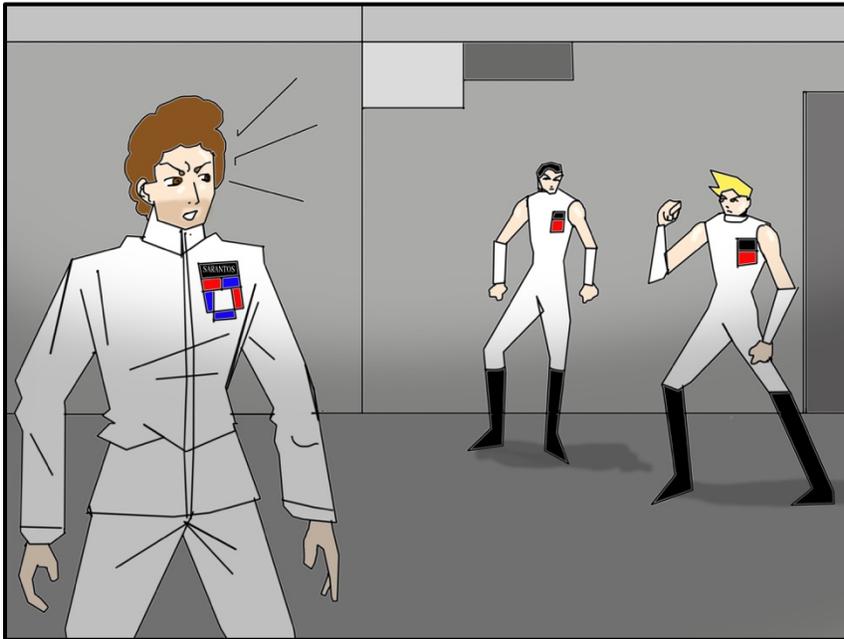


Chapter 11

“I’d Follow You Into Fire”

Addie was livid. He’d never seen her that angry before today.

The morning had turned into a blur. Needless to say, they never made love, which considering the circumstances he desperately needed. Instead, Addie was screaming for security and had the whole ship on red alert. He felt like a sinful mind forsaken.



His quarters were immediately overrun with hordes of guards and several security teams. They spent hours scanning his room with tri-quarters and what they found embarrassed both him and Addie. He was utterly humiliated. He felt like a nitwit. He was filled with rage and confusion. Under the circumstances, he

couldn't order them out of his quarters - security in a time of crisis superseded his commands as a Captain.

Kitara had definitely been in his quarters last night, even in his bed, and apparently, they had sex. He could barely remember past her entering his room. That was a lie though. Unfortunately, he remembered everything all too vividly. It was the best sex the two of them ever had. He just couldn't admit that right now to everyone else. In his mind, no one really needed to know specifics of what they did.

There's two tragedies in life, not getting what you want and getting it!

He was ashamed and felt violated but at the same time his shame was directed at his willingness to participate in such a scandalous event. He thought he'd never see her again, except for behind bars. However, Kitara walked back into his life to play. She caught the words he threw her way. Those words were turned into bile.

He told her that he loved her smile and missed the old days. He remembered that much about last night. He told her that he would follow her into the fire!

"I don't care. I want to know how she got this far onto the ship." Addie's voice boomed into his head...guilt.

The worst part was knowing that deep down inside, he wanted her to come out and play. He let her in his room. He encouraged her with his eyes. His body language was obvious. He so desperately wanted to remember and relive those fond memories from their younger days when life was sweet and simple. When Kitara showed up last night he was running on empty and all he could do was think of a way to get her, again. She still made him nervous when she walked in the room. He knew he'd never have another chance at that intoxicating memory. So, he acted selfishly but willingly and he most definitely did remember enjoying every single second of it. That realization made him mad and disgusted with himself when he awakened this morning and his proper senses had returned. He wanted it to be a dream, but of course it wasn't. He was only as good as his last gesture. He could not cling to the past and pretend that's who he was. The mistakes he made in the present are a far better reflection of who he truly is.

