

Walking Death

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by Kyle Eggleston

Kate Monson was resting in her quarters curled up with a good book. Well, she thought it was a good book at least and that's all which mattered. Kate had read the book at least a dozen times, it was one of her favorites. The title, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. It was a classic. She was at the point where Scrooge was finally understanding the meaning of Christmas. It was her favorite part of the book. The story never grew old on her.

"Atta boy Scrooge." Kate said. "You're getting it."

"Killpack to Commander Monson." The security chief's voice came over the comm unit.

Setting the book down, Kate reached for her communications unit. She couldn't recall Jeff calling her after hours in the past. Something must be up. "Go for Kate." She said into the device.

"Sorry to bother you ma'am, but I saw something on the news channel that I thought might interest you. Channel 3." Jeff said.

Kate turned on her vidset and tuned into channel three. What she saw was impossible. On the screen was a man she knew, a man she knew very well. It was her ex husband who had been sentenced to prison for the destruction of a small Moon colony six years ago. Now it would appear he was out and about foot loose and fancy free.

"What the hell?!" Kate stammered. She stood from the couch, her forgotten book falling to the floor.

"Isn't that your ex?" Jeff asked.

Kate nodded, and then remembered he couldn't see her. "Yes, yes it is. Thank you lieutenant. Monson out." She walked up to the vidset and scowled. When the court trial had happened, she had been told he would be put away for life without the opportunity for parole. Well something had obviously changed over those years, she was not pleased.

"I can only thank the parole board on their swift execution of justice." Kate's ex said. "I have become a better man due to my incarceration. I am a changed person."

Kate switched the vidset off. She didn't want to listen to anymore of it. Kate couldn't even get back into her book. She was upset now. Kate wished Jeff hadn't of called her with the news. It bothered her that bad.

"Computer, lights." Kate said. The lights in her quarters turned off. As she got ready for bed her mind was running a thousand miles a second it seemed. Laying down, she tried to get comfortable. It was no use, she would be up tonight for sure. Kate hated the thought that her ex still managed to get under her skin.

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Norev and Jack O'Brien were seated in her quarters cross legged on the floor. They were facing each other. Norev was teaching Jack the Mind Walking ways she had learned as a child and managed to nurture as the years grew with her.

"Take hold of my hand." Norev said. She held out her hand palm up. Jack took hold of her hand and held it lightly.

Images of Norev's past flashed before Jack's eyes. Her most recent incarceration at the prison ship orbiting Dubor, her as a child growing up. He saw some rather intimate personal memories that she was not likely to share openly with just anyone. In turn she too saw into his past and memories that he held close to his heart.

The emotions were overwhelming. Jack let go of Norev's hand and breathed harshly. It took him a moment to regain his composure. Once he did, he stood up and backed away from Norev. What on earth had he just experienced?

Norev remained calm. "I'm sorry Jack. The emotional connection is high during such a Mind Walk. I should have prepared you for it better." She said. "It get easier with time."

Jack hesitated. "I saw things. I saw you as a child, I saw you when you became a delegate for your home world. How did I experience those moments in time? I wasn't around for any of them."

"The Mind Walk is a sharing of experiences." Norev explained. "It is a very intimate experience. You could say it is a form of telepathy. We do not have telepathic abilities in the traditional sense of the word. But we can share these experiences with those whom we feel a connection to." She held out a hand again. "We experienced something unique in that prison. We bonded telepathically."

Jack didn't remember bonding with Norev on a telepathic level. "I was alone for over a month before I ran into you and Obshi." Jack said. "We weren't together."

Norev shook her head. "That's not true Jack. We were in that prison for a lot longer than a month. At first they had us all together in one cell. Then they divided us. You don't remember it?"

Jack shook his head. Sitting back down on the floor, he was confused. "You're telling me I don't remember correctly what happened? What about the station's chronological clock? It even shows that we were gone for a month."

"The Dubor don't see time the same way as we do. According to your calendar, we were gone for over six months." Norev explained. "I thought you knew."

Jack was taken back for a moment. "One of Earth's months, is six months on Dubor?" He asked for clarification.

