

Chapter 7: Decision

I found it surprisingly easy to initiate the rest of the slave routines. But this time the results hit several days later.

I was working in the new clone dwelling with Duan, trying to keep myself on task in spite of a pervasive sense that I was unable to finish anything. I forced a surge of effort, stood up to reach a high access panel, and the pain hit. I stood in shock, immobilized by twisting muscles in my torso.

I had never known great pain – so I assumed it was some serious injury. As I looked down to see what was wrong, the image overwhelmed me. I gave an unintelligible shout to Duan as my legs loosened, and I felt myself spinning around a small pool of my own blood.

I felt sick and dizzy, and pressed my abdomen in a fruitless attempt to force the pain into submission. But the combination of fear, pain and nausea overtook me. I tried to grasp the nearest counter for support, but missed, and the wall swirled upward as I fell to the floor.

I lay still with my eyes closed... stunned. My head had struck the wall, but I felt no pain. When I opened my eyes, Duan was close, concern flowing on every channel.

Every possible question was racing through my mind, but as moments passed, my cognitive skills mastered the majority easily. Many of the questions, like 'Am I on land or ship' were absurdly trivial, yet quite essential before understanding what had just happened.

Duan spoke with a deep supportive timbre. "I think you are fine, Jama. You probably just passed your first viable gamete. Bleeding is a natural part of your fertility cycle."

I looked at him doubtfully. “Then why are you so concerned?”

Duan was surprised for only a second, then, with a slight smile of recognition and a deep sigh he said, “The expected symptoms file did not suggest you would lose consciousness. I was about to summon an automaton.”

Hearing Duan talk helped clear my head. *Of course.* This was exactly what I had been expecting after removing the final hormone blocks. “Duan, I completely forgot about my fertility cycle, and the pain frightened me.” Then I looked down at the floor and my clothing. “Home, Duan! How do I adjust to this much bleeding. Why is it necessary?”

He gave no answer – doubtful I really needed him to. This was reality, and I had to get used to it if I wanted to bear a child. I picked myself up, stripped off my bloody clothes and took them to the cleaning unit recessed into the opposite wall. I washed my hands and looked in a mirror over the wash basin. My face was a strange off-color, so I took a few moments to relax, and watched as the darker tones lightened into a more healthy hue. I spoke softly to myself in the mirror, as though my reflection could respond, saying, “Now you get to clean up the floor – happy?”

I turned, laughing a bit at myself, and saw Duan working on the mess. “I will clean it up, Duan. I need to get used to it.” I walked over and reached for the mop.

But he held it away, saying, “Jama, I want to help. Besides, next time you will know what to do.” He paused, looking at me for a moment, a restrained smile spreading. “But maybe you should go get something absorptive for yourself.” Then his laugh snuck out and I realized what he was talking about.

My hand became a stopper while I ran to the supplies locker for a fix.