

Second Chances

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by Kyle Eggleston

Jack O'Brien stood near a grave marker. His remains were there being laid to rest. Jack decided to bury his body on Shuka instead of transporting them to Earth. There was no way in hell he could have gotten them through customs. To transport a body, even a dead one, took so much red tape he just didn't want to go through with that. So, on behalf of the Shuka government, he was able to bury his body on Shuka in one of their burial places reserved for dignitaries and the like.

He didn't consider himself a dignitary in any sense of the word. But Jack accepted the burial place for his body. At least one of him could be buried in a proper place. Jack hoped that when he would eventually die, that someone would bury him in such a place. Jack chuckled at the thought, who was he kidding? He planned on going out guns blazing like in one of those World War Two movies.

Walking away from the graveyard, Jack decided to walk along a nearby river. He wished he had a fishing rod, Jack bet there were some good fish in that river swimming along living their best life. He missed fishing, it had been a number of years since Jack had gone fishing with his father. Maybe if he got back to Earth more, he could go fishing. But that wasn't likely to happen.

Beep Beep. Jack's communications unit beeped alerting him that someone wanted to talk. He wasn't in the mood for talking to anyone, but he was on call. Jack didn't have the time saved up to take actual time off. He was just away for a moment or two.

Reaching into his pocket, Jack pulled out his comm unit. "This is O'Brien, what's up?" He spoke into the device.

"Sorry to interrupt you sir." Kate Monson's voice came over the communications line. "Ketish has arrived with an entire envoy of representatives from his government. They wish an audience with you."

O'Brien sighed. *What the hell is Ketish up to now?* He thought. "Alright, I'm nearly finished here as it is. I'll be up shortly. O'Brien out." Pressing another button on his comm unit, he contacted his shuttle. "O'Brien to shuttle. Teleport me directly to your coordinates."

Jack vanished in a swirl of blue and green lights. Normally he wouldn't call for a teleportation, the fixed technology was still brand new, but he wanted to know what Ketish was up to on his station as soon as possible. Whatever it was, he had a feeling it wasn't going to be a tea party.

Once inside his shuttle, Jack sat down at the controls preparing the shuttle for take off. "This better be good." Jack said.

"Unknown command, please rephrase." The computer replied.

Jack chuckled. "Disregard."

The computer beeped in response.

"I see you're taking a very direct route to the station Jack. Is that wise?" Holo Ketish asked.

Jack looked over to the copilot seat. Holo Ketish was sitting there grinning. He was wearing a polo shirt and khakis. It was very un Dubor of him to say the least. Jack kinda liked the outfit, it looked like he was going golfing or something.

A Dubor golfing? Jack mused. Now that's a sight. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh nothing." Holo Ketish said. "I just see you're trying to get to the station as quick as possible and wondered *why*." He stopped grinning. His face became rather somber.

Jack laughed as he managed the controls to the shuttle. "You *know* why Ketish. I'm heading there to see *you*. Or rather the real you, not holo you." He was beginning to confuse himself. "Speaking of which, when are you going to leave me alone? I did what you wanted. I brought about peace between our three worlds just as your so called prophecy predicted. Shouldn't you be done with me by now?!" He was angry.

Holo Ketish shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know the mind of my master unfortunately. I can only do what I am programmed to do and that program is telling me to stick around a bit longer. Oh look we're approaching a docking port. Get ready for docking!" He vanished.

Fine I'll deal with you later. Jack thought. "Docking control, this is shuttle Epsilon Delta Four requesting permission to dock."

The dock master's voice came over the comm unit loud and clear. "Shuttle Epsilon Delta Four you are cleared for docking. Welcome home major." The woman said in a bright cheerful tone. She clearly wasn't about to see what Jack was about to see once he boarded the station. A bunch of Dubor minions to Ketish all wanting to do his bidding. It made him sick.

A moment later Jack stepped out of the shuttle, he was greeted by countless Dubor officials all wanting his attention. Jack tried his best to get past them, he looked for Ketish in

the crowded docking port. He frowned, security was not there doing their job obviously or the crowd wouldn't have been so big. It engulfed him. If Jack didn't know any better he would think the crowd was pushing him towards someone. He could guess who that someone was. Seeing Ketish standing in the middle of it all, he had guessed right.

Approaching Ketish, Jack looked him square in the eye. "Ketish, to what do I owe this rather unexpected visit?" He asked. Jack really did want to know why the leader of an entire civilization was standing at his doorstep.

"Jack." Ketish said greeting him. "I am so glad to hear that you escaped that nasty prison. I heard it was quite an ordeal for you. I'm glad you're safe." He bowed towards Jack. Ketish's followers all bowed in unison as well.