Norev nodded. "Yes Jack. That's exactly right." She sighed at the thought. To not understand the passage of time was something she had not experienced before. She couldn't fathom having roughly five months of your life vanish from your memory as Jacks had. Norev couldn't believe he didn't remember the time they had spent together in the same cell in orbit of Dubor. They had been through so much together.

Again Norev gestured to her hand. "Take my hand. Let's see if I can help surface those memories you are missing."

Jack hesitated. Doc Allen had given him a clean bill of health. He had run every scan known to man including his mind. Nothing had indicated he had missing memories floating around in his brain. It wasn't something that could be taken lightly. He wasn't sure he wanted to have those memories back. But on the other side, he needed to know.

Taking hold of Norev's hand, he reached for her other hand as well. She accepted his reach and grabbed his hand tightly. "This might be more intense." She explained. "I will have to dig deeper this time to have those memories surface."

Jack nodded. "Do it." He held on tight as Norev started the Mind Walk. This time around the emotions were much more intense. Instead of seeing Norev's history, Jack was seeing things that had happened to him.

He watched as Ketish had visited him on more than one occasion interrogating him on Earth's defenses. The station's defense systems. Command codes. Anything to get an upper hand over Earth and their forces. Jack managed to deflect each question with his own question regarding the Dubor. Each time it made Ketish angrier. Each interrogation session ended in Ketish killing Jack only to bring him back alive again. Jack had died countless times during his stay in prison.

Jack gasped at the knowledge that was being remembered by his mind. He let go of Norev's hands severing the connection between the two. "Oh my hell." Jack whispered. "What did they do to me?!"

Norev hadn't expected to see all of that. She knew Jack had been taken for interrogation a lot of the time over the six months, but she didn't know he had been killed over and over again and then revived.

"There is a phrase among our people for what you have experienced." Norev said. "The Walking Death. You are neither alive nor dead but stuck somewhere in the middle." She sighed heavily. Stories of the Walking Death had mostly been rumors, but here was someone who was living proof of it. She didn't know how to react.

Jack couldn't help but say "They killed me." Over and over again. It was worse than the teleportation deaths, he had actually come back from death on multiple occasions. He could remember every time they killed him. How it felt, what it felt to be brought back alive just to be killed all over again. Each time more painful than the last.

"Excuse me." Jack said as he stood up. "I must be going." He exited Norev's quarters without further word. The psych team were going to have a field day with this, he was sure of it.

Norev's door chime rang.

"Yes, come in." She said.

Obshi entered her quarters. "So, he knows. I watched him leave here in a hurry."

Norev nodded. "Yes, he knows."

Obshi nodded in satisfaction. "Perhaps he will join our cause after all." He said. "It is only logical for him to choose to side with us in this upcoming war. I cannot see it happening any other way."

Norev shook her head. "I wouldn't be so sure Obshi. Humans have a tendency to be stubborn, more than we are or the Dubor for that matter. It's a character trait that takes some getting used to. In time we will see where his loyalty lies. With his own government or with us. But it will take time."

"Of course." Obshi said. "I meant no disrespect."

"And none was taken." Norev said. "I am just reminding you of your place in the grand plan of things. You are excused."

Obshi left Norev's quarters leaving her alone to consider all that had transpired. In time she would also learn how Obshi and his crew managed to live over one hundred cycles on a ship capable of only sub light speeds. Their FTL had failed at some point in their journey.

They should have all died long ago. It would seem there was more than one mystery to unfold here, and she was determined to figure it all out if it was the last thing she did.

O'Brien found himself at Grilka's quarters. She had been there when he was in prison. She had helped him escape. If anyone knew anything about what had happened, she might have an idea. It was at least a good place to start.

Answering the door, Grilka was surprised to see Jack standing there. "Dorf, why are you here? I thought you humans slept at this time of night. Which seems to be very inefficient. Sleeping for eight hours at a time when you could be up doing something productive. Like taking a bath, or watering your dying plants. Please, come in."

O'Brien walked inside Grilka's quarters. They were pretty spartan. No coverings on the walls, no photos of anything, no art. A bed was in the corner of the room. Two bar stools at the counter in the kitchen. The rest remained empty. It was quite a change from when he first assigned her quarters. The quarters he had assigned her had been full of furniture. Jack wondered what had changed. But that wasn't at the top of his concerns at the moment. He wanted answers. Jack didn't know if Grilka had answers, but she was the only Dubor on the station. It was a good place to start.

