



PROLOGUE

WHISPERS

President Richard Adar listened carefully as his Secretary of State, Horace Green, detailed the information from his latest trip to the colony world of Troy. It had been an important mission to mediate a dispute between the planetary mining guild and the Colony's Governor.

"So both sides wound up compromising." Green was saying, "The miners agreed not to strike and the Governor agreed to repeal the new taxes that he put into place on their mining stocks."

"What did both sides give up?" Adar asked, leaning back in his chair and chewing on his pen.

"The miners agreed to putting off the negotiations over health care reform and the Governor agreed to hear them out before next years elections." Green replied with a smile.

"That's a risk." Said Jon Baxter, the President's Chief of Staff. "If he doesn't play his cards right, it will cost him his re-election bid."

"I think it's courageous." Said Laura Roslin, the Secretary of Education. "I think it shows that he is taking their grievances seriously. If he plays his cards right, he'll have no trouble winning re-election."

Adar smiled as he listened to Roslin. He had always admired her down to Earth stance, even if it was somewhat politically naive. Nevertheless, he agreed with her in this instance. "I think Laura's right. Governor Sharp has made the right decision on this. Jon, schedule a trip to Troy for next week. I want to tour the mines there and speak with the miners personally. I want to meet with Jeffery as well, to demonstrate our support of his plan."

"That will mean putting off your scheduled trip to Geminon sir." Baxter said as he consulted his personal computer pad.

"Nonsense," Adar said, "We'll cut back a day on the Geminon trip and devote it to Troy. After all, they're in the same sector."

"Yes, Mister President." Baxter replied.

"Is there anything else?" The President asked as he looked around the room at the faces of his gathered cabinet members.

"Mister President," said Niles Hoffman, the Secretary of Defense, "I have one thing here that should be brought to your attention."

Adar sat forward, his interest immediately piqued since Niles Hoffman was a shrewd man who rarely spoke unless he had something important to say. "Go ahead Niles." Adar said.

"Sir," Hoffman said as he unrolled a map of Colonial Space, "Last week, the Battlestar Atlantia picked up some unusual energy readings from across the Armistice Line."

"What kind of readings?" Adar asked.

"Preliminary indications are that they were the result of an uncontrolled nuclear reaction some sixty S.U.'s into Cylon territory." Hoffman replied.

Everyone sat up at this news and the increase in tension in the room was palpable.

"Did the Valkyrie pick up anything like this when she did her recon mission?" Adar asked.

"No sir." Said Admiral Corman, the fleet military liaison. "The Valkyrie's Commander reported no activity that suggested the Cylons were dealing with nukes."

Adar nodded as he considered the mixed company he was in. Not all of his cabinet knew of the orders he had given to send a pilot across the armistice line.

“I think we can save the rest of this discussion for another time folks. Thank you again for all of your hard work.” Said the President.

One by one the members of the Cabinet filed by President Adar paying their respects until Admiral Corman came to him.

“Admiral, meet me in my office this afternoon with all the information you have on Adama’s mission.” Adar said.

“Yes sir.” Corman replied.

Adar watched as Corman left. He tried to comfort himself with the thought that the readings could be just random astronomical phenomenon but something inside him told him that it was wishful thinking. Whatever it was, he needed to find out quickly.

Adar had been a young boy when the Cylon War had been waged but he remembered all too vividly the stories his father used to tell him at night about the horrors he had seen inflicted on man by machine. He had no desire to see that happen again, especially while he was President.

Yet, while he felt these emotions, the part of his brain that was purely political and knew that there was an election coming soon told him that there had never been a war time president who had lost re-election.

Adar shook that thought away and focused on the present. He had a meeting in twenty minutes with Laura Roslin, the Secretary of Education, about a potential teachers strike.

Putting the thought away for the moment, he began to organize his thoughts towards his meeting. Yet as he moved to his desk and began reviewing the file he had on the teachers union’s grievances, he couldn’t get rid of the nagging feeling that the Cylons were up to something.

CHAPTER 1

CONFRONTATIONS

Stacie Percival and Jason Allen, both Viper Pilots, both squadron commanders, looked at the pictures of their son Tommy and smiled. In the image he was smiling while sitting on a swing. He had white blonde hair, like his mother, and his father's sly grin.

Jason couldn't help but feel a tug of pride inside his chest. "He has your hair."

"And you're attitude." Stacie said half sarcastically as she shook her head.. "I can't ever get the boy to take anything seriously."

"Well he *is* only six." Jason replied. "He still has plenty of time to get serious about life."

Stacie sighed heavily and turned towards Jason. "You see? That's exactly why I was reluctant to tell you about him. He should be thinking of his future and you act like it means nothing that he doesn't." she said.

Jason stared at her for a moment and then laughed out loud. "My gods, you're *serious* aren't you?" he said incredulously. "Stacie, the boy is only six! Let him be a kid for gods' sake!"

"Like you were?" Stacie shot back defensively, "I don't know if you understand this Jason, but life is a lot different outside of Caprica. Growing up on Arelon didn't leave a lot of time for fun and play. We didn't have all the money and luxuries that you did growing up. We had to work hard from the time we could walk."

Jason shook his head. "Look," he said, "I understand..."

"No you don't!" Stacie interrupted, "How could you? Your mom and dad were rich corporate execs who could afford to let you do whatever you wanted. We had to get by with what we could make on the farm and even then it was barely enough to put food on the table at times! There was no running off to the movies to see the latest film out of Aquarion for us. We had to work hard every day just to make it."