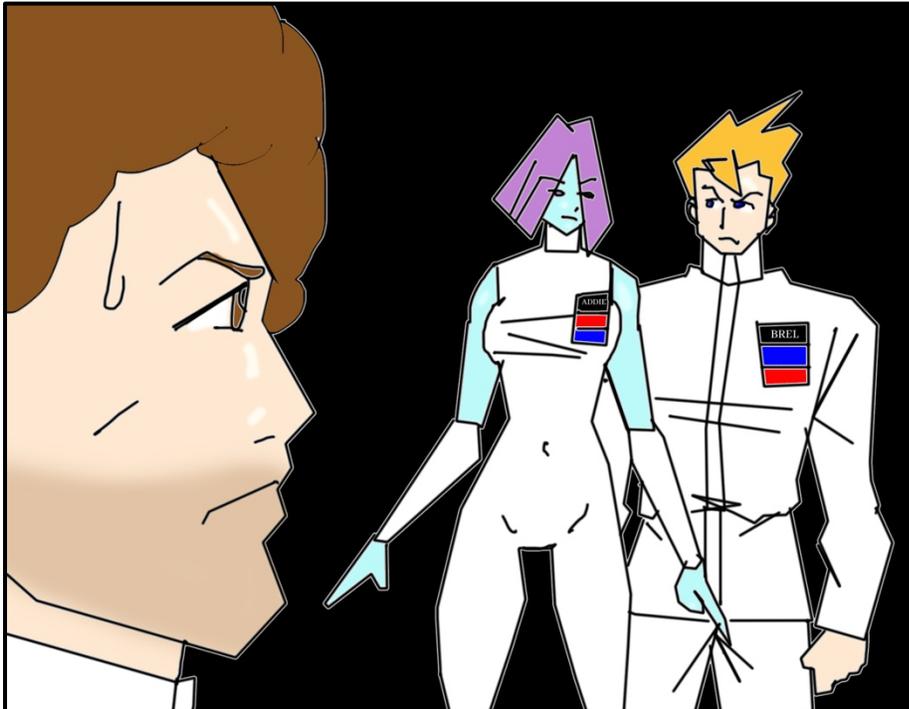
His mind drifted back again to last night. Why? He'd already felt anxious and depressed about being deceived by her but then he still allowed her into his chambers without calling security the moment she walked into his room. Did a part of him think that eventually her darkness would give way to the light?

Sometimes the brightest light comes from the darkest places. Even now, his mind was trying to rationalize his behavior, and even hers. What was wrong with him?

Her wild dark hair had tickled his skin and her flesh burned but she clearly wasn't Addie. When they kissed, the pain briefly went away. For a short-lived moment, they were not alone.

The questions repeated. How could he let himself down like that? Why did he give in to her? He was better than that and had become such a better person since he met Addie. But all of that was gone in a heartbeat. Now he might even be considered part of the conspiracy against the federation. After all, he allowed the enemy into his room and then made love to her. He broke every protocol aboard the ship.

“Finish up in here, and I want a report within the next hour,” Addie stated firmly.



She looked angry and annoyed. She'd worked all thru night but her beauty never wavered. Brel whispered something in Addie's ear and she looked weirdly towards him and nodded.

Sarantos could never read that man. Brel stared straight

at Sarantos revealing absolutely no hint of emotion. Weren't they good friends? This was crazy. What if they arrested him?

He didn't dare speak, because there was nothing he could say to take away last night and he might only put his foot deeper into his mouth.

Brel finished with Addie and approached him. "Captain, you have to come with me."

Yep, they were arresting him. It wasn't phrased as a question. It was a direct order. Addie couldn't look at him ever since she found Kitara's red, high heel shoes. The thought almost made him smile. She was something else.

He followed Brel out into the corridor and away from the crime scene. He was officially a criminal.

They were heading away from the brig. Sarantos could not bring himself to look back at the wreckage of the past night.

"Where are we going?"

Brel never answered him but kept walking with purpose. Wonderful. One of the few men he respected wouldn't say a word to him. That said a lot about what he'd done. He was the Captain but even faithful Brel wouldn't answer him.

"Brel, as Captain of this starship I demand you tell me where we're going?"

"Sorry, Captain. I was lost in thought, as I feel responsible for this obvious lack of security. We are going to the docs."

"You mean to see Cleary?"

“Yes, Captain.”

“Whatever for?”

“She will explain, Captain. I’m not at liberty to speak further.”

He felt lost and out of the loop.

“I’m still Captain, Brel.”

“Yes, sir you are, but under the circumstances you have temporarily lost security privileges.”

His face grew white hot and an achy twitch in his jaw wouldn’t stop. Stay calm, Sarantos.

“Fair enough, Brel.”

The silence as they headed to the sick room only gave him more time to rethink and reanalyze his actions. How could he have been so attracted to Kitara last night? Well, she was gorgeous. They did have a history. He didn’t want to believe that something as innocent and pure from his youth as her had actually turned out to be bad. Maybe, it was his own ego not wanting to believe he’d been deceived by Kitara, a woman he used to call a friend. Maybe he was still making excuses for not being able to control his primal urges. You’re always one decision away from a very different life!

