

Wednesday
September 7th, 2028
13:14 hours (PST)

Ensign KJ Ford rested as comfortably as he could in his bed in the infirmary. He'd been there for several days now, and was told that until he was given a clean bill of health by Dr. Mitchell, he would be confined to the infirmary. His Pantherian heritage had given him better hearing than the average human, so despite the fact that he was not part of the ceremony, he could hear the parade being held in honor of the B-Squad. Part of him wanted to be there, to pay his respects, maybe say a few words. But the rest of him felt as though he didn't belong there. After all, if he had done his job correctly, he would have brought the B-Squad back safe and sound. If he had been able to accomplish the one goal SPD had given him, there wouldn't have been a need for a memorial parade.

While he was well aware that it was an irrational way of thinking, he couldn't help but shake it. Admiral Cruger himself had personally come to him, thanking him for his service and even giving him the Shadow morpher permanently, and while he was satisfied that his superiors saw nothing wrong with his performance, it wasn't enough for him.

He was in no condition to celebrate, no position to pat himself on the back for a job well done. While he had been able to secure the red energem and bring it back to SPD, it was only because the team came to his rescue. *If they hadn't come, I'd still be sitting in that cell rotting away*, he thought to himself.

Doing a good job wasn't enough for him, he wanted to excel. He wanted to exceed expectation, not just barely scrape by.

The only company in the infirmary with him was the Phantom Ranger, or at least the previous Phantom Ranger. He'd been unconscious for as long as KJ had been there, and had no idea who the guy was. *Not that we'd have a lot to talk about anyway*, he thought. *Hey buddy, sorry I didn't save your life sooner. Yeah, that's an ice breaker*, he scoffed at himself inwardly.

His thoughts were interrupted as the doors the infirmary slid open. Before he even saw who it was, he secretly hoped it was someone from the team stopping by to check on him. He'd been in and out of consciousness for hours, but he seemed to recall hearing Ella and Nathaniel having a conversation. Between the concussion and the painkillers, he wasn't sure if he had imagined the whole thing.

He turned his head slightly as an older woman stepped in. Older in the sense that she was clearly older than he was, not that she was *old* by any stretch of the imagination. Based on the all black dress she had on, and the veil over her face, he was able to put together who it was.

Its Ella and Nate's mom, he thought to himself.

She had no doubt come for the memorial service, to pay her respects to the father of her children. As much as he wanted to say something, to reach out in any way to comfort her, he also knew it was not his place.

"Ei? Natey?" she called out, glancing around the infirmary.

He sighed. He'd been conscious now for a few a while now, and he hadn't seen either of them since the conversation he wasn't really sure if he overheard or not.

"They're not here," he called out, not realizing he'd said it until she heard him, looking in his direction.

She headed over to them. "You're kitty, aren't you?" she asked. The tone in her voice made it obvious that she was grief stricken, so he decided to let it slide... this one time. Ella had a tendency to call him kitty, and he hated it, but letting it go seemed to be the right thing to do in the moment.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm Ensign KJ Ford," he said calmly. "I'd get up, but I'm in no condition."

She shook her head. "Oh no, its fine. I just... my daughter talks about you all the time. She thinks the world of you," she said.

"Really?" he asked.

Most of his interactions with the team, especially with Ella, had been what he would consider negative. He wasn't overly nice to her, but if there was one thing he knew about Ella, it was that she always saw the best in people... even if they didn't see it in themselves.

"She goes on and on about you. You two must be good friends," she said.

"Must be," he said, nodding.

"Oh, I'm sorry. How rude of me, I'm Alyssa Enrile. I'm Estella and Nathaniel's mother," she said, extending her hand to him.

Even though it hurt him to reach out, he felt it best to accept the pain to oblige her. "Pleasure to meet you, ma'am," he paused slightly, clearing his throat. "I'm... I'm sorry for your lose. I didn't know Officer Carson very well, but I know they miss him deeply," he mentioned, hoping he hadn't overstepped his bounds.

She cracked a half smile, albeit insincere. "Thank you, ensign."

"Is the service over?"

"No, not quite. There are some stuff SPD bureaucrats out there giving all, drawn out speeches about duty and honor. It seemed like a good time to get out of there and see if I could find the twins. Have they been in here?" Alyssa asked.

"I can't say for sure," he took his index finger, twirling it around his head and rolling his eyes slightly. "They've got me on painkillers," he confessed.

"Oh, I'm sorry to have bothered you. Get some rest, Ensign Ford," she said.

"Its no problem at all, ma'am. My condolences to you and your family."

"Thank you," before she could turn to walk away, she caught a glimpse of the former Phantom Ranger, who was still unconscious and hooked to machines to monitor his condition. "Who is this?" she asked.

