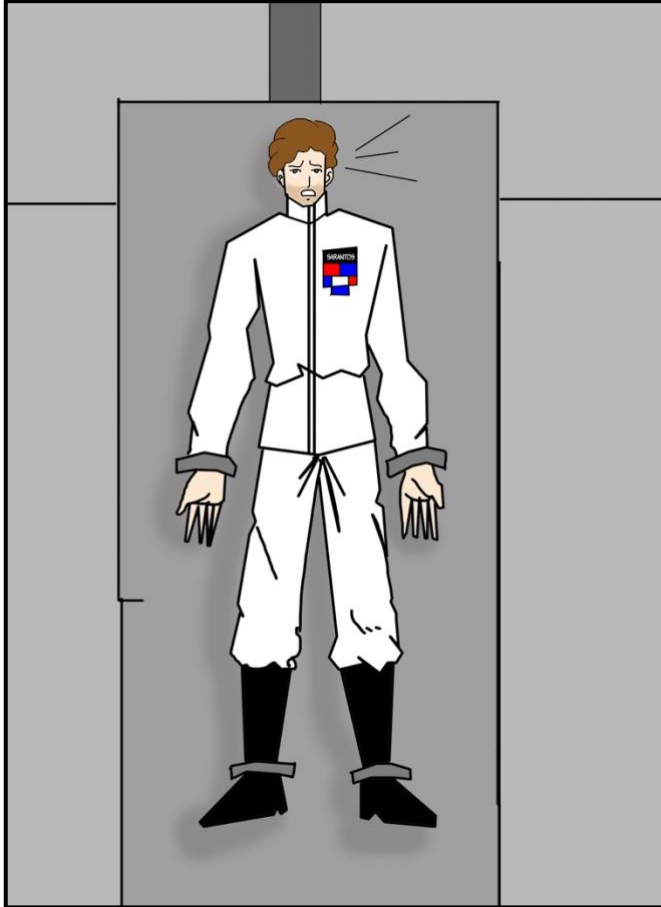


Chapter 6

“(We’ve All Got) Blind Spots”



A strong noise caused Captain Sarantos to flinch. As his eyes flew open, he remembered where he was - in sick bay with a complex monitor strapped to his brain, and heavy restraints shackled on his extremities. He lay there exposed. He was vulnerable which made him anxious. The medics didn't want him sitting up in bed quickly as it might cause the monitor to be ripped away from the screen. That was the reason for the restraints. Sarantos wondered if they also weren't sure of his sanity. Did they think he was unstable and might go mad, putting everyone on the ship at risk. He didn't think his mind was cracked, not really, but he understood the logical reasoning behind their decision. Some days you're the

pigeon, some days you're the statue!

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary as he glanced around the room. He tried to figure out what had awakened him. He grew more worried that he hadn't seen Cleary the entire time he'd been here. She still was not present, maybe she'd taken leave?

Sergeant Shawna Dawn had requested he stay under observation and didn't want him returning to duty. Because of that, they had trapped him in hell for two days. No one wanted to hear the truth of his situation. He had to smile politely and agree telling them how much he understood their decision. In reality, that wasn't the story

he wanted to tell. He had a ship to run and as Captain; the crew needed to see him, especially during this grim situation.

He could move his head to the right and left observing the events transpiring around him. Block was back on duty. He stood by the door attentively. When he saw the Captain look his way, he nodded respectfully. Private Adam Glass was next to Chief Storm talking so softly Sarantos couldn't hear a word. Glass was also positioned in such a manner to block his view of Storm. Was this intentional?

His mouth was a bare desert. Dry cotton mouth prevented him from asking about Storm. His fingers were fretting around in a come-over-here motion to Block. Sarantos was glad he noticed his gesture. Block moved quickly to his Captain's side. Block even removed the restraints when he saw his Captain was having trouble speaking. Overjoyed with his thoughtfulness and observant nature, Sarantos moved his hand to his mouth motioning as though he was drinking a glass of water.

Block understood at once. He nodded and went to get him a glass of cool water from the replicator. While Sarantos waited, he saw Storm lying in what appeared to be a carefree, peaceful state. Glass noticed and raced towards him.

“Captain, welcome back to the land of the living. I'm sorry you were held up here for a few days, but it was necessary.” She turned to Block as he helped his Captain sit up and drink water. Once his thirst was quenched, she checked his vital signs. “All good, Captain, I bet you were thirsty. Thanks Block, for helping him.”

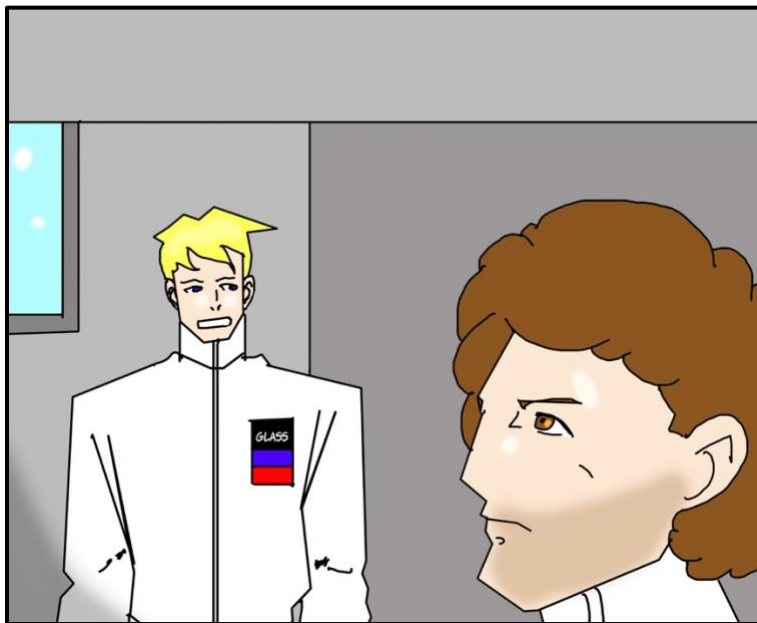
“My pleasure. How are you doing, Captain?”