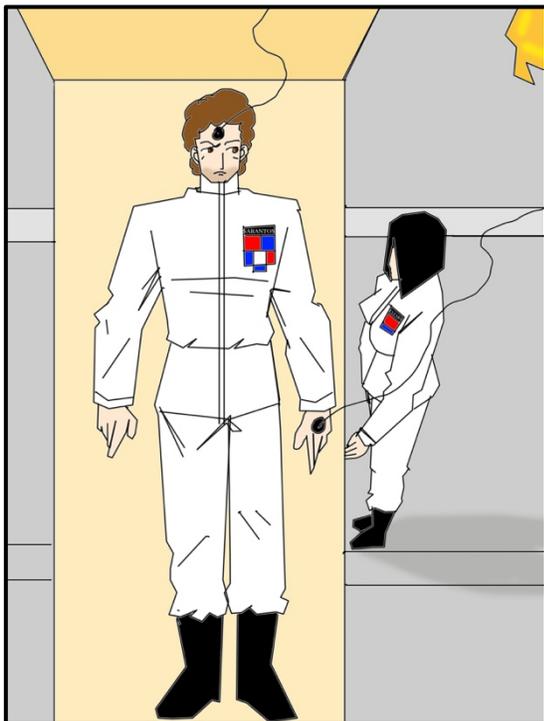
What would happen now to him and Addie? He loved her and there was no comparison between her and Kitara. Kitara never measured up to Addie, not even close. Addie was everything that Kitara wasn’t. Love is a magical moment in time

and is different for everyone. There is no script. There are no rules. There's nothing wrong with love that's not perfect because love never is. But he was weak. He failed love. He failed Addie.

He was weak. He weakened way too quickly to a woman he never was in love with. Sure, he enjoyed their times together, but it paled in comparison to Addie. He was a slave to Addie's smile and a slave to the games she played. She gave him her love, but that wasn't enough for him last night apparently and now he had ruined everything. Real tears started to form on the corners of his eyes.

The door opened slowly and the doc was waiting. No one else was in the sick room.

“Sarantos up on the table, I need to check some of your vitals as well as some of your mental functions.”



With defeated body language, he nodded slowly, climbed up wistfully and lied down joylessly allowing Cleary to probe relentlessly putting him under a string of tests. Brel stood by the door awaiting the final verdict.

Sarantos wasn't quite sure what she was looking for, but she injected him with something that made him swoon. Soon he was back in bed with Kitara and embraced in a dance of wild passionate carnal sex.

He must've fallen asleep because Cleary was standing over him still testing his vitals.

“Captain, do you know where you're at?”

“Of course, I know where I'm at. What kind of question is that?”

Brel was still standing at the door. Brel looked like he'd never moved, not even batted an eyelash.

“Captain, it appears you were injected with a certain type of drug, the dreamscaper. It causes the person to hallucinate about a past event that was pleasurable.” She frowned. “What the hell were you thinking letting her get that close to you in the first place?”

“I'm not sure. I couldn't move. I don't know if I was just so shocked to see her, considering security was following her so closely...”

“I don't care if security was right behind her and escorted her into your room. What were you thinking?”

“I don't know, Cleary. I've felt stressed lately and that's why I requested to see you earlier. I'm not well, and always fatigued. I've also been embracing the shadows of hate. I get upset so damn easily. I feel burnt out. In the end, the high cost of living is death. Maybe I'm at death's doorstep? I just feel so tired and hopeless...”

“Of course you are, with all the sexual activity you're engaged in, anyone would be stressed out.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Okay, but you check out fine, except for some drugs injected into you through the neck and possibly the exchanging of saliva. I’ll wait for results to come back.”

Brel stood still and never showed any concern over the results of the conversation.