Jack shook his head he gestured to them all to raise their heads. "Stop that." He said. "There's no need for you to bow to me. I'm no one special. Please rise." The crowd did as requested but none of them looked Jack in the eyes. They all faced their eyes downward, all but Ketish who looked Jack right in the face. He was not afraid of Jack like the others were. He did not fear the man. He respected him yes, but fear? Never.

"You'll have to ignore their ways Jack." Ketish said. "They don't know how to act around a ... well to put it simply a god."

Jack laughed at the thought. "A god. Me?" He asked.

Ketish nodded. "It's what they've labeled you as. I tried to tell them you are an ordinary man, but they have come to see you as something quite different. Unique even. Who am I to argue with the people, they have spoken." He gestured to the ones surrounding them. "Walk with me major." Ketish invited. They left the docking ports.

As they walked, the followers stayed as close by as they could in order to listen in on whatever Major O'Brien had to say. Some were even writing down what they could glimpse from the major.

"Is there any way I can convince you to leave the United Earth Force Alliance, Jack?" Ketish asked. "Have you plant your flag as it were on Dubor and live among your own kind?" His ask was sincere, a little too sincere for Jack's taste.

Jack shook his head. "No I can't do that I'm afraid. I have duties to perform. I did offer you a post here as Ambassador to Dubor but you refused. Ambassador Grilka has been doing a fine job from what I've heard." He smiled. Anything to remind Ketish that his place was on Dubor and *not* his station.

Ketish nodded. "Yes I remember your most ... generous ... offer. But again I must decline the invitation. My place is on Dubor. Ambassador Grilka will do fine in my absence I assure you."

“Yes, I suppose so.” Jack responded. He looked around at the Dubor people following him. “What exactly are you seeking here Ketish? My first officer said they requested an audience with me? What can I do for you?”

Ketish put his arm around Jack’s shoulder. Jack felt uncomfortable with that, but allowed it. If it would help get Ketish off his station faster? The sooner he wanted to learn about what it was Ketish wanted from him. It seemed only fair.

“They want to know what it’s like being you.” Ketish began. “They want to understand how a blended species, such as yourself, thinks and operates. None of that UEFA ... crap ... that your leaders would have you force down their throats. There is a time and place for that. This is not the time nor the place.” Ketish continued. “Just being you is all they want to know and learn about. Some have even shown an interest in living on the station, I told them I would have to coordinate that with you of course.”

Jack paused as he walked. This was not the same Ketish that he had been tortured by. This was a changed man. Jack believed in second chances, but this was a bit on the ridiculous side of the line. What was Ketish up to? Jack wondered. This was not normal behavior for him.

“Crimson Gamma is happy to welcome any citizen of Dubor onboard as long as they can afford it.” Jack said. “We do live in a capitalist society, there are rules.” He smiled. “As for meeting with your people, I believe that can be arranged. Contact my first officer Kate Monson, she had my schedule. If that will be all Ketish.”

Ketish bowed. “Yes, thank you major.” He turned to his people and gave them the good news as Jack walked out of earshot and escaped back to the safety of his station.

Jack wandered the station’s corridors for a bit. He didn’t know where he was headed, just for a walk he supposed. Jack needed time to clear the air in his head. It had been a long while since he was just able to freely roam the station without being bombarded with questions.

“Thought I’d find you around here.” Norev said as she approached Jack. They were walking near the Observation Dome. “You seem to do your best thinking in the dome.” They entered the Observation Dome. It was empty, just the way Jack liked it.

“How have you been Norev? It’s been a while.” Jack asked.

Norev shrugged her shoulders. “Oh, I’ve been.” She said. “Things haven’t been the same since Obshi left. But that man never could stay in one place for too long. Always on the move.” She looked out the window and down at her home planet, it was beautiful as ever.

“He’s gone?” Jack asked. “What happened?”

Norev sat down on a bench as she recalled what had indeed happened to Obshi. “He took General Tague’s death rather hard. Apparently he was the last one to speak with her before she ... died.” Suicide was such a nasty word that brought about the worst of thoughts and feelings, Norev chose her words carefully. “Then when Nokev disappeared, Obshi fought the Religious Government to begin a search for him. They refused. He went out on his own. Some believe he went to the edge of known space to look for him.” She paused. “We haven’t received word back from him since.”

“I see.” Jack sat down on the bench next to Norev. “I seem to have missed ... a lot in my absence.” He managed to say as he too looked out the dome’s window. In a high orbit was the Star Ship Fresno. Jack smiled as he watched the massive ship pass by the window. She was a beaut.

Norev too looked at the Fresno. It certainly was unlike anything Shuka had produced within the last decade or so. The Fresno was a warship plain and simple. She was meant to be on the front lines. Shuka’s ships were more of peace, not meant for war. Norev didn’t blame Earth for making ships of war, without the Fresno and Crimson Gamma they would have no line of defense against any hostile enemies that came against Shuka. She was indeed grateful for the assistance.

