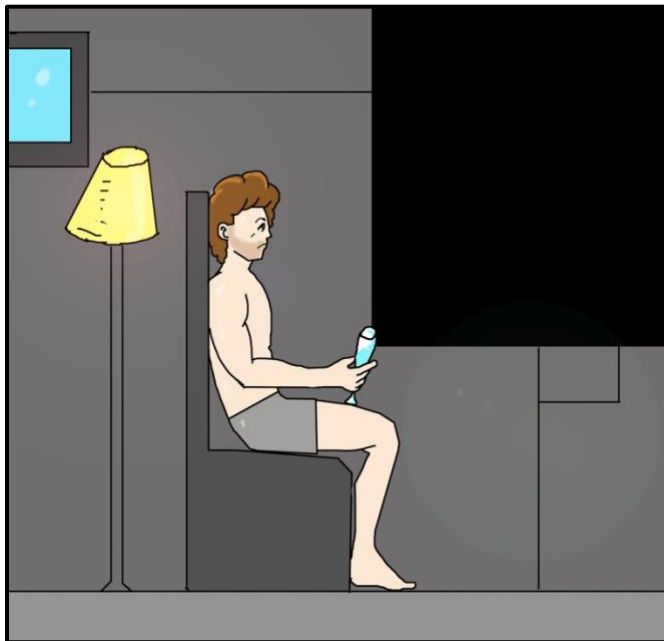


## Chapter 9

### “Coming Home”

The meeting had ended on a good note. If you reveal your flaws, then you'll be embraced. Now it was a week later. Everything was in place. There was nothing more they could do to secure their ship and their lives, short of not stopping at the space station and floating on by hoping no one noticed, but Sarantos knew better.



He sat back with a wily glass of wine and stared out into the blackness. The view from his room was no different than anywhere else on the ship. It was what everyone was now calling the “black soul out there from nowhere”. It felt like they were breathing inside of it unable to escape unless it allowed them to flee its prison, but that would not happen.

He'd just finished dinner and was trying to relax. They were a day out from the station and slowed down their ship to a crawl. Meanwhile, Brel had only left an hour ago on a small ship to infiltrate the station and do reconnaissance. It made sense before they were all put at risk.

Brel's ship was equipped with extra high-tech security devices that were built over the past week to ensure him going in without being detected. However, Sarantos still had his doubts.

His sigh was long and drawn out as he threw his achy legs up on a small cushioned ottoman. His dinner was still digesting. He glanced over at his guitar. He never sang

and played guitar enough anymore. The right words were harder to find in this blackness. Maybe that's what he should write about, the blackness, or his blackness. The seconds go by so slowly, but the minutes go by so fast.

His mind wandered back to the mission. They did not understand what type of security measures this station had in place. Maybe they wouldn't like people sneaking in, and who would? If Brel was caught, it could mean imprisonment or even his death, although Brel was cunning and that might help him. On the other hand, they knew nothing about the creatures of this quadrant. It's not about the window to their world, it's about understanding that world.

Sarantos was all for checking it out. He and Addie never saw eye to eye on this deal, and as head of security she was probably right. He downed the wine left in his glass.

Was he just racing to make the same mistake all over again? What were they doing out here, anyway? If they turned around could they even get back at this point? He drifted to thoughts of home and the simple life he'd left a long time ago.

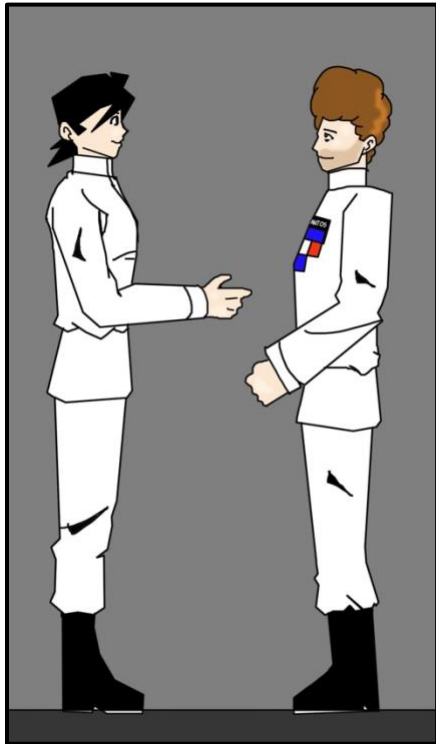
There was a young girl, Sandy. They grew up together, and he always thought they'd marry someday, but it didn't work out as planned. Nothing ever does. How did this become the way his life might end?