"Did you know?" Jack asked point blank. "Did you know they interrogated me, and killed me?"

Grilka nodded her head. "I had heard they were planning on doing that to some human they had captured. I didn't know it was you Dorf."

"Stop calling me that." Jack said. He was irritated. "My name is Jack. Remember? Jack?"

Grilka backed away. In all her time knowing Dorf...Jack, she had never known him to yell or snap at her like he just did. This was a side of him she had never seen before. Grilka did not like it one bit.

Jack saw the fear in her eyes. He raised his hands up and apologized. "I'm sorry." He said. "I have just learned what happened to me in that damned prison, and I am upset. Angry is more like it. I didn't mean to take it out on you. Forgive me."

Grilka took a step forward and smiled. There was the nice man she had met in that cell over a month ago. Walking over to a bar stool, she slid them out and patted one for Jack to sit down on. "Please sit. It is customary for your people to sit while you speak to one another." She said. "I have been learning your customs. I must admit, some are strange."

Jack sat down on the bar stool Grilka had pulled out for him. "How did they do it?" Jack asked. "How did they kill me and then bring me back to life? Some form of CPR?"

“CPR...” Grilka said. “I do not know this term. We have machines that can bring back the dead, but only if they have been dead for a few minutes. No one has come back from the dead who has been still for more than an hour. It is how the Dubor manage to live long lifespans.” She added rather proud of the fact. “Something I will not be able to experience since I am here now.”

Jack ran his fingers through his hair. How could a race, who claimed to be civilized, do this to another race? How could they get away with it? Certainly there must be some kind of moral compass to guard against such atrocities. These were aliens he was dealing with though, maybe they didn’t have such a moral code or compass by which they guided themselves. He couldn’t fathom the thought.

“The one called Ketish, he ordered the executions and the revivals.” Grilka explained. “I simply followed my orders. Once I couldn’t handle it anymore, I bought your way out of that vicious cycle. In exchange you helped me escape them. Those butchers.”

Jack was stunned. “You bought my safety.” He said. “You made it so they would stop the torture?”

Grilka nodded her head slowly. “Yes, I couldn’t stand seeing them do that to an innocent such as yourself. The cattle are a different story, but you. You are different. I had to do something.”

Jack wished he could experience a Mind Walk with Grilka. There was something about her. She was trusting of people who she was conditioned to be afraid of. Strangers from the sky as it were. No, Grilka was unique in that manner. Jack was grateful for that uniqueness. It might have very well saved his life.

Grilka placed a hand on Jack’s leg. “I hope you are not mad with me.”

Jack rested a hand on Grilka’s hand and shook his head. “Mad? Never.” He said. “You saved my life. I owe you one.”

Grilka looked to Jack with a childlike innocence and curiosity. “Owe me one what?”

Jack chuckled at the notion. “It’s a figure of speech.” He said. “Never mind, it doesn’t matter.”

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The next morning, Kate was seated in a general commons area eating breakfast. News had spread all over the station of what her ex had done, how he managed to get off the hook

and everything. It was not something she looked forward to discussing with anyone and she made that clear.

Jeff Killpack, the station security chief, approached the table Kate was sitting at. "Mind if I join you commander?" Jeff asked with a friendly cheerful tone in his voice.

Kate nodded. "Go for it." She said as she ate a bite of egg that was sitting on her plate.

Jeff looked at the slop on his plate and compared it to the almost gourmet food on Kate's plate. He knew being higher up the chain of command had its privileges, but he didn't know food was one of them. He figured he could go for a nice over easy egg right about now. But he would have to deal with the, he thought it was oatmeal on his plate. Nah, couldn't be oatmeal, it was too chunky. Whatever it was, it had all the nutrients he needed to get through his shift.

"So, how are you holding up commander?" Jeff asked.

Kate shrugged at the question. How was she supposed to be holding up? She assumed she was doing just fine. A little on edge, but other than that she was good. "Fine." She said. "I'm fine." Kate took another bite of egg.

