

"I tried so very hard, believe me. I tried to get away. I tried to avoid all this chaos, but it follows me."

"What are you?"

"I don't know!" Milton exclaimed. "I've tried to find out who or what I am, but after a thousand years of trying I simply don't know!"

Milton could see the shock on Billiam's face.

"I tried to end it, you know? Without me, none of this would be happening. I have caused so much pain and suffering by simply existing. I can't die, well not that I know how."

"So, you're definitely not human," Billiam pointed out the obvious.

"What you see here is a recreation of a human body. If you studied my anatomy, my DNA, I'm 100% human, but on a deeper level, beyond the sub atomic I'm not even matter or energy."

"I'm no quantum physicist, but that seems scientifically impossible."

"It is," Milton continued, "by all rights I shouldn't exist. I don't fit in this universe."

"And what's this got to do with what just happened out there?" he was pointing to the image of the collapsing moon and it's associated planet that were still colliding together in a symphony of destruction.

"It's a part of me!" he admitted.

Milton could see on Billiam countenance that he was putting the pieces of the puzzle together. Milton may of not been human at his core, but his emotions were. He could feel his heart beating, wanting to get out of his chest. His mind brought up all the disasters that he had caused over his millennial life. But he wasn't all to blame.

"How did the Empire get a piece of you? You've been with me and the Commander since all this nonsense began," Billiam asked.

“The ship we were following was an Order ship.”

“An Order ship? What’s an Order ship?”

Milton had to go back two hundred years to explain the societies of Chaos and Order. These two groups have been struggling for the control of the galaxy since before dinosaurs had roamed the Earth. They manipulated societies in believing that their way was the best way. Over the centuries, over the millennia societies went to war until just over two hundred years ago, just as humanity went interstellar, they disappeared. When Milton came on the scene, the last remnants of both, the holdouts remained.

That’s when he discovered the truth, at least a partial truth about himself. They only knew it as the particle. A substance like nothing in the universe. Both organisations had the tiniest samples of it, enough to power their devices, but Milton was made of it. It was a difficult time for him, both sides appealed to him to join, to finally defeat the other. In the end, he destroyed both of them and hid the evidence of their existence. It was an epic struggle, but alas again, it is a tale for another time.

“So, you are made of this unknown particle that can rip apart the fabric of the universe.”

“Well it’s not like that. It’s never been unstable before. Not that I know of. Something’s changed and I don’t know what it is.”

He believed that’s why the Order was showing up all of a sudden. Something in the universe had shifted. All the more reason why he needed to get out of here. But first the Commander. She didn’t deserve being caught up in all this.

“Empire ships entering FTL!” warned the computer.

On the display both ships flashed white and disappeared from view. “Computer, where are they going?”

“Tracking,” the computer replied. “98% chance they are going to T’Vis’shun.”

“She’s heading to her childhood home,” Billiam stated. “Her father had her and her siblings raised there as a symbol that everywhere in the Empire was safe, even at the border with their most hated enemy.”

“How do you know that?”

“She told me that herself.”

“Oh, yes. You two have met before, that’s how...”

“Yes, both our pasts are a little cloudy, but let’s focus on the matter at hand.”

“Yes.” Milton paused at the pilot’s seat. He was planning his next move, using every bit of information, strategy and creativity he could muster. “My guess, she’s going to consolidate what left she has left of the Empire. That demonstration was not so much a warning for the PC as it was to her dissenters.”

“I don’t think those who have decided to leave the Empire are going to come back anytime soon. If anything they’ll be more galvanised by the demonstration. I’ve seen what Empire worlds are like, all they needed was some hope and a spark. Now the match has been lit, they’re not going to back down. They’ll be more cautious though.”

“You may be right, but those who were on the fence are no longer on the fence. She’ll make her headquarters at T’Vis’shun.”

“But back to my original question, what now?”

“We do what we came here to do, rescue the Commander, then I get out of here.”

“What about the weapon? The particle?”

“What you do to each other is your business, not mine.”

“But you owe it to...”

“And what do you think I should do? Hmm Give people access to a huge supply of planet destroying ammo. No! The further away I am, the safer you all will be. I don’t know how much of this stuff is around but once it’s gone, it’s gone. Thankfully, some of it has been wasted on a lifeless moon.”

Milton was on the verge of hyperventilation.

“Where will you go?”

“The Core.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know!”

Chapter 19

Despite not seeing what had just happened, Commander Belle had heard every word. She couldn't just sit around the cell waiting for an opportunity to escape. She needed to make one herself.

Similar to PC brigs, Empire cells were five walls of thick seamless space age metal alloys that only a ship sized laser cannon could puncture. The sixth wall was a charged Electromagnetic Field that allowed air to pass, but nothing else. Though that could be adjusted. The main difference was the intensity. PC fields gave you a bit of shock. Empire fields were known to knock someone unconscious and on the rare occasion, kill them. So, Lillianna wasn't going to take her chances.

Besides from a metal shelf, for sleeping and a cornered off hole, for waste extraction, there was nothing she could do or use that would help her get out here. The trick about getting out of an Empire cell was to not get into one in the first place. Or was able to short out the power. That wasn't happening anytime soon.

So, if she wasn't able to force her way out by herself, she needed someone to help her on the outside. She was hoping that Milton or someone from the PC was coming to rescue her at any moment now, but it appeared that Milton had abandoned her and the PCF had bigger problems.

Perhaps, the guards.