Stacie paused for a moment to get her emotions under control before turning to Jason and looking at him through tear filled eyes. "I swore that I wasn't going to live my life out doing what my mom and dad, and their mom and dad before them, had done. I wasn't going to get stuck on Arelon farming food for rich colonies to eat while we scraped away with barely anything. That's why I worked so hard to get into the fleet academy on Picon. That's why I worked so hard to get into flight school."

Jason nodded, remembering her efforts. "I know you worked hard Stacie, I saw you do it. Everyone worked hard though."

“Not everyone.” Stacie replied shaking her head, “People from the rich Colonies had it easier.”

“That’s not true!” Jason said defensively.

“It’s not?” Stacie shot back, “How many people in our flight class were from Arelon? Or Sagitaron? Or Troy or even Leonon? How many?”

Jason made to answer but she held up a hand forestalling him. “Seven.” She said, “Seven out of a class of one hundred! All the other ninety three cadets were from Caprica, or Geminon or Picon or Tauron.”

Jason held his hands up in surrender. “Look I understand why you feel that way but I don’t want our son having to live like that.”

“He’s not *our* son,” Stacie said defensively, “You weren’t there for his birth, and you haven’t been there all these years. What makes you think you can come into our life and start dictating terms now?”

This time Jason stood, his anger threatening to overwhelm him. “I am not dictating terms.” He said through clenched teeth, “And as for me not being there, well you made sure of that didn’t you?”

With that he spun on his heel and stormed out of the room leaving Stacie alone at the table she and he had occupied.

Immediately, she knew what she had said to him was wrong but she couldn’t help it. In her mind, Jason had grown up a spoiled rich kid who knew nothing of hard work and she didn’t want that for her son. In fact, she was willing to do almost anything to make sure it didn’t happen.

Gathering her things and steeling herself and her resolve, she moved from the lounge down the hall to her cabin where she was left alone with her thoughts.

Then she started to cry.

In the bowels of the ship where Doctor Zylman had set up his office, he and his new colleague, Doctor Creighton, were pouring over the ancient texts of Pythia and of the information that they had recovered on Kobol, yet the more they studied the information, the more frustrating it became.

“My brain is mush.” Said Creighton as he rubbed, what felt like, sand from his eyes.

Doctor Z yawned and nodded. “Mine too. How long have we been at this?”

Creighton checked his watch and shook his head. “Eighteen hours.”

“Holy frack.” Zylman replied. “I didn’t even realize...”

Creighton waved him off. “Nor did I. I think we need some sleep old boy.”

“But the commander...” Zylman began to protest.

“The commander will not be happy if we can’t speak at the briefing tomorrow due to lack of sleep.” Creighton interrupted.

Zylman, too tired to argue the point, nodded his agreement. “I think I’ll go get some rack time then. See you in a few hours?”

“Sure.” Creighton said, watching as Zylman left the room.

When he was sure the door was closed, he pulled out a small square device from his pocket and pressed a button. “Mission continuing according to improvised plan. Should make contact on this course in four weeks. No success in gathering intell on light bringer but efforts continue undetected. Will report at next interval. Hail Sae’tzar.”

Creighton tucked away the device into his pocket and made a mental note to find a way to transmit the message before he met with Zylman again. After all, it wouldn’t do to have Zylman find out about his government sponsored mission. Then he would have to kill him and, truth be told, he was actually rather fond of the man.

Still, Creighton thought to himself, if I have to kill him I will. Mission first, duty always. Such is the life of a warrior...

Lieutenants Shelly Archer and Allain Halloran both laughed as they tipped back yet another glass of Ambrosia. Both officers were enjoying a rare day off and Halloran, remembering an earlier promise from Archer, had decided to take her up on the offer of good conversation and a bottle of Ambrosia.

“So, did anything ever become of that thing with the colonel?” Archer asked.

“What do you mean?” Halloran asked as he poured another glass for both of them.

“You know exactly what I mean.” Shell said as she pushed him lightly.

Halloran chuckled. “Ok, so what if I do?”

“Well? What happened?” Archer pressed.

“Look, you know I can’t tell you those sorts of things.” Allain replied.

“Come on, Al. I’m the one who told you about it.” Shelly said reaching for her now full glass and bringing it up to her lips. “You know I can keep a secret. Hell, I haven’t told anyone else about this so far.”

Halloran nodded. “Yes and its good that you have too. The commander hasn’t been in a good mood lately and I wouldn’t want to see what he would do if this started circulating.”

“What’s wrong with the commander?” Archer asked, her curiosity piqued.

Allain shook his head taking another sip of his drink. “I don’t know. He has been cranky ever since we got that last dispatch from home.”

“Ah.” Archer replied. “Maybe he got some bad news?”

“Maybe.” Allain said, replacing his cup on the table, “Speaking of news, I saw that you got a letter from home. How is your family?”

“All good.” Shelly said feigning a smile. “Kids are doing well in school and Robert just got a promotion at his job.”

“That’s good to hear.” Said Allain standing. “Well, I better get going. I need some rack time if I am going to be on shift in eight hours.”

Shelly smiled. “Ok. Come back anytime.”

Allain smiled back at her and hugged her. “Sure thing.”

The hug lasted for several moments, much longer than was appropriate for a married woman and a single man but Allain didn't notice. He was caught up in the moment.

He and Shelly Archer had been flirting around for weeks now but hadn't made anything of it. In fact, the hug that they were sharing was the closest they had come to anything intimate but they could both feel the temptation inside them.

Allain was the first to draw back from the embrace. Feeling color come to his cheeks as he looked into her eyes, his face adopted a sheepish expression.

"Um, good night." He said slinking back towards the door.

"Good night." Shelly replied, watching as he left.

