

Connections

201

by Kyle Eggleston

Captain Jack O'Brien didn't even wait for the Fresno to finish docking with Crimson Gamma, he was standing at the airlock waiting to exit the ship. As the airlock sealed and the connection was secure, the doors opened. Jack ran through the doors onto the station. He was stopped by station security.

"Woah, where do you think you're going." A security officer asked. "What's the rush."

There was only one thing on his mind. A person actually. "Grilka." He said.

The security guard held his tongue. *What would the captain be wanting to do with that Dubor scum?* He thought. Instead of speaking his mind to a command level officer, he simply said "Papers, please." He held his restraint from knocking the captain on his ass.

O'Brien fumbled around in his pockets for his identification papers. Finally reaching into his duty jacket pocket, he found the papers that would allow him access to the station. Handing the papers over to the security officer, he smiled.

The security officer took the papers and scanned them with a data pad. "Captain Jack O'Brien." The security officer said. "Any bags or belongings that need to be declared or scanned?" He looked at the captain who looked back empty handed. "Nope, guess you don't." He handed the papers back to the captain. "Alright, welcome to Crimson Gamma. Don't be running everywhere, we try to keep order on this station." He let the captain go.

"Right." Jack said. He walked away from the security officer and continued on his way to Grilka's quarters. It had been a while since he had seen Grilka in person. Sure they had chatted over a comm unit off and on when time permitted, but to actually see her in person? That was something special.

Entering a transport tube, Jack tapped his foot on the deck plating. Couldn't the tube move any faster? He was anxious to see the love of his life. When he was in charge of the station, Jack swore the lift moved faster than it currently was. Eventually the lift came to a stop. Jack exited the lift and walked briskly towards Grilka's quarters.

Upon reaching Grilka's door, Jack pressed the call button and waited. As the door opened and Grilka stood there, Jack rushed in and picked her up off her feet. Spinning her around he kissed her. "Hello my love." Jack said.

Grilka smiled as big a smile she could muster. “Hello darling.” She responded. “It has been far too long, to finally see you in person. It is like a dream come true.” Grilka continued to smile.

As they held each other, nothing in the universe mattered. Not the war, not being commander of a space station, nothing. Jack was with Grilka, that’s what mattered right now, that’s all that mattered. Grilka felt the same way.

“How are you back?” Grilka asked as they sat down on bar stools. She still hadn’t gotten any actual furniture in her quarters. Grilka couldn’t afford anything fancy, so she used what she had and that just happened to be two bar stools. “I thought you were protecting Crimson Delta.” Grilka said.

Jack frowned at the news he had to tell her. He felt a lump form in the back of his throat as he spoke. “Crimson Delta was destroyed by Ketish in a Dubor warship. The planet below was then bombarded and attacked by the warship. No one survived the assault. The Fresno barely survived the attack, we were spared.” He explained. “I don’t know why Ketish allowed us to leave, but he did and here we are, here I am.”

Grilka gasped. “All those people.” She said. “Dead.”

Jack nodded. “He even killed his own people, called them traitors. Our people.” He corrected himself reminding himself that he too was part Dubor. “I know our next encounter will not be as merciful as he was to me and my crew.” Jack added. “He will kill us next time.”

“The general should be made aware.” Grilka said.

Jack nodded. “I’ve already contacted her, I have a debrief at fifteen hundred this afternoon.”

Thinking of the death, and holding her hands up to her face, Grilka wailed. Stepping away from his bar stool, Jack held her in his arms and comforted her. “Shh, we are safe for now.” Jack said. “We are safe here.” He hoped he wasn’t telling a lie. That damn warship could show up at the station at any moment. There was no telling what might happen.

Grilka wanted to believe Jack, she wanted to believe him with all her heart. But war was war, and it was a terrible thing to live through. She just didn’t know how to accept all of this news that had been shared with her. It was devastating.

As Jack held her, Grilka managed to regain her composure and calm down. It was true, she had turned on her own people but they were *still* her people, and Jack’s people as well. Even if he was a Dorf, a half ling.

