

Clan Companions
Matthew

Chapter One

The nightmare giant stood over Kom's lifeless body. Matt screamed, and the monster turned to him. It reached from an impossible distance, but he knew it would catch him.

He turned and ran. Fell. He scrambled in the sudden darkness, searching for a place to hide. He found it, a hole in the ground, perhaps a cave. He crawled inside.

A hand like a manacle grabbed his ankle. It pulled him out, into dimly lit surroundings. He screamed and flailed, fighting the monster.

"Matt! Wake up!"

Kom's voice. As Matt was dragged from beneath the bunk in their shared quarters, there was Kom himself, scarred but whole. Alive. The monster was gone. Reality flooded in and reminded him of where he was.

Sobbing, Matt leapt at the Nobek, his arms wrapping around Kom's neck. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

"Hush. I'm here. You're safe." Kom sat cross-legged on the floor and gathered Matt against his chest. He rocked him and stroked his long, blond hair.

Matt wept, as much from shame as the terror of the nightmare. No matter how often he suffered the same horror, it never failed to devastate him. The only change in seven months was Kom's presence in it. His Kalquorian friend had been cast in the starring role of Matt's greatest fear.

As Matt's hitching breaths eased and his shaking calmed, Kom asked, "The monster, huh?"

"Uh-huh."

"Did I die this time?"

"I'm sorry."

Kom sighed. He placed a finger under Matt's chin and lifted his tear-streaked face. Their gazes met. "You know I'm a bad motherfucker to keep coming back from the dead."

Matt choked a surprised laugh. "You must be."

Kom grinned, softening ruggedly handsome features, but there was darkness in his purple eyes. Guilt stabbed Matt. Kom dealt with so much shit from him.

"No, you don't. No blame for nightmares you can't help." The Nobek's lips pressed his.

His touches were almost always gentle, but his kisses rarely were. He kissed as if he'd devour Matt. Passion lit, strong and heady...but it failed to replace his fears.

The monster was in his head. It snarled to him that it stood outside the door of their quarters, ready to burst in and catch them, two men, sharing an embrace it cursed as foul. Matt's palms slammed Kom's chest to push him away.

Matt wasn't weak. He'd been in the military years before and trained to fight. Kom had instructed him in Kalquorian hand-to-hand techniques too. He worked out regularly under his friend's guidance and was in the best shape of his life, toned with a decent amount of muscle.

Matt was small, however, even for a human. He stood five-foot-two in his shoes, barely up to his companion's chest. He was no match for a Kalquorian, especially Kom, a battle-tested warrior Nobek. Kom was almost a foot and a half taller and pure muscled brawn. He didn't shift an inch despite Matt's panicked shoving. The kiss continued until Kom was ready for it to end.

Over the past seven months, they'd done this dance more often than Matt could count. When Kom's hand slid over his crotch and Matt grabbed his wrist to try to stop him, familiar words rose over his frightened pants.

"Easy. You're safe. No one's going to hurt you or me. There's nothing to be afraid of, Mattie." The strong-featured face hovering over his was as intense as ever, but a smile hinted at Kom's lips. His cat-pupiled eyes were calm, his voice quiet. "You're nowhere near Mercy Colony. Sven Larsen has no idea where you are. Earth is gone, and no one, especially your father, can judge you for who you are."

Kom's touch was magic despite the fears it awoke. Heat poured into Matt's groin. Senseless fears refused to let him go, but his cock stiffened in Kom's hot, calloused grip. The Nobek insisted Matt sleep nude, an exercise in affirming he was free to live and love as he'd been born to.

It was the only therapy they'd come up with for the lingering trauma dogging Matt's every waking and sleeping minute. That, and the sleeping medication administered three times a week under Dr. Doljen's watchful eye.

"Don't. Don't," Matt whimpered, though the coils of terror were unraveling as Kom masturbated him to full erection. He was merely holding his beloved's wrist, resistance ebbing in the distance. "I can't."

"You'll come for me," Kom promised. "We'll prove once again you can, and no one will be hurt because of it. We'll do this until the nightmares give you up."

He lifted Matt onto the bed they shared. Matt's legs hung off the edge, spread apart, and Kom kneeled on the floor between them.

