

FREEDOM'S LAW

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SAMPLE

“I love you! I know it’s wrong. I know it would kill Gunther if he found out, but I can’t help it.” Carl clutched Willa’s hand. Her pretty face, with its frame of red hair, filled his vision.

Tears formed in Willa’s green eyes as she stroked the cheek of her young lover. His handsome, Hispanic features were full of emotion. “Carl, I love you too, but I also love Gunther, and he’s my husband. I’m forty-four, you’re twenty-two. What kind of future could we have?”

Carl hung his head.



“And cut to the long shot.” Troy pressed a button on the console in front of him, and the big screen shifted to Willa’s living room. The two lovers sat facing each other on the central couch. Willa’s slender, athletic body was

dwarfed by Carl's well-muscled form. Reclining chairs flanked the scene as witnesses to the tragedy being played out.

I hate this. It will kill the show, but John's the producer, thought Troy as he glanced over the screens dedicated to the other characters in the series. Gunther was leaving the hardware store carrying a package. Troy ran his fingers through his scraggly, straw-coloured hair.

On the big screen, Willa and Carl sat on the couch staring at the floor.

"I should let her end it." Troy turned his scarecrow-like body so he could stare at the memo on the wall. "John would fire me for sure. The jerk!" Turning back to the console, he watched Willa and Carl. "I'm sorry, Gunther, but John thinks the triangle will have audience appeal." Troy pressed a series of buttons. Nano-bots and other control vectors in Willa and Carl triggered the release of the chemical soup associated with sexual arousal.



Willa looked up and found herself staring into the brown depths of Carl's eyes. Her passion was overwhelming. Her lips met his. His hands moved to her small, firm breasts, teasing her nipples through the satin of her blouse.



"And place cut marker for the PG version, keep recording for adult." Troy hit a button, then stared at Carl's empathic monitors; they were spiked for eroticism, but there was an underlying sense of guilt. "Gunther's been like a dad to you. Season seven sucks! My luck, I get hired just in time for the series to tank."

Willa's sensation monitors climbed as Carl stripped. Troy switched the perspective so that he watched Carl through her eyes and her emotions and sensation were the focus of the general distribution cut. Carl's reactions were recorded for the specialty cut of his perspective.

"Keep telling yourself they're only clones, emotional

surrogates, fakeys. They aren't people. Yeah, tell yourself that so you don't go like that Ryan guy and rescue one of them."



Gunther stepped into the driveway of his two-storey, suburban house. The sun was shining, and the air smelled fresh. If he forgot what he knew, he could almost believe that all was right with the world. He sighed and ran his fingers through his greying, short, brown hair. He put the key in the lock and heard it click home. He opened the door, took a step and froze.

"Gunther!" Willa screamed from where she sat atop Carl on the couch.

"Oh Divine!" gasped Carl.

Gunther froze, slacked-jawed and staring. His well-proportioned body trembled with rage. Willa half fell off Carl onto the floor and tried to cover herself with her hands.

Carl sat up and made a grab for his trousers.

"Gunther, I'm—" Tears flowed from Willa's eyes.

"HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?" screamed Gunther.

Carl clutched his head as a bolt of telepathic force slammed into his mind. His body instinctively shifted colour to blend with the sofa behind him. He tried to use the mental defences that Gunther had taught him, but they were no use against the power, rage and pain of the mind he faced. Every tryst, every detail of his affair with Willa was laid bare.

Gunther's face became hard as he strode to the basement door. Throwing it open, he descended the stairs. One side of the basement was set up as an infirmary, while the other was a mass of electrical equipment. Moving to an open panel on the wall, Gunther pulled a graphite rod out of the bag he carried and slammed it into a pair of power clips.

"Gunther, what is the matter?" asked Toronk from the ambulance gurney he lay on. The two-point-one metre tall, humanoid cat sat up, grimacing when his injured leg

brushed the covers. His grey-tabby-like fur bristled at the look Gunther shot him, and his pointed ears pulled tight against his head.

"You know what, Toronk? I'd rather be a Felinezoid. Nothing could be as reprehensible as humanity!"

Toronk stared at his human friend.

Closing his eyes, Gunther thought to his wife, *'Willa, come here and bring Carl NOW!'*

Gunther slumped into the old office chair in front of his work bench. "Bastards!" he whispered.



