

A Time To Live

209

by Kyle Eggleston

The Fresno orbited Earth. Most of her non essential personnel were down on the planet enjoying some much needed R&R. Jack O'Brien wished he could have taken some R&R time down on Earth, but he was needed on the Fresno.

Jack sat in his office reading over technical reports. Everything that needed to be fixed was sitting in front of him on a datapad. Jack sighed as he read over the remaining items. Kate Monson sat across from him reading the same data on her own datapad, she too sighed.

“Well the dock crew is on task and they should be finished with the repairs in a few weeks. We’re on schedule.” Kate finally said speaking up. She took a sip of her coffee. Morning briefs always required coffee to be on tap. Kate was drinking her second cup of the day, so far.

Jack nodded. He was glad to hear that things were on track. “I just wish I didn’t have all of this red tape to go through.” Jack said. He looked at all of the docs that needed to be signed and filled out. “I wish I could just snap my fingers and it would all be done.”

Kate too looked at the docs that needed to be filled out. “When was the last time you talked with your parents?” She said trying to change the topic. Work and these meetings was getting boring, it was the same story day in and day out. The Fresno needed to get fixed. It needed to be repaired and get on its way.

Jack was taken off guard. His parents? He had to think about it for a moment. Jack didn’t really get along with his family. Not anymore. It was a long story, one he didn’t have time to tell Kate or anyone else. “Parent.” Jack corrected her. “Mom passed three years ago. All I have are my dad and my sister.”

Kate frowned. “I am so sorry, I didn’t know.”

Jack smiled. “Nor should you. I didn’t tell you. There are *some* things that I like to keep to myself, if that’s okay commander.” He didn’t need her okay on anything, it was just a figure of speech. “But I haven’t talked to my dad since my mom passed. As for my sister, I haven’t spoken to Alyssa in over ten years. We just don’t get along.” Jack explained. “What about you? Do you have family you need to see I can grant leave if you’d like.”

Kate shook her head. “No, no need to. I’m good. I stopped speaking to my parents when they realized which side I was on during the Civil War. Dad was a general, he served at the

missile silo on the Moon. I say served, Dad died in the Earth Civil War. Mom stopped speaking shortly after when she found out he had died. She hasn't spoken since and is in a mental institute. It's a good one from what I hear, but it doesn't seem to be doing much for her."

Jack leaned back in his chair. When it rained it poured it would seem. He was sorry to hear about Kate's father. The war had taken so many lives. It was a terrible war that Earth shouldn't have even started, but it was too late for that now. Jack wished things had turned out differently for the war, but things didn't always work out the way you wished or hoped for.

"Forgive me for intruding into your life." Kate said. "But we don't make it back to Earth very often. I know you can vidcall your dad or sister at any time, but you might want to at least check in on them." She offered her advice unsolicited.

"What would I say to my father?" Jack asked. "Hey dad did you know we're part alien?" He put his hands up confused. "I don't even know how to breach that conversation. We're not fully human, it's not a simple conversation to even have."

Kate sat forward and set her datapad on Jack's desk. "You don't think he knows he's part alien?" She asked. "Surely he's been to doctors and they've run tests determining he's part Dubor like you are."

Jack shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe that *is* a conversation I need to have with him." He stood from his desk, setting his datapad down and walked over to the food synthesizer. "Coffee, black." He ordered.

A white coffee mug appeared and black coffee began to pour into it. As it finished, Jack picked up the mug and drank from it. He stood there thinking things over for a moment. What if he father didn't want to speak with him? And what of his sister? Would she want to know about their heritage? There was a lot of things to discuss. Maybe it was *he* who needed to take a small vacation and see what would happen.

After another moment, he made a decision. "I will be leaving the Fresno at fourteen hundred hours, and shouldn't be gone for more than a handful of hours." He said. Jack figured it wouldn't take long for him to speak with those people who wanted nothing to do with him. "I best get some things together before I leave." He exited the office.

Kate stood and walked over to the window. She looked out at Earth. *Such a big blue marble*, she thought. Jack did have a point, maybe she should speak with her family. What could it hurt? Her brother might still wish to speak to her, who knew. Kate had a lot to think about and consider.