"Don't." Matt's voice was a thin whisper. He'd already surrendered, though his gaze slid to the closed door of their small quarters. Part of him defied any logic. It insisted the door would slide open, and the monster would stride in to enact vengeance.

"My poor, sweet little man," Kom sighed, staring at the shaft in his fist. He bowed over it.

Matt cried out as his cock was enveloped by warmth, as Kom's rough tongue stroked its underside. As long, sleek black hair spilled down to hide his features, falling over Matt's lower abdomen. As Kom's head bobbed over him, as he sucked and swallowed.

There was no resistance now, though in the power of subconscious sway, Matt's gaze found the door repeatedly as swells of bliss made his sight hazy. He bit his lip in an effort to silence the moans, keeping anyone listening in the corridor beyond from discovering what they did, but as Kom urged him toward crescendo, exhalations of rising excitement escaped with increasing frequency.

"Can't," Matt groaned as exhilaration filled his groin. "Don't make me," he added as a thrilling ribbon of exquisite sweetness began to unfurl. "Stop!" he wailed as it barreled through his cock.

All was tumult and frenzy as rapture jolted his senses. Kom's mouth and throat pulled rhythmically, swallowing the bursts of passion emptying Matt's loins. Matt jerked beneath him, for a few seconds blessedly free of the phantoms haunting him.

He was still uttering tiny sounds of gratification when Kom curled them together on the bunk, pulled the covers over them, and ordered the lights off.

Spooned in the warm curve of the bigger man's body, Matt came to himself by degrees. The rigid, slick thicknesses against his buttocks recalled him to his lover and what he'd done for him.

"Do you want me to—?"

"Try to sleep. Tomorrow's a big day." Kom kissed his temple and cuddled him closer.

“I want you to feel better too.”

“I’m fine, beautiful. Sleep.”

Guilt was a ready commodity, easy to come by. Matt wished Kom would let him jerk him off. It was the least he could do after the Nobek had snapped him out of the nightmare’s tendency to spiral him into the depths of shame and hurt.

They’d been together seven months. They were regarded as a couple by those who knew them. Yet the most they’d indulged in as lovers was mutual masturbation and Kom sucking Matt off after his nightmares.

Matt had yet to attempt fellatio on the Nobek who’d saved him. Actual intercourse wasn’t even up for debate. On his best days, he thought he might be ready for the next step as far as physical relations were concerned, but Kom wouldn’t hear of it.

“One step at a time,” he’d insisted when Matt tremulously brought it up. “I couldn’t handle it if you fell apart on me during an act that should be only absolute pleasure. There’s no rush. We’re together, and we’re staying together. The rest will happen when you’re ready.”

Matt was grateful Kom was so careful, but remorse grated on him. The Nobek wasn’t getting a fraction of the attention he deserved.

He wanted Kom as intimately as he could have him. He was eager to show his lover how much he meant to him. He wanted to share himself completely.

But always in the background, and often in the forefront of his mind, the monster was there, shouting at him it would destroy the joy he’d found with another man, as it had done before.

“Sleep, Mattie.” Kom slung a leg over his. He wrapped him in his concern, in his love, in his eternal readiness to forgive the endless irritations Matt thrust upon him.

“I love you, Kom.” The words were pathetic when he had so few actions at his command to back them up. It was no wonder Nobeks refused to speak them to other men.

“My beautiful man,” Kom whispered. His tone was happier than it should have been.

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Kom stepped to the hatch of the cargo transport vessel *Rogue* for the last time, feeling unreal to close this particular chapter of his life.

I’m opening another. Hopefully, it’ll be happy. He glanced at Matt, who stood at his side. The sight sent doubt thudding through him.

Matt was pale-skinned as a matter of course. “Nordic bloodlines. I didn’t get the height, but I have the skin. If I were any whiter, I’d be mayonnaise,” he’d joked.

“You taste a hell of a lot better than mayonnaise,” Kom had answered, grinning when Matt blushed.

He was white, all right, more so than usual as they readied to leave the *Rogue*. It made the blue of his eyes stand out. His lips, a fascinating shade of pink, were a stark rose color at the moment. They darkened when he was emotional, whether the feelings were good or bad.

