

Chapter 8

“Your Empty Chair”



The emptiness of his room crept into his racing mind slowly tormenting his thoughts. The slow silence gnawed away a bit at his sick heart, literally ripping it out piece by tiny piece. His life seemed to get a little more complicated as the seconds passed by.

It'd been two full weeks since he had poured his heart out to her, singing *This Song is Your Fault*. It had been his first real concert in a while. The memory of Addie coming up on stage and dancing towards him charged his emotions even now. There was nothing like the thrill of a live performance and she had added to it substantially. Frame by frame, he remembered the memory and played it back in slow motion whenever he had a free moment to himself over the last two weeks. In a world that

kept pushing him around, there were still a million reasons why he wanted to stand next to her forever.

When would he stop torturing himself? This was what he'd done every single night since then - pout and wallow in self-pity.

She'd said let's talk, and for some reason he thought that might be an invitation back into his bedroom on a daily basis. He dreamed of more but that clearly wasn't happening.

He had continued playing with the band at least two times a week for the last two weekends. He was in his element there. He was in a zone. Why couldn't she be happy for him? Was that too much to ask for? Maybe, he'd just misunderstood her intentions. It was all just very confusing anyway. Why would she possibly be upset that he was fulfilling his obligation to the band? Was she mad because he was happy doing something that did not need her? Did she really expect him to abandon the band in its time of need? Why was she not more understanding? The questions came one after another in rapid succession, unrelenting and without mercy.

No one could rescue him from the frozen iceberg he'd recently become. His personal life had become a mess. He lost all sense of direction when he was focused on his music though. Other than that, he and Addie continued to argue every time they saw each other about everything imaginable including time and space. He grew silent as each argument escalated and the line kept being drawn further and further. In the heat of their arguments, the line was crossed without sympathy and forgiveness was scarce.

He loved playing with the band. He loved making music. He loves writing lyrics. He couldn't give up Addie because he loved her too, so very deeply. Why was this so crazy that he had to even choose between the two of them? That didn't seem fair at all. Why couldn't he have both? Didn't he deserve to be happy? Why was she making him choose? This. Doesn't. Work!

He awakened without warning each of the last five nights in a cold sweat to a dark room. It existed without purpose. Music was blasting from a long corridor and he would go off searching for the source, checking all the doors that ran along the stretched grey hallway. Then a bubble would peek out from an open doorway, with one of those damned cartoon bubbles that had the word “dream” written on it. He was always compelled to chase after it and the dream was then always prompted to run. It was like they were magnets, always forced away from each other no matter how hard they tried to come together. Nevertheless, it never stopped him from going after the dream though, because it meant the world to him. If he could just catch it, just one time, he was sure it would be Addie. She was the dream he wanted and music was the way to get there, straight to her heart.

After his performance two weeks ago, they’d come back to the room and made hot passionate love for most of the night. He thought they were blissfully back to the same place they were before he proposed. It wasn’t though. Unfortunately, it did not change things. Nope, not at all. She hadn’t been back since then to spend the night with him again. They had breakfast together on occasion, but mostly she was somewhere else always pretending to be tired while he was mostly alone in his bedroom working on something instead of existing among the living.

She usually loved listening to him sing and play, but obviously grew tired of it by the second night they were back together. She seemed to be holding her breath and pouting, maybe because she wasn’t getting the proper attention she required and legitimately deserved. It’s possible she was right because she had waited all day to be with him. When the nighttime came, he would instead usually get carried away singing to strangers and writing lyrics into the deep hours of the night. They jostled like two medieval knights on horseback neither one backing down through that second night. She doubted his commitment to their relationship and his lack of sensitivity. They shouted back-and-forth. He didn’t feel like he needed to apologize for his passion for music anymore. He had had enough.

So here he was weeks later caught in a vicious circle. Music was all she’d left him with. Night after night he’d sing to her empty chair, the one where her smile had brightened the room and her beautiful face played its own soft song. He chased this

silly dream because it was important to him but while he did this, he was alienating her possibly even losing her forever. What was he thinking? He was stubborn. This stern stubbornness was one of the worst traits about him. His personality had many flaws but this is probably the biggest one. He wanted to see her. Why was he such an idiot?



