

Placeholder Vas Neema

Quarians, an alien race that has been banished from their homeworld from the very synthetics they've created to make their lives easier, known as the geth. For generations they travel the galaxy, unable to find a new place to call home. Ostracized by the other races socially for bringing the geth into existence, and physically due to their extraordinary weak immune systems caused in part of their generations of being on the migrant fleet and their unique homeworld that lacked harmful pathogens that would have stimulated a robust immune system that other species possess.

To protect themselves, the migratory fleet is constantly moving, searching, trading with intergalactic community and each member of the species is dressed in biohazard suits to protect everyone and themselves within the fleet and when dealing with other species. Today appeared to be any other day for the fleet, moving through the void of space, weeks till they get to the next mass relay, scouring an unclaimed asteroid belt for materials needed to keep their ships repaired when long range scanners detected something that will change the lives of three people forever.

"Do you think this is a trap?" asks Laaha'Timin, a female quarian to her husband as they use a small salvaging ship to approach the debris field within part of the outer belt of the asteroid field. Her dark purple visor hides her face from the outside world, her three fingers dancing on the control panel as she reads the scans, "I don't recognize the design or make of the ship."

Sima'Hili his visor a dark blue, with matching dark blue clothing responds, "Perhaps. There was rumor of bandits in the area. I'm sending the scans back to the fleet. Hopefully someone else has run into it." Scopes up salvage along the way, while keeping a constant vigilance, "The ship appears to have suffered burns from bandits, fairly recently too, but look at that hole there," he points, zooming into the side of the ship, where a massive hole about the size of a person is made in the side of the ship.

"It looks like it was hit by an asteroid that tore clean through it.," she remarks.

"We'll use that as our entry point. And if everything looks clear, we'll bring it back to the fleet," he says, their small vessel rumbling as they dock into the hole. Laaha'Timin remains on the ship, while Sima'Hili carefully boards the alien vessel. He carefully pushes his way through the floating debris.

"Careful, you don't want any of that puncturing your suit. Who knows what foreign contaminants are on it."

He chuckles, "Don't worry. I've been in worse scrapes during my pilgrimage," he says, "You never mentioned anything about this on your pilgrimage," she remarks.

"Well, I don't like to brag, but this one time I ran into this Krogan, woah," he remarks, taking a step back when lights in the back half of the ship suddenly flicker on.

"What is it?" she asks with concern, leaning forward in her chair, double checking the scanners for any hostile vessels.

“The ship still has power,” he replies, the door opening into a living space where pictures float in the air. The quarian manages to grab one, seeing a human couple on a beach with blue skies and water, “Wait, I think I’ve seen these before.”

“Seen what?”

“This species... I think they are called, humans.”

“Humans? Didn’t they just fight a war with the Turians? Why would a ship of theirs be this far out?”

“I don’t know. This might be a small private or a long-distance research ship,” he says, catching another picture of the same couple a bit older with a small child in a protective bubble, “It looks like they keep their children in a protective bubble like us and have hair too.”

“Hair? Really? I wasn’t expecting that.”

“I wonder if they are a dextro-protein race like us.”

“I wouldn’t get your hopes up, only the Turians have been like that,” she remarks.

“Never know. They could have some exotic cuisine to try.”

“And risk infection? It’s not worth it.”

“Who knows, it might be.”

“You know I couldn’t.”

Sima’Hili stops at the next door, tensing a little, an image flashing in his mind which makes his heart sink, “You’re right. Forget I mentioned it.”

She tenses when she hears the tremble in his voice, sharing the same unspoken memory, a hand resting on her stomach. But then she relaxes, smiling behind her mask speaking softly, “It’s alright. So far there’s no signs of any hostile ships. Whatever happened here the bandits seem to be long gone.”

“Keelah se’lai, there’s one still alive.”

Laaha’Timin sits up in her chair, “What? But our scans indicate there’s no life support systems active.”

Sima’Hili responds, “It’s the child. It’s in the protective bubble. The support systems must draw so little power that we didn’t detect it,” he says, looking at the floating kid within the bubble, kicking, and weakly flaying about. Too exhausted to even cry anymore. “I’m going to get it on board. I’m not sure how long it’s been here, but it certainly can’t last much longer. It’s a miracle he’s still alive.”