Kom had a good idea of which way Matt’s feelings were tending at that instant.

Though he was obviously tense about the coming face-to-face encounter with Kom’s clanmates...not for a mere week’s visit, but a reunion that was to hopefully last the rest of his life...Matt yanked on Kom’s heart in a way no other man ever had. He appeared vulnerable, igniting the protectiveness native to a Nobek warrior. Beyond his anxiety, however, was a sweet, guileless visage Kom was certain had never turned angry his entire life. Fearful and sickened, yes, but irate? An enraged Matthew Larsen was impossible to imagine.

He summed up the word *adorable*. A cute snub nose. Round cheeks. Those plump lips, which pooched when he was upset. He had an impish smile capable of halting Kom's heart when it made its too-seldom appearance. It transformed Matt into a being too endearing to deny him anything.

A true Nobek wouldn't speak of love for another man, but a mere glance at Matt filled Kom to the brim with the sentiment. It took every ounce of his strength to avoid reaching for him, to escape grabbing him, holding him close, and stroking his silky, shoulder-length blond hair. It was on the tip of Kom's tongue tell him for the millionth time everything would be all right and no one could hurt him now.

"I never thought this day would come. It's nice you wore clothes for such a momentous occasion." Captain Bernadette Miller interrupted Kom's thoughts. She grinned at him in his tank top and shorts, but her eyes were bright with tears.

Matt snickered, his expression lighting for a moment before worry clouded it once more. Bernadette tipped him a wink, her own stern features easing. She returned her attention to Kom. She understood how uncomfortable Matt grew when someone gazed at him for a few seconds. Particularly when the person looking at him was a fellow human.

Kom smirked, pretending he felt no grief at leaving his longtime friend and employer. "You'll miss seeing a real man around the ship." He glanced at her clanmates, particularly Nobek Halmiko.

As Dramok Tumsa chuckled and Imdiko Doljen's eyes rolled, Halmiko motioned toward his pants crotch, pretending he'd open it. "Want to see who measures up? I'll give you a real chance. We'll compare my secondary to your primary."

Bernadette scowled. "Thanks for reminding me of what I won't miss." Then her eyes misted over, and she gave Kom an awkward hug. "Take care of yourself. Larsen, don't take any nonsense off this idiot, okay?"

"I'll try, but nonsense is what he does best."

They probably laughed too hard at Matt's rare attempt at humor, but the sense of loss was overwhelming.

I'm doing this. I'm leaving the Rogue behind. When Kom glanced at Matt, however, his resolve firmed. The Earther was the reason he'd absented himself from his clan and roamed space in what should have been a hopeless search. He'd found Matt, and the hour had come to give him a happy home and the stability he'd been denied. When the hatch opened, he said goodbye to his friends and left his home of more than two years without a backward glance.

Matt was on his heels as he descended the ramp. His fingertips ghosted against Kom's elbow, left bare by his sleeveless tank, but he didn't grab on as the Nobek knew he wished to. When they were around others, particularly strangers, he wouldn't go further than that almost-contact.

Kom heard his sharp intake of breath as they entered the din of Kalquor's capital city's spaceport. Not only did tall, dark-skinned, black-haired Kalquorians swarm the docks, but also a fairly large number of Matt's fellow Earthers, a similar race of various colors and sizes.

Matt whimpered. His fingers brushed Kom's elbow and disappeared, seeking and rejecting shelter at once.

At the foot of the ramp Kom turned to him. Matt's gaze darted in every direction, instinctively searching for a threat while pretending casualness. No one standing farther than Kom would notice his minute trembling.

Kom restrained the urge to snarl at those who passed them and openly stared at Matt. Well-fed and healthy under Kom's care, a far cry from how the Nobek had found him, he was that damned cute. Many couldn't resist gawking when they saw him. His wide-eyed alarm while he attempted to appear nonchalant was easily misconstrued as an innocent's avidly curious gaze. Only Kom knew he was on the brink of bolting to find a place to hide.

I should have brought him home sooner, where we could find help beyond sedatives. Kom had hoped remaining in the *Rogue's* familiar environs would better ease Matt into normal, everyday life and loosen past ties that kept him knotted in fear and dread. After several months, he'd seen no sign of recovery.

