

Chapter 8

Helo and Apollo reported to the *Galactica* as soon as they jumped back to the Fleet. The mood on the CIC changed. If this had been just another Cylon report the actions would have been obvious. With Starbuck and the Blackbird lost, things became more uncertain. Adama had risked everything to save her once, would he do it again?

Tigh didn't have any doubts about what should be done. "Tactical, recall all Vipers. Set up the coordinates for the next jump, inform the Fleet, and set the clock."

"Belay that!" Adama's voice was raised just enough to carry over the buzz of activity on the CIC. Tigh gave his commander a belligerent look. Adama continued, "We're in no immediate danger here. I want to get more information about this Cylon base. We don't want another fleet following after we jump." There. Make it a policy decision. Never mind what his heart was telling him.

Tigh didn't buy it. "The only way to get more information is to jump in there and take it. Are you going to risk the fleet for the sake of a jumped-up race driver and her toy Viper?"

"The whole fleet doesn't have to go in. Just the *Galactica*. The Fleet can head to the next jump, and we'll rendezvous with them after we've decided what to do about this base."

Tigh knew he wasn't going to win this. And he knew he'd gone as far as he could go. "Belay that last order. Recall all Vipers. Send rendezvous coordinates to the Fleet. Now what." The last, in a lower voice, to Adama.

"We get as much information as we can from the Raptor's logs, then figure out what our strategy is."

"Our strategy is to get ourselves blown up because of a frakin' pilot," replied Tigh, but he kept his voice so low that Adama didn't hear him.

It didn't take long for the Fleet to react – or the one part of the fleet that mattered, at least. "Commander Adama. Colonial One for you."

"Thanks, Dee." Adama grabbed the handset. "Madame President."

"Commander. Am I understand that the *Galactica* is not going to accompany us on the next jump?" Roslin spoke in ironical political mode. The real message was "Do you have any justification for this crazy idea?"

Well, two, really. "That is correct, Madam President. Before we lost contact with Lieutenant Thrace she informed us that the next system is

occupied by Cylons. The *Galactica* will investigate and join you at the next rendezvous.”

“I understand, Commander. Lieutenant Thrace has an important role in our quest to find Earth. We need to rescue her.”

Damn. She had to say it aloud. At least she’d given Starbuck’s rescue a religious justification, so that it would no longer be just a man looking for the woman he thought of as his daughter. Nevertheless, this had to have a military justification. “We need to assess the Cylon presence in this system, Ma’am.”

Tigh snorted. Just loudly enough for Adama to hear him.

Roslin didn’t. “I’m still not convinced that this is a Cylon installation, Commander. However, we need to determine that, too. However, Commander,” she continued, “remember, that we need to resupply the fleet as quickly as possible. Don’t spend too long in there. Get Lieutenant Thrace, get the information, and rejoin us. We need you.”

In other words, don’t be too stupid. “Agreed, Madame President. *Galactica* out.”

The plotting chart was set up to show the target system. Helo lead the briefing. “The system has two gas giants, Commander, several rocky ones, and the usual bunch of debris. The planet that Lieutenant Thrace was approaching before she was shot – before we lost contact – is Kobol class. Infrared and radio detectors indicate the presence of a modest base of some sort on the planet. If they were human, maybe a few thousand people. There is also an installation of some type on one of the moons of the larger gas giant. The Blackbird launched a drone to take pictures of it. He placed the pictures on the plotting board. “As you can see, there is an extensive system of buildings around this large circular object. Emplacements here, here, and here,” he pointed, “look like some kind of weapons. There are also installations that look for all the world like flight hangers. Which would make sense, since they have to get on and off the place somehow. Again, if this were a human installation, we’d estimate one to two hundred personnel. With Cylons, it’s anybody’s guess.”

“We have someone who wouldn’t have to guess,” said Adama. “XO, have the prisoner brought up here.”

Funny, she still thought of herself as Sharon Valerii, or even Boomer. Not as her number, like most of the others. *I’ve been living with these people way*

to long, she thought. A small twinge in her stomach reminder her that she had a bigger connection to one of the crew than just a long time presence.