He moved the water around in the dry wasteland of his mouth then tried to speak. The words came out raspy and faint. “I need to get out of here. How's Storm? Have you found anything else out?” The biggest hurdle was himself.

Glass smiled, “Captain, Storm is doing okay. We noticed that when she hears the voice, it’s almost like a seizure on her EEG, which is confusing, since we assume it’s not a contagious disease. We’ve been trying to find a pattern in your brain that might also match. Whatever caused you to hear these things is unclear. We also checked your hearing acuity thinking you might have a more sensitive hearing capacity than others, but no luck so far. Nothing looks different on the two of you than anyone else we’ve tested.”

He had a hearty headache. This crazy situation inflamed his heavy furrowed brows. There seemed to be no resolution. This tested his spirit. He drank more water until he finished the glass then asked for a refill.

Why him, and why Storm? Everybody's got an opinion. Sarantos confirmed, “So as far as you know, no one else is hearing any voices?”



Glass answered, “No.”

“Well, did you send out over IC asking that specific question? Maybe some haven’t reported it yet, isn’t that possible?”

“Yes, Captain, that’s possible. No, we haven’t done that. I’ll have John do it right away and have them report to sick bay if

they hear someone calling their name when no one’s actually there.”

“I would just ask if they’re hearing any voices at all, maybe it’s not someone specifically calls their name, but just a voice of some sort. It could be different for others,” said the Captain. His mind was spinning trying to make sense of this.

“Sure.”

Glass contacted John and within minutes, they made the announcement. That’s why he needed to be on Deck. John was awesome, but he just took care of the daily tasks of managing the ship. Being a Captain meant more, always more that needed to be done. He watched Glass go to her office summoning Block back. He immediately walked to the door like a gargoyle statue guarding the premises.

“Yes, Captain?”

“Okay, Block, this may sound shallow, but did Lieutenant Stuart visit me?”

He wanted to know, if she still had him in her heart. He’d been there many times before, where love stopped breathing and the tiptoeing around land mines began. It tired him to avoid them and there were days when it seemed the lobby of loss was imminent. Addie was perfection, but was she worth the pain? Mirrors couldn’t hide the pain. He felt he’d been holding his breath for the past two years waiting for their mirror of light to break into a thousand pieces.

“Captain? Did you hear me?”

“Oh, sorry, Block—”

“I said she’s visited you every night after she was off duty, sometimes even early morning. For the record, Captain, she informed me she’d break all my fingers if I ever left someone else in charge of you except me or her, not that she doesn’t trust anyone else... or maybe she doesn’t.”

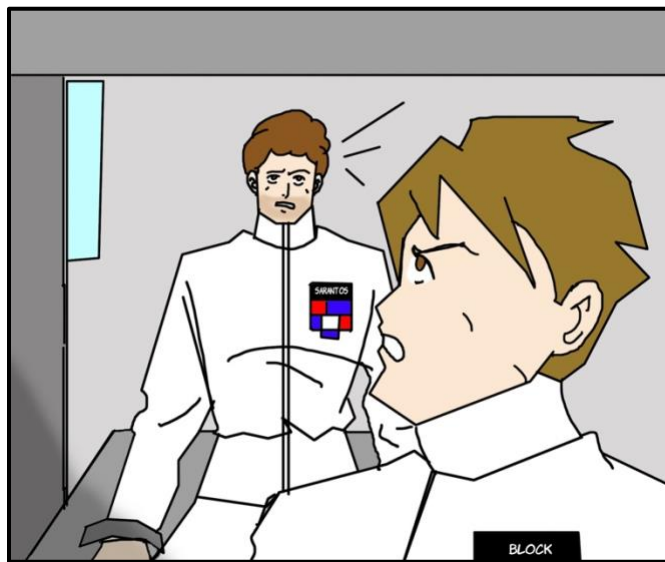
He suddenly felt giddy inside, elated and full of joy and hope. The arc of the universe is long but bends toward love. Why would he feel melancholy sometimes? Sarantos

didn't trust her but shouldn't he? Why would he fall in these moments of weakness towards a bottomless pit, drowning in his own pitiful blue tears crying all the way down? Good words for a song, he thought, snapping out of it. He'd have to write that down later. Sometimes sadness birthed the best lyrics. Sometimes sorrow is the only way to tap into the hidden and hurt parts of a soul. Sometimes the brightest stars can be plucked out of that dark place.

"That's my girl, Block. That's my girl, and I know you know she could break your fingers even if you fought back." Addie was extraordinary. She had no limits.

Block's chuckle was simple, but agreeing Block confessed, "Yes, Captain, I don't doubt she could."

