

The Boxman Trilogy

Book I

Give Us This Day

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## Chapter 1

Ninety two hours is not a long time but it seemed like an eternity to Zero, as it marked the end of his life. Especially since there was absolutely nothing he could do in that ninety two hours except wait. The next three and a half days stretched out before him like a lonely abyss. There would be no one to talk to, no one to commiserate with, and no one to file a complaint with. He was alone. He was utterly alone. In fact, there was probably not a living soul within ten light years of his current location. He had contemplated turning off his life support and just ceasing to exist but he really was not uncomfortable, just lonely. Life support granted him everything he needed to survive... for a while.

Of course there was always the miniscule possibility that he would be rescued. He and four other soldiers had been ordered to scout several systems five jumps away from their base ship. They were on a routine mission looking for supplies, scouring remote star systems for possible sources of tylium, the precious resource that powered their ships. They were also on the look out for other basic necessities like water, food supplies or useful deposits of ore. They were not expected back for three more days. Since it was not

unusual for scout ships to return late from a mission, Zero estimated that a rescue ship might be along in about six days. By that time, there would be no one left to rescue.

Zero, the only survivor of the crew, chalked his current predicament up to luck. Although, he thought as he floated aimlessly in vast emptiness, he was not entirely sure if his luck was actually good luck or bad. Sure he had survived. But to what end? Was he to just float around for the next ninety two hours and forty seven minutes and then be snuffed out like a burned out light bulb? His colleagues had met their end quickly and quite possibly painlessly. Were they the lucky ones?

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Colonial time: Wednesday, 2200 hours.

Galactica

“You’re late.”

“I know.”

“You’re over an hour late!” Lee could sense the disgust in her voice.

“I know. I’m sorry.” He was sure that she was paying her lawyer by the hour. He didn’t care. He just wanted this to be over. He even contemplated not showing up at all but he figured that the sooner he faced the music, the sooner it would be over, the sooner he could start over.

He took the one empty chair in front of the small table serving as a desk. Apparently they were not expecting him to bring his own lawyer. He glanced at Dee’s lawyer sitting across from him and next to Dee. He recognized him as one of the press lawyers that constantly hounded the President, making sure that the civil rights of the people were not violated and the free speech of the press was preserved. He was not a

divorce lawyer but he was an acquaintance of Dee and he was probably doing her a favor. Lee had always regarded him as a parasite, sucking the life out of the president with his constant barrage of motions and complaints. Lee had the feeling that his own life was about to be sucked out of him.

“Mark.” Lee gave the lawyer a courtesy acknowledgement with a nod of his head. Mark Ipeck was a young scrawny man barely taller than Dee. His pinched nose held a pair of coke bottle glasses which distorted the look of his eyes. His wispy hair always seemed askew but he was clean shaven, which was a far cry from Lee’s current state. Lee hadn’t shaved in three days and was looking pretty scruffy. Mark was dressed in a dark grey three piece suit with a grey tie. He looked very professional. Dee looked professional in her dress blues, pressed to a pin. Lee almost regretted not taking the time to change his own clothes. Almost.

“Hello Lee, I’m glad you’re here.” Mark responded without emotion. There was no warmth or genuineness in his greeting. It was simply business.

“Ok, where do I sign?” Lee abruptly stated. He had only been in the room for a few seconds and already he was anxious to leave. Although the room was well lit from the fluorescent overhead lights standard though out the ship, he sensed darkness, a coldness that cut to his bone. The room was small and cold. Dee and her lawyer seemed small and cold. It was as if the business taking place in the room was insignificant and all passion had been squelched. It was simply business.

The icy air was a stark contrast to Lee’s sweaty body. He had practically jogged all the way from the Starboard hanger deck to the forward office. He had been helping the Chief work on a Raptor, changing some of the electrical lines that had been fried on

its last mission, when he suddenly realized that he was late for the meeting. He scooted out from under the bird, apologized to the Chief for having to run and took off down the corridor. He had made a quick stop at the head and washed the grease and grime from his hands and arms. A glance in the mirror revealed that he was not presentable for a meeting with a lawyer. He was wearing a military issue green tank that was far from green and fatigue trousers that looked like they hadn't been washed in a week. They probably hadn't been, he mused, but, after weighing the time it would take him to change with the rage he would hear from Dee, he decided that he would go as he was.

Mark handed Lee a stack of neatly printed and stapled papers with the official seal of the courts at the bottom center. There were a half of dozen pages each marked in at least two places for Lee's signature and/or initials and a date.

"Can I borrow a pen?" Lee asked without looking up from the pages.

"Don't you want to read them first?" Mark responded as he slipped a pen out of his breast pocket, twisted the pen so the point extended from the barrel and set it in the middle of the table.

"I know what it says." Lee responded, picked up the pen and began initializing and signing where indicated in the document. He knew that it said that his marriage to Petty Officer Anastasia Dualla Adama was now legally over. He had no worries about losing anything to Dee in the settlement. Between them they had no assets, no children and nothing to split down the middle. It was also standard practice that there would be no alimony payments in marriages that lasted less than five years. Their marriage had lasted about eighteen months. Plus, Lee was currently unemployed.

His marriage had been “over” for months but Dee was finally cutting the ties. Although they still inhabited the same quarters, they rarely spoke and managed to avoid each other by taking opposing duty shifts. Dee had tried to move out during the trial of the century but was forced to move back in when a fresh batch of nugget recruits, new pilots, needed the bunk space. The two were able to cohabit quite well for a while; until Dee informed Lee that she wanted a divorce. That was two weeks ago.

Lee had tried to make amends but Dee would have nothing to do with him. She could not get past the fact that Lee had helped to represent and successfully defend Gaius Baltar as he stood trial for treason. Baltar was suspected of conspiring with the Cylons to eradicate humanity. Lee, seeing an opportunity to pursue a career in law, agreed to assist the lawyer assigned to the case. The entire process, although grueling as it was, awoke a passion for justice in Lee’s soul. Unfortunately his passion caused a rift between him and his father and a chasm between him and his wife. His father got over it, his wife did not. Was she angry because he helped defend the slimy bastard in the first place or was she upset because his testimony helped to win the case? Lee did not know the answer to this question and was not about to find out. His marriage was over.

The brevity of his marriage bothered him. He felt like a failure. How could other people stay married for a lifetime and he could not stay married for two years? Although this question nagged at his soul, deep down he knew the answer. He was reluctant to admit the truth. The truth was that he never really loved Dee in the first place. Not really. He did not have a burning passion to be with her. She had been convenient. She had been there when he needed someone. And she had been the one he turned to when his heart was shredded to pieces by the one he had loved for years; Starbuck.

He had confessed his love to Starbuck and she to him on New Caprica. Foolishly, he envisioned a lifelong marriage to her. Even when she was engaged to his brother Lee had a special love for her. He remembered having to resign himself to the fact that she was in love with Zack. Starbuck seemed like a perfect woman; strong, fun loving and full of surprises and spontaneity. He felt so jealous of Zack. Sure she was a loose cannon and had a problem with respecting authority but he just loved being around her. Maybe that was what drew Lee to her. She was completely opposite of his straight and narrow idealism. He should have known better.

After Zack's death, Lee couldn't even talk to her. It was too painful to deal with the conflicting emotions of losing his only brother and suppressing his feelings for Kara. Lee distanced himself from her, from his father and pretty much from everyone else who tried to get close over the next two years. When he suddenly and unexpectedly found himself on Galactica, working side by side with Kara while trying to protect and preserve the human race, Lee had allowed his feelings for her to return. That was a mistake.

It was a mistake to have made passionate love to her under the stars on New Caprica. It was a mistake to proclaim his love for her to the heavens. It was a mistake to ask her to leave the man she was currently with and to marry him. She readily agreed but less than five hours later, Starbuck had abandoned Lee and married another man. Lee was devastated. How could she pledge her love to him and marry another just a few hours later? Lee now knew the answer; she was Starbuck.

Dee had been there waiting for him unaware of his emotional rollercoaster ride. It really was not fair to Dee. He had married Dee on the rebound and almost to spite Starbuck. He figured that maybe he and Dee would live a long and happy life together.

Maybe they could start a family. Maybe Dee was a better match for him. But there was no passion. Their souls were not knit together as he had seen in other couples. His stray thoughts were not drawn to Dee and he did not look forward to being with her after a long day's work. He liked Dee. He even loved Dee to an extent but he was not in love with Dee. The marriage had been doomed from the start.

Now Dee sat silently watching him as he scribbled his name two dozen times on the papers in front of him. He did not look at her. He could not look at her for fear that he would see in her face his failure to love her as he should have.

By the time Lee had finished signing the papers the coldness of the room had penetrated his skin and was half way to his bones.

“Do you have a copy for me?” Lee asked Mark as he stood. Mark produced a second set of identical unsigned papers for Lee's records. Lee took the papers hastily folded them up into a wallet sized mass and shoved them in his back pocket. “I'll see you around.” And with that, Lee disappeared through the door almost as quickly as he had come.

Dee looked at Mark and Mark looked back at Dee. Neither knew what to say. The entire proceedings took less than three minutes. It was probably an all time record for the fastest divorce proceedings ever. There were no arguments, no nit picking about the documents, and no conversation to speak of. All Mark had to do now was file the paperwork. Dee almost felt cheated out of a “real” divorce, but then again, she had felt cheated out of a “real” marriage too.

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Lee stepped out into the corridor and took a deep breath. It was over. He was officially divorced. He took another deep breath, as if he had to re-fill his lungs that had been emptied of all air while he was in that room. He could see his grungy appearance reflected in the stainless steel wall opposite him. He looked pretty bad but he really didn't care. He knew where he was headed and he knew who was waiting for him there.

## Chapter 2

Colonial Time: Wednesday, 2218

Colonial One

It was late and it was hard for her to focus on the report that was just handed her. “I’m sorry Tory, I need you to explain this to me.” Laura had good days and she had bad days. This was a bad day. The cancer that continued to ravage her body seemed particularly vicious the past few days. She had spent most of the day lying on the couch in her office slipping in and out of a restless sleep. Every time she woke, Tory, her assistant, was there offering her a hot cup of herbal tea and another issue that needed to be addressed or another document that needed to be signed. On days like these, she relied heavily on Tory. She would often make her decisions based on what Tory thought. Laura was uncomfortable with this but the office of the President had to continue to function. The alternative, having the Vice President take over, sent shivers down her spine. The last thing that the rag tag fugitive fleet needed was a rebel terrorist at the helm.

“The head of security for the fleet, Major Gentry, is concerned about these robberies,” Tory began. “The individual robberies and break-ins, in and of themselves are

pretty insignificant. A few pipes missing from the Rising Star and a roll of copper wiring missing from the Adriatic are not a major concern. But when the recycling plant was broken into, it threw up a red flag. Madam President, someone is stealing supplies to make home made pipe bombs. Gentry wanted to bring this to your attention right away.”

The President let out a sigh of disbelief and sadness. Was it not enough that the human race was fleeing for their lives? Were the trials of traveling through space not a hardship enough for these people? Laura simply could not understand why people would want to inflict more pain on an already devastated group of survivors. Twice the Cylons had robbed the people of their home; once on Caprica, with the destruction of untold billions of people, and once on New Caprica, when two thousand more of the forty-nine thousand survivors of the human race were lost. The Cylons had been slowly diminishing their numbers over the past three years and now we were going to help them by finishing the job off.

Tory began again “Madam President, Major Gentry will try and track down these people but he was hoping you could help him out.”

“How?” Laura’s mind was still a bit foggy and was struggling to keep focused on the threat.

“The robbery at the recycling plant was caught on tape. He was not sure but he thought that one of the intruders was originally from the Astral Queen. He was hoping that the Vice President could help identify the men and maybe even help apprehend them before it is too late.” It was obvious that Tory had finished all that she needed to say. Now it was up to the President to make a decision.

“Get the tapes and get Mr. Zarek in here as soon as possible.”

“Yes Ma’ m.” Tory turned and left. Laura sunk back into the couch. She needed time to rest. She whispered a quick prayer that it would take hours to locate Zarek and the fleet would remain safe until then.

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Colonial Time: Wednesday, 2227 hours

Galactica

“Well look what the cat dragged in.”

“Hi Kara.” Kara had been saving a seat for Lee in Joe’s bar. Joe had opened the bar on one of the empty lower hanger decks shortly after the exodus from New Caprica. It had revitalized the morale of the crew; a casual place where the crew could go to unwind, practice pyramid shots, listen to music or have a dart tournament. Kara was sitting at a table for two with half a bottle in front of her, two glasses and a wicked smile on her face. Her security detail sat at the next table enjoying nothing and watching Kara carefully. Since her two month disappearance she was under suspicion of being... of being...well, nobody really knew what. It was inconceivable that she was a Cylon. Lee didn’t know what to think. He just knew that the spunky blonde with the attitude was Kara. His glass was full, Kara’s was empty but she quickly refilled as he sat down.

“I see you dressed for the occasion” Kara laughed with a bit of anticipation in her voice. She wanted to know the details but Lee was not forthcoming. Kara had been waiting for over half an hour, thus the half empty bottle and the giggles.

He stared at his glass for a few minutes, not responding to the crack about his grungy appearance. He knew she was half drunk already. He hoped she would not create

a scene, as she usually did when she had had too much. That hope was dashed when she leaned forward and asked in a loud inquisitive voice “Well...”

A couple at the next table glanced over and one of the security guards shifted his weight. Lee held his glass on the table with one hand and circled his index finger around the rim of the glass with his other. “Well,” he finally responded, “It’s done.”

Kara’s lips suddenly expanded into the wide smile that had held him captive for so many years. Her large brown eyes sparkled even through they were beginning to look bloodshot. This time her smile didn’t give him the same thrill as it had in the past.

“Wonderful, shall we go celebrate?” He knew what she meant but was not going to fall prey. All the time he had been married, he had been faithful to his wife in deed, although not necessarily in thought. Now that he had been divorced for seventeen minutes, he was not about to commit adultery with a married woman. He wanted to make love to the bottle in front of him until he passed out. But as he watched Kara in her drunken state, he was not sure if that was what he really wanted either.

“You’re still married” Lee reminded Kara.

Kara looked as if he had thrown a bucket of water on her. “You’re kidding, right?”

“You are still married, Kara, like it or not. Or are you a Cylon who died and was resurrected? I suppose that would release you from your marriage vow of ‘till death do we part.’” Lee knew that this would probably push her over the edge and he was right. The remaining liquid in her glass was now running down his face and onto the grease smeared tank. Kara had not dealt well with the concept that she might be a threat to the fleet and resented the security detail assigned to her. So why did he go there? He wasn’t

quite sure. Maybe a part of him thought Kara was a Cylon. Maybe he wanted Kara to actually face the only two choices she had regarding her marriage. Maybe he just needed to feel something, anything to combat the deadness in his heart.

Kara's face turned sour as Lee began to wipe the alcohol from his face with the tiny cocktail napkin that always accompanied a glass at Joe's. Kara set her glass down, poured another serving and took a sip. Just at that time, the giggles returned. Kara, unable to control herself, sprayed Lee with a fresh batch of alcohol mixed with saliva and began outright laughter. The sight of Lee unsuccessfully drying himself with the tiny napkin just struck her as hilarious. This time Kara helped to wipe Lee off as best as she could with her own cocktail napkin but she couldn't stop laughing. It was contagious. Lee began to snicker. "Thanks a lot, Kara" mused Lee.

He loved Kara but he knew that it would never work. She was married and she would never get divorced. Not because she loved her husband but because marriage was a sacred act that she would not dissolve. It was hard to see Kara as a religious person. Her defiant personality and crazy behavior was not typical of most of the religious colonists but Kara held to her religious beliefs like a ship holding onto an anchor. She would stretch the rope from her ship to the anchor as far as she possibly could but would never cut and run. Lee could either stay friends with Kara or become her boy toy. There was no future of lifelong happiness and growing old together. It was just not going to happen. His choice was easy to make.

"Look Kara, why don't you patch things up with Anders? You two are a lot alike, and you are married to him after all." Lee knew he was trying to reason. Reasoning with a drunk was not usually successful but he was going to give it a shot.

“I don’t want Anders, I want you,” Kara objected with a pout.

“You want me now. But what about tomorrow? Tomorrow are you going to want me or Anders? I can’t play those games, Kara”

“So what are you going to do? Find another girlfriend, find another wife? Good luck.” The challenge from Kara seemed too thought out to be a random spiteful response. Lee decided to press the issue.

“What do you mean?”

“You know. You are ‘Lee Adama’, son of Admiral Adama. You are like royalty. Half of the women in the fleet would give their right arm to be with you. How would you ever know?” Kara stopped, seeing if he would take the bait.

“How would I ever know what?” Lee fell for it.

“How would you ever know if she really loved you? How would you know if she was not just hungry for power? How would you know if she was just trying to get at your father or at the President. Everyone knows that President Roselyn listens to you.” Kara paused for a minute to let it sink in. By the look on Lee’s face, it seemed that he had never thought of this before. He obviously didn’t understand the minds of women. Especially power hungry women. “Half the women in the fleet know you by sight. The other half would have you pegged the moment you told them your name.” She had him hooked. Now all she had to do was reel him in. “I’m the only one you can trust,” She said as she lifted the glass to her lips. She took a slow sip with her eyes shut and waited, tipping her head relishing the burning sensation as the whisky ran down her throat. Slowly she opened her eyes and looked across the table.

He still had his full glass in front of him, slowly circling his index finger around the rim, staring into the amber liquid. She could see his mind working. He was remembering the incident with Chivonne. How he could have fallen in love with a prostitute was beyond Kara's comprehension. Chivonne's pimp had wanted control of the Black Market and Lee was in the way. She had set Lee up and it nearly cost him his life.

Kara continued, "I am the only one you can trust. We were meant to be together!" As soon as she said it, she knew that she had gone too far. Lee looked up into her eyes to see if she was actually serious or not. Kara held a straight face for about eleven seconds and then she burst out laughing. A broad smile appeared across Lee's face for the first time in a long time. They both laughed uncontrollably, causing the couple at the next table to move to the bar. Lee and Kara were obviously disrupting their romantic moment. This brought on another round of gut wrenching laughter. The security detail had no choice but to sit and watch an obviously drunk Starbuck have a good laugh with the Admiral's son. It was hard to tell if Lee was laughing at Starbuck or with Starbuck. Either way, the security guards had to check themselves so that they wouldn't let their guard down.

Lee suddenly felt free. He did not have to take life so seriously when he was around Kara. They sat and talked for another hour and a half. Kara finished the bottle. Lee's drink went untouched.

## Chapter 3

Remaining battery time: 88 hours

Eight... seven... six... five... four... three... two... one... ZERO! Watch out for ZERO! Zero felt a bit of forced excitement as he counted down the end of his fourth hour floating in space. It was amazing yet depressing to him that it had only been four hours!

Four hours ago he was resting comfortably on his scout ship with his four colleagues. He had just finished scanning the last planet in the system and was working on his report. He did not really know his crew mates, just in passing, and so his conversations with them had been limited. They, however, seemed to know him.

“Ready to Jump” came the notice from the co-pilot. There was nothing unusual about the jump. The navigation officer had charted the jump. The tactical officer had readied the weapons in case of some unforeseen foe at their new coordinates. The pilots began the jumping sequence. “Watch out for Zero” came the warning from the tactical officer.

Zero buckled his seatbelt. He was the only one who ever did. He had lost balance on his first jump ever and ended up sprawled across the deck, knocking down three

superior officers. That is how he got his nick name. Whenever the countdown neared zero, someone yelled “Watch out for Zero.” At first Zero had been hurt by the jibes but after three years, not only was he used to it, but he claimed it as his own personal safety reminder. He was not sure how the others in the scout ship knew about his “warning” but he was not surprised when he heard it.

Usually the act of buckling his seatbelt did little more than save him from further embarrassment. This time it saved his life.

The second the ship had completed the jump, a meteor the size of a grapefruit punctured the canopy of the cockpit tore through the cabin and out the port hull taking with it the severed head of the co-pilot. Immediately buzzers began blaring and half a dozen lights on the control panel opposite Zero went from green to a flashing red. The pilot had been knocked unconscious and his battered head rested on the control panel in front of him, his body wedged into his seat. The tactical officer and the navigational officer ended up sprawled across the floor, just as Zero had been three years earlier.

The immediate thought that ran through Zero’s mind was that now someone else would take on his nickname. He was still standing (actually sitting) and the poor chaps lying on the floor would now take up his burden. Later, Zero regretted having such morbid and selfish thoughts in the middle of a crisis. His fellow officers were dying and all he could think about was his own reputation.

The air in the ship was exiting through the two large holes at a rapid pace and the ship was shaking violently. The hull was being pummeled by a meteor shower. Zero knew that the chance of jumping into a meteor shower was one in ten-thousand. “Had this ship clocked over ten-thousand jumps?” Zero wondered. A meteor shower was nothing to

a large ship, but was deadly to a small ship; especially if the rocks and the ship were traveling in opposite directions. The meteor that took out the co-pilot must have been traveling at an incredible velocity to penetrate the canopy, remove a head, and then puncture the hull.

Anything that was not nailed down suddenly became airborne and began swirling around the ship, caught in one of two vortexes that were sucking the lifeblood from the ship. The two officers on the floor were gasping for air. They began to crawl back to their seats to find their portable life support systems but they were disoriented and crawling aimlessly. The pilot didn't need air.

The basic training that Zero had undergone once a year ever since he became a soldier, suddenly kicked in. Every soldier had to participate in disaster training just in case. Apparently this was "the case." Zero grabbed his own life support system from under his seat and immediately attached it to his exterior port. He then grabbed the utility box that had come loose from its mounting behind the scanning station. He opened the lid and rummaged through it to find the patches. Lighter tools from the box were caught up in the whirl wind and the heavier ones dropped to the floor. The patches were large metal squares with a white gummy ring around the edges on one side and a handle on the other. Finally he found two large patches, large enough to cover the holes. He quickly unbuckled his seatbelt and made his way to the hole closest to him. Zero activated the quick sealing adhesive around the edge of the patch by slamming it against the wall surrounding the hole. He had to wait ten seconds while the adhesive sealed.

Those ten seconds seemed like ten minutes. The tactical and navigation officers were still reaching for life support but were not being very successful. Zero could hear

their gasps for air. How long had it been since the meteor hit? Twenty, maybe thirty seconds? A typical person can be deprived of air for three minutes and still be revived. Should he retrieve the life support systems first and then go patch the canopy or should he patch the canopy first? He only had four seconds to decide. He could still see the air swirling about the cabin so he decided to fix the window.

Zero made his way to the front of the ship with the second patch. The violent shaking in the cabin made his progress difficult but he was able to reach the front of the ship in about fifteen seconds. Once he sealed the canopy, the reserve oxygen tanks would begin to fill the cabin. Unfortunately the body of the co-pilot was in the way. Zero had never seen a body without a head before. It was almost too much for him as he pushed the body to the floor. The blood that was previously being sucked out the hole in the canopy began to pool on the floor. It seemed amazing to Zero that the gravity plating continued to pull in spite of the fact that the atmosphere was being sucked out.

Zero quickly slammed the second patch against the canopy and began counting down ten seconds. Immediately the whirlwind in the cabin stopped and the reserve oxygen began to fill the space. The officers on the floor rolled onto their backs and began sucking in the precious gas. "Get us out of here" the navigational officer managed to gasp.

The ship was still being pummeled by the meteor shower. Another large, high velocity meteor could punch another hole in the ship. With one hand on the patch, Zero used his other hand to reverse course and direct the ship out of the moving stream of particles.

Finally the shaking stopped and everyone gave a sigh of relief. “Thanks Zero, we owe you one” said the tactical officer. Zero felt a sense of pride. He would probably be commended for his bravery and quick action. The casualty list was short and jumping back home should not be a problem, as long as the patches held. This feeling of hope lasted only a second longer than the ten seconds it took for the patch to seal.

The compromised canopy was barely hanging onto the tongue and groove mountings that attached it to the ship after the meteor hit. Eleven seconds after Zero slammed the patch onto the canopy, the mountings gave away. In a split second, the look on the tactical officer’s face went from relief to panic. The vacuum of space sucked off the canopy with Zero still holding onto the patch. The body of the co-pilot was drawn out next. Zero could see the two officers scramble to grab onto something, anything, but it was useless. There was no way to replace the canopy and the reserve oxygen had already been used. Their only hope was to grab their life support system and plug it in before they were sucked into space. Zero could see them struggling for about eight seconds before his view was obstructed by the ship. As Zero moved further away from the ship, drawn by the initial force of the canopy, he hoped to see his colleagues emerge with life support in tact. Instead he saw the lifeless body of the tactical and navigational officer slip through the open window into space. Only the pilot remained in the ship, wedged in his seat.

## Chapter 4

Colonial Time: Thursday, 0133 hours

Galactica

It wasn't until one thirty in the morning that Lee trekked back to his quarters. The light hearted evening in Joe's bar was beginning to wear off. Each step he took seemed to take him back to the grim reality of his life. The dimmed lighting made the journey even more ominous. He was beat. He just wanted to crawl into bed and mercifully dream about a life with hope. His own life had been filled with one disaster after another. It seemed to start with the divorce of his parents, then the death of his brother, then the genocide of his species. To top it off, he couldn't seem to keep a stable relationship with a girl for very long and he wasn't sure why. Had he just not met the right person yet? Was he just lousy with relationships? He tried to live his life by taking the moral high road but this usually dumped him in a lonely and depressed state. Maybe nice guys do finish last.

Lee rounded the last corner to his quarters. "Frak" The sight before him caused him to want to punch a hole through the bulkhead. He raised his fist but punched the air instead. All of his belongings were piled in three boxes in front of the door. The boxes

were small and overflowing with shirts, socks and underwear. A few books were piled on top of the stack under his uniform. At least she didn't crumple up his uniform. It was the only thing that was neatly folded in the pile.

He stood for a moment looking at the pile with his hands on his hips and in disbelief. Undoubtedly the door to his quarters was locked and he was pretty sure that the occupant would not let him in. He didn't even try. The message was clear; he was no longer welcome in his own home. He pulled out a shirt from one of the boxes but it wasn't much cleaner than the one he had on. He threw it back on the pile, and looked down the corridor. No one was around. He ran both hands through his hair and locked his fingers behind his neck. Letting out a deep sigh he continued down the corridor, not exactly sure where he was headed. Maybe he could find an empty bunk with the nuggets.

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#### Colonial One

"Madam President... Madam President." Laura could feel Tory's voice calling her back from a deep restful sleep. It had been a while since she had been able to sleep so soundly and resented the call back to the waking world.

"Madam President," Tory persisted, "Zarek will be here in twenty minutes. Do you want to review the tape before he gets here?"

"What time is it?" asked Laura in a groggy tone.

"0200 hours" came the reply.

It took a few minutes for Laura to gather her thoughts. Why was Tory waking her in the middle of the night and why was Zarek coming to see her. She vaguely remembered something about a pipe bomb. Laura sat up on the couch, rubbed her eyes

and reached for her glasses. She slowly stood with the aid of the couch and made her way over to the full length mirror hanging on the inside door of the closet behind her desk.

Tory had crossed the room to fetch a cup of tea for the president and was surprised that the president was gone when she turned back to the couch. “Madam President, do you need any help?”

“Actually, I’m feeling a little better.” came the reply from behind the closet door. The reflection in the mirror wasn’t too bad. At least she was already dressed, a bit rumpled but presentable for two in the morning. “Why don’t you run the details by me again; everything that we know for sure.”

Tory proceeded to repeat the report that she had given the President a few hours earlier while Laura ran a brush through her hair and applied some lip stick. She really did not want to look like she was dying when Zarek arrived.

As Tory finished her report, Laura returned to her desk. “May I see the tape?”

Tory turned on the video screen brought in for that purpose. The tape was already cued up and ready to go. It was a poor tape, grainy and plagued with shadows, but it clearly showed the backs of three men breaking the lock on the door to the recycling plant and entering.

“You can’t see any of their faces” protested Laura.

“Just wait,” Tory promised. She fast forwarded the tape about ten minutes, when the men were leaving the plant. Each of them was carrying a burlap bag filled with, presumably, fertilizer. The tape was still pretty unclear. The men were wearing ball hats to hide their faces and never looked up until, just as they were moving from the view of the camera, one of the intruders looked square into the camera. Tory froze the frame. She

also produced an 8X10 glossy of the frame that had obviously been sharpened up. The man's features were distinct enough to recognize without any problem but his most distinctive feature was the large scar that began under his right jawbone, followed his hairline over his cheek and ended just below his right eye.