“Look at the time” Grilka said, “It’s almost fifteen hundred. You best be getting to the general’s office to report in.”

“Right.” Jack said. “You going to be okay while I’m gone?”

Grilka nodded as she held his hand.

* * *

General Tague stood in her office aboard Crimson Gamma. She was waiting for Captain O’Brien to arrive. He was late. She didn’t like it when people were late to a meeting with her. Hell, she didn’t like it when people were late period.

As Jack arrived to the office, he tried his best to apologize but it fell on deaf ears. “I’m sorry ma’am.” He said. “The transport tube took longer than usual.”

Eve frowned at the excuse. “I assumed you stopped to get coffee and forgot to bring me a cup.” She said. “Fine, let’s get down to business. You and your crew are the only survivors of the attack on Crimson Delta and the planet below. Everyone else perished, does that sum up events?”

O’Brien looked around for a place to sit, Tague had removed all other furniture out of the office. There were no seats to be had. So he stood. “Yes, that’s right ma’am. We were attacked by Ketish. He came personally. He has some sort of vendetta against me, I don’t know what it is but it’s personal.” He paused, what was Ketish up to exactly? First the torture, then the death, and finally the heart swapping. Jack wondered who had his heart and who’s heart he had.

“And you survived while a quarter of a million people died.” Eve said. “Hell, more than that, an entire civilization was wiped out captain. I don’t like that. The admirals don’t like it, and neither should you!”

Jack pounded his fist on the desk. “I don’t like it general! Not one bit! You think I enjoyed seeing an entire Earth Force station get destroyed with families on it? You think I liked watching my crew get killed? Or an entire world fired upon making it uninhabitable for who knows how long? Well I don’t!”

Eve pounded the desk back. “I want answers mister! I want to know what this Ketish is up to, what his personal interest in you is. I want to know the truth.” She breathed hard, “Look, we don’t have to like each other to work with each other. In fact, I think you’re a subordinate disloyal officer. But, my personal feelings aside, I am willing to overlook that. If you can get me answers.”

O’Brien nodded. “Understood sir. Don’t tie my hands, let me track down leads wherever they may go. If I have to go into Dubor space, so be it.”

“You do that.” General Tague said. “Take the Fresno, she is under your command after all. Get me some answers. I’ll have a crew fix your ship. Shouldn’t take more than a week. Dismissed!”

O’Brien stormed out of the general’s office. A week. He thought. Just great. He’d have to stick around the station for another week before he could hunt down Ketish and look for answers. Why didn’t she offer him the Franklin? She was a more powerful ship than the Fresno, more advanced even. He was kinda pissed off that she didn’t give him that ship.

As he walked, memories came flooding in.

Last Year, Roughly Eight Months Ago

Ketish stood over the lifeless body of Jack O’Brien. O’Brien’s spirit looked on in wonder and amazement. He was dead, yet he was still alert watching what was happening. He couldn’t touch anything or feel anything, being a spirit was an odd experience.

“He’s dead again.” Ketish sighed. “Why must these humans be so weak?”

Ketish’s aid looked at him and shrugged. “It’s his heart.” She said. “It is not as strong as a Dubor heart. If he had a Dubor heart, he could take this kind of punishment for a long time before even showing signs of a struggle.”

Ketish smiled. “Then give him a heart.” He said. “I know jus the person. I’ll bring them to you for surgery. For now, revive him so we can perform surgery.”

“Yes, Honorable One.” The aid bowed and got back to work.

Moments later O’Brien woke up on an operating table. He was hooked up to several machines some with IVs running into his arms. “What happened?” He struggled to say.

“Oh you’re awake. Wasn’t expecting that.” Ketish’s aid said. “Don’t worry, you’ll be much stronger after the surgery.” Placing a mask over O’Brien’s face, she continued. “Now breathe deep. I’d rather you not be awake during the procedure. It can be rather violent.”

As O’Brien drifted back to sleep, he wondered what kind of operation they were planning for him. He hoped it wouldn’t cause any lasting permanent damage to him.

January 2247

O’Brien came back to, he was still walking away from Tague’s office. The mind transference Norev performed on him to help retrieve memories, that mind walk, must still have had some lasting effects on him. He struggled to keep his balance as he focused to center himself.