He finished his drink and seemed more relaxed. All forward motion is good. "Block, you think we could leave these restraints off for a while. Good grief, I can't escape, even if I wanted to. And, did you check on Cleary?"



Block's expression darkened at the mention of Cleary's name.

"Captain, I regret to inform you that your friend is having some serious issues. She's refusing to come to work and spends her days, and possibly nights too in the Creative Room. Your

concern for her is warranted. I explained the situation to Glass, and I think she's going over there tonight, possibly with medical crew to bring her here so they can help with her addiction."

“Oh, no! I worried about her a week ago. This black hole is getting to all of us. She was always so stable and if she’s struggling, I’m frightened about the others, how it’s affecting them. Please assign Lieutenant Stuart to go around the ship checking everyone’s quarters personally. She should bring a small security team and two medical personnel too, just in case.”

“I’ll contact her immediately, Captain, and if you don’t mind me saying, that’s an excellent idea.”

Sarantos allowed his mind to wander aimlessly, even though he knew it meant danger. He’d only heard his name a few times, but Storm had more pressing issues. What was this place? Why were they here in this black hole? He was angry with the Admiral, and now openly questioned this mission.

“Captain?”

He turned. Storm studied him with sad puppy eyes wrapped in confusion.

“Storm, what’s wrong? I’m here.”

“I feel better Captain, not hearing voices as often, unless I’m going insane and can’t tell how often I hear them anymore.”

Sarantos said, “I doubt that, Storm, you’re a trooper and a stellar officer. These strange things happen in a place like this. Cleary’s gone to a darker place and they have to retrieve her and bring her back. I can’t trust her on the bridge and that’s scary. You’re not alone. We will all get through this together!”

“Yes, sir. I have always admired the Doc. She’s so strong, so I don’t feel so bad if it’s got her going in circles too because it has enveloped dark fingers around my

mind and squeezed with consistently more pressure,” conceded Storm as she tried to smile.

He could tell her mouth was tight from the dryness. Block came back into the room and walked towards his bed with a look of satisfaction.

“Block, what’s with the look? You look like you swallowed a canary,” said the Captain.

“No sir, it just feels good to know the Lieutenant is on it. She said to tell you, that’s why you’re the Captain and we’re flunkies. Addie’s setting up the crew right away. She told me to tell you it was a great idea.”

He smirked. It's not the size of the body that matters, it's the size of the heart that guides it. “Glad to hear the Lieutenant thinks so. Block, can you get me more water, and grab a glass for Storm.”

Storm nodded her thanks, as the Captain winked. “Us soldiers have to stick together,” she said.

“We do, indeed we do,” said the Captain.

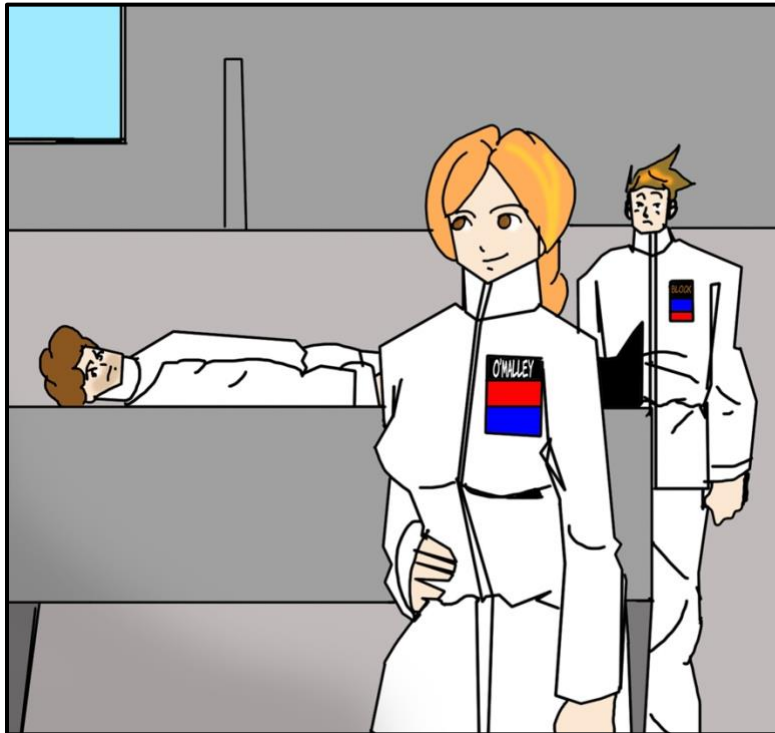
“Will do,” said Block as he once again proceeded to the replicator.

The sound of the water whacking the glass seemed to make him thirstier than he thought he was, a matter poking his mind... the story of his life.

Eventually after they drank water to their hearts’ content, the monotony engulfed them again. Watching the clock wore on his sanity. As time ticked away, Block stood

silently by the door, like a shadow that didn't move in response to light, but only when activated by something menacing, or the sound of his Captain's voice.

Several more hours passed until Cindy O'Malley entered causing Block to stir. Sarantos thought he'd been sleeping standing upright until that point. However, Block's reaction was not one of being startled but of casual readiness.



Cindy's warm smile was welcoming.

"Captain, how are you this evening? The mod squad cleared me for active duty. The Lieutenant and crew are on their way to find the Doc. I hope she's okay. She usually does well with outer space, weird situations and strange men," Cindy blurted out as she walked towards him laughing hysterically all the while.