Her vision of peace was through words and actions, not through means of killing each other. But each species had to learn that in their own way and time. Earth and Dubor would both have a sense of clarity eventually, it was only a matter of time. Each society would come to their own conclusion on the matter. It was not for her to judge either way.

“I understand you are planning on speaking with the Dubor delegation.” Norev said changing subjects. “I hope it goes well for you.”

Jack chuckled nervously. “You uh heard about that did you.” He said.

Norev nodded. “Mhmm.” She smiled at him. “Just remember the words my mother told me when I first got into politics. You might say something that could offend someone and thrill another. Both cannot be made happy in the same sitting.”

Jack smiled at the gesture. “I’ll have to keep that in mind.” He said. “My dad always told me to just picture the audience naked. That way I’d have something to laugh about.”

“What an odd phrase.” Norev said. “Why would you want to picture them naked?”

Jack shrugged. “Well, just to put my mind at ease.” He admitted. “Granted there are some people I *don’t* want to even imagine naked. I prefer your sentiment more. Thank you.” He said.

“My pleasure.” Norev smiled. “I’ll let you get to planning your speech.” She stood and left the Observation Dome leaving Jack all alone in the night.

Jack stood from the bench. Now was as good as any to start working on his speech. He wondered how an entire race of aliens could come to consider him a god of all people. The prophecy must have really held some kind of weight in their religious background in order for that to take place.

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An hour later, Jack stood before an assembled body of Dubor delegates from all over their world. Some non Dubor citizens had managed to sneak their way into the meeting as well. The Dubor did not mind. The more who could hear and benefit from the great O'Brien, the better in their minds.

“Greetings honored guests, delegates, ambassadors, friends of the Dubor community, comrades in arms.” Jack began. “As I was preparing this speech, a tidbit my father always said kept coming to mind and I thought I would share it with you all here today.” Jack spoke as best he could. He figured some would get lost in translation, but the gist of it all would be received, well he hoped. “He told me, Jack, the moment you look into the eye of the enemy and learn what it is that makes them tick you can never go back.”

Jack paused to allow the thought sink into the minds of those in attendance, and it did its job well. He saw several Dubor members nod their heads, even Ketish appreciated the sage old advice from Jack's father.

“We met on the battlefield.” Jack continued. “Many of us still do not know the names of those we fought against. That does not matter now. The war is over. We are at peace, in part thanks to this well known prophecy. Because of that prophecy you consider me a god. I am not one to be worshiped as a god though. I am but a man. I come from three bloodlines. Dubor, Human, and Shuka.” Jack said. “I am no god. But I am not here to tell you what to believe in. If believing me to be a god makes you sleep better at night? So be it. Let it be so. I will not change the way I act to fit into this god role though. So if that offends you, I apologize.”

Jack continued to surmise how their three cultures could learn from once another and balance out the awkward balance they had to play. It was not easy playing host to those who would put you on a pedestal. He finished his remarks and sat down.

Ketish bowed towards Jack and took the podium. “Thank you Major O'Brien.” Ketish said. “We will take your words into our hearts with gratitude. We thank you for speaking to us, for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak to our small but proud group.” Turning his attention to his people, he continued. “I have an announcement to make. As of thirteen hundred hours, local time of course, I have recalled all Dubor military to the home world. Any

occupied planets we may have seized over the years are no longer under our jurisdiction. We are embarking on a new era of peace for our people. Conquest is no longer our way.”

There were murmurings throughout the great meeting hall. Not all Dubor felt the same way to Ketish’s words as they had Jacks. Many were confused by the new course of action Ketish was taking their people. Others simply wanted to learn more.

“Order, order!” Jack yelled into the crowd. “Let your leader speak!”

Ketish looked to Jack with gratitude in his eyes. He was grateful.

“We are to become a peaceful people. I am further ordering the dismantling of our border patrol and listening posts. I know these have been active for well over one hundred years. It is time we put them to rest. Change is not always easy for us, the old ways will have to find a new home as these new ways come to pass. That is all.”

Ketish approached Jack as he was standing up from his chair. “Well major, what did you think of my little announcement?” He asked. “Be honest.”

Jack didn’t know what to think. It was quite a bombshell Ketish had just dropped on his people and on the galaxy as a whole. How was he supposed to react to that? “Dismantling your defensive weapons can be costly Ketish.” Jack finally spoke. “Are you certain you want to do that?”

Ketish nodded. “Yes, it is required of my people. We must ... how do you humans say it? Turn over a new leaf? Something to that affect.” He said. “If we are to embrace our new found friendships between Earth and Shuka, we must stop the old ways of doing things. We must find a new path. We must allow ourselves a second chance as it were. I hope you can appreciate and understand that.”

