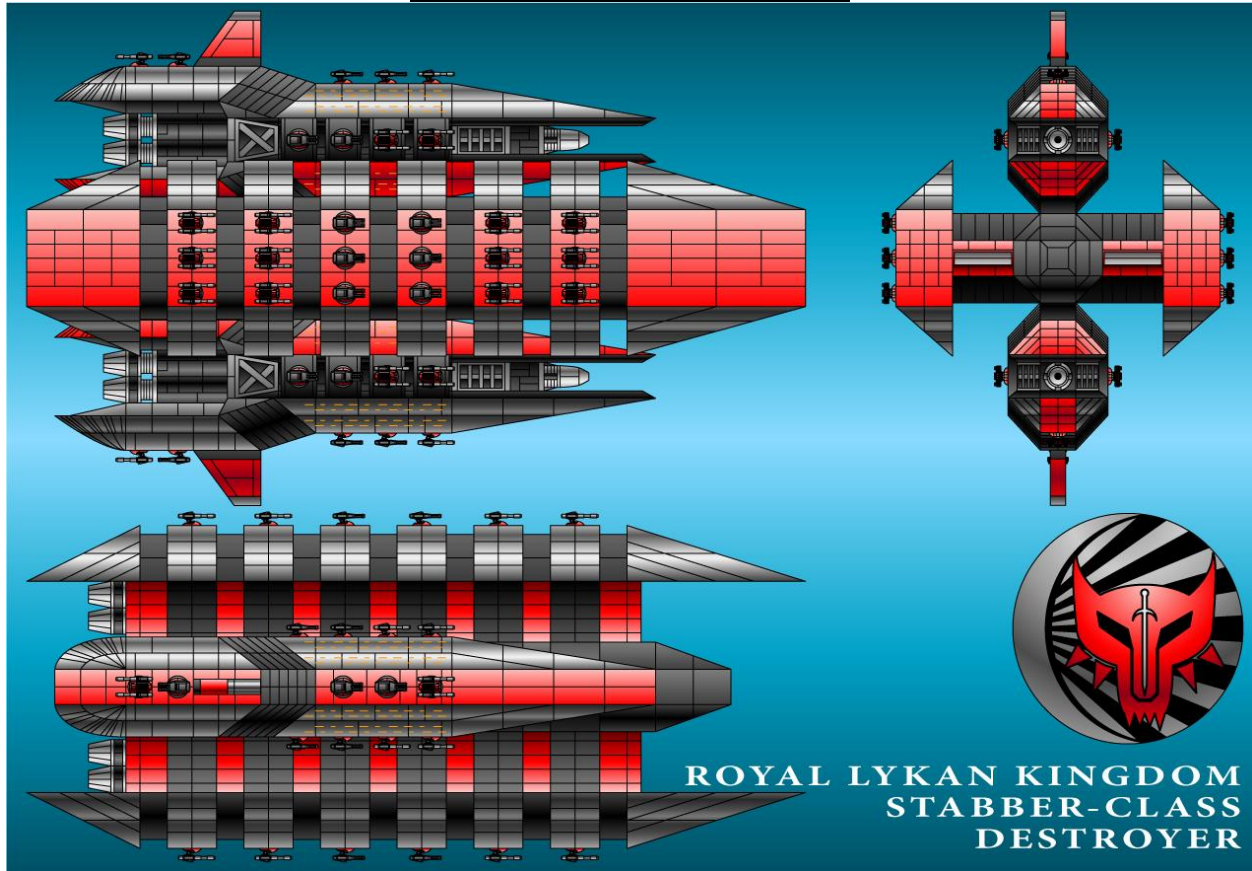


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode II: The Star to the North



PART 3

*Storage Room #53, Deck Five Section D, Destroyer-829
Northern Republic Military Headquarters, Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System
11:38am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"All clear."

The imposter of Vice Admiral Trent smiled as the internal sensors showed he was the only person left on the ship after the rest of the crew had left the destroyer. He could finally get out of the cramped storage room he had to hide in for a long time. Before he decided to get out of the room, he accessed the internal cameras to disable them while he roamed the corridors. He did not want someone to suddenly access them and see that he was aboard the destroyer prior to him commandeering the vessel. Once the cameras were disabled, he opened the door to the storage room and finally walked out.

He looked around the corridors to get his bearings before he accessed the floor plans of the ship in order to get an idea where he was going. Once he found his route to the bridge, he started to walk in the direction of the elevator. As he walked, he started to feel uneasy. It was not the mission itself that made him feel that way, though. It was being on an enemy vessel walking the corridors like this. The fact there was no one around also made it feel even more eerie than he

had anticipated. It was almost like being in a bad dream. However, he had to shake that feeling off in order to focus on where he was going. Now was not the time to have such feelings.

As he approached the elevator, he pressed the call button to summon it. As he waited, his tablet gave a notification that he had received a new message. He looked at it and saw that it was from a Captain Shannon of the *Renaldo*. The message had on its subject line “Update on fleet deployment” with an attached file. The imposter was about to open it as the information would prove valuable but decided to wait until he was underway to open it.

The elevator soon arrived and the imposter stepped in.

“*Bridge,*” he said.

The elevator gave an acknowledging chirp and began moving upwards towards the bridge. After a few seconds, the elevator stopped and the doors opened to the bridge of the ship which was in the same style as other bridges on other Republic ships. The computer did not stop him from going onto the bridge as it scanned his DNA before he arrived.

For the imposter, things were going well.

“Computer,” he said, “access dock controls. Close all docking ports and prepare the ship for departure.”

“*Warning,*” the computer voice said, “*scans show there is only one officer on board. This will affect ship performance significantly. Do you wish to continue?*”

“Yes.”

“*Acknowledged. Closing all docking ports. Access to dock control granted.*”

“Release docking clamps. Bring engines online and clear the ship for departure.”

“*Acknowledged. Incoming message from dock control requesting authorization for departure.*”

“Put them through. Audio only.”

A black screen appeared in front of the main screen. A red outlined box with the words “AUDIO ONLY” appeared in red within the box.