“Addie,” he said over the IC.

“Captain?”

“Can we have dinner tonight?”

“I suppose we can. The Diamond Room, say, in three hours.”

It wasn’t a question the way she answered. She meant if he wasn’t there in three hours, she’d eat without him. There was no window to open.

“Okay, great, see you there.”

He looked at her empty chair - it began singing to him with an edgy yet skittishly sarcastic attitude. Night after night you pretend to care as I sit here... Chuckling at the thought of an empty chair singing back to him and taunting him, he went and showered.

The Diamond Room was not crowded. Matt Blume spotted him the moment he came into the dark but inviting atmosphere.

“Captain,” he said. His smile was broad and filled with good cheer. Matt had the eyes and heart of a good man.

“Matt, how are you? It’s been a long week.”

“I’ve got your favorite table open, if you want it?”

“Sure, Matt, that’s great. Addie is joining me at some point.”

“Oh, that’s good, Captain.” He winked and led him to the back corner.

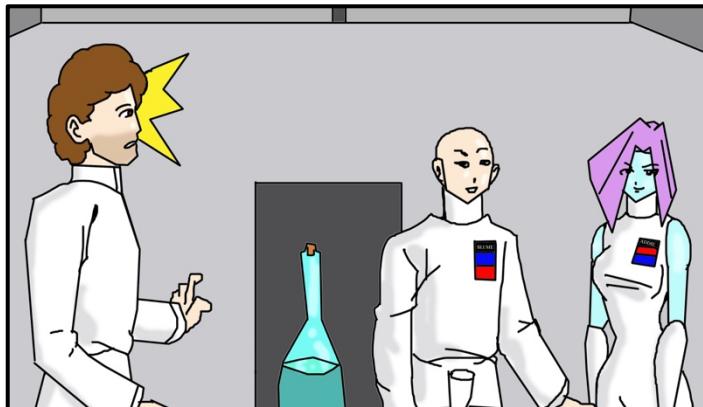
The lights from the space station they were docked at twinkled thought the open windows, adding an intensely romantic attitude to the tablecloth and a flirty flare to the silverware.

“Champagne, Captain?”

“Yes certainly, but because I like it, not because I have anything to celebrate.”

Matt chuckled and left.

There were only a few people having dinner further towards the bar, and two Olivian sitting at the bar’s counter enjoying a quiet conversation in their own language.



Matt was already returning with the champagne when Addie walked into the room.

God, she was glorious, even in her boring uniform. Sometimes the difference between fear and love is the blink of an eyelash.

She smiled and moved toward him sliding her arm in Matts. Her smile seemed to be a world of extremes.

“I knew he was coming your way, champagne, after all.”

“Can I get you a glass, Addie?”

“Sure, Matt. Don’t mind if I do.”

When he left, Addie sat down and smiled.

“Well, Captain, what brought this on?”

“I’ve decided that we argue too much these days and don’t spend enough time together. It makes me a mean captain and a lousy lyricist. I feel like a jerk. There’s too much conflict in me and just an expanding void of anger that makes me unhappy.”

Her eyebrows went up and her forehead wrinkled. “Really? You surprise me, Captain. I thought I was just a crimp in your style.”

“What? Never,” he said with conviction. “I never said that!”

“You know, Addie, I even sing to your empty chair pretending that you’re there, every night. I miss you so much!”

“You don’t.” Her voice held a hint of humor. Her arch raised as a smirk came across her face.

“Of course, I do. Why wouldn’t I? You mean the world to me. You know I want you there in my arms every night. Don’t you understand who I am? I’ve never changed. I’ve always been the same person ever since you met me. This is my nature. I can’t change how I feel about making music nor can I change how my soul feels about you. Why can’t I have you both?”

“I know. Sometimes that’s the problem. You could probably change your perspective sometimes, but anyways, on to other issues. Your friend, Kitara.”

“Oh, Addie, really? I don’t want to talk about Kitara. This is a personal dinner not a business one.”

“Well, sorry, Captain, but I’m still on the clock.”

“Addie, not when you’re having dinner with your Captain. I give you permission to have a little fun and forget about work for a few minutes. Additionally, I won’t tell anyone or put it on your permanent record. There’s nothing you’ve done that can’t be undone.”