Jack knew what Ketish was saying all too well. He nodded in solidarity. “I agree with you on that.” That was a first, Jack didn’t think he would ever agree with anything Ketish said, like ever. Yet here he was doing just that. “Quite a day you’re having.” Jack said. “I’d invite you to my quarters for a refreshment, but I have a feeling you need to get home to Dubor to sort out some things.”

Ketish nodded and laughed. “I did kind of spring it on them, didn’t I.” He said. “No one knew it was coming. That’s how I keep my reign of power major. I keep things hidden until the very moment they need to come out into the light. It seems to work quite well, wouldn’t you agree?”

Jack smiled. “I would say so.” He watched as the room dispersed and became empty leaving only the two of them to talk things over. “How do you think the rest of your people will react?” Jack asked.

Ketish shrugged. “I do not know. My message was broadcast to my home world, so they found out the moment I announced it. There could be rioting in the streets for all I know. I put my military on high alert just in case anything got too crazy while I was away. I must return home and find out how things are going. If you’ll excuse me major. Duty calls.” He exited the grand hall.

Jack shook his head. Ketish never ceased to amaze him. There was always something up his sleeve ready to surprise Jack and the rest of the quadrant. Ketish had done well, Jack could certainly see that. He wondered what other surprises Ketish had in store for Earth and Shuka. He clearly was taking this new alliance to heart and very seriously.

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Down in engineering, Madison was hard at work on the main reactor. Ever since they switched Crimson Gamma’s fusion reactor out for a matter antimatter assembly housing, she had to keep a strict eye on it. One false move and the entire station could go up in flames. Of course she had to keep an eye on the old reactor just as much so this wasn’t any different to her whatsoever.

“Madison, yo yo!” A woman’s voice could be heard shouting across the engineering room.

Madison looked up to see who was calling her name. It could only be one person. “Sarah?!” She shouted back. “Sarah is that you?”

“In the flesh baby!” Sarah came running over to Madison’s side and gave her the biggest bear hug she could muster. She had a foot on Madison so it wasn’t that difficult or surprising that she would do such a thing. Sarah was a big teddy bear at heart.

“Oh my goodness! What are you doing here on this end of space?” Madison asked.

Sarah stood six feet even, she had green hair and green eyes to match. Her skin was pale white. She wore the uniform of a dock worker just like Madison’s. Both women were head of their dock workers, both were in charge of their respective posts.

“Oh, my ship got caught up in an ion storm if you can believe it. We docked for repairs. I was off duty as your crew offered so graciously to repair my ship for me, so I figured I would come down here and see what you were up to these days.” She looked at the matter antimatter housing. “Holy shit! You have one of these things?”

Madison nodded. “Yeah, it was installed over a month ago. Works pretty clean too.” She said. “Your ship doesn’t have one yet?”

Sarah shook her head. “Nope, we’re still relying on nuclear fusion to get us around town. What I wouldn’t give for one of these babies. It must really purr!”

Madison nodded as she wiped engine grease off of her hands onto her uniform. Her sleeves were rolled up as she had been hard at work. “It’s clean, efficient, we haven’t had a problem since we installed it. I approve of this design over the fusion reactor any day, and you can quote me on that.” She smiled and laughed. It was good to see Sarah. The two had been inseparable at the academy when they went through so many years ago.

“I’ve got to go check on some things.” Madison said. “Let’s meet up, say my quarters twenty hundred hours?”

“It’s a date!” Sarah said as she exited main engineering to let Madison get back to it.

Madison smiled big. It was good to see an old friend. Turning around she got back to work on the matter antimatter injection system that had been giving her grief. The injector didn’t matter as much to her anymore. Her mind was elsewhere in preparations for that night.

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Lieutenant Killpack stared at his security feed. “They shouldn’t be doing that.” He said out loud. On the screen were two mercenaries trying anything to gain a buck. They were currently in the Main Gallery suckering innocent aliens into whatever scheme they had planned.

“Killpack to unit four. Grab them and bring them in for questioning.” Jeff said into his comm unit.

“Acknowledged.” Came the reply.

Killpack watched as his team moved in and apprehended the mercenaries. It was like a well oiled machine. They didn’t give up much of a fight, they knew they’d been had. It was easier this way. They don’t fight, he doesn’t have to slap them with more tickets in the process. It was a win win for everyone involved.

Turning his attention to another monitor, he checked the back lots. All two hundred and sixty of them. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary there. He was glad. Usually some mischief was afoot in the back lots of the station. Aliens hiding there to get away from something, other aliens trading goods or stolen merchandise. It was all shady business that had no place on that station. But it happened from time to time.

Switching to the external cameras, Jeff saw something he didn’t like. Leaving his office he went to investigate further. Outside was usually out of his league, but today he was curious.

Approaching an airlock, Jeff gathered the necessary gear for an EVA. He was going for a space walk. Activating the airlock doors with his command override codes, Jeff took a step out into space. This was his first time on the outside of Crimson Gamma. When he first arrived, they had an event for the senior staff to take a space walk, but he was too busy trying to get his office organized that he missed it. Now was his time to take a walk.

