

Chapter 11

“You Should Be With Me (Not Him)”



His heart was aching. Addie was injured...how could that possibly happen? His chest felt heavy. He couldn't breathe. Panic rose up inside of him aggressively exploding into hot fits of rage. His hands were trembling tragically as he pushed madly to the gate in what could only be described as slow motion.

What was taking them so long? He was helpless. He couldn't run to her because he wasn't even sure what direction they'd be coming from. Besides, it wasn't proper behavior for a captain.

Time stood still so he pretended for a second that they were back on The Chicago and that she was talking to one of her guards. This was his fantasy, yet the only man that came to mind right now was the most handsome guard in the galaxy who also happened to be a devoted member of her team. He remembered him well. How could he not? Tanned good looks with flashing eyes of steel that could penetrate the soul, if he chose to do it. Sarantos didn't like the way the guard was staring into her eyes. It was clear there was something more he wanted from Addie. What was wrong with him? He'd conjure up this as his fantasy right now? Really??

He closed his eyes and tried to imagine a different scenario, but that image wouldn't go away. The guard's name was Dillion and now he was pulling her close and kissing her on the mouth daringly.

Stop it. Think of something else, anything else. But no matter how hard he tried to kill the image, it would not go away. Addie, you should be with me not him. You should be with me, not him. You should be with me not him! This mantra played over and over in his head as his thoughts echoed that response. She was already his. So why was his mind creating this type of fantasy scenario now by placing her in the arms of someone else?

When they were in fact on the ship, he used to anxiously worry about Dillion taking Addie away from him, because that guard was a killer of a lady's man. His demeanor came wrapped up with a giant bow laced with a zesty sex appeal. Every time the two of them talked, he wanted to wail and throw up a force field around Addie. It wasn't just his sex appeal that got under Sarantos skin, but the fact that Dillion really had more to offer Addie than he did. They would have more freedom to love each other out in the open, whereas he never could openly display his undying love for her. He was her Captain. Being a captain was something he knew he wasn't very good at around her. If he was a stronger Captain, he would've had more control over how he felt and acted around her. He didn't want to settle for anything less than what he wanted but he never thought about what the cost was for someone else. What did Addie see in him anyway? He was simply unlovable.

He ached for her to hold him again. It was during these times when he felt safest. Now her life might be over, all because he wanted her here, with him. He could've had her stay on the ship and sent someone else down here instead. Maybe, that's why he imagined Addie with Dillion now. Maybe because if she had chosen to be with her guard instead of Sarantos, maybe she wouldn't now be injured or dying. He would've loved her the right way and not selfishly put his own interests ahead of hers. It was possible she might've stayed behind with Dillion on the ship and Sarantos might've moved on and chosen someone else.

He was making himself crazy with what if's! The world was a harsh place and love was just a cinematic sample of that cruelty.

He couldn't live without her. Life would be unbearable. Had he never met her, he would've never known what he was missing but now...his head was pounding and terror threatened to choke his brains straight out, because he knew exactly what he would be missing. It was unacceptable. He couldn't go on!

Suddenly, he heard some movement in the woods. It must've been a small animal. He took a deep breath and tried to clear his thoughts. There was no sense punishing himself over something that couldn't be changed. Addie was her own person and she most likely would've insisted on joining the ground crew anyway. That was her style. That's part of what made him love her so much.

“Addie, I love you so much, I refuse to lose you.” The sound of his voice inside his skull was comforting and the soothing words spoken out loud might somehow travel to her and touch her with his healing warmth.

The thought of caring for her scared him just as much as the thought of losing her, after all, he was her captain.

What would life be like for them from this day forward? Should he resign? He'd never want to put her in harm's way again but she was always willing to take risks with her life for the good of the federation to help others everywhere. Again, this was another reason he loved her so much. She would never give up her rank and position and he wouldn't want her to. She was too valuable. Her crew respected her ability to handle any crisis and to put others first. She didn't expect any member of her team to take any risk that she herself wouldn't take. She was far more of an asset than he was.

He felt sick and wanted to hold her softly, to make love to her slowly, to encircle her with the intimacy of their love. This was the only way he could feel so close to her and it comforted him. It made him feel like she'd never leave him. If they were holding each other with flushed cheeks making sweet love, all would be right again. She was there in a way. He could feel her there, next to him, stirring and breathing in sync with him; their heartbeats as one. A person couldn't leave when they shared the breath of another. That's what he wanted to believe.