Famous people are never as interesting as your friends. He couldn't help but grin. Sarantos said, "I'm better now because your sense of humor and sunshine have healed me. What keeps you so alive?"

"My daughter, Captain. Stowaway she may have been, but a light in my heart she is for sure."

The Captain nodded, “Ah, yes, children can have that effect. I’m glad she’s here and I think you should pass her around to the rest of the crew to lighten up the mood. Maybe we should check with Matt and get her to help in the Diamond Room during breakfast, lunch and dinner hours? Even a couple days a week would be helpful.”

“Well, I don’t mind sharing the joy and blissful energy of my child, Captain. I’ll speak to Matt during my break.” She looked over the readout on the equipment and winked at him before speaking again. “Captain, it would appear you haven’t had a visitor today, lucky you.”

“Thanks, and can I go back to duty?”

She was hopping towards Storm, but slightly turned throwing her head over her shoulder and grinned hard showing all her glistening white teeth. “You’re kidding me, right?”

That was all she said before chatting with Storm. He glanced over at Block.

“Block get rid of that stupid look,” said the Captain.

“Yes Sir, right away Sir.”

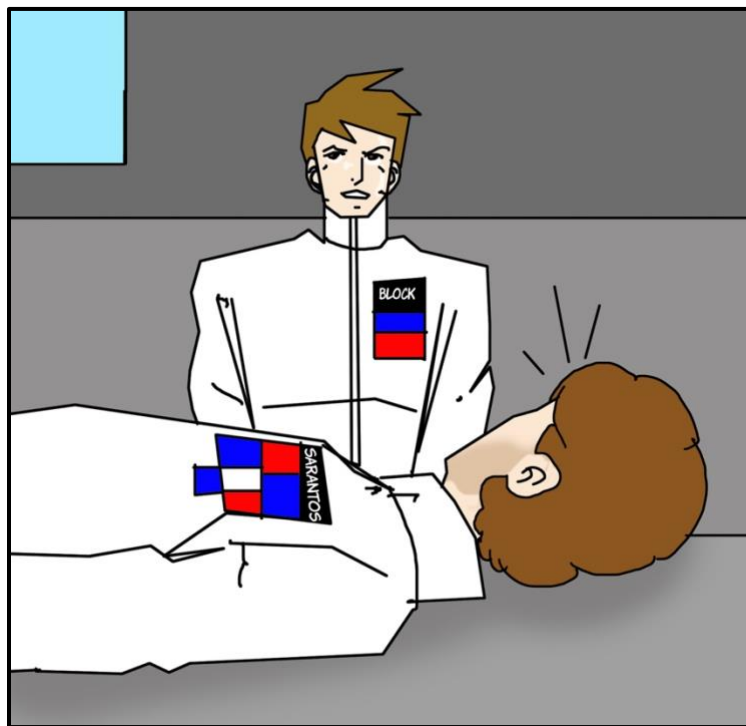
“Okay, Block, but we all have blind spots and Cindy’s is her refusal to see the need for my release from the confines of this prison.”

“Yeah, Captain we all have blind spots, funny saying I always thought.”

“You would say that, Block, because you’re not the one trapped in this bed, nor wearing this creepy contraption.”

“Sorry, Sir. Would you like me to wear one too?”

“I’m humbled by your gesture Block.” Sarantos fell back to his thoughts. Well, we refuse to see our blind spots sometimes. Those spots are the nagging situations that hold us like criminals behind bars and won’t let us leave, choking our sanity out of us until we can’t exhale, making it impossible to speak or sleep. They then drive us over the edge to a dangerous and deep place, unless we open our eyes and shake off the cry of our fragile baby blues; that’s the only way to outlast the mistakes we make. This place was one of those mistakes. Everything in his gut told him to turn around and try to find the way back home. The Admiral was wrong.



“Block, do you hear things hitting our ship still?”

“Not in here, Captain. Location is everything.”

“Block you’re funny, did you know that?”

“Yes, Captain, I’ve been funny on many occasions.”

His expression never changed. Sarantos rationalized that had to be part of his humor.

The door opened and in walked Addie, Brel, Sonny, Private Snow (part of the medical team), Sergeant Shawna Dawn, (medical), Cadet Tom Flann, and the infamous Doc Cleary. He tried not to laugh as the Doc was being carried in between Brel and Sonny. She was unconscious. She’d be mad when she woke, but he was sure it was the only way they could get her there without her kicking and screaming

wildly. He was sure they would've transported her with them to sick bay if they weren't in the dire situation they were in. They needed to preserve their energy source because they didn't know when they would get to more. It was only to be used in medical emergencies, and Cleary was not a real medical emergency.

Behind them were two members of Security. He didn't know them but their uniforms gave them away. They were accompanying a male human from Engineering and a female from Security, possibly victims to the name calling situation.

Addie was gorgeous. She was a good woman to ride the river with. She smiled at him when she noticed he was awake. Walking over to his bedside, she took his hand and said, "I'm so happy to see you finally awake Captain. Thanks for your thought earlier, it's proving quite productive."

He felt human again. "I see that," said the Captain. "Don't thank me too much, my ego can't handle it."

Addie pointed at the man and woman being led to a bed by Snow. "More victims of the eminent voice."

