

Sanctity of Life

By

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FADE IN ON:

**INT. SPACE COLONY - AIRLOCK**

A sibilant HISS as the airlock opens.

Fully suited, Mineral Specialist TRACIE CONOR (30s) stumbles in. Choking, she gestures to her shattered helmet visor, ripped uniform.

Takes one step - collapses. The airlock slides shut behind her spasming form.

ENGINEER RODNEY CAMP (40s) and MEDIC KEVIN LAFFERTY (30s) rush to her side. Kevin lugs a first aid kit.

RODNEY

Trace, we got the alert. What happened?

TRACIE

(gasps)

Mineral deposits in the South Quadrant...

RODNEY

South Quadrant? Jesus Heinlein Christ!  
You were supposed to sweep it first.

TRACIE

...know a vein when I see one. So I investigated. Stepped into a nest of-

RODNEY

Cerelopods? God, no!

Kevin fumbles to unseal Tracie's helmet. A RUSH of air as he succeeds. Tracie sucks in oxygen - gasps.

KEVIN

Well, you're back safe and sound. Count your blessings, Trace.

Tracie squirms under his hands.

TRACIE

No. It's in my suit!

Kevin and Rodney recoil violently at those words.

Rodney dashes to a panel, palms the lock. And pulls out:  
A wicked looking KNIFE - with TASER PORTS on each side.

He eyes a writhing bulge along Tracie's right leg.

RODNEY

Honey, I've got this. Don't move!

He stabs downward - a shallow thrust. And triggers the taser. Electricity arcs.

Something inside the suit SQUEALS. The bulge stops moving. Rodney sighs, assured.

RODNEY

(grins at Tracie)

One well cooked Cereelopod, coming up!

Kevin examines Tracie's shattered helmet, concerned.

KEVIN

Conor, what caused this hole?

TRACIE

That's where it hit me first.

KEVIN

Did it attach to your face at *any* time?  
Tell the truth.

TRACIE

Maybe for a second, sure.

RODNEY

(terrified)

Doc?

Kevin eyes Tracie, worry growing.

KEVIN

That's all it takes. How do you feel?

TRACIE

(weak)

Like today's winning shit storm of the millennia.

KEVIN

Internally, I mean?

Tracie spits up blood, spatters both men. Reverting to professional mode, Kevin barks into an intercom:

KEVIN

Notify the Xeno Regulation Bureau! Med unit, I need a gurney. Full alert! To stop impregnation, we need emergency surgery - now!

**INT. - SPACE COLONY CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER**

Tracie writhes on the gurney. Rodney and Kevin race-wheel her through halls. Towards a door labeled: "Med Isolation Unit."

RODNEY

Hang in there, Trace!

TRACIE

It burns! Cut it out!!

KEVIN

I give you my word as a doctor and your friend. Whatever I need to do... I will.

**INT. - SPACE COLONY - OPERATING ROOM**

Robotic surgery arms sprout from walls. Kevin fits an anesthetic mask over Tracie's face. Gas HISSES.

KEVIN

Breathe in deep. This is the easy part.

Black out. A medical monitor BEEPS.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - TRACI'S POV - LATER**

More black void. A sigh. Tracie opens fluttering eyes.

She's in a hospital bed. Kevin and Rodney hover over her. Rodney bends over, tenderly kisses her lips.

RODNEY

Finally, you're awake. That's... good.

TRACIE

(weak laugh)

I was covered in Cerelopod goo. Yuck. I hope they cleaned me up first.

Rodney laughs, oddly stiff. Kevin looks stoic, too.

KEVIN

Do you feel any pain, Conor? Any tenderness -

(prods her abdomen)

Here?

TRACIE

N - No. Though I'd wish you'd trim those fingernails. Those sutures are pretty new.

RODNEY

Always the wise ass. Super trooper, too.

Rodney brushes damp hair from her face. Tracie flashes "thumbs up". An IV dangles from her wrist.