With one last look of longing Halloran was out the door and moving down the hallway to his own quarters. Inside his stomach was churning. He had a personal rule to never get involved with married women, but out on a cruise like this it got awful lonely. Having some pleasant female company was a luxury on a long mission.

Shaking the lustful thoughts he was having out of his mind, he made his way back to the cabin he shared with four other junior officer and, remembering to set his alarm so that he could wake up on time, collapsed onto his bunk and fell into the deep sleep of the inebriated.

CHAPTER 2

STORM CLOUDS

Matt Campagna and Nat Tubanos sat at a round table in the early evening night surrounded by folders and loose papers as they poured over their notes about the next morning's news broadcast.

Matt wore a frustrated expression on his face, which was usual as of late, reflecting his inability to find out anything substantial on the Prometheus story he was so adamant about.

Nat, however, was the picture of calm serenity. Secretly, she found Matt's obsession with the Prometheus project to be somewhat amusing. After all she hadn't seen him this excited about something besides Gaius Baltar, his idol, since that had been in journalism school together.

"Ok," she said trying to get Matt's mind off of his worries, "So tomorrow we interview Janis Torrina and John Brooks about their new movie... what's it called again?"

"Battlestar Artimus." Matt replied without looking up. "Story about how the Cylons return and attack the Colonies and how one lone Battlestar fights back and retakes them after the fleet has been destroyed."

"That sounds interesting." Nat replied.

"It's a crock." Matt replied, finally looking up from his notes. "I mean seriously, one lone Battlestar against a Cylon fleet? My gods! We had hell just trying to beat them back last time and we had the entire Colonial Defense Fleet working against them." Matt waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. "One Battlestar against the whole Cylon fleet wouldn't last five minutes."

Nat rolled her eyes. "Ever the pessimist." She quipped.

"Ever the realist." Matt retorted. "My question is this: Why are we worrying about some stupid movie premier when what is possibly the biggest story of our careers is out there? We should be trying to follow up our leads."

Nat shook her head in exasperation. "Matt, the only *lead* we have is one document with a government seal that may or may not be authentic. Hell, for all we know this thing could be forged!"

"I've always trusted my instincts Nat," Matt replied undaunted, "And my instincts tell me that there is something real behind this. Something big is going on and I want to know what it is."

“But why?” Nat pressed, “Why is this story so damned important to you? Is it because of Adar?”

Matt’s silence to her question confirmed her guess.

“Damn it Matt! Ever since he kicked you off the campaign bus you have been on his ass. For God’s sake, it’s over! He’s the President and that’s that.” Nat said.

“No it isn’t!” Matt said looking her in the eye. “He kicked me off that bus because I caught him playing dirty politics and he’s doing it again with this Prometheus mission and I’m not going to let him get away with it this time.”

Nat sighed and sat back in her chair. “Fine, you track down the Prometheus story. I’m going home and getting some sleep.”

“Ok.” Matt replied, already back searching through his notes.

Nat shook her head and stood to leave. *I’m going to have to do something about this fast before he becomes too obsessed.* She rolled her eyes thinking about the last time he became obsessed with something. *Dear Lords of Kobol I’ll never get any thing out of him again!*

Richard Adar, President of the Twelve Colonies of Kobol, studied the map that Admiral Nagala had laid out before him. On it, he saw the stars of the twelve primary colonies as well as those stars where they had set up subsequent colonies. This wasn’t what held his interest though.

It was the blue line that marked the border between Cylon and Colonial space. More precisely, it was the area beyond that line.

“As you can see sir,” Nagala was explaining, “The reading came from this star system here.” He finished pointing to a star approximately ninety S.U.’s away from the line.

Adar nodded. “And you’re sure that this radiation signature is artificial? It looks to me like this system has an abnormal star.”

“Yes sir,” Nagala replied, “But this spectrometry reports that this isotope that we detected has never been seen before and is not naturally occurring.”

“Well if it’s never been seen before, how do you know if it’s not naturally occurring?” Adar asked.

“Because sir,” said Gaius Baltar as he strode into the room, “The isotope appears to be similar to a radioisotope that we used in our own nuclear arsenal back during the Cylon Wars.”

Adar stood up and motioned for Baltar to join them over the map. “I’m glad you agreed to work with us on this Gaius.” Said the President, “It’s nice to have a fresh perspective.”

“Yes,” Baltar said with an almost patronizing tone, “But fresh perspective or not, the Admiral is correct. I believe that this isotope is the result of an evolution of sorts from the nuclear material we once used and that the Cylons took with them, after the war.”

Adar nodded and sat back. “This could represent a direct threat to Colonial security.” He said.

“Yes sir.” Nagala agreed, “But if we send another mission across the line we could end up with a war on our hands.”

All three men were silent for a moment as stories and memories of the Cylon War drifted through their minds.

“Surely we could win if such an engagement occurred...” Adar said.

“Mister President,” Nagala began carefully, “We barely fought the Cylons to a standstill the last time we went to war with them. Millions of people died and this was when we knew where they were and what their capabilities were. We have no intelligence on them now and no ideas on what their capabilities might be.”

“So you’re saying that if we went to war with the Cylons we would lose?” Adar asked, aghast at the thought of the Cylons over running his forces.

“No sir, I’m not saying that at all. What I am saying is that we don’t know what they are capable of and until we do, it wouldn’t be wise to provoke them.” Nagala replied.

Adar remained quiet as he considered what the Admiral had told him. After a moment he said “Send a Battlestar out to the line to show the flag, one of the newer ones like the Prometheus.”

“Sir,” Nagala said, “The next Nova class Battlestar isn’t due to launch for another six months.”