Memories flashed back like he was re-living it all over again. Sandy's eyes glistened from tears that filled her eyes and slowly ran down her cheeks. This was the first time since he left that he'd thought about her. Shame on him for that! He broke her heart. She cried uncontrollably as she screamed at him he'd regret leaving and come home someday, but she was wrong. He didn't want to come back to that farming life. It wasn't who he was. Even trapped in this shadowy soul, he was happy with his life. He was happy with Addie, the woman he loved and was glad he'd met. Now, she was his home.

Whenever he was away from her, he made different choices. Whenever they'd meet up again, he always felt like he was coming back home. It wasn't a place, but a person who comforted his heart with homey vibes. She was the 4th string on his cello.

Sandy had been sweet, but she wasn't home for him, or he would've never left.

Sarantos missed his parents though. He loved his parents and always felt supported there, but now Addie and the people of this starship were his home. They all grew at the same rate, equally and together. He wasn't cold; it was just how he felt.



He recalled running away, almost in a rush, to become a Starfleet captain. At first, he thought it was a stupid decision. Sarantos certainly found his share of trouble nearly drowning on the stupidity of his actions. There were girls, trusting the wrong people, mischievous nights, but then he met John Baker. John was a man of integrity who threw him a life boat and saw something in him that Sarantos didn't see in himself.

Being around John also felt like home to him. He loved hanging out with his family in his free time. Sarantos matured a bit finding his way to a new home, one that would support him in the new life he'd chosen.

After five years and graduating the Academy with Honors, he inherited The Chicago. His dream that had become his obsession became a reality in a heartbeat and then everyone on board became his family. It felt right to care for them like a family. His starship felt like home.

It was a matter of where you placed your hat, like the saying goes. His mind wouldn't stop.

Next, Addie became his world and the love of his entire life...home was with her no matter where they were at. A heart in love is always young, and he felt young again. Smiling with the thought of Addie in his eyes, a sense of calm overcame his shoulders. Time lost meaning.

He didn't know how much time he lost but eventually his mind came back to Brel drifting towards the unknown.

Brel had taken a communications device to contact them with constant updates. Though he could teleport back to his ship with a click, Sarantos was still concerned for his friend's safety. Brel was no doubt brave and a gifted asset to the ship. He wouldn't want to lose him on a decision he'd help make.

His eyes closed, and he allowed himself the peace to drift off into the unknown gloom, as the ship moved slowly towards the mysterious space station.

“Sarantos?”

“Wha...ttt?” His head was still foggy when he opened his eyes to see a gorgeous face looking down on him. As she climbed on his lap, her silky hair tickled his chest.



“What are you doing, sitting here alone drinking wine in your underwear?”

He smiled and kissed Addie’s sweet lips. “Waiting for you, obviously,” he said with hushed tones that serenaded her ears, at least he’d hoped it did.

“You devil,” said Addie, kissing

him back.

Sarantos pulled her closer to him and asked, “Have we heard anything from Brel, yet? What time is it anyway?”

“No nothing from Brel, but he just left two hours ago.”

“Well, that explains why my head is so groggy, I barely dozed.”

Addie said, “I’m sorry, I woke you up.”

Sarantos said, “No worries, did you eat? Want some food or spiced wine for refreshment?”

“Some food will be great, and maybe a glass of wine to top it off. What do you have?”

“Anything your heart desires my love. You know I have a replicator, don’t you?”

They both chuckled.

Addie twisted her mouth as her eyes looked up at the ceiling. “Hum, how about some deliciously cheesy pasta, with organic extra virgin oil, ripe tomatoes, fresh basil, and a bit of that Planet Earth feta?”

“Coming up.”