"It should be no problem to identify this man." Laura stated in a matter of fact tone. "I don't understand why Gentry needs Zarek's help."

"That is just one man. We need the whole pack to eliminate the threat." Tory explained.

"I understand, we are looking for the mastermind behind this." Laura sighed.

"Exactly." Tory rewound the tape. "Zarek will be here soon"

"Thank you Tory." With that, Tory turned and left the room. Laura was pleased that Tory seemed to know exactly what to say, what to do and when to leave. It took quite a bit of stress off of Laura. Tory did not need any management. She was truly helpful and supportive of the President without being a burden. Now all she had to do was focus on what to say to Zarek.

Laura had the gut feeling that lives would be lost if Zarek failed to help apprehend this ring of terrorist. How do you get a terrorist to ferret out other terrorists? A cold chill ran down her spine as she considered the possibility that Zarek was in the center of this ring.

## Chapter 5

Colonial Time: Thursday, 0220 hours

Galactica

Lee followed the strange aroma around the corner and into the mess hall. He had been wandering through the ship presumably looking for a rack to sleep in but his feet were not taking him to the crew's quarters. Instead he had traveled passed the unusually empty gym, and around both hanger decks and down the aft crossover. He had only seen two other poor souls who had unfortunately been assigned the graveyard shift on the hanger deck. They were busy hammering out dents in a viper so he decided not to bother them. He was looking for something but he didn't know what. He was just about to force himself to turn toward the crew's quarters when he caught a whiff of a deliciously warm aroma.

After following the scent and making a few wrong turns, he found himself peering into a darkened mess hall. A door at the far end of the hall that led to the galley was open. Brilliant light poured through. The contrast was so great that nothing in the galley was

visible except light. It was almost as if the brightly lit doorway led to another dimension, another world, and maybe another life.

Lee decided to make his way to the galley through the gauntlet of tables and chairs. He could see the silhouettes of obstacles against the brilliant doorway and began to navigate his way through. About three-quarters of the way to the kitchen, Lee struck his foot against one of the chairs and sent it tumbling backwards. The crash, as well as a few explicative's from Lee broke the silence.

“Is someone there?” Came a voice from the kitchen.

“It’s just me.” Answered Lee, not knowing if “me” meant anything special to the voice from the kitchen.

“Well why don’t you come in and give me a hand. I need some help.” Directed the voice.

Why not, Lee thought. He was still drawn by the tempting aroma. He crossed the remaining distance to the kitchen and paused in the doorway to let his eyes adjust to the brilliant light. The kitchen was long and narrow. On the left side of the kitchen there stood three stainless steel ovens with gas burners on top. A small workstation separated each unit and hoods hovered over the cook tops. The right side was one long stainless steel work surface with a couple of sinks in the middle. A plethora of pots and pans crowded underneath the work surface and hung from the ceiling. At the back of the kitchen were two doors. One with a sign designating it the “Office” and the other had no designation but stood ajar.

The voice belonged to the cook who had her back turned to him, facing the stove. With a hot pad in one hand and a spatula in another, she was trying to release a portion of

the casserole from the pan in which she had cooked it without destroying the composition. A tightly woven braid of light brown hair poked out of the back of the ball cap that she was wearing.

“Go ahead and take a seat” she suggested with an encouraging tone, her back still turned. Lee pulled a three legged stool up to one of the work counters and began to wonder who this person was.

She placed a small portion of the casserole on a plate, turned and brought it to Lee. “I need you to taste this.” She said without any sort of ceremony or greeting. “I need your honest opinion. Don’t feel bad if you don’t like it. I’m trying out a new recipe and I need someone to taste it before I serve it to the crew.”

Lee had never seen her before and he could not tell if she recognized him or not. She was about his height and appeared to be a little older than Lee, maybe by five or six years. Her face was plain and without makeup but her smile was warm and her green eyes sparkled with hopeful anticipation. Strands of hair emerging out from under her cap were matted to her neck and forehead, a sure sign of someone working for hours in a hot kitchen. It seemed strange to Lee that she wore what looked like medical scrubs under a badly stained apron.

So he was to be the guinea pig. He realized that he kind of looked like a pig at the moment and he was sure that he smelled like one. The smell of the booze that Starbuck had dumped on him earlier mixed with sweat and engine grease couldn’t be a pleasant one.

The cook didn’t seem to notice his appearance or his smell. She placed the plate in front of Lee and handed him a fork. Lee discovered the source of the aroma that had

drawn him to the kitchen; it was sitting squarely on the plate. He inhaled a hearty breath of the heavenly smell before he cut a small bite sized piece. Something that smelled so good couldn't taste bad.

The cook turned and headed toward a cupboard on the other side of the kitchen. "So is 'me' your real name or should I call you something else?" She asked in a pleasant and playful tone.

"Actually, you can call me 'Mudd.'" Lee responded as he popped the fork into his mouth. His mouth was suddenly stimulated with the most incredible sensation. The casserole had some mixture of eggs, sausage, onion and several spices that he knew he could never identify. His taste buds suddenly came alive, as if they had been turned off for the past three years. Food on a starship is edible, at best. Once in a while you could get a decent meal but for the most part the food was bland and it all pretty much tasted the same, no matter what the cooks said it was. This was incredible. He had not had anything this good since, well, he couldn't ever remember ever having anything this good.

The cook returned with a cup of coffee and set it in front of Lee. "Don't worry, it's decaff." She pulled up another stool and sat down, waiting for an assessment of her cooking. "Mudd, huh. You must be having a bad day."

"A bad day, a bad week, a bad decade." Lee quipped as he put a larger piece into his mouth. He immediately regretted being so negative and realized that he probably looked like some bum scarfing down a meal in a soup kitchen. He began to consciously measure his bites so that he didn't look like a hungry animal and for the first time that

evening, he regretted his grungy look. He decided to turn the conversation to her. “I don’t think that I’ve seen you around before. Are you new to Galactica?”

“Yes, I transferred a few days ago. I’m Rina.” She held her hand out to greet Lee properly. Lee took her hand and they exchanged a nice solid hand shake. Lee did not give her his name.

“Where did you transfer from?” Asked Lee.

She paused, as if she didn’t want to tell him. She shifted her weight and glanced down as she muttered “The Astral Queen. But don’t worry, I wasn’t an inmate, I was a cook.” Many of the new people that she had just met on Galactica in the last few days had asked the same question and her response often brought an indignant “Oh.” Anyone associated with the Astral Queen was automatically labeled a rebel or a terrorist. She was neither but that didn’t matter much to most people. This time she received a very different and pleasant reaction.

“The Astral Queen, huh?” Lee remarked. “I was there a few times. Not as an inmate, but as a…” he paused. He didn’t want to give her any indication of who he really was. “A visitor.” He finished.

Lee smiled as he scraped the last bit off his plate. He hadn’t eaten since lunch. He didn’t think that he was hungry but now his stomach rumbled for more. He probably could have finished the entire casserole, if she let him. His eyes glanced over to the stove where the rest was keeping warm. He decided to go ahead and ask. “Do you think I can have some more?”

A smile crossed her face. It always worked. Give them a small piece. If they ask for more it was a success. If they left a bite on the plate, throw the rest out and tear up the

recipe. Rina stood and walked to the stove. This time she pulled a large plate from the shelf and cut a generous portion. Lee's eyes grew wide with anticipation. On the way back to the counter, she grabbed the coffee pot and refilled his cup as she placed the plate in front of him.

“Well I'm glad that you are enjoying a good meal now. Maybe tomorrow will be a better day.” Rina offered hopefully. She was not sure who this person was who wandered into the galley so late at night. He seemed like a nice young man who needed a break. She hoped to brighten his spirits a bit, especially since he willingly tasted her new concoction that she had been working on for about a month.

“I'm sorry,” replied the scruffy man she knew as “Mudd.” “I didn't mean to be so negative. My wife just finalized our divorce and I'm kind of between jobs. I just feel like there is no point anymore.”

There it was. Out in the open. Somehow this stranger was able to get Lee to verbalize his true feelings of depression. Strangely enough he felt safe instead of feeling vulnerable.

He started in on his second portion. It was all he could do to eat slowly. The woman in front of him seemed to exude class, not the aristocratic “I'm better than you” type of class but a humble, “I'm concerned about you” type of class and he didn't want to come off as a dolt. He could only imagine what she thought of him, dressed and smelling as he did. She didn't seem to notice but treated him with concern and respect, in spite of his appearance.

“I am so sorry to hear that” Rina was desperately trying to think of something positive or encouraging to say but came up empty. Her face demonstrated real concern as she bit her lower lip. Suddenly her eyes brightened as if a light bulb just came on.

“Just a minute, I have something for you.” Rina quickly got up and disappeared through the door that stood ajar at the back of the galley. She was gone for a good couple of minutes. Lee could not imagine what she could be getting but decided to use this opportunity to devour what was left on his plate.

She reappeared just as Lee was licking the last bits off of his fork. She had a small bowl in her hands and a spoon. She quickly crossed the room, set the bowl down in front of Lee and gave him a huge smile. In the bowl was a large scoop of chocolate ice cream.

“It won’t fix anything but it will sure make you feel a lot better!” said Rina.

A wide smile spread across Lee’s face. Here was a complete stranger caring for another complete stranger who looked like a reject from skid row. There was no judgments, no condemnation, no sarcasm, just one person caring for another person. Lee’s deadened heart began to revive as he dug his spoon into the frozen treat. She was right. I didn’t change anything but he did feel a lot better.

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Colonial Time: Thursday 0327 hours

Colonial One

Zarek sat back in his chair, both elbows resting on the arm rests, his fingers of both hands intertwined except for his first fingers which were resting against his pursed lips. The video he was watching was paused and the screen in front of him clearly showed the face of a man he knew all too well. Tory had also placed the sharpened 8X10

glossy photo of the man on the President's desk right in front of him. The picture was very good; it had turned out better than he thought it would. The president, sitting behind her desk, was waiting for a response from him and he was purposely taking his time. He would make her wait, just for a few more minutes. He had to measure his words, not say too much but at the same time keep his role necessary.

“So what if I did know this man,” Zarek proposed, “then what?”

Laura already knew this was going to be tough but gave him a warm smile anyway. “Then,” she began, “I would hope that you would fulfill your duty as Vice President of the Colonies and aid in the apprehension of not only this man but also the mastermind behind this threat.” She had little hope that appealing to his patriotism and duty would accomplish anything. Tom Zarek was anything but patriotic. He claimed to be the voice of the people but in reality, he was the voice of a few people; the vocal minority; the few people who looked for short cuts and handouts. The few people who wanted whatever it was that they wanted at the expense of others with blatant disregard for the needs of the majority. The people who would resort to violence if their agendas were not met to their satisfaction.

It was going to be a long night. Zarek had not arrived until 0300 and Laura had tea, pastries and fresh fruit waiting. She wanted this meeting to be as non-adversarial as possible but quickly realized that that was a pipe dream. Tom had not touched any of the food prepared and refused the tea. It was obvious that she was not going to win him over though his stomach. She didn't want to use hardball tactics but it was already clear to her that she was going to resort to them.

Tom began, “Look Madam President...”

“Please, call me Laura.” She interrupted.

“Look Laura,” he began again as he leaned forward in his chair, “you are putting me in a very difficult spot, here.”

“I don’t see what is so difficult about it.” Speaking before Tom could get out his next thought. “These men are clearly breaking and entering. We have other evidence that they may be part of a group trying to build explosives. Now I don’t know about you, but these facts cause me great concern.” Laura was careful to avoid words like “ring” and “terrorists” or “criminals.” There was no need to douse a fire with more fuel.

“How would you like it if I asked you to rat out a few people on Colonial One, who may or may not be involved in terrorist activities?” Tom knew how to handle most people; redirect, confuse the subject, put the ball in their court, but the President was a sharp woman. Even in her weakened condition, she was not one to have the wool pulled over her eyes. She really did not look very healthy but it could just be the fact that it was three in the morning and the President probably hadn’t had any sleep.

Tom threw another verbal dart. “You have no evidence that this man is part of any terrorist activities. Hell, you don’t even know what he has in the bag. He may be stealing aluminum cans to sell back to the recycling plant so he can feed his family.” It was pretty far fetched but he wanted to see how far she would press him.

“You have got to be kidding me” mumbled Tory who was standing beside the President’s desk. She had been standing there the whole time, like a vulture watching over the conversation, looking for scraps that she could devour.

Laura couldn't believe what she was hearing. Was he purposely trying to toy with her? She hadn't had enough sleep to play these games. She would give him one more chance. "Now Tom, I know that you are not that naive."

"You're right. But I don't think I have any business helping in this matter. Let Gentry do his job and if there is an actual threat, I'm sure he will uncover it. I really don't think that there is anything to worry about, especially since your evidence is so thin."

Tom leaned back in his chair and waited to see her next move. Tom was an avid chess player. He learned in prison and played just about every day for twenty years. The game fascinated him and his brilliant mind allowed him to plan up to seven moves in advance. By the time he negotiated his release from prison, he was winning about six out of every seven games that he played. When he did lose, it was usually because of some seemingly unthreatening rogue pawn that snuck up on his king. Since his release, it was difficult for him to find a competent adversary. Roselyn was certainly competent but was she willing to play? He would soon find out.

Tory was fed up with Tom. She didn't know why the President was being so diplomatic with him. She should just throw the whole lot of them back in their cells and throw the key away. That would eliminate the threat. Finally the look came that she was waiting for. Laura looked directly at her and gave an ever so slight nod. That was her cue to leave and she most gladly did. She excused herself and exited the room.

Tom knew what was coming. It was time to play hard ball. He had information that the President wanted and he was not about to give it away for free. Laura stood slowly, walked around her desk and sat in the chair opposite Tom. She removed her glasses and held them in her hands, leaning forward with her elbows resting on her knees.

She didn't begin her speech immediately but when she did, all pleasantness and cordiality had vanished. She glared straight at Tom. She meant business. Tom straightened up from his slouched position and leaned forward, ready to take on what she was about to give.

"Elections are still two and a half years away" she began, cutting straight to the chase. "Until then you are next in line for the presidency. It is no secret that I am dying and quite frankly, I won't make it that long. That means at some point in the not too distant future, you will become President of the Colonies."

Tom knew she was dying but was completely surprised at the imminence of her death. She had kept the details of her illness a guarded secret and only a selected few knew that she would probably not last another three or four months. This changed everything. He wasn't going to need the pawns to protect his king anymore. His mind began to spin, churning out different scenarios. He would have to hear out the President before he could decide on his next course of action.

"You and I both know that without the support of the military, the office of the President is futile. At this point in time, the military has absolutely no confidence in your ability to lead the Twelve Colonies. You need to start building that confidence and trust. Otherwise you will be run out of office."

Her words were truth. She had nearly been run out of office just a few months into her own presidency. Tom knew full well that "the military", meaning Admiral Adama, would hang him out to dry if he ever became President. Thus his strategy became clear. Buddy up to the Admiral, show himself competent and trustworthy and hope that he had enough time to gain his confidence before Roselyn passed. The thought didn't sit well with him but if he had to sacrifice a Bishop to take the King, so be it.

“Are you saying that if I assist you in hunting down these possible terrorists, Adama will back me as President?” It was too good to be true. Was Roselyn handing him the key to the presidency? Or was she just trying to find these thugs quickly and without incident. It was hard to tell if Roselyn was supporting him or threatening him. Since the exodus from New Caprica, Tom and the President had made enormous strides toward trust and mutual respect, at least so he thought. It was Adama that he was worried about. Tom wanted a clear cut picture of what Roselyn was actually promising.

“Adama will do whatever he thinks is best for the fleet. Changing his opinion of you depends on you. End this threat before anyone gets hurt and you can only score points. Do nothing and you will confirm what he already thinks of you.”

That was it. No promises. No assurances. Only a vague hope that the Old Man might think favorably of him. Tom could hand over the whole lot on a silver plate and Adama still wouldn't acknowledge him as anything more than a terrorist. He would have to consider this carefully. If he did gain Adama's trust, the outcome would be better than what he had hoped for. His people would be heard, not by President Roselyn but by President Zarek. If he could not gain Adama's support, what he had been hoping for, a serious representation of his people in the government, would all be lost. There would be no recovery. Roselyn had just placed him between a rock and a hard place.

Tom sat without responding for a good three minutes. He was still sitting leaning forward but his left hand had moved to cup his lips as if he were deeply considering all that the President had said. Laura couldn't even guess what was going through his mind. He needed to say something, do something soon because Laura was quickly losing her strength and needed to lie down. Finally he answered.

“I can’t make any promises but I will see what I can do.”

“Well, thank you for coming at such a late hour and I look forward to hearing from you soon.” Laura stood with her hand out ready to shake his. She hoped it wasn’t too obvious that she needed him to leave.

“Always a pleasure,” Tom returned with a broad smile as he stood, shook her hand and made his way out of her office.

As he was retreating, Laura walked over to the couch but would not allow herself to sink into it until she heard the door latch behind him. She didn’t even want to think about analyzing the meeting with Tom so she cleared her head and closed her eyes. The second her head hit the pillow, she was asleep.

Tory was shocked to find her already sound asleep just seconds after Tom had left the room. Debriefing would have to wait. Tory covered the president with a blanket and retired to her own quarters.

## Chapter 6

Colonial Time: Thursday, 0900 hours

Colonial One

Mornings were the best part of Laura's day. The Admiral, William Adama, or Bill, would call her like clockwork every morning to touch base. The Admiral had often called her to discuss issues and problems but over the past eight months, the phone calls became regular and more on a personal basis. She found herself looking forward to his daily call and often wished she could chit chat with him for hours. Unfortunately, twenty minutes was about all either of them could spare. Laura didn't want to waste her twenty minutes talking with him about the terrorist threat that surfaced overnight but she knew she had to at least slip it in the conversation. Maybe she would just have Tory send over a report.

The phone rang. Laura picked it up on the first ring. She was still lounging on the couch that she had slept on all night, still dressed in the same clothes from yesterday.

After the call, she would shower and dress for the day.

“Yes?”

“The Admiral is on the line for you,” came Tory’s voice. Did that woman ever sleep?

“Thank you.” Laura waited for the couple of clicks that indicated the connection was made.

“Good morning,” Laura began.

“Good morning,” Came the Admiral’s voice. When she first met the man three and a half years ago, his voice over the phone gave her a sense of dread. Suffice it to say, they did not begin their relationship on the best of terms. Now his voice warmed her like a cup of hot coco and a cozy blanket. “I heard you had quite a night.”

“Yes, it was quite an eventful night. Have you been briefed about the situation?”

“A report was waiting for me on my desk this morning. I wouldn’t put much hope in Zarek. I doubt he will come through.”

“Well, you never know.” Laura, amazed at Tory’s efficiency, hadn’t told anyone about her private discussion with Zarek and she didn’t want to dispel it to Bill. She had made no promises on his behalf but she did feel a little guilty because of the implications. Zarek could infer that Laura would go to bat for him on her death bead and recommend that Bill support him if Zarek came through. She had absolutely no intentions of doing this. Zarek would have to do much more than round up a few terrorists to gain her support. Laura decided to change the subject.

“How is Lee doing?” she asked.

“That is a good question.” Bill admitted. “I haven’t actually talked to him in over a week.” Even though their relationship had grown closer over the past three years, he still had a hard time talking to his son. The day before the Cylon attack, they were barely

on talking terms. Now they talked on occasion but rarely in depth. Despite their lack of communication, Bill knew through the rumor mill what was going on with his son, even if Lee was not ready or willing to share.

It was amazing how everyone on Galactica knew everyone else's business, even though it was the largest ship in the fleet. Rumors and gossip spread like wildfire throughout the ship. As the commanding officer, Bill made it a point to know as much as he could about his officers and crew members. Over the years he learned to discern the truth from the rumors and gossip. A well informed commander knew who to push, to whom to give leeway and to whom to offer support. A well balanced crew was an effective and loyal crew and for the most part his crew was loyal. He had offered support and encouragement to many of his charges over the years and they appreciated his concern. Bill was not so good at offering support to his own son.

Bill knew a week before Lee did that Dee was filing for divorce. He knew when she told Lee about the proceedings. He even knew when the papers were supposed to be signed. Bill never discussed any of this with Lee. He had hoped that Lee would come to him but so far that had not happened. He had watched as Lee's appearance deteriorated over the past few days. It was as if Lee had given up on life. Lee no longer wanted to fly and he didn't seem to have any direction or goals. He didn't even seem to have any feelings or passions left. He had spent the last week or so just hanging around the hanger deck helping with repairs and maintenance. Bill felt like he was looking at an empty shell when he looked at Lee, his only surviving son, and it broke his heart.

Like every father, he wanted the best for Lee. He wanted Lee to have a happy and fulfilled life. He wanted Lee to experience a lifetime of joy with maybe a few trials along

the way, as life should be. Instead Lee was facing a lifetime of hardship with a few moments of relief. Bill wanted to reach out to him but wasn't sure how. He could keep a crew of 1500 fairly happy but couldn't relate to his own son.

"Have you talked to him at all?" Laura asked.

"Our paths haven't really crossed lately." It was a lame excuse and Bill knew it.

"Just take the initiative and call him into your office. Keep it casual, maybe have a drink together, and let him know you are concerned about him."

"Is that a direct order?" Bill smiled even though he knew she couldn't see him.

Laura knew how to deal with children. After all, she had been a school teacher.

"Yes, that is a direct order."

"By the way, Saul wanted me to invite you to a little banquet that he is hosting in a few days. I will get you the details."

"That sounds nice, what's the occasion?"

"He found some new cook. He claims that dinner will be phenomenal."

"Wonderful. You should invite Lee too."

"I'll do that." Promised Bill. "You have a good day and get some rest, that's an order!"

"I will"

As Bill hung up the phone, he decided to take the long way to CIC, by way of Lee's quarters. When he arrived, he saw the boxes of clothes piled outside the door. His heart ached for Lee as he proceeded down the corridor. He would have to track him down later.

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Colonial Time: Thursday, 1500 hours

Prometheus

Zarek couldn't believe these guys. No wonder they were oppressed. No wonder they were stuck with lousy jobs. Zarek began to think that this cause he was fighting for was the wrong cause.

From the beginning Zarek had fought to eliminate the class system. According to the "establishment" there was no class system. Every person, regardless of their heritage, supposedly was given equal opportunities for education and employment. In reality, this was not true. People from the poorer colonies were destined to be farmers or factory workers. They did not have the same opportunities as people from the wealthy colonies. Being from Sagatarious, one of the poorer colonies, Zarek came face to face with discrimination in his early twenties when he was refused entrance to the University of Science and Technology on Caprica because he was not from Caprica. At least that was what he believed. He never actually got a definitive answer as to why his application was refused but his high test scores, stellar recommendations and perfect grades should have landed him a spot. Instead of re-applying or going through appeals, he decided to begin a movement against discrimination. His movement was in full swing by his mid twenties, he had published his first book at twenty-nine and had a significant following by his early thirties. After ten years of little to no progress with the government, he resorted to violence that landed him in prison for twenty years. He often wondered how different his life would have been if he had been accepted to the University.

Since his release, he continued his fight for equality but with a new twist. Most of the four hundred convicts recently released from prison on the Astral Queen were holding

down low paying manual labor jobs on various ships. He was fighting for their representation in the government as well as their right to have good jobs. As the eight men around him squabbled, he realized that between all of them they only had half a brain and absolutely no sense of decency. Given a choice, Zarek probably wouldn't hire them either.

Zarek needed to take a break. The “negotiation” meeting had already lasted two and a half hours and he was making absolutely no progress. He stood from his chair and walked to the wall behind him, staring at the cracks in the ceiling and stretching his arms. His hands landed on his hips as he dropped his gaze to the floor. What had he gotten himself into? He had to focus.

It was initially a simple plan. Have a few of the ex-cons steal a few choice items, make it look like they were planning some sort of attack. Tom, as Vice President, would bring the disgruntled ex-cons to a negotiating table with the President and help the two sides reach an agreement. Tom would look like a peacemaker, hopefully dissolving the concept that he was still a terrorist. The population would see him as the savior of the oppressed. The ex-cons would get some concessions and the President would feel as if she could trust him. It was true that Tom was looking forward to the next election and was trying to improve his image with the people. After his early morning visit with the President, he realized that he didn't actually have to win an election to become President, he just needed to win Adama's trust. Adama was the lynch pin now, not the population at large. Therefore he had to save Adama from some threat, but how? The strategy had to be adjusted slightly but his pawns were not seeing the big picture. The men at the table, save one, did not even know that they were his pawns. They thought that he was there to

negotiate and to bring terms to the President. They had no idea that Tom was actually behind the plot to begin with.

“I say we make as many bombs as we can, hide them throughout the fleet and set them off one by one until we get what we want,” came Jenkins’ voice from behind him. The others at the table were eagerly agreeing with him with a chorus of “yeas” and “that’s right” and “let’s do it.” Jenkins was not the brightest apple of the bunch but he was certainly the most violent. Explosive, in fact. He had knocked over a convenience store with a stick of dynamite on Caprica. He would have gotten away with it if he hadn’t dropped his cell phone as he jumped into his get away car. The police apprehended him a few hours later when he called his cell phone trying to get it back.

“You guys just don’t get it!” Shouted Tom as he turned back to the group landing both palms flat on the table. “There will be no bombs! There will be no explosions! You can’t actually do anything violent! Otherwise you will all end up back in the pen. It is the THREAT of violence that you hold over their heads.”

“Then why did we steal all that stuff if we aren’t going to use it?” protested Marvin, another real winner when it came to brains.

“You will use it as a bargaining chip,” responded Zarek frustrated that he had to spell everything out for them. “Look, I’ve got to report back to the President soon. I will tell her that I am still trying to get you guys together on the issues. That will buy you some time. Let’s meet back tomorrow, same time. Don’t do anything until then.”

The men retreated from the cramped room, leaving at different intervals so as not to arouse suspicion. The small room was a storage room behind Frank’s Bar, readily known for it’s sleazy customers, on the Prometheus. It was not hard for the motley bunch

to slowly blend in with the other customers at the bar, even at three in the afternoon. Plus, it was an unwritten rule at Frank's that the customers and the employees would not talk about anything that they may or may not have seen or heard in the bar to anyone, official or otherwise. It was a safe haven for unsavory characters to conduct their business. It was a safe place for the Vice President to meet with the supposed terrorists that the President was looking for.

One of the eight remained seated at the table watching Zarek until all the others had left.

"That picture of you turned out perfect. Better than I thought it would." Tom began.

The man opposite him grunted as he ran his fingers down the left side of his face, tracing the welt of his scar. Jason Sparr had received the scar in a jailhouse fight ten years ago but still fingered it with tenderness. It seemed to represent his personality; he looked tough on the outside but deep down he was a compassionate guy, loyal to the core.

"They will be looking for you, probably will arrest you if they find you."

"I have a place I can stay."

"You certainly picked a bunch of winners. Are you sure you can control them?"

"They won't do anything unless I tell them. That's why I picked them. They have difficulty thinking for themselves. You said that the plan was changed, what are we talking about?" Jason went straight to the point.

"All we have to worry about is Adama. He needs to trust me if I am ever to become President. We don't need to worry about the elections, just Adama." Tom left out the "why" behind his change in strategy but Jason really didn't care about the why, just

the what. “Find a few of the men who want to join the military. Preferably ones with fairly good records and decent skills.”

“You’re kidding, right?” It was an impossible task, Jason thought. It was hard enough to recruit from the general population, let alone from a group of ex-cons who already hated the establishment. Not to mention that the life expectancy for a new combat recruit was about eight months.

“We have to throw Adama some bones; no pun intended. The military is desperate for new recruits. If we find a few that Adama would see as valuable, it can only sweeten the deal. See what you can do. And whatever you do, don’t get arrested.”

“Yes sir.”

Both men left the room as discreetly as possible; Tom through the bar and Jason through a maintenance hatch. Both had a great deal of work to do in the next twenty-four hours.

## Chapter 7

Remaining Battery Time: 71 hours

What would actually happen if a ship jumped into the exact space of another ship? Would the two ships crash? Would the first ship explode as the second ship pushed its matter out of the way to make room for its own bulk? Would the two ships meld into one, essentially a ship within a ship? Whatever the answer was, the result could not be a good one.

Zero wondered if anyone had ever tested this scenario. It was hard to imagine that anyone would want to test such a futile notion. But still, the idea pulled at Zero's curiosity. Primarily because he wanted to know what would happen if a ship jumped to his exact location. Would he find himself suddenly crashing to the floor of a hanger deck? It terrified Zero to think that maybe his body would be severed in half if he happened to end up between decks. Maybe his body would explode before he could even know what hit him. The last scenario almost sounded appealing. His end would be quick and instantaneous, much better than the slow inevitable death that he was currently facing.