“Which one is that?” Adar asked.

“The Orion, sir. She’ll be going out under Commander Simeon Talbot.” Nagala said, consulting his notes.

“Admiral, I want the Orion pressed into service ASAP.” Adar said with urgency. “You can tell Admiral Alston that if the Orion isn’t put to space in three months, I’ll be looking for a new commander for the Scorpion Ship Yards.”

Nagala nodded wearily. “Yes sir. But even three months might be overly ambitious.”

“I don’t care. Whatever resources you need, you will have. Getting the Battlestar Orion out to the border is the top priority.” Adar replied. “Until then, however, I want your best ship and best commander out there.”

“I’ll send the Pegasus.” Nagala said, “Admiral Cain is the best we have and the Pegasus isn’t due to put in for another six months.”

“Good.” Adar said standing. “Report back to me when you learn something.”

The Cylons known as Doral, Cavil, Leoben and Simon, all watched from above as the cloud from the nuclear explosion that they had just set off rose up at them from the surface of the dead moon that they were orbiting.

“Look at the blast radius.” Cavil said in awe. “My god, just one of those things could level an entire major city.”

“Don’t get too excited brother.” Leoben said dryly, “There is no atmosphere or other obstacles to reduce it’s effectiveness down there.”

“Has this been tested in such an environment?” Simon asked, his eyes glued to the scene of destruction unfolding beneath him.

“Not yet. We’re still searching for a suitable world.” Doral replied.

“We could always test it on Caprica.” Cavil said with a smile.

All four men shared a brief chuckle before returning to their silent observation of the blast cloud.

“It looks like it could touch us all the way out here.” Cavil said.

“Possibly, but the Basestar is in high enough orbit that we shouldn’t be hit by any debris.” Doral replied.

“Still, just to be safe though,” Leoben said gesturing for the Centurion that stood guard next to them, “Go to the command center and inform them to increase our altitude by ten kilometers.”

“By your command.” The Centurion droned in monotone as it turned to comply.

Leoben smiled at the Centurion’s response.

When they had first been programmed, the Cylon’s creator had vainly installed a program into them to respond with “By our command” every time a human gave them an order.

When they had first rebelled against their masters, they had wanted to remove to code from their vocabulary but some forward thinking Cylons had decided to embrace and use it.

After all, the humans had been using Cylons to prosecute their wars for years. In fact, one of the final commands the humans had given the Cylons had been for them to go forth and terminate all resistance on Sagitaron during the time they had tried to secede from the Colonial government.

The Cylons from that time forward had taken a perverse pleasure in saying “By your command” whenever they took a human life since it was the last command the humans had given them.

Nowadays though, the Cylons used the saying as a sort of salute between each other, except in the case of the Centurions who actually did obey all the commands of the twelve human models. They also had a shared determination to never be commanded by humans again.

“I think we are ready to go to the next stage of testing.” Cavil said, bringing Leoben out from his reverie.

“We still need to test it on a habitable world first to see its effects.” Leoben said.

“Oh please!” Cavil said, throwing his hands up in exasperation, “We know what its effects will be: It will go boom and everything will die.”

“I’d like to be a little more precise than that brother.” Leoben replied calmly.

“Me too.” Said the Cylon known as D’anna Biers. “I think more tests need to be done. Six and Eight agree with me.”

Cavil rolled his eyes. “Of course they do.” He said, “Fine, fine, conduct the damn tests. Not like we’re going to all die anytime soon now is it?”

Leoben looked around the gathered heads as they all nodded in agreement. “I’ll send out scouts to find a suitable world.” He said.

“Good.” D’Anna said. “And while we’re waiting, I have something I want to show you.”

“Oh, a surprise?” Cavil asked sarcastically. “You know how I *love* those...”

“You’ll like this one brother.” D’anna said with a smile, “One of my scouts picked it up out by the Armistice Line.”

“What is it?” Doral asked calmly.

“Not ‘*what* is it’ but ‘*who* is it’.” D’anna clarified with a smile, “And the answer to that question is that he calls himself Bull Dog...”

CHAPTER 3

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Stacie steeled herself as she knocked on Major Horvath’s office door. It had been two weeks since she had been shot down over the surface of Kobol, most of which she had spent in the infirmary recovering. Now, having been up and about for the last forty eight hours, she had been summoned to the CAG’s office, ostensibly to discuss her recovery and her temporary assignment that she would be doing until she was certified to fly again.

Still, she knew that the revelation about her son was going to come back to haunt her and she knew that the conversation she was about to have wasn’t going to be pleasant and, needless to say, she wasn’t looking forward to it.

“Enter.” came the voice of Karla Horvath from beyond the door.

Taking one last calming breath, Stacie tapped the button that opened the door and used her crutches to maneuver through them, watching as they slid shut behind her.

It sounded like a coffin lid closing.

“Come in captain.” Horvath said gesturing to the seat across from her desk.

Stacie made her way to the chair and almost fell over trying to get into it.

“You ok?” Horvath asked.

“Fine ma’am.” Stacie replied.

“Good.” Said the CAG. “Doc tells me that you are healing well. Says it shouldn’t be long until you are fully functional again.”

Stacie smiled. “Yes ma’am. The drugs he gave me to help my bones knit worked well.”

“Hurt like hell though huh?” Horvath asked.

“Yes ma’am.” Stacie replied. “You sound like you have some knowledge of them.”

Horvath nodded. “I broke my radius two months out of flight school in a martial arts competition. Doc said if I wanted to fly again that I would have to use them and pray a lot.”

“I guess it worked then.” Said Percival.