Walking out of the captain's office, Kate entered the bridge. The Fresno was still docked with space dock as repairs were being worked on. She bet Madison was still mad about it all,

and she would be right. Madison really wanted her people working on the Fresno, she hated other people touching her ship. Well it wasn't *her* ship really, but she sure as hell felt it was her ship. Madison took care of the Fresno like she was her own baby.

* * *

On Dubor, Grilka walked into her parents home. "Father? Mother? I'm home!" She shouted as the main entrance to the dwelling closed. Grilka looked around the main living area, there was no one there. She checked other rooms in the dwelling and saw no one. *Where could they be?* She wondered.

"Father? Mother?" She shouted again. Still no answer.

A moment later, a male and female Dubor entered the dwelling. As they saw Grilka standing there, they froze. As they stood there they wondered if what they saw was real or if they were hallucinating. It had been years since they had done any drugs that would make them see things, but maybe they were having a relapse. Who could tell?

"Grilka?" Her father spoke. "Is it really you?"

Grilka nodded, tears rolled down her cheeks. "Yes father, it is I." She replied.

Grilka's mother approached her and hugged her daughter. What she felt was not a hallucination but in fact real. Tears streamed down her face. "My sweet daughter has returned to us." She said. "Finally gave up the military huh? Good for you."

Grilka took a step back. Give up the military she thought, never. The military was all the family she knew now. Her mother and father didn't really matter to her anymore. If that was the case, why was she standing there? Grilka guessed she just wanted to know her family was safe and still alive. Ketish had threatened their lives at one point if she didn't follow his orders. Here they were alive and well.

"I just had to see if you were okay." Grilka said. "As for the military, well I haven't given up on that. That is my life now."

Grilka's father sighed. "I see." He said. "You know we don't condone what that Ketish wants. We don't want Shuka to be bound under Dubor rule. We believe in the prophecy that it will be fulfilled, that someday Shuka and Dubor will live in peace and harmony." Her father said. "You know this. At one point you believed in it too...what's happened to you?"

Grilka sat down on some furniture, an ottoman shaped piece in the middle of the floor. "I met the man who is to bring about that peace." She said. "His name is Jack O'Brien, he's a Dorf, a human Dubor hybrid; and I believe with all my heart he will be the one to bring

peace.” She paused for a brief moment as she thought. She really did believe that Jack would be the one to bring about peace. Grilka couldn’t believe it, she had turned on the man who was to bring about a new era of peace for their people. Oh my, what had she done?!

Grilka’s father smiled. “Good, good. That’s good you still believe in the prophecy. All of that military training didn’t brainwash you like we had feared.’ He said. “There are still some aspects of religion within you my dear. That is a good thing to hear, you are not as lost as we feared.”

Her mother too smiled. “You say you met the man who would bring about peace. Why do I have a feeling it was something more?” She asked.

Grilka gave pause. She thought about Jack for a moment. How she had betrayed him. How Ketish had blown her cover. Was it really all fake or did she actually love Jack? Grilka raised her hands to her head. So many thoughts running through her mind, too many thoughts indeed.

“There was something more, wasn’t there.” Grilka’s mother placed a hand on Grilka’s shoulder. “Don’t try and lie to my daughter, I know you too well for you to lie to me.” Her mother was right, Grilka never could lie to her mother even as a child when she was in trouble she could only tell the truth.

Grilka held her mother’s hand. “Yes, I believe there was something there.” She said. “But I doubt I can regain what I had, I messed up pretty bad.” Tears began to stream down her face.

Grilka’s mother shook her head. “Oh my darling, it is never too late. Go back to him, try and rekindle what it is you lost.” She encouraged her. “Your father and I will be fine here. We are safe. I promise.” She hugged her daughter.

Grilka’s father hugged her as well. “Yes my dear, go. You must go. If you don’t you’ll regret what might have been.”