What were the odds? They had to be impossible. If landing in a random meteor shower was one in ten thousand, the odds of a ship jumping to his exact location had to be non-existent.

Yet these troubling thoughts continued to plague Zero's consciousness as he floated slowly to nowhere. Zero tried to clear his thoughts and think of positive things. Unfortunately it usually led to depressing thoughts, like the ones he was currently having. He began by thinking that maybe a rescue party was already dispatched and on their way. Maybe he only had a few more hours to hold out before the rescue ship arrived. Maybe the rescue ship would be jumping into range very soon. And maybe it would jump right on top of him.

Zero forced his mind to jump over these thoughts and to concentrate on what would happen after he was rescued. He would be honored as a sole survivor of a horrible and unfortunate accident. Maybe there would be an investigation. Maybe his decision to fix the window would be challenged. Should he have helped his crew mates get their life support plugged in first? If he had, they may be alive and floating with him right now. Maybe the investigation would reveal his incorrect decision and label him as negligent. He would be decommissioned and sent out to pasture, as it were. Again, not a pleasant thought.

Zero could only make one conclusion, he was a pessimist.

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Colonial Time: Friday, 0120 hours

Galactica

Lee stared at the bunk above him tracing the grains in the plywood mattress support as his mind reviewed the past twenty-four hours. Twenty-four hours ago he had been a different person. He had given up on happiness, he had given up on hope and he had stumbled into a different world. He could be himself in that world without being himself. He did not have to play the role of the “captain” or the “commander” or even “the Admiral’s son” but he could just be a guy down on his luck. The conversation was new and fresh and without veiled agendas. It was not about the despair of the human race but about life and ideas and possibilities. He didn’t want to leave. He had stayed in the galley chatting with Rina about everything and about nothing until 0400. It was incredible that they could chat for so long and not run out of things to say; especially since he was very careful not to reveal too much about himself. He had learned that they both liked chocolate, they both hated Pyramid games and they both were divorced. It was very strange. He felt so comfortable with her, safe to reveal just about anything to her except his name. She hadn’t asked for his name again but knew she would at their next encounter. To avoid recognition by other crew members, he made sure that he left the galley before the rest of the morning duty shift arrived.

After leaving the galley he was able to find an empty bunk in the 7B crew’s quarters, not the most prestigious quarters but it was a quiet place to sleep. He fell asleep the second his head hit the pillow and he didn’t wake up until after noon. He had slept like a rock. The sense of dread and despair had disappeared and he was able to awake refreshed and ready for the day, even though half the day had already passed.

Lee took one of the longest showers that he had ever taken and relished every minute of it. Warm water drizzled down his neck and shoulders as he generously lathered

his prickly jaw and chin. Nothing felt better than a good shave. Once his body was clean, he went back to his former quarters, gathered his boxes of clothes and headed to the laundry room. Some of his clothes were so dirty that he ran them through the washing machine twice. Nothing smelled better than warm cotton shirts fresh from the dryer. The transformation was complete. His old life was washed away and he was about to begin anew.

Now everything he owned was folded neatly in his locker next to his new bunk and he was resting comfortably. Sure his “new” bunk was in with a bunch of machine workers instead of with the pilots. It was a step down for his ego but he was just glad to have a pillow underneath his head and a soft surface to rest on. Hell, he was glad that his father hadn’t thrown him off the ship yet. Lee had resigned over a month ago and until now he had the excuse that he was married to an officer. Now that he was single, he really had no business staying on Galactica. He needed to find a new job and a new place to live.

Lee tried to focus on where to begin with the rest of his life but his thoughts kept drifting back to the galley. He glanced at his watch. 0138. He made his decision. He swung his legs over the edge of his bunk, pulled on a pair of kakis and shoes and headed for the galley.

A few minutes later he found himself where his feet had taken him twenty-four hours earlier. Rina was standing at the sink with her back to Lee up to her elbows in suds and dishes. It was almost like a bad movie, where the patron of a restaurant couldn’t pay so she was sent to the kitchen to wash dishes. There must have been three hundred dirty trays piled to Rina’s right and about fifty clean ones piled to her left. She had no clue that

Lee was behind her. She must have had earphones plugged in because she was humming and bouncing to music unheard by Lee.

Lee could have watched her for hours. She was still wearing the ball cap with a braid hanging down her back. She was again in surgical scrubs, this time they were grey, and her hips and elbows moved in rhythm as she scrubbed the dirty trays before her, rinsed them and stacked them neatly. Lee smiled as he watched her for a good five minutes. Finally he snuck up directly behind her, pulled on one of the earphones and said “What’s wrong, the dishwasher not working?”

Rina nearly jumped out of her skin at the initial surprise. The scrubber she was using as well as a mountain of suds flew up into the air and a pile of trays clattered to the floor as Rina turned suddenly. She had a wooden spoon raised to confront her attacker. It took her a minute to recognize the man standing before her. He was clean shaven and clean; a stark contrast to the man who visited last night. He had on a tight fitting army green tee shirt that perfectly outlined the muscles in his arms and chest. Not only was Rina surprised to see him but she was surprised to see him so cleaned up. When she realized who he was, she lowered her spoon.

“You scared me half to death!” she accused.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten you. I should know better than to surprise a woman with a deadly spoon. So what is up with all the dirty trays?”

“You guessed it; the dishwasher is on the frtiz. We put in a call to maintenance but they won’t be by for at least three days.”

“Do you mind if I take a look at it?” Lee offered.

“Sure, on one condition.”

“What’s that”

“Give me a name so that I don’t have to call you Mr. Mudd”

Lee was ready for the question this time. He had thought long and hard on what to tell her. He didn’t want to lie but Starbuck’s comments had plagued his mind since yesterday. Do women really throw themselves at men just because of the name? He knew the answer was yes. Lee didn’t want the fact that he was the Admiral’s son to spoil the relationship he was building with the woman in front of him.

“Leeland Joeseeph, but call me Joe.” So he left off his last name. So he gave her a first name that he hadn’t heard since roll call on the first day of kindergarten. So he revealed his middle name. To his knowledge, only one other person alive knew his middle name. At least it was no lie. It wasn’t the whole truth either and that fact pricked at his conscious. He would tell her soon, but not too soon.

“Ok, then, Joe. I believe that there is a tool kit next to the dishwasher. If you could get it working, I would be greatly indebted to you!” Rina peeled off the rubber gloves that had reached up to her elbows and led Lee to the serving counter just outside the kitchen. The serving counter was actually a steam table that ran parallel to the kitchen wall a few feet away. The wall of the kitchen had a long narrow opening through which food was passed to the serving counter. Just past the island was the dishwasher that could wash fifty trays in seven minutes. The tool kit was resting on the ground nearby. Rina retreated to the kitchen.

Like most of the equipment on the Galactica, the dishwasher was outdated and looked like it needed to be replaced instead of fixed. Lee took a deep breath as he pulled the face plate off the machine, not sure of what he was going to find, and began

examining it. It really wasn't as bad as he expected it to be and was able to find the problem before long. Two wires had apparently come loose and fried a resistor in the next circuit. Luckily the tool box had an ample supply of resistors and wires. Lee was half way through the job when a luscious aroma wafted through the open serving window. He quickly finished the wiring and cursed maintenance for not addressing this problem quickly. He probably just saved Rina six hours of dish washing. Before replacing the face plate, Lee flipped the switch. The dishwasher hummed into action. Beautiful.

He quickly replaced the face plate, stowed the tool box and headed back toward the kitchen. He nearly ran head on into Rina who was just coming out of the kitchen with a steaming hot plate.

“Finished already? You don't know how grateful I am that you came along.” Rina walked past Lee with the plate and placed it on the nearest table. “I hope you are hungry.”

Lee followed her to the table and sat down to an incredible meal of Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes and gravy and green beans. How had she cooked such a wonderful meal in such a short time? Again he enjoyed a savory meal that tantalized his taste buds.

“Aren't you going to have any?” Lee felt a little strange eating while she busied herself loading the dishwasher with the dirty trays.

“Oh, no. Please... enjoy.” She finished putting the first load into the dishwasher and started it.

“So how did such a great cook end up on the Astral Queen?” Lee asked as he took another bite of his steak.

Rina walked over to the table where Lee was sitting and pulled up her own chair. “Well, I was delivering final divorce papers to my ex on the Astral Queen. He was headed to Picon for his sentencing hearing. Things got a little ugly and drawn out which caused me to miss the last shuttle back to Caprica City. I ended up staying over on the Astral Queen. The Cylons attacked the next morning, so there I was.”

“Wow, so the terrorists of the fleet have been enjoying gourmet meals all this time?”

“Not really, all I did was wash dishes for the first year. I didn’t start cooking on the Astral Queen until practically everyone, including all of the kitchen staff, moved down to New Caprica.”

Joe was very much enjoying his meal and Rina felt uncomfortable letting the conversation drop. She had only shared the problems of her difficult past with one other person and that was only because she needed his help to survive. She usually felt uncomfortable thinking about her past, let alone sharing it with someone else but Joe seemed safe. He seemed to have had a difficult past too and Rina felt like he could relate to her situation. She took a chance and opened up.

“Besides, I didn’t want my ex to know that I was still on board the ship, let alone alive. That would have been bad. After the Admiral’s son freed most of the prisoners, he was one of the few that they kept locked up. I didn’t want to take the chance that he might recognize my cooking. He moved down to New Caprica when Baltar pardoned the rest of the prisoners.”

“It must have been difficult staying on the same ship as your ex.” Lee offered between bites. He could tell that this subject was difficult for Rina and wanted to be as

supportive as possible. Maybe she had been bottling this up for too long and just needed to talk about it.

Rina turned in her chair so that she was no longer looking at Joe. She pulled at a loose thread on the hem of her top. Her first nine months on the Astral Queen had been a nightmare. She had stayed in seclusion, washed dishes at night and talked to very few people about anything. The day her ex moved to New Caprica was the day she celebrated and could breathe again. After a good two minutes she responded.

“Yes, it was very difficult.” She was very quiet. Lee did not press her. If she was ready to talk about it, she would. She was not ready. After another minute or so she turned back, facing Joe and ready to engage in conversation again. She began tentatively, “What about you? You’re living on the same ship as your ex. Is it difficult for you?”

“I haven’t seen her since the divorce. Of course that was only last night.” It shocked Lee to realize that he had only been divorced for a little over twenty-four hours. It seemed like a lifetime ago. They both sat quietly for a while.

Rina figured it was time to change the subject. “So what is it that you do when you are not between jobs?”

“I’m a pilot.”

“Really. That sounds exciting.” Rina’s eyes began to sparkle again and her smile returned. “What kind of ships do you fly?”

“Just about anything. But I’m thinking about going into law or politics.”

“Really? That’s a drastic change.” Rina’s smile turned crooked as she poured more lemonade into Joe’s glass.

“What?”

“What, What?”

“That look. What was that look for?”

Rina placed both elbows on the table and rested her chin on her hands. “Lets just say that I never enjoyed the company of any lawyer or politician that I had the misfortune of spending time with. I just might have to ban you from my kitchen.” Rina teased.

“So it’s your kitchen now??”

“Well, graveyard shift- it’s mine!” Rina stood and retreated to the kitchen.

Lee grinned as he scraped the remains of the meal from his plate. He shook his head in amusement and began to clean up his mess. The playful banter lightened the mood and warmed his heart. He was at peace. He felt a sense of belonging. Even with the crack about lawyers and politicians, he felt safe. It was strange, though, to hear her refer to the “Admiral’s son.” It was obvious that she had not recognized him and he wanted to keep it that way... for a while.

Rina reappeared with an armful of dirty trays to restock the dishwasher. Lee helped her with the task including his own plate in the pile. Once the dishwasher was again humming, Rina retrieved two brooms from the store room and handed one to Lee. Did she want him to sweep? He looked a little puzzled.

“Haven’t you ever played broom hockey?”

Lee’s puzzled look broke into a wide smile.

## Chapter 8

Colonial Time: Friday, 0745 hours

Colonial One

Laura sipped her tea and breathed in the fragrant aroma that swirled above her cup. Chamomile. There were moments that Laura treasured and wished would last forever. This was one of them. The worries of the Presidency and the stress of her disease were miles away and the man that she considered her best friend was sitting across from her on the sofa.

Bill had made an early surprise visit to her quarters with a steaming pot of chamomile tea and a plate of danishes. She didn't mind that she was still in her pajamas, or that her hair was askew or that she hadn't packed on the make up yet. Bill had seen her at her worst many times throughout her disease. Instead of worrying about her appearance, she relished his presence. Bill was of course in his uniform and ready for work. Even so, he looked relaxed and not in a hurry. It was nice to be able to spend a few unrushed moments without any particular agenda or check list that needed to be done.

They sat enjoying each other's company for quite some time making small talk.

“Have you had a chance to talk to Lee? How is he taking the divorce?” asked Laura as she poured herself a second cup of tea.

“Actually, I haven’t been able to find him. Apparently Dee kicked him out of their quarters, which I’m sure was expected, but I’m not sure where he ended up. Everyone that I’ve talked to hasn’t seen him in a couple of days.” Bill shifted uneasily on the sofa and took another sip of his tea. He didn’t like the idea that he couldn’t locate one of his men, let alone his own son. It caused Bill grief to think that he had “lost” his son, physically, and hoped to the gods that he hadn’t “lost” his son emotionally. Galactica was a big ship but not that big. Lee would turn up. Until then, Bill was keeping a close watch on manifests of all outgoing ships.

“Well I hope he is OK.” Laura’s voice was heavy with concern. “He’s got to be somewhere.”

“I’m sure he will be just fine. He’s not the first man to go through a divorce and certainly won’t be the last. He’s probably just lying low for a few days.” Bill could sense that Laura was quite agitated over this so he added, “Don’t worry, I’ll find him and we will have a heart to heart.” Bill finished the last of his tea and set the tea cup down on the coffee table.

Laura smiled and took a second bite of her danish. Eating was not an easy task so Laura took it slow. The tea helped to ease the pastry into her digestive system.

After a long pause, Bill asked “So have you heard from Zarek?”

Laura felt herself being dragged back to reality. The tensions of the day began to loom before her as she desperately tried to claw her way back into the comfort of idle talk. It was a losing battle. With a sigh she responded, “He is supposed to meet with

them today. Apparently he was able to round up a few of the ring leaders yesterday but was unable to accomplish anything. He is supposed to have a report for me this afternoon.”

“I would like to be there, if you don’t mind.”

“Not at all. In fact, you probably should be there.” Laura needed a strong arm to lean on, especially when dealing with Zarek. “Do you think he will come through?”

“I think Zarek will tell us everything that he wants us to know.” It was a cryptic response but Bill knew Zarek’s type; ultimately only loyal to himself. “Zarek will give us names, locations, and might even bring in a few guys in chains if it Zarek thinks it will advance his cause. The question is; what is his cause?”

Laura pondered Bill’s comment long after Bill had left for his duties. What was Zarek’s motive? What was his agenda? It was a sad state of affairs when the Vice President’s word couldn’t be trusted.

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The shuttle ride back to Galactica was short but Adama was able to accomplish two important tasks. The first was to contact Gentry with some specific instructions regarding the investigation. The second was to make a personal request of his pilot, Sharron; discretely locate his son and report back on his whereabouts.

## Chapter 9

Colonial Time: Friday, 1445 hours

Prometheus

“So what have we got” Zarek was anxious to get the ball rolling. Too much stall time can lead to unforeseen factors to frak things up. The plan had to be wrapped up today, presented to the President this afternoon and carried out hopefully by this time tomorrow.

Jason handed him a list of six names interested in joining the military. Four of which were convicted of non violent felonies and the other two had very good recommendations from employers. Everyone on the list had kept their nose clean since their release and had attempted to get good jobs on several occasions. All of them were currently employed as knuckle draggers on two different ships and were paid close to minimum wage.

“Is this it?” Zarek couldn’t believe that there were only six men out of four hundred that had kept a clean record since their release.

“Quite a few have absolutely no desire to go straight. A good number of them have had multiple incidents since their release. About fifty want better jobs but quite frankly, I wouldn’t trust any one of them. Also, there are about a hundred guys that are unaccounted for. They might not have made it off of New Caprica.” Jason spoke slowly and without emotion. He had worked like a dog all night trying to track down information about the men on his list and get as many takers as possible without getting himself arrested.

Zarek sat down hard in the wooden chair behind him. It didn’t even seem worth it. Adama will never believe that a group of guys committed robbery so that six guys could get a good job. “What about you?” Zarek asked in desperation.

“I’m currently wanted for robbery.” Came the obvious response from Jason. Jason did not seem anxious at all. He was leaning against the door post sucking down the smoke from a hand rolled cigarette and slowly blowing rings. The rings floated slowly away from Jason and dissipated into the air. Almost like Tom’s plan. What seemed solid at first was slowly fading away into nothingness. Jason had nothing to lose. If he got collared for robbery, he could do his time and be out in a few weeks, months, or years. Life in jail was not all that different than life out of jail except for the fact that in jail he was guaranteed three meals a day.

Zarek had everything to lose. As Vice President, he has sworn to protect the twelve colonies with every fiber of his being. Masterminding robberies for terrorist activities fell outside that purview. If any of this ever got out, Zarek’s political career would be over instantly. At this point, only he and Zarek knew the truth. Jason would take it to the grave. He was pretty sure Zarek wouldn’t spill the beans either. If anyone

was going to take the fall, Jason knew it would be him. He didn't mind. It was another few years of free meals and a warm bed to sleep in.

Zarek stood and began pacing the room. The rest of the guys weren't due for another half an hour. Zarek stopped, turned, and then began pacing again. Jason almost thought it was comical watching him. Jason finished his cigarette, flicked it into a half empty coffee cup and lit up another. Tom seemed to be doing things backwards. You would think that he would have identified his terms, created the terrorist threat, and then presented his terms. Pretending that he wasn't the terrorist added a level of complications. Changing the objective in the middle threw the plan into a tailspin. Instead of impressing the public with a good diplomatic resolution, Tom needed to impress Adama. The public would believe anything. Adama is not so gullible. The only easy part of this whole plan was getting a bunch of guys to steal stuff. Jason considered that the best possible solution at this point was to wrap up this operation as originally planned, glean as much good will from the President and then create a new crisis. A crisis that hit Adama at a personal level. A crisis that only Zarek could possibly resolve. And a crisis that would leave Adama beholden to Zarek.

Tom would come to this conclusion eventually. Jason hoped that it would be soon, before the rest of the guys arrived. The plan was not designed to impress Adama and it was futile to hope that it would. Tom stopped pacing, turned to the table and rested both palms on the surface. He hung his head between his shoulders, as if he were a defeated man. Jason knew that he had arrived.

Just then a waiter came into the room with a rag and a tray. “Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize anyone was in here.” Stammered the waiter uneasily as he shifted his weight between his two feet. Then timidly, he asked “Do you want me to clean up a bit?”

“Yes, please.” Tom muttered. The storage room behind the bar was often used to conduct private business. The previous “business men” using the room had left filled ash trays and half a dozen dirty cups and dishes.

Tom moved over to the doorpost where Jason had been leaning the entire time. He placed one hand on the wall just to the left of Jason’s ear and leaned in close. Tom looked straight into Jason’s eyes with a dead serious stare. Tom made a quick glance at the waiter who had busied himself with clearing the table of glasses, emptying the ash trays and wiping down the table. Turning back to Jason, Tom muttered in a very low tone. “I hate to do this to you but you might have to take the fall on this one.”

Jason blew another smoke ring and waited until its form was just a memory in the air. He crushed the remainder of his cigarette on the waiter’s tray as he passed by to leave the room. Once he was gone, Jason replied, “I kind of figured I would. Not a problem.”

It wasn’t five minutes before the rest of the gang began to file into the room, one by one. Each took a chair around the table.

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Marcus wasn’t sure if he had picked up the entire phrase just uttered by the Vice President or not. He hadn’t quite heard it himself but he was hoping that his micro amplifier had picked it up. After he left the store room behind the bar, he removed his apron hung it back on the coat rack beside the door, walked the five steps down the hallway between the bar and the store room and waited for an opportune moment to

return to the bar area. While the bar tender was busy mixing a drink Marcus replaced the once empty tray, now full of dirty dishes, back on the bar as he passed by on the way to the head. No one had noticed that he had just emerged from the back room let alone with a tray of dishes. No one even noticed him as he walked through a sparsely populated bar to the rest room.

Once safely inside the rest room, Marcus locked himself in the third stall, closed the toilet lid and sat down. Quickly he removed the micro tape recorder from his pocket, rewound a few minutes and played back what he had captured.

There it was, clear as a bell. In the VP's own voice; "I hate to do this to you but you might have to take the fall on this one."

Marcus was not sure of all of the implications that he had just recorded but it certainly sounded like a cover up to him. His boss would be pleased. He stored the device safely in the breast pocket of his casual, short sleeved shirt. He removed his flimsy, wind breaker jacket and turned it inside out. Now it was a deep blue color instead of a light brown. He pulled out some hair gel and a comb from his hip pocket and combed the goo through his hair. Now his hair was almost black instead of sandy blonde. He emerged from the safety of his stall to take a better look in the mirror. He parted his hair down the middle and combed his bangs forward. A pair of glasses finished off the transformation. It was amazing how easy it was to change his appearance.

His job was only half done. He had to re-emerge into the bar as a totally different person and finish his surveillance. No one could recognize him as the man who had spent the last half hour sipping whiskey at the bar. It would not be a problem, Marcus was confident of that.

One thing that Marcus did exceptionally well was not to be seen or noticed. He had this “gift” ever since he was a young kid. His High School friends hardly noticed him. He was always the quiet guy who stood a little bit outside the close nit circle. Often his friends would not notice when he came or went. Not one of his college professors could recognize him. He was a name on the roll list but not a face to be remembered. He pretty much blended into the sea of faces, not drawing any attention to himself at all. This was partly because his appearance was completely average; average build, average height, average hair color. He had absolutely no physical distinguishing marks. However, his anonymity was largely due to the fact that he was an introvert, content with his own company, avoiding verbal contact with anyone if at all possible.

Half way through college he got a part-time job as an assistant to a Private Investigator. It wasn't long before his boss realized his special talent to be invisible. Marcus was given a few, low profile cases to handle. He so impressed his boss that it wasn't long before Marcus was handling highly sensitive cases. Marcus was a gold mind. His talents caused his boss to become quite wealthy. Marcus dropped out of college and began working under cover full time.

Marcus had actually been on an undercover mission when the Cylons first attacked the twelve colonies. Lucky for him, he had most of his undercover recording and surveillance equipment with him. Unlucky for him, his target and his employer did not survive the attack. Marcus found himself in need of employment and that was when he first approached Gentry for a job.

Now he was a full time undercover agent, unofficially working for the civilian police. Operations only came around two or three times a month but he was paid

handsomely, in cash, to be constantly “on call.” He had received the call early this morning to report directly to Gentry within ten minutes. Typically an early riser, he was already dressed and ready for the day. Gentry gave him the targets and the objective orally. The entire operation was top secret and there was no paperwork. As usual, the objectives of the mission may have been crossing over into the grey areas of civil rights and if he were caught, he was on his own. The police force would not even acknowledge his existence. That was typical for the type of work that Marcus did.

Marcus had tailed the VP into the bar and saw him disappear down the hallway to the left of the bar. After about thirty-five minutes of sitting at the bar and sipping whiskey he figured he needed to take a chance. The contact was probably already in the back room waiting for the VP and Marcus didn't want to miss the chance to tag him.

Marcus left cash on the bar under his empty glass, picked up the serving tray left on the bar by one of the waiters and grabbed a towel. Aprons were hanging in the hallway and he quickly tied one around his waist. Marcus was hoping that “peeking” into the store room would pay off. He hit pay dirt! Not only had he tagged his second target but he recorded a sound bite worth a bundle.

## Chapter 10

Remaining Battery Time: 52 Hours

If... if... if. Such a small word but the implications can be astronomical. Zero could trace his current predicament back to one moment in time. One moment in which the “if” could have saved him from the imminent death that he now faced.

If only...How could he have been so stupid? So careless? He had been well trained but for some reason, his training didn't pay off.

Zero had finally been promoted to Electrical Engineer and had been assigned to work in the munitions division. He had been on the job for about two weeks, working on detonators for small explosives. His specialty. Unfortunately, the day he was late was the day that his supervisor reassigned duties. By the time Zero had showed up, the only duty left was wiring detonators for the nuclear warheads. One would think that this would be a coveted position but most engineers were not comfortable working so closely to plutonium. Besides, over time it could mess up the circuits in your brain. Not a pleasant experience. For the next two weeks or so, Zero was stuck with the tedious task of

finalizing the wiring for the warhead and sealing the capsules. If all went well, he could get one done in two eight hour duty shifts.

If only he had not been late.

Ok, not a big deal. Everyone had to eventually rotate through this assignment. Might as well make the best of it. Zero worked at his task diligently for nearly three weeks. He kept up with his quota and was looking forward to reassignments. Unfortunately, he was nearly reassigned out an air lock.

The supervisor was so furious with him that Zero almost thought he would be thrown out an air lock. It wasn't his fault that the schematic he was following was upside down. It wasn't his fault that the eleven faulty warheads that he had finished were mix in with fifteen good warheads and there was absolutely no way to tell which ones were good and which ones were duds. Each case had to be disassembled, the wiring checked, and reassembled. A task of at least thirty-six hours per warhead.

If only he had taken the time to get the wiring OK'd by the supervisor on his first warhead. If only he had listened to his anal retentive instinct instead of assuming his work was correct.

Zero was not thrown out an airlock but he was thrown off the ship, assigned to a scout ship that just happened to be destined for disaster.

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Colonial Time: Friday, 1530 hours

Prometheus

Jason took control of the meeting from the beginning while Zarek watched as the semi-official negotiating representative from the administration. This meeting was to be

controlled and short, not filled with mayhem, as the previous meeting had been. Jason was going to lay out the plan, no discussion.

“I have spoken with the Vice President and have come to an agreement on a course of action. Since this administration will not negotiate with terrorists, the first thing we are going to do is return all the stolen items, no questions asked. No harm, no foul.” At this three of the men began to raise objections but Jason’s hard stare beat them down as he continued in a soft but direct voice. “Once the threat is removed, we will begin negotiations. We will ask for opportunities for training and job placements. Our objective from the beginning was to get better jobs. If you are not willing or interested in working hard at job training and possibly getting an honest job, you are welcome to leave.”

Jason paused and looked around the room, making eye contact with each and every one of the men sitting at the table. Several shifted in their seats and glanced at others around the table. No one stood up to leave. Although several wanted to ask questions or complain, no one dared to say a word. Jason’s stern face was not one that would welcome comments. The choice was stay or leave. Period. The silence dragged on until Jason was sure that everyone was committed to the plan.

“Well then, since we are all on the same page, I need three volunteers to compile and deliver the stolen items. You will be given an anonymous drop off point at which you will need to have all the items packaged and delivered by 1000 tomorrow morning.”

Again Jason paused but didn’t have to wait too long. Jenkins, Alberts and Dren volunteered almost immediately. It was no surprise. Of all the men at the table, they were the most anxious to get things moving. Anything moving. They couldn’t stand just sitting

around waiting. This was good. It would give them a job to do and keep them busy for a while. Hopefully, it would keep them out of trouble.

Jason spoke directly to Dren, probably the most stable of the bunch. “Come by my place tonight and I will let you know where to deliver the package. Be ready to start gathering the materials.”

Dren, pleased that he was picked with the responsibility of leading his little trio in this mission responded with a nod. “Don’t worry, we will be ready” he added after surmising that a spoken affirmative statement was necessary. He felt that the gravity of the situation required a verbal response.

“Good. Once the package is in place, I will notify the authorities were it is. I am hoping to meet with the President tomorrow afternoon and get a training program in place as soon as possible.” The meeting adjourned.

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Marcus had chosen a booth with a perfect view of anyone entering the hall way leading to the store room after his transformation in the bathroom but only four men had passed by. Each of them had been photographed with Marcus’s pen camera as he pretended to work a crossword puzzle. After ten minutes of inactivity, Marcus decided to switch seats so that he was now facing the hallway. There had to be more than six people involved. Hopefully he would catch the rest of the gang as they retreated from the meeting.

He was barely settled in his new seat when they began to emerge from the store room. It must have been a short meeting, thought Marcus. He snapped pictures of each person as they emerged from the hallway. He photographed seven men, four of which he

had previously photographed, and the Vice President. Zarek was the last to leave the room.

