

IA: UNION



PREVIEW

When Naz reached D's house, something was different. She had always met him before he even reached the walkway leading to her steps. No matter, today was as good as any to meet her parents up close and personal. He walked up the steps and rang the doorbell.

She opened the door immediately and stuck her head out. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"Uh, picking you up for—"

Before he could finish, she was pulled back inside and the door swung open wide.

"Daddy, I'm gonna to be late for school," D said.

Naz decided to stick his head inside.

D was standing in front of her father.

"It's your birthday, sweetie. You don't have to go to school today." He held her wrist.

"It doesn't matter, Daddy; I still have to go to school," she pleaded.

Naz had never officially met D's father, had never even seen him up close. He wore overalls that barely contained his beer-belly. His hair was disheveled and his skin burnt red by the sun. He had the appearance that he hadn't shaved in days and reeked of something awful. Naz didn't need to see anymore to know D was in trouble. He looked around the room and found a table, which held a lamp and set the flowers he had brought for her down. He immediately walked up to the man with his hand out.

"Hello, Sir. I'm Naz Andersen, so nice to finally meet."

D's father looked at him. "Naz ... what kind of name is that? I didn't—"

"Actually, Naz is just a nickname I gave myself. It's from the Bible, short for Nazarite," said Naz, trying to distract the man. He didn't have a plan beyond that, but he figured if he could keep talking, he could get D out of the house without incident. He was hoping. "Samson was a Nazarite—"

"Shut up!" The man was clearly confused and irritated. "I didn't invite you into my home." Spit flew from the man's mouth.

"We were just leaving, sir." Naz grabbed D's hand.

"Let her go!" The man snatched D away from Naz and moved to another part of the room. "Get out!" He looked at Naz and instead of pointing to the front door, which was already open, he pointed to the kitchen door."

"Daddy, don't. You're drunk," D reasoned.

Naz knew at this point diplomacy had failed, and he willed a part of himself alive that he had kept in check since moving back to the Exclave.

"Don't say that, baby. Daddy's just lonely," the man said calmly, still holding her wrist.

D looked at Naz, her eyes sad. "My momma didn't come home last night."

"How dare you talk about your mother like that. She's twice the women you ... or your good for nothin' sister will ever be."

D's words struck a nerve as her father raised his fist up and back in retaliation for her impudence.

Naz closed his eyes. D recoiled.

D closed her eyes, but there was no impact. An unseen force held her father's hand at bay. He could not move it forward or back. Naz opened his eyes, and D was looking at him awestruck. Naz had one hand near his head, palm open, facing them and the other in a fist at his side. When Naz slowly opened the hand at his side, D watched as her father slowly released his grip on her wrist. She looked at her wrist then at her father. He said nothing but stood still as a statue, sweating and shaking, his eyes looking into hers in some kind of perverted pain.

"D," Naz called.

When she looked at Naz again, he was standing calmly.

“Let’s go,” he finished.

She looked back at her father who seemed frozen in time and slowly walked away. Naz held out his hand. She took it, and he led her out the door. He looked back one last time and resisted the urge to threaten her father; he trusted his handiwork spoke volumes.

They walked hand-in-hand for almost a minute in silence.

“Where’s your glasses?” asked Naz.

“Naz.” She stopped and looked at him. “Did you do that ... all of that with my father? Did you ... hypnotize him ... cast some demonic spell on him?”

“No ... but I did stop him from hitting you. I’ll never let *anyone* ... hurt you.” He started walking again without her.

“Naz, so what did you do?” She caught up with him and took his hand.

He stopped and looked at her. “Do you remember what I told you ... about how my mom died?”

“Of course ... your stepdad, too ... that it was a freak accident. It was the first day I ever saw you cry ... and the last. It made me feel closer to you, that you would trust me with your pain.”

“Well there was more to it.”

“I figured there was, and that you would tell me one day.” She stopped him, grabbed both his hand, stood on her toes and kissed his lips.” I’m listening.

“Well it wasn’t an accident.”