“I’ll get the ship ready to accept a foreign occupant. Try to establish a connection with the ship’s computer. Find out if they can breathe our air.”

“Already on it,” he responds, uploading all the data to their ship, leaving the salvage for another day, and taking the child back, placing what they soon discover to be a *him* into quarantine. They look at the child, seeing how frail and weak he looks.

Laasha’Timin asks the quarian doctor, “Will he live?”

The doctor dressed in white, visor and all responds, “Unclear. We have limited knowledge on human biology but going through the data you collected from the ship, we found his medical records and are in the process of translating it now.”

Sima'Hili remarks, "I wonder how happy the fleet is going to be to change course to human space."

"I'm sure they'd like the idea to establish positive relations with the new up-and-coming species. But that is something for the admirals to decide," he answers when the computer beeps, "It looks like the translations are done." He walks over to the computer, his eyes widening, "This is surprising."

Laaha'Timin approaches him, "What is it?"

"It appears the human has a rare genetic disorder that has nearly completely disabled his immune system. There were already two cases of him nearly dying from something called the flu within the first four months of his life and he's barely six months old now."

Sima'Hili asks, "Why would his parents take him into space when they don't have to?"

The doctor types into the holographic screen, "They were quoted saying, "If our child's world is this bubble. Then we'll bring the world to him."

The doctor continues to look, commenting, "Human understanding of their own biology pales in comparison to other species."

Laaha'Timin feels a weight upon her as she says, "Taking the child back to their people is most likely sentencing him to death."

"Maybe, but that is not for us to decide."

Sima'Hili quickly states, "What if it is?"

"What?" the doctor asks, turning to face him, "What are you suggesting Sima'Hili vas Neema?"

"You know my wife can't have another child. What if we adopt him as our own?"

"I couldn't recommend it. He's a Levo-protein based life form. He can't even eat the same food as us."

"Levo-protein is cheaper in the universe, the impact on the fleet will be negated, and it would save the fleet time to get to human space to drop him off to only have a limited life where he could live a full life here."

The doctor sighs, "You'd need to take it up with the captain, and then it will be up to the admirals to decide."

"I'll do just that," he says, looking at his wife who even through the mask, he can see the mixture of shock, surprise and love behind those words.

She takes a deep breath, standing beside him, "Captain Ka'till can be very intimidating, I won't let you do this alone."

"I'll be fine. But I appreciate the company from someone as lovely as our home," he says, running his hand against her bio-protection helmet.

The doctor comments, "I advise against it. His immune system is as worse than our own but that doesn't mean he's still not a biological risk, but I'll say no more. The captain has my report," he said, tapping on a holographic computer projection on his wrist, "And he knows you're coming. We'll see if he has time to see you."

Sima'Hili looks to his wife and then back to the human child, his wife holding onto him, giving his hand a little squeeze, "He will."

Words and reality meet and collide, not on some grand ship bridge, but in his private quarters, space is a luxury that no quarian has. Captain Ka'till's bio-suit is of dark blues which almost turn into purple, striped with black with a golden class helmet that hides the outline of his face more than most others. He stands tall and proud, motioning the two to take a seat, which they both do.

A moment of silence hangs in the air, the couple hold onto them, doubt swells in the back of their mind, not so much on their decision, but if they should wait for him to talk or break the silence himself.

"Not a thing happens on this ship without me hearing about it," he says, taking command of the conversation, "Every birth. Every death," he says, slowly, with a hint of concern, giving both a long stare, "You're both very hard workers. Kind, carrying, empathetic to everyone you meet. It's a shame what happened to two of the finest quarians on this ship. But don't think because of what happened in your past that you are any less valuable members to the migrant fleet."

Laaha'Timin jumps from her seat, "That's not it!" she exclaims, catching herself a moment later, hand still tightly grasped by Sima'Hili who looks at her with a concerned loving face, helping to pull her back down to her chair, ever so slowly, "Sorry."

The captain raises his hand, slightly waving it off, standing tall behind his desk, "I can understand. The child is a human. A species barely known to us. It's a great risk to the fleet. We know nothing of their ways, except they were willing to wage war against the Turians. Barely able to use the mass relays and they've stirred up trouble with a council race. What do you think they'll do if they find out we've taken one of their own?"