Grilka nodded. “Yes father, yes mother.” She said. Standing up, she walked towards the main entrance to the dwelling. “I’m going to miss you.” She said. “I’ll try my best.” She walked out the door and didn’t look back. It was true, she would miss her parents but if they felt she had a greater purpose ahead of her she had to believe in that for herself as well.

* * *

Jack stood at the door to his father’s house. He hesitated at the door before knocking on it. What was he doing there? Was he really there to talk to his dad? What was his dad going

to say? These thoughts ran through his head as he stood there. Jack wondered what the worst thing that could happen was. His dad would just not talk to him? Would he yell? Would he scream? Jack was about to find out. He rapped on the door.

The door opened. An older man stood there. He stared at Jack standing there with his hands in his pockets. Jack stared into the mans eyes looking for something familiar. Something he remembered about the man he used to call father. He saw nothing that resembled his father, the face was the same but the eyes were empty.

“What do you want?” Jack’s father said.

Jack looked at the old man and tried his best to smile. “I was in the area, and thought I’d stop by.” He said. “I know we haven’t spoken in a while, and I was thinking we could catch up or... something.” He looked down at his shoes like he did when he was younger and in trouble.

The man stood there staring at Jack. He wondered what his son was *really* doing there. His son didn’t make it back to Earth very often and Jack sure as hell didn’t ever contact him. So what on Earth was his son doing at his doorstep that very moment?

“Catch up?” Jack’s dad said. “Catch up?! It’s been three years since your mom died and you want to *catch up*?” He began to close the door.

“Dad, we’re aliens.” Jack blurted out.

Jack’s dad stopped closing the door. He looked at his son with shock. “Wait, what?”

Jack nodded. “Yeah, we are um part Dubor.” He said. “One of our ancestors married a Dubor female, and introduced their DNA into our bloodline.”

“Come in.” Jack’s father said. “We need to talk.” He held the door open for his son.

Jack entered the home cautiously. As they entered the living room, they sat down on the couch. Jack’s dad looked at him. There was a frown on his face. “I know we’re part Dubor.” He began. “I learned this about half a year ago. I was in need of some medical assistance, and come to find out no human on the planet could help me. They pinpointed down who could and I was out of luck.” He explained. “They took my kidney, Jack.”

Jack whistled. “Ouch.” He said. Then it dawned on him, his dad *knew* they were part alien. What the frack was up with that?! He didn’t even bother to contact Jack to let him know what had happened, what he had found out. “Do you need a kidney?” Jack asked. “I have a spare I can give you...”

Jack’s dad laughed. “No son, no. I don’t need one of your kidneys. I’m good, trust me.” He paused. “Look, I get it. We don’t talk.” He said. “Your mother’s death hit me hard. I didn’t know how to react to the news. I just shut down on everyone. I haven’t even spoken to your

sister since she died either. I know it's bad, but that's just how things went down. I can't explain to you *why* that happened, it just did." Jack's dad tried to explain himself, but didn't know if Jack would understand. He hoped he would. Deep down he missed Jack and his sister, but he wasn't sure he was able to tell Jack that.

Jack stirred on the couch. "Yeah, you know I haven't talked to Alyssa in like ten years now." He said. "She hasn't bothered to reach out to me, and I haven't tried to speak to her either. I mean there's so much to talk about, and I can't bring myself to vidcall her."

Jack's dad nodded. "I understand son. I get it." He said. "Alyssa didn't understand when you joined the military, she didn't *want* to understand. It was very Alyssa of her. She's into this peace for all shit. When you renewed your contract, it just pushed her farther away."

Jack smiled, at least someone understood what was going on in his life. Well at least part of it, the family part. The rest of it? Well that would take some time to explain and for his dad to actually understand. Jack wasn't sure his father was ready for the whole prophecy thing, so he decided not to bring it up.

"Yeah," Jack said. "Well she has a right to know about her heritage. We owe that to her at least. I just don't know how to go about contacting her. Last word I had was she was on her way out to the outer edge of The Rim." He sighed. "That's a damn big sky if you ask me. There's no telling where she is."