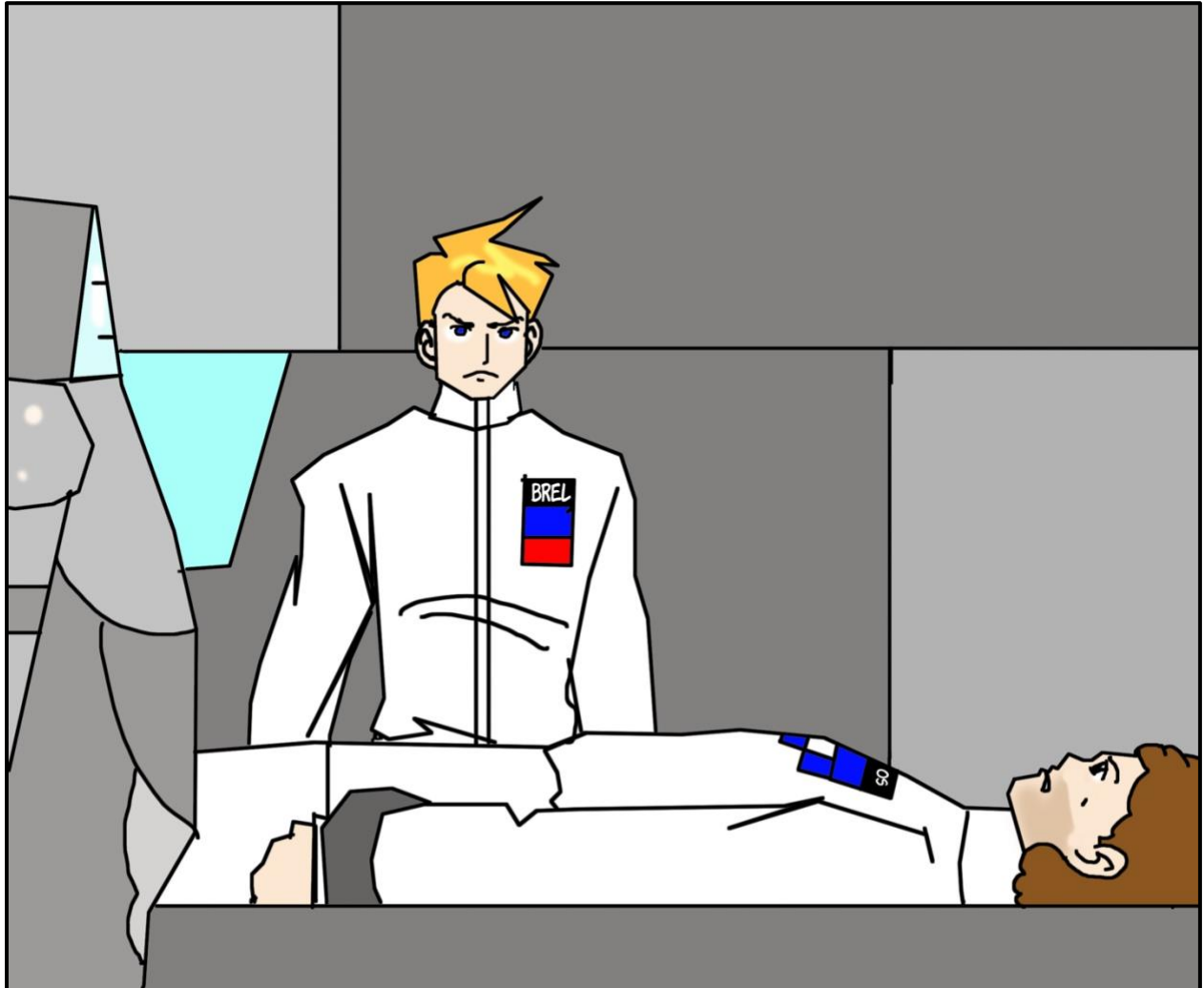
"I thought so. You'll be happy to know I haven't been tormented by the name calling at all today."

"Oh, Captain, that's great news, but you're still not returning to active duty, if you're asking."

"Oh, you as the Head of Security have a blind spot in your point of view," said Sarantos.

She chuckled. “Oh, is that so? A blind spot? Well, I think you could be right, and I like it right where it is. It’s there, and it’s staying there, thank you very much.”

“I thought so. Can’t blame a Captain for trying, can you?”



“Captain, good to see you,” said Brel, as he moved closer to Sarantos.

Sonny moved to the other side of his bed. “Captain, we miss you around the ship,” said Sonny.

“You guys are great, and I miss all of you. Sonny, how much pull do you have? Can you get me out of this place?”

“Well, I overheard the previous conversation you had with our Head of Security, and I have to say, I have that blind spot as well. They built it into my system. ‘Look away and what was there is now gone’, that’s my motto, sorry Captain, didn’t really hear the question.”

Sarantos inhaled deeply and slowly let it out. “What kind of motto is that? I think the Lieutenant has you all wrapped around her finger. Are you guys in love with her too?”

Brel laughed, “No Captain, she has a choke hold around our necks, much more severe. She doesn’t love us so she’s not gentle with us!”

Everyone who heard the conversation couldn’t help but laugh at Brel’s comment, even Addie. It was good to hear laughter on the ship and see happiness spreading among his crew again.

He felt like his old self for a moment until a painful panic kicked in and he wondered if they were all mad. Had he lost track of reality? He felt like a speck of dust drifting through darkness. But he knew it wasn’t just him that was a spice-less speck now. Their ship was a speck of dust lost in the darkness. Where was he going with such thoughts? He needed to stop thinking for once about the pathetic life he was living... wait, his life was never pathetic, what was going on in his head? Was he possessed by something?