Reaching a transport tube, he called out the command that would take him to Med Bay. He hoped the station's doctor could help him out as he was feeling quite queasy at the moment. If he didn't hurry, Jack was afraid he was going to pass out.

Two other aliens were in the lift with him. One of the aliens looked at O'Brien with concern. "Are you alright human?"

O'Brien grabbed his chest and shook his head. "Not sure." He said. "I've felt better." He held against the bulkhead to steady himself. "Can't this damn thing move any faster?"

The alien just looked at O'Brien with that same look of concern. Grabbing him by the arm, he smiled. "I will help you human. Doctor Evans can help you." They rode the rest of the way in silence.

Doctor Emmett Evans, the doctor who replaced Doctor Allen as CMO of the station, stared into a microscope. He was doing a survey of cultivated spores from an alien species. The alien told him the spores were normal, they were part of their anatomy. But Emmett wasn't so sure about that, hence the analysis.

O'Brien and the alien entered Med Bay. The alien called out. "Doctor, come quick!"

Doctor Evans looked up from his work, standing up he saw O'Brien hobbling in clutching his chest assisted by an alien. "What's wrong/" He asked.

O'Brien was out of breath. "Don't know. Something with my chest." He said. "Pains, it hurts."

"Alright, let's get you to a medical bed and have a look, take some scans." He assisted the alien in walking O'Brien over to the main medical bed. Emmett quickly setup a scanner and proceeded to place it over Jack's chest. He looked at the monitor and let go an audible gasp. "My goodness, your heart." He said.

Jack nodded. "I know, it's not mine. That's not news." He snapped back. Then apologized. "Sorry, I have a lot on my mind. That was uncalled for."

Doctor Evans smiled. It wasn't the first time a patient had snapped at him, and it probably wouldn't be the last. He continued to stare at the scans. "It's been in your body for a while, normally I'd recommend replacing it. But your body has become adjusted to it. It would probably take your life if we tried to remove it." He paused as he continued looking over the results. "Whoever did this surgery did a poor ass job of it. They clearly didn't know human anatomy. From the looks of things, they tried their best to make the proper connections, but it's off. I'll need to operate. If I don't, you'll die within a week."

O'Brien nodded again. "Do it. I have a mission in a week I need to get started on. I need to be up and running by then doctor." He said.

“That’s a tall order.” Evans said. “Even with the advanced medical technology, I can’t guarantee a week, but I’ll try my best.” Looking to the alien he smiled. “Thank you for bringing him in. I’ll take it from here.”

The alien nodded and left the Med Bay.

A nurse entered the surgical bay and looked to Evans. “Orders sir?”

“Prep him for immediate surgery.” Evans ordered. “We have a heart to save.”

“Yes doctor.” The nurse responded.

Three hours later the surgery was complete.

Grilka stood over O’Brien’s sleeping body. She held his hand in hers. She had been there ever since the call came over the wire that he had been admitted. O’Brien meant something to her, there was no other place she wanted to be than by his side. Even if he wasn’t awake.

“Delegate, what are you doing here?” General Eve Tague asked from behind.

Grilka turned to face the general. “He’s my mate, where else should I be?”

Eve folded her arms over her chest. “Your mate.” She said. “I see. That wasn’t in his report. Neither was this botched heart transplant that has him on death’s door.” She faked a smile. “I’ll have to ask him about it when he wakes up.” Finding a chair, she sat down in the corner. The two of them would wait it out however long it would take.

Doctor Evans peeked in the surgical bay at the two women and shook his head. They would be waiting there for at least three more hours for Jack to wake up and for the sleep medications to wear off.

* * *

Norev sat in her quarters going over status reports of the war effort. It really was only a matter of time before the Dubor attacked her home world. She wanted her people to be prepared as much as possible. Their way was of no confrontation, no conflict, but if they wanted to survive those ways wouldn’t work. She had to convince her government the old ways just weren’t the good ways.

The door chimed.

“Yes, come in.” Norev said.