“Fine.” Her head tilted to the side and her eyes were suddenly sultry, flashing an ornery fire or a neon red hazard sign, he couldn’t be sure which one it was.

He took her hands in his and brought them to his mouth kissing them lightly.

She beamed at him and winked.



His heart exploded as he wondered, oh, Addie do you feel the love again?

“So, Addie, what’s with that grin? You know we can’t just jump straight to the end, the journey is the best part.”

“Sarantos, you know I love you, but it’s been crazy this month and you’ve

wanted attention that I don't have right now. My focus is on our security. I can't afford to be distracted. You can be a huge distraction to me. This is a critical time for all of us. You always make me lose my focus way too easily my love. You're too much of a distraction. You draw my attention away from things are important to all of us."

"Is that why you're staying away? I thought it was because of the marriage thing."

"No, silly man. I miss you, so much, but I can't even think clearly when I'm around you, and I feel it's important to keep my head focused at this time only in matters of the ship's security."

"Yes, of course. You're right, as always, my beautiful lady. I just feel we've been arguing a lot when we're actually together. It seems like we do nothing else."

"Well, Sarantos that's because you want to practice your music more these days, but when I'm with you, I want to spend my time holding you and making love. That holds me all week. The music is wonderful, but our time together is fleeting. It needs to be fine-tuned to each other."

He sat back in his chair as her hands slid down from his grasp.

"I am a silly man, Addie. What was I thinking? I should be acting more like a Captain, as well. Can you forgive me, darling?"

"Oh, Sarantos there's nothing to forgive. We're here together now having dinner. It's a perfect time to catch up. You like your music and so do I, but for me, right now, I need more. I long for you to fulfill my needs too. I need that strength and those few memories to sustain me through the BS I deal with all week long out there. I've enjoyed your shows the last few weekends, though."

“Well, now I’ve got another song for you.” He couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Great, with that laugh, it must be something about the wicked witch of the East?”

“Never, Addie.”

Matt returned and took their order. Then he nodded to both of them and left.

After Matt left, he continued speaking. “Okay, Addie you’re right. Tell me about Kitara. It’s the people your closest to that can quickly become strangers. Let’s focus on the ship and everyone else for a bit.”