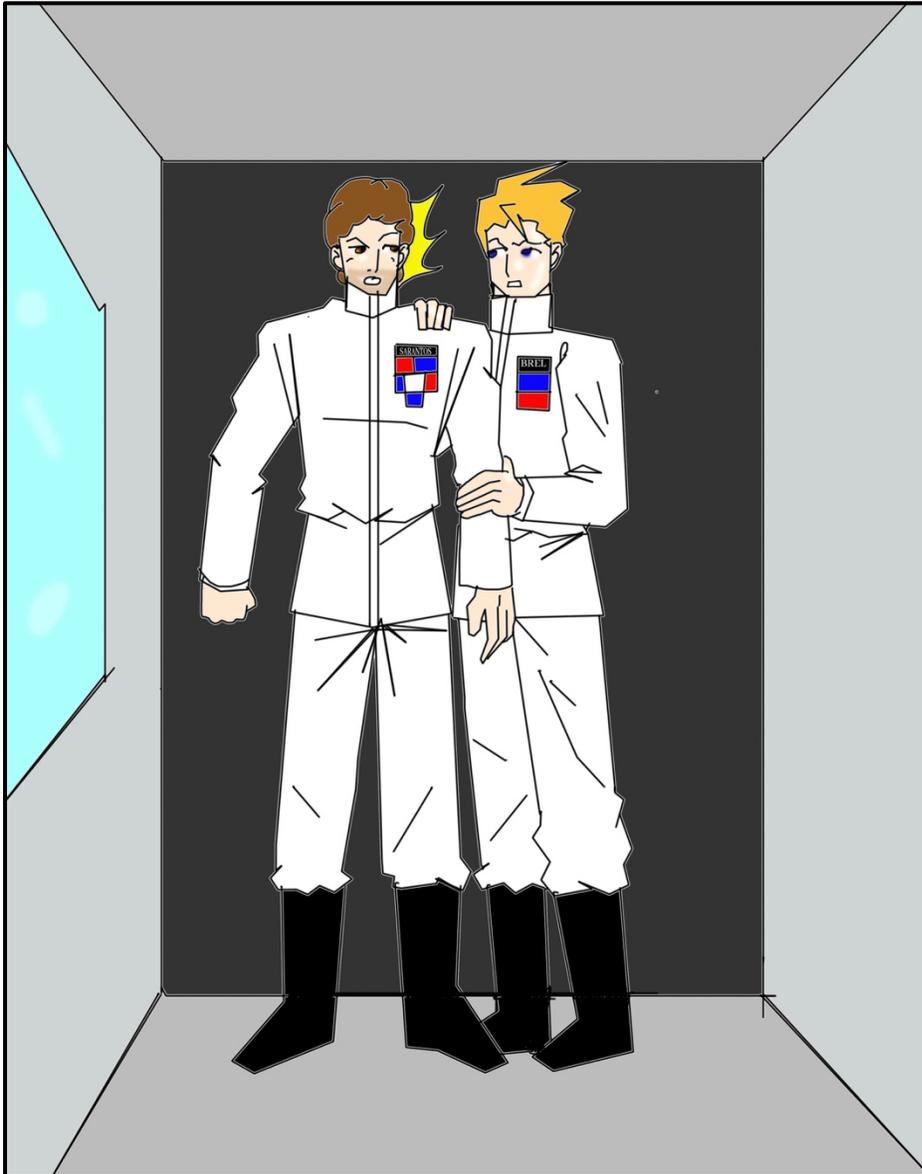
“Well, I don’t know how it happened.”

“Of course, you don’t. Brel, in my medical opinion, I think he is not safe to himself or this ship. He needs to be securely locked in his room until new information comes to light that might give us more information about this current situation. Those times with Kitara seem more precious now that they're in the past Sarantos but there’s nothing you’ve done that cannot be undone. Don’t be so hard on yourself! Some time off will be good for your chronic stress and fatigue.”

Sarantos knew there was nothing he could do. There was no point fighting her. If the doctor deemed him unable to capably perform his duties as Captain of this ship, she could dismiss him. It was rightfully within her authority. Doctor Cleary was now acting Captain of his starship.

Brel nodded and took Sarantos’s arm. “Sorry, Captain. I need to escort you to your quarters.”

This was even more demeaning but he had to go along with it. Everybody's got their neuroses but nobody reveals them. It’s a world of extremes, one second on top and the next at the very bottom. Wait until the Admiral hears about his inappropriate play date. Where would he send him?



They were treating him like a criminal, and he felt like one. It amazed him how people you're the closest to can so quickly become strangers. As they walked down the corridors, he felt sorry to be alive. Sharing in the missions and happiness of the ship was the greatest privilege in all his life. That was now gone in a flash. He was sure Addie would also be done with him, permanently.

Addie was waiting for him in his

quarters. Everyone else was gone.

Brel left them together.

“Well Sarantos, how could you do that to us?”

“Oh, Addie. I’m sorry.”

Their eyes met, it was a perfect illusion and they were the perfect twosome if only for a single second.

“Addie, please don’t say goodbye, although I’ve gotten rather good at them. I couldn’t bear to lose you too right now.”

Her eyes locked onto his and he felt hypnotized. His heart rate slowed. His brain fogged over and his feet buckled under him. He slid to the floor.

He looked up into her face. “Addie please look at me. I’m in love with your smile, I’m in love with you. I never wanted or expected this to happen. You know I would do anything for you, go anywhere you do. I’d follow you into fire!”

“You should’ve thought about that before you let her slip her tongue in your mouth. Oh, Sarantos, you never even called security. Not once.” She turned away from him and left him on the floor wanting her. “I’ve got work to do. You’re locked in your quarters until further notice.”

Her gorgeous purple hair flowed down her back and touched her waist as she moved with purpose toward the exit. Then he did something completely out of character for him, but this day was full of surprises.

He gathered his strength, jumped to his feet and grabbed her from behind dragging Addie to the floor. She was shocked. That gave him enough time to remove her IC and throw it across the room. He didn’t stop there. Her lips were inviting, and he slid his across hers and wildly tore her clothes from her body. She never had time to resist.

“I want you and I want to marry you. I’m tired of the games you play.” His voice was firm, but full of emotion. “I’m tired of playing Captain to your Security. I want you now and I will have you. You’re not going to walk out on me again.