Jeff shoved a spoonful of slop into his mouth. The texture alone wanted to make him gag, but he managed to swallow it down without a problem. "That's good." He said. "I'm putting out a bulletin station wide. If your ex even steps foot on this station, I want to know about it."

Kate shook her head. "No chief, that's not necessary." She said. "He's probably too busy with the Moon as it is. Planning on blowing up another small colony or moving onto higher priced targets. I'm sure he won't show up here."

Jeff nodded. "Well, just in case I want to be ready. I want you to feel safe."

"Thank you chief." Kate smiled at him with a warm smile.

Finishing her plate, Kate stood and readied herself to leave. She would start her shift early in C&C that day, nothing like work to keep her mind off of the world around her.

Jeff watched her go. Tapping his comm unit, he called down to security. "Hey, remember that order I gave earlier? Double it." He said before closing the channel. If someone wanted to get to Kate, they would have to go through him and his crew. No exceptions.

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O'Brien woke up on the floor of Grilka's quarters. They had spent the entire night talking to the point it had gotten so late he didn't feel like heading back to his own quarters. Grilka had offered to share her bed with him, but he declined stating it wouldn't be very gentlemanly of him to do so. He opted for a blanket and pillow on the floor.

Looking at the time, he noticed he was late for a briefing with some general from Earth. It was someone he hadn't heard of before. This was not the best way to get on the good side of a general he had never met before. He quietly slipped out the door leaving Grilka to sleep in peace.

Rushing to his office, O'Brien managed to stall the general by telling him he was having communications problems on his end and that it would be cleared up momentarily. It seemed to work, the lie that is. He would pay penance later on Sunday when church services rolled around on the station. Jack had been meaning to visit the church since it had been established. He heard good things about it, that it was very welcoming to all kinds of religions. Earth had so many religions to choose from, one church couldn't fit all its needs; but it sure as hell tried to.

As the general's face appeared on the monitors in Jack's office, Jack winced. He recognized the general now. He had met him in battle during the Civil War. As Jack remembered it he had given the general a run for his money. Beat the pants off him causing him to retreat. It had been a major victory for the war effort and the winning side. He was sure the general remembered events differently. But that was in the past, surely the general wouldn't hold such a thing against Jack, would he? Jack was soon to find out.

"General" Jack said. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"You son of a bitch." The general said. "First you catch me with my britches down during combat, and now you delay a meeting? Either you're bucking for promotion or want to get thrown in the brig." He laughed. "It's good to see you again Jack. Those major stripes look good on your uniform. Much better than a captain who outsmarted me."

Jack let go a sigh of relief. No hard feelings were had, that was good news. "Thank you sir." Jack replied with a smile "If I may say so sir, you just had an off day. Could have happened to anyone."

"Maybe." The general replied. "But I didn't call to rehash old war stories long behind us." He said. "I understand you have a Dubor problem on your hands."

Jack nodded. At least someone was reading the updates he was sending back to Earth in his communiques. "Yes sir. You could say that sir. The Dubor have erected a small settlement on Shuka soil. So far two Dubor are inhabiting the settlement. I expect more to follow. Just like they did over a hundred years ago during their first war."

“Dammit Jack.” The general said. “This is not good news. We might have to pull your forces out in order to stay neutral.” He paused. “I know they took you hostage as well as an ambassador and a delegate from an unprovoked strike on their home world.”

“Yes sir.” Jack confirmed the report. It was all there in the official records from his gun’s camera. There wasn’t a way of hiding the information from the higher ups. Jack had to be honest about what was happening on the edge of the frontier, no matter the cost.

“I plan on bringing my flagship out there to your station within the next couple of weeks.” He continued. “Show our flag as it were. Maybe make the Dubor think twice about attacking the Shuka home world while we’re on patrol.”

“I’ll take any help I can get.” Jack said. “Thank you sir.”

“Jack” The general said. “We might have been fighting on the opposite sides during the war. But that’s behind us now. We’re on the same side. I just wanted to get that out in the open. I’ll be in touch. O’Neil out.”

O’Neil, that was his name. Jack thought. He couldn’t figure out for the life of him why he didn’t remember the general’s name. Oh well, it didn’t matter now. Seems to be water under the bridge. Jack was relieved at that point. Sometimes working alongside those who you fought against was difficult. He didn’t need anymore of that going on in his life.