Sarantos moved to the replicator and soon the wonderful aroma filled his quarters.

“Here you go, beautiful lady.”

She reached out and took the warm bowl and slowly smelled the fragrant puffs of heat rising from the dish.

She was sexy, especially doing that. He tried to ignore his own request and instead poured her a generous glass of wine.

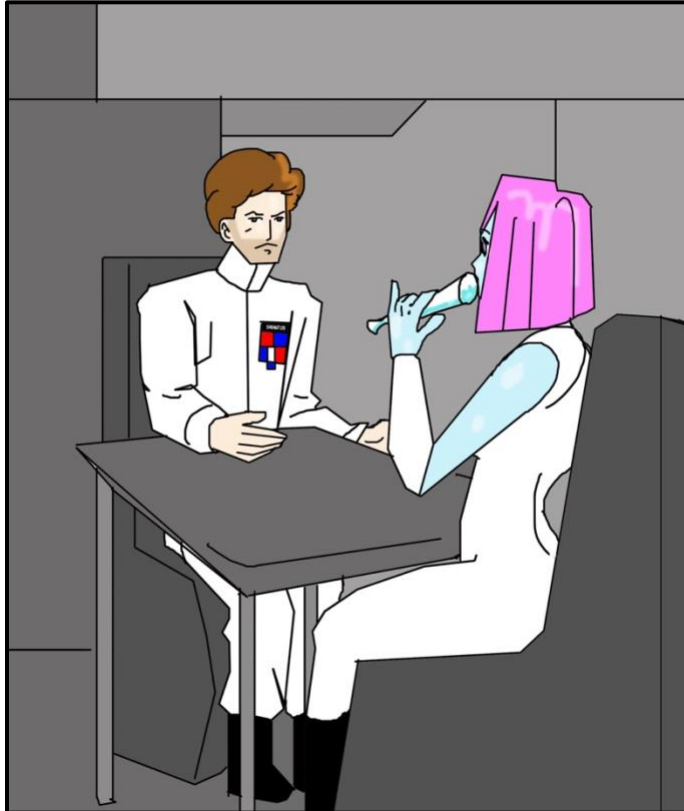
Addie eagerly took the glass he handed her and said, “Thanks.”

“I was pondering the decision to send Brel.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Well, Captain, it’s a little late to ponder, however, even though I wanted to bypass the station, I think we made the right decision if we make contact. Brel can take care of himself. He has lots of skills.” She winked at him.

Well, what the hell did that mean? He knew the Bladian race were unusual and there was a lot the Captain didn't know about Brel, but he had a feeling that Addie knew more than she let on about Brel.

“So, what do you know? Come on out with it Addie.”



The side of her mouth curled up as she took a bite of her dinner, watching him intently and knowing quite well that he was anticipating her giving up secrets. His patience was wearing thin as she chewed and chewed and chewed some more. Then she grabbed a napkin and slowly wiped her mouth before taking a long sip of wine.

She coughed, holding up a finger. “Just a minute.”

She was ruthless.

“Alright, Addie, enough. What's the scoop?”

“Really, Captain, I can't offer you any more information. They're a secretive race, and Brel is a private person. If he wants to share with you, he will. I've known him a long time and we've shared a great friendship, not to mention I am Head of Security and on a need to know basis with my crew.”

She continued to eat, ignoring his look of frustration.

“You’re such a tease! Well, I suppose you’re right and I’ll just have to wait for all to be revealed or ask him myself.”

Addie looked up and said, “That’s the spirit, and this food is divine.”

He hoped he wouldn’t end up in a corner with no way out, after he decided they needed to explore the space station. He could find himself dented up, but if they succeeded, he would enjoy the taste of success, but if they lost Brel or Addie, it would be nothing but a waste.

He watched Addie enjoy her meal and realized that as a Starship Captain, sometimes the only pal he had was pain, no one loved him for him. As a captain, he had to make the right decision, being in a worse position than Sonny and his group of robots. They were programmed to perform. He wasn’t programmed, not yet, but he still had to perform. There was no freedom for him except in the shadows and tears of the rain.