He couldn’t stop himself and she didn’t refuse him for some reason, maybe she felt sorry for him? Their eyes danced. Her race was wild by nature with this caveman-like sex inviting her in. A chance at life together was greater than the risk of being apart. They just fit together. They both knew it.

She nibbled on his neck and gave in to his desire fully. He knew at any time she could have thrown him across the room and left, but not today. It was like a roller coaster ride on a Saturday afternoon with your dream date... everything was perfect and the authenticity they both craved was genuine. His heart became a room with wide open windows.

He was awakened by Cleary’s hard and stern voice. “Captain, please have security escort you to the sick room.”

“I’m on my way, Doc.”

“I heard, Sarantos. I’ll escort you.” Her smile melted him into liquid gold. Her fresh eyes injected life and energy into his spirit.

“I’m sorry, Addie. I don’t know what came over me last night. Every breath I take is incomplete, until your heart whispers back. I needed you and wanted you. I’m sorry if I was too forceful.” She smiled politely. He kissed her forehead and jumped in the shower. “You coming?”



“Yes.” She jumped in the shower ahead of him knocking him over playfully and said, “I’ve heard your sorry already. I’m sure there was more involved. I believe in you.”

She shook her head happily sending her hair in all directions. She poured shampoo over her hair. He watched her cheeks sparkle as her forehead wrinkled in thought. He wished life was like Photoshop, where you could just crop out all the unwanted stuff. He just wanted moments like this.

He massaged the shampoo into her scalp and contended with her hair helping her rinse it until the shampoo was gone. He loved giving her a scalp massage. Then he

piled conditioner onto it and worked it slowly through the long purple strands. She moaned.

“I agree, Addie. I felt like I was in a trance and suddenly memories that I hadn’t had of her jumped into my brain and took over. I thought it very unusual since I was so angry at her and wanted her arrested right away before that night.”

“Yes. Something’s not right my love. We will figure it out.”

“In fact, the shoes she left was also part of my thoughts. It was of a time when she left shoes in a closet after we made love. It all seemed too perfectly staged.”

“Brel was following her, Sarantos. He told me he was. An illusion perhaps? I would’ve preferred to say the illusion was who Brel was following. I’m surprised he didn’t detect it. His race has a lot of skills that most don’t know about. They’re secretive about it but I’m really surprised it fooled him.”

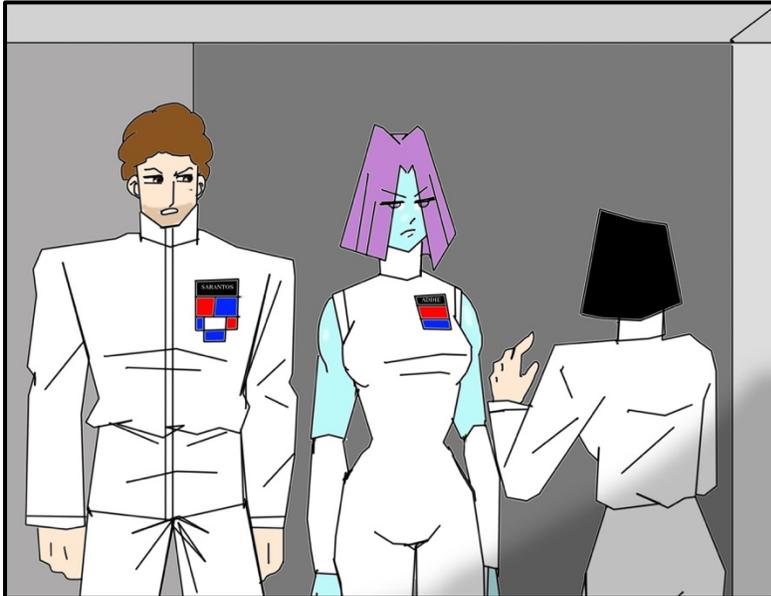
Sarantos agreed, “Yes, they don’t share a lot about their race. They seem to like surprises.”

She finished rinsing her hair and they both got every last soap sud off and stepped out of the shower.

“Luckily I left another work suit here for emergencies such as this,” she said. She tilted her head and lowered it before drawing her eyebrow together in a rather fierce expression.

“Yes, sorry about that my beauty. I didn’t realize I was strong enough to rip the Federation uniform.”

They dressed and within twenty minutes they were standing in front of Cleary.



“Well, there you are. I’m glad you brought the Lieutenant with you, Captain. We’re going to need a security team to check captain’s quarters ASAP for a very specific drug called dramon. I don’t know if you’ve heard of it, but it’s a very powerful hallucinatory drug. Sarantos had some remnants left in his body.”

“I’ve heard of that. It can be used to cause a person or several people within ten feet of the administrator to feel and do things that are implanted into their mind by a mere suggestion. It’s wicked and was banned by the federation years ago,” said Addie.

“But wouldn’t she have been affected too,” asked Sarantos?