Where were they?

“Cleary?” He was on his com.

“Yes, Captain?”



“We have two injured, coming in shortly.”

“Who?”

“Major Flint and Lieutenant Stuart.”

“How bad are they? Do you have any details?”

“None. No details, Doctor.”

“Who called it in?”

“Sargent Cam. I’d sent them out to assist the group and apparently, they needed more assistance than I realized. I assume they were treating them medically and it’s taking all of them to bring in the two of them. I haven’t heard anything else.”

“Captain, are you okay?”

“I’m as good as I can be under the circumstances. The Sargent did say that he didn’t know if they were okay.”

“That’s not good, Captain.”

“No, it’s not good at all.”

“I’m sure once they get them over to sick bay, they’ll recover nicely. That place has everything and is state of the art.”

“Well, right now I don’t know and I hate playing the waiting game. That type of game is not one I’m very good at, as you well know.”

“Yes, Captain, I know. If they’re hurt that bad, surely they would’ve teleported them directly back to the ship, unless they didn’t that communications were recently opened?”

“I can’t think right now to be honest. I can’t even remember who was in that group. Some great Captain I’m being.”

“Sarantos, don’t be so hard on yourself. None of us were well prepared for this trip. Oh, I know we prepare for anything and everything at the academy, but real life hits us very differently. Simulations, textbooks and classrooms just aren’t the same.”

“Don’t I know it.”

“Well, hang in there Captain and get them here as soon as you can.”

“I will.”

“Oh, and Sarantos, I’ll do everything in my power to heal them. Do they have trackers on? I could teleport out to them if they do.”

“Yes, Addie does actually. Why didn’t they contact you then, instead of me?”

“I don’t know. I’ll see what I can figure out.”

“Thanks Cleary, you’re the best...wait.”



Something was running through the woods and broke into the clearing at a fast jog.

Private Bonnie Day had dirt and blood all over her uniform and ran directly to him with eyes that looked like a scared rabbit being chased by ten wild dogs.

“Cap...tain.” She struggled for breath.

His instinct was to grab her and shake her until she told him where Addie might be. Instead, he took her shoulders and gently

said, “Breathe, Private. You’re ok now. You’re safe. Relax and tell me what happened.”

Her chest heaved up and down as she eventually calmed herself between breaths.

“Captain, the enemy is using strange lizard women to entrap our men. There must be hundreds of them.”

He knew the danger that she spoke of, it’d happened to him a few hours earlier. “Private, you must be exaggerating the amount. Their danger poses a threat, and may appear to be more than there actually are.”

“No, sir. We counted at least 75. They’re taking over the small army that was sent to rescue us and clean up the woods. Sargent Cam is shooting them, while trying to move out of the woods with Lieutenant Stuart and Major Flint. What are they sir?”

He didn’t care what they were and didn’t have time to explain.

“Where are Flint and Stuart? How far away are they? Can we get to them?”

“I don’t think so. It doesn’t look good, captain. The woods are overrun with enemy soldiers and the female men suckers.”

He opened his cam. “Leary?”

“Captain, what happened? I’ve got a lock on Addie.”

“Get to her now, but be warned. The enemy surrounds them and I’m going in with Private Day, retracing her steps. They need help. Do you have any female security in sick bay?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact. I do. I have two women with me and two men.”

“Bring only the women and leave the other two men on guard.”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Only the women, Leary. Do you hear me? Bring only the women.”

“Yes, Captain. Only the women. We’re leaving now.”

He turned back to Day. “They were smart sending you to get to the base. Do you think you can back track to where you left the group?”

“I think so, sir. I was running wildly, but I can try.”

He patted her on the back. “Good, because I’m coming with you.”

“Sir.”

He didn’t care anymore, he had to take the risk. Day started running towards the part of the woods where she exited from and he followed closely behind.