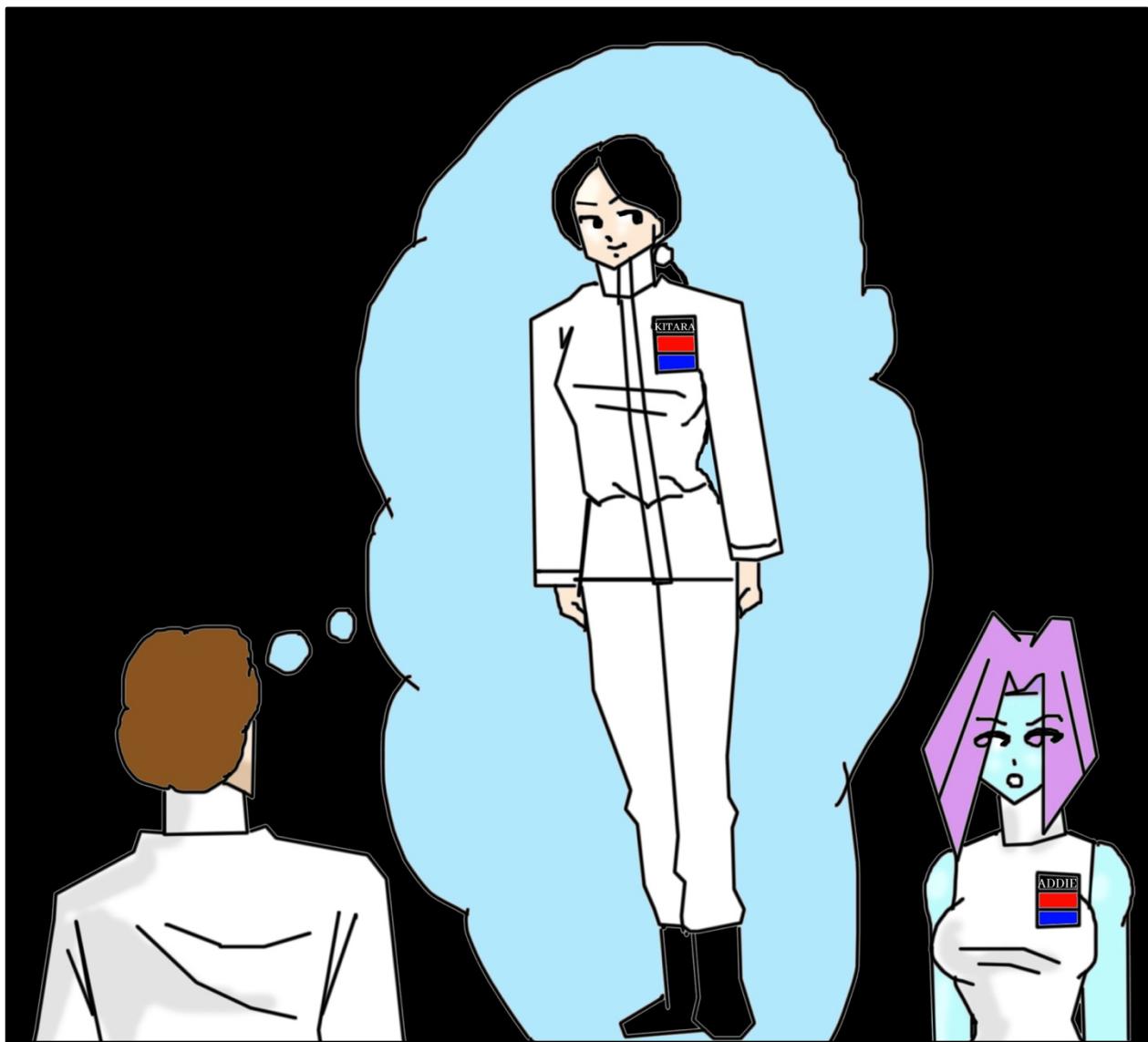
“She is definitely up to something. My security detail has followed her religiously and noticed some pretty shady characters meeting with her in the darkest corners of little cafes and dim, dingy corridors. Of course, they can’t get close enough to hear what’s being said but I think she might know we’re on to her, which makes her even more cautious.”

“That doesn’t sound like she’s being too cautious to me.”

“I suppose. I can only imagine what she’s doing when we’re not watching. Captain, I think she believes she’s infallible. Even though we’re watching her, she knows her rights and if we can’t prove anything we can’t do anything about it. I think she knows how to play the game. She knows all the rules.”

“Yes, I suppose you’re right. I might be able to keep her off duty with an undersuspension to commit conspiracy order. I think it would in the ship’s best interest for now.” He chewed on his lip nervously.

He couldn't believe what he was saying about Kitara. What went so wrong with her life? They were great friends and lovers. Was she always just waiting for the right time to change sides, or was it a last-minute ditch? Was she trying to get his attention? He didn't think he'd ever find out the truth at this point. It was unfortunate. He felt sad for her and sad for him, because in that moment he knew he'd lost a lifelong friend and a great lieutenant.



Kitara's bouncy dark hair was the first thing that always caught his eye, then her simple smile. She was intelligent, brooding, sexy and full of amazing conversation about almost any topic. She was the life of most parties. He loved her anchor tattoo on her right buttock. It had special meaning for her, but it was something she never

shared with him. She was a private person in a way and that might be what caused her to go off the deep end.

“A penny for your thoughts, Captain.”

“Sorry, Addie. I was just thinking about what caused her to go off the deep end.”

“Sarantos, I don’t think it’s ever any one thing, but many smaller things piled one on top of another over the years that probably made her what she’s become today.”

“Again, you’re right, Addie. That’s one of the reasons I adore you so much. Your brilliance.”

“Well, I don’t know about that, Sarantos, it’s just common sense to me. Maybe I’m not looking at this from a biased point of view?”

“Addie, you’re right. Back to our personal feelings, you gave me everything but I felt like you asked me not to dream. I was sitting on my own ego. I can see your point. It wasn’t about you telling me not to sing or make music. I’m sorry.”