Simi'Hili speaks up, standing up slowly, "I've looked through the ship's records. The child's family left their own so he could see the galaxy. He could barely survive with his kind. We have the means and technology to give him a full life that he could never have had otherwise. And perhaps he could bridge the gap between our species. Become an ambassador to the new species. A valuable trading ally."

"That is a lot of what-if's and possibilities Simi'Hili vas Neema. As Captain of this ship, I can't deal with possibilities, but certainties. For the very continuation of our species depends on not only my decisions but that of every captain, admiral and council member."

He remains firm, "I... we know that. Every quarian knows it. The loss of a home we would love to see. To return to those waters, breathe the air, and every day we are away pains us in a way that no other species can understand."

"And yet you want to bring this human on board our ship? Take it as your own? Deny him his own people. Homeworld? You'd put this child through the same forced upon wanderlust that we endure?"

Laaha'Timin pulls onto Simi'Hili's hand, not to yank him back down, but to pull herself back onto her feet, "That's where you are wrong captain."

Captain Ka'till turns his attention to her, his hands behind his back, "Explain."

"He was born into the world like us, unable to remain at his home. Fate deciding that he should be wandering the stars."

"That was his parents doing, not his."

"Was it our ancestors that decided our fates which we must now endure?"

The Captain pulls his arms back in front of him, tapping on his wrist to type into a holographic computer screen, alien text flies past him with the quarian translations next to it, "His parented cared for im very much. Wanting to see the galaxy instead of being stuck on a bubble their entire fragile life. You'd exchange their simple bubble prison with that of the migrant fleet. Plastic with metal. Turning their kind into as alien as they are to us now. Is this fair to the child?"

Laaha'Timin tenses, "I know what you are saying captain, and this is not just an impulse decision."

"Is it though? You know nothing about human biology. It says here they can't even eat our food. Special measures would have to be made that they survive, expending limited resources for one."

Sima'Hili shakes his head, "We always do. Every meal we have is an expenditure of resources for the one. But that one is part of many, and that many is us as a whole. I believe there is much we can learn about each other and what he could achieve, if given the chance. A chance that he won't have with his kind."

Laaha'Timin adds, "This is not to replace what happened, but more we are able to take him in as our own. It would make no sense to have a family who could..." she trails off when the Captain raises his hand.

"I know what you are getting at. But again, all you two speak about is possibilities and believes. Nothing concrete. I can't just allow you to take on this human child just like that. I'll pass it up the chain perhaps they'll rule in your favor, but I doubt it."

"Captain," says Sima'Hili, taking a step forward, "We've existed and survive by our beliefs. A belief that we will one day see our homeland. You can't say that you operate on nothing but cold calculating logic. We aren't machines."

The captain keeps his composure, taking a deep breath, looking over at the pictures of the previous captains that commanded this vessel, each showing their real faces, unhindered by their biosuits. He looks at his own, remembering the antibiotic treatments he had to go through just to last long enough to make it through the after effects of going out of suit to take the picture. He caught a nasty bug from it. There was no reason to take such a risk for a simple picture. Yet it was done so out of tradition. Remembrance of all those who helped carry the people forward based on that one singular belief, that they will one day return home.

The quarian couple stand firm, close to each other, watching the captain, giving him the time and space, waiting in the moment of silence that only he can break. Under the command that what he says in the end, goes.

Captain Ka'till turns back to them, pulling up his omni-tool, looking through the countless reports, his well-trained eye, able to skim through information within minutes that would take a novice hours to do, "I've thought about it, and I've come to a decision. And what I say goes, do you understand? My decision is not made lightly. I have more than just you to look after but everyone on this ship and to a lesser extend the fleet as a whole."

They nod, "We understand." Laaha'Timin tightens her grip on her husband, as he returns it, wrapping an arm around her in a comforting hold.

"The humans call themselves the alliance. And their space is about seven relay jumps from where we are now. That is quiet the distance for any one person. We couldn't risk taking the fleet or a lone vessel to take him back to his kind. And it just so happens there are no quarians about to reach pilgrim age on the fleet for a few more months. And it wouldn't be right to force upon a mission to drop off this child with someone on their journey to become an adult."