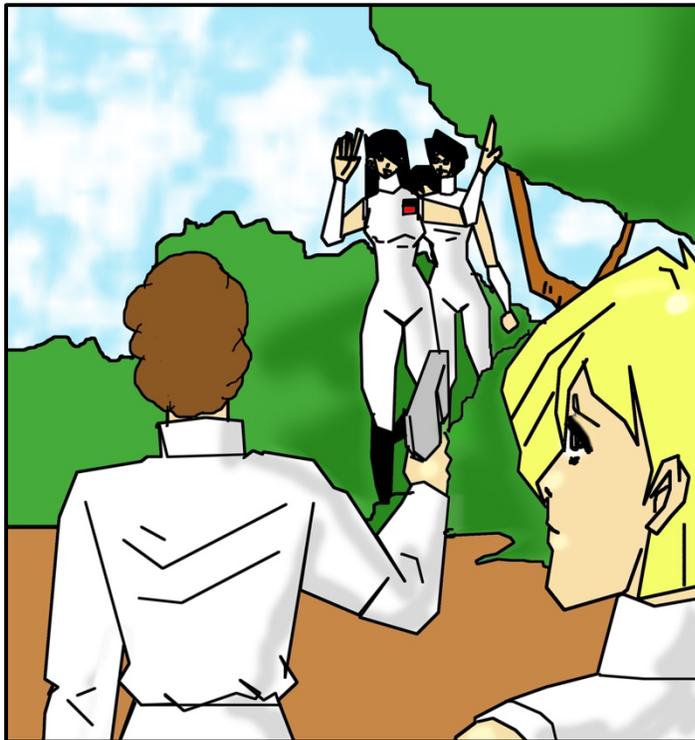
Before they could get to the opening, the woods crackled under running footsteps, not far from their intended entrance.

He stood his ground and held up the laser gun, as did Private Day.

Three women soldiers from the troops that were sent in earlier jumped out of the woods and stopped short when they saw the guns aimed at their exposed bodies.

“Captain, Sarantos. We’re with the OKurian army. We were overrun because we’d split into smaller groups, but what we didn’t expect was the female warriors. There must be hundreds of them.”

Great, the count went from 100 to hundreds in a matter of 5 minutes. This was madness.



“Okay. Get set up behind that fence and keep the lizard females from penetrating behind our secured lines. Close the gate and defend the fortress. Shoot to kill, because those women are highly dangerous. At this point, take no prisoners.”

“Yes, sir.” They all replied at the same time.

He looked over the three women and noticed the highest rank of the three.

“You’re in charge, Lieutenant.”

“Yes, Captain.”

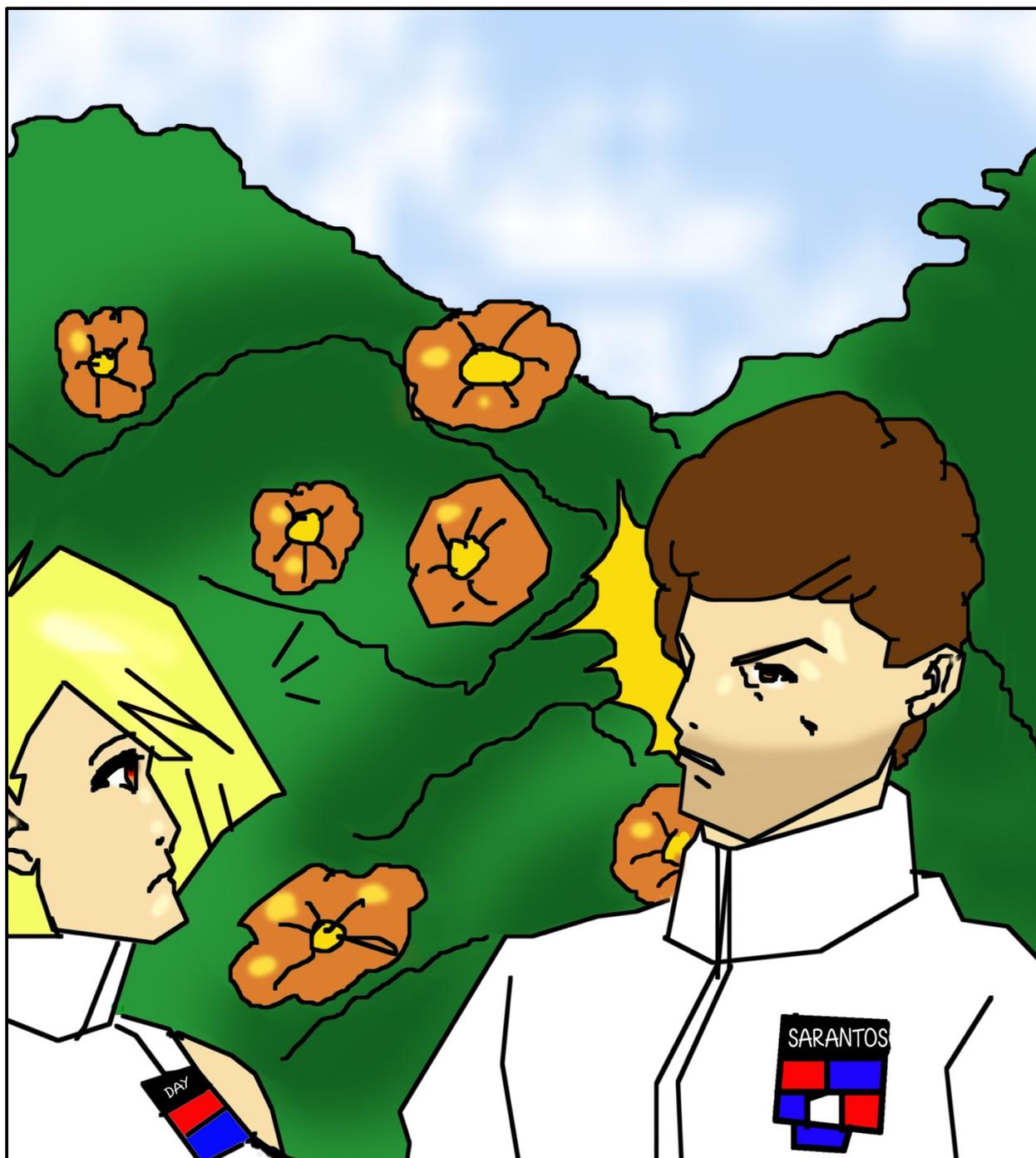
The three of them didn’t wait to talk but took off across the field. They went inside the gate and locked it. One went to the tower and one went into the building. He thought she might be getting water and food for the three of them. He was glad they showed up because his emotions had gotten the better of him. He’d left the gate unguarded.