Willa heard her husband's voice in her mind. She shifted from a fetal position. She knew it was impossible for her to have a heart attack. The cybernetic replacement that Amitose had used to save her from cancer would last a thousand years, but at that moment, her chest throbbed.

"Carl, get dressed. Gunther wants us downstairs."



Troy watched the monitors. Gunther's showed incredible emotional pain. "Need to dull this down, or it won't fly with the audience." Troy released a trickle of a euphoric into Gunther's system from his built-in drug-pack. Troy glanced at Willa and Carl's monitors, then repeated the process with them. Toronk's monitors indicated confusion.

"What I wouldn't give to be able to read your thoughts, but emotions will have to do."



Willa and Carl descended into the basement.

"Gunther, I'm sorry. I don't know—" began Willa, but as soon as she stepped off the stairs, Gunther threw a switch. A hum filled the room. She felt a prickle of static, and her cybernetic limbs twitched.



Troy blinked as his main screen and the dedicated screens for Gunther, Willa, Carl and Toronk filled with fuzz.

Must be some weird side-effect from that telepathy booster he's been trying to build. He must want to understand why things happened real bad, poor bugger. I hope I don't miss anything good. Troy shifted the big screen to Farley's living room's overview. Farley, a muscular, Japanese man, was brushing the fur of what appeared to be an oversized, green otter with an elongated head.

"At least one relationship is working out. Quinta's cute, for an Otterzoid. Better than he deserves after how he treated Rowan."



"What have you done?" demanded Toronk.

Gunther, with tears streaming from his eyes, embraced his wife. "It wasn't your fault. I love you."

Willa sobbed; there was no understanding his reasons, but she could feel her husband's love.



Arlene observed Willa and Gunther through Toronk's eyes. The hard-wire feed installed in the drain of Gunther's basement was working perfectly. Pulling out her hand-held, she opened the device, folding it out both vertically and horizontally to expose its screen.

"Hand-held, connect me to Michael Strongbow, head producer of S.E.T.E."

Michael appeared on the screen. He was a ruggedly handsome, silver-haired man. "Arlene, is there some problem with *Freedom's Run*?"

"No, Michael. I'm just calling to tell you that you were right about what Gunther was building."

"Is the hard feed we installed getting the signal?" Michael's brown eyes reflected concern.

"It's working like a dream. Our board is the only one that can monitor the room. The rest are getting static."

“Excellent! Keep recording. This could be the greatest event in the history of e-entertainments.”

“It will give us something for season three with Ryan and Rowan in the Switchboard System.”

“Don’t count them out. I’ve arranged for Henry to keep feeding us their telemetry. I won’t be comfortable until Ryan and Rowan are in orbit around Geb. Keep monitoring the feeds.”

“Right.” Arlene shut off her hand-held and turned her attention back to the screen.



“Gunther, I’m sorry I—” began Carl.

“It wasn’t your fault either, though I’d still like to knock your genetically altered ass onto the ground.” Gunther pulled away from Willa and faced the others in the room.

“Listen, we don’t have much time. Everything we thought we knew is a lie. Remember when Ryan rescued Rowan from the poison and took her to speak to the Republic council? What he told us about being descended from captive humans was a cover story. I found out when I scanned him. It’s really the seventh century after humans made contact with aliens. Humans are members of the Interstellar Republic with a faster than light stargate and colony worlds.

“We’re clones, designed as performers in a full sensory entertainment. People experience edited versions of our lives. It’s all the senses and emotion. The only thing they don’t have is thought, something about it taking up too much bandwidth.

“The controllers manipulate us using implanted chemical packs, nano-bots, and the Divine knows what else to get the stories the producers want. I’ve spent the last month picking the brains of controllers when they came into the ‘set region’. That’s what they call Sun Valley. From that, I’ve built this jamming device. This is the only place we can talk about this and not be monitored.

“If the controllers find out that we know the truth, they’ll kill us so that we don’t compromise the set region.”

Willa stared at her husband, slack-jawed.

“Gunther! Oh, stardust, we’ve pushed him over the edge,” breathed Carl.

Toronk’s cat-like face looked thoughtful, and his tail quivered. “It is within the realm of technical possibility. If humans are where I was led to believe my species were technologically. It always bothered me that our ship’s stealth systems remained functional long enough for us to crash-land undetected when so many other systems failed.”

“You believe this?” demanded Willa.