“Sarantos, what’s with that look on your face? You look kind of angry, and weird... lost, confused or no maybe searching for something you can’t find or have.”

Well, she hit that right on the head. He was searching for something he couldn’t have or ever find in the position he was in, in his life as Captain. Maybe, if he got out of there, he might reconsider what he might want to do with his life, but could he give this up?

He looked at Addie who was just finishing her meal and smiled.

She saw something in him. Maybe it was the fact he was alone, yet she was his home, but even at home things go wrong and can get twisted, maybe home is more of a comfort zone.



“Addie, do you get me, at all?” He blurted that out and wasn’t sure why.

Her mouth pursed and her brows went down to her eyes. “What does that mean? Of course, I get you, maybe not always, but no one ever truly gets anyone else, do they?”

She could be right, maybe he always over-thought everything. His mind overanalyzed always thinking ahead and maybe he didn’t always enjoy moments he should. Instead of enjoying this moment, he concentrated on the pain and the isolation, and the poison ran through his veins trying to rip out his soul out.



She watched him closely and spoke again. “Sarantos? Are you alright?”

There was concern in her voice. Her words cleared his poison. She was his home, his love and he should allow her to do so.

“I’m sorry, Addie,” he said when he saw the anguish on her face.

“Sarantos,” she said and moved toward him, “I love you and your pain is mine. You should be okay with your decision to send Brel. You have to be. I am. In the end your decision is what matters, and I feel you took everything into consideration. What will be will be.”

He managed a grin.

“Thanks, Addie. I guess sometimes I ache for the simpler days. My mood swings seem like a daily occurrence.”

“What, have there ever been simpler days? There’s always some drama with life, that’s what makes it life. It hits you, so you know you’re alive. Enjoy your moments, because that’s all you have in the end. No regrets, just moments.”

He leaned over and kissed her on the mouth. She smelled of tomato and garlic.

“I love you, you know. You give it to me straight, that’s all I can ever ask for since I’m a head case. Sometimes, I can’t get out of my own way. I thought I shouldn’t stay in my current position as Captain, because I’m not stable enough, but now I know I have to. I’m here and I will take this challenge and embrace the outcome, no matter what.”

Addie laughed and her laughter lit up the room and settled around his heart like a cozy blanket.

“I’m a straight shooter, and you know, Captain, I hate it when you feel sorry for yourself. I never liked the self-pity mode. Life is life and there’s good with the bad. Our decisions reflect what we desire, and who we are. That’s all it is, nothing more, nothing less. Enjoy who you are.”

“Yes, I will start doing that. Thanks Addie.”

She giggled. “Oh, Captain you’re never alone, not even when the four walls are the only thing with eyes. You should be your best company.”

“Yes, you’re right, I am.”

They both laughed so hard it ached, but then the door opened and in came Block.

“Lieutenant?”

“Block what’s going on?”

“We’ve heard from Brel. He’s still on track and has noticed no one tracking him. His ship is moving quickly and should arrive within five hours.”

“Good,” said Addie.

Sarantos looked at her and felt cutely bashful.

“Brel is the plan,” Captain Sarantos said.

“Thanks, Block, but next time please knock, this is the Captain’s private quarters,” said Addie.



“Sorry, yes, Lieutenant.” Block turned on his heels and left the room quickly.

Sarantos looked at Addie and tilted his head not hiding his grin. “Wow, you just hurt the big guy’s feelings, Lieutenant.”

Her brows twisted, and her expression spoke confusion. “I’m not sure what you mean?”

“Well, I mean that you reprimanded him in front of his Captain.”

“Really?”

Her voice, although questioning held an edge of sarcasm; he couldn't help but chuckle, causing her to raise her arm to hit him on his right arm.

“No, not really,” Sarantos said laughing over the words while trying to get away from the attacking Lieutenant. “Who needs coffee? I have love.”

“You think you're so funny, don't you?”

He said, “Of course.”

“I'm off, so you want to go to the Creative Room and do some mountain climbing, just to take the edge off?”

Sarantos let his mouth fall open before he closed it and said, “Really?”