“You have a right to have an overactive mind and extended ego, darling. I didn’t ask you not to dream, just not to do it on Captain time. Kitara is visiting Garnash. This ship needs its captain!”

Just like that out-of-the-blue, Addie and reality smacked him upside the head. He was trying to talk about forgiveness and their relationship, but she steered the conversation right back to Kitara. Not that the fact Kitara was seeing Garnash wasn’t significant and important news, but it might have waited a few more moments until they got their much-needed relationship back on the right track. Maybe, he was being

selfish but he had waited so long to be truly alone with her after her near-death experience. He wanted to be selfish for just a moment in time.

Garnash was a creepy little Mangee. He was well known for being scrappy and skillful at theft, treachery and under-handed trickery. He could even shoot a nebula out of a phaser gun. He had a big mouth and a bigger need for making the deal of the century. He wanted part of anything he could profit from. Garnash wasn't to be trusted. His race was mischievous, but he was wanted by his own kind for stealing a rare stone from one of their museums while leaving behind a massive locust attack on their field of granges. That had devastated the Mangee, because granges were one of the sweetest luxuries that could be brought home and placed on the dinner plate. They wanted him dead or alive. He was noted for pranks, but that one was his last hurrah. He had burned that bridge. He was now their biggest outlaw.

Embracing his role, he held his feelings in check and attempted to play the part of the Captain. "That's certainly not great news. What's he up to hanging out with humans? That's not his style unless she has something worthwhile that he wants but what could she offer him that he'd possibly need?"

"More importantly, Sarantos, what is she up to?"

"Yes, Addie, I see what you mean. Was there anything else? Did your people follow Garnash or just Kitara?"

"I had two on her, so one went after Garnash but he lost him of course. Garnash knew he had eyes on him. After all he is a Mangee."

"Right, but I wouldn't think that he'd want the federation on his tail. He couldn't be that stupid. That's a big risk for him to take. There must be a big reason."

"Sarantos, he is indeed very clever. I met him many years ago and was pretty uncomfortable in his presence. He made me itch, if you know what I mean?" Addie began rubbing both of her arms and shivered at the old memory.



"I've met a few Mangee over the years, but never did I feel that way, Addie. For you to say that to me is both alarming for me and a huge red flag for the Federation. Nothing makes you itch." He looked at his food in thoughtful contemplation. It stared back at him without making a sound.

"Well, he did have that effect on me. There was also something odd, something not quite right but I couldn't figure out what it was. I almost wondered if he was part Laxien." Her mouth curled up in disgust and her eyes narrowed causing her brows to pull forward leaving little tiny lines across her forehead. They were sexy.

His neck cracked with the speed with which he lifted his head from his plate to look at her to see if she was joking. She wasn't. Addie's violet eyes were fixated on his. Her mouth was serious.

"You must be joking? Why would you say that?"

"Because he wasn't right. It wasn't natural. Something you don't yet know about me Sarantos. I have an incredible sense of smell, and I'm slightly telepathic. By that, I

mean I can sense certain things. Truth especially and if something is off, it makes me itch. He was off.”

“Certainly, you didn’t smell Laxien?”

“Yes. I looked around and didn’t see anyone else around. Besides, we were in a bar and it was very unlikely that any Laxien would show themselves there. They’d be killed on the spot.”

“Well, that would explain what Kitara was doing with him if she’s going against the federation. Your sister would know what he is, wouldn’t she?

“Yes. I thought of that. This is one of the main reasons that our relationship needs to take a back seat right now. There are far more important issues at hand, ones that have a profound impact on the entire federation, Sarantos.”

“I see. Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

She took his hand. “Because, I had to be sure of all my information before I worried you with what might only be a coincidence.”

His face heated up in annoyance. “Next time just tell me what’s going on. Tell me the truth. It’s not your choice to withhold information that I need to know. I’ll be the one to decide if it just a coincidence or not. Is that understood, Lieutenant?”

“Yes, Captain, it’s understood.” She dropped her head obediently and continued to eat.

He poured more champagne into his glass and drank it down like it was fruit juice. She sighed.



“I’m sorry. It won’t happen again. You’re right, I should’ve told you. There is no excuse that I could give you that would make any sense. You are the Captain. You should have all the information.”

away from us, so let’s keep it real when we’re on a date. Okay?”