Sitting down in his chair, he began reading over reports. The dockers guild demanded more money for their time and services. Money he didn’t have to allocate towards them. It was always one thing or another and right now he didn’t want to have to deal with that. Setting the paper aside, Jack turned his attention to a more urgent matter regarding his first officer. He sighed as he read the report. Jack didn’t need some old ex husband causing trouble on his station. Especially that of a known terrorist. Leaning back in his chair he wish he would have stayed in bed.

The news report was five days old, Mr. Monson could easily have been on his way to the station already and no one would be the wiser.

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Down in docking port twenty-six a man exited a transport, he looked around. So this was the famous Crimson Gamma Space Station he had heard about. To be honest he thought it would have been bigger than it was. There was something about it that just didn’t star struck him like he wanted. He was sure it would go away eventually, but for now he just wasn’t feeling it.

A security officer approached the man. "Welcome to Crimson Gamma." He said as he checked the man's profile against his record of known suspects. "Business or pleasure?" He accepted the man's passport and ran it against a handheld computer device in his hand.

The man smiled. "A little of both." He said. "Here primarily for business. I'm from a Moon colony looking to expand my business." He accepted his passport back and continued to smile.

"Everything checks out." The security guard said. "Welcome to Crimson Gamma Mister Gerelli."

"Thank you." The man said, he continued on his way through customs. As he didn't have anything to declare, his trip through customs was rather quick. Gerelli turned a corner and came face to face with a computer terminal. A few keystrokes here and a few commands there, he was in.

"Locate Commander Kate Monson." Gerelli ordered. The computer picked up the information he was in search of and relayed that information to the terminal. According to the computer, the commander was in her quarters. It was even nice enough to tell him where her quarters were. Section Gamma Six-Three. Gerelli scanned the station map and found where her quarters were located. He took the most direct route.

Kate was in her quarters brushing her hair as she got ready for the day. Kate had the day off, she was planning on spending it relaxing and doing some light chores around her quarters that needed to be done. She had been so busy taking care of the station, Kate had forgotten to take care of herself. She was drained, tired, and exhausted from worrying about everyone's needs but her own.

As her door chimed, Kate sighed. She really was not up for any kind of company. "Enter." Kate commanded to the door. It slid open.

Gerelli walked into her quarters. "Commander Monson." He said. "Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Jim Gerelli. I am a former associate of your ex husbands. I understand he was released from prison rather unexpectedly."

Kate placed her hands on her hips. "You read the news, good for you."

Jim chuckled. "Oh he called me directly from prison on the day he was to be released. I had no choice *but* to know what was going on." He paused placing his hands in his pockets. "We didn't leave on good terms. He hates my guts. I don't have to tell you, you're in danger."

"Tell me something I don't know." Kate said.

Jim nodded. "Like I said, I don't have to tell you. He has a plan in motion to kidnap you I'm afraid." He added. "I don't want to see that happen. I'm here to protect you."

“You’re here to protect me? From my ex.” Kate repeated. “What can you do that my security team can’t?”

Jim shrugged. “I know how he thinks. I can anticipate his actions before your security team can even get into position.” He turned to face the door. “You need to reinforce that door. Make it stronger. Your current security provisions simply suck. I can help you.”

Kate frowned. Security had beefed up a bit. Customs had stricter requirements. Passports scrutinized more closely. She thought security had done an admirable job. They were certainly trying their best.

“How do they suck exactly?” Kate asked.

Jim held up a gun. “Well for starters, I managed to smuggle in parts for this and construct it out in the open corridor before coming here.” He looked at the gun. It was only a symbol of what could be achieved with such lax security. “Don’t worry, it’s not loaded.” He tossed the gun to Kate who caught it mid air.

She looked at the design, it was crude. Made from parts that wouldn’t alert security. Something you would find in a prison. Jim had clearly done something like this before. It wasn’t his first rodeo. Kate smirked at the thought. Okay so she had a professional wanting to help her, it was a start.

