

# Under The Sky

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by Kyle Eggleston

Doctor Matt Allen was monitoring Elise's recovery process. Major O'Brien had ordered around the clock surveillance on the alien. He didn't want her doing anything without his knowledge. Matt didn't like the thought of security in his Med Bay, but Earth's survival was at stake so he allowed it. Not that he had a choice in the matter. The major's orders came first and foremost. That was the law on Crimson Gamma.

The doors to Med Bay opened as Jack O'Brien entered the facility. He approached Doctor Allen. "How's our patient?" He asked.

Matt frowned. "If she were human, she'd be dead. Fortunately she has some redundant systems in her in case other systems fail, they take over. It's been helpful in her recovery process. She's healing nicely, from what I can tell. Should be good to go in a few days."

"Is she awake? I want to talk to her." Jack said.

Matt nodded. "Yeah, she's awake. I'm not sure if she'll be willing to talk, but you can try."

Jack exited Matt's office and walked towards the Recovery Bay. There he found Elise resting in a bed. She was reading a book. It had been a while since Jack had seen an actual paperback books. Everything was on datapads these days. Electronic. Jack missed the smell of an old book. He took a quick peek at the cover. *Les Misérables* was on the jacket. A timeless classic and quite a page turner. He smiled at Elise.

Elise looked up from her book. "You must be Major O'Brien." She said.

Jack smiled. "I must be." He said. "You must be the woman who held me captive on Titan." He accused.

Elise nodded "Guilty as charged. Don't let this human form fool you major. I am neither male or female. My species doesn't have genders. But I like this form it is pleasing to the eye, is it not?"

Jack shrugged. "Wouldn't know." He said. Pulling a chair over to the bed, he sat down on it. "We have some things to discuss it would seem." Jack said. "I've been told if we don't release you soon, your people will attack Earth."

Elise nodded, she set the book down on her lap. “Yes major, you hear correctly.” She said. “Captain McDuff released all of his other prisoners from my ship. I don’t see why you are keeping me.”

Major O’Brien sighed. “I’ve spoken with Captain McDuff.” He said. “He understands that keeping you prisoner was a mistake. We apologize for the inconvenience. As soon as your wounds heal, you can go in peace if you wish.”

“That’s it?” Elise asked. “You don’t want to question me for why I held you prisoner? Your Captain McDuff sure wanted to know.” She paused for a moment. “You know he beat me right?”

Jack folded his arms. “Not according to Bert.” He said. “According to him, you hurt yourself while attempting to escape from your cell.”

Elise scoffed. “He’s lying.”

“I checked the security cam footage.” Jack said. “It clearly shows he wasn’t even near you when you threw yourself at the force field. The footage doesn’t lie. Care to tell me *why* you tried to escape?”

Elise froze. She didn’t have an out on this one. She sighed. “Fine, I tried to escape. I didn’t think it fair that I was being kept locked up while my crew was set free. Then there’s the issue of the condition that if I don’t return to my people, they will attack Earth. I don’t want Earth to be attacked anymore than you do.”

“Why are you so important?” Jack asked. “Why do your people want to attack Earth? I can see you attacking anyways even when we let you go.” Jack could see Earth being attacked no matter what. Nothing was ever safe anymore.

Elise shrugged. “You’ll have to believe me when I say we won’t attack you if I’m returned.” She said. “I have top secret information my government wants. I can’t communicate it other than in person. It’s that vital to my home world’s survival. That’s all I can say.”

Jack frowned. “You’re facing an extinction level event aren’t you.”

“Something like that.” Elise said. “It’s very time sensitive. We have the rest of the year to figure things out.”

“I see.” Jack said. “Doctor Allen says you are healing nicely and are on schedule to be released in a few days.”

Elise shifted in bed trying to get comfortable. She groaned as she moved around. “Okay, so I can go home in a few days. That’s good. My home world is a good ways away from here. I’ll need as much time as I can get to reach home.”

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Jack wondered how far her home was exactly. “Where is your home?” He asked.

Elise frowned. “Sector Eight Five Nine, near The Rim.”

Jack smiled. The Rim. That was a good six month journey. No wonder why the deadline was a year away. The aliens seemed to be levelheaded that was for sure. At least they hadn’t given Earth an impossible deadline. “Well, you best get some rest so you finish healing. No offense but I want you off my station as soon as possible.”

Standing up from his chair, Jack began walking out of the room. He turned around to face Elise to say something else but decided against it. She had heard enough of what he had to say. He exited the Recovery Bay.

Passing by Matt’s desk, Jack gave him a thumbs up. “Good work doc. She has a long ride ahead of hers to get home. I’ll make sure she has transportation ready when the time comes.” He exited the Med Bay.