“Yeah, but growing bone that quickly hurts like a son of a bitch.” Horvath replied pulling out a file.

“Look,” said the CAG, “I’m not going to hold you up here long. I just need to brief you on your new duties.”

“Whatever you need me to do ma’am.” Stacie replied eagerly.

“Good.” Horvath nodded approvingly, “You’re going to be the new Intell officer for the commander. You’ll be reporting to the X.O. from now on and he will be giving you your assignments.”

Stacie began to feel hopeful. She had dreaded the possible assignment she would be getting in the interim, afraid she would be shuffling useless papers back and forth while she recouped. Intelligence duties, however, offered her a chance to be somewhat useful. Definitely not the worst duty shoe could have pulled.

“I understand ma’am.” She replied with a smile. “But I’ll be coming back once I get certified for flight again right?”

Horvath was silent for a moment and the hopefulness that Stacie had felt died quickly as icy cold dread crept into Stacie’s stomach.

“Look Stacie,” Horvath began carefully, “You know what the missions’ regulations are about related service members. Hell, one of you isn’t even supposed to be here.”

“I know but I never knew that Jason, I mean Captain Allen, was going to be on this mission.” Stacie said.

“I know,” Horvath replied understandingly, “And that’s why no severe consequences are being pressed in this matter.”

“No severe consequences?” Stacie exclaimed. “You mean revoking my flight status isn’t severe?”

“You could have been busted in rank captain.” Horvath said firmly. “You’ve lied on official documents and violated mission regulations by not coming forward as soon as you found out about Captain Allen. The Commander could have busted you all the way back to ensign for that.”

Horvath paused and allowed the gravity of her words to sink in before continuing. “Look Stacie, you’re a good pilot and I don’t like losing you on the line, but we have to make sure that one of you is at least somewhat safe during this mission. We can’t go off orphaning your son if worse comes to it.”

Inside, Stacie was ice cold and infuriated, yet she managed to keep her cool about her. “I... understand ma’am.” She said through gritted teeth. “Will that be all?”

Horvath looked at her for a long moment then sighed sadly. “Yes captain that will be all.”

Stacie stood and moved her crutches beneath her for support before offering her salute, which Horvath returned quickly.

As she watched Percival go, Horvath couldn’t help but let a little sadness creep into her heart. In the short time she had known her, Percival had been one of the best squadron commanders she had seen in a long time. It was a shame that she had to now be grounded because of something as trivial as this.

Still, rules were rules and Horvath was one who always followed them. Nevertheless, she vowed to herself that she would find a way to get Stacie Percival back into a Viper cockpit.

“Commander on deck!”

“Carry on.” Said Commander Turner as he entered the Combat Information Center of the Battlestar Prometheus.

Master Chief Palmer watched from his position behind the helmsmen as Turner approached the center table and studied the star charts there. After a moment, he turned to the young crew man in the prime station. “You have it.” He said moving down and out towards the commander.

“Evening sir.” Palmer said as he sidled up to the situation table. “You’re up late.”

Turner looked up from his paperwork. “I couldn’t sleep. What’s going on up here Chief?”

“All quiet sir.” Palmer reported. “X.O. went off shift about an hour ago and Major Argyle went down to engineering to handle something that cropped up there.”

“How is he adjusting to duty in the C.I.C.?” Turner asked.

“Not bad, for an engineer.” Palmer replied. “He just has to get used to how things run up here. A lot different than working with the snipes you know.”

Turner nodded. “That’s why I put you on shift with him Chief. I trust that you’ll nursemaid him through these difficulties?”

Palmer smiled slyly. “That’s why you have me here sir.”

“Indeed it is.” Turner said.

Suddenly, an alarm began to blare from the ships status board. Palmer was there in an instant.

“Violent decompression on C deck, sections thirteen through fifteen sir!” Palmer reported.

Turner was in action almost immediately. “Seal off the emergency bulkheads and stand by...” he began, but was cut off by Palmer.

“Belay that sir. False alarm.” The Chief said.

“Say again?” Turner said as quiet returned to the room.

“False alarm sir.” Palmer reported breathlessly. “Someone in engineering did an alarm systems check and didn’t notify us.”

Turner was silent for a moment but Palmer could see the anger and irritation in his face. “Tell Major Argyle,” the commander said through gritted teeth, “That the next time he doesn’t post a systems emergency check with the C.I.C. I’m going to have him cleaning the sludge from the decks for a fracking month. Am I understood chief?”

Palmer nodded. “Yes sir.”

“Good. I’m going to go to bed now. Don’t wake me unless something important comes up.”

Palmer watched as Turner strode off the deck. “Whew.” He said, exhaling strongly. “I don’t believe I’ve ever seen him that close to losing his temper.”

Michael ‘Archangel’ Johnson, the commander of the Raptor group assigned to the Prometheus, smiled as he came across the form of Jason Allen in the pilots lounge.

“Hey there kid.” The enormous ebon skinned man said with an amiable smile, “How you doing?”

“Who you calling kid?” Jason asked as he feigned indignation. “You’re not that much older than me you know... are you? Come to think of it, you never did tell me your age.”

Archangel laughed and pulled up a chair across from Jason. “Age is nothing but a number my friend.”

“Truer words have never been spoken.” Jason replied sharing in Archangel’s humor. “But seriously, how old are you?”

Archangel gave a conspiratorial look to Jason and said “Old enough to know better and young enough to get away with it.”

Jason shook his head smiling. “Fine, keep your secrets friend.” He said and then adopted a rueful expression. “Everyone has them.”

“Yeah,” Archangel said sympathetically, “I heard about that.”