Marcus remained where he was waiting for the man with the scar to emerge. He continued to mess with the cross word puzzle while watching the door carefully. Time passed. Finally Marcus began to realize his dilemma. He could only remain where he was for maybe another ten minutes before he would start drawing attention to himself. If he went into the back room, the target might recognize him as the waiter who came in earlier. If he left, he would lose his target. Marcus mentally weighed the pros and cons of each course of action and decided he needed to make a move.

After glancing around the bar, he slowly stood and slipped into the hallway. What luck, the door to the back room was ajar. Marcus carefully peered around the edge of the door, staying back in the shadows of the hallway so as not to be noticed. The portion of the room he viewed was clear. He slowly drew closer to the door so he could see more of the room. Still nothing. Marcus stepped carefully through the doorway and viewed an empty room. Quickly he turned back to the hall way. No other doors in the hall way. The man with the scar could not have just disappeared! He had to have gone somewhere. Could he have accidently photographed him as he passed by and not realized that it was the same man? Marcus pulled out his pen camera and quickly clicked through each picture. The left side of the face of each man was clearly visible in the pictures and none had a scar. Marcus stood in the doorway perplexed. He had never lost a target before. At least not unintentionally. His pulse began to quicken and his anxiety level, which is usually quite low, suddenly peaked. The run of the mill assignment suddenly made an

unexpected turn. He thrived on a good puzzle but tracking real people was usually quite boring. Now his tracking skills would be challenged.

He began with a thorough search of the room. There was nothing in the room to hide in; no large boxes, no cabinets. The shelves against the walls were piled with boxes of napkins, extra glasses, and bags of beer nuts. There was no where to go. Marcus walked around the room carefully examining each of the walls and the ceiling. No doors, no ventilation ducts big enough for a person to fit through and no evidence of anything unusual. Except for one thing. One of the walls had a short scaffolding of shelves against it, which was not unusual. What was unusual was that there was nothing on any of the shelves. He pulled on one side of the shelf and it was solidly bolted to the wall. When he pulled on the other end of the shelf, it swung out, revealing a 3 foot by 3 foot maintenance hatch. Jackpot!

Marcus pulled out his mini mag light from his back pocket. After flipping on the switch, he looked through the hatch. There were dim lights running along the wall which stretched as far as he could see in both directions. The space between the walls, which was used to run plumbing, electrical wiring and ventilation ducts, was only about two feet deep. A musty smell came from the opening and Marcus could see the dust piled up on the different fixtures. After carefully examining the floor, he determined that the man with the scar had shuffled to the left. Marcus crawled through the opening and pulled the hatch closed behind him. Slowly, he made his way down the corridor carefully examining the floor for foot prints in the dust. Progress was slow as Marcus ducked under vents and squeezed passed electrical panels, spaced about every twenty feet. Finally he came to the end of the trail. The dust on the passage floor in front of him was completely

undisturbed. Turning his head, he made a mental note of the numbering on the access hatch; S257-D. His target was probably residing in these quarters. It would be a simple task to pinpoint the cabin number on the other side of the hatch. Anxious to report back to his superior, Marcus made his way back the way he had come.

## Chapter 11

Colonial Time: Friday, 1730 hours

Inter-ship Transport

The meeting with the President had gone much better than Zarek had expected. And to top it off, Adama was there. Icing on the cake! Zarek stretched back in his chair and sipped his chilled Ambrosia. The shuttle back to the Astral Queen happened to be one of the more luxurious shuttles and Tom was enjoying every amenity. He was in control of the board and could see checkmate within just a few moves.

As Tom rested his head on the back of his chair, he closed his eyes and reviewed the meeting in his mind. The President was sitting behind her desk when Zarek was ushered into her office. Adama was standing just behind her with his arms folded in front of him, as if he were her guard, her protector.

“Tom. Thank you for coming.” Roselyn stood and held out her hand. Tom shook it firmly and sat down. “Were you able to make any progress?” she asked hopefully.

“As a matter of fact, I think we can bring this situation to a quick and easy resolution.” Tom looked from Roselyn to Adama and back again. Roselyn seemed hopeful

and encouraging. Adama was a stone wall. “I’ve met with the group responsible and convinced them to return all the stolen goods in exchange for immunity from prosecution for the thefts. No harm, no foul. All they want is the opportunity to be trained for better jobs.”

Neither Adama nor Roselyn spoke for several seconds. Finally Roselyn took off her glasses, folded them and placed them on the desk in front of her and responded in an incredulous voice “You’re kidding. These people want better jobs so they threaten to blow things up?”

In his mind, Tom’s plan seemed perfect. The disgruntled ex cons threaten to cause havoc unless they are given good job opportunities. It seemed logical but now that Roselyn summarized his plan in a few short words, it did seem pretty shallow. Time to improvise and embellish. Tom leaned forward in his chair and offered up his open palms, a sign of vulnerability and honesty. “You have got to understand these people. Most of them have been in and out of trouble all their lives. They don’t know how to effect change other than by force.” Tom could tell that the two before him were not relating to their situation. He began again. “Ok look, they often get together after a long hard day’s work of knuckle dragging and commiserate over their miserable jobs. Some of them have tried to get better jobs but have been turned down for no other reason than they are ex cons. After half a dozen of their friends, guys who they consider upstanding and hard working, get turned down time after time, they start complaining about the unfairness of it all. ‘What can we do about this,’ ‘it’s not fair’ ‘we will show them..’ You can see how easily things can escalate. I don’t think that any of them were actually planning on blowing anything up. Stealing the few things that they did was the only way they could

get anyone's attention. And look, they have your attention. All they want is a chance to talk with you, maybe some training and an opportunity to become better members of society." Tom was somewhat proud of the little speech that he just presented. It seemed to soften the glare from the two principals behind the desk but there was still a ways to go.

"Did you know that most job applications require the applicant to disclose if they have been convicted of a felony? Before the Cylon attack, an ex con could get into a work program or be assisted by the detention centers to find employment before release. Those things don't exist anymore. There are no opportunities for these guys. Even military service is not available. Any applicant to military service who has a felony on their record is automatically denied entrance. I know several ex cons who would love to join the military but can't because of their record." Tom was intentionally pushing as many buttons that he could. He knew that he hit one when Adama shifted his weight and pushed his glasses back up his nose. He also knew that Roselyn was a proponent of second chances. Tom guessed that it was time to play that card, and he was right. "All some of these guys need is a second chance. They will return the goods but are you willing to listen to them and take their situation seriously?"

Roselyn turned in her chair and looked at Adama. Tom figured that there was some sort of non verbal communication going on and was willing to wait to find out exactly what it was. Adama waited a few seconds before he moved forward and sat on the edge of the desk. He leaned forward over the desk and looked straight at Tom. "We will make absolutely no promises for anything until after the goods have been returned."

"I understand" Tom replied.

“What kind of arrangements for the return are we talking about?” Laura inquired.

“The materials are being gathered and deposited in one location. Once all the supplies are there, I will receive a phone call as to the exact location of the supplies and I will forward that information on to who ever you want me to forward it to. It will probably take a day or so...”

“Make those arrangements” Adama cut in “and then call me with the information.” He stood up and walked around the desk, standing next to Tom.

“Can I assure these guys that you will meet with them in the next few days?” Tom wanted to tie the package up with a nice bow.

“I will be glad to meet with them and talk. I can’t make any promises beyond that.” Laura stated in a mater of fact tone that ended any discussion.

Tom stood and held out his hand toward Roselyn. “Thank you for your time.” Roselyn remained seated as she shook his hand, a bit less firmly as when he arrived. Tom turned and walked toward the door. Adama followed.

“Do you have those names on you?” Adama asked “the ones interested in joining the military?”

Tom pulled out the sheet of paper that Jason had given him a few hours earlier and handed it over. It was difficult for Tom not to smile. Adama took the bribe unaware that it was the first of at least two bribes that Tom had planned for him. Adama would receive the second bribe tomorrow night and would not even realize it. Through these unassuming bribes, Tom was hoping that he was well on his way to gaining Adam’s trust and confidence. Had he actually mastered the art of manipulation and influence? Tom only hoped that the men on the list would prove to be worthy of military service.

Tom laughed out loud as he reclined in the shuttle, drawing the attention of the flight attendant. “Is there something you need Mr. Vice President?” came a sweet voice above him.

Tom opened his eyes to see a lovely young woman with brilliant red lip stick holding a serving tray. “Oh, no thank you.” Was Tom’s reply. His eyes traced the curves of her body as she turned and walked down the aisle. Soon, he thought, she would be calling him “Mr. President.” Little did Tom realize that his rook and a few pawns were about to be captured.

## Chapter 12

### Colonial One

“So what do you think?” Laura asked. She stood and moved to the couch to recline.

Bill returned from the door and sat in the chair across from Laura. “I don’t trust him.”

“It sounds like he has been able to round up these thugs and calm them down.”

“There is something that is just not right.” Bill glanced over the list of names in his hand. He did not recognize any of the names but that did not mean anything. He would have them checked out. If they were on the up and up, he would see what he could do about getting them a position on Galactica. He had been running on a minimal crew for months. Fresh blood would help.

Bill began again after folding the paper and placing it in his shirt pocket. “The question remains, is Zarek truly an intermediary or are we not seeing the whole picture? It is hard for me to believe that Zarek is doing this out of the kindness of his heart. He always seems to have an ulterior motive. That begs the question as to who is actually

holding all the cards? Is Zarek controlling these guys or are these guys controlling Zarek? Either way, it is just not right.”

Bill was a realist and was not swayed by flowery speeches but Laura liked to give people the benefit of the doubt. “He seems to be working very hard to better life for the poorer people in the fleet. Like that work study program for orphaned teens. This might be another way he is trying to help out.” Laura had practically threatened Zarek to assist in this matter and now that it looks like he may have brought the problem to a quick and non-violent resolution, Bill was second guessing his motives. She felt obligated to stick up for Zarek’s apparent accomplishment. “I don’t think that we can assume he is pulling the strings without some hard evidence. Until then, I think we should assume Zarek is actually trying to help resolve this situation.”

Bill grunted as he stood. He needed to get back to his post. He had not told Laura of his communications with Gentry. If there was dirt, he was pretty sure Gentry’s guy could dig it up. “You are right, he may be on the up and up but I will reserve my judgment until this thing plays out. I’ll let you know when he calls with the drop point.” Bill began to make his way to the door but was not able to escape before Laura asked him the question he had hoped that she would not ask.

“Have you talked to Lee?”

Adama kept walking toward the door and put his hand on the door knob. With his back still facing her he replied, “Not yet.” He was hoping she would not pry any further but she did.

“Well, why not?”

Adama mumbled something that Laura just did not pick up.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t hear what you just said.”

Adama opened the door ready to dart through before she could probe any further. Ashamed to admit it, he turned to Laura and made his confession, “I have not been able to find him yet.” As he was finishing his sentence, he quickly stepped through the door and closed it behind him.

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Colonial Time: Friday, 1800 hours

Galactica

Sharon had already covered the obvious bases first. She had talked to Starbuck, Chief and even her husband, Karl. No one had seen Lee in a couple of days. The most recent confirmed sighting was two days ago at one in the morning. Starbuck had shared drinks with him at Joe’s bar before leaving for her bunk. She had also checked his usual hang outs- the gym, the bar, the flight deck. No one had seen him. She reported this back to Adama just before he left for Colonial One. “Keep looking” were his orders.

Her next thought was that maybe he was not on board Galactica at all. She spent a good part of the last two hours going over all the transport logs. No luck. She closed the last log and leaned back in her chair. If he did leave the ship, it was not through standard procedures. Sharon reviewed the list of all the ships that had come and gone over the past two days. None were what she considered “questionable” in reputation. It was possible but unlikely that Lee had left the ship. Time to redirect her efforts.

Sharon wandered into the corridor and leaned against the bulkhead. When Adama asked her to find Lee, she figured it would take half an hour at most. She had spent most of the day so far. Adama made it clear that this was a priority and that her other duties

would be covered but this was getting ridiculous. She had better things to do than to track down the Admiral's son. Sharon let out a heavy sigh and decided to just start asking random people if they had seen him. The corridors were always full of people. If Lee was on the ship, it would be impossible for him to move about without someone seeing him.

Sharon approached the first person who walked by. "Have you seen Lee Adama?"

## Chapter 13

Colonial Time: Friday, 2140 hours

Prometheus

Marcus sprayed the wall with liquid cleanser and began scrubbing the profane word off the wall. Lucky for him, the hallway outside room S257-D had plenty of graffiti and markings on the wall that needed to be cleaned. He was working on his third hour of surveillance of the room that his target was believed to be in and had cleaned about twenty feet of wall space. Gentry was in constant radio contact with Marcus and would confirm reception every ten or fifteen minutes. "Radio check" would come through the wireless earpiece and Marcus would whistle a little tune into the micro transmitter attached to his top button. He would only speak if there was something to report. So far he had reported six males and four females who happened to pass by over the past two hours. Nothing else.

Gentry and his troops were waiting not so patiently in an empty room down the hall. Gentry wanted to confirm that the target was actually in the room before they stormed it but Gentry was getting a bit anxious to get this over with. There were several

risks in just storming the room. The target could escape out the back maintenance hatch before they could catch him or he might not even be in there. A broken down door might tip the target off that he was in their scope. They could be staking out the wrong room. Suppose they stormed through the room of some poor elderly lady and gave her a heart attack. That would not be a good thing. Gentry wanted to wait for confirmation before making a move. Besides, his troops were not “off duty” for another hour and a half. They would certainly wait that long.

Gentry mentally reviewed the data Marcus had brought him a few hours ago. The sound clip of the VP was compelling but not rock solid proof that he was trying to cover anything up. Hell, he could have been talking about the bar bill. He needed corroborating evidence to build a case. He wanted to start by arresting and interrogating the target.

The photographs of the other participants were very good quality and his team had already put names to three of the pictures. He had four people working on getting names for the rest and possibly last known locations. They actually had seven possible names for the current target , the one with the scar, so he decided to refer to him as “the target.”

Gentry would wait for a couple more hours before calling in a second shift.

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Jenkins and Alberts met up at Dren’s place around 2200 hours. Jenkins was not totally convinced that this plan would work but he trusted Jason. Jason was the most honest man that Jenkins knew, which wasn’t saying a whole lot. Most of the men he knew would turn in their own grandmother for a cubit. Jason had principles.

The three headed off to Jason's. They were going to get the drop off location from Jason and gather the loot. On the way to Jason's the three passed by Hilda's place and Jenkins decided to stop in for a few minutes. "I'll catch up with you at Jason's, I'll only be a few minutes."

Alberts and Dren continued down the corridor, Dren shaking his head. "He has absolutely no self control."

"Aw, come on. He just needs something to take the edge off. He always does that before a job."

"It takes the edge off all right, as well as his focus and his ability to think."

"He never thinks anyway so what does it matter" Alberts felt semi obligated to defend his friend. Jenkins was practically his only friend in the Universe. So he used a few mind-soothing drugs before a job. It gave him the confidence he needed. Unfortunately, it also set him up for making stupid mistakes.

"If I have any indication that he's going to frak things up, he's out." Dren was insistent on not disappointing Jason or compromising the plan. The two continued on their journey to Jason's unaware of the trap waiting for them.

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Colonial Time: Friday, 2215 hours

Galactica

"How did you find this place"

"Believe it or not, I was looking for a sack of flour."

"This is much better than flour!" Lee exclaimed as he gazed into the stars. The four and a half inch thick reinforced clear shielding three feet from his face magnified the

intensity of the stars like he had never seen before. The clear shielding was ten feet long and eight feet high, a huge picture window into the great expanse called space. It gave Lee the impression that he was lying in open space as one would lay on the beach. A half a dozen ships were visible through the window as well as the galaxy of stars. It was quite breathtaking. Sure Lee had swum through the heavens thousands of times in a viper or a raptor but he had never sat and gazed at the stars. There was never time. Always an instrument to read, a surveillance to report back, a correction in course, a Cylon to blow up. Never a chance to just sit and enjoy. This was peaceful. This was relaxing, and most importantly, this was romantic.

He had arrived in the galley as early as he possibly could after the swing shift left. Rina was busy packing a basket with sandwiches and munchies. “Are you going somewhere?” Lee asked.

Rina jumped slightly “Boy, Joe, you have a way of sneaking up on people.”

“Sorry.”

“I found this great place and I thought we could have a picnic.”

Rina handed him the basket as she threw a blanket over her shoulder. Lee followed her through the kitchen into the store room. At the very back of the store room was a ladder that led to a hatch. They both crawled through the hatch and ended up in a small open space between the top of the store room and the hull of the ship. After crawling about ten yards, they came upon a huge picture window. Why there was a picture window where no one could look through was beyond Lee. He guessed that the window originally opened into part of the dining room but because of limited space, it was covered over with the ceiling of the store room. The top of the store room was at a forty-five degree

angle with the hull of the ship. This made a nice place to recline and watch the stars. Rina spread the blanket and they both reclined, enjoying the goodies from the basket. Even her sandwiches tasted fantastic! How was it that anything that Rina made was incredibly delicious? Once they were finished, they stretched out and enjoyed the stars.

Had she intended this to be a romantic “get away” or was she just sharing something she found with a friend? Was she attracted to him? Or was she just being nice? Lee was not sure of her feelings toward him but he was well aware of his feelings for her.

Laying on the surface next to him was a woman he wanted to be close with. He longed to touch and caress. He wanted her to know that he was falling desperately in love with her but was afraid that it was too soon. This was only the third time that he had seen her but he knew. He knew in his heart that he had to be with her. He wanted to be with her forever. Her smile, her generosity, her fun-loving spirit. She was different from all other women he had been with before. They all had some level of selfishness, some agenda, something that they wanted from him. Rina made him feel special for no reason at all. She was fun to be with and had a great sense of humor. He smiled inwardly as he recalled their previous evening together.

Last night they had played broom hockey until nearly 0300 hours. He was having so much fun that he didn't want it to end. She was very good too. It was obvious that she had played many times before and she almost won. It was a close game but Lee pulled ahead by two points. Although it was Lee's first time playing broom hockey, he managed to pick it up quickly.

It was also the first time the Lee noticed her limp. She managed to walk without showing any indication of a limp but when she was chasing a battered lid to a butter dish

acting as a hockey puck, the limp was very pronounced. “An old injury” she had said. No other explanation was offered and Lee didn’t press.

Finally they collapsed in a heap, breathless and exhausted. After a few minutes Rina pulled herself up from the floor, retreated to the kitchen and reappeared with two eight ounce glasses filled with ice and a flask of amber liquid. Lee joined her at the table as she poured the liquid into the glasses. Lee motioned for her to stop when his glass was half full.

“That’s all you want?”

“That’s enough for me.” Lee replied knowing that alcohol only made him more thirsty than before. Besides, he decided two nights ago that he was going to stop drinking.

Rina filled her glass up to the rim and guzzled the entire glass. Lee was shocked. Was she trying to steal Starbuck’s title of ship’s drunk? Rina proceeded to fill her glass again but this time she drank in more measured sips.

Lee finally raised his glass to his lips and took a sip. What was this? It was sweet and flavorful but absolutely no hint of alcohol. He took another sip and found the drink to be very refreshing. It kind of tasted fruity. “What is this?”

“It’s iced tea.” Rina began to giggle. “What did you think it was?” They both began to laugh. It was absurd to think anyone could drink alcohol at such a rate and enjoy it. Their sides were already sore from the intense game and now the laughter intensified the pain. They laughed until tears ran down their faces. He couldn’t remember ever having so much fun.

He had stayed sipping iced tea and chatting with Rina as late as he possibly could before the morning shift arrived. He almost told her last night but never got the nerve. He

was thinking of telling her now. After all it was quiet, they were alone without any possibility of someone happening to come along but the mood was quite romantic. He did not want to spoil it by announcing his true identity.

Lee turned his head to look at her. Her face was perfectly silhouetted against the dark expanse of the universe. The pale ambient light from the stars cast a blue tint to her skin and she looked like a precious porcelain doll wearing scrubs. She wasn't wearing her ball cap but her hair was still tightly braided. To Lee, she was a vision of beauty.

As Lee was watching, a tear escaped from Rina's eye, reflecting the stars as it traveled down her cheek. "Is something wrong?" Lee asked.

"Oh no, just remembering. Remembering things from before." Rina wiped the tear from her face.

Lee wanted to ask but he waited. He hoped that she would trust him enough to share. Feel close enough to him to confide. Lee was not prepared for the story she was about to begin.

"My parents owned a cabin up in the Dogwood Mountains, you know, North of Caprica city?

Lee nodded in recognition of the previously popular vacation resort.

"I used to take my son up there quite often during the summer as a little get-away. We would lay in the hammock in the yard and stare up at the stars. There were so many! He so wanted to fly to the stars..." her voice trailed off.

Lee, attempting to recover from the news that she had a son swallowed hard. Knowing what must have happened, he asked in the most concerned voice without sounding like he was prying, "He didn't make it off Caprica?"

“He was staying with my parents in Caprica City when the Cylons attacked. From what I heard, Caprica City was pretty much destroyed in the first blast.”

“Well, he might have made it off.” Lee offered hopefully.

“He was not on any of the rosters from any of the ship. I had a friend check.”

“I am so sorry.” Was the only condolence Lee could offer. “How old was he?”

“He was just about to turn thirteen.”

Rina wiped her nose on a napkin and turned her head toward Lee. “Did any of your family make it?”

Lee paused before answering. “My father.” Lee felt a little guilty that he still had family when so many others lost everyone.

Rina’s face brightened. “That is so wonderful. You two must be close.”

Lee chuckled, remembering how his father would barely look at him three years ago. “It’s funny. We were barely on talking terms before the attack. Now we are closer than we have ever been. Which of course is not very close but our relationship has come a long way over the past couple of years.” Lee suddenly had an idea. He rolled over onto his side, reached for Rina’s hand and held it between both of his hands.

“Can you do me a favor?”

“Sure, anything.”

“I would like you to meet him.” This was his answer. His way of telling her who he was. It was perfect. He would turn it into an actual date, hopefully solidifying their relationship and finally revealing his identity.

“I would love to meet your father.”

“How’s this, I can pick you up after your shift, give you a VIP tour of Galactica and meet up with my father. What time do you get off?” Lee asked hopefully.

“That sounds very nice. I get off at 0700 hours.”

Lee rolled back so that he was once again reclining, facing the stars. As he did this, he continued to hold Rina’s hand with his right hand but moved his left hand to behind his head, as sort of a pillow. She didn’t pull away but seemed content to hold his hand. It was an old trick he learned in High School. Hold her hand in both of his to ask a very important question, then only let go with one of the hands. It worked every time and this time it worked like a charm. Lee could hardly control the electric charge of excitement that coursed through his body and he held the hand of someone he truly wanted to be with forever. He actually felt like he was back in High School and on his first date. He felt as though he could soar through the heavens with her at his side. He longed to hold her in his arms, to cover her with kisses but he didn’t want to overstep his bounds. One step at a time.

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Battery Time Left: 29 hours

Life was a gift. A gift from God, was what he had always been told but Zero didn’t quite understand that. His life relied on a battery pack, one with only a little over twenty four hours left. Maybe the battery was a gift from God.

Zero did not know what to think. That was all that he had been doing for the past three days; thinking. Were there truly gods who watched over their children? Or was there one true God, the giver of life. He could not be sure. Who could be sure?

## Chapter 14

Colonial Time: Friday, 2220 hours

Prometheus

Whatever Hilda had given him had reduced Jenkins' anxiety level by half. Jenkins never went on a job totally sober. He couldn't handle the stress. A little something, this time it was a green liquid, always put him at the top of his game, or so he thought.

He was probably only about ten minutes behind the others and they would have all the information sketched out before he arrived at Jason's. That was good. He was ready to start moving the goods. Few people wandered the halls at night and the maintenance uniforms that Alberts had dug up would throw off any suspicion of illegal activities.

Jenkins rounded the last corner to Jason's quarters and froze. Jason, Albersts and Dren were up against the wall, spread eagle, with a half a dozen marines pointing assault rifles at the back of their necks. The door to Jason's quarters was open and Jenkins could hear people, presumably more marines, tossing his room. They wouldn't find anything.

Jason never kept any incriminating evidence on or near him. He was very careful about that.

Jenkins paused. Should he keep walking and pretend he didn't know any of them. Should he turn and run? Before considering any of the consequences of either action, his instincts kicked in. Jenkins turned to run but his feet didn't turn as quickly as he had hoped. He found himself sprawled in the middle of the hallway. Behind him he heard "Look, there's another one." Without looking back, Jenkins leaped to his feet and sprinted down the hallway. He could hear a couple of the marines take off after him.

Jenkins ran like he had never run before. Taking a left, then a right, then climbing up a ladder to the next deck. He could still hear the marines closing in behind him. He knew that his out of shape body could not keep up this pace very long so he needed to give them the slip, and fast. He rounded a corner and realized that he had run straight for his own quarters. He quickly opened his door but kept running till he turned the next corner. Hopefully the Marines would spend a couple of minutes tossing his room before realizing their mistake.

Unfortunately for Jenkins, only one marine stopped to inspect the room and the other continued down the hall toward Jenkins. Jenkins was standing with his back against the wall just around the corner and trying not to breathe heavy. He would have to fight his way free and he knew it. He just hoped these guys weren't trigger happy. He could hear the marine slowly approach the corner. It seemed to Jenkins that the marine knew he was there. Was he breathing that heavy? All Jenkins' had was the element of surprise and apparently he didn't even have that.

The second Jenkins saw the barrel of the rifle come around the corner, he rammed his elbow into the guy's nose. He went down, blood spurting everywhere. He was sure that he had broken his nose. Thankful for the quick rest and a jump on the second marine, Jenkins took off sprinting again. Jenkins envisioned himself as a gazelle, flying like the wind through the corridors, taking corners at lightening speed. That was actually not the case. He was clumsy in his stride and almost didn't make two turns. The drugs he had ingested earlier were taking their full effect and unbeknownst to Jenkins, they were not helping. The only reason the marine hadn't caught up yet was because he was lugging around an extra fifty pounds of gear. However, the gap was closing.

Jenkins rounded a corner and lunged through an open hatch. It was probably the wrong hatch to go through because he nearly flipped over a railing to a three story drop. Jenkins found himself on the catwalk of the starboard hanger bay. The catwalks were suspended from the ceiling and could be moved in different positions to tend to the different ships that docked. This catwalk, however was running parallel to the bay. Jenkins could go left or right. He chose right. After running fifty feet down the catwalk, he realized his mistake. Another fifty feet and the catwalk ended. There was a ten foot gap between his catwalk and the next one. He stopped and turned. The marine was just now stepping onto the catwalk. No turning back. There was no choice. Jenkins judged he could make the leap with no problem. Another miss-judgment on his part.

Jenkins took a deep breath and ran as fast as he could to the end of the catwalk. He took a flying leap. About halfway across the expanse he realized he would be about two feet short. Strangely enough, he didn't feel any fear or regret. Only a vague sense of misfortune. Then it happened. Time slowed down.

It had been rumored that if you jump in the air during a “Faster than Light” jump, you would not land where you would have expected to land. This was never actually proven, probably because of liability issues. Protocol demanded that every person be secured or sitting during a jump. Most people complied but some attempted to prove or disprove this rumor. The problem was timing. It was very difficult to time suspension in mid air with the jump of the ship. Jenkins now became the proof.

The ship began the split second jump as Jenkins reached the peak of his leap. The world around him seemed to shrink into oblivion and then ease back into clarity. Jenkins tumbled safely onto the next catwalk clearing the gap with three feet to spare. In his altered state of mind, Jenkins actually thought he cleared the gap on his own strength. He quickly picked himself up and disappeared through the next hatch. The marine, not believing what he just saw, did not attempt the jump.

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Zero did not hear anything or feel anything. It was just a sensing. Something was different. Something around him was not the same as it had been a second ago. His range of vision was only about one hundred degrees. He twisted his head around as far as he could to the left, nothing. He tried to the right. And there it was. A ship had just jumped into the area, about three clicks from his position. Was it possible? Was he going to be saved? He still had a whole twenty-four hours of battery power. Apparently real life didn't mimic fiction, where time ran to the last second before the person in distress was saved.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw another ship jump into the area, then another and another. As more and more ships appeared, Zero began to worry one would jump on

top of him. He tried to count the ships but they were appearing faster than he could count. The number of ships must have been nearing thirty! The chances that a ship would occupy his space were significantly increasing by the second. His fears were practically realized when a very large ship jumped twenty feet in front of him.