She wasn't sure why, or even how, but there was something about him that seemed to draw her to him. Though he was unconscious and motionless, something about his face seemed to cry out to her. There was a strength in him, she sensed, though she wasn't sure how she knew that.

"He was the Phantom Ranger. They're not sure if he is ever going to snap out of this coma or not," he paused. "I know Ella had been in here sitting with him for hours, hoping he would wake up. She's a sweet kid," KJ said.

"Yes, she is."

Alyssa stared down at him, and almost immediately realized why her daughter would gravitate towards him. He wasn't hard on the eyes at all, but more than this, she more than likely sensed he had a kind heart. Ella had a knack for seeing into someone's heart, knowing who they really were. And if Ella had dedicated *that* much of her time to being by his side, she knew he had to be someone special.

She reached over, touching his hand slightly, amazed that he felt so warm. She wasn't sure what to expect really, but she'd assumed that being in a coma wouldn't have left him feeling so... so alive.

"Was he special to her?"

He nodded. "He gave his life to save her, to save us all. He's a hero, and deserves to be honored in that parade as much as the B-Squad does," he realized that he was trying to pay a compliment to the former Phantom Ranger, but also realized that in doing so he may have taken away some of the spotlight that Bridge and his team deserved. "In my opinion," KJ clarified.

“Thank you for your honesty, ensign,” she said softly as a tear rolled down her face. She tried to wipe it away before KJ noticed, but she was much too late for that.

“No, thank you. The twins are... a genuine pleasure to be around,” he said.

While he would never admit it to them, he didn't have a problem paying them a compliment to their mother. After all, she looked like she could use a bit of good news.

“Again, rest well, ensign. Get better,” she said, turning to walk away.

As she headed for the infirmary doors, they slid open, and *he* walked in.

KJ recognized him right away. While he may not have remembered KJ, KJ had full knowledge of Jack Landors. He was the street thief turned red ranger, and leader of the B-Squad. He led his team to victory in the Troobian War a few years ago, and then mysteriously resigned from SPD. There were rumors that Cruger had sent him on a covert mission to some obscure corner of the galaxy, and others believed that he ran off with a girl to start a business. Whatever Jack had done with his time away from SPD was his own business, but KJ recognized that he deserved a certain level of respect. He was a legend at SPD, and it made sense that he would come back to pay his respects to his former teammates.

Alyssa almost bumped into him, but was stopped as he reached out, putting his hands on his shoulders. Jack appeared much older than KJ remembered him; he could be partially due to the full beard he'd grown, or the weight he'd packed on since leaving SPD. But even now, after being away from active duty for at least three years, Jack still appeared to be in great shape.

“Lyssa,” he sighed. “I came when I heard about Bridge. I'm so sorry,” he sighed, wrapping his arms around her.

Alyssa seemed to melt into Jack's arms, allowing herself to be comforted.

“Thanks, J. I know you aren't in SPD anymore, thank you for coming,” she sighed.

He nodded. “Of course. Bridge was my teammate, my friend... my brother. Where else would I be?” he replied.

It struck KJ as odd that they knew one another, but he easily dismissed the thought. After all, her kids were in SPD. Jack is a former red ranger and no doubt checked in on Bridge's kids from time to time. It made sense.

“Still, thank you. I know it would mean a lot to him.”

“So... did they find Bridge, or...” he allowed his sentence to trail off, unsure of if there was a polite way to ask.

“No. B-Squad was declared lost in action. I still have hope, but I haven’t seen in years. It’s not as though we kept in touch,” she said.

Jack glanced over her shoulder slightly, getting a look at KJ. Realizing that they were about to discuss some rather sensitive information, he took a few steps away, pulling her over with him slightly. It was just enough to be out of earshot.

But again, KJ’s Pantherian heritage afforded him much better hearing than the average human.

“I was always against the admiral wiping Bridge’s memories. I felt like he deserved to know about the kids,” Jack mentioned.

She sighed, nodding. “I knew what I was getting into when Bridge and I got involved. Doggie chose not to take my memories for fear that the process may interfere with my pregnancy. The truth was, when you guys left 2004, I wasn’t pregnant,” she said.

Jack seemed confused. “What? But the twins...”

“Think about it. That was 2004. Ella and Nathaniel weren’t born until 2008, almost four years later. I didn’t get pregnant until...” she was interrupted.

“Bridge’s mission in San Angeles in 2007,” Jack said, snapping his fingers. “I didn’t even put that together until just now,” he said.

“No one did, and it was best that way, I guess. For everyone.”

“I’d heard found someone else. Got married. Settled down. Last report I heard you had another baby, you were happy,” he brought up. “Whos the lucky guy?”