Jim looked at the doorway. “At least put up some security cameras in the hallway. You’ll know how’s coming.” He approached the door. It opened allowing him to exit. Before leaving he said “Think about it. I’ll be around if you change your mind.” He walked out the door to go find some other business to drum up. Kate wasn’t the only person who needed his services, there were plenty of other aliens onboard the station who could benefit from his help.

Setting the gun down on her coffee table, Kate stared at it. If he could bring in such a simple weapon, what could someone with more skill bring onboard the station without security knowing about it? The thought didn’t make her very comfortable.

Kate followed Jim to a transport tube. As the tube doors opened, a handful of aliens exited the lift. Jim and Kate entered the vacant lift.

“Delta Red Five.” Jim said indicating his destination. “Are you following me Ms. Monson?”

Kate regretted not changing her name back to her maiden name. She had just never gotten around to it. The paperwork alone would have taken months. Kate knew she should have filled out the paperwork when it was apparent what an evil man her ex husband was. She couldn’t really say why she never did.

As the lift began moving to its destination, Kate stared at Jim. “What’s in it for you? Why do you care so much about what happens to me?”

Jim smiled. It was a smile that said trust me, but that’s the thing Kate didn’t trust him. “Oh a modest fee of course.” He said. “My profit margin needs to be upped a little.” There it was. Anything or anyone could be bought for the right amount of money. “Five hundred credits or the equivalent in gold. You do use gold here on the station I presume? It’s only accepted everywhere.” He sighed. “As for the why, I want to see that man punished. He deserves what he has coming to him.”

Kate nodded. Revenge is what he was after. It only made sense. You don’t go screwing over a business partner and expect things to be happily ever after. There must be some bad blood between the two in order for Jim to want revenge against her ex. Some real bad blood.

“Okay.” Kate agreed. “I understand wanting revenge. Hell even I would want some sort of revenge against him. I get it.”

The lift stopped short like it was stuck in the transport tube. Both Kate and Jim fell to the deck hard. Kate hit her head on the way down. The lift went dark.

“Emergency lights.” Kate said. The computer responded and illuminated the lift in a blue glow, barely enough for anyone to see anything.

“What happened?” Jim asked as he steadied himself enough to stand up.

Kate shrugged. “I don’t know, probably a relay short circuited. Maintenance will have us back up and running in no time.” She said. Switching to her comm unit, she contacted maintenance. “Commander Monson to Maintenance Crew Gamma, can you get transport tube forty-seven alpha back up and running? We’re stuck in here.”

“Working on it commander.” A man’s voice came over the comm unit. “Sit tight, we’ll have you free in no time.”

Kate leaned against the wall of the lift. “So Jim, what exactly were you and my husband doing working together, and what were you working on?”

Jim chuckled. “Oh I’m sure you wouldn’t like it if I told you.” He said. Looking her in the eyes, she could tell she wasn’t about to let up without an answer. So, an answer she would get from him.

“We were running an underground smuggling ring, sixty feet below the Moon’s surface.” He said. “Right out in the open of everyone. I’m surprised we didn’t get caught sooner than we did, and thank goodness we did get stopped. We were in way over our heads.”

“Smugglers.” Kate scoffed. “What were you running? Drugs? Weapons?”

“Light arms mostly. We left the bigger guns to the more seasoned and professional teams. In fact we started the supply chain that gave weapons to your side of the war effort.” Jim watched as a light bulb came on in Kate’s brain. Ah, that struck a nerve.

Kate folded her arms. She was not amused by what he thought he knew. “And what do you know of which side I was on during the war?”

Jim grinned. He sure had struck a nerve. First the ex, now this. He was two for two. What a great day this was turning out to be. “Oh I know your type commander. I’ve seen it before. You weren’t fighting on the side of Earth. You were fighting on the losing side. Tell me, does your precious major know which side of the war you actually stood on?”

The topic of which side Kate had fought on had never came up with the major. She wasn’t too keen on bringing it up in conversation either. Some things were better left unsaid, she figured this was one of them.

“It amazes me, you were married to the guy and you didn’t even know what he was really doing on the Moon.” Jim said. “Only that he killed over twenty thousand inhabitants of a small colony. Now that’s a shame.”