Where were all these ships coming from and why were they traveling together? Maybe the three days of floating in space had caused Zero not to think clearly and quickly but the last two and a half minutes were so shocking and unexpected that he did not realize what had just happened around him. All he could think about was that he was saved! Or he hoped that he would be saved. Would they see him? Couldn't they pick up his distress signal?

The ship in front of him was so massive. Maybe they couldn't "see" him. Maybe their sensors couldn't pick up his signal. Surely they wouldn't pass him by as he floated down the starboard side of the ship. He estimated that he would be floating past the end of the ship in about eight minutes. He had eight minutes to get their attention. Then fear gripped his thoughts. Not because he may be missed, not because his life was still hanging in the balance but because of the eight foot letters that were passing in front of his eyes. A...C...I...T...C...A...L...A...G! Galactica! The enemy!

The second Zero's brain recognized the human ship, the trans-subspace Enemy Encounter Emergency beacon, or EEE, recently embedded in every Cylon Centurion was automatically activated. The EEE was specifically designed to automatically begin transmitting the second enemy ships were encountered. That way the message would get through, even if the centurion was incapacitated. As long as the centurion was functional, the signal would be sent. A priority homing beacon reached up to ten light years away

and would lead the Cylons directly to the humans. After all, the primary mission of the Cylons is to find and destroy the humans. The only problem was that the EEE sucked up power at an incredible rate. Zero's battery power went from a twenty-four hour supply to a four minute supply in an instant.

Zero had to prepare himself for an enemy attack. He activated and locked into place the two machine guns stored in each of his forearms. He began searching the hull of the ship that was slowly passing him by for a sensitive spot to hit. Then he saw it. Two civilians sitting behind a huge picture window.

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Galactica

Rina couldn't believe what was happening. The man lying beside him had finally made his intentions known and the excitement that originated at the center of her being sent pulses of energy to her extremities. She had hoped, deep down, that Joe was attracted to her and was spending so much time with her because he liked her but she was unsure. Was he hanging out to get a free meal or was he truly interested? Was he drawn to the galley because of her or because of her cooking? Barbara thought Joe was a freeloader.

Barbara, the morning shift manager, had warned Rina. "He is only coming by for the free food. Men are all the same. You feed them once and they keep coming back for more. Just like a dog. Besides, he is unemployed, recently divorced and apparently not seriously looking for a job. Certainly a loser and possibly involved in the Black Market or terrorism. What other kinds of people are roaming the corridors in the middle of the night?"

"He seems nice enough." Rina defended Joe.

“Look, I know most of the crew and I have never heard of a Leeland Joseph. He could be a refugee from New Caprica who never actually got sent back to his ship.”

Barbara had looked squarely in Rina’s eyes with both hands on her shoulders. “Listen, you be careful and don’t get too close until I can check this guy out.”

Rina thought Barbara was going a bit overboard. Living on the Astral Queen had exposed Rina to all sorts of unsavory characters and Joe just didn’t seem the type.

Barbara couldn’t find any Leeland Joseph on the ship’s roster so she expected the worse. Joe seemed like a pleasant and honest young man but then so did her husband... at first.

It had been so long since Rina had dated that she felt quite surprised and thrilled when Joe continued to hold her hand. Feelings arose in her that she hadn’t allowed herself to feel in a very long time. Her husband had disappeared long before their son was born. Since then, her son was her world. She never had time or any inclination to date. Not that there was much of an opportunity. Few men were looking for a companion with a young child. When Joe returned last night, she had secretly hoped that he might be interested but was afraid to dwell on the possibility. She didn’t want to set herself up for a disappointment. Now her reservations were eliminated and she was looking forward to their first date.

Rina’s passions were stirred as she anticipated a future and the hope of a meaningful relationship with the man lying next to her. Her life had been so barren since the Cylon attack. She had tried to make the best of things on the Astral Queen but found herself alone most of the time. Transferring to Galactica was an exciting opportunity for her and she was thankful that she was able to meet new people. Unfortunately, the night shift was probably not the best time to meet people so Rina was glad that Joe had

stumbled into the galley the other night. He had made Galactica a welcoming place. He had made her smile and he had made her feel needed.

There was something about him though. Rina couldn't quite put her finger on it. She had a strange feeling that she was missing something, maybe he wasn't telling her something. Maybe she had seen him before somewhere. Maybe she vaguely recognized him when he had visited the Astral Queen. Rina had wrestled with this sensation since the first time he had wandered into the galley. Asking "Don't I know you from somewhere?" sounded too much like a pick up line so Rina never asked. She wasn't quite sure how to otherwise bring up the subject so she dropped it. Everyone had their secrets. Gods know that Rina did so she pushed the troubling thoughts to the back of her mind and focused on enjoying his company.

Oh so peaceful, so beautiful were the stars, the far off galaxies. As the two reclined next to each other gazing at the stars, they both realized the unspoken feelings that they were developing for each other. It was a special moment that they would remember for quite a long time.

Suddenly, one by one, the ships in their view began to disappear. The fleet was jumping and the two were watching the process, anticipating what was coming. When all the ships in their view had vanished, they knew that it was now Galactica's turn. The entire window filled with streaks of light from the distant stars. The entire heavens seemed to glow for an instance and then everything went black. Rina's head began to spin, as it always did during a jump, with an intense feeling of vertigo but this time the incredible light display in the heavens seemed to lessen the effects. After a split second, the view from the window appeared as it had just a few moments before; a couple of

dozen ships, each pretty much in the same general area as they were before, and the splendor of the stars.

The entire jump took less than a second, but what a second. Both Rina and Lee gasped in response to the incredible view from the window. It was breathtaking. Lee felt so thrilled in his inner being that he could not resist the urge. He leaned up on his elbow, facing Rina. Rina was looking straight into his eyes and Lee began to move forward, intending to culminate such an incredible experience with a kiss.

As Lee leaned in close, Rina's face suddenly contorted into a look of terror and her mouth opened into a silent scream as her right hand clamped down over her lips. Lee had never had such a response to an attempted kiss. Sure he had been brushed off before or had the sudden "turn the head so you can't reach my lips" maneuver played on him but he had never had a woman respond in complete terror! Lee couldn't understand what was wrong until he noticed that her eyes were not focused on him but behind him. He whipped his head around and saw the object of fear.

Not even ten feet from the window was a Cylon Centurion, his read eye slowly bouncing back and forth across his chrome-plated face. Guns were positioned, ready to fire. Lee instinctively threw his body across Rina but knew that if the Cylon's barrage of bullets pierced the plating, they were both goners. He heard the bullets begin to crash into the window, sounding like a hard rain on a tin roof. The Galactica was a sturdy ship, built to resist incredible fire power. Theoretically the shielding should hold. However, the ship had taken a number of beatings over the past three years. There were always weak spots that had to be patched. Lee hoped that this was not one of them.

Lee counted the pelts against the shielding as he focused on Rina's terrified eyes. "Its ok, its ok" he kept repeating over and over again half anticipating the feeling a piercing pain in his back. The bullets crashing into the pane seemed to slow. Was the Cylon slowing down or was it Lee's perspective of time that was slowing down? Lee turned his head back to face the enemy just in time to see the last bullet hit the window and the slowing red eye of the Cylon fade to black.

## Chapter 15

Colonial Time: Saturday, 0100 hours

### Raptor Mission

Sharon was not happy about running a mission in the middle of the night but Karl was with her and that made all the difference. It had been an incredibly long day. Her one task assigned to her this morning concluded with an empty bunk. She had asked hundreds of random people if they had seen Lee Adama as she made her way through the corridors. Surely someone had to have seen him lately. No such luck. The Admiral would not be happy with another futile report so Sharon decided to press on after dinner.

Her husband had the graveyard shift so Sharon picked up Herra from child care, threw together a quick dinner in her quarters and took a walk with Herra. She continued to ask everyone she passed if they had seen Lee. It was amazing that he seemed to have just dropped off the draidus!

Sharon stopped by the gym and tried the flight deck again. Nothing. People were beginning to pass by and say “Sorry, haven’t seen him” even before she asked. This was

getting quite ridiculous. If the whole ship knew that she was looking for Lee, you would think that Lee might actually get the message somehow.

Finally she took a breather in Joe's bar. She purchased a chocolate milk for Herra and a glass of red wine for herself. She needed something to break the building tension. She would have to report back to Adama soon and she was not looking forward to it. The two enjoyed their drinks and munched on pretzels for a while.

It was way past Sharon's scheduled duty shift but she felt like she needed to wrap this up, one way or another. "Hurry and finish up, sweetie. You need to be getting to bed."

Herra's angelic face looked up and smiled, "OK mommy."

She was truly a blessing from the gods. She was a miracle baby. She was the first offspring between a Cylon and a human. This made her special. And on top of that, she was a beautiful child with dark ringlets of curls framing her face.

Herra, in an attempt to suck the last couple of inches of chocolate milk from her tall glass through her straw, tipped her glass. Sharon knew it would go over and spill but it happened too quickly for her to catch the glass. The milk spilled and the glass tumbled to the floor, thankfully not shattering. Unfortunately the milk spilled into Herra's lap. As any child would, she began to cry.

Sharon signaled to Joe about the spill, picked up Herra and carried her to the head across the hall. She placed Herra on the counter, grabbed a couple of paper towels and began to wipe the stains from her skirt. Tears continued to stream down Herra's face. It was nearly 2200 hours and Herra was tired.

“It’s ok sweetheart. It’s fine. No more tears.” Sharon comforted her daughter.  
“We don’t need to keep looking for Lee Adama anymore. Let’s go home.”

The young man shaving a few sinks down from Sharon looked over when she mentioned Lee’s name. Shaving at 2200 hours, he must be on graveyard shift. Sharon did not recognize him at all.

“You looking for Lee Adama?” he asked.

“Yea, why? Have you seen him?” Finally, a glimmer of hope!

“Sure have. He’s bunking next to me.”

Sharon tried to restrain her excitement at finally getting a piece of information, a shred of evidence that Lee is still aboard! “Really! Where’s that?”

“B7, I’m in bunk 3 and he is right below me. I just saw him about half an hour ago.”

“Do you know where he is now?”

“Couldn’t say. He has been sleeping most of the day but he got up, got dressed and then left just before I got up.”

Sharon continued to pump him for as much information as she possibly could, thanked him and then left. Herra was practically falling asleep in her arms as she hurried back to her quarters. She quickly dressed Herra for bed and put her down. Sharon was also exhausted but had to make a call to Adama with an update. A recent sighting and a bunk number was hard evidence that would at least prove to the Admiral that she was making progress.

After the call, Sharon fell into bed. It seemed like she had been asleep for ten minutes when Karl was above her, shaking her to get up.

“Sharon, I need you.”

“Not now, I’m so tired.” She rolled over and hugged the pillow.

“No, I need you to fly a mission.”

“Can’t someone else do it?”

“This one’s pretty tricky and I need the best. You’re the best.” Karl paused, shook her again and then pleaded, “Come on, get up and get dressed.”

“But Herra...”

“Don’t worry, I brought a baby sitter.”

Sharon groaned and rolled out of bed. Half an hour later, she found herself in a survival suit flying a raptor backwards. Four marines armed to the teeth were standing on the deck of the raptor. Helo was opening the back hatch of the raptor as Sharon was holding the ship steady. According to sensors, the “debris” they were collecting was just outside the back of the ship.

As the hatched slowly opened, the marines cocked their weapons, ready to shoot in case the “debris” posed a threat. They had all been briefed fully on the mission and the thought of capturing a centurion did not sit well with any of them.

When the hatch was fully opened, Sharon eased the ship back. The toaster was directly astern and as she backed up, the centurion floated into the raptor. So far, so good. There was absolutely no sign of movement from the centurion. As the hatch began to close, two of the marines disabled and removed the weapons from the centurion’s fore arms that were still locked and loaded. Sharon let out a sigh of relief. Now all she had to do was fly back to the hanger bay and crawl back into bed.

Sharon turned back to the controls and prepared to maneuver the ship forward. Out of the corner of her eye, something caught her attention. She looked up through the canopy of the raptor. Her own dead face stared back at her.

Sharon let out a piercing scream and nearly tumbled back over her chair. All four marines, as well as Helo looked up to see what was wrong. "REPORT, REPORT!" Could be heard over the wireless.

Floating just outside the canopy was Sharon. Actually a copy of Sharon, staring with cold blank eyes into the Raptor, her skin was blue as ice and her arms stretched out as if she were trying to penetrate the canopy. Certainly a disturbing discovery but there was no immediate threat so the marines once again turned their attention to the toaster on the floor, each of them cursing themselves in their minds for being so easily distracted.

Again "Report, Report was heard over the wireless. This time it was clearly the Admiral's voice demanding to know what was going on."

Helo, the ranking officer, regained his composure and replied, "It's OK, we just ran into another Cylon floating in space. This one's a skin job. Most certainly dead. What are your orders, sir?"

After a pause, the Admiral responded. "Recover the body. We will begin a scan of the area for any others. Be prepared for more recoveries if necessary."

"Yes sir."

Sharon heard Helo's concerned voice over her com link. "Sharon, you OK?"

"Yeah fine. Just fine. Just a little startled." Understatement of the year, she thought.

Sharon was still recovering from the shock. She had ended up on the floor behind the cockpit. Her heart had jumped to her stomach and cold sweat was dripping down her face. Thankfully the environmental suit hid her panicked state of being from the marines and from Helo. She had seen plenty of dead bodies before but this one really creeped her out. It was like looking in a mirror, a mirror into death with her own face staring back at her. After a few moments, she pulled herself together, slipped back into the cock pit and began to man the thrusters.

The “skin job” was floating above and to the port side of the ship. Sharon rolled the ship thirty degrees and pulled forward as Helo opened the port hatch. He was able to reach the left ankle of the corpse and pull it into the Raptor. The marines strapped down both bodies making sure neither one could or would pose a threat. It was disturbing to Helo to look into a frozen face that exactly resembled his wife. He decided to join Sharon in the cockpit and wait for further orders. Hopefully the Raptor wouldn’t turn into a floating morgue. No such luck.

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Colonial Time: Saturday, 0430 hours

Galactica

“Here, have a drink” Lee took the glass from his father’s hand even though he had absolutely no intention of drinking it.

“Don’t you think it’s a bit early for this?” Lee asked. It was 0430, too early or too late to start drinking.

“I’m not on duty for another three hours.” The Admiral crossed the room from his minimally supplied wet bar to the couch where Lee was sitting. “Besides, it has been a

long night.” His office was not large but it was cluttered with books and nick knacks he had collected over the years, most of which he hardly looked at anymore. Too many long lost memories. Adama stirred his drink as he sat on the couch across from Lee. Where to start? He took the easy route.

“We found two centurions, three skin jobs, one without a head, and a scout ship that looked like it had jumped into a meteor shower. Who knows if a base ship is close at hand. We will be jumping again as soon as possible.”

Lee nodded his recognition of the situation but didn’t offer any kind of comment about anything. He was sitting on the edge of the couch with his elbows resting on his knees and holding his glass with both hands.

“I thought Gaeta could take a look at the Centurion you found. It seems to be in perfect shape. Maybe we can find a weakness, something we can exploit.”

Again Lee did not respond verbally. He just sat staring into his glass. He was not making it easy for Adama to begin his heart to heart. Maybe a direct question would get him to open up a bit.

“So, you just happened to be looking out a window in the middle of the night when this toaster saw you and began shooting at you?”

“Yeah... that’s about it.” Lee was not interested in a lengthy conversation. He wanted to maybe take a quick nap, shower and shave before his date.

The Admiral had asked for a debriefing but Lee was not forthcoming with explanations of the details. Lee was having difficulty focusing on the conversation with his father. All he could think about was his date with Rina. He had left Rina in the galley a couple of hours ago, obviously shaken but she seemed to be ok, under the

circumstances. He was not worried about her but his thoughts were consumed by her. He did not mention Rina in his report. There was no need. Besides, Lee wasn't even sure why he was making reports in the first place. He was now a civilian. Not military. Even so, he was pretty sure his father was wondering why in the world he would be looking out a window in the middle of the night in the first place. Lee wasn't sure if he was ready to share the whole story.

Adama was getting a bit frustrated. He always had trouble communicating with Lee. There was always some wall, some hurdle, some hidden agenda. Lee seemed quite distracted, possibly depressed. Maybe he was just not ready to talk about the divorce. The fact that his son was staring out a window in the middle of the night didn't make sense. There had to be something wrong.

Lee, anxious to leave, placed his still full glass on the coffee table and stood, "If that will be all..."

"Actually, I did want to talk to you about something." Now there was no turning back. Adama needed to just come out and say it.

Lee sat back down but did not pick up the glass. Another oddity, Lee had not touched his drink.

"Look son, I know that I have a hard time talking to you so I will just cut to the chase. I am very concerned about you. I know about the divorce, I know you have been sleeping all day and I know that you have pretty much been in seclusion." Adama paused. He didn't want Lee to think he was spying on him, even though he was. He continued cautiously, slowly, choosing his words carefully, "Not having a job can just add to the loneliness. Depression is a natural response to situations like this. I want to help you any

way I can.” Another pause. Adama couldn’t resist offering Lee a position back under his command. “I could always use you back as the CAG.” Hopefully this didn’t sound like a self serving offer. Lee was the best CAG Adama had ever had. Adama desperately wanted him back but knew that Lee wanted to pursue other career avenues. Adama figured the offer was worth a shot.

Lee cocked his head sideways and grinned like the whole thing was a joke. A little disturbed by this Adama pressed on. “I know what you are feeling. I have been there. Sometimes just talking about it helps.”

“No dad, you don’t understand...”Lee began.

Adama was a bit angry at this statement. Of course he understood. He had gone through a divorce. He had suffered because of his own wrong selfish choices and lost his family because of it. Adama was opening up to Lee and Lee was throwing it back into his face. Adama’s first response was to defend himself and to argue with Lee but then he thought of Laura. What would she say in this situation? After all, she was the one who put him up to this. She certainly would not attack the vulnerable. Adama took a deep breath and decided to take another approach.

“I know things seem bleak right now..”

“No dad, listen! It’s not the divorce. I’m not depressed and things right now are better than they have ever been. I, uh...” Lee paused trying again to decide if he wanted to tell him about Rina yet or just let that be a surprise a few hours from now when he introduced them. She was such an incredible person, he knew that he could not do her justice.

“You what?” Adama pressed.

“I, I uh, met someone.” Lee let it sink in.

Adama was shocked. That was the last thing he expected Lee to say. How could he have met someone so soon after his divorce? Three days and he was already seeing another woman? Adama had a hard time processing this. Was he seeing her before the divorce? That wasn't like Lee. Could he just be on the rebound? Was this poor girl simply a band aid for a victim of a broken heart? Hopefully not. Adama knew that Lee was never passionately in love with Dee in the first place. He was pretty surprised when they got married. Although he was glad that Lee had someone to be with, Adama never understood why Lee had settled for Dee. The lack of passion in their relationship was obvious but Adama never commented about their relationship one way or another. Perhaps not making a comment was a comment in and of itself.

All Adama could choke out was “Really??”

Suddenly Lee came alive. “Oh dad, she is the most remarkable woman I have ever met!” Lee stood enthusiastically and began pacing the room. He continued in almost a whimsical voice, “She's kind, she fun, I can't stop thinking about her. We only met a few nights ago and it seems like I have known her forever! We can just sit and talk for hours. I don't know dad, I have never met anyone like her before.” His words seemed empty and trite as he tried to describe Rina. The words coming from his lips rang in his ears like a teenager trying to describe his new girlfriend. He resisted the temptation to use words like “totally awesome” and “so cool.” Even so, he felt young, fresh, alive, and full of energy and hope.

“She was the one I was with, you know, looking out the window in the middle of the night. It was amazing. That was until the Cylon showed up.”

It wasn't Lee's words but his enthusiasm that impressed his father. Adama hadn't seen Lee so excited about something, about anything since he won the debate championship in eighth grade. Lee was as steady as they come. Sticking to his morals and principles, not taking chances and trying to live the "ideal" life. Adama was pretty sure if it were left up to Lee, he would have never gotten a divorce. He would have stuck it out, even if he was miserable, just so he would not be tagged with a failed marriage.

Now he saw something in Lee that he hadn't seen in a long time. Something that died around about the time that Zack died. Lee's passions were resurrected by this someone special. He hoped to the gods that this was for real. That this woman was not just a gold digger or someone taking advantage of Lee. Lee had had so many disappointments in his life, maybe this woman, whoever she is, would bring hope and meaning back into his life. Adama was anxious to hear more about her, to find out who she was.

"I think she's the one." Lee stated bluntly after a long pause.

Adama's mind swirled. "The one for what?" was the first thought that popped into his mind. It didn't take Adama long before he realized that Lee meant "the one he wanted to spend the rest of his life with." How could this be? Lee had already had his chance for "the one" and it ended in divorce, THREE days ago! How in the world could he be thinking that he had met another "love of his life?" How could there be more than one "one"? Adama didn't completely understand young people these days but he did understand one thing; his son was a different person than he was a few days ago, and a happier person at that. Apparently this mystery woman was the source of such a change.

"I'd like to meet her"

“I was hoping to bring her by later on this morning. We have kind of a date in a few hours and if you’re not busy...” Lee dropped the end of the sentence, hoping his father would invite them to meet.

“Of course, of course. Bring her by CIC any time this morning. I’m anxious to meet her.”

Adama stood and gave his son a parting hug. Lee left quickly, undoubtedly anxious to prepare for his date.

Lee had not offered a name of this mystery woman. Adama could not imagine who she could be and had no way to “check up” on her before meeting her in a few hours. He would have to be patient and wait. Adama chuckled to himself as he imagined the conversation he would have with Laura in a couple of hours.

## Chapter 16

Colonial Time: Saturday, 0700 hours

Galactica

Barbara was removing the last of the serving trays from the steam table and wiping down the counter. Five hundred and sixteen meals served this morning. It had to be a record! Most people preferred to eat on the run, grab a protein bar or cook a little something in their quarters on their hot plates or in their microwaves. Of the two thousand crew members on board, the mess usually served between two hundred-fifty and three hundred people each meal. The standard prep was for three hundred and the mess never ran out of food. Until now.

Ever since Rina began cooking breakfast, the mess had run out of food practically every morning. Barbara had already turned away fifteen disappointed and hungry crew members who had waited a bit too long to come to breakfast. “Get here sooner tomorrow” was her only consolation. The mess opened at 0600 for breakfast and by 0645, the food was gone. Amazing!

Barbara slipped the last tray through the opening in the wall that led to the kitchen. From behind her she heard a man's voice say "Excuse me."

"I'm sorry sir but we ran out of food about twenty minutes ago. You will need to get here a bit..." She stopped mid sentence when she turned around and saw Lee, looking very handsome in civilian clothes and standing on the other side of the steam table.

"Oh Hi Lee, I hardly recognized you in civies."

"Not a problem." Lee responded.

"We did run out of food, though. I can whip you up some eggs if you want." Barbara offered. She always went the extra mile for Lee. Not just because he was the Admiral's son but because he was one of the few officers who treated knuckle draggers as real people. Not as servants but as peers.

"Oh no, that won't be necessary. I'm, um..., I'm actually looking for Rina. Do you know where she is?" Lee stammered. He was a bit nervous and wasn't sure why. This certainly wasn't his first date with a woman. He had wined and dined many before but none like Rina. He wanted everything to go perfect, especially when she met his father.

"Oh, she's in the back getting ready for a date with some loser." Barbara went back to scrubbing the stainless steel steam table between them.

"A loser, huh?"

"Yeah, I don't see why she's going out with this guy. He throws up all the red flags."

"Red flags?"

“You know, unemployed, recently divorced, plus he only comes around in the middle of the night. I warned her. This guy has got to be bad news. I told her I would scope him out when he comes in.”

“Well, that’s very kind of you.”

Barbara smiled and continued scrubbing.

“Well...” Lee asked.

Barbara looked confused. “Well what?”

“Do I pass your inspection?”

“What do you mean..” She stopped scrubbing and looked up at Lee. It took a couple of seconds for Barbara’s brain to connect the dots but when she did, her whole demeanor turned from pleasant to shocked to apprehensive.

“No! You’re not...” She held her hand up to her mouth to cover her jaw that had nearly dropped to the floor. “You’re Leland Joseph?!”

Lee smiled, amused at Barbara’s response. “Yea, that’s me.” Lee was not expecting what came next.

Barbara began scrubbing the table with such fervor that Lee thought she would scrub a hole right through the steel. “You are fraked! You are so fraked!” She repeated as she shook her head in dismay.

Lee felt a dull pain of fear growing in the pit of his stomach. He had certainly experienced his share of fear before. He had faced impossible odds taking down Cylons in and out of the cockpit. He had looked death squarely in the eye and didn’t flinch. He had even risked everything for his principles but he never felt the kind of fear that he was

experiencing now. Had he unknowingly done something to jeopardize his relationship with Rina?

Lee's smile turned serious. "What are you talking about?" Lee demanded.

"She has no clue."

"You mean about who I am?"

"Dam straight." Came the curt reply. "You are totally fraked."

"I don't understand."

Barbara stopped scrubbing and shifted all her weight onto one foot, placed her empty hand on her hip and held up her hand that was holding the rag and shook it at Lee, like a mother scolding her child. "You know, it's one thing to be some mysterious "regular" guy who shows up in the middle of the night but..." She paused, leaned forward looking both directions as if to see if anyone else was listening and continued an angry whisper. "You're Lee Adama."

"So." Lee was still a bit confused by Barbara's response and was hoping to the gods that she was over reacting. His stomach began to churn.

"So, you're Lee Adama." Repeating herself as if it were some new revelation. Lee looked even more confused so Barbara began to spell it out. "Look, it would be one thing if you were some hot pilot or some guy from engineering. You would be a regular person, like the rest of us. But you are not. You are the son of the Admiral. You're practically royalty. And to top it off, you are chummy with the President. You don't hide things like that. It's like lying. It makes all the difference in the world!"

Lee let her words sink in as Barbara continued to scrub the table. Had he made a terrible misjudgment? Should he have told Rina who he was from the beginning? He

liked it better when Barbara thought he was just some loser. Fewer expectations to live up to. Meekly, he responded in a quiet voice, “I never lied to her.” Lee’s composure was noticeably downcast.

Barbara stopped her scrubbing and took a good look at Lee. He looked like a child who just lost his puppy. She almost felt sorry for him. It must be tough, being the Admiral’s son. He really was a great guy and who was she to spoil their relationship? Lee could do that on his own. “Ok, look. I’ll put in a good word for you but you had better tell her... today.”

Lee brightened, “Oh, I was planning on it.”

The beginnings of a smile spread across Barbara’s face. “Wait here, I’ll go get her.”

Barbara made her way through the galley and into the office where Rina was getting ready. She slipped through the door and closed it behind her. Rina, standing in front of her open locker, was fussing with her hair. A small, five inch mirror hung on the inside door of her locker and Rina could see Barbara in the corner of the mirror. “He’s here?”

“He’s here.” Barbara’s mind was racing. What to say?

“So what do you think?” Rina asked.

Barbara answered slowly and with a steady voice. She wanted Rina to take what she had to say very seriously but she didn’t want to reveal any secrets. “I think that if you have this guy hooked, you had better reel him in as fast as you can before he gets away.”

Rina couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She had spent the last two hours listening to Barbara describe all sorts horrible speculations about Joe. He could be a

loafer, a fugitive, a criminal... and the list went on. Rina finally just tuned out Barbara's comments as she went about her work. Now she was to "reel him in??" Why the turn around. Rina turned to look at Barbara to see if she was joking. Her face was dead serious.

"Why the change of heart?"

Barbara didn't answer the question. Instead she crossed the room, took the comb from Rina's hand and said "Here, let me help you with that." After a few teases here and there, Rina's hair looked amazing.

"Wow, that's fantastic! You should open a shop."

"I used to do hair. That's what got me through culinary school" Barbara confessed. Maybe she should have stuck with hair styling. It was obvious that she didn't have the gift of culinary arts like Rina had. The funny thing was that Rina never went to school. She was a high school drop out and yet everything she touched in the kitchen turned out amazing. It didn't seem right but Barbara accepted the fact that she would never measure up to Rina in the kitchen. Maybe she should go back to hair styling.

Barbara turned Rina around, put both hands on her shoulders and looked straight into her eyes, as she had done before when she first heard about "Joe." "I want you to listen to me very carefully" Barbara waited until their eyes were locked. "Everybody deserves a second chance."