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Madison Park sat at a desk on the main Maintenance Level of Crimson Gamma. She was reviewing the matter antimatter reactor readouts for the last week and a half. Madison didn’t like what she was seeing. The readings were a little off, not too far from specifications but still a little off.

“You wanted to see me?” Kate Monson said as she entered the office.

Madison didn’t turn around to face her. “Close the door.” She said.

Kate closed the door behind her. “What’s up?” She approached the desk Madison was sitting at and rested a hand on the back of Madison’s chair.

Madison shook her head. “I think we have a saboteur onboard.”

Kate let go of the chair. “That’s a pretty strong accusation chief.” She said. “Do you have proof?”

Madison handed a datapad to Madison over her shoulder. “Here’s a list of parts that have gone missing over the past week. At first the water purification processor was damaged, when I went to look for a replacement part it wasn’t to be found. Since then, other parts have come up missing. Things you wouldn’t expect to go missing unless you went looking for them.” She paused. “I began running diagnostics this morning. The reactor core is running hotter than it should. It’s off by a few degrees.”

“A *few* degrees.” Kate echoed. She checked the datapad. “Three percent.”

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“I know it doesn’t seem bad.” Madison nodded. “But trust me, it could jump to ten really quick, then we’d be in a world of hurt.” She checked her monitor. “Switch to page three. The weapons systems seem to be fluctuating as well. If we’re under attack and those go down? We’re screwed. Then there’s the shields ...”

Kate sighed. “I see your point.” She said. “Who knows about this?”

Madison turned in her chair away from the computer monitor. “No one. You’re the first person I’ve told. I know the major is busy with other business. I figured ... someone ... should know about it.”

Kate handed the datapad back to Madison. “I’m glad you told me. We can’t be caught with our britches down. I’ll alert security. Hopefully we can track down this bastard. Transfer that data to my station.” She pointed to the datapad in Madison’s hand. Turning around, Kate exited the office leaving Madison alone to review more reports.

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Kate walked into security. Jeff Killpack was seated at his desk monitoring. As he saw Kate walk in, he closed out the screen he was viewing. He could look at that later.

“Commander Monson, what brings you here?” Jeff asked.

Kate sighed as she sat down across from Jeff. “We might have a saboteur onboard the station.” Kate said. “Computer, bring up file Monson Six Three Five Two Eight and transmit it to this terminal and navigate to summary page.”

The computer beeped in response. “File ready.” It responded.

Jeff leaned forward in his seat. “What am I looking at here?”

Kate pointed at the terminal. “You’re looking at a summary of malfunctions all over the station. Madison started an investigation when a part for the water purification system went out and she couldn’t find a replacement. She noticed other ... odd occurrences. Weapons, shields, the main reactor all seem to have been affected.”

Jeff looked over the summary, then he began going through the report page by page. “This is a lot of failing systems commander.” He said. “That’s a lot to go unnoticed for so long. I mean, look at some of these dates.”

Kate nodded. She knew how it looked. “I know, it looks like Madison wasn’t doing her job. But that’s not the case at all. I’ve gone through her logs, everything is on the up and up.”

Jeff looked at Kate. “You didn’t trust her.”

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Kate shook her head. “That’s not it at all. I was just covering all of the bases. That’s all. You know the drill, it’s standard procedure.” Kate looked Jeff square in the eyes. She was telling the truth, it *was* standard procedure whenever something suspicious happened on the station. It helped prevent bad things from happening.

Jeff nodded his head. “Yeah, you’re right, it is.” He admitted. “I’d do the same if it was one of my guys. I get it.” He continued to look over the report. “I’ll increase security around the affected areas.”

Kate smiled. “Thanks Jeff.” She said. Standing up, she proceeded to walk out the door. “I’ll let you get back to work.” Kate exited the office.

Jeff activated a communications line. “Killpack to Park.” He said.

“Park here. Go ahead.” Madison’s voice came through the line.

“Do you have time to come down to the security office? I need to ask you a few questions.” Jeff said.

“On my way, Park out.” Madison said closing the communications line.

Jeff leaned back in his chair, now *he* was going to find out if Madison was telling the truth. Sure Kate had her intel, but he needed to find out for himself. Jeff wanted the truth, no matter where it took him.

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Bert McDuff sat in a mostly deserted bar, he was sipping on a cola. Ever since the station went dry, most of the bars had shut down. A few, like this one, had decided to stay open. They figured they could serve things other than alcohol. Most of the patrons decided not to come back seeking out alcohol in another way. But a few decided to stick with their favorite watering hole. It wasn’t about the alcohol for them, it was about the company.

“Want a refill Bert?” The bartender, Alice, asked. She knew Bert rather well to know he couldn’t refuse another cola, even if it meant he had to spend another two credits for it. Bert was good for the money, she had served him long enough to know that.