“It would explain much. Such as why no one has any desire to leave Sun Valley. How is it that in all our battles, none of us has died? It pleases me to learn that Rowan survived. She is a valued friend. It also explains why Angel broke faith with me. She’d never expressed a sexual interest in Farley before that day. It could also explain other events of the same nature.” Toronk’s expression became pensive.

Willa and Carl stared at the floor, their minds racing.

Toronk continued. “Look at this from an outsider’s perspective. If you were presented with this story or the story of a group of campers who came across a crashed, off-world police officer that grafted alien DNA into them, granting them alien powers so they could fight a group of invading pirates, which would you consider more likely?”



Michael Strongbow placed his palm against the scanner. The door to the *Freedom’s Run* control room opened. As he stepped in, Arlene swivelled her chair, and her full lips formed a smile on her open, pleasant face. There was a mischievous sparkle in her brown eyes, and her copper skin was flushed. She’d tied her long, black hair into a ponytail.

“Gunther knows the truth. If John knew, he’d hang himself. The entire set region has been compromised by one of his characters,” said Arlene.

Michael smiled. “As long as they can’t trace it back to

me, I am pleased with the results.”

Arlene’s face became grave. “Are you sure about this? I mean, sure, they’re phasing out Sun Valley, but it still has another fifteen years of operation.”

“Actually, the new set region was decided at the last meeting. We’re switching to an ancient Egyptian theme. It should be ready to go in five years. The lower the tech-level we’re emulating, the easier the setup.” Michael pulled over a second office chair and sat facing the display screens.

“Ancient Egyptian, weren’t they Stone Age?”

“Early Bronze. That’s part of why I had to do *Freedom’s Run* now. Sun Valley is the seventh century Before Contact. They can almost detect the control vectors as it is. If the tech was lower, Rowan would have had a harder time adjusting to our present-day world, and Gunther couldn’t have jammed the signal. When we broadcast our series, it will shake the foundations of how our society sees clones. Look.” Michael pointed towards Willa’s emotional monitors. There was a slight increase in adrenalin levels.

“She’s wrapping her head around it. Smart woman,” said Arlene.

Michael smiled. “It’s a trait of the AH series, along with the slender, compact figure. I’ve always found the series most attractive.”

“That’s obvious. How is Marcy doing?”

“My wife is fine. Why do you ask?”

Arlene’s eyes sparkled. “No reason.”



“If this is true, what happened to Rowan and who was Ryan?” Willa could still see Gunther’s pain, but under that, she saw his determination. They had both loved their daughter, and the forced parting had been hard, made worse by the necessity of pretending that she had died of the alien poison.

Gunther took Willa’s hands in his own. “Ryan was one of the controllers. He fell in love with Rowan and couldn’t stand to watch the producer, John Wilson, kill her. Ryan was going to take Rowan to a world where she’d have legal

rights. Studio clones are property on this world, which is called Gaea.”

“She’s safe, though?”

“Safer than us, now that you know the truth.”

“It wasn’t our fault. We were manipulated by these controllers.” Carl sounded relieved.

“Carl, I understand that intellectually, but don’t think that it helps emotionally. You slept with my wife and, if I know the controllers, will probably do so again. I could kill you, but I need you.”

“For?” asked Toronk.

“We now know who the real enemy is. We have to organize, get the characters from the other shows to understand. It’s time for the gladiators to revolt!”



“That a boy Gunther, give Big Brother all the stardust he can handle.” Michael chuckled.

“Big brother?” asked Arlene.

“Seventh-century Before Contact literary reference. I can lend you a modern translation.”

“No, thanks. Can the surrogates really revolt?”

“With a lot of help from us, they can put up a credible showing. That’s all we need. We need *Freedom’s Run* to touch people, force them to see what we already know.”

“What’s that?”

“That clones, all classes of clones, are people. The coelenteratezoids are right. No civilized species permits slavery. What’s that beeping?”



A beeping came from the jumble of electrical equipment on the workbench.

“What’s that?” Emotions warred on Willa’s face.

“The jamming system can only operate for a short time. I have to shut it down. None of us can say or do anything that will let them know that we know the truth. Only in this basement, when the jamming system is active, can we

speaking safely. Willa, I love you. I forgive you. No matter what I say or do, remember that. Carl, I'm working on it."

"I love you, Gunther." Willa slipped into his arms and kissed him.

"I love you. You'd better step away. We need to give a good performance." Gunther moved to his device and threw a switch. He turned back to Willa. "YOU WHORE!"

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