

## Chapter 11

Se-Cond only took a small security entourage on the Viper, similar to a shuttle but could travel FTL. As she walked through the docking bay of the Widow Maker, a scout vessel doing cavalry runs of the ITU, she was greeted by the Captain, Lo'var. She requested that her presence be kept on the downlow as there were many security risks now as the de-facto leader of the Empire. She had made many enemies and the less said about her whereabouts the better. But, she needed to be here, she needed to close this gnawing impulse to enact revenge.

Lo'var escorted her through the ship, the crew stopping and saluting as she walked past. This made it a little difficult as the corridors on a scout ship were particularly narrow. Lo'var escorted her to his ready room and offered her his seat. She accepted.

"You look a little nervous Lo'var. That's very unlike you."

"I'm sorry your Eminence, I don't know what you mean," he hesitated in his response.

The Empress, which still wasn't her official title until she reached the sector Homeworld of T'Vis'shun for the ceremony, looked at her on again off again dalliance who was keeping his head bowed.

"Nothing has changed between us Lo'var."

"Of course, your eminence." But still he remained.

She couldn't blame him. Being the plaything of the Emperor's daughter was one thing, of the Empress is quite the other. She made a mental note at the back of her mind to worry about the changes in the close relationships she had made, but now revenge was afoot.

"So, Captain. What's our status?" She thought it best to change the subject.

Lo'var explained the events when he had got here. They had sent an agent of board to monitor the situation.

"Are you telling me that the Pirates have some sort of teleporter?"

“It would appear so,” he replied. Our man observed the Commander and her capture disappearing into thin air. His partner didn’t seem worried.”

“Interesting!” she pondered. How and where they got it is beyond me, but I’ve made it a priority to obtain it as soon as possible.”

“Negative. That is not our mission here.”

“I beg your pardon your eminence.”

“Our priority here is the Commander! We can worry about the pirates technology later.”

“As you wish.” Lo’var looked stunned. The teleporter would be exactly what they needed to have the upper hand to the civil war everyone knew was coming. “There is something else you should be aware of. We aren’t the only ones looking for her. They have sent former Captain Billiam Dirk.”

She laughed. “The PC must be desperate to have sent that has been to retrieve her.”

“But, he is not alone. That man I spoke of, that was on the shuttle with the Commander, is with him.”

“The one-night-stand?” she asked. “We’ll need to get him too. I want to know his role in the destruction of my family.”

“That’s the next interesting thing I need to tell you. He’s not human. I don’t think he’s humanoid.”

“A shapeshifter, you mean?”

“We don’t think so. A couple of witness our guy as ‘questioned’ noticed him interacting with things in a strange way.”

“How strange?”

“Like he would just place his hands over things and they would work, like computer consoles, locks and what not.”

“An android.”

“That’s what our agent thought at first, however, one person said he merged with the station’s floor panelling and then ran off in the direction of the Commander’s kidnappers.”

“Are things always this weird in this part of the universe, Captain?”

“Everything in the Universe is weird, your eminence. We just know our weirdness.”

“That sounded awfully PC of you,” she joked.

“I’m sorry, your Eminence.” Lo’var stood up straight. He did not read it as a joke.

Another mental note. No more jokes.

“Anyway, have your man determine where all these players are. Our priority is the Commander and her companion, whoever or whatever he is. Then we will proceed.”

“That may be a problem. The station has put up a communication blanket. Somehow the station was alerted to an Empire ship in the region, even though we are certain they haven’t detected us.”

“How can you be certain?”

“They are searching on the far side of the system. And I know for sure we are the only Empire ship in the area.”

“So what triggered the alert?”

“Unknown.”

This had put a crinkle in her plans. She pondered for a while and weighed her options. Ultimately, it came down to two options. Attack now or abandon the revenge plan together. Her revenge was at arms length and it would be very doubtful she would have another chance at receiving closer, or the closest people of the Empire got. However, with the pirates on alert and only a scout vessel to assist her, it would be an uphill battle. Besides, it would also leave her vulnerable to her enemies, which were increasing in size daily.

“We can’t do anything, can we?” she sounded defeated.

“No your eminence,” Lo’var confirmed. “If we could restore communications with our agent and coordinate with him, then it would be possible. At the moment, we are powerless.”

And there was the word again; powerless. Powerless, a word she had heard for most of her life. As the Emperor’s second born child she was given the title Mistress Se-Cond. A reminder of her position in the family, always second, never first. That’s why she had join the ranks of the military and rose through the ranks on her own merit. She knew that her reputation as the Empress’s daughter had sway, but she had proven herself in battle more than once and showed that she was a capable warrior, second to no one.

“I’ll go and get her.”

“I beg your pardon, your eminence?”

“I’m not going to put you or this crew in danger.”

“I don’t think I can let you do that, Connie. You’re the Empress for goodness sake. To be honest I don’t think you should be here.

“It’s Connie now, Vary,” she pointed out. “I thought we were only doing titles.”

“Your eminence. I would be remise in my duties as a member of your military to allow the leader of the Empire to go on a potential suicide mission, especially so soon after...”

“After the death of my father, my brother?”

“This is what it’s all about. The Empire needs to see justice served by their Empress.”

“To be completely honest, the Empire needs their leader. That’s you.”

“I know who I am Captain. I don’t need you to remind me of my position. It’s my decision. You can either support it, or your dismissed.” Her tone had changed dramatically. This was no longer a conversation between lovers. This was a conversation between superior and subordinate.

“Fine, but I’m going with you.”

“Well Captain, I don’t think you were going to have a choice in that.”

## Chapter 12

Commander Belle's head was pounding, and it felt like her body had been on fire. She had no vision as of yet as the glare was all too bright, but she knew she wasn't on the space station anymore. It didn't smell as bad for starters and the temperature was a lot more pleasant. But things weren't all peachy. She could feel restraints over her arms, legs and forehead. Where was she though?

She recalled the encounter at the food market, attempting to have some of those mysterious kebobs, that smelt divine. Then some huge strangers came by and took her. She remembered resisting and then nothing; and now here.

After a little while her pupils began to contract and she was able to see a little more detail. There were swirls of dark red, yellow and black. The colours were more vibrant than anything found on the pirate ship. Strength was also starting to return to her body, as the numbness from what they injected her had begun to wear off. However, she could feel the cold hard press of metal on her skin. She wouldn't be busting out of these restraints any time soon.

"A challenge," she thought.

If she were to be entirely honest, the past few days had been more interesting than the past few months had been. For the most part she had been participating on diplomatic missions as part of the McGuffin. She wasn't the flagship of the PC, but she was the sister ship to it, the PCFS Bhutto. She never thought for a moment that what she was doing was never important. All the talk, all the negotiations, the meetings, the ceremonies, the dinners and dances; they served a purpose, to spread and maintain peaceful relations. Lives were not needlessly wasted in warfare.

But by all the holy figures in the universe it was boring. She joined the PCF to explore on the Frontier. To meet new civilisations and encounter weird anomalies. She wanted a little more excitement in her life. And that, she knew was what had gotten her in this mess in the first place. At the very least though, she didn't have to write up that report for the President's attaché.

More of her senses were coming back to her. The room she was in was small but empty, at least from the angle she could see. She felt as if she were on an angled flatbed raised above the ground. There was a bright fluorescent light above her. She could hear a rumble beneath her, as if the room was shaking. No, not shaking. It sounded more like the hum of an engine. She was on a ship that was moving.

How long had she been asleep and how long had she been travelling? An hour, a day. She was hungry for sure, so at least a couple of hours.

Her body was feeling a lot heavier now. Commander Belle could feel the weight on her restraints.



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