Her smile lit up the room and he wanted to kiss her so much but refrained. “Okay, Sarantos. From now on I’ll report to you at once and not bring our job only to our rare private moments. I didn’t mean to ruin our dinner. I’m sorry.”

He stood up and walked to her side. Bending down like a gentleman, he gave her a kiss. “You’re forgiven.”

“Thanks,” she said.

He sat down. Now he was worried though. What was Kitara up to? How could they find out? They needed a good plan. He still had trouble thinking that Kitara would

have anything to do with taking sides against the federation, but someone on his ship had been giving information to the enemies and it might be her.

When they started on this journey, he was sure she was all in for the federation. How could he have been so deceived by her as a person and especially her as a federation officer? It didn't make any sense.

"You don't believe it, do you," asked Addie?

"I get that anything's possible, but she certainly has always seemed like a team player." He poured more champagne. His heart felt heavy. "Addie, how could I have been so wrong about her all this time? When did it change?"

"Don't be so hard on yourself, Sarantos. You couldn't have known. Obviously, she's good at being deceitful. Do you think she wanted to be close to you to keep tabs on what was going on?"

"For sure. Yes I was thinking that, but you didn't have to say it out loud. Now I feel like a dope. It makes it all too real, and yeah, I'm sure you're right. I was not too smart about it."

"You did fine, Sarantos. She was your good friend. It's not easy to want to believe that sort of thing about someone so close to you."

"I guess so but now that the blinders are off, I feel a fool. We need to have a meeting to decide what to do about it."

Matt brought them over a flaming chocolate dessert called, mocha coffee flamboro. It was a devilishly delicious dessert. They both finished it in record time. Neither spoke during the pleasurable dopamine release of this monumental dessert

experience. It was one of those types of food. To eat it in silence was part of the zen moment you shared with this fabulous dessert. It stimulated all the senses.

He returned to gather the plates.

“Matt, can you sit for a moment?”

“Really, Captain? I thought you were having a private dinner.”

“It was, but I want your opinion.”

“Sure, Captain. What is it?” Matt pulled up a chair and sat down pouring himself a glass of champagne.

“What do you know about the Laxien?”

Matt almost spit out his drink. “Why do you ask?”

“Because we believe Kitara went to speak with Garnash, a Mangee, but Addie believes he might be part Laxien.”

“Well, I’ve met Garnash, and I would agree with Addie that there’s something off about him, but a Laxien? If that’s true we’ve got a huge problem. What would someone like Kitara be doing with Garnash anyway?”

“We’re not sure, but we think she’s helping our enemy work against the federation. I still have trouble saying it out loud. Although I’ve suspected her as a possible traitor, I honestly hadn’t realized it could’ve gotten this far.”



"You do understand the consequences if Garnash is part Laxien, right Captain? I know Addie does."

Sarantos looked at Addie. Her expression was blank. "I think so, Matt."

Matt looked at Addie. "Are you certain? This is horrible news and if it's true how did he get away with it for so long?"

Addie said, "You mean how did the Mangee not know about it? I'm not sure why the Mangee would mate with a Laxien to begin with."

Sarantos said, "Possible rape?"

"That would explain a lot. The Mangee wouldn't want anyone to know, so the mother would've kept it a secret for as long as she could but someone probably found out. It makes sense now they want him dead or alive. It's not their way to want someone dead," said Matt.

“I think they were going to murder or exile him when he stole the gem and ran away. That’s probably one of the reasons they want him back. I guess they feel their race needs to deal with the issue at hand in their own proper way,” said Addie.

Matt frowned. “You’re probably right, Addie. What a mess. The Laxien are a vicious race. It’s hard to tell the difference in their appearance between them, humans, and Mangee.”

“They have a foul odor and an evil presence making the hair on your neck just stand up. His mother must have done an outstanding job of raising him for it to take so long to be noticed. Garnash must not have been able to contain his actions any longer.” Addie’s voice was higher pitched than normal and she appeared nervous.

“Are you okay, Addie?”