Jack's father rubbed his head. "The Rim? I didn't know. It makes sense, she never was happy on Earth. Always wanted to go out and explore, just not the way the military does it. If I was younger I'd find a way to track her down, follow her out there. But I'm not a young man anymore Jack. Look at me."

Jack nodded his head. He placed a hand on his father's knee. "I know dad. I'm not asking you to do that. No one's asking you to do that. Your place is here on Earth, not out in space chasing your daughter wherever the hell she might be."

Standing up, Jack's father made his way to the kitchen. "I don't know about you but I'm hungry. Want something to eat?"

Jack nodded. "Yeah, I could eat. If memory serves you make a mean grilled cheese and tomato soup." He smiled as he stood and joined his father in the kitchen.

* * *

In her quarters, Kate opened a communications channel through her vidscreen. Kate breathed in sharply. "Kate Monson to Josh Nickelson, please come in Josh. I hope you can

hear me.” She said hoping that her brother would respond. There was no telling what he would do, would he actually say something? Could he hear her at all? Was he even on Earth? There were too many questions for her to answer at this time. “Look, I get it if you don’t want to talk.” Kate said to the open channel. “But I hope you know I still care.”

The vidscreen flickered as a connection was made. “Why should I believe you.” A man appeared on the screen, it was Josh. “Dad died, you were in the service, mom went crazy, and you didn’t even bother coming back to Earth to check in on how I was doing.”

Kate looked at her brother. His beard had become gray in places. In a way it made him look distinguished. He had a point, she hadn’t bothered to even contact him after their mother went crazy and their dad had died. Just because she was doing her duty wasn’t a good enough of a response, her brother wouldn’t understand. Kate didn’t blame him. The truth of the matter was she couldn’t get away, it was war time. Again another fact that Josh just wouldn’t understand.

“I’m sorry.” Kate finally said after a moment. “You’re right, I am a terrible big sister. I should have checked in on you to see how you were handling things.” Her bottom lip trembled as she spoke. “If possible, I’d like to make up for it. Let me come down and we can visit.”

Josh shook his head. “I don’t really have anything to say to you.” He said, his tone was cold. “Did you even know mom doesn’t recognize me anymore? I visit her every week and she doesn’t even know me.” Josh stammered. “She talks about me, wishes I would come visit. Talks about you too, wishes you would come visit. I try to tell her who I am, but she refuses to see it.” He broke down in tears. “I mean, she doesn’t even know me sis. What am I supposed to do with that?”

Kate frowned at the thought. She had known her mother had gone mad since their father’s passing, but she didn’t know Josh wasn’t recognized as her own flesh and blood. Kate hadn’t known it had gotten that bad. She didn’t have an answer for her brother.

“Maybe you should go visit her.” Josh said. “Maybe at least she’ll recognize you.”

Kate nodded. “Maybe I should. I can be down planet side within the hour. Just tell me where to meet you.”

“Clark Hospital.” Josh said. “It’s in the old Mission District. You know the one.” He closed the communications channel.

Forty-five minutes later, Kate had landed near Clark Hospital. It was a short twenty minute trip to the hospital. She had plenty of time to think of what to say to her mother. Kate couldn’t even count the number of years that had passed since her mother had been put away. She didn’t want to think about how long it had been. It would just bring up memories of her dad, Kate didn’t like to think back to those days.

At Clark Hospital, Kate met Josh. They hugged briefly, but only because it was expected. Neither of them really felt like hugging, but they were brother and sister after all. Blood being thicker than water and all of that nonsense, it was true. All of it.

Josh wasn't amused by the hug. Sure it was expected, but he didn't feel anything by it. As far as Josh was concerned, his sister was dead to him. "Come on, let's go. She's in a high security mental ward." He led Kate into the building.

They walked the halls in silence. Soon they stood in front of a heavily guarded door. At the sight of them, the guard nodded. Obviously he was familiar with Josh. Kate smirked, he wasn't lying about visiting every week or the guard wouldn't know him.

"Josh." The guard said.

"Michael." Josh greeted in return. "How is she today?"

Michael shrugged. "The same, hasn't really changed since last you were here."