“*Destroyer Eight-Two-Niner,*” a male voice said over the screen, “*you have not been cleared for departure! Provide your authorization immediately or we will force your ship to shut down!*”

The imposter realized that the dock control may need verbal authorization in which he did not have. He went over to the communications console and hooked in his tablet. He then used the fingerprint and DNA scanner to transmit an override into the docking controls.

“*What in the world?*” the male voice said through the screen. “*Why am I getting an override from...this CAN'T be right!*”

The imposter heard the docking clamps release the ship as the engines came online. He went to the helm and began to pilot the ship away from the dock. The lights in the station all turned yellow. He needed to get the ship out of port fast.

* * * * *

*Observation Room #3, Main Docking Bay Juncture, Northern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus (“Serene”) System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System
11:44am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“What in the world?”

Brenda and Marina looked around as the lights all turned yellow and was accompanied by the following alert klaxon. They looked over at the destroyer they were tracking and saw that the ship began to move out of port.

“Didn’t that destroyer’s crew just leave the ship?” Marina asked.

“If that is the case,” Brenda said, “then who in the world is on board?”

As the two of them looked at the ship and pondered why it was suddenly leaving, the speakers suddenly came on throughout the station.

“Yellow Alert!” a male voice said over the speakers. *“Destroyer Eight-Two-Niner is currently leaving port unauthorized! We are getting being locked out and controls are overridden by the authorization of Vice Admiral Trent!”*

“Trent did that?” Brenda asked. “But why would he do that?”

“Isn’t he still in Tranquillus?” Marina asked.

“We need to report this to Laura, right now.”

“And what are we going to say to her? That her husband is somehow locking out everyone and everything here, allowing a ship with no crew to somehow depart?”

“I’m waiting to hear an alternative if you have one.”

Both of them looked out as small towing craft started flying towards the departing destroyer. As they got close, they suddenly impacted on the shields of the destroyer that got raised too close for the small craft to avoid. As several craft exploded upon impact and as the destroyer started turning towards the exit, Marina looked over at Brenda.

“I’m glad you are the one to give a live report right now.”

“Thanks for the reminder,” Brenda said as she activated a camera drone next to here. She got her phone out and called the NBS News station.

“Get me the Chief!” she said as someone answered. “I have a breaking news story right now in the Serenus System involving the abduction of a Republic destroyer!”

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*Bridge, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
International Star Gate #1, Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
11:45am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Looks like I got it.”

Captain Shannon had looked at the results of the tracker program that was sent to Vice Admiral Trent’s email account. The program did not have to be opened in order to track, only to trace where the receiver was located.

“You found out where my email is being accessed from?” Trent asked.

“Where is it located?” Chancellor Drew said as he had waited patiently for an answer to whether Trent was responsible for deploying a destroyer to the Serenus System.

“So far,” Shannon said, “it is located in the Serenus System itself. The trace is narrowing down the exact location.

“Sir?” Ro said at the Communications station. “I’m getting a transmission from Grand Admiral Mikey.”

“Put him through,” Trent said. “I wonder if he is inquiring about the same thing.”

Another screen appeared with Grand Admiral Mikey on it with an all-too-obvious look of anger on his face.

“Vice Admiral Trent!” he yelled. “Would you care to explain your WHY you are overriding the docking controls in Serenus right now?!”

Trent looked highly puzzled to the accusations of the Grand Admiral as was everyone on the bridge. Even the Supreme Chancellor was surprised as he overheard the accusation.

“Ro,” Trent said, “link the channels, please.”

At that point, the two screens with Mikey and Drew connected. The moment they did, Mikey was shocked to see Drew was already communicating with Trent.

“Supreme Chancellor?” Mikey asked. *“Why are you on the line?”*

“I’m trying to figure out the same thing you are,” Drew said. *“However, I have been on the line with the Vice Admiral for several minutes. He has not done anything of the sort at Serenus.”*

“He hasn’t?”

“No. The Vice Admiral has been unable to receive messages and his phone has been turned off. He is getting notifications his email is being accessed from somewhere else.”

“How is that even possible? Doesn’t the service require one’s DNA in order to access it?”

“Captain Shannon has sent a message to the Vice Admiral’s email with a tracer. We are narrowing down the location specifically but what was this you mentioned about Serenus’ dock control?”

“Somehow, the dock control is being overridden using the Vice Admiral’s credentials. For the some reason, a destroyer from the DP Zone was transferred there and the crew was ordered to leave the ship. A few minutes after that, the ship began to depart. The ship is almost out of the docking bay right now. I have ordered Captain Mandy to intercept the destroyer once it has left the docking bay.”

“Has anyone gotten a visual of the perpetrator?” Trent asked.

“From what I heard, no,” Mikey said. *“Dock control confirmed that there was someone on board since they were able to open a channel but it was audio only and they could not see or hear anyone. There is also more bad news.”*

“What’s that?” Drew asked.

“This is making NBS News right now. They are airing this live thanks to a reporter named Brenda who was there.”

“That must have been how Laura knew about what was going on there in Serenus.”

“Leave it to my wife to find out this sort of thing before I did.”

Trent thought for a moment about the situation.

“Where did this destroyer come from again?” Trent asked.

“It came from the DP Forty-Two System under Rear Admiral Nora’s command,” Mikey said.

“Ro, get me in touch with Rear Admiral Nora right now.”

“Yes, sir,” Ro said.

“Do you have an idea what is going on?” Drew asked.

“If I’m right, there is more than just a possible imposter on board that destroyer. We could be dealing with an infiltrator from the Kingdom.”

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*Bridge, Cruiser-158, Guardian-Class Cruiser, Northern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System
11:49am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"I knew something wasn't right about that destroyer coming here!"

Mandy had received the orders from Grand Admiral Mikey to intercept the "rogue" destroyer and disable it while he contacted Vice Admiral Trent about his involvement with that ship. She had her cruiser along with six destroyers come close to the right side of the docking bay entrance with their tractor beams ready target the ship. However, if the ship raised its shields, the tractor beams won't be able to hold the ship. They would have to take down the shields. Thankfully, there only seems to be one person aboard so the ship won't be able to fully combat Mandy's forces.

"Captain," Commander Danielle said from the Tactical Station, "the destroyer is starting to emerge through the atmospheric barrier."

"Once the ship has fully emerged from the field," Mandy said, "prepare to fire. We need to bring that destroyer's shields down before we engage the tractor beams."

"Understood."

The destroyer started to clear the atmospheric barrier. As it passed through, it was obvious based on the gap between the field and the ship that the destroyer's shields were raised.

"I had a feeling they were already up," Mandy said. "All ships, open fire on the destroyer. Take down its shields!"

The fleet opened fire on the destroyer as it began to move away from the station.

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*Bridge, Destroyer-829, Exiting Northern Republic Military Headquarters Docking Bay
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System
11:52am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"Why am I not surprised?"

The imposter found the Republic's efforts to stop him almost whimsical. However, he knew that unless someone else was manning the tactical station, he could not manage the shield boosters while trying to flee the system. He needed to get the ship to its destination now.

"Computer," he said, "is there enough crystals on board to initiate a jump?"

"*There is enough Salire Purpura Crystals for one emergency jump.*"

Salire Purpura? The imposter was not sure where that name came from and right now he did not care. As long as the jump was to where he wanted to go, that was all that mattered. He inputted a set of coordinates into the ship's navigation.

"Prepare to jump to the following coordinates."

"*Warning. Coordinates are for a star system eleven Light-years north of this vessel's current position outside of Republic space. This jump will use all crystals on board and will prevent the ship from returning to Republic space without resupply. Do you wish to proceed?*"

"Confirm. Activate the crystals."

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*Bridge, Cruiser-158, Guardian-Class Cruiser, Northern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System
11:53am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"It's doing WHAT?!"

Mandy thought she was hearing things when Danielle detected the use of the Salire Purpura Crystals on board the rogue destroyer being energized. She then realized Danielle was telling the truth as a wormhole started to form in front of the destroyer.

"What is the shield strength of the destroyer?!" Mandy yelled.

"Down to forty percent!" Danielle said. "The ship's shields won't be down in time!"

"Where is it pointing towards?"

"It is pointing towards a system eleven Light-years north of here outside Republic space! According to our records, that is within the territory of the Camino Star Empire!"

Mandy was stunned about hearing where the destroyer was about to go that she had barely any time to react to the destroyer entering the wormhole it had created. The destroyer was suddenly gone as the wormhole collapsed. Mandy leaned back in her chair as the realization was now setting in as to what had just happened.

Whoever is aboard that destroyer was about to commit an act of war against the Empire and the Republic would look like the aggressor.

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*Observation Room #3, Main Docking Bay Juncture, Northern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System
11:54am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"It just...jumped."

Brenda suddenly was in shock at the sudden disappearance of the destroyer. She could see what was going on beyond the atmospheric barrier as the destroyer suddenly entered the wormhole it had created. Based on what she could tell, it was heading north into what she knew was beyond Republic space. She suddenly turned back towards the camera.

"From what I can tell," Brenda continued, "the destroyer has jumped to a star system north of here outside of Republic space. I currently do not have information as to what the significance of that system is or why the ship jumped there. Hopefully we will have more information as to what has transpired here from either a spokesman from the government or the military to explain what has happened. This is Brenda, NBS News, Serenus System."

With that, the camera turned off showing that Brenda was no longer on the air. The report was live so billions if not trillions of people across the Republic witnessed the report. Marina stood nearby as she typed up her article on her tablet looking equally perplexed as to what has just happened.

"I think I know where that ship just went to," Marina said.

"What do you mean?" Brenda asked.

"I looked at an article not too long ago about information the Republic had on the Kingdom and the State but also information on the Camino Star Empire as well."

“I’ve heard of that Empire. Wasn’t the Republic still on the fence about establishing contact with them?”

“Yes, but the problem is that the Empire resides in the Northern Region and I heard the proximity of their border was close to ours. If the star system that the destroyer jumped into belongs to the Empire, they may view that destroyer’s intrusion as an act of war.”

“Are you serious? Why would anyone want to do such a thing?”

“I can think of one good reason why someone or some party would want to see us at war with the Empire in order to divide our attention.”

“You don’t mean who I think you are talking about, are you?”

“If you are thinking about the Kingdom, then yes.”

“But how is that possible? That ship was ordered here and managed to flee because of Vice Admiral Trent.”

“Then hopefully the Vice Admiral will soon give us and the Republic some answers.”

* * * * *

*Bridge, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
International Star Gate #1, Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
11:56am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“What do you mean you didn’t order that destroyer to Serenus?!”

Nora was on an additional screen that joined with the one both Drew and Mikey were connected on in a video conference call. Trent could understand her confusion considering the circumstances but this situation needed to be assessed as to what has transpired. Nora looked as confused as everyone else was when she was told Trent didn’t order the destroyer from her fleet to Serenus.

“I’m telling you, Rear Admiral,” Trent said, “I never sent or authorized such an order. I have not had access to my email since this morning and my phone was deactivated.”

“But it had your DNA signature and everything!” Nora said. *“There was no way that could be faked!”*

“It had my DNA signature?”

That started to bother Trent as DNA signature would require an active scan of the DNA of the sender and a simple small amount of DNA would not suffice. There was only one explanation but he had to be sure if this was the case.

“Rear Admiral,” he continued, “did anything strange happen to that particular destroyer during your last engagement?”

“Anything strange?” Nora asked as she thought about it for a moment. *“The only thing that was odd was a shell hitting it that did not explode on contact. We assumed it was a dud.”*

“Where is that shell now?”

“It is currently in a salvaging ship that is in the battle zone doing clean up duty.”

“I want them to check that shell and see if there is any evidence that someone was in it.”

“You want them to check for evidence of an occupant?” Nora asked confused on the request. *“Are you telling me that there is possibly a Lykan on board that destroyer?”*

“Most likely and somehow this occupant has my DNA.”

“But if there was a Lykan on board, the onboard sensors would have detected him and detained him in a force field.”

Trent thought about it for a moment. Nora had a point. Anyone who comes aboard a ship without approval would be detained by a force field barrier. Since no Lykan has been allowed aboard a Republic ship since they declared war, any Lykan who tried would not get very far. If there is an intruder on that destroyer, they needed to not have any Lykan DNA at all.

And then it hit Trent how all of this might have happened.

“Captain,” Trent said, “do we have any way to detect a DNA scan in the conference room while the Lykan ambassador was here?”

“You want me to check for evidence of a DNA scan?” Shannon asked, puzzled by such a request.

“That is correct. Rear Admiral Nora, have that shell’s interior scanned for Human DNA, if possible.”

“Wait, are you saying we have a traitor?” Nora asked.

“No. I’m saying we have a clone.”

Everyone on the bridge and on the screens gave Trent a surprised look.

“Are you saying that the Lykan ambassador used the same device to scan your DNA?” Mikey said.

“He may have scanned everyone’s DNA that was in that room at the time for just this reason. I’m not sure if the State is aware that the Kingdom is in possession of cloning technology or not. However, I can see after the loss of so many slaves that they would be able to use such technology to replenish them. What surprises me is the fact that this clone is possibly going along with their plans?”

“How about we verify that there is a clone before we jump to speculation,” Drew said. *“I don’t doubt that the possibility exists and the theory does fit the facts that are present but we need to know what we are dealing with first, especially in light of recent developments that just happened.”*

Everyone looked over at the Supreme Chancellor with a slight look of dread.

“What recent developments are you referring to, sir?” Trent asked.

“NBS News is still reporting it, but apparently our rogue destroyer has decided to jump eleven Light-years north right into Imperial territory.”

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*Main Broadcasting Stage, National Broadcasting System Building, City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen (“Light”) System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:59am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“I can’t believe I’m about to report this.”

Laura sat in her seat with only a minute left before the live broadcast of the noonday news. However, a few minutes ago, Brenda in the Serenus System reported the alleged theft of a Republic destroyer from the local military headquarters in that system. While she did not say so, the speaker system in the observation room in which Brenda was reporting mentioned Trent’s name as the one who was allowing the ship to leave by overriding the systems there and everyone in the Republic watching the broadcast overheard his name.

NBS News had been trying to get a hold of both Supreme Chancellor Drew and Grand Admiral Mikey for comment but both were busy at the moment. There was word from those near them that they were talking with her husband Trent right now about the situation.

“Thirty seconds,” a man said from the side of the stage.

Matt sat next to her. It was decided that due to the circumstances that he would report more on the story than Laura by the Chief. The Chief had considered not having her do the broadcast due the fact that she was “close” to the person that might be responsible, but Laura insisted that until it is proven that he was indeed responsible for what has happened that she can still report the news. The Chief reluctantly agreed but made it clear that if something comes up that makes her lose her control of her emotions that she would be pulled during the following commercial break.

She had to keep her cool no matter what until someone gets to the bottom of the matter.

“Going live in five!” the same man from earlier said as he started counting down with his fingers.

Laura took a deep breath and faced the front camera as they went on-the-air.

“Good afternoon,” Matt said. “My name is Matt.”

“And my name is Laura,” Laura said while trying to smile.

“Today’s top story,” Matt continued, “is the continuing development of what is now being considered a possible theft of a Republic destroyer in the Serenus System. Serenus, which is located on the edge of the Northern Region, is also the location of the Republic military’s local headquarters. The destroyer has been identified as Destroyer Eight-Two-Nine and according to reports this ship was originally assigned to the Defense Perimeter Zone System Number Forty-Two under the command of Rear Admiral Nora. Our news correspondent in the Serenus System, Brenda, has interviewed some of the crew of the destroyer who had disembarked prior to the hijacking of the destroyer.”

Laura was trying her best not to look at Matt with a shocked expression. An interview with the crew of the stolen ship was something she had not heard about at all!

“According to the ship’s commanding officer,” Matt continued, “after they had engaged Kingdom forces yesterday, the ship was ordered by Vice Admiral Trent in the Tranquillus System to proceed to the Serenus System, a trip that took almost four hours from its current location. The reason for their deployment was unknown at the time.”

Laura wanted to say something badly at this point but knew that now was not the time with billions of people watching the news right now. Matt continued on knowingly aware of Laura’s disposition but he had to continue the report.

“The crew upon arriving at the Serenus Military Headquarters was also ordered to disembark from the ship. Soon after, the destroyer was hijacked by someone unknown and according to dock control was assisted with overrides from the Vice Admiral as well.”

At that point, the feed showed a picture of Trent in a dress uniform at his last formal engagement from a few months ago. Laura was about to lose it. It was no wonder the Chief was concerned about how she would feel about this report.

“Also according to the staff, the ship upon exiting the docking bay performed a jump in which its destination is eleven Light-years north into the Northern Region. It is believed that this system is under the control of the Camino Star Empire whom the government has not established

contact yet. We have yet to hear how the military or the government will respond to the situation but from what we understand both the Supreme Chancellor and the Grand Admiral of the Navy are in contact with Vice Admiral Trent to understand his motives and why he deployed the destroyer to begin with.”

Laura knew in her heart that Trent could not be responsible for what has happened today. This was not like him at all.

“We will keep you updated as more details unfold,” Matt said before he suddenly put his right hand up to his ear. “We will be right back after this.”

That last sentence caught Laura off guard. She knew the next segment was one she was covering but someone decided to go to a commercial instead. Matt turned to her.

“The Chief notified the production team to pull you off the broadcast,” Matt said. “They could see that the news about the destroyer was affecting you. They are having your substitute fill in.”

Laura was about to burst into tears. She tried the best she could to hide her feelings but that did not stop them from showing. She got up from her seat and headed for the exit to the room. Another lady, one who fills in for her when she is not around or available, walked in and sat in her spot. They would no doubt have to explain to the audience why there was a switch but those that know Laura already know of her husband and can guess why very easily.

After Laura left the broadcast stage and closed the door, she sat down on the floor and began to cry. She needed to know what was going on because she knew this was going to affect their relationship with friends, family, and their peers.

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*Bridge, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
International Star Gate #1, Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
12:09pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“We have completed our analysis.”

Captain Shannon, along with Trent and everyone on both the bridge and on the screens, were waiting on a team of investigators who were scanning the conference room for any signatures of a DNA scanner in use in that room. The results came in.

“*And what do they say?*” Grand Admiral Mikey said.

“It has been confirmed,” Captain Shannon said. “They have detected residual scans of a DNA scanner in the room. It appears to originate from the seat the Lykan ambassador sat in.”

“*We have also completed our investigation,*” Nora said. “*The shell indeed had someone aboard. There are harnesses and inertia dampeners inside the shell to protect the occupant from the shock of being shot from an artillery cannon and impacting into a ship. We also ran a DNA scan on the shell and it would appear that the occupant at some point used his bare hands upon entering the shell. The DNA and fingerprints match that of the Vice Admiral. I think the Vice Admiral is right. The Lykans must have created a clone of him from the DNA and ‘programmed’ him to send the orders while locking the real Trent out from his email and phone to countermand the orders.*”

“*Based on these facts, it is clear that we have an imposter on board that destroyer,*” Mikey said. “*The question now is what to do about it? How do we stop him from completing*

whatever his objective or objectives are involving the destroyer? If this imposter is indeed a Lykan operative, he may be planning to use the destroyer to attack Imperial forces in the name of the Republic.”

“Is there a way to override his commands?” Drew asked.

“I can override it from here easily since I have a higher rank but that is only if the imposter has not locked the system down to only accept his commands.”

Trent thought for a moment about what to do. A thought came to mind but he knew what the consequences would be if he brought it up. After a moment and considering the Lykans have his DNA, Trent decided to make his proposal.

“I have a recommendation,” Trent said, *“although you all may not like it.”*

“Go on,” Mikey said.

“As much as I don’t want to have this done, I want my DNA signature removed from the military database. This would prevent the intruder from being able to operate the destroyer. It would also prevent the Lykans from using my DNA to create any further clones to cause havoc like they did today.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Drew said.

“No, it isn’t!” Mikey said. *“Trent, do you know what you are asking us to do?!”*

“What is the problem, Grand Admiral?”

“Supreme Chancellor, every ship has a security system on board to prevent intruders from getting on board by putting up a force field around them if they are unauthorized to be there. Only if the person is being escorted by a security detail will the field go down as long as the detail is within five feet of the person.”

“What does that have to do with...wait a moment. Are you saying that the moment that someone removes the Vice Admiral’s DNA, the ship’s computer will identify him as an unauthorized intruder and put up a force field around him?”

“That is correct, sir,” Trent said. *“While this would prevent the imposter from doing anything more with the destroyer, I would no longer be allowed on board any military ship or facility without being escorted.”*

“Trent,” Mikey said, *“I feel like if we do this, it would feel like you were being punished for something you had no control over and was not your fault. It almost feels like a dishonorable discharge in some cases.”*

“I am aware of this. However, it is the only way to stop the imposter from doing any more damage.”

“Very well. Hopefully we can find a way to reinstate your commission once this matter is resolved.”

“With the Lykans in possession of my DNA, that would be next to impossible. If it were an access code or password, it would be easy to change and I would not have an issue such as this. But there is no way to change my DNA. The moment the Lykans know I am reinstated in the military, they may try something like this again.”

Mikey did not look very pleased with what was about to happen.

“This may not feel like a dishonorable discharge as it does a forced retirement,” Mikey said. *“Are you sure that there is no other way?”*

“Not that I can think of under the circumstances,” Trent said. “Captain Shannon, have a security detail report to the bridge. Inform them of what is happening and have them escort me to the brig. Unfortunately, the computer will not allow me into my Ready Room or my quarters without putting a force field up again.”

“This doesn’t feel right at all, sir,” Shannon said with an upset look on her face. “We have to put you in the brig for events that were not your fault at all.”

“Not to be rude to you all, but while I know how you all feel, now is not the time for sympathy. We need to stop this imposter now before he does any damage.”

“Yes, sir,” Captain Shannon said as she pressed the intercom button on her chair. “Security, please send a detail up to the bridge please. Instructions are to follow when you get here.”

She turned off the intercom.

“I figured it would be best not to announce why they are coming up for until they get here,” she said.

“Alright,” Trent said as he turned towards the image of Nora. “Rear Admiral Nora, as my final order if not advice to you, if your ships ever have a dud shell in them again...”

“I know,” Nora said. “We will make sure what happened yesterday does not happen again. I’ll spread the word.”

“Thank you.”

Nora’s image went away as Trent turned towards Drew’s image.

“Supreme Chancellor, my DNA might not be the only one scanned when the Lykan ambassador was here. Agent Tora of the RCIA, Ambassadors Wade and Autumn, Colonel Blair and Lieutenant Colonel Benja, and finally Vice Admiral Bridneo of the State Navy most likely had their DNA scanned as well. Now that we know the Lykans possess cloning technology...”

“I understand,” Drew said. “I will get in touch with those people and explain what has happened. Depending on how things go, they may have to be pulled from their current positions for the sake of security. We will arrange for a shuttle to bring you back to Luminaire as soon as possible. I also have to make a statement with the media before things get any worse. I have the noonday broadcast of NBS News playing right next to me and after they reported what happened in Serenus, your wife was no longer in the broadcast after a sudden commercial break.”

“I wondered how she was taking this considering the circumstances. I hate to ask this of you but if you could...?”

“I will get in touch with her shortly before I make an announcement and let her know what is going on. Hopefully this will put her at ease until we can get you back here to Luminous. We will also have your crew gather your personal possessions from your Ready Room and quarters for transport. I’ll have some people do the same from your office at headquarters until we can figure something out.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Captain Shannon,” Mikey said, “you will be in charge of the fleet in the meantime. I hereby promote you to the temporary rank of Commodore and you will take command of the fleet at Tranquillus until we can either find a way to reinstate the Vice Admiral or assign a new command officer for your ship.”

“Understood,” Shannon said.

At that point, the elevator doors opened and a security detail of four officers with weapons in hand walked onto the bridge. They came to attention in a line as Shannon and Trent turned towards them.

“Commodore,” Trent said, “go ahead and announce what is about to happen to the whole ship so that there is no confusion.”

“As you wish,” Shannon said as she activated the intercom. “Attention all hands. This is now Commodore Shannon speaking. As some of you have heard, a destroyer was stolen from the Serenus System with what is allegedly some assistance from Vice Admiral Trent. We have discovered that the Lykan ambassador who came aboard a few weeks ago has scanned the DNA of the Vice Admiral and others in the conference room. They made a clone of the Vice Admiral who managed to infiltrate the destroyer, provided orders to deploy the destroyer to Serenus, and later hijacked the vessel. There is evidence to support this based on readings from the conference room and the artillery shell used by the imposter to infiltrate the same Republic destroyer.”

Shannon paused for a moment to look at Trent. He could tell she was not happy to say what is about to happen next.

“In order to prevent the imposter from carrying out his agenda,” Shannon continued, “at the request of Vice Admiral Trent, we are going to remove his DNA from the military database.”

The guards looked at Shannon and then at Trent with surprised expressions. Trent could tell they knew why they were here now.

“While this will prevent the imposter from doing anything further with the stolen destroyer,” Shannon said, “it would make the Vice Admiral unauthorized to be on any Republic ship or facility. The Vice Admiral would have to be escorted to the brig as he won’t be allowed into his quarters or his Ready Room. This is not, I repeat, NOT an admission of guilt for any reason. This was his suggestion to protect the Republic. Please do not treat him as a criminal in any way. He will soon be escorted by a security detail in order not to be contained by the onboard force fields. I will be in command of the ship and the fleet until further notice. Shannon out.”

As soon as she turned off the intercom, she gestured the security detail to assume escort position around Trent. As soon as they did so, Trent turned to the screen with Mikey on it.

“I’m as ready as I will ever be,” Trent said.

“Very well,” Mikey said. *“I just hope this course of action is worth it. Computer, this is Grand Admiral Mikey. Verify voice and authorization code Echo-Niner-Five-Hotel-Charlie-Two-Delta-November-Tango.”*

The computer on Mikey’s end of the transmission gave a confirmation tone.

“Remove DNA authorization and signature for Vice Admiral Trent from all Republic military databases.”

“Confirmed,” the computer said. *“Removal of DNA authorization and signature for Vice Admiral Trent complete.”*

Trent looked at the security detail and gestured them to stand back for a moment to see if the force field would activate. As soon as they were more than five feet away, an alarm sounded and a cylinder of light appeared around Trent.

“I guess it is official now,” Trent said. “I’m no longer in the military.”

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*Bridge, Destroyer-829, Planet NR-A02-II Airspace
NR-A02 System, 11 Light-Years North of Serenus System, Camino Star Empire
12:15pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Where are they?”

The imposter was growing evermore impatient. He transmitted a threatening message along with the Republic dictionary in the direction of the Imperial capital to get their attention. The plan was to get the Empire to attack the destroyer for invading their territory and start a campaign against the Republic in order to draw their forces away from the Imperial border and force the Republic to do the same. So far no Imperial ships have shown up on scanners.

Then it hit him how long it took for the Kingdom to translate the Republic language. It most likely would take almost as much time for the Empire to translate as the Kingdom took. This was going to be a long wait.

He decided to get up from the communications station and head back over to the helm. He may need to get their attention. As he got halfway towards the helm, the alarms on the bridge went off. The imposter looked around and on the screen, thinking Imperial ships were detected. Suddenly, a cylinder of light appeared around him and contracted till it was within half a meter from him.

“Unauthorized personnel detected,” the computer said. *“Currently contained on the bridge.”*

“Computer,” the imposter said. “Scan my DNA. I am Vice Admiral Trent. Release me from this force field.”

“DNA scanned...DNA is not registered in military database. Force field will remain active until security team escorts you.”

“It can’t be. Don’t tell me they removed the Vice Admiral’s DNA?!”

The imposter was in a predicament that he did not expect. He never would have guessed that the Republic had such measures in place. It may have been a good anti-boarding measure but right now it was more of a nuisance than anything. If the imposter could not reach any of the controls, the Empire will know something is up if the ship doesn’t defend itself using its shields. The imposter wished he had left the shields raised at least, but they went down before jumping.

The plan also called for the ship to be destroyed and the imposter would reach the reactor in order to incinerate the body just as his consciousness would be transmitted back to his original body. If he could not reach the reactor or at least cause the ship to self-destruct, he could not destroy the evidence behind his ability to transmit his consciousness to this body and back.

The technology was something that was found and salvaged from the Camino Star Empire ships when it was discovered they had the means of reducing the crew needed to run their ships by having cybernetic implants in an individual who could control most of a ship’s vital functions with their mind. It also allowed them to transmit their minds to a clone body in the event of death. While this made the individual practically “immortal,” it also allowed the Empire to not use so much time and resources in training newer candidates for the role. Also, the “pilot” was not the sole operator of the ship as there were usually a total of three of them that take turns between shifts based on their remains in the wreckage. The Kingdom found these bodies and the technology and reverse-engineered it. Not only did it allow them to convert slaves as the sole pilots of Kingdom ships, but it allowed them to come up with this method of

espionage this imposter was assigned to. However, there was so much of the design of the technology that was like the Empire's that if the imposter were to be taken and studied by Imperial forces, they would know it was the Kingdom that created him despite appearances. The Empire has only come in contact with the Kingdom when it comes to alien forces so it would be easy for them to know who was responsible.

However, the imposter never came up with a backup plan for this sort of scenario. He needed to leave the destroyer as there was no longer anything he could do but just stand there and wait for either the Empire and/or the Republic fleet to arrive. The last thing he wanted was to answer their question in an interrogation.

Among the teeth that were in his mouth was a molar that contained a potent chemical similar to cyanide in case of such situation. However, while this would almost instantly kill him, it would not destroy the body. He would have to explain this situation to his superiors and to Advisor Forneido. He put his fingers in his mouth, yanked the tooth out, split it open to reveal the chemical, and put it back into his mouth. Within seconds, he could feel the chemical doing its job as he suddenly grew cold. At that instant, just as his heart stopped, he suddenly felt pulled from that spot and felt like he was going through a wormhole as his consciousness was transmitted back to his original body.

He suddenly awoke on a bed in a cloning facility in his original body. Glad to be in his original Lykan body, one of the attendants noticed he woke up and alerted his superiors. Now he had to explain to his superiors what had happened, a debriefing he was not looking forward to.

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*Brig, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
International Star Gate #1, Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
12:27pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Definitely not the most comfortable beds around.”

Trent did not know whether to laugh or cry about the situation he was in. Having to be in the brig was not what he envisioned he would be doing for the rest of the day. This did give him some time off away from work but he would rather spend it in his quarters than in the brig. Thankfully, no one other than the computer was treating him like a prisoner. They did have to put the force field up at the entryway so that the computer would not go off, though. However, everyone understood the circumstances and made sure he was as comfortable as possible.

The guard who was stationed there laughed a little bit at Trent's comment. The guard had not had anyone in the brig since the attempted kidnapping of some pop idols a few years ago. He never would have imagined the Vice Admiral being held here but thankfully it was due to the situation he was in that was no fault of his own.

“I'm sorry the bed is not to your liking,” the guard said amusingly. “Should I call room service to fluff up the pillows?”

“While you're at it, how about a steak cooked well done with some eggs?” Trent said jokingly. “I didn't have much of an appetite earlier considering what kind of a morning I had.”

The guard laughed.

“I know I should not be laughing,” the guard said, “but I have not had anyone in here for a while. Unlike other prisoners, I know you have not done anything wrong nor are you guilty of

anything that has happened. I feel like I can be more relaxed with you compared to an actual prisoner.”

“Well, that’s good considering. But seriously, were these beds always this hard?”

“They would probably get softer if they were used more often but obviously that is not happening.”

“True enough,” Trent said as he sat up. “If the news were to see me in here like this, they would think I really was responsible for what happened in Serenus.”

“It is probably a good thing that reporter from a few weeks ago went back to Viridis then, huh?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Is it alright for me to be so candid with you, sir?”

“Go ahead. I need someone to talk to after all of the stress I had endured due to that imposter and his actions.”

“I just had to make sure, considering you are still a Vice Admiral.”

“Maybe in title right now, but how long will that last once I get back to Luminaire?”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“My DNA has been removed from the system. Even if they add me back in, if the Kingdom manages to infiltrate our forces again with another clone of me, we would be doing this all over again.”

“It sounds like we need to remove your DNA from their systems.”

“A good idea but the Republic won’t be going on the offensive to do so anytime soon. At least, not at this time and not without them having a very good reason to do so.”

“So, are you saying that there is a chance that because your DNA could not be added when there is a risk of infiltration that you would have to leave the military permanently?”

Trent paused for a moment for he answered.

“That does appear to be the case now, doesn’t it? What good is someone in my position without access to secure areas and locations?”

The guard suddenly fell silent.

“Excuse me for being blunt, sir,” the guard said, “but that is a lot of…”

“You are still on duty,” Trent said. “Please be professional and refrain from swearing.”

“Yes, sir.”

“However, you are right. That is why I’m trying to wrap my mind around this whole thing. If we had caught that scanner on the Lykan ambassador while he was here, we would have been able to avoid this whole scenario.”

“I heard you were not the only one, though. What will happen to those people?”

“I doubt the RCIA agent’s DNA would do anything useful. Her DNA comes and goes from the military database whenever she is on assignment. As far as Wade and Autumn are concerned, they may be called back to Luminaire alongside Colonel Blair and Lieutenant Colonel Benja. As for the Vice Admiral Bridneo, his government may pull him from his current post for the sake of security. While this whole scenario is not our fault, I doubt we will be allowed into any secure facility or location ever again until our DNA has been removed from the Lykan databases.”

“That could be a very long time.”

“I know. While this may make my wife happy, I won’t be happy with my situation. This may also affect our livelihood. Both of our incomes allowed us to live rather comfortable lives at home. I would have to find something to do until the war is over in the meantime.”

“What if they limit your access to just this ship?”

Trent looked at the guard with a surprised look on his face.

“Limit my access?” Trent asked.

“Yes. I only have access to certain areas of the ship so I don’t see why they can’t limit your access.”

“The only problem is that my access is tied to my rank. A Vice Admiral has to have access to everything aboard the ship. However, I might need to see if my access could be limited to this ship and my office in headquarters. Could you get me a tablet for me to use to contact the Grand Admiral?”

“Yes, sir,” the guard said as he picked up a tablet. “Attention, bridge. Vice Admiral Trent has requested a line to Grand Admiral Mikey.”

“Understood,” Ro said as she appeared on the tablet. *“Could you pass the tablet to him, please?”*

“Yes, ma’am.”

The guard walked up to the force field and deactivated it. Trent got up and walked towards the guard who handed him the tablet. The guard stayed next to the force field controls so that the computer would not activate the force field and shut off the tablet.

“You need the Grand Admiral again, sir?” Ro asked.

“Yes, I do. Please get a hold of him.”

“Yes, sir. Wait one moment.”

The screen changed to a black screen with the words “Stand By” on it. After a minute or so, Grand Admiral Mikey appeared on the screen.

“Vice Admiral Trent,” Mikey said. *“I have to say your current accommodations leave much to be desired.”*

“I’ll say. Room service is terrible. I ordered steak and eggs and I haven’t gotten it at all.”

Both the guard and Mikey laughed.

“At least you still have your sense of humor. What’s on your mind?”

“I need to see if there is a way to reinstate my DNA but only to have access to just this ship and my office at headquarters.”

“I thought about that after we talked earlier and I was already looking into it. However, after talking with the Supreme Chancellor after you were escorted off of your bridge, we may have something else in mind for you.”

Trent was both surprised and puzzled.

“Something else in mind, sir?”

“Yes. When you get back to Luminaire, the Supreme Chancellor and I will give you a new assignment. I will grant you access to your quarters and Ready Room so that you can get your things. Trust me on this, Vice Admiral. We have bigger plans for you that you will like.”

Trent saluted.

“Yes, sir.”

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*Office of Anchorwoman Laura, National Broadcasting System Building, City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen ("Light") System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
12:36pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"It's Trent!"

Laura was in her office with the door closed crying over the news report earlier that sounded like her husband was being blamed for the theft of the destroyer from Serenus. No one bothered her during at all because they knew how she was feeling considering there had not been any follow-up or statement from either the government or the military to the best of her knowledge.

She was suddenly surprised when her phone went off and it showed that the caller was her husband. She accepted the call.

"Oh my goodness, Trent!" she said still in tears. "What is going on? They are saying that you were responsible for the theft of a destroyer at Serenus! I couldn't get a hold of you or anything!"

"Calm down, sweetie," Trent said. "Everything is okay and the Supreme Chancellor will make a statement shortly."

"Well, what happened?"

"What I am about to tell you may seem unreal but it has proven to be true. Remember when I first encountered the two alien nations weeks ago?"

"How could I forget? You kept it a secret from me at the time about the real reason why you were out in Tranquillus to begin with!"

"I'll take that as a 'yes' to my previous question. The Lykan ambassador who came aboard my ship apparently had a scanner that not only got the map of the Republic at the time but it also contained a DNA scanner."

"Wait a minute. Are you telling me that the Kingdom has your DNA and possibly made a clone of you or something?"

"We have evidence that shows that to be correct. They made a clone of me."

"But how did that clone infiltrate the military?"

"There was an enemy fleet in the forty-second system of the DP Zone that engaged our forces. One of the Republic destroyers had lost its shields and one of the enemy ships fired a round into the hull which was mistaken for a dud when it did not go off. Turns out it housed the imposter inside who quickly got out and hid before the shell was extracted from the hull."

Laura was starting to calm down as Trent was explaining but was slowly being filled with dread.

"Am I to assume that because it was a clone of yourself that he was, in short, 'programmed' to access your email because it is linked to your DNA?"

"Yes. He used that to send orders the next day to Rear Admiral Nora of that fleet who accepted the orders and allowed the destroyer to be deployed to Serenus. He also shut down my phone in the process which I will have to reactivate once a statement is made by the government. If I do so now when everyone thinks I am a traitor to the Republic, no one would do so for me."

"I was a bit concerned with how people in our own neighborhood and here at work were going to react."

“That won’t be a problem soon. Apparently the imposter not only issued the orders but also used my email to verify and try to deflect inquiries about the destroyer’s deployment in the process. Once the ship reached the station in Serenus...”

“He ordered the crew to leave the ship so that he could take control, right? The crew was interviewed by the local reporter there who told them their part of the story.”

“That probably didn’t help things. I’m surprised they issued their own statement so soon but I guess they were that distraught with the situation. I take it afterwards that the fleet in Serenus engaged the destroyer once it left the bay?”

“Yes until the ship jumped eleven Light-years away going north.”

“Yes, I heard it jumped there and it has been confirmed that the system it jumped to was indeed a system belonging to the Camino Star Empire.”

“So, that was the imposter’s plan or rather his mission. They take a ship of the Republic into Imperial territory and attack their forces in the name of the Republic.”

“Correct. The imposter may have known the ship only has enough Salire Purpura Crystals to make one jump so this was a one-way suicide mission to get the Empire at war with the Republic. This would divert our forces to the Northern Region as well as the Empire’s. The Kingdom would then encounter weaker resistance from both nations which would allow them to invade both.”

“So, what is the Republic going to do about the situation?”

“Well, that’s were things get a little complicated. In order to prevent the imposter from fulfilling his mission, I suggested doing something that I knew would cause me some problems if done so.”

“What was it?”

“To keep the imposter from controlling the destroyer any further, I had Grand Admiral Mikey remove my DNA from the database. With that removed, the imposter would be captured by an internal force field and would no longer be in control of the ship.”

“That’s great! Wait a minute...then what happened to you? Wouldn’t it do the same thing to you?!”

“Yes and it did. I had to be escorted by our security team to the brig as it was the only place the ship would release the force field. Everyone on board knows this was my suggestion and they’re not treating me like a criminal. However, with the Kingdom in possession of not only my DNA but others who were with me as well, the military cannot put my DNA into the system back in without severely limiting my access to where I can go. While this is doable, Mikey has stated that they are bringing me back to Luminaire for another possible assignment along with my things. I’m not sure what they have planned for me, but there is a civilian shuttle being hired to take just me and my things back to Luminaire. They are granting me access to my quarters and my Ready Room to help get my things together. Shannon ended up getting a promotion too. She is now a commodore and will command the fleet and the ship from this point forward.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, sweetie. You’ve been in command of that ship for so many years that this must feel like a forced reassignment.”

“It does, but it is the only way to make sure that the imposter’s mission would not succeed.”

“At least you get to come home soon. You’ve been out in Tranquillus for too long in my option.”

“Oh, I am well aware of your position on where I was stationed and for how long. The shuttle won’t be here until tomorrow though because of the late notice to get one. This gives me time to pack my things. It will also be the last time I sleep in my quarters on board among a few other things for a while.”

“Any idea what the military will be doing involving the destroyer that was stolen?”

“I was told that they are looking at sending a fleet to that same system to retrieve the ship but make it clear to the Imperial forces if any are there what has happened. They are currently loading the ships with twice as many crystals in order to jump back to Republic space along with the stolen ship. This will be announced as well.”

“Thank goodness. I was worried all day when I first heard about the destroyer first going through the Viridus System.”

“I’m sorry for what you had to go through involving all of this. I heard what happened during your broadcast earlier today.”

“Yeah. I could not believe I let my emotions get to me during the broadcast. That is incredibly rare for that to happen.”

“It happens though I am sure everyone at your office understands under the circumstances about the situation. I’m wondering why they didn’t put someone else in your place to begin with?”

Laura coughed for a moment.

“Well...”

“Don’t tell me that you told them you would be alright going on the air after hearing what was going on?”

“Well, you can’t say I didn’t try to be professional?”

“I can’t believe you went on the air like that.”

“Well what was supposed to do? People know me. If they saw that I was not on the air, there would be questions that I don’t really feel like answering.”

“I see. I guess that makes sense but please don’t do that again, alright?”

“Alright, sweetie.”

“Well, I have to get going. I need to start packing. You should be fine by the evening news once the announcement goes out. I will try to get my phone reactivated a little bit afterwards so you can reach me again.”

“Alright. I will talk to you later.”

“Talk to later. Bye-bye.”

“Bye-bye.”

As Laura hung up the phone and put it down on her desk, she felt like a huge weight was lifted off of her. Things were finally being answered and Trent was indeed not responsible but the circumstances were definitely unfavorable for everyone, especially him. At least he was coming home soon. Right now, she needed to get her composure back and she would have to go get something to eat, but she figured it was best to wait until after the announcement was made.

She didn’t need people asking her what it was like to be married to a traitor right now.

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