Rina was completely puzzled. Had Barbara totally flipped out? She was not making any sense at all. What could have possibly made her do a complete 180 regarding Joe? What did she mean, everyone deserves a second chance? Who needed the second chance?

Before Rina could reconcile her confusion, Barbara practically pushed her through the door saying, “You had better hurry, he’s waiting for you.” And with that, Rina found herself hurrying through the galley and into the dining area. Joe’s back was to her, leaning against the steam table, apparently in deep thought. He did not notice her at first.

“Good morning.”

Lee glanced over and did a double take. He was completely dumbfounded by what he saw. Previously, Rina has always been in scrubs, her hair pulled back tightly in a braid and without any make up at all. He would not have used the word “dumpy” to describe her but maybe “practical for the job” was a better description. After all, she spent most of her time in a steamy kitchen over a hot stove. Scrubs gave her a boxy look, unflattering and hiding her figure but comfortable to work in. Besides, it wasn’t her looks that attracted him. It was her kindness and pure heart.

The woman standing before him now looked amazing. She wore a deep blue tailored jacket over a white blouse and short skirt to match that came just above her knees. It was a business suit but it made her look stunning. The tailored jacket and skirt complemented her curves and the deep blue made the green in her eyes ignite to a fiery sparkle, twinkling like the stars that they were gazing at just a few short hours ago. The touch of make up gave her face dimension and color. How could he have ever thought of her as plain? Her long, light-brown hair framed her face and hung in loose curls down around her shoulders, causing her features to soften. Lee couldn’t help but stare.

“You look fantastic!” Lee finally was able to get out as he continued to gape at her.

“Oh, thank you.” Rina’s heart leapt, drinking in the admiration. It was like pouring rivers of water on a thirsty soul. No one had ever admired her appearance with such obvious pleasure before, at least not that she knew of. She hadn’t “dressed up” for anyone for over ten years, except for that one day. That one day when she delivered her divorce papers. She was wearing this same suit but the occasion was very unpleasant. Since then she had sent the suit in three times to be cleaned but here were still a few blood stains visible around the collar. She hoped no one would notice. Joe was not looking at her collar but at her legs. She had been able to scrounge up a pair of nylons and apparently they were causing Joe to drool. Rina giggled to herself. She felt like a school girl being picked up for the prom.

Joe offered his arm and Rina gladly took it. Together they passed through the remains of the morning breakfast crowd. It seemed to Rina that eyes were staring and whispers were flying as they passed but she was not sure why. Had they never seen a couple before?

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### Colonial One

Zarek paced the length of his office, stopped to stare at the phone and then began pacing again. Why hadn’t Jason called yet? He had assured Tom that the materials would be gathered and packed by morning. What was the hold up? Zarck stopped and glanced at his watch for the fifth time. 0730. He had meetings with various members of the Quorum all morning starting in half an hour. He found his duties as Vice President tedious and time consuming. Someone was always whining and complaining about something and

President Roselyn had put him in charge of dealing with the minor issues. Tom began pacing again, running his fingers through his hair, a nervous habit of his.

Tom briefly considered calling Jason himself but all outgoing calls from his office on Colonial One were logged. He couldn't risk the paper trail. He would have to wait until the afternoon when he could call Jason from the Astral Queen.

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Galactica

Lee had led Rina onto the hanger deck, maybe not the most romantic place but a good starting point for a tour of Galactica. The first thing that Rina noticed was that the place was practically empty.

“Where is everybody?” she asked.

“It's between shifts.” Lee stopped to lean against one of the vipers. “These beauties are all prepped and ready to fly for the next shift. Right now there are about six vipers out on patrol. The next shift is in briefing and should be skids up within the hour. Have you ever been in Viper?”

Rina laughed, “Hardly, I've only been in a shuttle twice.”

“You want to check it out?”

“Can we?”

“Sure. Here...” Lee held on to the step ladder that was pushed up next to the bird and motioned for Rina to climb them.

“Are you sure we can do this?” It just didn't seem right that anyone could just stroll onto the hanger deck and check out vipers like that. Rina was a bit apprehensive.

“Come on, it’s pretty awesome.” Lee motioned for Rina to climb the steps as he held onto the ladder.

Rina took the railing and began to climb up the seven steps to the cockpit. Lee climbed up right behind her, standing just one step below her.

“Go ahead, get in.”

“I can get in the cockpit?”

“Sure, it’s no problem.”

Stepping into the cockpit was a tricky task in pants. You had to make sure you didn’t step on or knock any controls. Stepping into a cockpit in a short skirt was extremely difficult, especially if modesty was an issue. Rina looked down into the cockpit and decided the best plan of attack was to step on the seat and then lower herself down from the knees. However, just as Rina was about to step onto the seat, she glanced down and read the name on the viper. “I can’t get into this viper.”

“Why not?”

“This is Apollo’s viper. He’s the Admiral’s son. I think we would both end up in the brig if he found out we were messing with his viper.”

Lee chuckled to himself and then replied in an encouraging tone. “Really, he won’t mind.”

“Are you sure?”

“I happen to know him quite well and really, it’s fine.”

Rina carefully stepped onto the seat, keeping her skirt from riding too far up her leg. She lowered herself down and Lee leaned over the edge of the cockpit. He began showing her all the different switches and buttons. Rina enjoyed listening to his

excitement as he pointed out the controls for the thrusters, the draidus, the weapons. She had no idea how any of these things worked or what half of them were for but she listened and was happy to see Joe's enthusiasm.

"Excuse me, sir." Came a husky voice from below. "Excuse me but you can't be up there."

Lee stopped explaining and glanced down the ladder.

"See, I told you we would get in trouble." Rina whispered.

"Don't worry, I'll be right back." Joe climbed down the ladder and Rina could hear two men conversing in low tones, too low for her to hear. She decided to use this opportunity to try to get out of the cockpit without an audience. Had she known she would be climbing in and out of cockpits, she would have worn something different. After a bit of tugging, twisting and paying careful attention to her hemline, she was back on the ladder, climbing back down. Joe was standing at the bottom of the ladder speaking with a man in an orange jump suit.

"Rina, I would like to introduce you to Chief Tyrol. He is in charge of keeping all these birds in the air."

"Nice to meet you, mam."

"Nice to meet you too. I certainly hope your pilots treat you well. After all, their lives are in your hands." Rina gave the Chief a hearty hand shake. "You must be incredibly efficient, keeping all these planes in top condition. Such an awesome job and an awesome responsibility."

“Thank you, mam. They treat me just fine.” The chief’s face lightened up. Lee wasn’t sure but he thought that the Chief may have been blushing. “Hey, would you like to see the inside of a Raptor?”

“That would be great!”

The Chief took Rina’s arm and led her across the deck to a waiting raptor. Lee stood amazed, watching the two as they strolled away. Rina had said maybe five sentences to the Chief and he was putty in her hands. She had an amazing way of making people feel good about themselves. Lee couldn’t take his eyes off of her legs as she stepped into the raptor.

## Chapter 17

Colonial Time: Saturday, 0720 hours

Rising Star

Jason stared at the ceiling longing for a smoke. His entire concentration was focused on not giving any sign of anxiety and that included needing a smoke. His body wanted to get up, pace the cell, rattle the bars, pace some more and yell complaints at the guard. Instead he forced his body to lie still on the bunk and look toward the ceiling. He only allowed his eyes to dart about, scanning the ceiling over and over again. He knew they were watching. Waiting for him to break. Waiting for an opportune moment to interrogate him.

He had been in the cell several hours, he was sure, but there was no clock. It was a common tactic of interrogation. Prisoners without a clock often estimated their time in a cell as up to three times the actual length of time, thus causing heightened anxiety and opportunities for interrogators to glean important information. Jason was very familiar with the tricks of the trade and refused to give them the upper hand. But he sure could use a good smoke.

The detainee processing clerk had taken all his personal belongings, including his shoe laces, and sealed them in a large manila envelope. He cared for nothing in the envelope, except his cigarettes. He probably wouldn't be able to get them back until after he asked for a lawyer. This, unfortunately, would never happen. He would confess, take the fall and end up in a cell for a while. Not a big deal.

Jason would gladly take the fall for Tom any day of the week. They were friends, long time friends, closer than brothers. They had grown up together in a small town on Sageterian. They were inseparable all through school; getting into mischief, constantly challenging authority and even playing a few pranks. Anytime there was a prank at school, those two were the first to be called into the Head Master's office. After High School, they both went their separate ways but by some act of the gods, they were reunited seventeen years later when Jason ended up as Tom's cell mate. What were the odds? Practically non existent!

They quickly renewed their friendship. Prison was a tough place but they watched each other's back. Jason even helped smuggle pages of Tom's second book out of prison. It was complete crap, all seven hundred and twelve pages of it; at least in Jason's opinion. He knew Tom better than anyone and Tom cared nothing for the oppressed, the disadvantaged or the unfair class system. Tom only cared for Tom. It was as if Tom was using this cause to advance his own agenda, to achieve his own goals that he couldn't possibly achieve legitimately.

Jason thought it was hilarious that anyone would fall for one word from Tom's book. But it was more than Jason had ever done. Jason never had, nor did he want a

following. He applauded Tom for his and was amazed that people would actually spend money to buy his book.

No, Jason didn't mind taking the fall. He didn't even mind living in an eight by ten cell. He did know that Tom would watch out for him, whatever happened.

There was only one problem. Tom was counting on him to deliver the goods. Obviously this would not happen in the near future. He could not rely on Jenkins to gather the materials and contact Tom. Hell, he didn't even know that Tom needed to be contacted. Only Jason was privy to that information. Tom was probably wondering where he was. Why he hadn't called yet.

Jason could see the handwriting on the wall, actually the ceiling. Zarek's plan was going to go down in a blaze. His chances of becoming the next president was dwindling quickly. Jason sighed, "Well," he thought, "It's not the end of the world. That had already happened."

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## Galactica

There are not a whole lot of places of interest on a battle ship worthy of earning a spot on a VIP tour of Galactica. At least Lee thought so. He didn't think that the water recycling tanks, the power generators and the crew quarters were worthy of interest but Rina seemed very interested as Lee took her around the various parts of the ship. They had also visited the engine room , the rec room, Joe's bar, and even the gym. Most of the rest of the ship was dedicated to some ship function or off limits to civilians.

The only place left was CIC, the heart of the ship, the place where decisions were made that could change the course of humanity and more importantly, the place where

his father was currently working. It was almost as if Lee had been avoiding CIC, putting off the scrutiny of his father. He was pretty sure that Rina would dazzle his father, almost sure. His anxiety level rose as they neared their final destination.

The couple rounded the corner and Rina stopped. Both sides of the corridor were lined with pictures, candles and small memorials dedicated to lost loved ones. She was floored. Never before had she seen such an outpouring of mourning and heartache in one place. She walked over to the wall and began scanning the pictures with awe. Young people, old people, children, parents, all types of people were represented. Lee could hear her whisper “So many, so many,” over and over again. Every so often there was a candle burning, a necklace, a hand written note or some other personal item tacked to the wall. It was overwhelming. Billions of people killed in a single day is such an overwhelming number to deal with but the thousand or so pictures pasted to the wall gave faces to the countless numbers lost.

Lee had passed through this corridor so often that he rarely stopped to look anymore. Sure, there always seemed to be a few more pictures tacked up here or there. Lee had not paid much attention since he took Kara’s picture down. He was glad to do it, thrilled to know that Kara was still alive but the rest of the pictures began to lose their meaning. Faces he vaguely remembered or complete strangers. The pictures no longer tugged at the emotions of his heart strings. Was he losing his ability to care for the sufferings of his fellow shipmates? Or was the emotional rollercoaster of the past few months just too much for him to process anymore.

It had taken three weeks for Lee to put Kara’s picture up in the first place. He did not want to do it. He didn’t want to admit that she was gone. Just as he was finally over

losing her, she quite inexplicitly rejoined the human race. Another unexpected turn in the life he knew as “survival”.

Rina had stopped at a picture, about three quarters of the way down the hall, and was studying it carefully. It was a head shot of a woman with a teenage boy. Both had a rounded face with sandy-blond hair, obviously related to each other, and smiling broadly. They looked so happy. Rina wondered if a grieving husband and father had placed the picture or maybe the mother, longing for her lost son. Rina fought to keep the tears from falling from her eyes but it was a losing battle. She sniffed and rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand. Slowly she reached into the pocket in her jacket and pulled out a small billfold. There were no bills in it but there were half a dozen pictures. She leafed through until she found the one she was looking for, pulled it from the sleeve and tacked it next to the other picture on the wall. It was the same pose, just with different people. The woman in Rina’s picture was older, had long stringy grey hair and the boy looked about ten with a bowl hair cut. Written in the corner of the picture was a carefully scripted note, “Love G-ma.” Rina stood back and stared at the picture for a while.

Lee came along side Rina and wrapped one arm around her waist and stood next to her. Not knowing what to say, he said nothing and looked at the pictures with her. It was true that just about every picture on the wall contained smiling, happy people, yet the people standing in the hall, drinking in the pictures, were sad and melancholy. Was there hope for the survivors? Was there a happy life at the end of the long, dark tunnel? What was left for them? Lee pushed the depressing thoughts from his mind and focused on being a comfort to Rina. She had lost so much.

Lee's eyes focused on the boy in the picture that Rina had pinned up. Something was strange. He leaned forward on one foot and furrowed his brow as he moved in close for a good look. The boy looked incredibly familiar, as if he had seen the picture somewhere before, or maybe the boy. But that would have been impossible. He had seen him, he was sure of it, or someone who looked very much like him. He just couldn't place him. When? Where?

Minutes had passed as Lee studied the picture. Not wanting to give any false hope, he said. "Such a handsome boy. How old would he be now?"

"Sixteen." Rina sniffled and took another step back. Lee knew what she was feeling. Trying to let go but not wanting to.

Rina suddenly smiled and turned to continue down the corridor. She was done grieving, at least for now, and ready to continue. However, she had no idea what was in store for her through the next hatch.

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Colonial Time: Saturday, 0945 hours

Prometheus

Jenkins first felt the pounding in his head before he opened his eyes. Whatever trip he had been on, it left a killer of a headache. He rubbed his eyes and rolled over. He could feel moisture on his face, probably drool. As he tried to sit up, the pain in his temples intensified. His hands moved to his temples and began to massage them as he forced his body to sit up. He squinted his eyes open. The first thing that he noticed was that he was not in his cabin. He was not exactly sure where he was. All he knew was that

he was lying on an ugly avocado green rug in a room that seemed familiar to him and his head felt like it was going to explode.

Jenkins continued to massage his temples as he attempted to remember anything from the night before. He remembered heading to Jason's and stopping off at Hilda's. He remembered being chased but that was a bit fuzzy. He had this odd memory of flying through the air. He shook his head and groaned.

"You up, baby?" came a woman's voice from another room. Jenkins instantly recognized the voice. It was Hilda. Of course. His mind began to recognize his surroundings. He was in Hilda's bedroom. Why he was on the floor was a mystery.

Hilda appeared in the doorway with a cup of coffee. She came over, squatted next to Jenkins and handed over the steamy mug. "I was so worried, I think you took a bit too much last night. Next time you listen to me."

Jenkins took a slow sip of the sweetened brew and let the warm liquid seep into his being. "What happened?"

"You came back, you know, about a half an hour after you left. You were so scared and talking crazy. You kept saying that they were after you. And something about flying. I didn't know what to do. You finally collapsed on the floor. I tried to get you up on the bed but you wouldn't budge. How are you feeling?"

Jenkins took another long draw from the mug and hoped the caffeine would relieve the pounding in his head. "Better" was his reply.

He had to think. He had to focus. The plan began to ease back into his memory and his mind began to race. Gather the loot, package it, deliver it. But no! They arrested them. Where was he to deliver it? What was he supposed to do? Were all bets off? Where

did they take Jason? Certainly to jail. Where else would they take him? What was he to do now? He was the only one left. Gather the stuff? But he couldn't. Not by himself. Not that much. Too heavy. Too much. What to do? What to do? There was only one thing. Could he do it by himself? Maybe. He would need a place to work. Frank's. He could work behind Franks.

As Jenkins slowly finished his coffee, still sitting on the avocado carpet, he formed his plan. It was his plan. It was all he knew to do.

## Chapter 18

Colonial Time: Saturday, 0945 hours

Galactica

Dee saw them the instant when they entered CIC. She was gorgeous. Where in the world did he find her? Was he here to rub her nose in it? Dee had not seen Lee since the divorce and she preferred it that way. Out of sight, out of mind. That way she wouldn't have to deal with her emotions. Did she love him? Did she hate him? She wasn't sure. She just knew that she couldn't keep living with him. She needed to get away from him and she needed to start over. Not running in to him over the past few days had been a blessing. Or so she thought. In reality, it allowed her to not think about it, about them, about how she felt. She didn't have to deal with her own feelings. Now it was catching up to her. She really didn't want to do this.

No one had said anything to her about the divorce. No one in CIC, no one in the rec room, not even the Admiral. Surely they all knew. Surely they were whispering behind her back. Dee pretended not to care. But did no one else care? No one had asked her if she wanted to talk about it. No one to confide in or to lean on. It was as if it had

never happened and life was just continuing on. Now he was here in CIC with another woman, showing her around like the CIC was a tourist attraction. Unbelievable.

Dee decided it was time to take her morning break. She requested permission to leave her post and Adama granted it without hesitation. Adama was preoccupied with star charts and hadn't even noticed Lee's entrance. Dee quietly slipped out of CIC and decided to go get a cup of coffee and relax. She probably had about fifteen to twenty minutes before she would be expected back. Hopefully they would be gone by then.

Adama had noticed their entrance and was desperately trying to figure out how to get Dee out of CIC without causing a scene or making her feel uncomfortable. He could ask her to get him a cup of coffee but that was almost demeaning. The star charts he was staring at intently did not give him any help at all. In fact, it was almost impossible to focus on them. One thing that Adama hated was awkward situations. When he told Lee to bring his new friend by CIC, he hadn't even thought of Dee. Not until just now. Surely this put her in an uncomfortable situation. He was grateful when she asked for a break and didn't hesitate to grant it.

Lee had started by astrophysics and was making his way around CIC. Introducing his new friend to the various officers on the deck, their positions and their responsibilities. As Adama watched them from the corner of his eye, one thing stood out in his mind. She was not what he expected. When Lee was describing her a few hours ago, he mentioned nothing about her looks. Only her personality. That usually meant one thing; her beauty was on the inside. This woman did not fit that profile. She certainly had the looks but she also did not fit any profile typical of Lee's tastes. She wasn't young and spunky, she was mature and demure. Very courteous and charming as she was introduced

to the different people around the deck. Adama continued to stare at the star charts in front of him even though there was absolutely no comprehension of what he was looking at and waited for his turn to be introduced.

Lee's tension was rising as he came closer and closer to the opps table where his father stood, staring intently at different charts. Believe it or not, this was the first woman that he had "brought home to introduce to Dad." How would his father react? How would Rina react? Lee was planning on beginning the introduction by saying "Rina, I would like you to meet my father, Bill Adama." He thought he would leave off the "Admiral" part even though it was probably not proper. After all, this was a personal introduction, not a professional one.

Lee had played the scenario over and over a thousand times in his head. His father, of course, would be cordial whether he liked her or not. He sure hoped he liked her. Rina, on the other hand, was hard to predict. He was pretty sure she would take the "father" part in stride and not make any sort of a scene. She was certainly not going to flip out. He was pretty sure of that, well mostly sure. Whatever happened, it would be over with in a few minutes.

Lee guided Rina around the opps table and Adama turned to greet them. Lee began his little speech, "Rina, I would like you to meet..." was all he got out.

Rina interrupted him with "Admiral Adama," as she took the Admiral's hand and shook it heartily clasping both her hands around his. "It is such an honor to meet you sir. I just wanted to let you know how grateful I am that you and your crew so faithfully protect us day in and day out. I know that the press may not paint you in a very favorable

light but I, for one, am eternally grateful for your service and protection. It is an honor to be able to serve on your ship.” She released his hand at the end of her speech.

“Why, thank you.” Adama wasn’t quite sure how to take her introduction. Was she genuinely grateful or was she trying to butter him up? Her response to his next question reassured him that it was the former and not the latter.

“So tell me,” began Adama, “Where did you meet my son?”

“Your son?” Rina began looking a little puzzled. Lee had moved next to his father and was standing there with a slight grin on his face. “I don’t think... that I have met... your son.” Rina was looking back and forth between Joe and the Admiral as she spoke, not quite sure of what to make of the question and hoping for some help from Joe. And then she saw it. The hair line, the shape of the jaw but especially the eyes. It was the eyes that was the clincher. Just like the woman and the boy in the picture. It was obvious that they were related.

Rina took a step back bringing her hand up to her cheek in astonishment. “No.” She paused again processing what she saw. “You’re Leeland Joseph Adama? And You’re his father??”

The Admiral could read between the lines. The shocked look on Rina’s face said it all. Somehow Lee had kept his family name from her. She obviously hadn’t known he was Lee’s father and she was the genuine article. Honest and true. Adama decided to ignore the fact that she had suddenly realized who she was with. It really wasn’t important. He wanted to curb the uncomfortable feeling that Rina must have been feeling at the moment. “Listen, I want the two of you to join me for dinner tonight. It’s kind of a special occasion. 2000 hours in the adjunct dining room.”

Rina instantly regained her composure “Thank you, you are so kind. We will be looking forward to it.” Lee was of no help. He continued to just stand there, smiling and looking a bit relieved.

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Galactica

Zero had been conscious for twenty seven minutes but refused to turn on his ocular input or to make any movement at all. He could hear human voices in the background. “It has power... It’s not moving... No indication of a problem... Maybe it can’t be turned back on once they lose power...Any signs of consciousness? ... None...It sure is sucking down the power...Should we keep it plugged in?... (pause)... Yea, maybe it takes time to charge it up...It is no threat... We can leave it...

Zero heard some rattling, the sound of a cage door closing and two pairs of footsteps walking away. There was total silence. Zero waited. Nothing. Not even the sound of breathing, just a faint hum of engines chugging a way somewhere in the distance. Humans were so stupid. Why in the world would they give him power and then leave him alone. How hard could it be to escape? Their technology was significantly inferior. How could they expect to hold him? How could they say that he was no threat? Zero was obviously missing something. He had no idea. He decided to continue waiting, a little while longer, just to be sure.

Zero had not expected to ever be conscious again. The last thing he remembered was staring into the eyes of a young man he had targeted. He was very disappointed when his bullets did not penetrate and destroy the two humans. At least then he could have claimed some sort of success in the battle against the human race. Minor as it would have

been, it would have been something. Now he was a prisoner. Little did he know that he was actually a science experiment.

Twenty minutes had passed since there had been any noise at all. Zero decided to chance it. He turned on his ocular input and began to survey his surroundings. He was in some sort of a cage, a cell apparently strong enough to keep him in. He would see about that.

After determining that he was alone, he attempted to sit up. Restraints were buckled across his chest. Not a problem. He raised his arm to snap them off but there was no arm. He glanced to his right shoulder and there was nothing. Nothing past the junction in his shoulder. It was a strange sensation. His brain was ordering his arm to move and if his ocular input were turned off, he would have thought that his arm was moving. In reality, only a few gears were aimlessly spinning at the top of his shoulder.

Time to run a full diagnostic. It took only a few seconds but Zero's brain received a full report on all his functioning and non functioning parts. Both arms were severed at the shoulders and both legs were severed at the thigh. Even if he could sit up, he could do little more than roll around. Now he understood why he was no longer a threat. The good news was that all his functions were fully operational if they were attached. No damage. No fried circuits. And best of all, his EEE was fully functional and already running. That meant that help was on the way. It may take several hours, maybe even a day but they would come. His auto destruct was fully functional too. That might just come in handy. Unfortunately he would not be around after to see what damage he had caused if he did use it. A fully functional base ship could do much more damage than a single auto destruct device. He decided just to wait.

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Galactica

“Can you wait a minute?” Lee begged as he followed Rina down the corridor.

She was walking at a pretty good clip, her face set like a stone and her gait determined. Twice she had stopped, turned to face Lee, opened her mouth as if to say something, thought twice about it, closed her mouth and turned, resuming her stride down the hall.

“Please, can I just explain?”

No response.

“Please stop. Just...I need to tell you...” Lee was not sure she was going to listen. After all, he had totally embarrassed her in front of the Admiral; his father. He wasn’t sure which was worse; the fact that it was his father or that it was the Admiral. He desperately needed her to listen, to give him a chance.

She finally stopped, turned with a frustrated look on her face and rubbing her hand against her forehead as if she couldn’t believe what was happening. “Ok, I just don’t get it. True, you never lied to me. At least not out right. But why didn’t you tell me? Don’t you think that this was an important piece of information about yourself? Was this some sort of game you play on the newbies? Was it fun exploiting my ignorance? I don’t get it! Why would you hang me out to dry like that?”

Now was his chance. What he said next was going to make or break his relationship with her. He grabbed her free hand in his and held it gently but firmly so she wouldn’t sprint down the corridor again. “I am so sorry. It was totally not my intention to embarrass you like that. I am so sorry.” Lee tried to sound as genuine as possible. Rina

shifted her weight but still maintained a face of stone. “I wanted to tell you, I did, but I thought that you would... wouldn’t... I don’t know.” Lee began to panic. He wasn’t saying what he wanted to say and she would be gone. “Look, I’m sorry, I was wrong. I can only ask that you forgive me. I need you to forgive me. I need you! All I think about is you, when I will see you next, when I can spend time with you.” Her face was beginning to soften. “I have never met anyone like you. You have changed my outlook on life. You have given me hope, but only if I can be with you. You are truly amazing and I need you. Please....Please give me a second chance.”

Second chance. Second chance. That phrase rang in her ears. Barbara had told her everyone deserves a second chance. She knew. Obviously she knew. She was trying to let her know that the man before her was worth giving a second chance. Rina looked up to the ceiling. She could feel tears welling up in her eyes but fought them back. She had given second chances before and it had come back to bite her in the end. Did that mean that no one deserved a second chance? Did Barbara know this man well enough to vouch for him? The decision was here and now. She could either forgive and allow herself to be vulnerable to this man, allow her heart to possibly be torn to shreds again or she could turn and run. Protect herself. Go back into hiding. She looked back to Lee, biting her lip.

Her indecision was driving him to desperation. He moved both hands to her shoulders and looked straight into her eyes. “Please.” Was all he said.

He looked so sincere. He looked so desperate. Her heart went out to him. She had enjoyed their time together the past few days. Just a few hours ago she had hoped that he was interested. What had really changed? He was still the same person. So he was a little

further up the food chain than she had originally thought. Did his last name really make such a difference? At least he was not a terrorist.

Rina leaned forward closing her eyes and touching her forehead to his. When she looked up he was smiling, and she was too. All was forgiven.

“So, dinner tonight?” Lee asked as his heart soared. “I thought I could pick you up a little early and we could visit with my dad a bit.”

“What time again?” She asked, enjoying his touch, the comfort of his hands around her shoulders, the closeness of his face to hers. She felt safe. She knew it was the right decision.

“I thought I could pick you up at 1930 hours.”

Rina suddenly bolted upright slightly bumping their heads together, as if she had just remembered something. “Actually, I think that I have to work until 2000 hours. I... my schedule is a bit different tonight. I think I am going to have to meet you there. 2000 hours?” She suddenly seemed quite agitated.

“Yes, no problem.” Lee was a little surprised at her sudden change of demeanor.

“I gotta go. Thanks for a lovely morning.” She blurted out as she suddenly turned and took off down the hall, disappearing around a corner.

Lee was a bit surprised at her sudden retreat but decided to let it go. She forgave him and his heart was flying. He jumped up off the ground punching the air with his fist and let out a victory cry. “Woo hoo.” People passing him in the corridor gave him strange looks but he didn’t care. He headed back to his bunk, his feet barely touching the ground.

## Chapter 19

Colonial Time: Saturday, 1030 hours

Galactica

Rina made a b-line straight to the galley. The mess was empty, all the breakfast crowds were gone and it was too early for lunch. Rina headed to the kitchen. Barbara was at one of the counters cutting up potatoes as Rina entered.

“You knew.” Rina kept walking straight through to the office. Barbara followed.

“Of course I knew. Everybody knows Lee Adama. How could you not know?”

“Well, I didn’t.” Rina began shuffling through the papers on the desk.

Barbara waited, wanting to ask but not sure if she should. Finally she asked “So how did it go?”

“Oh, just fine. It was actually a very nice date, up until the part that I totally embarrassed myself in front of the Admiral.”

“Bummer.” Barbara didn’t know what else to say about that but was still curious.

“Are you going to see him again.”