Jeff closed the sun shield on his visor, he wanted to keep his eyes intact that day. It was beautiful. Shuka was below him, the suns in the distance, the moons as well. It was breathtaking. As he walked along the hull of the station, Jeff was reminded that a simple slip of the gravity boots and he would be tossed out into open space never to be heard from again.

“Don’t fail me now.” He whispered.

“Monson to Killpack.” Kate’s voice came into his helmet. “I see you’re going for a space walk. Unauthorized I might add. Care to tell me why?”

Jeff winced. He knew he had forgotten to tell someone about this. Jeff opened the comm channel so he could respond to the commander. “Yes commander, I apologize. I didn’t follow procedure. I saw something when I was doing a routine security scan, thought I’d check it out.”

“What do you mean you *saw something*.” Kate said. “Care to elaborate?”

Jeff shrugged. “That’s what I’m not sure about commander. Once I get there I’ll radio back. Killpack out.” Jeff had a feeling he was going to be in hot water for this. Oh well, it didn’t matter he was just doing his job, he could deal with O’Brien if it came down to it.

Coming upon the object that caused Jeff concern, he saw what it was. A person, an alien to be exact. It was about seven feet tall without a protective suit. The alien’s skin was a bright pink color. As Killpack approached, the alien turned and stared at him.

“What are you doing out here, human?” The alien asked.

Killpack chuckled. “I was just about to ask you the same question friend. Station security. Mind stating your business out here?” Jeff pointed to a power conduit. “That’s a main power conduit that runs the length of the station. Seems to me like you’re trying to sabotage it.”

The alien stared at Jeff without speaking for a moment. It appeared to be gathering its thoughts for an excuse, or something. Jeff couldn’t be sure. Finally it spoke. “No, human, I am not trying to damage your power conduit. I needed it to power my distress beacon. My people think I am dead, I need to prove I am still alive. I am almost finished.” He pressed a button on a small device in his hand. It began broadcasting a range of sounds.

Jeff nodded. "I see. Well couldn't you have done that from inside the station? I mean we have machines that allow you to make a call to basically anywhere in the explored regions of the galaxy."

The alien put his device away. "Your methods of communication are primitive." He said. "This method is more secure, it will reach my people immediately. They should be dispatching a ship to rescue me."

"Well I need to fill out some paperwork regarding this incident." Jeff said. "If you'll follow me, I'll take down a statement."

The two walked along the hull towards an airlock. At least the alien was being cooperative, Jeff thought. He was happy it didn't try and put up a fight. Those could get nasty in an ugly kind of way. Once back inside the station, Jeff escorted the alien to his office so they could work on the necessary paperwork. No fines would be filed this time as it was a first offense, but Jeff had to make it clear to the alien that he just couldn't go about doing things like that.

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Commander Kate Monson reviewed the security paperwork as it came in. She was afraid this alien was contacting his people not to rescue him, but to mark the station as a target. Wouldn't be the first time an alien disguised itself as peaceful just to wreck havoc on the station later on down the line.

Looking at the telemetry from the signal the alien's device put out, it would take over a year for the message to be received by his people. Not instant as he had originally thought. Kate sighed, that alien was going to be with them for a while. What else was new? There were several aliens on the station that didn't have a place to call home.

Looking at the time, it was nearing twenty hundred hours. Her shift was about over. As the next duty shift arrived, Kate smiled. They were early. Thank goodness for small favors. "Begin night watch." She announced. The computer made the necessary adjustments. As the light level lowered, Kate continued to smile. She enjoyed watching C&C become a more peaceful relaxed atmosphere.

As Kate left C&C she knew she was going to relax with a good book and a glass of wine. There was no other way of relaxing for her. Maybe a hot bath, but she didn't feel up to that tonight. It had been a stressful day for sure, but a hot bath just didn't feel right. She was on a tight water budget this month, Too many hot baths appeared to tick off the higher ups it would seem. She chuckled at the thought.

Walking down the corridor towards a transport tube, Kate stopped dead in her tracks. A man stood before her blocking her path. She knew him, it was her ex husband Joe Monson. Kate stood her ground.

“What? No chameleon shield this time Joe?” She scoffed. “Taking me on for real this time is that it?”

Joe shook his head. “I just want to talk.” He said. Joe raised his arms up. “Search me, I’m not armed. I figured last time was too much for you to handle. I’m sorry about that Kate.” His apology appeared to be sincere, but Kate couldn’t tell.

She turned around and began walking the opposite direction. Joe followed her.

“What? You don’t want to be in a transport tube with me *again*? Is that it?” Joe called out after her. Kate simply kept walking.

Turning a corner, Kate approached the security office.

“Oh no you don’t.” Joe said, he activated a teleporter. The two vanished just as Kate was entering security.