"Kom! Matt!" Masok's delighted shout rose above the port's thunderous voice. The Imdiko appeared ahead of Avir, both hurrying to greet them.

Kom's heart swelled, and he prodded Matt forward, eager to greet his clanmates. They'd been more than kind to allow him to search for Matt for so many years when he should have been home with them. He vowed to show his overwhelming gratitude as soon as possible.

Masok's glee was evident in the wide grin spreading over his earnest, pleasant features. Muscled but trimmer than his clanmates, he was a stirring sight to Kom in his casual but fashionable shirt and shorts. His waist-length hair was plaited in a braid, which swung as he rushed to them.

He planted a hearty, cock-stirring kiss on Kom's lips. "How's the arm? Is it still working well?"

"Couldn't be better. Wait until I show you the new moves I can do with it." Kom wagged his brows suggestively and flexed the prosthetic arm. His former limb had been mangled in an attack on the *Rogue* some months ago, shortly after he'd found Matt.

The prosthetic was a top-of-the-line model. It would have appeared to be the arm he'd lost, but for the missing scars and where it divided at the wrist from his new hand, a separate unit. Microprocessors fed information to his brain and almost made it feel like the appendage he'd been born with.

"And here's this gorgeous sweetheart! Welcome home at last, Matt!" Masok grabbed the blonde and picked him up for a hug.

Before Kom could react to the alarm bursting over Matt's face, he was also grabbed. "My Nobek!" Avir's kiss was just as passionate as Masok's had been. His workout was almost identical to his Nobek's, though he wasn't quite as defined. Avir felt damned good despite Kom's concern for Matt. "It's so good to say hello without a goodbye in the near future!"

"Yeah, it's wonderful," he answered breathlessly, trying to return the affection and check on Matt too.

"Are you excited? Glad to finally put down roots?" Masok had set Matt down, but he was petting his hair and fussing over the small Earther, somehow missing how wildly Matt examined their surroundings and the people passing them.

"Hold on there! Where do you think you're going with our little guy?"

The two Nobeks who'd filled out Kom's security team on the *Rogue* charged from the ship's hatch. Berkan and Dakmo playfully nudged a laughing Masok aside and focused on Matt.

"Come on, Matt, you aren't really leaving us for *those* three?"

"Cause two of us Nobeks are definitely worth a Dramok, Imdiko, and...wait, what's Kom again?"

"Some sort of mutant offshoot impossible to categorize. He definitely doesn't deserve you, Matt."

Perhaps Matt had noted the approving attitudes of Kalquorian and Earther passersby as they carried on. Maybe it was because he was comfortable with Berkan's and Dakmo's outrageous flirting. Maybe it was because he realized the trio of Nobeks present wouldn't let anything bad happen to him. In any event, his rising panic abruptly departed.

"I'll miss you guys." Sincerity rang in his voice. It renewed clamoring from the pair of rough, bearded thugs to reconsider leaving them.

Berkan and Dakmo had been infatuated with Matt at first sight. Kom realized they only half-joked, and they'd run off with the Earther if they had an actual chance. Nonetheless, he took no offense at behavior most Nobeks would have beaten the shit out of them for. He'd known them for years, and they wouldn't step over the line where Matt was concerned. He let them carry on for a few seconds before growling a warning.

"You have our com frequencies," Berkan whispered loudly to Matt after they said their goodbyes. "When you're ready to return to us, let us know."

"I guess we'd better not mess up," Avir chuckled to Kom, his beefy arm around his waist. His handsome face beamed from Kom to Matt and back. "He'll have his pick of suitors if we don't keep him happy. Welcome home, Matt."

He released Kom to hug the calmer Earther. Matt's smile was tentative, but Kom thought it was because he was still a little shy where Avir and Masok were concerned. Their few visits over the past seven months had been brief. Most of the relationship they'd forged with the Earther had been over vid coms.

Matt's gaze flicked here and there, but since no one reacted to his embracing a man, there was no freakout. Kom mentally sighed in relief.

Masok nudged him and whispered, "Why were you so worried? He seems perfectly fine to me."