She glanced back at KJ, ensuring that there was no way he would be able overhear. KJ anticipated it and made sure to be looking in a different direction as she glanced his way.

“No, there was no one else. I knew that if I seemed like some lonely widower, mourning over the lose of my fiance, SPD would never let my children have a normal life. We tried to move on as best we could, have a life. I adopted an orphan child, I think you might remember him. Samuel,” she brought up.

“Little Sam? Really?”

She nodded. "Both his parents were gone, he didn't have anyone. He was alone, I was alone. I thought we could help each other. All he ever talked about was SPD, putting thoughts in the twins head. How could I be surprised that as soon as they were enlistment age that they would come running to this place?" she giggled, or at least tried to giggle.

"How long have you had Sam?"

"Shortly after Doggie made him an honorary member of SPD, we found each other. He was a student in my class. I felt for him, and when I discovered he didn't have anyone, I offered to help," Alyssa explained.

"In your class? Sam couldn't have been older than 12 at the time. I thought you taught high school over in Reefside," Jack brought up.

"I did, for a while, but honestly I needed to get away from that. Every other day there was some sort of monster attack on the city or some big megazord battle in the downtown area. I understand why it was happening, but honestly, homeowners insurance doesn't cover zord damage. I moved out of there and settled outside of Reefside. But apparently no city in California is safe from that," she said with a slight smile.

"Even after all that, you still find time to help others. How do you do that?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Once a ranger, always a ranger."

"Is Sam still in SPD?"

"He is, but he isn't old enough to enlist yet, especially since all the new changes. When he turned 20 he will be able to officially enroll. In the meantime, he helps out when he can, but he tries to stay out of the twin's way. They're full fledged officers now," she said proudly.

"Bridge would be very proud... if he remembered them," Jack assured her.

Alyssa leaned in close to him. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course."

"The memory suppressor didn't work on him. Maybe it was his genetic enhancements, maybe it was the fact that he passed through a temporal wormhole before it could take effect, maybe it was pure power of will not to forget... but he remembered. We saw him again in 2014 during the legendary war with the rangers of that era," she mentioned.

"I remember that. *All* of the rangers showed up for that, didn't they?"

She nodded. "Mmm hmm. It was nice to get out there and protect the Earth again, but I don't really fit in my uniform the way I use to," she sighed.

"Stop it, you look great."

"I always told the twins who their father was; I wanted them to be proud of him. He was out there defending not just the Earth, but the entire galaxy. Plus, by then Ella had begun to exhibit certain... *abilities*. She needed her father to explain it to her," Alyssa explained.

"Does your son have abilities?"

"None that we've seen. It seemed to just skip him. Either that or we don't know what they are yet. Bridge promised that if he did manifest powers, he'd come to help again," she said.

"Bridge isn't the kind of guy to skip out on family," he pointed out.

"Our family dynamic was... *unique*, but it wasn't as though they didn't grow up without him. He was actually born in 2007. The kids had the chance to grow up with him, watch him become the man I would fall in..." she stopped, refusing to finish the sentence. "They were friends, and they understood that the situation was a little strange. But it was important to me that they knew who their father was," she said.

"I understand," he paused. "*Were* you... I mean, *are* you... still in love with him?" Jack asked.

She shook her head, albeit reluctantly. "No. I *do* love him though, and I am grateful for the children, but it's more mutual respect at this point. 2004 was a long time ago, I'm not the same person I was 24 years ago," she chuckled. "Funny, he *is* though, isn't he? For me it was a forbidden affair that spanned half of my life, but for him it was a few weeks," she sighed.

"I try not to think about time travel. It gives me a headache," he admitted.

"Well, we should probably get back out there. I came in here looking for the twins, but Ensign Ford over there told me they hadn't been here in awhile," she paused. "What do you know about this Phantom Ranger guy?" she asked.

"Nothing. I don't really keep up with SPD's missions anymore. Ally and I are pretty busy down at the shelter. I don't come here very often," he said.

"I hear he gave risked his life to save the twins. He's in here because he helped them. I owe him for that," Alyssa said.

“So do I. I don’t feel like, in the end, I was a very good friend to Bridge. He deserved better from me,” Jack sighed, realizing that he’d let his personal life get in the way of keeping up with his friends. In retrospect, he regretted it.

Alyssa wrapped her arms around him. “Bridge knew how much you cared about him. He always did. All her ever talked about was B-Squad and buttery toast. It would have been annoying if he wasn’t so cute,” she smiled.

“You have my number. Please, keep in touch. And you tell the kids that Uncle Jack will stop by and check on them more often. I owe that to Bridge,” he paused. “To you.”

“Thank you, Jack.”

She leaned up, kissing him on the cheek gently, then wrapped her arm around his and walked out of the infirmary.