The couple hold each other a bit tighter, Laaha'Timin hinting what she and her husband are hoping, "Does this mean what I think it does?"

"For now I will allow it. But his place on this ship will be placed on hold and the ones above me might come to a different conclusion when they hear about this."

Sima'Hili holds his wife close, "And when will that be?"

"I'm sure word will get around to them, but by then, perhaps you two can give more concrete answers than what you've given me."

Laaha'Timin gleefully exclaims, "Thank you Captain Ka'till. I don't know... we don't know how to thank you for this opportunity."

He waves her off, "Prove me wrong and that will be enough for me. The resources required to take him back far outstrip what is required to keep him here, for now at least. Till then, his fate will be placed on hold."

She smiles and nods, "Thank you Captain. And I think I know what to call him Sima'Hili."

He looks to her, a smile on his face, hidden by his mask, but felt just the same by her, "Oh, and what would that be?"

Several years later...

"Placeholder! Be careful when moving through the ship!" exclaims Laaha'Timin, giving her son a bit of a tongue flashing.

Placeholder is almost as tall as his parents now and rapidly still growing being in his mid-teens. His blue and black suit and dark blue glass visor would give him the appearance of anyone else on the ship, if it were not for his feet lacking the distinct two toes of the others, which some of the other kids would call him "Round feet". Though he has five fingers, the suits three finger design works well enough for him and when offered to get a custom suit for his unique hand biology he simply responds, "No, last thing I want to be called is a five hand."

Reluctantly his parents agreed to this wish, wanting him to fit in with the others as much as possible.

He looks at his mother, saying, "It's fine. I know what I am doing. I'm staying out of the other's way."

"We'll be traveling through some difficult space soon. I just worry."

"Mom, you always worry."

"I just have this feeling something bad is going to happen to you."

"You always say that. I'm caught up on my studies and I promised to catch up with my friend Hedini. I can't keep him waiting," he says, bouncing on his feet.

She sighs, "You're so much like your father is maddening."

He grins, "Thanks Mom, love you!" he exclaims rushing off.

"Hey, I didn't say you could..." She reaches out to him, but he's gone before she even knows it, disappearing down the ship "I blame his father for going so easy on him," she huffs, shaking her head a little, trying to shake off that feeling.

When the alarms blare an hour later that feeling grew even worse. The ship took on light damage from an unexpected hit by a large asteroid that it couldn't navigate around. It would be later known that the rock was made up of a material that absorbed a lot of their sensors masking its approach. A rare stealth rock as it were, but that became irrelevant when she and her husband would get the news that made their hearts sink down into their stomachs, their son has been in an accident.

They rushed to the medical ship where he was transported. His injuries along with his unique biology demanded he'd be brought there. The story of what happened, brought to them in piece meal, each part adding to the concern they shared.

"He was in the part of the ship that was hit by the asteroid."

"He was hurt saving his friend from falling debris."

"He was found under the debris, badly injured."

"He was partially crushed."

"He's lucky to be alive at all."

The sight they saw, made that sinking feeling go all the way down to their feet. His legs were completely destroyed and unrecoverable, leaving with just two options. To be ousted from the migrant fleet as there are few resources to spare for those who can't help the fleet continue its endless voyage through space. Or further invest into a human with their limited resources, meaning that when he becomes of age and does his pilgrimage, he'll need to find something big to be welcomed back to the fleet. Unwilling to lose their child, Laaha'Timin and Sima'Hili fought hard for the latter, and with a vote two to one by the admiralty, they got their wish. The fact he saved a quarian's life at the expense of his own was the key in tipping the scales in his favor.

And through it all, their son, though pained by the situation, kept up a smile and had only one thing to say, "At least now I'll look like everyone else." The quarian suit perfectly hides the synthetic enhancement, for good measure as seeing it bare would remain all quarians just why

they are on a migrant fleet in the first place. But in the end, it leaves Placeholder's parents with one looming worry as the time till his pilgrimage shifts from years to just mere months. Will he bring back something worthy enough to be accepted back?