Rina continued to look through the papers but was not finding what she was looking for. “Oh yea. Dinner tonight with the Admiral.”

“Dinner with the Admiral, are you kidding? That’s awesome. Not too many people get invited to the Admiral’s table.”

Rina grunted. Rina’s demeanor was still disturbing and Barbara wasn’t sure why. Then she remembered.

“Hey, aren’t you catering a banquet tonight for Colonel Tigh?”

“Where is that schedule?” Frustrated, Rina turned to Barbara.

Barbara pulled a clipboard off the shelf. “Here. When is your dinner with Lee and the Admiral? Maybe we can work this out.”

“2000 hours, in the adjunct dining room.”

Barbara paused and looked up at Rina. She said nothing. It was impossible to read her face. Was it workable or not?

“What?” Rina asked, her frustration rising by the minute.

“Tigh’s dinner is at 2000 hours in the adjunct dining room.” Barbara said flatly.

Rina, stunned, sat down hard in the chair. She let out a deep sigh and rested her face in her hands. She felt defeated. She collapsed further as she folded her arms in front of her and put her head down on the desk.

“Wow, you got invited to a dinner you are catering. What are the odds?” Barbara was trying to bring a little levity to the situation. Rina’s response was to slowly bang her head against the desk.

The phone rang. Rina ignored it so Barbara picked it up. “This is Barbara... Yes... Not a problem... I’ll be sure to let her know... Yes sir... Thank you for letting us know... Good by.”

Rina looked up hoping for some sort of good news.

“That was Tigh. He wanted me to let you know that there will be nine for dinner instead of eight tonight. I told him that it wouldn’t be a problem.”

Rina rolled her eyes and went back to banging her head against the desk.

Suddenly she sat up straight. “I’m going to need your help.” She had an idea, that was obvious, but Barbara wasn’t sure what was up.

“Ok” Barbara was a bit hesitant.

“Be here by 1930 hours. I need you to serve the food.”

“What?”

“Look, I’ll cook the food, I just need you to serve it.”

“Yea but what if they find out?”

Rina paused. It was bad form for a cook to eat with the guests. It was also unheard of to stand up the Admiral for dinner. She was caught between the lesser of two evils.

“What’s the worse that could happen?”

“If they find out, they could have you fired. You would have to go back to the Astral Queen.”

Rina paused. The upper crust was so unpredictable. Some were very down to earth while others would insist on your termination if you put the fork in the wrong place. She was hoping that the Admiral was the former and not the latter. She did not want to go back to the Astral Queen. She also could not decline her invitation to dinner. That would

surely be an insult. What to do? “Let’s just hope they don’t find out. So, will you help me?”

“Of course.” Barbara really wanted this to work. Both Lee and Rina were very nice people and it would be so great if things worked out between them.

“By the way,” Rina continued, “Do you have a dress I can borrow.”

Barbara smiled. “And shoes.”

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Colonial Time: Saturday, 1305

Prometheus

Jenkins sat down carefully in the chair, not wanting to agitate any of the items stowed in his jacket. He was exhausted but was glad that his task was nearly complete. Slowly he retrieved his treasures from the inside pockets of his jacket and laid them on the table. Everything he needed. A pipe, end caps, pipe wrench, accelerant, wires and a few other choice items that would make his construction go a bit faster.

He could only make one. That was all that he could hide under his coat without rising suspicion. He had spent the past few hours traipsing around the ship gathering what he needed from the various hiding places. He was sure that the marines were after him. He had been very careful, or so he thought, wearing his cap pulled way down to hide most of his face, retracing his steps to make sure he wasn’t followed and only taking what was necessary so that it didn’t look like he was concealing anything under his coat.

The reality was that no one was currently looking for him. If they had been, he would have been very easy to spot. He was the only one on the ship trying to move from place to place without looking conspicuous. Of course, this actually made him very

conspicuous. Jenkins thought that he was using stealth tactics but in reality he was only mimicking things that he had seen in the movies. In fact, all of his “combat training” took place on his mother’s sofa as he watched late night “B” movies. It was almost comical to watch, if someone had any inclination to watch. It’s no wonder that he had spent most of his time in the pen. As far as criminals go, he really wasn’t all that skilled. Gentry had no interest in finding him, at least not at this time. Gentry had all that he needed locked up in holding cells and his entire team had left the ship hours ago.

Letting out a deep sigh of anticipation, Jenkins got to work. The room behind Frank’s bar was his for the next two hours, no interruptions. Frank had given him his word. Jenkins had perfected his skill in building pipe bombs by the age of fifteen. He and his buddies used to build them in his mother’s basement. At first they would ride their bikes out to an open field in the country and set them off but as they grew older, that was not nearly as fun as setting them off in the junk yard, carefully placed under choice pieces of scrap metal. Of course, that was how he ended up in Juvie the first time.

It wasn’t long before Jenkins had his masterpiece completed and resting on the table in front of him. The only problem was the fuse. He had never been too successful with fuses. He could never get the timing right. His best explosions were the “light and run like hell” type. He didn’t think that that would work this time. He decided on a long fuse. Hopefully giving him enough time to escape without raising suspicion.

Once completed, he wiped down the pipe to get rid of any finger prints and carefully put it in an old box that had been stored on one of the shelves. He attached the ignition device and taped everything down tight. There happened to be a bag of

Styrofoam peanuts formally used to cushion Ambrosia bottles so Jenkins threw them in for good measure without thinking. Probably not a wise choice.

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### Astral Queen

No answer. He tried again. The phone rang about fifteen times and still there was no answer. Tom slammed the receiver down and began to pace the floor.

“And you say that there have been no calls at all?” Tom asked.

“None, sir.” Came the reply from Howard, Tom’s personal assistant.

Tom’s pace picked up. What to do. What to do. He should have received a call from Jason hours ago. He was surprised that Adama hadn’t called wondering where the drop was going to be. He had promised a location by this morning. Tom immediately stopped his pacing and looked up. That was it. Adama hadn’t called. He already knows that the “package” is not ready. “Frak!”

“Ok, listen carefully,” Tom turned to Howard and rested both hands on his desk. “I need you to find out what happened. My guess is that Jason got arrested. Check out the arrest records and see what’s going on. I’m supposed to be reconciling this situation and it doesn’t help if I can’t negotiate.” Tom chose his words carefully. Howard was not clued in to the real plan. Oh Tom could trust him, to a point. It was only Jason that Tom could trust fully and completely. It was only Jason who knew the entire truth.

## Chapter 20

Colonial Time: Saturday, 1530 hours

Galactica

“You said the other two sang like canaries.” Adama sat looking at the report in front of him.

“They sang all right. The problem is that they both fingered Jason, the one with the scar. They really did not know anything we didn’t already know, sir.” Gentry stood at attention in front of Adama’s desk, hoping that his report would be satisfactory. The evidence linking the Vice President to the robberies was circumstantial at best. The sound clip could have been damaging but without corroborating evidence, it was pretty useless. It did, however, confirm in Adama’s mind that Zarek had to be behind all this in some way or other.

“And Jason?” asked Adama.

“He is taking full responsibility. We pressed him pretty hard, offering full immunity if he testified against Zarek. No go. I even played him the clip but he wouldn’t take the bait. He doesn’t seem to care if he ends up behind bars forever or not.”

Adama continued to read through the report, looking for any detail, any insignificant statement that could implicate Zarek but there was none. Gentry waited patiently.

Maybe he was clean. Maybe he was trying to help both sides come to a non violent resolution. The sound clip could be totally misleading. It was out of context. In fact, there was no context at all. Just the one sentence. Adama grunted, Zarek could be on the up and up, but not likely... However he did give him that list of possible recruits. Adama was torn.

“What is our course of action, Sir?” Gentry wanted to call it a day. He had been on duty for almost thirty hours and was ready to hit the sack.

“How much longer can you hold them?”

“Without charging them with anything? About two more hours.”

“Let them sweat it out, then cut them lose. Do you have surveillance on their quarters?”

“Their rooms and phones are tapped. Even the one that got away.”

“Fine. Let me know if anything turns up. Dismissed.”

Gentry turned to leave.

“And one more thing...” Adama added as Gentry paused before leaving the office, “Good work.”

Gentry left with a smile on his face. Nothing was more rewarding than a good word from the Old Man.

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Inter-ship shuttle

Jenkins sat back in his chair and relaxed. He had just flipped the remote ignition switch for the bomb as his shuttle was pulling away from the Rising Star. It was almost too easy. He had put on brown cover-alls and a cap and delivered the package to Gentry's office. No questions asked, no security hassles and best of all, no delays.

As he looked out the window, he hoped to the gods that the woman who took his package and placed it on Gentry's desk would not get hurt. She was a pretty thing and Jenkins had flirted with her ever so slightly.

"Here mam, I have a special delivery from the Vice President to a Major G-entary?" Jenkins acted as though he was some clueless delivery boy, miss pronouncing the name. He was proud of his acting skills.

The receptionist was quite cute, blonde with bright red lip stick. She looked barely of legal age and was chomping on a piece of gum. Jenkins enjoyed the view of the low-cut knit sweater as she looked up at him, handing him a clip board for him to fill out.

"Why, thank you, Miss Barnes. May I say that you look very nice this Saturday afternoon?" Jenkins read her name off the plate on her desk.

"Thanks." Came the reply, with a slight blush.

"So, how do you like working for the Major?"

"Oh, just fine. He keeps me very busy."

"I'm sure. You must have a lot of responsibilities, taking care of all his in coming and out going stuff."

"There always seems to be something. Phone messages, packages." She grinned, pointing to the box in his hand. "Did that go through security yet? It doesn't have a sticker."

“Sure it did.” Jenkins lied. “They told me to tell you that they ran out of stickers and maybe you could order some more?” Jenkins had managed to avoid security when he got off his shuttle by waiting in the shuttle’s bathroom until everyone had left. It was pretty sad, how lax the inter-ship security was. On the other hand, why would people want to blow each other up? People had enough to worry about with Cylons. Most of the Cylon agents had been identified and he did not look like any of them.

“Hey, are you getting off any time soon? I know a party we could hang out at.”

“I don’t get to leave until the Major leaves.”

“That’s too bad. Maybe I’ll catch you next time?” Jenkins smiled as he handed back the clip board. He wrote as sloppy as possible and made up most of the information. “To” was Gentry, “From” was Zarek and “contents” was official documents. The rest of the information, like phone numbers and his name, were bogus.

“The Vice President wants to make sure that he gets this as soon as possible.”

“I’ll be sure to put it on his desk.”

“Thank you. And have a wonderful afternoon.” Jenkins left quickly, hoping to catch the shuttle that was leaving in ten minutes.

He was not sure how long it would take before the bomb went off. Five minutes, twenty minutes. Surely it wouldn’t be long. If Miss Barnes shut the door to Gentry’s office after she put the package on his desk, she would probably be shielded from the blast. If not, well Jenkins chose not to think about it.

Twenty minutes later he was safely aboard the Prometheus. No sign of any explosion. Apparently his fuse did not work very well. Frak that. Jenkins headed to Hilda’s with the sole intent of getting plastered.

## Chapter 21

Colonial Time: Saturday, 1800 hours

Astral Queen

“I don’t look half bad if I do say so myself.” Tom thought as he finished adjusting his tie. Taking one last glance over in the full length mirror, he picked up his coat and was about to leave. He wanted to look good tonight. It wasn’t every night that he got to have dinner with the President and the Admiral. Come to think of it, he had never been invited to dine with either before. Certainly his “gift” was paying off.

There was a knock at the door.

“Enter.” Tom turned to face whoever was about to walk through. He was certainly surprised to see his assistant back so soon. Did that mean good news or bad?

“Howard! So what did you find out?”

“Good news, sir. They were just released. By the time I got over to the Rising Star they were being processed for release. Jason told me to tell you that the package would be ready tonight and sorry for the delay.”

What started out as a nerve wrecking morning and a disastrous afternoon was going to turn into an incredible evening. An incredible meal and plenty of brown nosing. Tom wasn't looking forward to a brown nose but it was a small price to pay to set himself up for victory in the next game. This game was nearly over, and he had won. There were only a few details to mop up and everyone would be resting comfortably and safely tonight.

“Walk with me. I don't want to miss my shuttle.” Tom directed to Howard.

The two left Tom's quarters and headed to the shuttle bay. “So do you have any other details, as to their release, I mean?”

“Apparently there was insufficient evidence to hold them.”

Tom stopped his trek down the corridor. Now that did not make sense. They had enough evidence to pen Jason up for a long time. Maybe not the other two but certainly Jason. Tom took more measured steps.

“There was also something about a previous deal made? Jason didn't seem to know anything about a “deal” but the order for release came from Adama.”

That was probably the real story. Adama and Roselyn wanted their supplies back and knew they couldn't get them back as long as they were holding those men. Tom began to relax again.

“Will that be all?”

“I need you to wait for the phone call from Jason. You can take a message. I'll be on the Galactica if anyone needs me.” That was Tom's standard response whenever he needed Howard to man the phones... “Take a message, I'll be on the ...”

Howard stopped walking with Zarek, gave a parting “Have a nice time.” And retreated back to Tom’s office. He had hoped for the night off but no such luck. He had to wait for a phone call that may or may not come in the not too distant future. That was OK, Tom had a very comfortable couch in his office. He was an intern after all. Interns don’t have a life, or so he was told.

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Colonial Time: Saturday, 1945 hours

Galactica

Nine plates were all served up, dressed with finishing touches and covered. Rina had just finished putting the last one in the warming cart, ready for transport, when Barbara showed up. She had two dresses, covered in dry-cleaner’s plastic and two pairs of shoes to match.

“I couldn’t decide which one would look better on you, the blue satin or the white chiffon so I brought them both.”

Rina always preferred blue but when she tried it on, the neck line reached practically to her belly button; a bit too low cut for her tastes. The white chiffon looked like a bride’s maid dress but it was much more conservative. Sleeveless with a scoop neck, the dress tightened at the waist giving the top a fitted look. The semi-full skirt came just below the knees. It had a nice wrap to cover the shoulders and looked pretty smashing. Barbara instantly began pinning up Rina’s hair. Although Rina had washed it just a few hours earlier, her hair had frizzed up as she had prepared the dinner. In less than ten minutes, Barbara had swept Rina’s hair into an elegant bun, with small ringlets

of brown curls hanging down around her face and neck. A few touch ups with her make up and Rina was ready to go.

“Now give me a five minute head start before you bring the food.”

Rina stopped her hustle and bustle with her makeup and looked at Barbara. The butterflies in her stomach were overwhelming. She could hardly keep her hands from shaking.

“Look, take a deep breath. Everything will work out just fine.”

“But what if they find out?”

“So what if they find out. It won’t be the end of the world... Just maybe your career.”

“Oh thanks, you’re some help.”

“I’m just kidding with you. You need to relax. Take another deep breath.”

Rina did, two in fact, and it did seem to calm her nerves, somewhat.

“Now you need to get going.”

“Right.” Rina turned and began to practically jog out of the galley.

“Slow down, girl. And you might want the shoes.”

“Oh, Right.” Rina hadn’t even noticed that she was still in her stockinged feet.

She grabbed the shoes and hurried out of the mess hall.

“Gods be with her.” Barbara whispered.

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“I thought Rina would be here.” Adama commented. It was strange seeing his son in a suit and tie. He was so used to seeing him in uniform that civilian clothes just made him look... different.

“She will be here. She had to work up to the last minute.” Lee answered.

Both were enjoying cocktails in the adjunct dining room. The President and Tory were already there talking with Karl and Sharron Agathon. Laura wanted to give Bill and Lee some space. She was pretty shocked at the news of his new girlfriend this morning. She did notice the spunk in Lee’s eyes, like a burst of new energy. Tigh was busy around the table, making sure everything was ready and everyone had a cocktail. It was his show, after all.

“I’ve been thinking about what you said this morning. About Rina being the “one” and all.” Adama began in low tones. Lee wasn’t sure where this was going. He knew that his father was pretty conservative when it came to relationships. He really didn’t want to hear a lecture about being on the rebound or jumping into another relationship so quickly. Lee took a sip of his club soda with lime juice determined not to make a scene.

“Well,” Adama continued, “I probably should have given this to you sooner but quite frankly, I had forgotten that I had it until our conversation this morning.”

Adama pulled out a small box from his pocket and handed it to Lee. Lee set his glass down and took the box. A jewelry box, a ring box to be more exact. He opened it to find a small solitaire diamond in a simple setting of white gold.

“It was your grandmother’s, my mother’s.” Adama explained. “I wanted you to have it in case you might have the need for it someday.”

Lee was speechless. He never would have guessed. He bit his lip and wiped a stray tear that had somehow escaped. He embraced his father and whispered “Thank you, Thank you.” It wasn’t necessarily the ring but the unconditional support.

Laura, watching the scene out of the corner of her eye, had to blink to hold back the tears. It was so beautiful, seeing Bill and his son. Sure they didn't always see eye to eye but they were family. They were there for each other, through the good times and the bad. This was a good time.

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Rina rounded the last corner, trying to slip her shoes on as she hurried down the corridor. She didn't even see Tom until it was too late. He was coming from the opposite direction and she found her face pressed against his tie.

“Any news?”

“No news is good news.” Tom responded, almost automatically. That had been their standard greeting for the past year or so. Ever since the exodus, Tom had been on the lookout for her ex husband. He wasn't on any of the ships' rosters but that really did not mean anything. Tom constantly kept his eyes peeled, hoping he would never have to bring her bad news.

“Hey, you're not serving in that are you?” She looked gorgeous. And her legs! This was only the second time in the three years that Tom had seen her legs. His mind flashed him back to the first time. He was in his cell, reclining on his bunk, when a deep blue suit with legs that wouldn't quit passed before him. He only saw her back but that was fine with him. He was enjoying the view, the hem line and the legs. She was having some sort of conversation with Jones.

Jeff Jones occupied the cell directly across from him on the transport. He was one of the few prisoners on their way to sentencing. Most of the others were up for parole.

Tom wasn't paying much attention to the conversation but it became a bit heated. She had some sort of papers to deliver and he was unwilling.

Tom watched as the woman took a step forward, toward the cell. That was a mistake. Jones reached through the bars, grabbed her around the back of her neck and began banging her against the bars. Tom leapt to his feet and started shouting for the guards. He didn't care if he ended up in solitary for shouting, this was a true emergency. Blood began to spurt as the woman fought to free herself but Jones' grip was like iron. By the time the guards arrived, the woman was unconscious, lying face down on the deck in a pool of blood. They took her away on a stretcher, her papers still lying on the floor. Jones was moved to solitary and Tom didn't think that he would ever see the woman again.

He was wrong. Nineteen days later, three days after Lee Adama had released the prisoners and gave them control of the Astral Queen, Tom discovered that she was still on board. Most of the support staff had left the ship. All the guards as well and most of the crew were evacuated to a "safer" ship. The captain and about half a dozen crew members elected to stay. The captain notified him that there was a "patient" staying in the Physician Assistant's quarters and refusing to leave her room. The PA had been off the ship during the original attack by the Cylons and so the "patient" was given his room.

She was a mess. Her face was bandaged up and what was not bandaged was black and blue. She was wearing surgical scrubs, apparently the only thing that she could find in the PA's quarters that fit. She was also scared to death. Tom had assured her that Jones, as well as eight other prisoners in solitary would remain in solitary. From that day forward, Tom's umbrella of protection covered her. Very few of the men on the Astral

Queen even knew that she was on board and those that did know were not to touch her. Jones had been kept secluded and had absolutely no reason to think that she was on board, let alone still alive.

Nine months later, Baltar had released the rest of the prisoners in solitary to help colonize New Caprica. Jones moved down to the surface, Rina did not. Tom also moved down to the surface and was keeping track of Jones up until the time the Cylons threw him in prison for four months. After that, Tom had no idea if Jones got off the planet or if he was one of the many casualties. He had not seen Jones since his imprisonment but was always on the lookout.

“Of course I’m not serving in this.” Rina replied.

“But I thought...”

“Yes, yes, I did cook tonight but I..uh.. I accidentally got invited to the banquet. Please, please don’t say anything.” Rina looked up into his eyes, pleading.

Tom could never resist her doleful green eyes. In fact, he had often wondered if the two of them... well, he usually dismissed that idea out of hand. She was a Lilly and he was a thorn. Plus he must have been twenty years older than her. There was no way that it would have worked. Keeping quiet, though, might compromise his plan. How would Adama know that he had given up such a jewel if he didn’t take credit for it? He was counting on Adama’s good will toward his generosity.

“Please,” she persisted.

“I won’t say anything, I promise.” Tom said resigning himself to the thought that the game might be a closer match than he preferred. Tom offered his arm and Rina took it as they continued to the dining room. How in the world does one get “accidentally”

invited to the Admiral's table? The second he passed through the door into the dining room, he understood.

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Prometheus

Jason, Dren and Alberts went about gathering the materials without any worry about getting caught. The authorities knew who they were and what they were involved in. Jason was pretty sure that the only reason they were released was because the President wanted the materials back. It only took them a couple of hours to gather the loot and package it in unmarked crates. They could even "guard" the crates until Adama's people could come and pick it up. Stealth was no longer an issue.

What was an issue was what happened to Jenkins? Jason decided to leave Alberts to "guard" while Jason and Dren went to track down Jenkins.

## Chapter 22

Colonial Time: Saturday, 2005 hours

Galactica

Lee saw her the instant she came through the door. She looked like an angel, all dressed in white, holding onto the arm of the devil, dressed in a black suit with a red tie. He wasn't jealous, per se but more disturbed by the sight. Lee was at her side immediately.

“Hello, Tom.”

“Lee.”

“I forgot that you two knew each other.” It clicked in Lee's mind that Tom would certainly know Rina, especially since they were both on the same ship for so long. Lee offered his arm to Rina and she graciously switched, thanking Tom in the process.

Tom watched as Lee introduced her around the room. He had no qualms about admitting his jealousy. Lee was a good man, even though Tom had tried to kill him once. Lee was an idealist, an idealist who didn't believe that the ends justified the means, as Tom did. They were actually very similar. If Tom had had the same opportunities in life

as Lee had, they would probably be friends. Was he jealous because Lee had what he wanted or because Lee was what he wanted to be?

“Madame President, may I introduce Rina.” Lee suddenly realized that he did not know Rina’s last name.

“I am very pleased to meet you Madame President.” Rina made a small curtsy.

Laura extended her hand and said “I am very pleased to meet you. Bill was telling me very good things about you.” Laura noticed the curtsy. Rina was obviously feeling quite out of place. Laura wanted to make her feel as welcome as possible.

“Why thank you.” Rina shook the President’s hand but couldn’t imagine what kind of good things Adama had said. She had only made a fool of herself this morning and was afraid that she was about to do the same thing again. The room was filled with people totally out of her league; the President, the Vice President, the Admiral, the XO and the CAG. Sure she had cooked for dignitaries before but had never dined with any. In fact, she couldn’t remember ever sitting down to a formal dinner. She was always in the kitchen.

“The food’s here. Everyone take a seat.” Tigh suddenly announced.

The Admiral, naturally, sat at the head of the table with Roselyn at his right and Tigh at his left. Lee sat next to Roselyn and Sharron. Rina was between Tigh and Karl. Tory and Tom sat at the foot of the table. Rina noted that the seating around the table reflected some sort of pecking order, probably determined by Tigh. Rina was only half surprised to find herself closer to the head of the table. To Tigh, she was Lee’s date, not the cook. Hopefully it would stay that way.

As the guests were gathering around the table, Tigh made his way over to Barbara, whispering to her, “Where’s the new girl?”

“She had another commitment. But don’t worry, she prepared all the food.” Barbara reassured him.

“I kind of wanted to introduce her to everyone. In fact, I haven’t even met her myself yet. If you see her, can you have her stop by?”

“If I see her, I will give her the message.” Barbara began serving the plates. Once she was done, she left the serving cart and retreated back to the galley.

Tigh took his seat and raised his glass. “If you are wondering why I have invited you all here tonight, let me assure you that it is to enjoy good food and to thank our good friend Tom for blessing us with a new incredible cook, Ms. Boxman. Thank you Tom.”

Everyone raised their glass and a chorus of “So say we all” followed.

“I was informed,” continued Tigh, “That although Ms. Boxman could not be here to serve this good food, she sends her greetings in the form of this excellent meal. Enjoy.” Everyone took a sip and began to dig in.

Lee was a bit confused about Tigh’s little speech. Was there another new cook from the Astral Queen? Who was this Ms. Boxman? His mind didn’t put two and two together until he took a bite. Undoubtedly it was Rina’s work. He looked up to see Rina looking intently at him. She very discretely brought a finger up to her lips in a silent “Shh” asking him not to say anything. Lee laughed inwardly. She was quite surprising. Amazing, really. How could she cook for nine and look so fantastic?

“I swear I have been down to the Mess ten times in the past five days and she is never there!” Tigh lamented. “I haven’t even met her yet.” Confessed Tigh.

“You just have to know when to go down there.” Karl offered. “She’s been cooking breakfast. I went down there right after my shift, just after 0600 and there was already a line out the door!”

“So if you haven’t met her, how did you find her?” asked Tory, skeptical of the whole situation.

“Tom invited me to lunch a few weeks ago to talk about converting the Astral Queen to a manufacturing plant. The food was amazing. I convinced Tom to let her come to Galactica.”

Tom was loving the conversation. He didn’t even have to say anything and he was getting all the accolades. Credit for upgrading the Astral Queen, credit for Rina, he just hoped that Rina’s secret wouldn’t make it out. At least not tonight. He could find himself in a difficult spot for not saying anything. He also noticed that Lee was not saying anything either but looked like he was about to burst. He obviously knew, grinning from ear to ear and keeping his eyes on her. It was amazing that he wasn’t drooling into his food. Rina looked very uncomfortable, just picking at her food and only looking up from time to time. He needed to change the topic of conversation before it was too late. He opened his mouth to say something but Roselyn beat him too it.

“I’m sure we are all looking forward to meeting Ms. Boxman.”

Lee couldn’t stand it anymore. “But you all have.” He blurted out.

“What?” demanded the Admiral and Tigh at the same time.

“She’s sitting right next to you.” Lee said directly to Tigh.

With that the entire table erupted. Lee had absolutely no idea what he had done. Everyone seemed to be talking at once. Everyone except for Lee, Tom and Rina. Rina

swallowed hard finishing what she had in her mouth. She could feel the heat of embarrassment rise up from her chest and into her neck. She was pretty sure that her cheeks were scarlet as she stared down at the peas on her plate. She wanted to run. She wanted to hide but most of all, she wanted to cry. She regained control of her emotions and fought back the tears. She had plenty of time to cry back in her quarters.

“Hold on everybody, just quiet down.” The Admiral was taking control of the situation. “Now Rina, is it true, did you prepare all this food?”

Rina looked up first at Lee, whose face was completely confused by the commotion, and then straight at the Admiral, not afraid to look him in the eye. “I am terribly sorry sir. I didn’t know that I was cooking for the banquet that you invited me to, at least not until I got back to the galley and checked the schedule. And then it was too late to back out. I thought that if I let someone else serve, and kept my mouth shut, no one would care. I am very sorry.” Rina folded her napkin in place, stood and walked to the coat rack to retrieve her wrap.

Tom was impressed at how Rina handled the situation with class and confidence. He did feel devastated for Rina but was intrigued by what might happen next. It was like a game within a game. Would the Admiral send her packing? Would Lee stand up to his father in defense of Rina? Would this cause a rift in the “royal” family? Did the Admiral care that his son was involved with a cook? With support staff?? Glancing at Lee, Tom knew Rina would not get any help from him. Lee’s jaw was practically on the floor and he seemed unable to make any type of noise, let alone protest. He was in shock and had no clue what was going on. Tom knew. He had seen it a million times before. The battle

of the classes. The upper crust really didn't see it. How could they? They were never on the losing side.

“Where are you going? Come, sit back down.” Came Adama's gentle voice.

“It's not my place.” A plain and simple response.

The Admiral rose and walked over to Rina, taking her wrap and putting it back on the coat rack. “Don't be silly, it would be an honor for us to share a meal with the person who prepared all this good food. Please.” The Admiral ushered her back to her seat.

Tom's emotions soared. It was like the end of a romantic movie, when two long lost lovers are reunited. Tom had to fight to control the inward smile that wanted to take over his face. Deep down, he really was a romantic. The Admiral stepped out of his class and supported his son. It was beautiful, it was classic. Too bad Lee didn't appreciate the significance of it all. Lee had barely recovered by the time Rina was re-seated.