Addie turned towards him and shook her head biting her lower lip before releasing it quickly sending a kissing sound into his ears, that quite frankly turned him on.

She noticed his look and stared him in the eyes and said, “No, and I mean it. We need to go get another form of exercise.”

“Spoiled sport,” Sarantos said.

“We can do something else, if you don’t want to do the rock climbing.”

“No, that’s fine, I could use the stimulation, not that we have had none lately, not of the good kind, anyway.”

She moved into him and pulled him close. “I know, Sarantos, this journey has been long, that’s for sure. I’m sorry you’re not able to go home.”

He pulled her closer and kissed her forehead, smelling her hair. Sarantos sighed and then softly said, “Baby, every time I see you, and hear you, that’s home, that’s where I belong, you are my home, best thing is home moves with me. Home is, so they say, where the heart is, and you have mine. I’m most comfortable with you, Addie.”



He felt the tightness of her body relax in his arms, as she kissed him passionately on the mouth.

Addie then slid her tongue to his ear, slowly caressing his skin on the way there. He felt her warm breath that sent waves of tingles and goose bumps through him and down into his leg.

“Sarantos, no one ever cared for me the way you always did and you never stopped me when I needed time away from you, you stayed low key, knowing I’d come home to you, my darling. You’re my home, as well. I have nothing else to seek, no one else and nowhere else I need to go. You are it, my home, my world.”

God, he loved her and wanted her, forget the stupid mountain climbing.

“I want you,” he said.

She laughed and pulled away from him. “I know,” she said looking at his manly hood before continuing, “but that’s not happening, you can’t get out of a good mountain climb that easy. What say we hit the snow slopes of Centra, that’s a good hard climb?”

Centra was a beautiful area on the planet Sibling that only hosted winter events and not much else. The planet was inhabitable, but several races had jumped into making some fast dollars by setting up resorts for those who enjoyed mountain climbing and skiing. Not everyone had a Creative Room on their space station or ship to accommodate them without making the actual trip. It was a popular vacation spot, although he’d only gone there in the Creative Room with Addie. Her experiences on the planet added to the fun and adventure.

“You love that place, Addie. I enjoy it, but not sure if my soul is as much about the cold as yours, however, you look hot in your ski clothes and sweaters so I’ll accompany you there.”

“Yes, I figured that’s the only reason you’d go. White or pink? We can stay the night in the resort and you know, maybe there’ll be a little something in it for you, Captain.”

“Oh, how you tease me, white... and bribery is your specialty!”

Addie said, “I thought by then we might hear from Brel and in the meantime, it’ll take your mind off of the anxiety.”

He nodded. “Okay, sure, you’re right, I’m in.” It takes a mirror made up of others to reflect back our true purpose.

“Yay!” She jumped in the air and headed to the door. “I will go pack an overnight bag, meet you in room 7 in about 20.” Then she was gone, and the swish of the door sounded final behind her enthusiasm.

He almost felt lost without her in his space. It was empty. She was the kind of person who lit up a room so much that when she left, the silence almost drowned him.

He paused for a minute to breathe in her remaining perfume and then went to gather things he needed for their overnight adventure.

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Addie was already inside and had the place set up. The resort was at the bottom of a mountain covered in snow. He disliked the snow-capped mountains, because you never knew when there would be a slide, although security measures were part of the room, making this experience safer than the real thing.

There were, what he called fake people (projections) moving about creating a real-like atmosphere, and the smoke was billowing out of the chimney inviting him inside, away from the below zero temps. He walked over to the large

double wooden doors and went inside.



A female Mangee greeted him. They were much more trustworthy than their male counterparts, typically for their love of money. A lot of Mangee owned these said resorts.

Scurrying about were several more female Mangee that appeared to be part of the good housekeeping team. One reminded him of Sharmaine, Matt's good friend and bed partner. The desk clerk was an Olivian female whose blue face lit up with the sun hitting her skin on one side of her face. He didn't need to go see her, because the main hall opened into the bar area where Addie was sitting in knit sweater, ski hat, and high boots, chatting with an Olivian male whose blue tuft was showing interest in his better half.

He walked into the dimly lit bar area, and away from the blazing fire that was an enticing sitting area in the main room.