“Yeah.” Jason replied taking a large swallow of his drink. “You know, I was content to let her have her way up until this happened. She didn’t want nothing to do with me and wanted me to have nothing to do with our son and I was cool with that. Now though...”

Archangel waited silently for a moment, watching the internal war being waged inside his friend’s head and heart. Finally, he said “The question for you is: What has changed?”

Jason chuckled a bit. “Everything.” He said. “I mean, I was a young guy when this all started. After the break up with her I had absolutely no desire to be a husband or even a boyfriend for that matter, not to mention a father. All I wanted was my freedom. Now though, all I can think of is that little boy and how I’ve missed out on some of the best years of his life and I’m angry about it.”

“But who are you angry with?” Archangel asked.

Jason was quiet for a while as he thought about the answer to that question. Certainly he was angry with Stacie for keeping him away from his son but inside he felt angrier with himself for allowing her to do it.

“Both of us.” He finally said. “There is a part of me that absolutely hates her for pushing me out of his life, for keeping the secret of her pregnancy from me and then not even allowing me the option of trying to be his father. Yet at the same time, it’s not like I didn’t know. Her mother told me about it as soon as Tommy was born and I could have taken action... but I didn’t”

“Why?” Archangel asked.

“Because it hurt too much.” Jason replied quietly and when Mike didn’t respond, he continued. “You see, Stacie and I always had a... contentious relationship. She had worked so hard to get into the academy and flight school and she always had this feeling that the rest of us were looking down on her and maybe some of the others did but I didn’t.”

“So she had an inferiority complex.” Archangel said flatly.

“Yeah, but I never understood why.” Jason said. “She was just as good in the cockpit as any of the others in our class.”

“Except you.” Archangel replied.

“What?” Jason asked.

“She was as good as anyone else in the class except for you.” Archangel replied.

“Well... maybe but I mean, come on! My father was a pilot in his spare time and I’ve been flying since I was old enough for my feet to reach the pedals.” Jason replied defensively. “She never had that kind of experience and still she was one of the best.”

“But it wasn’t good enough for her was it?” Archangel asked.

“No, it wasn’t.” Jason replied, his anger growing inside as the memories of her came back to him. “She always wanted to show me up, always wanted to surpass me.”

“And did she?” Archangel asked.

“No.” Jason replied, a look of sadness coming over his face. “There was an accident during the final flight maneuvers phase. She was leading one group and I was leading another. We both had to plan and execute a combat insertion into enemy controlled airspace.”

Archangel nodded. “What happened Jason?”

Jason took another large swallow of his drink before he continued. “Her plan was good but she pushed her people too hard. My team had scored in the ninety eight percentile range and she was hell bent to beat it.”

“And?” Archangel pressed.

“And,” Jason continued, “Two of her pilots collided during one of the maneuvers. One of them was my best friend Tom. He...” Jason stopped as his voice cracked with the emotion he was feeling.

Archangel nodded. “He didn’t make it.”

Jason shook his head, tears forming in his eyes. “Nope.” He said. “Didn’t even have time to eject.”

“What did the review board have to say?” Archangel asked.

“Hah!” Jason barked, “The review board concluded that it was pilot error due to lack of sleep the night before.”

Archangel cast a suspicious look at his friend. “You sound like you don’t believe that.”

Jason smiled ruefully. “That, my fine friend, is because I *know* why Tom didn’t sleep the night before. Stacie had him so stressed out that he *couldn’t* sleep. He was too worried about the test the next day.”

“What did Stacie do to have him so stressed out?”

“Huh?” Jason asked, confused.

“What did she do?” Archangel repeated. “Surely, she must have done something extraordinary to get a well trained pilot like your friend so stressed out that he couldn’t sleep, much less fly straight.”

Jason shook his head. “I don’t think she did any extraordinary to him. I mean, she out his feet to the fire a few times but that’s because he had a bad habit of slacking off sometimes.”

“If you had been in her shoes would you have done anything differently?” Archangel asked.

“I don’t know.” Jason replied after a moment of thought.

Archangel was silent for a moment allowing Jason to process his thoughts before he asked his next question. “Jason,” he said quietly, sympathetically, “Do you think it’s possible that it wasn’t her fault?”

Jason sat upright. “What do you mean?” he asked.

Archangel chose his next words carefully because it was clear that the alcohol had begun to have an effect on his friend. “What I mean Jason,” he said, “Is have you ever considered that maybe it *wasn't* her fault? That maybe it was pilot error?”

Jason looked ready to explode for a moment but Archangel remained quiet and calm, waiting for the emotions to pass through his friend.

“Yes.” Jason finally answered quietly. “I have considered it and I can't honestly say it *was* her fault. I guess I just never got around to forgiving her.”

“It's not her that you should be forgiving Jason, it's yourself.” Archangel replied.

Jason nodded wearily. “You're probably right. Still, I can't forgive myself if she hasn't forgiven me.”

Archangel smiled at his friend and placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “At last, we find enlightenment.”

Jason chuckled and cast an appreciating look at his friend. “Have you always been this wise Mike?”

Archangel shook his head. “My only wisdom comes from the Gods whom have blessed me my friend.”

Jason smiled. “That *have* blessed you, old buddy.” He said standing. “Thanks.”

“Anytime kid.” Archangel replied, “Anytime.”

CHAPTER 4

OLD WOUNDS

Jonathan Turner was sitting at his desk inside his quarters staring at the photo of a beautiful woman with golden blonde hair when a sudden knock at the door startled him out of his reverie. “Enter.” He said placing the photo face down on the desk.