“So where ever did you learn to cook like this?” Laura began, hoping to smooth over the tense moment and again make Rina feel welcome. She had suspected something like this when Rina had curtsied. Only people trained to serve the affluent would ever think to curtsy.

“My father. My parents owned a restaurant in Caprica City. I practically grew up in the kitchen.”

“Oh, which one. Maybe I've been there.” Continued Laura. She had spent most of her adult life in Caprica City and knew quite a few of restaurants.

“It's kind of embarrassing. My parents bought it just after I was born and named it after me.”

“Rina’s. Never heard of it.” Tory remarked curtly. She was annoyed by all the shenanigans.

“Actually, my given name is Serina. Nobody ever calls me that though.”

A momentary silence blanketed the room. Everyone had seemed to have froze, not sure if they had heard right.

“You mean Serina’s, on seventh and main?” Laura asked incredulously.

“Oh yes, you’ve heard of it then.”

“Heard of it” jumped in Tom. “That’s was practically the most exclusive restaurant on all of Caprica. Everyone’s heard of it.” Tom was amazed that she had never mentioned that before. No wonder she was such an amazing cook.

“Even President Adar had trouble getting reservations. They were always booked months in advance.” Laura recalled.

“Well, yes, we were pretty high end.” Rina wasn’t sure what the big deal was. Caprica had plenty of restaurants that catered to the wealthy. Maybe these poor people just hadn’t had a good meal in three years.

“Well, enough of this jibber jabber and let’s enjoy this amazing gourmet meal. And many...” Tigh’s statement was cut off by a blaring alert signal and a loud voice calling for “Action Stations.”

Adama was out of his seat and reaching for the phone in an instant. It actually rang as he was picking up the receiver. “Report.” He demanded. There was a brief pause. “I’ll be right there.” Adama turned to the group and said, “The Cylons found us. They will be in weapons range in six minutes.”

The room suddenly cleared. Everyone had a post to man. Even Lee left to find an environmental suit and a viper. Rina found herself sitting by herself surrounded by half eaten plates of food. It was over. She had survived. Rina decided to make doggie bags for everyone, clean up and head back to the galley.

## Chapter 23

Colonial Time: Saturday, 2040 hours

Galactica

“How the frak did they find us?” complained Tigh as he looked up at the Draidus display. The screen showed one base ship with dozens of Cylon raiders heading toward Galactica. Seventeen colonial vipers were charging out to intercept them.

“Doesn’t matter. They are here now and we need to hold them off.” Adama stated flatly. He was not happy about having to forfeit his dinner. “How long until the civilians jump?”

“A good fifteen minutes, sir.” Came the reply from Dee.

“Good Lord! Why so long?” Tigh seemed to complain about everything instead of just dealing with the situation.

“They all need to spool up their FTL drive. We did verify jump coordinates with all the ships, though.”

“Good thinking Dee.” Tigh glanced around the CIC. Everyone was at their post, busily checking reports, verifying sensors and passing on information. Only three stood

still. The President, the Vice President and Tory were watching everything from the second level. Tigh muttered under his breath. “Great, dinner and a show.”

“Twenty seconds to interception”

From the moment of interception, the chatter amongst the pilots increased ten fold. “I’ve got that one... I’m covering you....break right, break right...Look out behind you...”

Lee was flying steady in his viper and picking off raiders left and right. It was almost too easy. It was like the raiders’ weren’t trying... or thinking. “Apollo to actual.”

“Actual, go ahead.”

“It’s almost too easy. It’s like flying against rookies.”

“What, they are not fighting back?”

“Oh, they are fighting back, just very badly. Something has got to be up.”

“Keep your eyes peeled.”

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### Cylon Base Ship

“See, I told you they would be there.” Cavil has spent two hours convincing his colleagues to follow the EEE signal that they had picked up. The signal had originated from a region that was far from the projected course of the humans. Cavil , originally involved in the research and development of the EEE, knew it was an extremely reliable device. It had just never actually been activated before. His colleagues finally relented and they hit pay dirt.

“But we are getting killed out there.” Simon reported.

“I guess lobotomizing the raiders was not such a good idea after all.” Leopen commented.

“At least they are fighting.” Said Cavil. “Just not very well.”

On their last encounter with the humans, the raiders simply shut down. Apparently there was a Cylon, or a couple of Cylons flying vipers that had signaled their existence to the Raiders. From that time on, the Raiders had refused to fight. Cavil’s solution was to lobotomize them all.

“We have to launch the nukes.” Said Simon.

The rest agreed.

“We only have eleven and some of them might not be wired correctly.” Said Leopen.

“Frak that. Target some of the civilian ships as well as Galactica. Launch them all.” Cavil ordered.

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“Eleven incoming nukes, sir.” Came Dee’s warning. “Eight of them targeted at civilian ships.”

Adama grabbed the wireless and practically shouted into the microphone.

“Disable the nukes!”

The Galactica could handle one, maybe two nuclear blasts but most of the civilian ships couldn’t. They would be utterly destroyed if one got through.

“We’re on it sir.” Helo’s responded.

Most of his pilots didn’t need hand holding, they knew what to do. They scattered, each taking a target to disable. It wasn’t as easy as targeting a Raider. The

missiles often twisted and turned in random maneuvers in order to hit their target. The only thing that the missiles did not do was shoot back, like the Raiders did.

“Got one.” Came a voice over the wireless. “Another down... Bingo... I got one too.” Came more confirmations of hits.

“How many left?” Adama asked.

“It looks like three. One headed for us, one headed for the Rising Star and one headed for the Demetrious.” Tigh answered.

“How long until all the ships have jumped?”

“Less than a minute sir.” Came Dee’s voice from behind him.

“Got one.” Came Ander’s voice over the wireless.

“Still one headed for the Demetrious and one for the Rising Star.” Came Tigh’s updated report.

“Who’s out there?” Asked Adama, beginning to get a bit edgy. They seemed to be cutting it awfully close.

“Helo is on the one headed for the Prometheus and Apollo is on the one bound for the Rising Star.”

Adama almost breathed a sigh of relief. Competent pilots and great shots. If anyone could stop the nuke, those were the two who could do it.

“Ten seconds to impact.”

“Come on Helo, come on Apollo!” Adama was rooting for them.

“The Demetrious just jumped.”

“What about the Rising Star?” Adama asked.

“They won’t jump in time. They have to shoot it down.”

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Apollo was having a bear of a time keeping the target in his cross hairs. It was squirreling all over the place. He didn't use to have such a difficult time shooting targets but somehow he felt out of it. He had only clocked a few hours in the cockpit over the past four months. Maybe he was getting rusty.

He could see the Rising Star getting closer and closer. He had to hit the mark, and fast. He had to get between the nuke and the ship. Apollo went full throttle up and over the nuke, keeping his nose pointed and shooting at the nuke the entire way. He found himself in front of the nuke, shooting at it constantly and flying backwards. He felt like he was shooting blanks. And to top it off, his proximity detector was going off.

He only had a split second to make an immense decision. He could eat the nuke, killing himself but saving the thousand or so civilians on the Rising Star or he could just give it his best shot and if he missed, he missed. The Rising Star would be destroyed but he would be alive. He didn't have time to think, just to act.

He reversed his throttle and headed straight into the path of the nuke, clamping his finger on the trigger for a steady stream of bullets. He could hear his father over the wireless, "Lee, what are you doing, pull up! Pull up!" Instead he went straight through.

**IMPACT!**

Lee closed his eyes as he felt the impact of the nuke. For that split second he regretted his decision. He had just forfeited his chance at life, at love and possibly a family. Was his one life more valuable than the thousand aboard the Rising Star?

Lee thought it was over.

It was over. But Lee was surprised to find himself still strapped in his Viper and heading toward Galactica. He could hear cheers and shouts over the wireless. Had he done it? Had he destroyed the nuke? He flipped his ship around to see what had happened to the Rising Star. It was gone but there was no debris. It must have jumped. Then he noticed a streak of light, fading off into the distance. It was the nuke, still armed but heading off into nowhere. The nose of his ship looked a bit crooked. He must have bumped it off course. Why didn't it explode? It should have detonated it on impact. Maybe it was a dud? Maybe he had hit the nuke before it was fully armed? Maybe the gods were protecting him. He offered up a quick prayer of thanks, thankful that he was still in one piece and headed home. All the civilian ships had jumped and Galactica was only waiting for him to land to make the jump.

It was at that point in time that Lee decided that his Viper days were over. He wanted to live. He wanted a life. He just needed to force himself not to jump into a viper every time there was an attack.

## Chapter 24

Colonial Time: Saturday, 2105 hours

Galactica

“Sir, you have a phone call.” Came Dee’s voice from behind him. “Where would you like to take it?” Zarek was a bit startled. Who would be calling him on the Galactica? The rest of CIC was in a state of joyous celebration.

“Is there some place quiet?” Tom asked.

“Right this way.” Dee led Zarek to a small office not far from CIC.

Zarek sat at the desk and lifted the receiver. “This is Zarek.”

“Jason.” Came the voice at the other end. “The delivery is ready. Adama can pick it up on deck D, hatch 465. It is right next to the hanger deck so it will be easy to pick up and transport.”

“Great news. But why didn’t you just leave a message with Howard?” Tom was a bit disturbed that Jason would track him down on the Galactica. After the crisis the fleet had just been through, this seemed a bit anticlimactic.

“We have a bit of a situation. Permission to speak freely, sir?”

“Absolutely not.” Was Tom’s response. There was no way of knowing if the line Tom was on was secure. Anybody could be listening. Or worse yet, the conversation might be recorded. Little did Tom know that Galactica’s phones were secure, it was Jason’s phone that was tapped.

“Well, sir.” Jason paused a minute, trying to think of a way to let Tom know without actually saying it. “We have a rogue pawn who lost one of his toys.”

Sudden fear gripped Tom in the pit of his stomach. No, no, not after all the points that he had scored tonight. This could be irreparable. “Meet me. I’ll be there as soon as I can.” Tom slammed down the phone and headed straight to the hanger deck. He need a shuttle to the Prometheus and he needed it now.

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“That was pretty close.” Helo was helping Apollo out of his viper. “Did you see what it did to your nose?”

“I guess I won’t be flying straight for a while.” Lee quipped.

“Hey, do you think our dinner is still waiting for us?” Helo had only taken a few bites and was hoping to be able to finish.

“Lets go find out.” Lee and Helo headed to the lockers and were only half out of their environmental suits before the red lights began blaring again.

“Action stations, Action station.” Tigh’s voice was booming over the ship’s intercom.

“What the Frak?” Helo swore as he and Lee began to pull back on their environmental suits.

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“How the frak did they find us?” It was the same question that Tigh had asked just forty five minutes earlier. Now Adama believed that that question needed to be addressed.

“How long since we last jumped?” Adama asked.

“Thirty three minutes.” Came the reply from Dee.

“They’re tracking us.” Adama said flatly. They had all seen this before. During the first week after the original attack on the Colonies, the Cylons had caught up to them every thirty-three minutes. It took them almost a week to discover that the Olympic Carrier had been compromised. But how were they tracking us now? What had changed? It has been weeks since the last Cylon encounter and now? Every thirty-three minutes? What was different?

Adama was lost in his own thoughts as Tigh gave the order to launch the fighters and prepare the fleet for another jump. Hopefully there would be no more nukes. Then it hit him. Of course. The toasters!

“The toasters!” Adama shouted as he pounded his fist on the opps table. How could he have been so ignorant? In an instant, Adama ordered a squad of Marines to throw the toasters out the air lock.

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Rising Star

Gentry was not happy. He had been awakened once already by the Cylon attack and now his phone was ringing. It had better be important. He listened quietly to the caller as he felt his blood run cold. “I’ll be right there.”

The Colonial Police Headquarters was two decks below his quarters but Gentry was there almost instantly. “When did you pick up the call?”

“Just minutes ago.” Jennifer was competent and highly skilled in listening surveillance. Any of his other technicians might have let this one slide. It didn’t necessarily sound suspicious.

“Let me hear it again.”

Jennifer played the tape. Two men were in conversation, one was obviously the Vice President, the other was Jason.

“We have a bit of a situation. Permission to speak freely, sir?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Well, sir... We have a rogue pawn who lost one of his toys.”

Jennifer played it a third time. Gentry knew what it meant. There was a bomb planted somewhere in the fleet. Only the gods knew where.

“Locate the Vice President and Jason. Arrest them both on sight and bring them here. I’ll be in my office.”

“Yes, sir.” Jennifer replied, picking up the phone.

Instead of going straight to his office, Gentry made a stop at the head. He then went to the break room for coffee. None. He started a fresh pot. Someone must have left the burner on under the empty coffee pot for it smelled like burnt marshmallows. It was going to be a long night.

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Prometheus

Tom had only been on the ship for about five minutes before the alarms sounded again. People were again scrambling this way and that, preparing for another jump. Tom sprinted to Franks, trying to push his way through the crowded corridors. It was amazing how people panicked in a crisis. Why didn't they all just stay in their quarters and let the crew take care of business?

Finally he arrived at the bar and rushed into the back room. Everyone in the bar was either too wasted or too panicked to notice the Vice President rushing through the bar. Jason and Dren were there. Jason was pacing the room at quite a brisk pace with a cigarette dangling from his lips. It must be bad. This was the first time that Tom had seen him rattled.

"Ok look." Jason began without any formalities. He was just going to say it. Time was of the essence. "We found Jenkins. He was stoned out of his mind and about to pass out. But he kept saying over and over again that 'It didn't go off, it didn't go off.' We think that he put a bomb together while we were in the pen and delivered it somewhere. We have no idea where, or even if he did it. But I will tell you that he usually doesn't get so wasted unless he botched a job."

This was bad, worse than Tom had thought. If they knew where it was, they could disable it before anyone got hurt. What could he do now? Call the President and tell her that somewhere there was possibly a bomb that might or might not go off? Talk about causing a panic. Tom sat in the chair, leaned his elbows on the table and cupped his face in his hands. Maybe this wasn't such a good day after all.

## Chapter 24

Colonial Time: Saturday, 2125 hours

Galactica

Six marines barged into the lab where Gaeta was working on the toaster. There had been absolutely no noise, no movement or any sign of life from the toaster. The sudden rush of Marines startled him, to say the least. He had been working on the toaster all afternoon, learning how its circuits worked, trying to read its programming and most importantly, trying to find an Achilles' heel. He had not made much progress, to say the least.

The marines began to grab the different parts of the toaster and throw it onto a rolling cart. The damaged toaster was already on a gurney and two of the marines began rolling it out of the room.

“What are you doing? What’s going on?” Gaeta demanded.

“They are tracking us, the Admiral thinks it’s through the toasters. We are to put them out the air lock immediately.” Said one of the marines as he piled toaster parts on the cart.

Gaeta , a bit disappointed, began to help them. He had the parts spread out around the room categorized and ready for study. He didn't want to miss any, especially if it was the one part with the tracking device embedded in it. The Marines began to roll the cart out the door.

“Wait, wait.” Gaeta unplugged the toaster from the power source. “Ok, all set.”

Once his assignment was rolling down the hall, Gaeta realized that he didn't have anything to do at the moment. He decided to head up to CIC.

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“How long until all the civilians have jumped.” Adama asked.

“Ten minutes sir”

“Thanks gods they don't have any more nukes!” It was actually wishful thinking on Tigh's part. He wasn't sure if they had more or not. What he did know was that the alert fighters were slowly picking off the Raiders. It seemed to be easy pickings. Everyone was keeping sharp for nukes.

“Sir, one toaster has been ejected, the other one is en route.”

Adama began to breathe a little easy. Thirty-three minutes from the next jump would determine if his guess was correct or not.

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Zero decided to activate his self destruct device. It wasn't a hard decision to make. He was already in pieces. If he didn't activate it, he would soon find himself floating in space once again with little to no hope of rescue. The Cylons were attacking. He knew they wouldn't stop to pick up some half functioning debris. It took fifteen

seconds to activate, plenty of time to take out a nice chunk of the corridor and maybe a Marine or two.

The self destruct device had a high pitched sound, virtually inaudible to the human ear. However, pets and small children could possibly hear it. Wasn't it just his luck that a small child was passing by in the corridor with her mother as Zero had activated the device.

"Mommy, why is that toaster beeping?" the little girl asked her mother.

The Marine closest to the girl heard the question and immediately yelled, "Everyone, hit the deck! Hit the deck!" The Marine grabbed the woman and the child, threw them to the floor and fell on top of them.

The corridor must of had at least fifteen people besides the Marines headed one way or the other. Every single one of them fell to the floor immediately and covered their heads with their arms. Standard training on a battle ship. Every one except one. A woman in a white chiffon dress pushing a food cart.

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The explosion rocked the ship and could be heard clearly in CIC.

"Report!" Demanded Adama.

"Sir, the Marines report that one of the toasters self destructed. There are casualties, sir."

Adama pounded the opps table. How could he have let this happen? He should have known better. They were machines. Machines did not die. They were either working or not working. Apparently this one was still working.

"Send medics. How much longer until the fleet has all jumped?"

“Just three minutes.”

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## Rising Star

Gentry filled his cup of coffee and headed toward his office. He opened the door and walked to the window. He could see the fleet jumping away. Strange, the burnt marshmallow smell seemed stronger in his office. The Rising Star always seemed to be one of the last to jump. He decided to sit at his desk and secure his coffee cup. He didn't want to spill it all over himself during the jump. He sat in his wooden swivel chair and placed the cup in “Coffee Saver” clamps designed just to hold cups during jumps.

Someone made a bundle off that invention!

On his desk was the tape of the VP, just where he had left it, but there was also a box. He stood and looked at the top of the box. It was addressed to him from the Vice President. Odd. Still the smell of burnt...

Gentry couldn't get out of his office quick enough. He leapt over his desk and slammed the door behind him. “Everybody out, Everybody out!” He yelled as he ran down the hallway. Why was nobody listening to him? Where was everyone? Then he remembered that it was only he and Jennifer.

“What's going on?” Jennifer came out of her office and was practically bowled over by Gentry.

“We have to get out now! I found the bomb!”

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The fuse had lit, hours ago, just when Jenkins intended it to light. The only problem was that the Styrofoam peanuts that he had used as packing material did not

allow for much oxygen for the fuse to burn steady. Instead of burning like the fuse on a firecracker, it smoldered, like a cigarette. Had it burned normally, it would have blown up the office in twenty minutes, Miss Barnes and all. Instead it took nine hours. Once the smoldering fuse hit the accelerant, it was all over. Gentry's office exploded into a fire ball, which spread to the outer offices and the corridor. Gentry and Jennifer were just opening the outer hatch when the fireball caught up to them and consumed them both instantly, along with all evidence that may have implicated the Vice President.

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Galactica

"Frak, now what's going on?" Something was up on the Rising Star and Tigh was trying to get answers. "Did they get hit? Did a nuke get through?"

"I'm not sure, sir. They say that there has been some type of an explosion. Internal, they believe."

"Can they still jump?"

"One moment.. Yes, sir, they can jump."

"Well, what's stopping them? Tell them to get the hell out of here." Tigh was getting too old for this. Combat was truly stressing him out.

"They are away, sir."

"Recall all the fighters and let's get out of here." Adama ordered. "As soon as skids are down, start the jump clock. Dee, patch me through to the Chief."

"Yes sir... Chief is on the line."

“Chief, make sure no one, I repeat no one leaves the deck. They need to be prepped and ready for another attack thirty-three minutes after we jump. Hopefully we won’t be tracked this time but I want to be ready.”

“Yes sir.” Came the voice of the Chief over the line.

Adama hung up the phone and leaned back against the opps table. He rubbed his hands over his face several times. It had been one hell of an evening. That was for sure.

## Chapter 25

Colonial Time: Sunday, 2420 hours

Galactica

Ninety minutes had passed before Adama gave the order to stand down. “If they could track us, they would have done it by now.”

Dee handed a paper to Adama. “Report, sir, from the Rising Star.”

Adama read through the report and was not happy. An internal bomb, two dead, including Gentry, extensive internal damage but no hull breaches. Adama breathed in a deep sigh. “Thank you, Dee.” He knew exactly who he wanted to blame for this. He just wasn’t sure if it would stick.

“Casualty list from the Cylon explosion” Dee handed him a second piece of paper.

Adama scanned the list. Four dead, several third degree burns, two in critical condition and half a dozen minor injuries. Adama’s eyes froze in the middle of the list. He looked up at Dee. His first impulse was to ask her to find Lee. He decided against that

and simply thanked her. As Dee returned to her post, Adama turned to Tigh, handed him the list. "Find Lee, tell him to meet me in Sick Bay."

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Lee ran the whole way. The corridors were pretty packed for 0100 hours but the time of day or night does not have much meaning during combat. When he arrived, the first thing he saw was four bodies covered completely with white sheets. No, it couldn't be. Lee did not even want to think about that. She had to be behind one of the curtains.

The rest of sick bay was filled with medics tending to what seemed to be a score of injuries. Most were burns. One little girl had her arm in a sling and was holding onto the hand of her mother. The mother was lying on a gurney on her stomach. She had extensive burns on the backs of her legs but otherwise seemed to be OK. Lee could hear the doctor in the back recesses of sick bay, ordering medics around as he furiously operated on someone. Three marines had their fingers bandaged up, apparently the only part of their body not covered during the blast. Lee tried to look around discretely but she was not to be found. He had to start poking around behind the curtains and patricians.

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Rina woke with a splitting headache. Even before she opened her eyes, she knew where she was. She could hear moans and groans all around her, people talking quickly asking for twenty cc's of this or forty cc's of that. She would have preferred to go back into the dark, unconscious state that she was previously in but the pain was too great.

When she did open her eyes, the first thing she saw was the white dress that she had been wearing, hanging over the patrician. Great, Barbara was going to kill her. It was covered with all sorts of colorful food stains; brown, green, yellow and bright red. Rina

couldn't remember fixing anything for dinner that was red... It also looked like someone had cut the dress in half. She decided that she had better go find Barbara and try and explain.

Her first attempt to sit up was unsuccessful. A shooting pain ran through her ribcage. Another broken rib, she thought. She knew the feeling well. She also felt like she had been lying on a bed of pins and needles and the pain was quite intense. She had to get off of her back. She attempted to sit up again. This time she rolled onto her side and then lifted herself up. Success. Cool air washed over her bare back and it felt heavenly. The fire that seemed to be burning on her back cooled a bit but her head began to feel a bit woozy. The cubicle began to spin around her and black splotches clouded her eyes. She could feel herself falling forward toward the floor and was unable to do anything about it.

As her consciousness faded to black, she vaguely felt a pair of strong arms catching her, lifting her... all was black again.

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Two of the voices were familiar but she had never heard the third before.

"She was unconscious when they brought her in. We weren't quite sure how extensive her injuries were because she was covered in food." Rina heard an unfamiliar, raspy voice say.

"So how extensive are her injuries?" asked a vaguely familiar voice.

"Concussion, a pretty bad one too. Apparently she was pushing a catering cart. It shielded her from the heat of the blast but the force smashed her head between the cart and the bulkhead, broke a rib too. The cuts on her back are minor, probably from the shards of the broken dishes that fell on her. She was lucky, though, no burns."

“How long will she have to stay here?” This voice was very familiar.

“At least a couple of days. I want to keep an eye on that concussion.”

“Thank you doctor.”

Rina groaned and tried to open her eyes. The pain was back and quite intense.

“It looks like she is waking up. How are you feeling missy?” Rina looked up into the face of a codgedy old man with a well worn face.

“It hurts.” Was all she could get out.

“Here’s a little something for the pain.” Rina felt a needle prick on her arm. “I’ll leave you three. Let me know if she needs anything.” The doctor disappeared behind the patrician.

Rina blinked and focused on her visitors. Lee was at her right and Adama was at her left. Ordinarily, she would have felt self conscious, she could only imagine what she looked like, but the intense pain caused her not to care.

“You gave us quite a scare, there, young lady.” Adama began. “But you’re going to be just fine.” Adama was holding Rina’s left hand in both of his. He gave it a gentle squeeze, “I never got to thank you for a lovely dinner.”

Rina smiled. She wasn’t sure if he was serious or being facetious. From Rina’s perspective, dinner had been a complete disaster.

“You get some rest, now.”

“Yes, sir.” Rina croaked out. The drugs were starting to kick in and she was not feeling the pain so intently. Adama smiled, looked back and forth between Lee and Rina and then left. He knew that Lee wanted to be alone with her. That much was obvious.

Lee sat down on the edge of the bed and reached to move a stray hair from Rina's face. He continued to caress her silky hair, no longer pinned into a bun but gently lying around her face in large, sweeping curls.

"He must think that I am a total idiot." Rina whispered.

"Actually, he is quite impressed with you. I think you are my first girlfriend that he ever approved of."

Rina was a bit taken aback when Lee referred to her as his girlfriend. "Probably because he likes my cooking." Rina giggled slightly, and then stopped when pain began to shoot through her body.

"My mother warned me about women like you." Lee couldn't resist playing off her humor. "Trying to get to a man's heart through his stomach." Lee leaned in close, supporting his weight with his elbow.

"I suppose I have you to thank for catching me?"

"All in a day's work. Besides, I didn't think a bloody nose would match your eyes." Lee leaned in even closer, close enough to nuzzle her with his nose.

"Thank you." Whispered Rina.

Lee's lips found hers and what started as a gentle, meeting of the lips, turned into a deeply passionate kiss. A first kiss that lasted, it seemed, forever. Lee's thoughts went instantly to the little box still in his pocket. He wanted to ask her, ask her right there and then but decided against it. The first kiss was not typically the best time to ask a woman for her hand, especially when surrounded by patients groaning in pain. He would wait, not long but he would wait. Now was the time to fill the empty well in his heart with the sweet passion from the lips that he had longed to kiss.

A medic came around the patrician to take Rina's vitals. She decided to come back later. The patient looked pretty alive at the moment.

## Epilogue:

Colonial Time: Monday, 1900 hours

Astral Queen

Zarek reached in his desk and pulled out a bottle. It was full, but not for long. It was the end of a long day and Zarek needed this. The interrogations, the investigation and the game were over. Tom certainly hadn't won but it wasn't a complete checkmate either.

To his credit, Tom was successful in gaining the good will of the President and the people. He took the credit for helping resolve the terrorist threat and for standing up for the downtrodden and disadvantaged. Jason was currently leading negotiations with the President to start some kind of work study program for the ex cons.

Although, to Tom's credit, Apollo had a new "love of his life" and the Admiral was enjoying gourmet meals every night Tom knew that he had fallen from grace in the eyes of Adama. Tom was absolutely convinced that Adama was holding him totally responsible for the bombing on the Rising Star, even though there was not a single shred of evidence. Not a single shred of evidence that had survived the blast, anyway. Even though Jenkins had given a full confession and was now serving twenty to life and even though the president and the colonists were happy because they had a culprit to blame, Tom had lost to Adama. Tom had seen the mistrust in Adama's eyes. There was no mistaking it.

The big question was could he start over? Was it possible to gain Adama's favor before the President's body lost its battle to cancer? Did he have enough time or possibly enough chances to prove his ability to be President? The odds were against him. It was like starting a game without the queen or any rooks.

Tom decided not to think about it, at least not for a few days. He polished off his first glass and filled his second.

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Galactica

Sharron hadn't paid much attention to the pictures pinned to the wall outside of CIC in a long time but for some reason, she decided to slow her pace as she walked down the corridor. Most of the pictures had been there since the first attack, almost three years ago. It was good to remember all who were lost and thank the gods for all that had survived. It almost made her feel human.

One of her favorite pictures was of a mother and son. She always looked for it when she was perusing the corridor. There it was, in the same place it always was. They looked so happy, so carefree. Before moving on, she noticed that a new picture had been put up next to it. Another picture of a woman and a young boy. This time it looked like a grandmother and a grandson. The boy looked very familiar. She wasn't sure how, she didn't know any children, except her own precious Herra.

She looked closer at the shot. "Boy that looks a lot like Boxy." She said aloud. The boy in the picture was much younger but it had a striking resemblance to the teen she had rescued off of Caprica three years ago. It couldn't be him. She gently pulled the pin out of the picture and turned it over. "Boxy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade" was the inscription on the back.

No, It couldn't be. She had just seen Boxy last week! He was working part time in a classy restaurant on the Zehpyer while he was going to flight school. He so wanted to be a pilot. Just like his father. How did his picture get here? Who would have put it up? Who would have had a picture of him from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, anyway?

Sharon hadn't seen a list of the casualties from last Saturday night. Could Boxy have been on that list? How could he have been? He was on the Zephyr, nowhere near either of the explosions. She had to be sure. Picture still in hand, she made her way to a phone.