The bartender was a human male, physically fit and attractive. Addie had meticulously planned this place. He wondered if she ever came here without him and played some hanky-panky in the snowdrifts.

Moving completely into the room exposed more of Addie's play toys. Sexy men of various races lined the bar, ones that women in various races would consider them to die for, or to enjoy, that's for sure. Addie, Addie, Addie, what a woman. He honestly couldn't blame her, after all her race had a high sexual thirst, almost unquenchable.

He wasn't beyond reproach; he enjoyed his psychiatrist occasionally too but that was now over because it was real. If Addie enjoyed these men, it was all in fun, they were, after all just projections, handsome but projections just the same. He couldn't help but think they might be better at sex than he was, because they were exactly what Addie would program but not challenge like him.

She was gorgeous. The men probably didn't need programming to be enthralled with her anyway. She was a sex toy walking around for all to see, but also an amazing woman with brains, wisdom, and logic that would turn on any normal male of any race. Two human men approached her and offered to buy her drinks. He sat at a table in the corner and observe them for a while. She was pre-occupied and hadn't noticed his arrival.

He noticed she allowed them to flirt relentlessly with her and even encouraged it. He loved her and knew he'd forgive her these cheap flirtations. She forgave him for worse, like when Kitara had sex with him, although he didn't have control. Regardless, she could've blamed him for not wanting to have control as an excuse and not once did she suggest that, not once.

The one human male who looked like a dark haired duplicate to the blonde earth actor Blake Brake, was toned in his tight sweater and decided he couldn't keep his hands off of the woman next to him. He ran his hand down her back and then pulled her around and kissed her hard on the mouth.

Sarantos felt his cheeks heat up and he almost stood up, but realized this was a hologram, and because of that he felt a little turned on. Addie was gorgeous, a sex goddess. He felt a little guilty for getting some cheap thrills from watching her at a distance.



She didn't stop him, that fake Blake. In fact, she wrapped her legs around him and did a move he'd never seen her do until now. He wasn't sure if he could've handled it but watching her was intriguing, not to mention a total turn on. These holograms could handle anything that Addie could dish out. Her race was unique and sexually adaptable to unusual acts.

Her exposed skin shimmered and tiny shimmers of purple lights raced around her skin like the old Christmas lights that twinkled in earth's old movies. She began screaming, hell her clothes weren't off, but clearly something was happening.

He was aroused, but just watched her achieve something pure that she couldn't reach with him, not because he didn't want to, but because being human limited them. He was glad she had somewhere to go where she could open up her exotic ecstasies.

He kept silent. In that moment he somehow realized she loved him despite his inabilities and his failures as a human male. He was her home even if that home didn't meet her entire expectations. Sarantos didn't think many could, except maybe her own kind, but she wasn't fond of her own kind.

She looked towards the door, possibly wondering if he would come in any moment and see her in that position, all the while still screaming. All he could think of was, let it out, baby, you need the relief.

She was all he would ever know from this day forward. He'd never leave her, or push her away. She was stronger than he realized and her love for him was greater than he could've ever imagined.

He was smiling for her, and realized how he couldn't contain himself any longer, and stood up.

She immediately saw him, because her face was pointed in his direction, her eyes searched his and the sadness of them hurt his heart. He smiled to remove the pain in her soul for him.

Addie wrinkled her nose and searched his eyes again, this time she penetrated them deeply looking for signs of anguish. He showed her none.

Walking to her, he noticed she was frozen and still wrapped around the human hologram that was still enjoying her being there.

He stood next to her and smiled.

“Sarantos,” she said with a sad whisper.

He took her hand and pulled her down taking her in his arms and making love to her the good old human way.

She cried.

“It’s okay, my darling, my home that lives in me is yours. I’ll never leave you, I love you and completely understand your needs. I’m good, we’re good.”

