

Alainn had no idea if she was supposed to say or do anything, so she just continued to sit and look at his shadowy figure.

Eventually, Alainn couldn't do it anymore and she turned her head back to the windows. Mist slipped by, streaming around the tower.

Alainn glanced back to the man. "May I stand?" she asked. Her legs were tingling with the need to move.

"Do whatever you'd like," he said.

Alainn's eyebrows rose; she couldn't help it.

His words sounded almost courteous, which was the last thing that she'd thought would happen.

To hide her surprise, Alainn stood and crossed over to the window.

The thin white blanket of sea air continued to pass over the window, obscuring the view of the bay.

"Do you . . . can you appreciate a view like this?" he asked from behind.

Alainn hesitated. "I do appreciate it. It's pleasing."

The man did not respond or come any closer.

Somehow, with her back to him and the view to her front, Alainn had the confidence to ask, "What functions do you want me to do here? I can cook, clean, help with business—"

“No,” he said.

She looked back to his shadow, trying to hide the alarm from her expression. She needed to see if there was anything in him she could read.

There wasn't.

“No. I don't want you to do any of that,” he reiterated.

“What is it that you *do* want me to do?” Saliva filled her mouth as she waited for his response.

“You will have dinner with me.”

“Dinner?” Alaiinn wasn't able to hide all the surprise from her voice. Rose couldn't eat food. This was a detail that Rose and Alaiinn hadn't addressed in her mad rush to push Alaiinn into this. Rose didn't eat *or* go to the bathroom. She recharged her biological system on a wireless charging station built into her bed.

How was Alaiinn supposed to explain when he heard the toilet flushing?

For the first time, Alaiinn heard the tone of the cold, unyielding man she'd spoken to yesterday. “You will come to the dining room every day at six exactly. If I am not in there, you will wait for me until I am. If I do not come, you will leave the dining room at seven.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You will not call me sir. You will call me Lorccan, or Lor.”

“Yes, Lorccan.”

“And you will never come out of your room at night. Ever.” This he almost yelled.

“Yes, Lorccan,” she repeated.

His breathing came hard from the shadows, inflating the room with an electric tension. When the room had entirely filled with it, he said, “That is all. I cannot spend any more time with you today. The first dinner will be tomorrow.” He stepped entirely out of view, moving his imposing presence away with him.

Taking a steadying breath, Alaiinn called after him, “What should I do with the rest of my time?”

“I don't care. Just stay off the floors above this one before dinner time.” His footsteps echoed as his figure retreated, then quieted to nothing.