Bert handed Alice his glass. “You know it.” He said as he set two credit chips down on the bar.

Alice took the glass and filled it with cola. “Here you go sir.” She said. Picking up the credit chips, she entered them into a nearby till.

“So,” Bert said. “What new things have you heard?”

Alice laughed. “What makes you think I’ve heard any *new* things that you don’t know about?” She asked.

Bert shrugged as he took a sip of his drink. “Dunno. Just thought I’d ask. Sometimes people talk to their bartenders and tell them things they’ve ... heard.” He tried his best to explain his thinking, but felt he was failing at it. “Does that make sense?”

Alice placed her hands on the bar. “Sure I’ve heard things.” She said. “But I don’t believe everything I hear. Do you?” Alice waited for a response, any kind of response from Bert.

Bert hesitated. He wasn’t sure how to answer the question. Bert knew he didn’t always believe everything he heard, but there were some things he did believe in with no questions asked. Finally he answered. “No, I don’t believe I do.”

“Okay.” Alice said. “You get my point.”

Bert nodded. “Yeah, I guess I do.” He drank the rest of his cola and stood from the bar stool. “Same time tomorrow?”

Alice nodded. “Yeah, I’ll be here.”

Bert walked out of the bar.

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Norev strolled around the Main Gallery. She was doing some light shopping at the different markets the station had to offer. Smelling an Earth fruit known as a grapefruit, she smiled at it. Norev wondered what it would taste like. She placed it in her bag.

“Norev, I didn’t expect to see you here.” Grilka said. “I thought you got your fruit from the Shuka market.”

Norev smiled. “Oh Grilka, I like to try different alien food from time to time. The Earth market has been my favorite so far. Last week I ate something called a strawberry. It’s a small red fruit surrounded by seeds. Quite delicious.”

Grilka stuck her tongue out at the thought of eating fruit. Meat was her go to choice for food. Her teeth were made for tearing flesh of meat, not fruits and vegetables. It was an easy thing to mistake one for the other by non Dubor standards. But it wasn’t something *she* was able to confuse.

Norev chuckled at the sight of Grilka’s tongue. It was rather long, longer than she imagined it would be. Not that she imagined such things on the regular.

Grilka laughed along with Norev. After a moment, she stopped laughing. “Do you have a moment to talk? I need to ... get something off my chest.”

Norev cocked her head to one side. “What an odd expression. Yes, we can talk.”

The two women wandered their way through the crowd up to one of the restaurants where they sat down at a small table in a corner booth. Looking at the menu, Grilka decided Shukan cuisine wasn't for her that day and set it aside. Norev ignored her menu.

“What is you wanted to talk about Grilka?” Norev asked. She had her complete undivided attention.

Grilka sighed. “It's Jack.” She said. “He's become quite distant towards me since he's been back. I don't know what I'm doing wrong or how to fix it.” She placed her hand on the table frustrated that she didn't know what to do. It wasn't her way to consult outsiders on her personal matters, but she didn't know how to handle it.

Norev reached across the table and put a reassuring hand on Grilka's. “He's been through a lot. Being captured twice, cloned, God knows what else. Jack is a strong individual, whatever he's going through he'll come to you in time.” She said.

Grilka frowned. She wished she could believe Norev, but she would have to wait and see if what the ambassador said was true.

Norev smiled. “It will be okay. I promise.” Looking at the menu she frowned. “Want to get a steak?” She stood up from the table.

Grilka laughed. That was the best thing she had heard of all day. The women left the restaurant in search of an Earth restaurant that served meat.

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Madison walked into her quarters and sighed. She had not planned to spend the entire day in security answering the same questions over and over again. She was beat. Removing her duty jacket, she walked over to the mirror and stared at herself. She was wearing a tank top that was covered in grease. She sighed. What was the point of wearing a duty jacket if her clothes underneath were going to get stained. Removing her tank top, she walked towards the shower.

The hot shower felt good against her bare skin. Closing her eyes, Madison thought of what it would be like to swim in an ocean. That's where she wanted to be right now. Not on some distant space station out on the edge of the frontier. She wanted to be back home on Earth swimming freely doing whatever she pleased.

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“You’re slipping Madison.” She said. “Keep focused.”

“Warning, five minutes until water shut off.” The computer announced.

Madison nodded. Right, the water saving procedures had kicked in telling her she was taking too much time in her own shower. She sighed. Real water was better than no water at all. Finishing up, she turned off the water and grabbed a towel.

Walking up to the mirror Madison dropped the towel. There was something odd that she noticed in the shower, but wanted to take a closer look. Running her hand over her left breast, she felt a lump.

“Oh hell no.” Madison whispered.

The End