As the doors parted Colonel James Ryan entered carrying a bottle of Ambrosia and two glasses. Without preamble he sat down, uncorked the bottle and began pouring.

“What’s the occasion?” Turner asked curiously. “Did you get promoted and I didn’t know about it?”

Ryan ignored him and finished pouring the Ambrosia, then passed a glass to his commander. “You’ve been walking around with a stick up your ass for the last three days and I figured a drink or two would loosen you up.”

Turner looked over his X.O. and wondered for a moment if the man had gone insane. “Excuse me?” he said irritably.

“You heard me sir.” Ryan replied firmly. “You’ve been a flaming ass to everyone on board for the last three days and it’s time you loosened up.”

Turner was aghast and his legendary patience was wearing thin quickly. “You’re way out of line Colonel.” He growled.

“Am I? Ryan asked. “Can you honestly tell me that you’ve been your normal self these last few days?”

Turner stood up and leaned over his desk. “My personal demeanor has nothing to do with you Colonel.”

“That’s a load of shit, sir, and you know it.” Ryan replied standing up and looking Turner in the eye. “Everyone knows something is wrong, we all see it.”

Turner’s eyes darted away from Ryan’s, toward the photo on his desk. “I’m fine Colonel, thank you for...”

“Gods damn it Jon!” Ryan shouted slamming his fist down onto the desk. “I’m more than just your fracking X.O. here, I’m your friend! Talk to me for gods’ sake!”

Turner gave Ryan a laser intense stare for a moment before backing down and sitting back in his chair. "I suppose you're right Jim, I apologize."

"Don't apologize." Ryan replied, "Just tell me what the frack is going on with you."

Turner continued to exchange stares with Ryan for a moment then picked up the photo and showed it to him. "Denyse wrote me, told me she is getting re-married."

Ryan sat back down in his chair. "Damn Jon, I'm sorry."

Turner waved it away. "Not your fault."

Ryan nodded but said nothing.

"I always knew it would happen sooner or later." Turner said as he looked at the photo, "I just never thought it would be so soon."

"Jon, it's been four years." Ryan replied.

"I know." Turner replied with a half smile. "I guess I was just hoping..."

"What? That she would wait until your retired?" Ryan asked.

Turner chuckled. "Yeah, something like that."

Ryan shook his head. "Jon, you can't hold onto her forever. You had ten good years and two fine boys together but she has moved on. You need to as well."

"How?" Turner asked. "How do I move on from someone like her? She was... amazing."

"Yes, she was." Ryan agreed, "But she never did like the military lifestyle. She couldn't handle you being away all the time."

"I know." Turner said. "She made an ultimatum: either her or the fleet. I chose the fleet."

"Do you think you made the wrong choice?" Ryan asked.

"No." Turner quickly replied, "Being in the Colonial fleet was something I had dreamed of all my life, since I was a boy. I wasn't about to give it up and I don't think it was right of her to ask me to."

"Then why are you pining away now?" Ryan asked.

Turner smiled. “Because I miss her.” He said, “Because I know that this is probably my last tour and I am afraid of coming home to an empty house when it’s all said and done.”

“Your last tour?” Ryan asked. “What do you mean?”

Turner smiled slightly for his X.O. “Come on Jim, you know how this is going to end. Whether we find Earth or not, when we get back I’ll be due to rotate out and chances are I won’t get another command. They’ll want to promote me or have me teach at the academy and I just don’t want that. Besides, after commanding this ship I think I’ll be ready for something new.”

“Like what?” Ryan asked.

Now, Turner picked up his glass and took a long sip from it. “Mmm, that’s good.” He said placing the glass back on his desk. “Do you remember the little house I bought in Theedis a few years back?”

“Yeah,” Ryan replied taking a drink from his own glass. “The one on the face of Mount Arathia that over looks the ocean. I remember it well.”

“Well last year, after I got promoted, I had some work done on it. My dad is overseeing it. When I get done with this command, I am going back there to retire.” Turner said leaning back in his chair.

“And what are you going to do once you retire?” Ryan asked shaking his head. “I can’t see you just sitting around and writing your memoirs.”

Turner laughed. “Me neither.” He said. “Actually, I think I am going to take up my dad’s offer and help him run the fishing business.”

This time Ryan laughed. “You? A fishing boat captain? I can’t see it.”

Turner smiled. “Actually, I miss fishing with my father. We haven’t done it in years.”

“Yeah, well as I remember it, you and he weren’t on speaking terms for quite a while.” Ryan said pouring another glass for Turner and himself.

“Well he wasn’t too happy with my decision to join the fleet.” Turner said picking up his now refilled glass. “We Leonites are generally a pacifistic bunch. Not a lot of us who join the military.”

“That’s the truth.” Ryan said taking a sip of his drink, “In fact, I think you are the only person from Leonon that I have ever met in the service.”

Turner chuckled. “It’s not pronounced Lee-oh-non, its Lee-oh-nin.”

Ryan arched his eyebrow. “You Leonites have a funny accent, you know that?”

“No worse than Arelon.” Turner said imitating the gravely voiced accent that was common of that world.

“Or Tauron.” Ryan drawled out.

Both men had a good chuckled over that. Their former commander, Admiral Cain, had come from Tauron and when she was angry she had had to work hard to keep her native drawl from coming out.

“It’s time to move on Jon.” Ryan said finally after several moments of silence.

Turner nodded thoughtfully. “I guess it is.” He said. “I just have one question.”

“What’s that?” Ryan said.

“Where did you come up with ‘flaming ass’?” Turner asked smile.

Both men laughed again.