Day had already taken off as he watched the three Okurians get organized. By the time he turned around, she stood waiting at the entrance to the woods.

The woods were thick and dark and the dampness seemed to crawl into his flesh giving him the chills. He didn’t remember them being this way when he was a kid, but today he wasn’t a kid any longer and dark death lay upon the sacred ground causing the woods to cry. He believed that the moisture was a direct result of their tears.

Day was moving slowly now, actively listening for the enemy and searching for her own tracks so they would find Sargent Cam and his group. He turned off his cam, because the noise would surely draw the enemy to them.

They came upon a group of bushes that had a sweet fragrance. He remembered them from his time as a kid, when he picked a handful for his mom and took them home to her laughing as he ran across the fields knowing how much she loved their strong smell.



He reached out and grabbed Day's arm. She turned and looked back at him. She looked like a scared, shaken kid. He shook the horrible feeling off that had seeped into his gut. He pointed at the flowers and then picked some. He began wiping them all over his clothes and bare skin. She nodded in approval. He was glad she understood what he was attempting to do.

The thought that those lizard women could smell men miles away made him nervous and if he could cover his smell, it might prevent them from finding him. This meant that if they ran into them unexpectedly they'd have a better chance of killing them. If they couldn't smell his scent and they approached them cautiously, maybe they could even take them by surprise.

He was getting real tired of surprises.

Once he finished, they continued moving forward.

Screams and curses filled the air around them. Gunshots sounded like a weird distraction to the gunships firing overhead.

Then out of the woods right in front of them suddenly stood Brel.

Brel nodded at him causing Day to jump back and hold up her weapon.

Sarantos was glad to see him. He turned and held up a finger to silence them both.

Good grief, Day looked at him. He nodded for them to continue forward. He knew he had to find Addie.

After an hour of walking, he was starting to get worried that Day had made a mistake with her directions but suddenly they heard a crashing commotion in front of them.

Day stopped moving. He moved in behind her and listened.

“Damn, it. Get us out of here!”

It sounded like Major Flint. If it was him, his negotiating skills were no longer needed in this situation.

He moved in front of Day and then quietly proceeded forward. There was bulky brush all around them that protruded past his sightline and onto the top of the tree lines. That's what made this so dangerous! At times, you couldn't see a foot in front of you.

He calmly peered around the brush.

Major Flint was on the ground laying on what appeared to be a rather barbaric looking stretcher. His leg was tied off at his thigh with a piece of his own shirt. Blood had soaked through it. His boot was removed from one foot and blood-saturated bandages were wrapped around it. He was right below Sarantos and looked irritated. The Major held onto his gun and raised it blowing away a lizard that came within the Major's view.