Addie looked at him and grinned. “Not necessarily, she might’ve had an implant inserted that would prevent it from affecting her too. She’s much more clever than I initially give her credit for.”

Sarantos said, “Wow, she’s more evil than I thought. Why do you suppose she did that?”

“Well, Captain one reason would be to show you that she’s the one with the power, not you. She’s in control and she can use you at will. Another one would be to have sex with you, to persuade you of her innocence by seducing you and conjuring up

sweet memories. Confusing your rational thoughts about her with emotion and leaving you not sure what or who to believe. This is how you make the Federation stand up and listen,” said Cleary.

“Wow, Doc. I feel resentful and violated. I knew we should’ve thrown her in the brig. It’s the things we love the most that destroy us and the friends we trust that use that to their advantage.”

“Captain, this might work to our advantage. We could leave you in your quarters with security and get the word out about your cohorts with her and the Drifters. That might get her attention and lead us to where we need to go.”

“Addie, you’re brilliant. I like the idea. What do you say Doc?”

“I think it might work. I’ve already taken charge as commander of the starship and the crew all know that fact. We just said you’re working on a project in your quarters that will take quite a bit of time and I’ve been put in temporary charge of the ship. We did not give the crew the real reason.”

“Can’t we turn the ship over to John?” Sarantos wanted someone that was more qualified to guard his deck. He didn’t dare say that to Cleary though.

“Yes, that’s a good idea, Captain. For security reasons and plus I’m pretty busy in sick bay. I’ll assign him to lead the ship immediately and explain what’s going on to him confidentially.”

“Thanks, Cleary. It just might work.” He had nothing left now, so he had nothing to lose.

Addie said, “I’ll have monitors installed in his room, so we can see anyone enter who should not be entering. Captain, you’ll have to refrain from sexual pleasures unless you want the security team to watch the show you put on.”

“Can I charge an admission fee?” He grinned. He felt like everyone was watching his life thru a hole in the wall anyway.

“Let’s get moving. I’ll take you back to your quarters Sarantos,” said Addie.

“Sure why not, I barely understand this mess myself and I’m living it.”

Sometimes he wasn’t sure what was wrong with him, joking when this was such a serious situation. He’d always done that his whole life. Either he had great comedic timing or he was just inappropriate. There was no middle ground with him. Making jokes was his usual reflex to cope with bad situations and this was indeed a bad situation. Addie wasn’t a joker; if it was serious, she was serious and had no time for what she called silly games, but for him, it was a necessary defense mechanism that clicked in to help him get through tough times. He developed it when his dad was killed in action. Everyone has ways of coping and he was no different, at least among humans.

He was pretty sure that Kitara wouldn’t be able to get into his quarters again, because of the three security guards posted at his door.

Addie had left to join Brel. He knew this could take days, maybe weeks before they would be able to find out who was involved as the leader of the Drifters. It was important. He knew that but still wasn’t happy about being locked up on his own ship.

“Earl Grey.”

He watched the cup rise up out of nowhere and the hot steamy liquid filled his cup. He should have had coffee. The thought of having too much caffeine that might cause him to get jumpy was a concern to him but in reality there was just as much caffeine in tea. He set the cup on the table and went back to the replicator. “Coffee, black.”

Sipping on coffee, he sighed and pulled out the captain’s journal. This would give him a chance to review recent events and get caught up on paperwork.

Paperwork wasn’t relevant since it was all computer documented, but the term had stuck around and all documenting of anything was still referred to as paperwork.

“Captain.” The welcoming voice of John reached his ears.

“John, good to hear your voice. I suppose you’ve heard the news?”



“Yes, Captain. Are you alright?”

“I’ll be fine, just catching up on things.”

“Good. I’m in your ready room. Private. I cancelled your appearance with the band. They’re still doing the event but adjusted their music to suit the four of them. Sorry, buddy. I know how much that meant to you. The revival would’ve been awesome.”

“It’s okay, John. I’ll have more time to practice I guess. This has to be done and has gone too far anyway. I’m seriously worried about Federation security.”

“I know what you mean. I was only a little surprised about Kitara. I’ve been uncomfortable around her for several years now. Something was off.”

“Yes, something was off, that’s for sure. Something was also off with my ability to notice that,” said Sarantos.

“We can’t always know everything. It’s just what it is. She knew we all trusted her and she abused that trust. She abused it deliberately and fully.”

“Yes, of course, I know you’re right, John.” As soon as he said that, for some reason, Sarantos started wondering why he was usually afraid of little things but not afraid of big things.