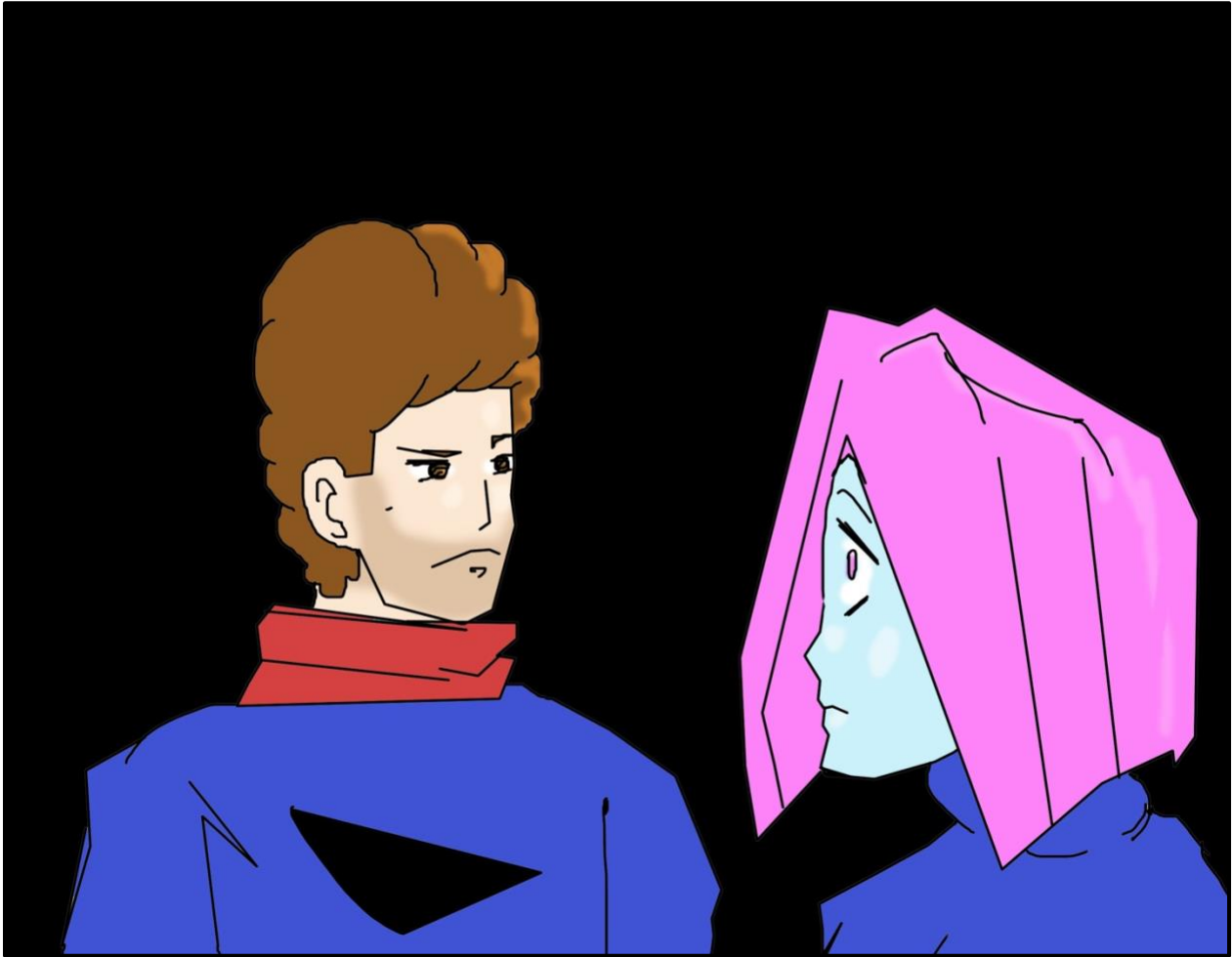
She grabbed him and wept holding him so tight he could’ve never got away if he tried.

“I love you,” she said.

“I know. My emotions come and go, and it doesn’t matter, because you’ve grounded me, we free each other, our breath and the ground beneath us bind us as one. Trust me, I’m not perfect. All I want is for you to be happy because all you do is make me happy.”

“Captain.”

Damn the IC. It was John.



“Yes, John.”

“We’ve heard from Brel.”

Sarantos looked at Addie and her eyes widened.