Gaius Baltar shook his head as he looked over the latest reports from the Battlestar Pegasus. “Yes, I definitely see the pattern here sir.” He said to President Adar, who was sitting across from him. “These radioisotope signatures are definitely artificial and with the frequency that we have been seeing them, I have to assume that someone is testing nukes.”

“You mean the Cylons.” Adar said.

“Possibly.” Baltar replied. “But the truth is, we don’t know much about that region of space and we probably never will since we can’t go there without starting another war.”

Adar sat back and listened to his friend. Arrogant though he might be, Adar knew that Gaius Baltar was one of the most brilliant men alive and he trusted his word over almost anyone else.

“Do you think that it might be someone other than the Cylons?” Adar asked, “Some new form of life that we haven’t encountered?”

Baltar shook his head. “No, but one can’t be too sure. After all, the Cylons took much of our technology with them when they left the Colonies. If, by chance, they ran

into another race that was capable of assimilating their technology into their culture, it would explain why we see so many familiar markers in these readings.”

Adar shook his head in amazement. “A species able to defeat the Cylons... my Gods it took everything we had just to fight them to a standstill.”

“Yes.” Baltar said taking a sip from the tea cup in front of him. “However, whether it is the Cylons or whether it is some new alien species, I think we should exercise caution. The out put of these weapons is astonishing to say the least. They easily rival our own arsenal, perhaps even surpass it.”

Adar nodded. “I thin you’re right. In fact, Gaius, I’d like you to head up a commission to study ways to improve our defenses.”

“Me sir?” Baltar asked, shocked. “But I have no experience in military matters, no taste for politics.”

“That’s why I want you Gaius.” Adar said. “You’ll be able to cut through all the B.S. and get straight to the heart of matters.”

“Sir,” Baltar stammered, “While I am honored by your show of trust in me I...”

“Gaius, it’s not just this I’m worried about.” Adar said, cutting him off. “You know that we sent Prometheus off into unknown territory. What if they run into someone and that someone sends a force back here to us?”

“I would think that that is a risk you considered before sending them on their mission, a mission, I might add, that I thought was foolish to begin with.” Baltar said.

“Yes, yes I know Gaius.” Adar said, waving his comments away, “You don’t know how many times I have been tempted to recall them and to give up on this mission entirely. The possible rewards are just too great to ignore though.”

“Yes,” Baltar said, “But do they out weigh the risks?”

Adar was quiet for a moment, then said “I hope they do.”

Baltar considered the President’s answer for a moment, and then nodded in agreement. “Very well, I will head up this commission for you Mister President... as a personal favor.”

Adar smiled. “Thank you old friend, I won’t forget this.”

Baltar shared the President’s smile. “Happy to be of service.”

EPILOGUE

ONE STEP FORWARD...

Jason knocked quietly on Stacie's cabin door and awaited her answer. After what seemed like hours, he finally heard the muffled "Enter" from the other side.

Upon entering he noticed two things immediately. The first thing was that Stacie's eyes were red and swollen and her face radiated anger. The second was the set of pilot's wings that were burning in a dish on her table.

"What's going on?" he asked cautiously.

Stacie barked a harsh, humorless and vicious laugh. "What's going on?" she asked, her tone icy. "You should know since you're the one who brought this on."

Immediately, Jason was on the defensive. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"I've been grounded!" Stacie growled.

"It's just temporary, until you..."

"No!" Stacie screamed angrily, "It's permanent! I've been removed from flight status!"

Jason rocked back on his heels as if he'd been punched. "But why?" he stammered.

"Why?" Stacie asked incredulously as she stood up on her crutches. "You *dare* ask me why? It's because of *you*!"

"Wait a fracking minute!" Jason said, "What did I do to get you grounded?"

"YOU... TOLD... THEM!!" Stacie shouted.

Suddenly, it all clicked for Jason and his anger threatened to overwhelm them. "They grounded you because I told them about Tommy." He said.

"Yes!" Stacie hissed. "And now you get what you always wanted! Me, out of your way!"

"I never wanted this!" Jason snapped back.

“Didn’t you?” Stacie snarled. “All through flight school, you hated that I was just as good as you are. Hated that a poor farm girl from Arelon could out fly the big shot rich kid from Caprica!”

“Get it through your head Stacie! I never was competing against you! For frack’s sake, I loved you!” Jason said, angry tears welling up in his eyes.

“Loved!?” Stacie said with a harsh laugh. “Someone who loved me wouldn’t have accused me of getting his best friend killed! Someone who loved me wouldn’t have run off and left me alone and pregnant!”

“I never knew you were pregnant! You never told me!” Jason yelled back. “You lied to me and kept me from seeing my son you self righteous bitch!”

“Yes I did!” Stacie retorted just as angrily, “And if I have my way about it you’ll never see him!”

Jason stood there stunned for a moment, then spun on his heel and marched out of her cabin, the doors sliding quietly shut behind him.

It was good thing that the walls of the ship were sound proofed. He couldn’t hear her scream in anger as he walked away.

Dear Denyse, I know it’s been a while since I wrote, but life has kept me pretty busy lately. I received your letter the other day, but with the communications delay I would imagine that the ceremony has already taken place. I bet you looked as beautiful as the day you walked down that aisle for me.

I have to admit that my reaction to your news was mixed at first. Nevertheless, I am happy for you. I am sure that he is a good man and will give you everything that I couldn’t and for that I am grateful to him.

Denyse, you are an amazing woman and I only hope your new husband realizes how truly fortunate he is to have you in his life. I have no doubt that you will be a good wife to him.

In closing, I want to wish you both well. I have always loved you and I always will and I wish you nothing but happiness and long life.

*All My Love,
Jon.*