“I hope I’m not intruding.” Nokev asked peeking his head in the door.

Norev looked up and smiled. “Oh, please. Come in Nokev. Come in!” She exclaimed.

Nokev entered Norev’s quarters and sat down. He watched as she cleared her console of whatever work she had going on so she could focus her attention on him. Norev stood from her desk and walked over to where Nokev was seated and sat down next to him.

“I was hoping to see you. I heard the Fresno was docked, but just hadn’t had time to come find you. But you found me instead. What a joy!” Norev exclaimed.

Nokev smiled. He couldn’t help but stare at his descendant. “Sorry to stare.” He said. “You look so much like my wife, your great great grandmother. The similarities are astonishing.” Nokev continued to look into Norev’s eyes searching them to see what other things he could see.

Norev returned the smile. “Well thank you, the name Norev has been passed down the family line ever since her. My mother’s name was Norev as well, and so was my grandmother.” She said. “It’s kind of a family honor, one I hope to pass down to my daughter if I ever find a mate and settle down.”

“I see.” Nokev said. “Kerta put a stop to anyone naming their child after me. She felt it would be a slap to the face of the religious council to do so. So as far as I know, I am the last Nokev of our people. The family name stopped with me. I think my father would be disappointed.” He looked down at the deck and frowned. Memories of his dad were far and few between.

“You know,” Norev began “Obshi and I have been discussing how he knows you. Some say your FTL drive keeps you young. He says others believe something else, something about a fountain of youth that you and grandma found?” She asked. “Which is it? You should have been dead by the time Obshi was old enough to hold a staff.”

Nokev chuckled nervously. “That would take some doing to explain.” He said. “It’s a little bit of both. At first my FTL drive did keep me young as the universe around me got older, then we did find what you would call a fountain of youth planet. It reversed my aging quite a bit.” Nokev smiled. “I could explain more, but that would take some time.”

Norev placed a hand on Nokev’s knee the same way Obshi had done with her. It was a sign of familiarity usually reserved for close family members. He was family to her, so she felt comfortable touching him in such a manner, making a connection.

Nokev didn’t flinch, he placed his hand on top of hers. Family was everything. He was sad he wasn’t there for his own family when they needed him most. The war and occupation that followed hit all of Shuka hard. When he had heard about what happened after he left, Nokev never forgave himself for leaving his wife and child behind. It was a regret that he wouldn’t ever be able to recover from. He had put his work first before his family. In a way he

had a second chance at it, getting to know his great great granddaughter, but he doubted that would cover it.

“Like I said, I’m glad you’re here. There are some stories that I’m sure I haven’t heard, and some I’ve heard a million times over. I’d like to learn more about you, know about your experiences out on The Rim and all of that. If you’re willing.” Norev said offering an opening.

Nokev nodded. “I’d like that. I have time now if you’d like. I can tell you all I know, if you’ll tell me all about you so I can get to know you better.”

Norev smiled. “You have a deal.”

So they talked for three hours. Nokev regaled Norev with his tales out on The Rim and everything else about him and her ancestor. Norev in turn told him all there was to know about her. His tales were more entertaining than what her life was like. Growing up being trained to do government work wasn’t all that after all.

As they finished their conversation, Nokev stood from his seat. He hugged Norev goodbye for now. “It was a pleasure to speak with you Norev, ambassador.” He said. “Now I must find Obshi, there are a few things we need to catch up on and discuss.” He left her quarters in search of Obshi.

* * *

Jack O’Brien looked up from the surgical bay operating table. Grilka stood over him, looking around he also saw General Tague. He grunted in pain. What the hell was she doing there? “Grilka.” he said.

“Yes my love, I’m here.” Grilka said as she squeezed his hand.

Jack smiled at her. The pain in his chest was subsiding slowly. Too slow for his liking, but it was going away. Jack hoped he would be back up and running within a week. He had answers to find out for the general.

Looking over to the other side of the table, Jack grunted again as he saw the general sitting there. Funny, he didn’t think she ever did sit down. Apparently he was wrong. “General Tague” Jack said “To what do I owe this pleasure? You don’t have a busy schedule to keep on the station?”