New Orlando didn’t even know what hit them before it was too late. It had all started with the Moon quakes. Then the real trouble began with the tremors. Fires erupted all over the city shortly thereafter, and then came the big explosion. It could be seen with the naked eye on Earth. You couldn’t miss it. Not a day went by that Kate didn’t dream of what had happened, what chaos her husband had caused.

“What caused the explosion?” Kate asked. “What were you two up to?”

Jim shrugged. “Couldn’t tell you for sure. It could have been the new propulsion fuel we were working on. Or the ammo dumps we had stashed below the city. There are just too many things that it could have been. Talk about a tragedy. In the end I doubt we will ever know what was going on in your ex’s mind. Only he can tell you that. Maybe his gambling bets were too steep, he owed too much money.”

Kate shook her head and unfolded her arms. “Joe didn’t gamble.” She froze. It had been over five years since she had spoken his name. It stung her like a bee being sat on. His name left a bad taste in her mouth, one she didn’t like nor could get rid of.

“Really now.” Jim said. “That’s news to me. He was always found at the racetrack betting on the horses.” He wondered if he was striking another nerve in the commander. He was hoping to find out. “New Kentucky was always a favorite spot on the Moon to place bets on Earth.” He explained. “I don’t know why they couldn’t have come up with original names for these cities. Instead they went with New Orlando and New Kentucky. It’s very odd, don’t you think?”

Kate ignored the question. She was too focused on what her ex husband had been up to on the Moon. This new information was enlightening to say the least. She wasn't sure what to do with any of it. Probably just store it away until she could deconstruct it later, if she had time to do that.

"Anyways, something must have gotten under his skin because he started ordering bigger guns. More powerful armaments. It went against our core principles when we started running guns. We had decided against anything big enough to take into battle, like into space. We wanted to keep things small." Jim continued. "Something must have made him change his mind and leave me out of the decision making. Whatever it was, I hope it was worth it. Look where it landed him...and now he's free."

Jim had brought the story back around full circle to when he first met Kate. They were back on the topic of what she wanted to do regarding her ex husband, Joe. Jim seemed to be quite crafty in his way of thinking. He seemed to be one step ahead of her. She didn't like that one bit. It was her job to stay one step ahead of the game, one move away from checkmate. Kate was at a loss at what she should do. What she did know is he had information regarding her ex husband that no one else did.

"How did you escape punishment?" Kate asked point blank. "Surely you must have had some kind of escape plan in place. How else would you not have been sent to prison with Joe?"

Jim chuckled. She had him there. At least she *thought* she had him. The truth of the matter was so much more complex. More complex than he was willing to admit, especially to her. In his mind he owed her nothing. He was doing a service for her, nothing more.

"Oh that would take a lot longer than it would for your maintenance crew to take care of this lift." Jim said. "We simply do not have the time. Needless to say, I know people. High up people who watch after me." Looking at his watch he scoffed. "I have places to be, people to meet. What is taking them so long?"

Kate saw perspiration form on Jim's brow. Something was bothering him now. Something bad. He was losing control, panicking. They hadn't been in the lift for more than twenty minutes. Whatever was bothering him, it was bothering him bad.

"Hey, are you okay?" Kate asked.

Jim nodded as he wiped his forehead. "I'm fine." He said. "Is it warm in here? It feels warm in here." He continued to rub his face trying to get the sweat off of it without success. Pulling a handkerchief out of his pocket, he wiped up the excess sweat. That's when his face digitized, it transformed for a brief second into something else. Someone else.

Kate held her breath. "A chameleon shield." She said. "Who are you?"

Jim, or rather the man pretending to be Jim, sighed. "You got me." He deactivated a small device on his wrist. His face changed form into that of Kate's ex husband Joe. "Surprise darling." He said.

Kate couldn't breathe. Her thoughts and head were spinning in hundreds of different ways. She was trapped in a transport lift with her ex husband of all people. A dangerous serial killer. There was no escape. "How did you get here?"

Joe laughed. "Your station security really is sub par. They didn't even detect the chameleon shield I was wearing. You really should look into that." He paused as he assessed the situation. Kate was afraid of him, and had every right to be. This of course was not how he wanted to be found out. Joe had wanted to tell her on his own terms, in his own time. Unfortunately the chameleon shield had failed to work properly. That was the last time he bought sub par equipment from a drug smuggler.