He looked up at everyone who was laughing and for a second he couldn’t see them. They faded until they were lost in his blind spot and their faces changed to deaf darkness.

“We’ve all got blind spots,” Sarantos said in a voice so soft everyone around him leaned in a little closer to pick up.

“Sarantos are you okay?” Brel was the first to ask about his sanity, the concern in his voice was mocking.

It was the voice of darkness; he was sure. “No,” he said.

“Captain, what’s going on?” She didn’t wait for his answer. “Doc, over here, quickly. The Captain has gone pale and appears incoherent.”

It was Addie asking about him, that was kind. She bent over him and was so close to his mouth he could taste her lips and her breath fed him... it wouldn’t stop; it was drowning him. He reached his arms up and gripped the back of her neck like a vise pulling her down on him, kissing her hard... passionately. She didn’t pull away. He slipped his tongue in her mouth. Her cheeks reddened, and she pulled away from him, being acutely aware of their surroundings. He wasn’t aware, and it didn’t matter if he was. He wanted her, like always.

“Addie, now I am, okay, yes.”

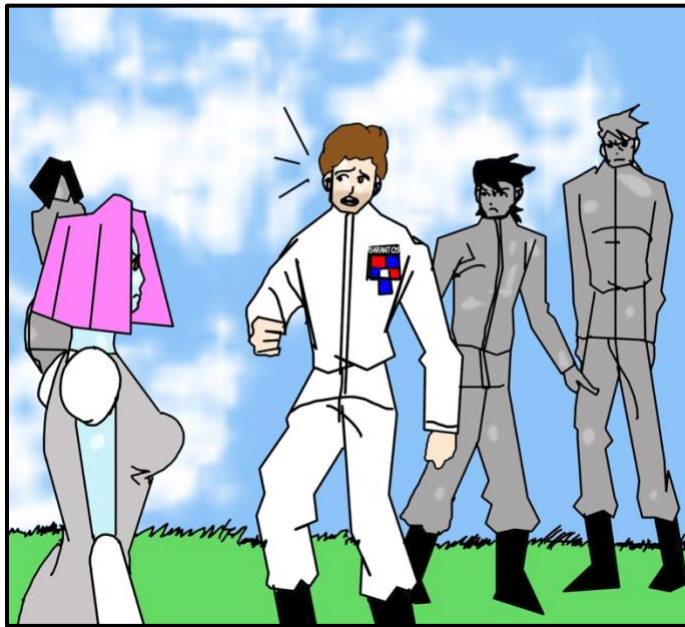
“It looked like we lost him for a moment. Brel, get the Doc over here. This is the Captain. I don’t want to have to drag her over here. I think his mind went somewhere else. It seemed like he was hallucinating.”

Brel left the side of his bed and moved towards the Doc. Sometimes the darkest light comes from the brightest places.

He heard Addie speaking and for a bit understood her anger. Suddenly, the doctors appeared at his bedside with Brel and Sonny. They were all anxious and talking so

fast he couldn't keep up. He heard a horribly hideous laughter, and when it stopped, he fell into darkness. Nothing but darkness.

The Shadow is not so obvious on the surface. It playfully hides away to not reveal itself.



He was in a hospital gown running around in a field of statues. Everywhere he turned, they accused him of wrongdoing. The eyes of people he'd known over his lifetime condemned him. His hands moved to cover his face as he rocked back and forth in discomfort. He was ashamed.

When he looked again, nothing changed, except they were now alive and moving towards him... he

had to run!

He turned and ran into the familiar face of Addie; but there was hatred in her eyes, disdain and envy. Envy? Why would Addie be envious... wait, it wasn't Addie, oh my God? It was Amy Stuart, twin sister to Addie! He screamed.

Turning frantically and guided by roads of rainbows, he sprinted across the grassy field full of wild flowers moving away from Amy as fast as he could, but he could feel her following him. She wanted to hurt him. He felt her breath on his neck. He tried running faster.

“Stop, it already hurts so much,” he said with a spitting venomous voice that didn’t seem to belong to him.

He ran into another figure. She was barefoot with beautifully manicured nails. His eyes longed for her beauty and his hands reached out to touch her naked body. He moved along each curve until he found her comfortable neck and then found himself looking into the sorry eyes of Kitara.

His body suddenly felt cold. He trembled as she licked his mouth. She smelled incredible and her dark bouncy curls tickled his face. He lost control.

Every inch of her demanded his attention, and he caved into her every whim. He ravished in her evilness that somehow turned him on. Sarantos wanted to stay there forever, letting himself be hers and fully giving into his dark side. He pulled her over on top of him and she went with ease. It's weird how things work themselves out when you let them.

Her hair flew back from her face. Her eyes were wicked. He wanted her more. She drove him mad with desire... but, something was in her hand, something he couldn’t see.

Her sinister laughter increased his wanting, until she showed him what she held in her hands. It was a mirror. He saw himself. He saw the pain of what he was doing, who he had become and how he allowed Kitara to drive him into the horror of this dark place.

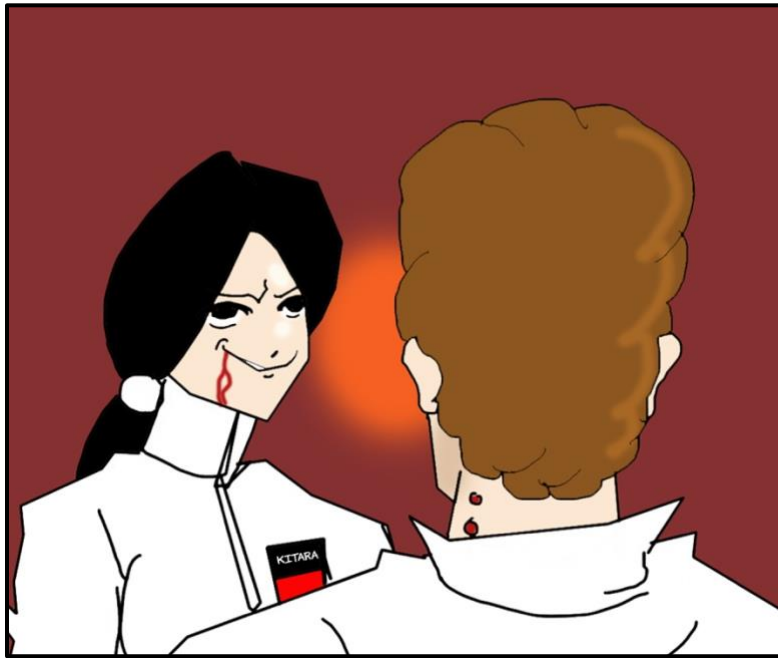
“No!” His scream hit his ears like a locomotive racing towards him as he laid tied to the tracks. Each track represented all the years he held his breath waiting for the pain to subside. The tracks were endless.

She unleashed a leaky laugh. Her style matched her ambition. She wouldn't release him. He wanted to care, but he didn't because he enjoyed this feeling of finally giving into his darkest side which lay dormant for far too long. He bit her lips forcefully and took the mirror from her and threw it far across the field, until it hit a statue of Addie shattering her into a million pieces. The mirror was still intact. It flew right back into his hands.

His voice was delicate. "Addie."

How could he not see her? Was she lost in the field? He threw the mirror again, as Kitara continued to reduce him to a sheet of flimsy paper, thin and used, but he couldn't help but enjoy how she was doing it. He didn't want her to stop. She played him like a fiddle.

Brushing her dark curls away from her face and pulling her head down into his neck felt right. Offering his essence as a sacrifice felt good. Kitara laughed repeatedly just before she took him over and over, waiting until he was nearly depleted, then she struck again and again, like a demon on speed.



He felt the prick of her teeth as she sunk them into his neck drinking his eager blood. Their dancing was a conversation between body and soul.

"Take it all," Sarantos gasped in a weakened voice. "I give it to you freely; it feels right."

When he thought she wouldn't stop, she did. Lifting her mouth from his pulsating neck, she looked at him sadly, but then slowly a grin from the depths of hell ran across her sultry face. And so the game continued as she taunted him again. He didn't mind.

His blood dripped down from her lips, trickling down from her over endowed breasts and onto his exposed bare chest. She stared at him lustfully. *Take me.* Two large teardrops were being burned into each of her cheeks right below her insanely demonic eyes. *Take me.*

His strength was gone. He wanted to grab her. He longed to take her but lacked the energy to do so. *This darkness felt satisfying.*

Then the tears on her face started. Crying as she held her head over his, her acid tears fell into his mouth. They were blue tears, dark blue tears, they were his own, and she was giving them back. *Thank you.*

The silent flow of gentle blue tears filled his mouth repeatedly until he swallowed. He had no choice and every time he swallowed, Kitara would wrap her bloody mouth around his and suck on his lips so hard it hurt. Then she'd blow her demon breath into his mouth filling it with her poisonous soul, making it hard to continue breathing.

This went on for a while. He heard the mirror hit another statue, but he couldn't lift his head to see who it was. Again, he felt the mirror as it returned to his hand. *It took longer to find a target.* His thumb caressed the handle of the mirror, wondering if he could find the will to throw again.

He heard a noise like the rush of a waterfall. Sarantos looked at the face of Kitara that hung over his like a vulture waiting for him to die. The rush of water grew louder until the tears split open on her lovely cheeks and billions of blue tears hurried

towards him. As he opened his mouth willing them into it, he couldn't contain them all and soon he was drowning in his own blue tears.

He managed to pull the mirror up to his face. He wanted to watch his own drowning but as he did, he found a little strength and pushed off Kitara. Struggling to his feet, he was choking, gagging and spitting out the tears to avoid a dismal death. After what seemed like an eternity, he stood over a dark blue pool of water that had bright yellow lily pads floating on the top. He made something good of his tears.

When he looked around, he still refused to see he was in the same spot he'd always been and hadn't moved past it. Kitara was gone, or was she? Had she become the pond or the lily pads? He knew she wasn't really lost; his darkness was hiding. His mistakes couldn't be slept off or overlooked. Was it everyone else or was it him?

Not everyone caused his pain. He'd made his own choices in this life. No one stood over him and twisted his arm. He made his own bad decisions.

This was a trap, a hellish trap. He knew all the signs and needed to be careful of what decisions he made. Landmines lay hidden everywhere, but he wouldn't let the fact he knew they were there stop him from moving past this point in his life.

He chose to move, to carefully to avoid the mines. The water was full of depth and deception so he went off into the woods looking for the safer fields so he could start over. He longed to move in a different direction. The wonderful thing about a new idea is you don't know about it.

The woods were dark and scary. He thought he heard strange noises on every path he chose - a break of a fragile branch, or maybe a scared small animal?



He walked for hours and always came back to the same white lone flower he'd seen earlier. He remembered it because of the pink rock nearby. His own self-destructive patterns wouldn't let him leave... there was no escape. He closed his eyes and realized he still held the mirror. How could he not see that?

"You'll let me leave this hell," he said to no one in particular. The mirror became hope, and he threw it into the air hoping to sling it to another world where tears don't change to blue.

Yet, he was back in the field tiptoeing around landmines again, being careful where he walked, searching for the path that appeared the least likely to have traps ready to send him into oblivion.

He stopped. He listened carefully. Sarantos followed a voice.

“Sarantos.”

The voice was back again.

“Sarantos.” The urgency of the voice sent his head spinning into overdrive and caused his eyes to ache.

He didn't recognize the voice. He couldn't open his eyes. “Brel, I'm glad you're here. It seems the Captain is waking up. Get the Lieutenant and notify Cleary. He's finally awake.”

No, he wasn't awake, because he hurt and didn't want to open his eyes.

It seemed like hours and then Addie's voice broke through. “Oh, my God, Sarantos. You've been misplaced inside your head for weeks. We thought we lost you!”

Someone was giving him water. His lips were parched. He glanced to the left to see if Storm was okay.

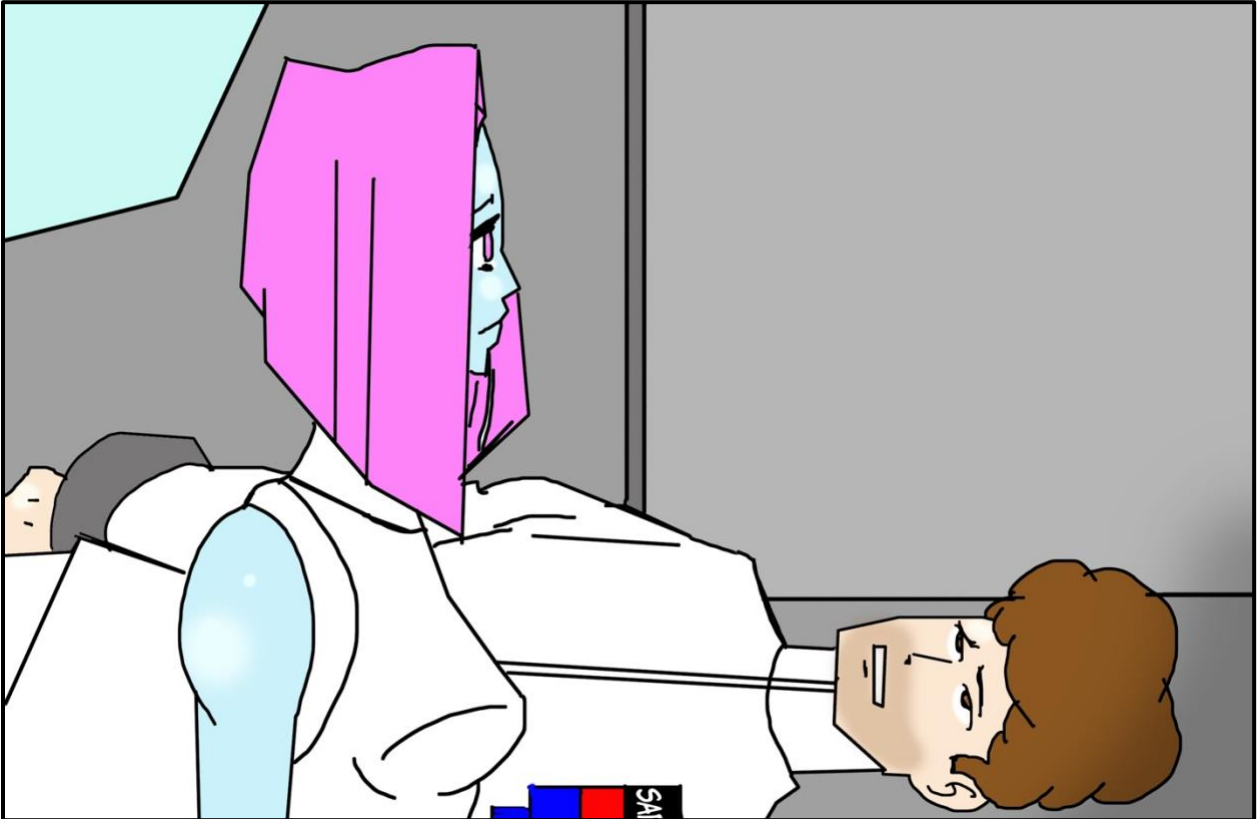
“Where's Storm,” his voice was barely audible.

“Storm? Not sure what you mean, Sarantos,” said Addie. “Just rest, my darling.”

He took a while. Finally he blurted a complete sentence. “Storm was here with me hearing voices.”

Cleary's head popped into his visual sight. "Storm's been working, and we have had no problems with her at all. Addie do you know what he's talking about?"

"No, not at all. Sarantos it's okay, you will be okay."



"Addie, where's Block?"

"He's on break, when you fell into this sleep, we were so afraid for you. Keep your eyes open and see who's around you, Sarantos. We all care about you."

"Addie, we all have blind spots and I'm afraid I lost track of reality. What happened??"