General Tague stood and walked over to the table. Resting her hand on the table she ignored the comment. “From what the doctor tells me, you have a Duborian heart in your chest and are in fact part Dubor.” She was not pleased, the tone in her voice indicated that.

Jack sighed. Well that cat was out of the bag. He was hoping to keep certain information from the general until he had more answers. Hopefully he would have been able to embark on his mission before ever having to divulge such information to her.

“The doctor fixed you up. Your mate provided you blood even since he couldn’t find a match from *anyone* on the station but her.” General Tague said. “Before your operation, I gave you an assignment. I am rescinding that assignment. If I can’t trust an officer under my command to tell me the truth about their origins, how am I supposed to trust them on a mission of such magnitude? I will send the Franklin in your place.” She placed her hands on her hips. “There is no option for debate, the matter is closed. The Fresno will stay in orbit of Shuka to help protect the station. I will leave you in command until I figure out what to do with you.”

Jack sighed. What could he do but obey the order? At least they weren’t taking his ship away from him, at least for the time being. What else could he say but, “Understood sir.” Jack shifted his eyes back to Grilka who was still holding his hand.

“Alright, now that you’ve seen he’s okay. I need you to leave.” Doctor Evans walked into the surgical bay giving orders like he owned the place. Which he did. He waited until Grilka and General Tague left the surgical bay, and eventually the Med Bay.

Turning his attention back to Jack, he smiled. “How do you feel?”

“Like I’ve been run over by a truck.” Jack said. “What’s the damage?”

Evans sighed. “There is so much about the Dubor heart that we don’t know. There are twice the number of valves than the human heart. That’s why you almost fainted, they didn’t hook it up quite right, which is to be expected. I doubt they know much about our anatomy.” He explained. “Luckily you came in when you did, given another week you’d be dead. You’re stable now. I will release you from Med Bay in a day or two, and then expect you to come back in for a checkup.”

Jack nodded his agreement. “No argument from me.” He said. “I just wonder why I haven’t felt bad before today.”

Evans shook his head. “That I can’t tell you. You’ve just been lucky so far, and a good thing Grilka was here. You needed a full blood transfusion, she was the only one with compatible blood.”

“I see.” Jack said. “Well yes thank goodness she was available.” He thought about it for a moment, was it just a coincidence that she helped him escape from that Dubor prison? Or was there something actually behind it all. He didn’t know. Jack wasn’t sure he *wanted* to know. Grilka hadn’t shown any reason for him not to trust her and he didn’t want to start distrusting her now.

“Well, I will let you get some rest. We’ll transfer you to recovery within the hour.” Evans said as he exited the surgical bay. As he left, he muttered to himself. “Welcome back from the dead you lucky bastard.”

Jack smirked at the thought. *Back from the dead?* He wondered what the doctor meant. It was clear the doctor didn’t like O’Brien. Probably all of the command staff under General Tague were warned not to warm up to him. They were following orders quite well.

There was still an unanswered question, among many, who had given Jack a heart and who had his heart? He really wanted to know the answer to that question. He also wanted to know why Ketish had seemed to take an interest in him for some bizarre reason. Yes, there were many questions to be answered, and now that he was off the assignment he couldn’t get answers to those questions. Not yet at least. He was determined to eventually figure it all out if it was the last thing he did.

Reaching over to a comm panel, Jack entered in a command that would contact the Fresno. As Kate Monson’s face appeared on the screen. She tilted her head sideways. “What the hell happened to you?”

Jack smiled. “Long story,” and so the story was told to his first officer.

* * *

Commander Kate Monson sat in her quarters aboard the U.S.S. Fresno in orbit of Shuka. She had just closed the channel with her commanding officer. She was beside herself, Jack rarely let any doctor other than Doctor Allen see him, and he allowed Doctor Evans to not only touch him but to operate on him? She was surprised at the thought.

Pressing a button on her computer console, she opened a channel to engineering. “Monson to Park. Madison, you there?”

