

Saturday
September 3rd, 2028
11:01 hours (PST)

As usual, the promenade was full of life, officers coming and going, all of them looking for something to eat or socializing with friends. There was a lot of friendly chatter at each table, and everyone seemed to be so happy.

Except for Asia.

She found herself sitting alone at a table at the far end of the promenade, politely shooing away any waiter or waitress who stopped by to ask if she was ready to order. The truth was, she wasn't very hungry, and she wasn't much in the mood to be social with anyone. She had other things on her mind.

Her entire life, she remembered hearing about the power rangers and the good they did in the city. She'd watch on television as the rangers once again protected the city, or made first contact with a new alien race. They were peacekeepers, it all seemed to nobel. She knew that the only way to ever become a ranger herself, she'd have to go through SPD, but she also knew that Space Patrol Delta didn't accept just anyone. They were very selective with their process, and many of her friends had applied, only to be turned down but encouraged to apply the following year. So when she applied and was immediately accepted, there was a sense of pride. Being at SPD had been a wonderful experience for her. She'd met her alien races, traveled to different planets and seen her fair share of action. The entire world; no, the universe was at her fingertips. There was nothing she couldn't do, no goal she couldn't strive for an achieve.

It amazed her that she managed to make it to D-Squad so quickly, and found herself on a team of amazing officers she was happy to serve with. They each had their own quirks, their own way of doing things, but none of it even interfered with what she wanted to do. While she wasn't quite sure what her long term plans were, she was happy that she had all the time in the world to figure it out, and there were no limits to the possibilities.

Then, Serenity came and changed all that.

Somehow knowing that in future she would have a child *should* have been comforting for her, but it was just the opposite. Now, her future had been planned *for* her. She hadn't even met the father of this child yet, but it was a foregone conclusion that it was going to happen. *What happens if I meet him and don't like him*, she wondered. *Is that screwing with the timeline? Will I destroy something?* Suddenly, her choices were no longer her own. Suddenly, decisions about her life were being made for her, and she felt trapped knowing that one way or another, destiny would have to fulfill itself.

It was nothing against Serenity; she thought the world of her. Serenity seemed strong, capable, independent and headstrong. She was everything she hoped her child would grow up to be, but being told what her daughter would be took away her choice to raise her as she saw fit. Suddenly nothing felt like it was her idea anymore.

"Mind if I sit down?" a voice asked.

She looked up to see Pascal standing in front of her in civilian clothes. It was rare to see him out of uniform, but just because it was a familiar face didn't mean she was ready to entertain anyone. There were still things she needed to sort out for herself.

"I'd like to be alone," she said, not realizing how cold she sounded until it was too late.

"You seem burdened. Is there something I can do to help?" he asked.

She sighed. "You're sweet, but I'm fine."

"I'm an Xybrian, Asia. My species is designed to know when someone is in distress, then to do whatever we can to ease that burden. If you would like to be alone, I accept that, but know that if you need to talk or just need someone to listen, it would be my pleasure to help," he said cheerfully, then turned to walk away.

There was something in his voice, something so soothing, calming. Pascal meant every word he said, and there wasn't an insincere bone in his body. She admired that about him.

"How do you do it?" she called out.

Pascal immediately stopped, turning back around to face her. "How do I do what?" he inquired.

"How do you *just* serve? How is that the only thing you do? What about the things you want? What about your goals? Your dreams? Your desires? Doesn't it bother you that from birth you're told what you're suppose to do?" Asia replied.

Pascal sat down across from her. "Do not mistake my desire to serve as something I am forced to do. There are no Xybrian laws that demand it. It is something we want to do. It is my wish to serve, my pleasure to do so. I like to ease the burdens of those I care about," he explained to her.

"But that's all you do. What about when you're alone? When there is no one to serve, what do you do? How do you act when there is no one around who needs anything?"

"I look for ways to better help my peers. There is no greater joy than to help those I cherish," Pascal said.

"That's real sweet, but that's *all* you do. What else is there? Don't you ever get sick of it?" she asked him.

It was at that moment that a waitress walked over to them. "Hello. Would you like to order?" she inquired.

"I will have an Earth beverage; warm chocolate," he said pleasantly.

Asia couldn't help but crack a smile. Pascal wasn't from Earth, so what was common knowledge to her was foreign to him.

"He means hot chocolate," she corrected.

"Ah yes, *hot* chocolate," Pascal said.

"Marshmallows?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry. Perhaps you misunderstood me. I would like a hot chocolate," he paused. "Or am I not saying it right?"

"No, she means do you want marshmallows in your hot chocolate," Asia pointed out.

He nodded in understanding. "Oh, I see. I don't know if I do or not. Is it customary to have these marshmallows in your drink?"

"It's a preference."

"Then yes, I will have them. Thank you," Pascal said.