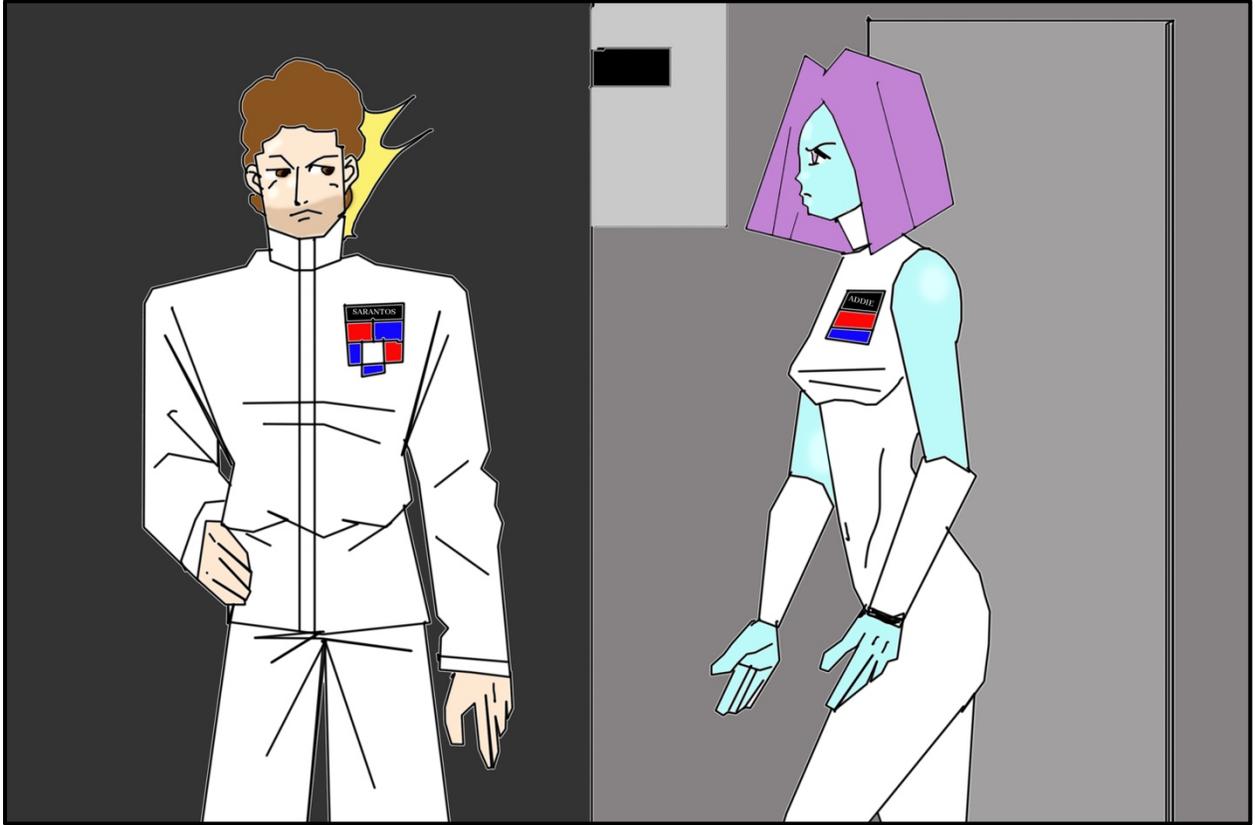
“Well Captain, I just wanted to inform you of the concert and see how you were holding up. Glad you’re okay. Out.”

“Out.”

Once John Baker was done talking, that was it. He was like Cleary in that regard. Short and to the point. He found himself smiling thinking about his two friend’s behavior. It felt good.

The coffee was good and actually relaxed him; it was familiar. He was reviewing an incident that happened a week ago when he was interrupted.

“Captain.” It was Addie.



“Enter.”

As the breeze of Addie blew in, his mind flooded with oxygen. She was glorious standing in front of him, but he could quickly see by her facial expression it was all business and no pleasure.

“What’s wrong, Addie.”

“Nothing. I just want to keep you updated to what’s going on. Are you really drinking that tea?”

“No. Help yourself.”

She sat down, sipped and breathed out slowly. “That’s nice,” she said.

He watched her and patiently awaited her thoughts.

Sarantos said, “I spoke to John. Concerts off.”

“Yes, I’m sorry.”

She looked tired.

“No big deal, I can do that anytime, but are you alright? You seem very concerned.”

“Yes, Sarantos I’m fine, just a little tired.”

“So, what’s the news?”

“Brel can tell if she tries the illusion trick again. He got a tool specifically to detect that. He made it himself. Don’t ask me how it works or what it is. I don’t know but I trust him to do what he needs to do to get the job done.”

“He’s amazing and if anyone can pull it off, it’s him. I’ll be glad when we have a new mission and can get out of here.”

“Yes I agree but that’s unlikely, at least not anytime soon.”