Josh nodded. "Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of." Turning to Kate he gestured. "This is my sister Kate, she wanted to see mom." They walked through the open security door. "We shouldn't be too long today." Josh ended the conversation.

Kate and Josh walked down another hallway lined with rooms. Coming to an open door, Josh pointed at it. "Mom's in there." He said. "She uh, gets agitated whenever I come and visit. At first. Then she seems to calm down a bit, it's best you go in alone today."

Kate nodded. "Got it." She said before walking into her mother's room.

As Kate entered her mother's room, she looked around. It was a simple room. A bed and a chair was all that decorated it. Those and a family picture hung on the wall, an old family picture from several years ago. Her mother was seated in the chair looking out a window.

"Mom?" Kate said. Her voice cracked a little as she spoke. "Alice?"

Alice turned around in her chair to see who had called out to her. She saw a woman standing there, a woman she did not recognize. "Yes my name is Alice. Who are you dear?"

Kate paused. "It's me mom. It's Kate."

Alice smiled. "Kate, I have a daughter named Kate. She's my baby girl."

Kate walked further into the room and stood by her mother's chair. "Mom, I am that daughter. It's me Katie."

Alice looked into Kate's eyes. She was searching for something familiar about the woman who stood before her. After a few moments recognition finally hit. "Katie?" She asked. "Is it really you?!" Alice exclaimed with excitement.

Kate smiled. "Yes mom, it's me."

Standing up, Alice hugged Kate in a big ol' bear hug. "Oh honey, I have missed you so much. There's so much to tell you! Your father has passed."

Kate's smile turned to a frown as tears rolled down her face. Dad. "Yeah, I um heard the news." Kate finally said after a moment of silence. "I am so sorry mom." She hugged her mom again.

Alice sat back down in her chair as Kate sat on the edge of the bed.

"I brought someone with me." Kate said. "It's Josh."

Alice's eyes lit up. "Joshua is here?" She asked. "Oh how I've been wishing to see him!" She said. Looking around the room, she asked "Where is he?"

Kate stood from the bed and walked out into the hallway. "She wants to see you."

Josh shook his head. "I told you, she won't recognize me." He said.

Kate folded her arms. "She recognizes me. Give it a shot, maybe today will be different."

Josh sighed. "Fine, fine." He said. "Guess it wouldn't hurt." He entered Alice's room not expecting anything but her usual reaction to him.

He was wrong.

Alice saw Josh enter her room, her eyes lit up just like they did for Kate. "Joshua!" She exclaimed as she stood from her chair. Alice rushed over to Josh and gave him a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. "My Joshua has come to visit me!" She said. "Both of my children are here. What an amazing surprise this is!" She was overcome with joy.

As tears rolled down Josh's cheeks, he looked to Kate who stood in the doorway. "Thank you." He mouthed as he hugged his mother harder. Kate gave him a thumbs up and turned to leave.

"One moment mom, I'll be right back." Josh said as he followed Kate out the door.

"Kate." Josh said. Kate turned around to see what her brother wanted.

Rubbing the tears from his eyes, Josh smiled. "Thank you so much for this. I've been waiting over a year for her to recognize me. Your presence here has done something good."

Kate smiled. "What are big sisters for." She said. She lingered on a question she wanted to ask, but was afraid to. Finally she just blurted it out. "So, we cool?"

Josh returned the smile. "Yeah, we're cool." He said. He hugged Kate, this time meaning it. "How much longer are you on Earth?" He asked.

Kate shrugged. "Repairs are underway. I think we're in orbit for another two to three weeks." She said. "Why?"

Josh smiled. "Well I think it's time we caught up on some things." He said. "Haven't spoken to each other in a while, it's time we changed that." He meant every word of it, it could be considered a simple gesture that his mom recognized him but it meant something to Josh. In all his years of visiting Alice and her not realizing who he was, to finally have a break through was a major success.

"I'd like that." Kate said. She turned and walked away.

Josh re entered the hospital room where his mother was waiting.