"Right away, sir," the waitress said, hurrying away.

"To answer your question, lieutenant; no, I never get *sick of it*, as you put it. I take pride in knowing that I have somehow enriched the lives of those around me. Nothing gives me greater pleasure," he explained.

"That must be nice."

"Oh it is," he said eagerly. "Some people are good with their hands, others with with minds. Some are soldiers, some are farmers. *I* am a person person," he said.

"You mean *people* person," Asia corrected.

“Perhaps you’re right. Thank you,” he said. “Is that what's bothering you? Are you being forced to do something you would rather not do?” he asked.

She sighed. “One minute I’m the right of my Lt. Commander on the most advanced starship in the galaxy with the world in front of me, the next I’m being told that I have to have a child with a man I don’t even know. I mean, who the heck is the Phantom Ranger? What if I don’t like him? What if he doesn’t like me?” she asked.

“On Xybria, we have arranged marriages. Sometimes the mate we are given is,” he hesitated slightly. “Less than desirable, but we accept it and eventually most Xybrians fall in love and enjoy their marriage,” he told her.

“Well on Earth we don’t like to be told what to do or who to love.”

“Do you feel as though knowing Serenity is your daughter in the future, you have an obligation to ensure she is born under the circumstances she described to us?” Pascal asked.

“Yes, exactly. It’s not my choice anymore. I’m being told I will have a baby with the Phantom Ranger and I don’t know if I want to do that or not,”

“Then don’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you do not desire it, don’t do it,” he said.

“But what about the future? What about Serenity?”

“What about it? What about her? The future is not set in stone. Your fate is not written, it is *being* written. The actions you take will take you down two different paths; either you will not accept what you were told and the future will shape itself around that choice, or you will accept it, and even if that case the future will still move forward,” Pascal said.

“But isn’t that selfish? Serenity traveled all the way back to our time to help others. Isn’t it selfish of me to not do my part to ensure the future?” she asked.

“The future will come regardless of what you decide to do. The choice is yours, regardless to what options you have been presented.”

“Were you presented an option? Isn’t serving part of your religious belief?” Asia asked.

Just then, the waitress returned, bringing Pascal his drink. “Here you are, sir. Enjoy. And be careful, it’s hot,” she warned, then walked away.

“It is, but it is still our choice to follow. There are religions on our world that think serving is ultimately pointless considering we all die, and because there is no alternative to Elysium Fields, some believe that regardless to what you do, we all end up in the same place,” he said.

“So why do it? Why serve?”

“I serve because I enjoy it. Why wouldn’t I want to help a friend?” Pascal asked.

She nodded slightly. “I guess you’re right.”

Pascal took a sip of his drink, smiling. “This is delicious. Thank you for suggesting the mallows,” he said cheerfully.

“Anytime, Pascal.”

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Ella decided to spend her downtime in the common area of SPD. Officers came and went; some of them playing arcade games, others watching television on the big screen. Ella, on the other hand, stood in a corner doing a handstand.

She watched as people came in and went out, having conversations with one another. Every now and then someone glanced her way, and she smiled at them, but it didn’t stop her from what she was doing. The last couple of days had been a lot to take in, so she was happy when Lt. Commander Serenity gave her team the day off to relax and unwind. She’d already spoken with her mother, filling her in on what was going on. And now, she was taking the time to father her thoughts.

She was interrupted as the doors to the common area hissed open, and Garr entered the room. It was the first time she’d seen Garr out of uniform. He wore a green t-shirt that seemed to cling to his muscular frame, and what appeared to be a kilt. He didn’t have on socks or shoes, and with Ella being upside down, she immediately spotted that he had webbed feet.

“Hello friend,” Garr said, tilting his head slightly to get a good look at her. “What friend doing?”

“I’m just relaxing. This always seems to relax me,” she said cheerfully.

“Garr relax with mud bath.”

“That doesn’t really sound like my cup of tea, but if it works for you, cool,” she said.

“Garr join?”

“If you think you can get up here, go for it, big guy!” Ella said.

Garr dropped to his knees, planting his hands on the floor, then kicked upwards, standing on his hands and resting his feet up against the wall. His kilt immediately fell to the floor, covering his face.

“Garr do right?”

“I sure hope you have on underwear, Garr,” she giggled.

“What underwear?” he inquired.

She paused. “If you don’t have anything covering up your, um... guy parts, you must be putting on quite a show right now,” she said.

“Garr no put on show. Garr stand with friend.”

“No, I mean, everyone can see you.”

“Garr no care.”

There was a moment of silence between them.

“So, if that was Doggie Cruger we met on the planet, but he was a little kid, does that mean he was Puppy Cruger?” Ella asked.

Garr laughed. “Garr don’t know. But that funny.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard you laugh before,” she mentioned.