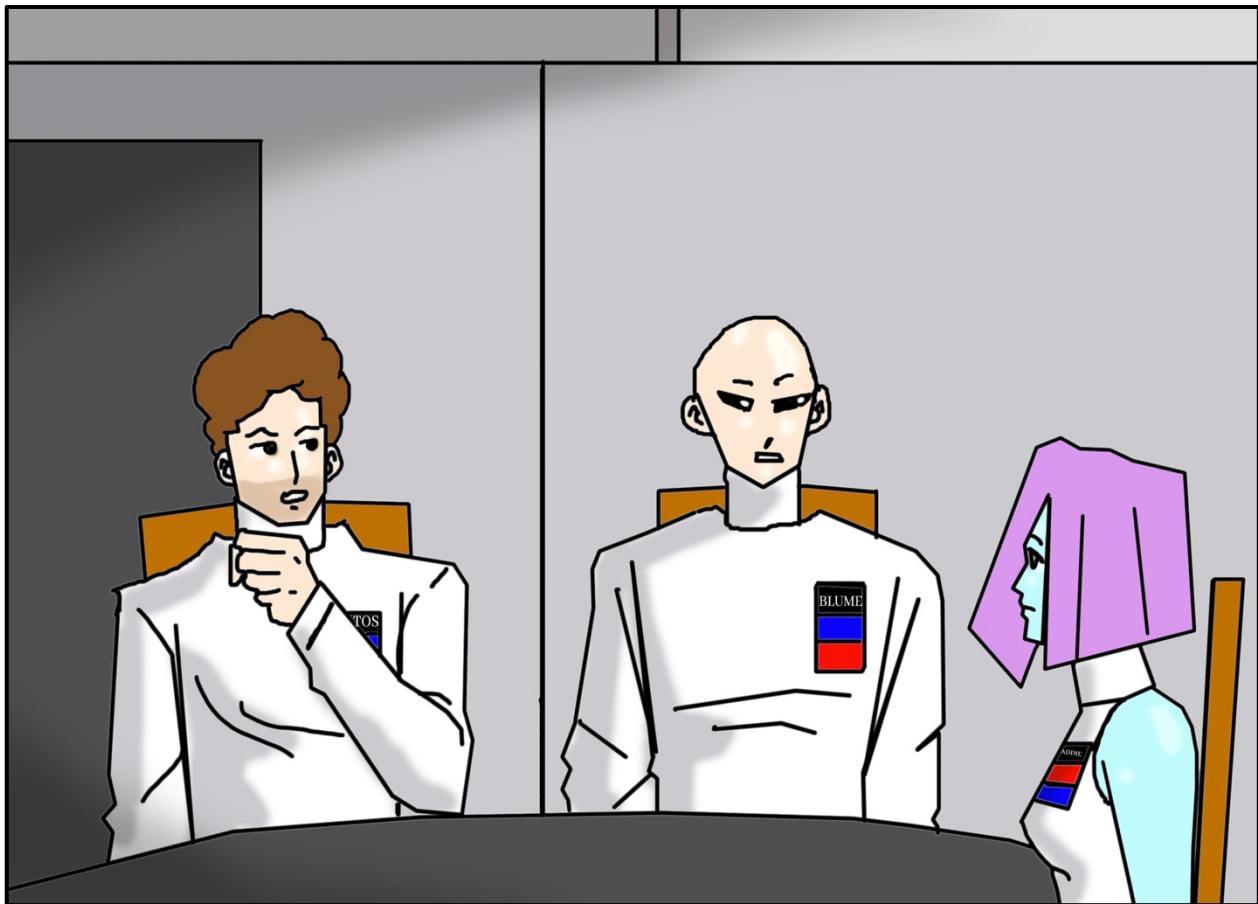
“Yes, Sarantos. I’m fine. Except not as security of the federation because if my sister is in league with a Laxien, we’ve got bigger problems than I initially thought possible.”

“But he isn’t a full Laxien so some of their traits and abilities may not be part of Garnash’s make-up. Unless he’s pulled the Laxien people into the battle too.”

“That’s true Captain. The Laxien usually won’t bother with making war. They feel they’re above the annoyance of it. You know better than anyone else the big egos they have,” said Matt.