A moment later they found themselves in Kate’s quarters. Kate stumbled to her knees. “What the hell Joe!” She yelled at him. Kate turned around and made a run at Joe. He deflected her attack with ease.

“Are you done attacking me Kate?” Joe asked as he deflected one more attempt by Kate to stop him.

Kate, out of breath, nodded. “Yeah, for now.” Crossing the room she went to the synthesizer. “Water, cold.” A glass of cold water appeared on the platform. Kate picked up the water and drank it. It helped her regain her composure. “What do you want Joe?!” She demanded.

Joe sat down on the couch. “You haven’t done any real decorating since last time I was here.” He said. “That’s a shame. Hey, remember when we were trying for a baby? You wanted to plaster our cabin with pictures of our kids? I miss those times.”

Kate resisted the urge to swear. “You murdered people Joe. You don’t get to have those nice memories anymore.” She sat down on a couch across from him. Kate didn’t dare sit next to him, there was no telling what he was capable of.

“Killpack to Monson.” Kate’s comm unit beeped.

Joe put a finger to his lips. “Don’t tell them I’m here. I’m not ready to leave, not until I’ve finished my business here.”

Kate answered. “Go ahead.”

AskEarly dot NET

“I just remembered I missed something from my report from earlier today.” Jeff said. “Want me to transfer it over now and we can go over it?”

Joe shook his head and mouthed the word no.

“No, that’s fine Jeff. Let’s take a look at it in the morning.” Kate said.

“You’re the boss.” Jeff responded. “Killpack out.” The channel closed.

“Disable your comm unit.” Joe ordered. “Do it now.”

Kate put the unit in standby mode and tossed it over to Joe so he could confirm she did in fact disable the unit. When he was pleased she did so, he continued. “I wasn’t acting alone in that attack you know, there were at least a dozen of us. They only caught me.” Joe smirked as he thought of his success in the mass bombings. “To be honest I think I allowed myself to get caught, it wasn’t anything glamorous, just a simple man doing a civic duty to his home world. We never should have colonized the Moon or Mars! We don’t belong there!” He slammed his fist on the coffee table.

Kate shook her head. “That’s what you wanted to talk to me about? The government stated we needed to be there. That’s answer enough for me.”

Joe frowned. “I just want you to understand my side of the story is all.”

Kate scoffed. “You murdered innocent civilians. Men, women *and* children! You deserved to go to prison. I still can’t believe they let you out of there. You should rot in prison for what you did, for your crimes.”

Joe slicked his black hair back. He was getting nowhere with this. *Why did I even try?* He thought. “First we colonized the Moon and Mars and then we went out and built damn space stations in orbit of other alien worlds!” He was angry. “This is bullshit and you know it Kate. Remember which side you fought on in the war? Earth is for Humans. Our facilities are for Humans. No aliens allowed.”

Kate sighed. He was right, that was her stance during the Earth Civil War. But times had changed her. She no longer thought that way. Her commanding officer was part alien for heaven’s sake. She no longer had the luxury to think the way she used to.

“What I did on the Moon? I did for the betterment of mankind.” Joe said. “Without that chaos, there never would have been an Earth Civil War. We lost the fight, but that was just one battle in an ongoing struggle for Earth dominance across the galaxy.” He continued. “You’ll see soon enough.” A device in his pocket beeped. “Oops, gotta run. Catch you again sometime.” He vanished in a teleportation beam.

Kate sighed as she rested her hands on her legs. How else could this day get any worse for her? “Computer, whiskey.” She said. “Neat.” The computer beeped.

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Madison and Sarah were well into their second bottle of wine. They were in Madison's quarters. Madison had changed from her work garb into something more relaxing and comfortable. Sarah was in jeans and a t-shirt.

"Remember that guy in the academy? You had a big crush on him." Sarah said as she drank from her glass of wine. "What was his name?"

Madison tried to remember the guy's name. She knew who Sarah was talking about but couldn't pinpoint his identity. It came to her finally after thinking about it. "Matt Crenshaw." She said. "If I remember correctly he turned out to be rather nice, I was too nervous to talk to him. I wonder what happened to Matt."

Sarah shrugged. "Let's find out. Computer, locate academy records for Matt Crenshaw class of thirty-six and follow through his career to present."

The computer beeped as it scanned through the man's records. "Matt Crenshaw found. Graduated class of twenty-two thirty-six with high honors. Assigned to U.S.S. Farragut where he served as an ensign, transferred to U.S.S. Hood after becoming a Lieutenant in 2240." The computer paused and then continued. "Killed in action during Earth Civil War aboard the U.S.S. Clemens. All hands lost."

Madison sighed. That damn war always got someone. She frowned at the thought. "He was a fine man."

Sarah nodded. She clinked her glass with Madison's. "To Matt, may the stars find you good shelter in the great beyond."