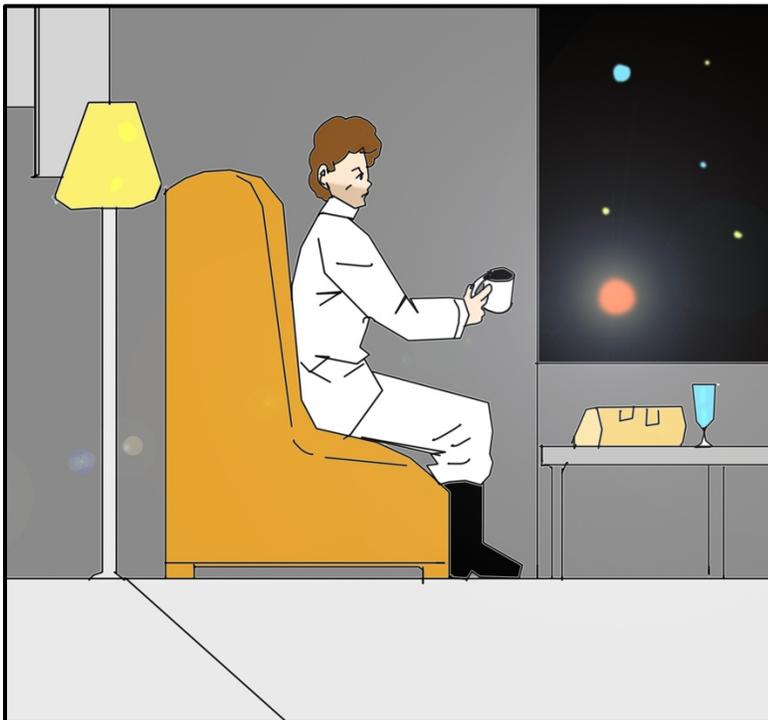
“I know. Wishful thinking,” he said.

“The Admiral wants us to rendezvous with a new race called the Strats. We know nothing about them but it won’t happen until this mess with Kitara is cleared up. The Federation wants the Strats to join us for trading purposes and as another ally.”

“That sounds both promising and interesting,” said Sarantos.

“I know, it’ll be a nice change from what we’ve been faced with over the years. Unfortunately, I must go back to work now.”

She stood up and left the room without a goodbye. This time he allowed her to go without grabbing her arm and kissing her soft lips. She did not need his distraction right now. They will build their Rome if they just take it one step at a time starting tomorrow.



Sarantos got his breakfast and took it over to the couch to stare out into the allure of space while he ate.

He was starting to go crazy. It’d been three weeks since he was confined to his quarters and he hadn’t heard much news about what was going on in the outside world. Addie came and got him once with a security team to take him to the Diamond Room for dinner.

His crew had looked at him suspiciously and that made him uncomfortable. Something needed to happen soon or he might just flip out. He was pain, that's all he was.

John would IC him on occasion to let him know how the starship and crew faired. He hated the fact that his crew thought he could be a traitor with Kitara. At least no one had been able to get into his quarters, not that he wouldn't welcome an intruder at this point in time.

His songs were made and recorded and ready to go for the next event, if they ever actually got a chance to have it. The Admiral wanted them gone from this space station as soon as the Drifters were apprehended. He could probably do it on the ship with some of the crew that played instruments at some later point in time he reasoned.

Sarantos was worried how the crew would react to him once he was put back in charge. He would have to earn their trust again. Even if people hear they're wrong about a person, the seed's already planted and when it has time to grow, it's hard to overcome that growth. Guilty until proven innocent! The truth is he would never be ready and he would always have scars that won't be seen.

His quarters were tidy. He was all caught up on his paperwork. According to Addie, the Admiral was happy about that at least. Cleary had made regular visits to his quarters to check on his health and on one occasion had him escorted to sick bay to run another full physical and mental evaluation.

He didn't know how he passed with flying colors. He felt like he was ready to lose it. He tried to be patient and let time do its thing.

His eggs were cold. The door of his quarters flew open and in walked Addie.

Her eyes were swollen and red. He didn't care if she was his Lieutenant. He needed to comfort her and went to her immediately. He took her hands in his.

“Addie, are you okay?”

“No, Sarantos. I'm not okay.”

His mind raced.

“What's happened.”

“We have Kitara and the three leaders of the Drifters. We found their headquarters and we disbanded the operation, at least on this planet. We got more intel about other locations and groups of Federation officers that are traitors and are taking them out as we speak.”

“Then why the tears, Addie? What's wrong?”

He knew she'd been crying. Waiting was the hardest part.

She looked away from him and said, “Kitara claimed she's pregnant with your baby.”

Her body shook as she spoke the words. He dropped her hands from his and stepped backwards.

“What? That's not possible.” He was at a loss for words. His mind raced. The only thing he knew for sure is that his life got way too narrow all of a sudden.



But only silence filled the room. It was dead air. It seemed like there was nothing breathing here in this room anymore.

Perfect illusion. Perfect twosome.