“Warriors no suppose to laugh.”

“And who told you that nonsense?”

“Kull tell Garr no laugh. Tell Garr to be warrior. Be strong. Be brave,” he said.

“You can still be strong and brave and still have fun. You’re off the weekend. Enjoy yourself,” she told him.

“Garr enjoy battle. Garr enjoy victory.”

"Can't you just enjoy being with friends?" she asked.

"Yes. Garr like friends."

"Good. We like you too," she said.

"That make Garr happy," Garr admitted.

"Lt. Garr!" Commander Tate said in a firm tone.

With his kilt over his face, Garr was unable to see anything in front of him, but immediately recognized the voice.

"Yes sir?"

"Are you aware that you're... exposed?" he asked.

"Garr no exposed. Garr dressed."

"Garr, you're upside down, which means everything that is suppose to be *under* this garment is fully viewable," he told him.

Garr finally realized what Ella had been trying to tell him, and immediately stood back to his feet, making sure his kilt was facing downward.

"Garr didn't know. Garr sorry," he said.

"Next time, just wear underwear, Lieutenant," the commander told him.

"Garr understand, sir."

Commander Tate tilted his head slightly, getting a good look at Ella. "Like father, like daughter, I suppose," he said with a smile, turning around and walking away.

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"Okay, try it again," Nathaniel said, going over the calculations one final time.

Boom, who was across the room on another panel, nodded. "Is everything aligned properly?" he asked.

"I don't see any problems. This should do the trick," he said.

The two of them had been in the research and development room all afternoon working on a project, so much so that both of them had lost track of time.

"Alright. Bringing it online, now."

Boom activated the system, and a holographic woman appeared in the center of the room. She was short with short black hair, and wore a white lab coat. "How can I help?" the hologram asked, but the voice seemed a bit distorted.

"We need to adjust the vocal subroutines. She sounds... robotic," he said.

"I'll do it from here and reinitialize," Boom said.

The woman disappeared, there was a slight flicker, and she reappeared. "How can I help?" she asked, this time in a much more organic sounding voice.

"That's perfect!" Nathaniel said.

"Now, we can start uploading the medical database into her program and she'll be 100% ready to go," he said.

Just then, the doors slid open, and Serenity walked into the room. Nathaniel looked up, noticing she was in full uniform.

"Can we help you, sir?" he asked, giving her his attention.

"I thought I told you to take a couple days off, chief," she pointed out.

"I am. I find that tinkering with something helps me relax. Boom and I are working on a medical hologram to install in the medbay and even on ships in the fleet. It will help in the event there is no medical staff available," he told her.

"And this is *relaxing* to you?"

"Yes, sir," he said.

She turned to Boom. "Can I borrow your partner for a minute?" she asked him.

"Oh, of course. I'll keep uploading those files, chief. We'll have her up and running in no time," he said.

Serenity looked at the hologram. "Is that suppose to be Doc K for the Alphabet Soup project?" she asked.

"Yes. How did we do?"

"She needs to be shorter."

"We'll work on it."

Nathaniel followed Serenity out of the room and into a corridor. A few officers walked by, and she waited until they were out of earshot before she spoke to him.

"I've been meaning to talk to you about the other day," she scratched the back of her head nervously. "I said some things, you said some things. I just wanted to make sure we were still... still okay," she brought up.

"Why wouldn't we be, sir?"

"Come on, Nate. Drop ranks for a minute and talk to me. I told you you were smart and funny..." she was interrupted.

"... and cute," he added.

She blushed slightly. "Yes, and cute. Look, I know that was a lot to take in, but in all that time we didn't really discuss how you felt about me," she brought up.

"What does it matter? You made it clear that nothing can happen. You're worried about finishing your mission and then fading away like Lt. Jordan did. I get it. You don't want to get attached," he said.

"But..." she paused. "I am attached."

"What does that mean?"

"It means it felt nice to be able to tell you how I felt. That had been weighing heavy on me for a while, I guess. Everyone was trying to tell me but I was lying to myself. I *do* like you," she said.

"But your position hasn't changed. You don't want to see where it can go. It would be inappropriate," Nathaniel pointed out.

“You’re right,” she nodded. “You’re absolutely right, chief. Forget I said anything. I’m sorry I disturbed you. Please, go back to whatever you and Boom were doing,” she said, turning to walk away.

Before she could leave, Nathaniel grabbed her hand, stopping her. She turned back around, only to be met with a kiss. It didn’t linger very long, but it was enough for Nathaniel to make his point.

Of course I like you. You’re smart and funny and cute,” he said, teasing her.

“So what does this mean?”

“I don’t know. Whatever this is, it will happen on its own. And when it is over, I won’t be sad that it’s over. I’ll be happy that it happened,” Nathaniel said.

Serenity smiled, turning and walking away.