* * *

Down in Main Engineering Madison Park was hard at work trying not to step on the toes of her overseers. Ever since the boys from space dock got their hands on the Fresno they had managed to screw up one thing or another. She was done with it all. Nothing felt like it was going the right way, she was up to her ears in paperwork. If only she had been able to have *her* crew work on the ship, none of this would have ever happened.

She threw her hands up in the air as another report of a minor injury came across her desk. That was three this day. What were those folks at space dock thinking? Did they hire a bunch of trained monkeys to come in and do the repairs? She swore that's what they had done.

"Bloody hell." Madison said under her breath.

"Problems there chief?" The voice of the Fresno's security officer Lieutenant Jeff Killpack said as he entered the room. He had obviously overheard her swear.

Madison turned to look at the security chief. "No problem here chief." She said. "They sent idiots to do the work of trained professionals. That's all." She tossed a datapad onto a nearby desk. "You don't usually come down here, what's going on?" Madison hoped he was there to arrest the space dock workers and get them the hell out of *her* engineering bay. But she doubted that would be the case.

Jeff scratched his chin. "I um, got a strange call earlier today. Figured you oughta know about it." He began. "She claims to be your mother? Said she hasn't heard from you in a while, and that you're refusing to answer her calls."

"Good grief!" Madison yelled. When it rained it poured. "Yeah, I've been ignoring all calls from that woman." She said. "I don't want to speak to her and she sure as hell doesn't

have anything meaningful to say to me!” Madison stormed off into another section of engineering.

Jeff followed her. He pressed his hands together as he walked not sure how to continue the conversation, if there would be any continuation after Madison had just walked off like that on him.

“I uh,” Jeff said. “Well see, your mom’s sick.” He explained. “She told me herself, it seems pretty bad, stage four of something I can’t even begin to pronounce.” He looked at Madison’s back waiting for her to turn around.

Madison turned to face Jeff. “That woman and I haven’t spoken in fifteen years. What gives her the right to try and come back into my life, because she’s sick?!” She scoffed. “That’s ridiculous and you know it.”

Jeff shrugged. “I don’t know the whole story obviously.” He said.

Madison nodded her head as she folded her arms across her chest. “No, no you don’t. So I’d appreciate it if you’d butt out of my business.” She stared Jeff in the eyes hoping he’d back down. She had a way with people, men especially, if she wanted you to back down she could figure it out. It only took some time. Eventually everyone had their breaking points.

“She’s not the only one.” Jeff said. “I also got calls from your father, your brother, and your aunt Sue.” He paused. “That aunt Sue of yours, she’s a firecracker ain’t she.” He chuckled. “Anywho, they all said you don’t want to talk with them. I don’t know why they’re calling me.”

Madison looked up at the ceiling and groaned. “You have got to be kidding me! My whole frackin’ family wants to bother me now!” She turned back around and started hitting a pipe with a wrench.

Turning to Jeff she held the wrench up. “Tell you what, if they call again *you* can tell them to shove it.” She walked off.

Jeff raised his hands in the air. “Don’t shoot the messenger.” He called out after her.

Madison kept walking. As far as she was concerned the conversation was over.

Jeff exited engineering. He didn’t want to be there for round two of whatever the hell had just happened.

* * *

Ketish sat in a control room on Dubor. He was surrounded by people and monitors.

Everywhere he looked he either saw a loyal subject of the Dubor Republic or a monitor. On those monitors was broadcast a different status report on his warship. That's all that mattered at the moment, Ketish's warship. He wanted her back up and running as soon as possible, there was a mission to accomplish on the fourth planet in the Comeki Star System.

He couldn't help but wonder what Grilka was doing, what she was up to. Grilka had requested leave over three days ago. She had told Ketish she would return shortly, he didn't think she would still be gone. Maybe he shouldn't have let her go to begin with, then she would still be at his side like a loyal Dubor officer.

But there was nothing he could do about that now. Turning his attention to the monitors he was pleased with the progress they were making. Any less than that and he would have been upset. Those under his command wouldn't want him upset. He had an entire planet to rule over as it was.