On the other end of the line, Madison’s voice was strained. “Yeah I’m here. I’ve been here since the attack ended. I haven’t left my post. Someone has to fix this bloody thing.” She paused. “Sorry commander, just frustrated is all. Waiting on the station dock workers to get off their asses to help is frustrating.”

“Yeah, about that.” Kate said. “We’re probably not going to be on the list for repairs for at least a week. You’re going to have to make do.” She cringed internally as she heard Madison swear up and down like a sailor. When she was finished, Kate continued. “Let me know what resources you need to complete repairs. You can have any personnel you want, just let me know so I can schedule accordingly.”

“Aye ma’am. Thank you ma’am.” Madison said before closing the channel.

Kate turned her attention to Med Bay, she contacted Doctor Allen and informed him of the procedure that had been performed on his commanding officer. To say Matt took the news badly would be an understatement. Matt considered himself to be the captain’s personal physician. To learn that the captain went under the knife of a different doctor? That was upsetting to Matt. No one touched his captain, especially his heart, but *him*.

“I’ll make a call to the station’s doctor.” Matt said. “Allen out.”

Kate cringed again. Who else could she make have a worse day than it already was? She looked through her staff personnel files. She hadn’t spoken to Jeff Killpack, the security chief in a while. Why not? What could it hurt? She thought. Kate put the call through.

“Killpack here.” Jeff responded to Kate’s hail. “What can I do for you commander?”

Kate sighed. “Jeff, ever just have a day where nothing seems to be going right?”

“Uh” Jeff said not exactly sure how to respond to the question presented him. “Well yeah, I guess you could say I have. Why do you ask?”

Kate sighed. At least someone understood. “Want to grab a cup of coffee? I just need to vent.”

Jeff chuckled. “Yeah, I’ll meet you in the mess in fifteen. Killpack out.”

Kate closed her eyes. The day had to get better right? She thought it had to, so that meant it had to. But life didn’t work that way, and she knew that. Kate imagined the upcoming week was going to be a bit difficult. With the captain out of commission for a bit, she was in charge of the Fresno and the general wasn’t the most pleasant woman to work for or with.

Looking out her window, she watched as the Franklin left orbit and headed towards Dubor space. “Godspeed.” Kate said wishing them well. They were going to need all the luck they could get.

* * *

Engineering was a mess. Madison had her sleeves rolled up on her uniform as she worked on the engine core. “They won’t get to the ship for a freakin’ week.” Madison echoed Kate’s words. What in the fresh hell was she going to do with the personnel she had? They were competent sure, but they weren’t up to par on the same level as the dock workers of the space station.

“Hey, need a hand?” Doctor Allen’s voice could be heard from outside the access tube.

Madison hit her head on the ceiling of the access tube as she was started. “Son of a bitch!” She yelled. “Matt? What the hell are you doing here?” Madison crawled out of the tube to meet the doctor who was standing in main engineering.

“Matt.” Madison said as she wiped engine slime from her hands onto her uniform pants.

Doctor Allen smiled. “Yeah I got pretty pissed about what’s going on with the captain. So I figured if I could make myself useful down here. I did take an engineering course at the military academy if that helps any.” His smile grew.

Madison rolled her eyes. An elective course was nothing compared to her engineering level, but since he was offering to help she couldn’t turn him down. “Sure, I’ll accept your help, on one condition. Answer this. We basically do the same work, you and I. The engine core is like a human heart, they both run and help function a vessel; mine a star ship, yours the human body.”

Matt nodded, yeah he could see the similarities in the functions of an engine core and a human heart. It somewhat made sense, he went along with it. “Okay, yeah. I can see that.”

Madison nodded. “Yeah, so why is it you get paid so much more than I do? We basically do the same work as I stated.”

Matt chuckled. “Simple, when I operate the engine is still running.”

Madison smiled at the notion. “Hadn’t thought of that.” She said. “Alright, did your academy training teach you how to monitor the engine coolant levels?”

Matt nodded. “Yeah, engineering one oh one. I can do that.”

“Great!” Madison said. “The monitor is over there, make sure it doesn’t rise above eighty percent above normal.” She headed back down into the access tube to continue working while Matt went to find the monitor she referred to.