TRACIE

The operation was a success?

KEVIN

You're alive. So - by that metric? Yes.

RODNEY

Honey, there was an - unexpected complication.

KEVIN

Invasive surgery should always be last resort. Instead we conducted a full laser endoscopy, repairing damage to your digestive tract. That should heal if you take it easy. But as for the life-form...

TRACIE

What? You didn't remove it?

She fumbles under her gown. Kevin's face grows cold; in contrast to his anguished eyes.

KEVIN

I can't. Not legally. Removing it now would kill the Xeno.

TRACIE

No shit, Sherlock. That's the point!

KEVIN

If I could. But my hands are tied. And there's someone coming you should meet.

**LATER**

Kevin's gone. Rodney sits by Tracie, holds her hand.

RODNEY

The Representative for the Xeno Regulation Bureau's en route. One more hour til his shuttle lands.

TRACIE

This is none of his fucking business!

Red eyed, Tracie pops two pain pills. Dry swallows.

RODNEY

Hey, easy there with the meds...

TRACIE

Whatever I eat - it does, too. If I can overdose that bio-squatter, good!

She selects a third pill. Rodney grabs her wrist.

RODNEY

Honey, I promise we'll fight this. All the way to the Federation's Highest Court.

TRACIE

Doc promised to help. Now look where we are.

A door BEEPS. The two look up.

COUNCILMAN MINO ESQUIAT enters the room. Middle aged and distinguished, he wears a uniform with a regal religious/military theme.

A silver LOGO glints at his collar: A heart, divided by a pulse. Overlaying Helix DNA.

Kevin trails in the Councilman's shadow.

KEVIN

Rodney? Tracie? This is Councilman Esquiat, from the Xeno Bureau. He's here to make sure... well, that you're OK.

Esquait smiles broadly at Tracie.

ESQUAIT

So, you're the host I've heard so much about.

TRACIE

Host?!? My name is Tracie Conor, Senior Colony Mineral Specialist, you motherfuc-

RODNEY

Yes, Tracie's the one carrying the parasite. Sir.

Esquait's eyes harden at the word.

ESQUAIT

In the Bureau, we avoid the word  
"parasite". That's dehumanizing.

RODNEY

But it's not human. Is it, now?

ESQUAIT

(chuckles)

Quite human-centric of me, mea culpa. We  
prefer the term "independent life-form."

TRACIE

It's imbedded in my intestines. That  
doesn't sound independent to me!

The Councilman purses his lips, turns to Rodney.

ESQUAIT

What Ms. Conor and I must discuss is  
sensitive. If you could leave us alone...

RODNEY

I'm Tracie's fiancé. Hell no, I won't!

ESQUAIT

(to Tracie)

The Bureau feels it crucial I make our  
position clear: that life-form you carry  
is only a temporary inconvenience.  
Gestation of Cerelopods takes seven  
months. So before you know it, the two of  
you can be on your way. 'No harm, no  
foul' as they say.

TRACIE

"No harm"? It's inside me... not you!

Tracie bolts up in bed. Winces at a zap of pain.

TRACIE

Ow!

Rodney glares at Esquait, hostility growing.

RODNEY

You want this creature to feed off my  
wife?

ESQUAIT

(drily)

Your fiancé, unless I misheard?

RODNEY

Don't split hairs, *bureaucrat*. How are you gonna get it out, without killing her?

Kevin hangs his head, mutters.

KEVIN

It detaches naturally. C-section would do fine.

RODNEY

Cut her open, get it over with!

ESQUAIT

It is illegal - and immoral - to kill the life-form by removing it before viability's reached.

RODNEY

What's immoral is commandeering Tracie's body against her will!

Impatient, Esquait swivels towards Kevin.

ESQUAIT

Doctor, would you show the hos- I mean the "patient" your imaging, please?

Kevin pulls out a tablet, gently lays it in Tracie's lap.