"Oh I booked passage on a ship headed out this way. They actually were headed for The Rim, but I didn't want to go that far. I found myself sitting next to my old pal Jim. He was shocked as you are to see me. Unfortunate for him, he didn't make it the rest of the way. I had to take his place." Joe explained. "A shame really, Jim really was a good guy. But well someone had to die so I could make it here. He happened to be it."

"Twenty thousand people wasn't enough for you huh? You had to add one more to the list?!" Kate accused Joe. "Well we're trapped in here, what do you want with me?"

Joe held up his hands. "I'm unarmed. You have the only gun I brought on the station." He said. "I just want to talk."

Kate tried to get as far away from Joe as possible, which wasn't easy considering the confined space they were standing in. "Alright, talk." She said. "We've been talking, but now I know it's you I can assume everything you've said so far has been a lie."

Joe shook his head. "No, not a lie. Maybe a slight fabrication of the truth, but it was mostly the truth." He said. "Except you're right, I don't gamble. Never gambled a day in my life. So there's that. You do know me, well part of me." He wasn't sure where this was going, but they were at least talking like he had wanted. Face to face.

Kate pressed a switch on her comm unit. Nothing but static came through the other end.

Joe held up another small device, apparently this one was working as intended. "I'm sorry, I'm jamming us. No one can call in and you can't call out. I need privacy." He said. "I just want to talk."

Kate put her comm unit away and sighed. "So talk." She said. "You have me at a disadvantage. I'm all ears."

“I didn’t mean for those people to die.” Joe said. “I know what it sounds like, that I would say anything to make you believe me; and you would be right.” He continued. “I was conducting an experiment of sorts. Long range tactical nukes. It was a big contract. Jim was against it from the start, he only wanted to deal in small arms. But I saw the bigger picture as far as the war would be going. So I pushed him into something he wasn’t ready for.”

Kate listened to the half attempt at an apology story. A sob story as it were. As far as Joe was concerned he did nothing wrong. He only backed the losing side of a war. In a way they both did, but that was neither here nor there. At least she wasn’t responsible for killing over twenty thousand colonists. Innocent people who had something to live for.

“So you killed twenty thousand people because of your, what, ambitions?” Kate scoffed at the thought. Joe was a terrorist in her eyes. A mass murderer. Nothing he could say would change her opinion of him.

“Like I was saying, my experiment was at fault. It grew too big too fast. I couldn’t control it. Before I knew it things went critical and I couldn’t shut it down. I managed to get Jim out and tried to warn the city above, but it was too late. They were destroyed. I was buried in the rubble. When the search teams came looking, they found me. Arrested me for treason, and threw me in prison.” Joe explained. “It was only through a loophole that I was able to get out of my life sentence. They did a poor job of an investigation. Mistakes were made in the process. It was enough to convince a judge of my innocence.”

Kate shook her head. “And what of Jim? You did mean to kill him didn’t you?”

Joe sighed. She was obsessed with the killing. “Yes, but that needed to happen. I had to get here safely, so we could have this conversation. So I could convince you of my innocence.”

Kate continued to shake her head. “No, no, no.” She said. “You killed people, Joe. There is no innocence in that. True you were in over your head and that caused you to make poor decisions. But it doesn’t make your actions innocent!” She threw her hands up in the air. “I can’t believe the sheer hubris you are showing. It’s ridiculous!”

Joe frowned. He hoped somehow she would understand. If anyone would understand it would have been his own wife.

The lift began moving again. The emergency light turned off and normal illumination resumed.

“Ah” Joe said “Looks like my time here is done. If you’ll excuse me.” He pressed a button on his watch and teleported away from the station to parts unknown.

Kate sighed. Today was not going as planned. Here she had been expecting a relaxing day off and instead she got this. She of course would have to file a formal report to the station commander. The major would be understanding of course, but she wasn’t concerned about

that part of the report. She was concerned about what would happen if Joe managed to show up a second time. What would she do about it then? She hated to admit it, but he needed to be stopped by any force necessary.

Deep down, Kate knew she would be seeing her ex husband again. It was only a matter of time.

The End