The guards were at their station outside the brig cell block. There were two other cells in the block, both were empty. They would either come in to feed her or taunt her. One of them gave her a little shock for disobedience, though he looked like an officer. He seemed to get a perverse pleasure out of it, unlike the Empress who used it as a means to an end. However, if the guards wanted to give her something like a tray of food or water, they'd open a small hole in the field to for it to pass through. Perhaps she could pull the guard into the field and grab the remote emitter. They usually carried it on their forearm.

The idea was technically possible but not highly. No, there had to be something else.

"Get in there, traitor!" A guard she had seen before was pushing what looked like an officer who had been beaten to an inch of his life. Behind the guard was the other officer that had tortured Belle previously. He gave her a wicked smile.

"Put that piece of trash in the opposite cell. They can keep each other company. Until he dies. Perhaps, she'll learn what's in store for her."

“But, Empress said...”

“I know what the Empress said

The beaten officer, still bleeding from his wounds was pushed into the empty cell. The hardened officer went over to Lilliana.

“She’s absolutely right, you know.”

She could smell the stench of alcohol on his breath through the EM field.

“You do look a lot like her. The shape, the eyes. I do like the short hair though. More befitting an officer.”

“Sir?!” one of the guards interjected. He looked just as confused as Lilianna did.

“Leave us!”

“Should we call the doctor, so he can stand...”

“I said leave us. He will die here for his attempt at the Empress’s life. Their will be no trial.”

The guards stood there looking at each other. This was clearly not standard procedure.

“Would you like to join him for not following orders?”

The guards quickly filed out. The officer’s attention went back to Lilianna. By his stance, she felt like he would be standing over her if this was a bar situation. It may be the end of the 23rd century and people were generally more enlightened but there were still creeps around and Belle has had her fair share.

“You’re really going to let that man suffer in there?” Belle pointed out.

“He is nothing to worry about. The Empire of old is back. We don’t worry about scum like him. He does the crime, he suffers the consequences.”

“Charming,” she rolled sarcasm.

“You even sound like her,” he gave a dark chuckle.

Belle’s face went blank as she began to formulate a new plan. She didn’t want to do it, but there were no other opportunities available. She would have to try and live with herself at a later time. She gave a hidden smile.

“Do I sound like the Empress?”

He gave a sneer. “You pale in comparison to her, but you certainly have your similarities.”

“I see,” she replied. “Yes, she is a beautiful and powerful woman. Admittedly, I’m a little envious of her strength.”

“As are we all,” he gave a short look of despair before shaking it off.

“You love her don’t you?”

He looked at her suspiciously.

“But she doesn’t love you, does she? You’ve tried so hard to get her to notice you.”

Fire began to burn his eyes. “She did notice me,” he growled. “We grew up together, rose through the ranks together. We both loved each other once.”

“Man, this guy seems pretty smashed,” she thought. “And now she doesn’t,” she interjected. “That’s the problem with relationships with your superiors. Command always comes first.”

“What are you playing at Peacey?” he growled.

“Nothing. We’re just having a conversation. One officer to another.” She turned around and walked back to her bench that was her bed. She was trying to keep it together, trying to be as demure and authoritative at the same time. Something told him that he liked women with power but hated to be ignored. On inside she was exhausted, she was scared, but she needed to get out. “Despite everything that’s happened, I admire your loyalty. You get treated like nothing, but you still follow every one of her whims.”

The officer started breathing deeply considering her words. “I know what you’re trying to do Peacey. I will never turn against my Empress.”

“I wouldn’t dare turn you against the EMPIRE’s Empress. You love for her is absolute.” She recrossed her legs slowly. She got his full attention. “I’m just sympathising. All that love and devotion. You deserve to get something back. After all you’re a Commander...”

“Captain,” he growled.

Whoops. “Yes, Captain of the Empire. A loyal subject.” She flicked her hair back. It was hard to feel sexy when you’ve been carted across the sector being kidnapped, drug and carried like a sack of potatoes, however, it looked like she was pulling it off. It was about getting him horny or angry enough for him to come in the cell. She felt like she could take him in his drunken state. She would have to hope that no one was watching.

“What are you implying?”

“I’m not implying anything. I’m saying that a man of your calibre deserves to have what he wants. And if he can’t get what he wants then perhaps he should get the next best thing.”

The Captain had his thinking face on. He was considering his options. Lillianna felt incredibly disgusted by what she was doing. What if she couldn’t handle him? What if he was too strong? What if he...

He deactivated the forcefield. It was go time. She had to wait until he got closer before she made her move. She smiled wickedly as if to say I’m waiting for you. Take what you want. His face was practically drooling. What abhorrent behaviour from an officer, taking advantage of a prisoner. She knew the Empire did some horrible things, but seeing it up front was a wake up call. The PC shouldn’t be negotiating with these monsters. They should defeat them and free those they have abused for centuries.

He was now standing over the top of her like a drooling dog, his hands on her wrists. She could feel him about to pull her up. The great thing about Empire citizens was that they were human, which meant they had all the vulnerabilities humans had. She smiled as she kicked the Captain in the groin. He released his grip after that. She then kned him in the face before he had a chance to react.

Belle grabbed his weapon and searched for the field button. But before she could find it, the Captain regained control and went for her throat. He pushed against one of the walls, The weapon fell out of her hand. Lillianna saw that he was reaching for his communicator with his other hand. She held on to his arm for dear life, but the strength was leaving her.

“You bitch! You’re gonna get it now.”

“Lee’dur!” came a voice from behind. Commander Belle couldn’t see clearly as her vision was fading.

“Release her at once,” came the command.

He released his grip and she collapsed to the ground. At that point she lost consciousness

Chapter 21

The Empress sat on her lounge was again in the darkness of her suite, looking out to the streaks of multicoloured light.