THE IMAGE: An Ultrasound of Tracie's intestines. Something small and unearthly's entwined. The head isn't yet formed, but the torso and tail stand out.

RODNEY

That's one fugly lump of cells.

KEVIN

Xeno-fetus is the scientific term.

RODNEY

It doesn't even have a head.

ESQUAIT

Cerelopods are quite sapient. I'm told this one already has a heartbeat. As for its soul, who knows? But better safe than sorry, no?

Tracie stares at Esquait, floored.

TRACIE

I didn't give consent to this!



ESQUAIT

Yet, in a way - you did.

Esquait attempts to take Tracie's hand. She recoils.

ESQUAIT

I'm told you visited the South Quadrant voluntarily. No precautionary bio-scans. As "Senior Colony Mineral Specialist", you of all people knew the risk.

Tracie smashes the tablet to bits against the floor.

TRACIE

I didn't invite that *thing* to shove... well, whatever that was down my throat!

ESQUAIT

That life you carry didn't commit that trespass. The carrier Cerelopod HE killed did.

(points at Rodney)

Which tragically was self-defense. But one cannot blame the sins of the - for lack of a better term, "father" - on a child.

RODNEY

If you won't do the right thing, I'll kill this one too!

Spotting a SCALPEL across the room, Rodney starts to stand up. Kevin places a hand on his shoulder.

KEVIN

Calm down.

ESQUAIT

I know this is all quite sudden, but the Federation can't allow any potentially sentient life-form to come to harm. That's why we've brought this.

He snaps his fingers.

Two uniformed GUARDS stride in. One carries a metal BRACELET, studded with digital displays and lights.

Before anyone can react, he locks it on Tracie's wrist.

TRACIE

Hey!

RODNEY

What in Bode's Galaxy is that?

ESQUAIT

A biometric monitor. It will keep track of both your life-signs, and that of the being you so graciously host now.

TRACIE

I'm not the Bureau's incubator. Fuck you!

KEVIN

Trace, I'm so sorry. I asked them to consider your needs as my patient, but -

Esquait's lips twitch. He maintains paternal composure.

ESQUAIT

A small sacrifice for the greater good.

He stands up, summons the guards.

ESQUAIT

As I'm sure you will realize once you've had time to calm down. You and your spouse surely would like some privacy. I'll remain on the surface overnight. But for now, excuse me. Paperwork calls.

Esquait and his escorts head for the exit. The door slides open. Rodney leaps to his feet.

RODNEY

Not so fast, *Councilman*! Reconsider that report, or we'll sue!

(to Tracie)

Honey - I'll be right back. Don't move!

Kissing her quick, he storms after Esquait.

The door HISSES shut behind them, flashes red and LOCKS. Leaving a forlorn Tracie to stare at cold metal.

TRACIE

You said that before. Where can I go?

Tracie jumps out of bed, rips out tubes. Barefoot, she bangs on the door. Her knuckle scrapes, leaves a smear.

TRACIE

What am I, a fucking prisoner? Come back, you bastards. Let me go!

The device on her wrist BEEPS. Startled, Tracie stops.

TRACIE

Tattle-tale.

(mutters)

Monitoring my every move. While it feeds  
on me... for seven months?

Her eyes drift to the scalpel. She grabs it. Back against  
the door, she slides down to the cold, tile floor.

TRACIE

"Count your blessings, Trace." A locked  
door gives you a *few* minutes.

Pulling her hospital gown aside, Tracie exposes her  
slightly swollen stomach. Something ALIEN bulges,  
distorts the skin. She touches it gently with a palm.

TRACIE

Fuck. I can feel you move already.

She dry pops the third pain pill - scalpel poised.

TRACIE

My body, my fucking choice. Whatever it  
takes, this ends now!

Gritting her teeth, she makes the first incision. Blood  
flows. The monitor on her arm shrieks.

Sudden blackness. Tracie screams.

FINAL FADE OUT: