

Chapter 6

“Do You Wanna Dance?”



Tonight, was the night and his heart whirled with passion, but his mind danced in fear.

The past month was surreal. He was thrilled being back at his primary job as Captain of The Chicago. It took a little adjusting coming to terms with the different conditions on the ship versus Okura. Fear finally released his mind a bit from its grip after about three long weeks of nightmares. He'd wake up alarmed, surrounded by aliens wanting to end him, after they had already wiped out his entire army. The worst nightmares

were always the ones where he was watching them kill Addie over and over again, right in front of him, and there was nothing he could do to stop the madness. Except wake up from the nasty nightmare.

On those nights he'd awaken in a cold sweat. Addie was always there by his side soothing him, holding him tightly and whispering soft comforting words into his ears, kissing them ever so gently.

He couldn't understand how she did it. The strength of her mental state was simply a little scary. She had been through so much, yet she was so strong. She had been

through a lot more than him! He didn't know many people who could withstand that type of torment without being punished by the same foreboding nightmares he was having. She was his rock. He thought it should be the other way around though. Addie always took care of him, except when she was working security and last night was one of those nights. He'd had another nightmare. It surprised him, because they'd stopped for a while. Maybe it was the fact that he was helpless without her presence.

During the day he was in his element. The challenge to be Captain of a starship had been his dream since he was about eight years old. He relished this role. That was heaven in the daytime but his dreams at night while he slept were shaped in the pits of hell.

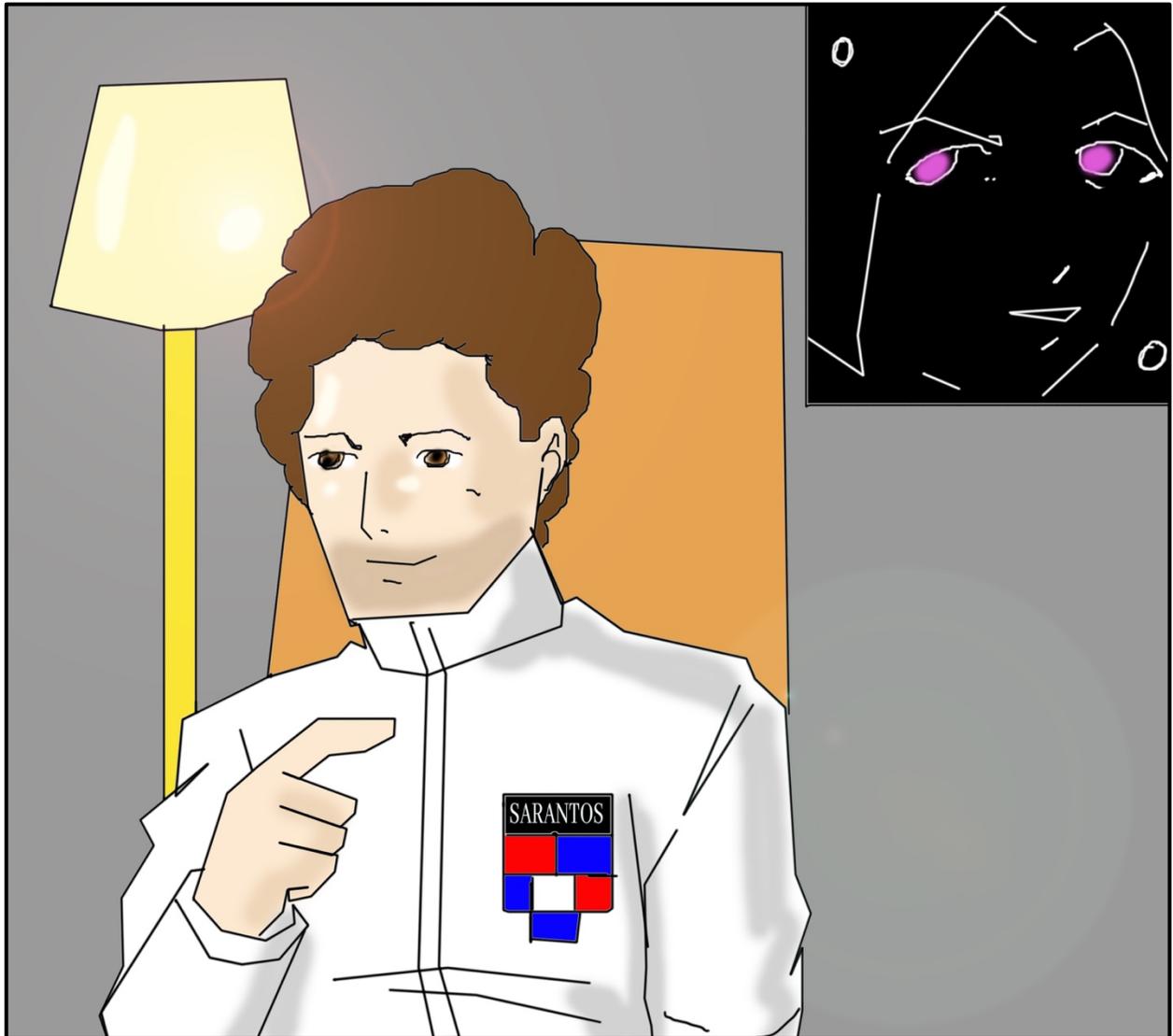
The ship had been docked on Beltor, a star located in the Okura zone. It offered a haven, a small town where the crew could visit from time to time so they weren't driven mad with space fever. As soon as he'd arrived on the starship, Kitara wanted some leave. He gave it to her.

It was good to see Kitara. They'd been friends and more than that for many years. She was different now though, somehow. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, so he consulted John. John had noticed it as well and during his absence, John had ordered her followed closely by security. His friend knew there was something not quite right and was worried about what she might be up to. Several times, the security detail had lost her only to find her hours later in the Diamond Room or in engineering. She was becoming a woman of mystery. Maybe, she felt threatened by the security team, or maybe even furious that someone would follow her around the ship where she had been the Captain's number one. Kitara was also known to have a bad temper.

The ship was awaiting orders from Admiral Bane. Their mission was temporarily on hold while the Generals, Admirals, and chief advisors to the Federation decided where they'd be needed most in this ongoing war. A thorough evaluation of the other planets that were attacked was currently in process by the high command.

He smiled, leaned back in his chair, and looked around his private captain's chamber. He was not complaining about the break. It gave him more personal time with Addie. Time well deserved and much needed.

Addie was more glorious than ever, if that were even possible.



The lights in the Diamond Room last night had flashed in her eyes causing her violet eyes to look like amethyst shining in a dark cave creating a glorious gem-like intensity.

He wanted to ask her to marry him, but the fear crept up inside his mind and took control. Everyone in the room last night had to be looking at him. Were they all wondering what he was up to? He was mush. They could all see that his heart was beating as wildly as an untamed animal caught in a trap with no way out. Could he be more obvious? He almost drooled. He was acting like an unsettled lunatic with a borderline commitment phobia.

Could he have a commitment problem? Surely that couldn't be what was holding him back because he loved Addie. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. Maybe he was afraid of what she might say. He loved Addie. He knew she loved him back. Would that be enough?

He got out of bed and allowed the soapy shower to clear his thoughts.

Addie was an independent woman. On more than one occasion, she'd proven to him that she loved her freedom. She treasured it. She never liked the idea that he was a Captain of the ship while she was head of security and they were in love. It bothered her, of that he was absolutely certain.

He couldn't blame her. He was so crazy for her that there were times it was hard for him to control his raw emotion. This was clearly not a good example to set for his crew. The war moved on without her when she was injured and he did a stellar job as a commander when it was critical but the others sensed that it was still on his mind. He'd put her on the back burner then because he had too.

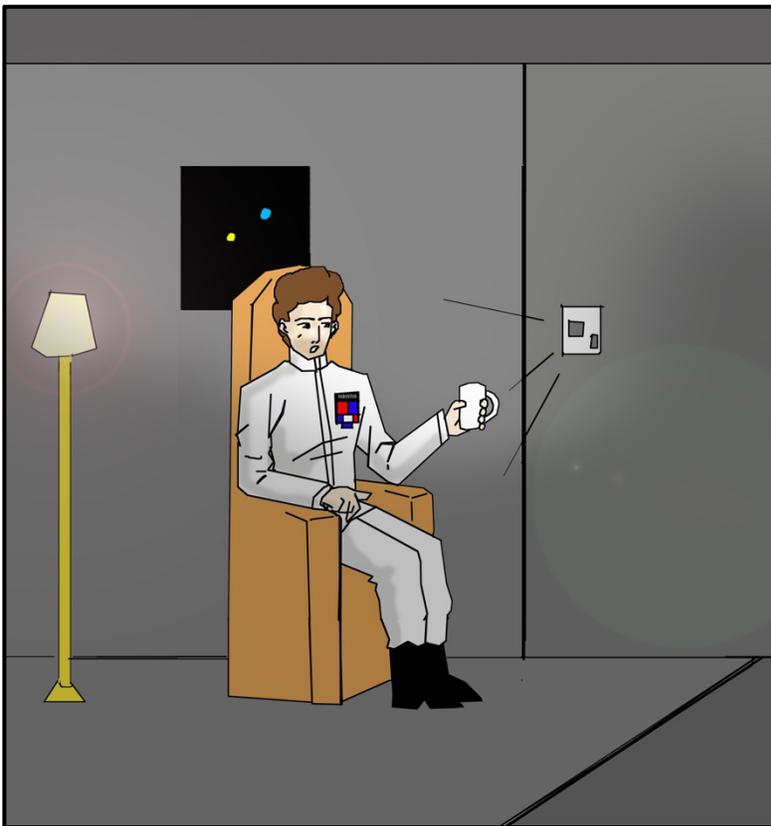
He wasn't a bad captain, it's just that his love for her was endless, boundless and unfortunately without restraints. His hands slicked back his wet hair. He grabbed a towel and stepped out of the steamy shower. The fogged-up mirror beckoned him to clean it off. He dressed instead and when he finished he saw his clean-shaven face in the mirror. The fog had dissipated.

His face looked drawn and slightly aged after the year or so on Okura. The battle was exhausting. It showed on his face.

“Coffee, black.”

The cup fell and filled to the brim with steaming hot coffee. The smell was great. Grabbing the cup, he headed for the sofa and sat down looking out at the dark, yet colorful space that stared back at him through the wide heartless window. He liked this room. He sipped his coffee.

“Captain?”



“Yes, Chief Mark Beady?”

“Yes, Captain, it’s Beady. Are you coming to the bridge, soon?”

“I’m thinking of going to breakfast. Do I need to be on the bridge, Beady?”

“No, Captain, but I thought I’d brief you with the starships logs, while you were gone.”

“Did you do your own logs, then Beady?”

“Yes, Captain. I did and some of it you might find interesting.”

“Sorry, I’ve been preoccupied since my return and haven’t had a chance to get to everyone for a briefing.”

“That’s fine, Captain, but I have a few things you might want to look at.”

“Okay, Beady. I did review the logs from Lieutenant John Baker and had a briefing with him when I returned. Did you turn your logs over to Chief Petty? How about early tomorrow morning? Say 0700.”

“Yes, Captain, I did hand them over, but I’m not sure if he had time to look at them yet and I think it’s important. In your room, sir?”

“No, Beady, meet me for breakfast in the Diamond Room, my treat.”

“Yes, thank you, Captain.”

“Out.”

He just couldn’t meet with him today. His curiosity about what Beady had to show him nudged at his curious mind, but he didn’t want to be upset over any weird things that might’ve happened while he was on Okura. Not tonight of all nights. He was determined to carry this out, or he just might burst. Not healthy.

The halls were empty as he stepped inside the shaft and headed to deck ten. A relaxed vibe permeated the air.

Heading into the Diamond Room, he noticed Donny Frame was serving food while Matt was behind the counter patiently sitting on a stool.

“Captain,” said Donny. “Good to see you.”

“Yeah, you too, Donny. I see your partner in crime has you running solo today.” He nodded at Matt. Matt nodded back.

“He worked all night and was just packing it in for the day.”

“Sure.”

“What can I get you, Captain? Will anyone else be joining you today, sir?”

“No. I’m flying solo today as well. Looks like we’re two peas in a pod.”

“Looks that way, Captain,” Donny said smiling.

“I’ll have two hard boiled eggs and toast. Give me a very large orange juice please.”

“Sure, that’s it?”

“No, now that you mentioned it. When I was gone, Kitara frequented this fine establishment. Can you tell me who she spoke to and did you notice anything out of the ordinary?”

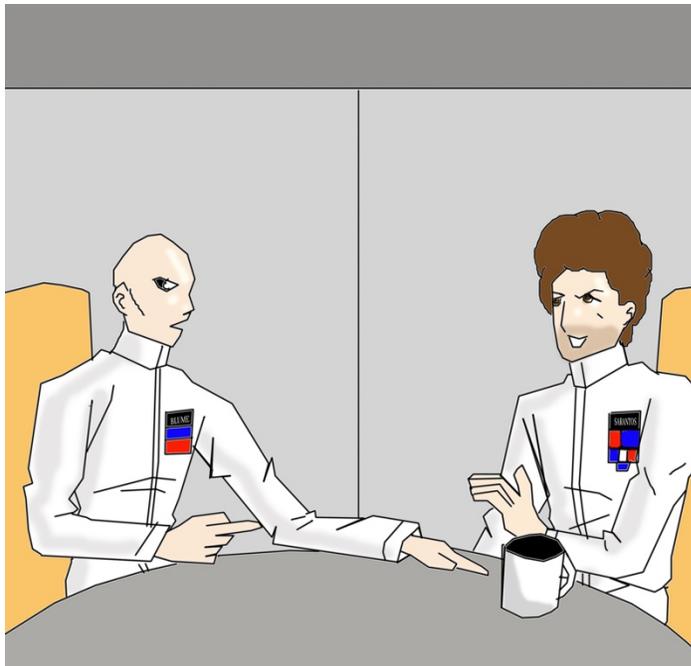
“Humm, now that you mentioned it. I often noticed her talking to someone. I think it was a guy, couldn’t tell what race he was and never saw him on board before then. Haven’t seen him around here since, either.”

“Did you hear what they were talking about?”

“Nope. Thought it was weird that every time I came close to them they quit talking. One night one of the security crew showed up and escorted her to the bridge on account of the Lieutenant was looking for her. That I know because they were quite loud about it. She left willingly but the guy put up a fight when they tried to escort him off the ship. That was the last time I saw him in here, anyway.”

“Did you see him somewhere else?”

“Yes, just once when I went to the space station for a night off. He and Kitara were getting quite chummy at the bar, you know that place called Logo’s...”



“Yes, I know the place.”

“Let me **get** your eggs, Captain.”

“Sure.”

Well, what is she up to?

Matt came over and sat down across from him and smiled. Placing a coffee in front of him, he leaned back on his chair.

“So, Captain, I didn’t hear you order a coffee. I know you must’ve had one though, but from the look on your face, you definitely need more.”

He couldn’t stop his smile. “Yes, Matt you’re right. Thanks.”

This coffee was better than the replicator version.

“Beautiful stuff, my friend. Now, what’s going on?”

“Matt, I’m concerned about Kitara.”

“Why? I haven’t seen her since I’ve been back, so I can’t help you with that. However before we left, I noticed a substantial change in her - I thought it had to do with you and Addie.”

“Yeah, me too, but it was too much of a change for that reason alone. I could never put my finger on it. Something was out of sorts. She was just not herself. It was all wrong but I couldn’t tell you why.”

“Yes, that’s it Captain. She felt amiss, not the way she acted so much but her presence. It just felt off.”

“Matt, when you see her in here next time, just please notify me. Ok?”

“No problem, Captain.”

He placed his hand on Matt’s arm. “Thanks, Matt. It might not be anything, but then again, I can’t take the chance that it isn’t.”

“Here Captain,” said Donny, as he placed the eggs and toast on the table. “Millie, is bringing over your juice.”

“Thanks.”

Millie was a young intern who worked with Matt when she wasn't in school or studying. She followed quickly with a large juice. She smiled and left without saying a word. She was only eighteen and just barely made the age limit she needed to work on the starship and get an education at the same time. It was an ideal position for her.

He'd done it himself for two years and enjoyed every minute of it. Then he headed to the academy. That's when the crazy fun started.

“Great eggs, Matt.”

“Yeah, my specialty. Well, I think I might need some sleep. Have the nightmares stopped Captain?”

“Yes, until last night. Last night's nightmare was way over the top.”

“Does it have to do with Addie?”

“What am I going to do if she says no?”

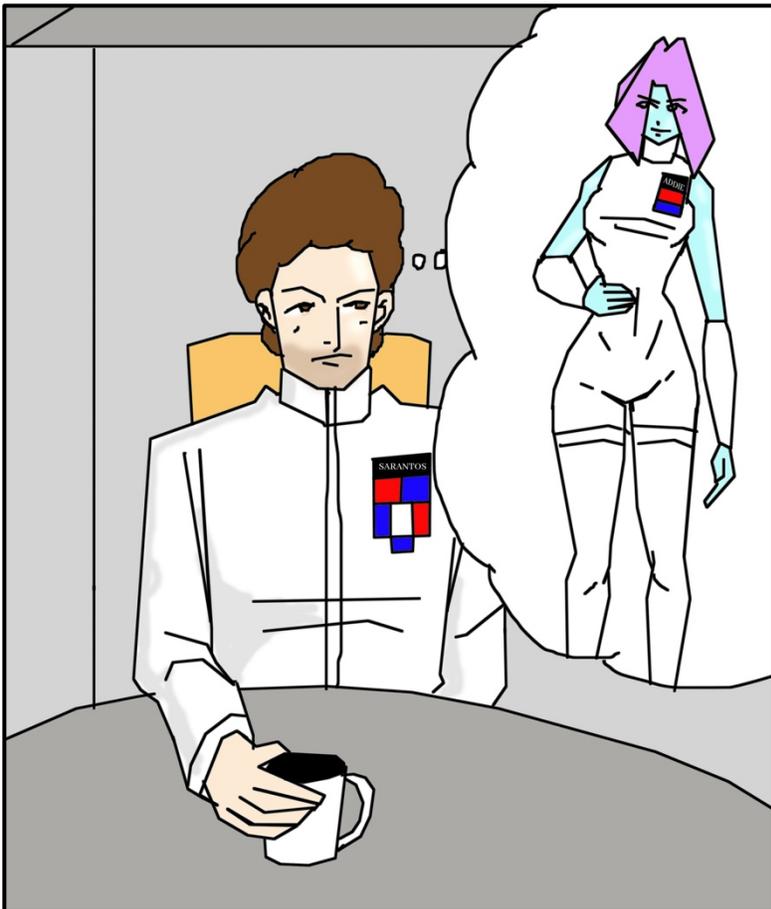
“Captain, you make me laugh. Even if Addie says no, and she might, knowing that tigris, you still have the best of both worlds. You have absolutely nothing to lose.”

“What do you mean by that, Matt?”

“Well, Captain, you still get to spend time with her and she’s crazy about you. Sometimes that’s good enough. You know me and marriage. Don’t need it. Just be happy, Captain. Life is too short to stress over everything. Enjoy all your moments together, you must know by now how precious they are.”

Nodding in agreement, Sarantos leaned back and finished chewing a bite of toast and egg. “You’re absolutely correct. Enjoy the moments. I should’ve learned that lesson already, but I have been known to be stubborn!”

“Well, good night, Captain, or good day, I need my beauty sleep. I’ll keep my eyes open for anything with regards to Kitara, and I’ll see you later tonight. Your special dinner is going to be ready on time and I’ll make sure everything is perfect. It



shouldn’t be too crowded; a lot of the crew are on leave.”

Matt stood up, patted Sarantos on his back and left the dining room.

He sighed. Matt was right. It didn’t make a difference. Addie was a strong woman and never wanted to appear weak. Being the head of security was part of it. Sometimes she thought he took away her power when he was too clingy and looking out for her, because she didn’t need it. She

needed no special favors. She worried what others would think, especially those under her command although they all knew how tough she was. Still, to her, it mattered.

It'd be easier if her beauty wasn't so overpowering. Sometimes it was hard to believe she could kick the crap out of most aliens in almost any type of combat setting. She practiced daily and was a committed person.

Tonight, though, they'd dance. He would ask her to dance. He was ready to take the chance. He hoped the dance would be for two and he didn't find himself dancing solo, which might be humiliating.

Being with Addie forever would be like dancing through life. A long graceful, heartfelt dance that he'd never want to end.

Enough time spent on breakfast. He didn't work out this morning. He'd have to find time for it later, before he met Addie for dinner. Now he needed to head over to the bridge.

The door slid open.

“Captain on the bridge.”

He would never get tired of hearing that sound. He sat down in his chair and surveyed the bridge.

He was glad to see Cadet Flann. The young human looked older to him since his return. Although, the ship wasn't in flight yet, Tom Flann monitored it closely always making sure she was flight ready at a moment's notice. Working with Lieutenant John Baker, Sarantos felt secure knowing that the two of them were on board. They made his job much easier.

He didn't see Chief Mark Beady, but Petty was on deck and at his post.

"Petty, where's Chief Beady?"

"Captain, he was on the night shift and left for the day. Do you need him, sir?"

"No, that's fine. I was just wondering."

The door swished open and in walked Chief Candy Storm.



"Captain, good morning," Storm said.

"Good Morning Chief Storm."

Petty smiled at her, stood up and stretched.

"Finally, I can get some rest. Good to see you Chief Storm."

Storm was a cute human with the classic girl next door look. In Baker's logs, he mentioned that Storm had done some extensive research on Kitara's childhood for him and she hadn't found anything out of the ordinary. It appeared that Kitara had Baker's attention too while Sarantos was not on board the starship.

He closed his eyes in guilt. Kitara had been his lover and his best friend but now he was questioning her loyalty. Not just him, but his friends were as well.

The door swished open. "Good day, Captain," said Petty.

"Yeah, get some sleep Petty."

He disliked the ho hum boring parts of the day when he wasn't soaring through space and traveling through the galaxies. The job when that wasn't happening was relatively dull.

Mornings were a little busy on the bridge. The door swished open again. Ensign Born came in with Walt.

Even though Walt was OKurian he looked American-Indian to Sarantos. His ponytail and dark long hair along with his squared off chin, dark eyes, and use of incense made him a prime suspect for American Indian heritage. There were a few known tribes left on the main planet, and all were active in preserving the land and all creatures that walked it. If it wasn't for them, several species would've been wiped out centuries ago. He respected their race and was intrigued with Walt.

"Captain, good morning," said Born.

"Morning, Born."

Ensign Born pointed to Walt. “I brought him in to take a look at the replicator in your office Captain. Remember, yesterday you told me it was sticking once in a while. So I thought before it stops working altogether, we need to check it out.”

“Good idea, Born. Hello Walt.”

“Captain,” Walt said. His voice was soft, and he barely nodded but walked straight to the captain’s room to do his job.

The man was amazing. Sarantos would like to know more about him because he was interesting and intelligent. No one knew if Walt had a last name. They all just knew him as Walt. No title, just Walt. Sarantos figured the man liked it that way. He looked like a simple loyal man.

There wasn’t much to do, so he went to his office to check on back logs to see if there was anything suspicious that might have happened and been missed while he was gone. The more he talked to the crew, the more concerned he grew about Kitara. Could she be the hidden link that gave information to the enemy? Was Kitara a traitor? It was inconceivable, but he had to keep an open mind regarding his crew, especially if they appeared off in any way. No matter who it was, no favorites were allowed in a Captain’s investigation. Everything was on the table.

Walt was just finishing up when he walked into his office. The swish of the door behind him was comforting.

“All done, Captain. Can I get you something?”

“A test, Walt?”

“Yes, Captain.”



“Okay, I’ll have a coffee cream mint, hot.”

They both watched in anticipation as the cup slid to the tray. The creamed mint followed the coffee filling the cup nicely.

He smiled at Walt. “That’s better, Walt. It forgot the mint yesterday. A little sluggish.”

“Not now, Captain.”

He headed out of the room without saying another word.

The drink was good. He sipped it slowly while looking at the ship’s logs.

“Captain.”

The forceful voice of Dr. Major Cleary jarred him out of his work.

“How’d you get in here?”

“Why Captain, through the door. It’s a modern invention that allows people to enter a room. You were so intrigued with your work, you must not of heard me come in. Plus, I am a stealth ninja when I want to be. It’s good to see you back on the job. I can’t say I miss the constant supply of patients.”

“I bet.”

Cherrie sat down across from him and threw her legs up on his desk. Very shapely legs.

“Look at you. You’re not dead after all.”

“I’m not sure what you mean?”

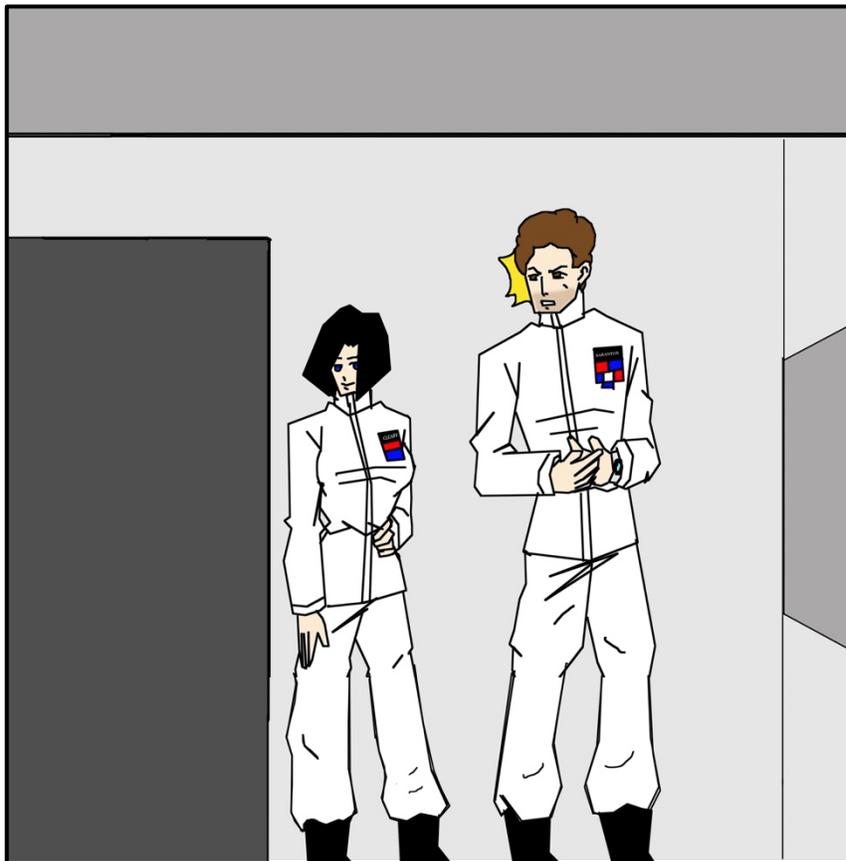
“Don’t kid with me Sarantos. You can still notice a nice pair of legs even though you’re with one of the sexiest women in the galaxy. Oh, except for her twin sister.”

“You’re funny. Cherrie. What’re you doing here?”

“You dog. I’ve come to make small talk. I needed a break and thought it’d be fun to bug the heck out of my Captain.”

“Oh yes, of course you did.”

She stood up and looked in his empty cup. “What’d you have? Can I get you another?”



“Sure. Coffee and creamed mint. What time is it anyway?”

She turned and winked. “Check on your own wrist, Captain. Too nervous to think? A little smoochy tonight, dinner for two to dance into the future together?”

“Who told you?”

“Word travels fast and I have my ways.”

Great, that's all he needed. If Addie said no, everyone on board the starship will know he was turned down. Wonderful. He tapped his watch.

“Seriously, Cherrie what time is it. I think my time is off.”

“You are losing your mind, Captain. Ships time.”

God was he losing his mind? Of course, he just had to speak to the ship.

“Be fair, Cleary.” He always called her Cleary when he was a little perturbed with her, or in front of the crew. “I’m not used to being able to do that for over a year, but now here I am, obviously still adjusting.”

“Yeah, sorry, Captain.”

She didn't look sorry. Cleary grabbed a cup for herself, as well.

“I love this drink,” she said, and sat back down.

“So, you're just here to bug me. Where did the time go? In all seriousness, I was checking on Kitara. She has roused many suspicions on the ship while we were gone.”

“Of what?”

“Disappearing, being seen with strangers not on board the ship during wartime. Oh, I felt something was wrong before I left, I thought it was because of Addie.”

“Now, you don’t think that?”

“Nope.”

“Well, I’ll keep an eye out for you. I haven’t noticed anything unusual, but then I haven’t seen her but once since I’ve been back. Checked her out and her physical health is fine. We didn’t talk much, but we never did. So that’s my feedback. I can check with Chief Cindy O’Malley and see if anything unusual happened while I was gone.” She licked her lips. “Love this drink, heavenly.”

“Yes please check with Cindy, I’d appreciate any feedback I can get.”

“Okay, well, I better get out of your hair.” She stood up, finished her coffee in one gulp and headed to the door. Cleary turned and winked. “I hope she says no, Sarantos, after all think of all the gals that’ll be disappointed if she says yes.”

She left him sitting there feeling rather stupid. That was her specialty...

He’d gone to the gym, had a shower and was sitting breathlessly at the table like a young teenager waiting for Addie to walk into the room. Matt had returned for the evening shift, but Sarantos knew he came in a little earlier than usual to help him out.

“Dinner’s almost ready, Captain. Champagne on ice, fancy napkins, and fine china. The works. Do you approve of the table settings?”

“It’s great, Matt. I’m wild with anticipation. I hope I’m not too late for the show. Maybe I should’ve done this long time ago? Or maybe not at all?”

“You’ll be fine, Captain. Just fine.”

He left him sitting there, alone with his thoughts. He felt her before he saw her. Addie entered the room.



She headed to their table smiling.

He was paralyzed. He couldn’t breathe! This was worse than fighting Bendarians, he felt much sicker. He was actually scared.

“What’s wrong, Sarantos? Are you sick my love?”

Her voice was like hot honey dripping down his eager body slowly moving to his... healing his every...

“No, I’m fine, beautiful lady.”

Somehow the word beautiful didn't fit. She was a goddess.

She sat down and took his hands in hers.

He couldn't stop the freak inside that wanted to come out to play. "Do you wanna dance, Addie?"

"What?" She was confused. Good, that now made two of them. He had no clue what he was doing.

"Do you want to dance, and take the chance, on us?"

The room started to spin. He was out of control.

"What's going on, Sarantos?"

Crap he thought, I'm going in for the win. I don't care if she says no, okay, maybe I do, but I gotta ask her. I can't take this anymore.

"Addie, I love you. I can't wait any more. Marry me. Please marry me!"

Oh, my GOD. He just blurted it out of his mouth. She looked shocked, sick, almost.

The room was spinning faster now. Her mouth fell open. God he loved that mouth. Say something, Addie. Anything.

"Can I poor you a glass of champagne?" It was Matt to the rescue.



His voice changed the feel of the tension.

“Yes,” said Addie.

He couldn't tell if she meant yes to marriage or yes to Matt that she'll have some champagne.

This was going to be a long night...