A woman approached him and leaned down over the Major blocking Sarantos view. They were fighting for their lives. Cleary was fighting and trying to check over another body that laid at her feet.

He knew who it was and leapt into the combat giving Cleary the advantage she needed to get Addie out of there. She took it.

He disintegrated two of them and turned to see Addie. Cleary was leaning over her and began transporting them out, but not before he saw a bloody and agonized Addie. He didn't know if she was still alive.



He went mad and fired like a crazy man killing every enemy in site not stopping until the area was littered with dead bodies. He disintegrated them all.

Sargent Cam put his hand on his arm. Sarantos looked up into the eyes of a battered and exhausted Todd Cam.

Major Flint was gone and so were the three women from sick bay that were sent to save Addie and Flint.

“Captain, Sally Mann was also injured when they parachuted out of their shot down plane, but not as bad as Flint. The medical team took her, as well.”

“Matt, are you okay?” He liked the guy and worried that he might not be able to cut it out here in the war zone.

“Of course, Captain. Now, how about we get the hell out of here?”

He wasn't sure who was with them but they all followed Day. He was right behind her as they all retraced her footsteps to safety.

His eyes could only see red blood. Addie covered in real red blood. How could this have happened? She was so good at her job. No, it wasn't Addie! It couldn't have been her. The universe wouldn't be that cruel. If it was really her, it was probably a small flesh wound or she had the enemies blood all over her. Yes, that would make more sense. She was a fierce warrior. There was no way she was covered with that much of her own blood!

He was walking like a zombie staring at the back of Day's head. He focused on the bobbing up and down of the Private's helmet as she moved steadily through the thick wooded terrain.

Then, blood started trickling out of her helmet. He stared in disbelief as if it wasn't really happening. The flow increased until it saturated the Private's jacket. Yet, she kept moving. There was no hesitation in her pace.

Blinking, his eyes caused his head to hurt and when he looked again, it was Addie. No, it can't be Addie, she went with the Doc, but it was the face he loved. It was Addie!

Her face was beautiful but her eyes were accusatory. She walked backwards, almost trancelike and he wanted to scream. "I'm sorry, for loving you too much."

Her bloodshot eyes wavered, questioning the accusation and her love for him. Slowly, drops of blood oozed out of her eye sockets, causing her eyes to roll up into her head. Scars appeared on her cheeks and her lip split open, as a red liquid spewed forth from her mouth. She grinned at him with bloody teeth. Her shiny purple hair became matted in grime and blood. Her hands flew up to her chest as a gaping hole exploded throwing her internal matter all over him. No!

He reached his hands out to block the hole but she started to wither away in front of him vanishing into nothing.



"No!"

"Captain, are you alright?" It was Matt.

He shook his head and saw Matt had a grip on his arm. His hands had reached out and were gripping the backpack of Private Day. She stood in front of him, frozen in place. His grip was so tight. He knew she'd been unable to move because of his gesture.

“Yes, sorry. I thought I saw something.”

Matt just stared at him, as he removed his hands from Day’s backpack. He couldn’t tell them he’d been hallucinating, for god’s sake he was their Captain or at least he thought he was a good leader until this moment. He wanted to yell at the accusing eyes of Day and Matt and say, ‘sorry, I’m only a human.’

There were still woods in front of them and that irritated him.

“Private Day, continue on. There’s nothing there. I needed to stop you, just in case. It looks clear though.” He turned slightly and spotted Sargent Cam. “Cam, check the woods to both sides of you and make sure we’re alone.”

“Yes, Captain.”

Cam didn’t hesitate and walked along the woodlands to either side of the group searching for infiltrators. He continued to keep a watchful eye as they moved slower now through the trees.

Matt, walked beside him and that irritated him as well. At least Matt was discreet and would keep a close watch to see if his captain flipped out again.

This wasn’t working out, him and Addie. The relationship was perfect but their roles with the federation caused a stressful relationship. This war made him angry. It ruined lives in so many ways, death was just a part of the daily destruction. He had no idea until today how much it could affect personal relationships. Maybe it was another certain casualty in the deadly game of war.

He managed to keep his head on and his emotions intact when they finally cleared the woods. It must've been mid-afternoon by the looks of the sky or quite possibly late afternoon. Time didn't seem to matter when life hung by a thread.

The three women soldiers were still holding down the fort when they approached the gate.

They marched through the open gate and as he turned to his left, there stood Brel.