Madison nodded. "To Matt."

"So, do you have anyone you're interested in *now*?" Sarah asked.

Madison laughed. "Oh I've pretty much sworn off men. My last two relationships were complete dumpster fires." She thought about the last two men she had dated. They were the worst of the worst.

Sarah nodded. "Same." Leaning over, she kissed Madison on the lips. She found her lips to be soft and warm just how she imagined it. Madison didn't pull away but she didn't reciprocate the kiss either. She just sat there not knowing what to do.

Sarah pulled away blushing. "Oh my, I am so sorry." She said. "I've been wanting to do that for a long time. I thought maybe tonight was the night. I am so sorry if I offended you."

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Madison shook her head. "I'm not offended." She leaned forward and kissed Sarah again. Madison didn't know if it was the wine doing the kissing or if she really wanted to experiment with Sarah. Did it really matter anyways? She didn't care. Standing up, she held out her hand. Sarah grabbed hold of Madison's hand. They walked into the bedroom.

The next morning, Madison awoke to a half empty bed. She reached over to the pillow Sarah had been using and smelled it. It smelled like her. Madison smiled at the thought. On Sarah's pillow was a note folded in half. Madison picked up the note and read it.

Sorry had to leave you early. My ship's repairs are complete. I was going to wake you to let you know, but I didn't want to disturb your peaceful sleep. You're so beautiful. I'll call on you next time I'm in your star system.

Keep in touch.

Love,
Sarah

Madison smiled at the note. It was so thoughtful. Most people she spent the night with just got up and left without saying a word. Sarah had actually put some time and effort into this and it showed.

"O'Brien to Park, come in Madison." The major's voice echoed through her quarters.

Madison hopped out of bed and put on a robe. Entering her living area, she walked over to the communications panel and activated it. "Park here, go ahead."

"Good morning." O'Brien said as she came on the screen. "Sorry to bother you at this early of an hour, but Admiral Cain's Star Ship will be docking in an hour. She's in bad need of repairs. Another ion storm. I swear these ion storms keep creeping up on us without warning. Anyway, I need you front and center. See to it the admiral's ship gets the best attention it deserves."

Madison nodded. "Aye sir." She said. "Sir, this Admiral Cain, any relation to former President Cain?"

O'Brien nodded. "His father."

"I see." Madison said. "Well I'll be sure to give it my best effort sir. Park out."

There went her day off. She went to get ready for the day. Madison didn't mind it though, working on Star Ships is what she was meant to do. It was her calling in life. She came from a long line of engineers, it was in her blood.

* * *

Ketish walked along the different Docking Ports until he came to the one that held his shuttle. He was surprised to find Major O'Brien there waiting for him. "Major." Ketish said. "Have you come to see me off?"

O'Brien nodded. "Yes Emperor Ketish. It is customary for the station commander to see off foreign dignitaries as they leave the station." He smiled the best smile he could muster. "It was a pleasure having you onboard even if it was for a short while and your plans for reform are refreshing. I just wanted to make sure we got off on the right foot."

Ketish bowed. "I am grateful for this kind gesture major." He said. "I told you this treaty was going to work out for the best didn't I?" Ketish smiled. "I'm saddened I didn't get to see Grilka on this trip. She probably has more important duties to attend to I am sure. Change does not come easily for my people." He paused. "Oh do tell her I took the liberty of dropping off another two hundred cases of the medicine for her use. She'll find it in Cargo Hold Thirteen. It's in her name."

O'Brien smiled at the gesture. "Thank you Ketish.." He said. "I'm sure she will find it most useful."

"Indeed." Ketish said. He stepped towards his shuttle. "Time for me to go. Home awaits. Goodbye major, until we meet again." Again Ketish bowed to the major.

Jack returned the bow never taking his eyes off Ketish. He watched as Ketish boarded the shuttle. As the doors closed, Jack breathed a sigh of relief. This new peace treaty was going to take some getting used to. Especially with that man in charge of the Dubor home world. He turned and exited the Docking Port Area.

* * *

Grilka watched the exchange between Jack and Ketish from afar. She did not trust Ketish. He spoke peace but there was still something about him that she didn't like. Grilka couldn't place her finger on it, but it was bad. As Ketish departed, Grilka ran across the Main Gallery to catch up to Jack.

"Jack!" She called out.

Jack turned around and smiled. "Grilka, where have you been? You missed it all. I gave a speech."

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“So I hear.” She responded, “And that it was received quite well among the Dubor. I heard Ketish also gave a speech. His was met with mixed feelings. Which is custom among our people.”

“Seriously, where have you been?” Jack asked.

Grilka tried to shy away from the question, but finally answered. “I can’t be in the same room as that man.” She said. “Too many bad painful memories while he was torturing you. I just can’t forgive him for what he’s done.”