Standing from his chair, Ketish headed towards an exit. "Keep me informed of any progress that is made." He ordered as he exited the main control center.

Traveling the city was so peaceful to Ketish. It was something he missed being away for so long onboard his warship. Ketish was headed to his home, he missed his wife and mistress. It had been a while since he had been home to visit. His wife understood that work came first, she would get her turn to dance.

Coming upon a modest home, Ketish opened the door. He walked inside and found a place to sit down. His wife would attend to him shortly. She always did when he came home. Sure enough a moment later Aleria, Ketish's wife entered the room.

"My Lord." She said bowing to her husband. "It is agreeable to see you again. How long are you planning on staying?" Aleria walked over to Ketish and kissed him. He returned the kiss and held her in his arms. She let out a low growl.

"I half expected you would have brought that whore with you." Aleria said. She of course meant the Dubor female, Grilka. Ketish didn't appreciate her calling Grilka a whore. She was anything but a whore, she was a loyal subject of the Dubor Republic. It was a rare treat to find such a loyal subject, loyal subjects were hard to find these days. Ketish was lucky with Grilka, and he had let her go.

Changing the subject, Aleria smiled. "I understand we are at peace with Earth now." She said. "Before long I suspect we'll be taking over Shuka." She was so certain of herself.

Ketish laughed and shook his head no. "No my dear. We will not be going to Shuka. That was part of the deal I made with Earth. We don't attack Shuka, we stay in a peaceful state with Earth *and* Shuka." He explained. "It is all part of the plan my pet. You will soon see as I do. Yes you will see it all come to fruition. It only takes time."

Aleria frowned at the news. What was this nonsense her mate was going on about? Peace with an enemy? Peace with *two* enemies? Had he gone mad? The thoughts spun around in her brain as she tried to accept the changes in reality. The changes her husband proposed. “You are our leader.” She finally said. “Wherever you go, I will follow.”

Ketish nodded. “I never doubted it.” He stood from his chair. “Now, if you’ll excuse me I have other business to attend to.” He left the dwelling in a hurry without further goodbyes.

* * *

Several blocks from the central command station was a small prison. It was unlike the prison in orbit. It had fewer guards as the prisoners had been Mind Fragged when they arrive. The prisoners hardly knew anything about their previous lives, they knew their names and their occupations, but any hatred or bigotry towards the Dubor people was erased from their memories. In a way it was a rehabilitation center for the mentally diseased against aliens.

As Ketish entered the prison, guards stood at attention. He waved them on to go about their duties. There was no need for them to stand at attention for him. He was there for one thing and one thing only, to speak with a prisoner.

“Cell Forty-Seven Alugra.” Ketish said. “Has he been fed today?” He really wasn’t concerned with *what* the prisoner ate, just that he was keeping up his strength. Ketish couldn’t have sick prisoners on his hands, what would the government think? Oh right, he *was* the government.

The guard on duty nodded his head. “Yes sir.” He reported. “He’s eaten both breakfast and lunch. Would you like a word with him?”

Ketish smiled. “I would.”

“I’ll see to it.” The guard stood from a desk and grabbed a keycard. He walked down a long corridor with Ketish walking closely behind him. The corridors were easy to get lost in if you didn’t know your way around. It made it harder for prison breaks to occur. If prisoners couldn’t find their way out they couldn’t easily escape, at least that was the thought behind the construction of the prison.

“Here we are.” The guard said. He opened the door.

A man sat inside the dark cell in the corner on the floor. There were no luxuries of any kind in the cell. No bed, no running water, no toilet to speak of. It was just a small dark room they had thrown him in. He figured they had left him there to die, but they kept feeding him and making sure he was healthy. What possibly could be the reason for that?

“Bert McDuff.” Ketish said to the man. “You are Commander Bert McDuff of the U.S.S. Fearless, aren’t you?” He asked.

Bert raised his eyes to Ketish and nodded. “Yes, I’m Bert McDuff.”

Ketish nodded approvingly. “Good, good. I have a mission for you.” He said. “I think you’ll enjoy this one my friend, you’re going home.”

The End