No matter how many times Brel did that, Sarantos always felt his body flinch in surprise. He didn't know if he'd ever adjust to Brel suddenly appearing right next to him out of thin air. He hadn't seen him since he briefly showed himself in the woods. He didn't need to ask him where he'd been because Brel just moved about protecting the group and Sarantos didn't think he wanted to know exactly what he did to protect the group anyway.



“Brel.”

“Captain.”

“Can you get a message to the groups left out there to find the flower Climine. They'll know what I mean. They are Okurians, after all. Tell the men to cover themselves in the essence, as it will prevent the female sirens from smelling them out. It might save their lives.”

“Yes, sir. I wondered why you smelled so pretty.”

Then he was gone.

A sense of humor, too. Sarantos didn't think he'd ever find a flaw in the Blad warrior.

Matt touched his arm after Brel disappeared.

“Just one thing, Matt, did you see him go?”

“Who go, sir?”

“Brel, he was right next to me...oh, forget it.”

No matter what he said, if Matt hadn't noticed him, no one else would have either. He only wanted to know if Matt had seen him leave but obviously, he hadn't seen him appear or leave.

“Captain, are you okay?”

“Yes, Matt, I'm fine. Is everyone except Brel accounted for?”

“Yes sir, and the other army. The Okurians are scattered about the woods.”

“Good. If you see Brel before I do, can you please tell him to kill as many of those siren warriors as possible. They'll be the death of our men otherwise.”

“Yes, sir. I will. Do you think you should check in at sick bay?”

“Yes, Matt. I’m on my way. Get that gate closed and locked.”

“Yes, Captain. Right away.”

He quickly found Bonnie milling about, and told her to go grab something to eat, get a little rest and then come back to help guard the tower. She had to be utterly exhausted.

He informed the rest of his group to also get food, rest and stay prepared for more battle.

Before he left he shouted, “I want no men watching the tower. Only the people I assign. Cam, after you’re rested, get those ships checked and make sure they’re ready to go back to war.”

“Yes, Captain.”

He headed to sick bay and was proud of himself - he’d kept control long enough to give understandable orders. Maybe, he could in fact work this out with Addie. She had no problem after all. It was all him, he had the problem.

As he got closer to sick bay, his head grew racy and reeling. He felt like he’d been up for 48 hours and worked out for 24 of them. He was on fumes but one last squirt of adrenaline kicked in.

His stomach churned. He might throw up. The nausea was self-inflicted because he was so scared to see Addie, scared of what happened to her, and scared that he couldn’t live without her if she was dead.



Cleary had posted a guard outside the door to keep everyone out but when the guard saw it was the Captain, he moved to the side allowing him to enter.

He went inside the room cautiously. Major Flint was the first person he saw. He was unconscious and breathing peacefully on a white bed. Of course, Cleary drugged him. She enjoyed doing stuff like that.

It was quiet and then Cleary pulled a curtain back and noticed him standing there. He couldn't tell from her

expression if Addie was okay or not. She was a card shark. You could never tell when she was holding the ace.

“Captain.”

“Doc, how's Addie?”

Before she could answer him, Private Sally Mann came into the room from a closed door.

“Captain, I'm ready to return to duty.”

“I’m glad Private but get some food, and possibly more rest. Then join the women at the gate tower. We need all available women out there, and only women. As soon as the men come from the woods, send them down to sick bay to get checked out, then for some food and rest.”

“Yes, Captain.”

She opened the door to the hallway and was gone.

“Captain.”

“It was Addie.”

Cleary pulled back the curtain and he walked over to her bed. She was beautiful as ever, but appeared anemic and weak.

“Don’t stay long, Captain,” Cleary said, as she pulled back the curtain.

He quickly went to her bedside and took her hand. “Addie, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not your fault, Captain.”

“Quit with the Captain for now, okay. I’m madly in love with you. I was so worried about you. Nothing else matters!”

She smiled that killer smile. “Okay, Sarantos. Doc said I’m going to be fine. She said I almost lost the baby but…”

“Wait, what?? You’re pregnant?”

“No, just kidding. I wanted to see if you were paying attention to what I was saying and not just checking out my body.” She grinned politely. “I’m going to be fine,” she reassured him again.

He was dazed. “Of course, you are. I was insane, I wasn’t sure how much of this relationship I wanted to risk, but…”



She cut him off. “But, isn’t life worth a kiss?”

“Yes, you took the words right out of my mouth.” He kissed her long and hard.