Jack put his arm around Grilka. “I understand.” He said. “I don’t fully trust him myself. But he seems to be trying to change for the better. If his plan goes into effect as he promises, we will be seeing a new Dubor surface from the ashes of it all. Think of it, no longer a conquering race but one full of peace. Isn’t that something to celebrate?”

Grilka nodded. “Yes, I suppose it is.” She said.

“Hey, there’s a new sushi restaurant that just opened up. How about lunch?” Jack asked.

“That sounds nice.” Grilka said. “What is sushi?”

“Fish.” Jack said. “Raw fish.”

“Fish is a form of meat?” Grilka asked.

Jack nodded. “Yes. I think you’ll like it. Just don’t use too much wasabi.”

“Wa..sa...bi.” Grilka repeated. “I do not know this word.”

Jack chuckled. “I’ll show you. See you around noon?”

Grilka nodded. They kissed and parted ways.

* * *

Bert McDuff sat outside a brig cell onboard the U.S.S. Fresno. He sneered at the occupant in the cell. Elise Vanderspiel. The woman who had kidnapped Major O’Brien on Saturn. He had unfinished business with her.

“Why don’t you let me go?” Elise asked. “You let my crew go without question like I asked. Why am I still *your* prisoner? Shouldn’t you have shipped me off to an Earth prison by now?”

Bert shook his head. “Elise, our time together has just begun.” He said. “I want to know what Saturn’s main defenses are. We got the major out of there without hardly alerting anyone except for your two star ships that came chasing after us. I was expecting more of a fight at Saturn itself. What defenses are surrounding Titan?” He paused. “Number and strength please.”

Elise frowned. “I don’t have that information captain.” She said. “Honest. If I did do you think I would be stuck in your prison? We would have stopped you the moment you dropped out of FTL if we had anything comparable to your star ship. As you already pointed out, we were no match for your vessel. You are far too advanced for us.”

“Guards.” Bert said into a comm unit on the wall.

Two guards entered the brig. One held a set of restraints. At Bert’s command, the force field on the brig dropped. The guard holding the restraints placed them around Elise’s neck, wrists, and ankles. She was unable to move. The other guard watched with his weapon trained on Elise in case she tried to make a run for it. Elise didn’t try anything. She was his captive.

“I know if your race.” Bert said. “You hate captivity. You aren’t human like you say you are. My scans indicate you are Jalosian. Your kind prey on others assuming their identities.” He smiled. “What happened to the *real* Elise Vanderspiel?”

Elise tried to stretch but found it impossible. “We found her and her crew floating lifeless in space in orbit of Saturn a month ago. No one had bothered to check on them it would seem. They all died in the vacuum of space.” She smiled. “We assumed their identities in order to see just how strong Earth was. You humans are pathetic, weak. You are no match for us.”

Bert leaned back in his chair. “The others.” He whispered. “Your *crew* are also Jalosian?” He paused as reality hit him. He had allowed her crew to go on their way. There was no telling where they were now, or what identities they had overtaken. He began to panic.

“You see the error of your ways I take it.” Elise said. “It’s no matter, they will not strike until I give the order. But since you have me in here, I cannot communicate with them. That leaves two options.” She grinned. “Option one. Nothing happens, I live in this cell of yours until the day I die. My race doesn’t act against it because they don’t receive the signal. Option two, they come looking for me. Tear your ship to pieces and you in the process. They liberate me and we attack Earth.”

Bert shook his head. “Option three. I kill you right here, right now.”

Elise laughed. “You won’t kill me. You *need* me. There are answers to questions you have. I have those answers. Yeah, I’m not going anywhere.”

She had him there.

Leaning forward, Bert frowned. “Fine.” He said. “You have me. Will you at least tell me what you plan on doing with Earth?”

“A global nuclear event.” Elise said. “We plan on eradicating your entire species from existence.” If she could fold her arms she would. But that seemed impossible due to the restraints she had on her. “That is unless...”

“I’m listening.” Bert said.

“If you leave Saturn alone, leave it to my people. We need a place to go. Saturn and its moon Titan are the perfect climate for my species. The perfect environment. We wouldn’t have to destroy human life on Earth to terraform it to our liking that way.”

Bert gave it some thought. “I’ll have to speak to my government about this. I cannot grant you the permission to simply inhabit one of our planets without authorization.” He explained. “These things can take time.”

Gesturing to the restraints with her face, Elise smiled. “Seems I have all the time in the world captain. Like I said, my people won’t make a move until I give the order, or until the year is up. Whichever comes first. If you want your civilization to survive, you best make the decision quickly.” Her grin was something straight out of a horror movie.

Standing up, Bert looked to the guards. “No one comes in or out without my authorization.”

They nodded. “Aye sir.” The guards said in unison.

As Bert exited the brig, Elise stared at him watching him walk away. *He’ll make the right decision.* She thought. *He has to.*

The End