Addie said, “I don’t know why a Laxien would rape a Mangee. Usually they’d consider them not worthy enough to make the effort. You don’t suppose there was love involved, do you? The whole thing is inconceivable. Laxien aren’t ones that

usually love anyone of their own race, much less someone of another race and to rape one...what would be their purpose? Doesn't sound right?"



Sarantos rubbed his chin. "I think we should find out what actually happened. Do you think the female Mangee made a deal? What kind of deal would cause her to have sex with a Laxien? That might be the most important question but how can we find out?"

Matt smiled. "I know a Mangee that might be willing to find out for me."

"What kind of deal can you make for them to tell you?"

“Oh, Captain, you just had one of the prime assets I have in my possession. They have an awful sweet tooth. I’m sure I have something worthy of their price and attention.”

“Can you trust him?”

“Trust? Addie, you can’t trust a Mangee but if the deal is sweet enough, you can get them to do your bidding. And it’s not a him, it’s a her.”

He smiled at Matt and looked at Addie whose eyebrows raised high on her forehead.

“So, Matt, what’s her name? How did you meet her?”

“Alright, enough of you two with your inquisitive looks. Yes, I had sex with her, although they don’t like mingling with humans or other races but I’m not any other race now, am I? We met on a starship when I was working as a chef for her cousin, many years ago. She came in one night and you know yada yada, one thing led to another. They’re quite frisky in bed. Sharmaine was quite gorgeous and we get together on occasion. I’ll talk to her - she loves sweets...” His grin was like that of the conspiring Cheshire cat.

“Well, I’m glad you’re willing to sacrifice yourself for the cause, Matt,” said Sarantos.

“Oh, I hear the sarcasm in your voice Captain, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. I’m at team player. I’m that kind of guy, you know always willing to make the sacrifice. I do deserve credit for playing the game don’t I?”

“When can you find out?” Sarantos asked ignoring his question.

“I can go and contact her now. As soon as I find something out, I’ll let you know.”

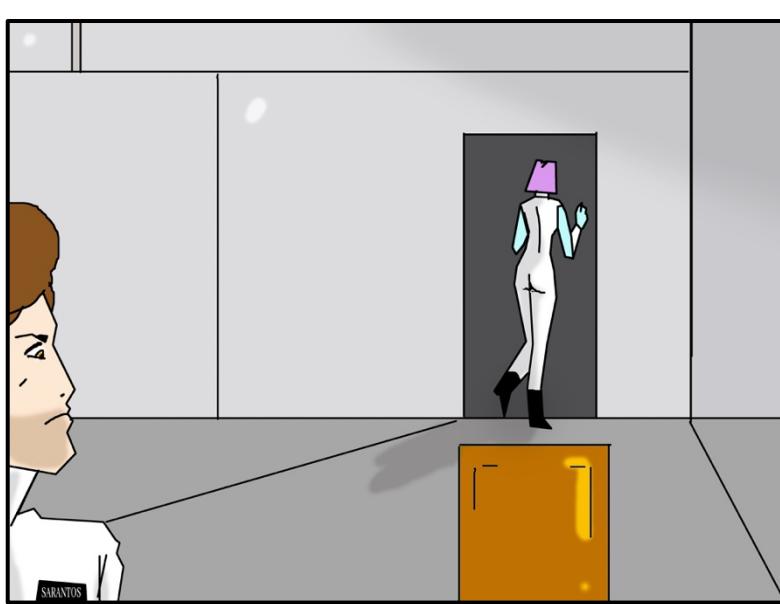
“Thanks, Matt. We’ll set up a meeting within the next two days. Hopefully you’ll have something for us.”

“Hopefully. Later you two love birds.”

Matt left rather abruptly. Addie giggled and shook her head.

“He’s a peach, isn’t he?”

“Yes, Addie, that he is. I’m concerned about all of us and once he gets confirmation, I need to let the federation know about the Laxien. Hopefully someone in the main branch will have a connection to them and be able to access more information. We need to get to the bottom of this quickly.” He frowned. “On second thought, I better let them know as soon as we’re done here. We need to address this asap.”



“You’re right, Captain. I better get back to work. Thanks for dinner. I’ll let you know what I find out.”

He watched her walk out the door. One minute she was here with him and he could see her angelic face and now all that was left was the smell of her perfume and her empty chair. Always that damn empty chair!