* * *

Jeff and Kate sat in the officers mess drinking coffee and talking.

“You know the general’s a bitch, right?” Jeff asked Kate.

Kate nodded. “Yeah, I’m getting that. She seems to have had it out for the captain ever since she demoted him on the spot. I understand that she was on the opposite side of the Civil War, but that’s been over for six years now.”

Jeff nodded. "Right, and since President Cain hand picked her for this assignment, you know he's behind it all. Running the show as it were. He's the puppet master, General Tague is just a puppet. As are we all under her command."

Kate scoffed at the notion. "I am no one's puppet." She said. "Yeah, I supported Cain during the war. There were several of us command officers who did. We thought he was right when it came down to the alien problem. But that doesn't make it right, now. Tague singled out the captain because he opposed Cain during the war. That's the only reason she took command, I'm sure of it."

Jeff sipped his coffee. He was there to listen to the commander vent. Jeff had to remind himself of that. So, he let her vent.

"I mean, with the captain's surgery it just gave General Tague another reason *not* to trust him." Kate said. "It might be enough for him to just walk away from his command." She sighed. "If he walks? I walk."

Jeff set his coffee up down. "Whoa." He said. "Are you sure about that commander? I mean, I get being loyal to the captain. But to just quit and give it all up if he does? Isn't that being a bit impulsive?"

"What else is there to do?" Kate asked.

Jeff shrugged. "Well, she might give *you* command of the Fresno. You could be on the fast track to becoming a captain yourself." He suggested. Sure, it wouldn't be the ideal way of becoming a captain, but it could be possible given the circumstances.

Kate couldn't believe what he was suggesting and implying. It felt like betrayal of some sort. "I can't believe you would even suggest that." She said, obviously offended at the idea.

Jeff smiled. "Well I didn't say it was a *good* idea." He said. "I just thought that *maybe* it might happen. Who knows what will happen with the captain. If what you said is correct, that the general is *thinking* about what to do with him. We could very well be in a bit of trouble."

Kate nodded. "You're forgiven." She said. "Let's just hope it doesn't come down to quitting. I don't have anything lined up if I quit my job." Kate thought about it long and hard for a moment. If the captain really got fired or walked out of the service, would she follow him? Kate knew she said that she would, but would she really? It was a tough question to answer.

Jeff too thought about the future and what it had in store for him. If Kate quit, he might as well up and quit as well. They were a good working team the captain had assembled, and in the year they had worked together Kate had learned to trust and lean on those under the captain's command just as he did. It would be difficult to just leave it all behind.

“Yeah, I can see your logic and point.” Jeff said. “If you walk, I walk. We’re a team after all.” He explained. “The general better not touch the captain’s command *again*. She already messed up a good thing when she took over Crimson Gamma. She can’t screw him over a second time. I won’t stand for it.”

Kate smiled. They were in agreement. “Thanks for listening Jeff.” She said. “I needed a listening ear, and you were perfect for the job.”

Jeff nodded in agreement. “You’re welcome commander. I’m always here to lend a listening ear.” Standing up, he excused himself and left the mess hall leaving Kate alone with her coffee.

* * *

“I don’t care how decorated of an officer the man is. If you can even call it a man.” President Cain said. “General Tague, what kind of command are you running out there? Do I need to make a personal inspection of it?”

General Tague stood at attention like she was being dressed down by a superior officer. In a way she *was* being dressed down. “No sir, your presence isn’t required at this time.” She said. “I will take care of the situation.”

Cain rested his hand on his desk before him. “Good. You better general. If you don’t, I’ll see that you’re replaced. That captain is a half breed. An alien. Last I checked we didn’t have *any* alien officers in the fleet, and I’m not about to start now. Get rid of him. I don’t care how you do it, just get it done.”

General Tague swallowed the lump in her throat. “Aye sir.” The communication line closed. That was it. She thought. She had an order to carry out. Before Eve had contacted the president, she thought she could carry out such an order. But now that it had been given, that she was to simply ‘get rid’ of the man by ‘any means necessary’? Eve wasn’t so sure about it, and was having second thoughts.

She had a decision to make.

The End