Fortunately, she was Cylon enough that she could find other things to occupy her thoughts. Just for practice, she ran through a simulation where she would overpower the guard at her next feeding, grab his keys, slip behind the armed guards just outside the cell block, make her way to the landing tubes, steal a Viper, and escape.

The probability of that turned out to be less than one percent, with death (for this body) at ninety percent. If she seduced the guard, the probability of success rose to five percent, but a ninety-five percent chance of death. Not good either way. However, the situation was always changing, so maybe there was another way out.

The situation changed again as Tigh knocked on the door of the guard-room. The guard opened it. Tigh and a squad of troopers entered. *Why do they think they need a dozen of them to stop me? One bullet will do it, just like my predecessor.* She didn't have direct memories of the previous Sharon's death, but she could imagine it. All too clearly.

"Get up," Tigh yelled at her, then turned to the guard, "get her cuffs and collar on, and take her to the CIC."

Probably not going to shoot me this time, thought Valerii. "What do you want?"

"You'll find out when we get there." Tigh paused, "We found some more of your friends. Maybe you can help us meet them."

Valerii had seen video of her shooting. The guards hadn't really protected her from the front. This time she was completely surrounded. Crew members, some of whom she remembered as friends, stared at her, most with expressions of revulsion, but some with pity. *Stop that! Don't think of me as human!* If these people began to believe she was human, she might, too. And that would lead to a tremendous sense of guilt for all her kind had done. *Not that they didn't have it coming – but still.*

Karl Agathon (Helo!) was on the CIC, along with Apollo and the command staff. Helo stiffened as saw her, and instinctively looked at her stomach. *No, I'm not showing yet – but soon. Soon our child will be born, if they let it.*

Tigh personally supervised the clamping of her leash to the overhead bulkhead, and her ankle and wrist cuffs to the chair. Predictably, he looked like he was enjoying his work, and, equally predictably, he made the leash

just a little too short and the cuffs just a little too tight. This was going to be an uncomfortable session.

As if there was any other kind.

Adama was talking to her. "We have indications that the next system is occupied by Cylons. Tell us what these installations are." Typical. Not even a pronoun. Very good, Commander. Do your best to keep thinking of me as a machine.

She looked at the pictures. "This is not our technology."

Tigh slapped her across the face, hard. "Liar."

Valerii raised her voice. "I'm not! We never build anything that way. You know it." Though the ring in the middle did stir memories. Deep memories.

Another slap. "Why would Cylons build something like this, then?"

Someone yelled. Probably Helo.

"Do you have proof that this is a Cylon installation?"

Another slap. Boomer was starting to lose awareness. "Who else would be out here?" cried Tigh.

"Maybe a race more cruel than yours."

Tigh's fist brought unconsciousness.

Apollo restrained Agathon. If looks could kill, Tigh would have been dead by now anyway. Adama sighed. Well, he hadn't expected too much. "Take her back to her cell. Have Doctor Cottle look her over," he told the guards. Then, he turned to Tigh, "XO." How much discipline could he enforce here?

"Sir." The rest of the CIC crew looked at the pair.

Not much, apparently. "Put yourself on report."

"Yes, Sir." He left with the guards.

Adama turned back to Helo and Apollo. "You know, she might be right. This doesn't look anything like Cylon installation. And, in any case, it's not a major installation. Should be a cakewalk."

"We can't be sure, though," said his son, "and even if it isn't Cylon, it might be hostile. And the weapons might be hidden. It might not be a cakewalk."

"I know. Brief the Viper crews. We're going to jump as close to the moon as we can. We'll split the crews, half to the moon, the other half to the planet Starbuck was heading for. Get as much information as possible, find the Blackbird, and rescue Lieutenant Thrace. Then we jump to the rendezvous point."

“Yes sir.”

Adama raised his voice. “Set the clock for jump. Inform the rest of the Fleet that they can jump at will. We’ll meet them at the rendezvous in 48 hours.”

“Fleet informed, sir.”

“Captain,” said Adama, turning toward his son, “you and Lieutenant Agathon head to the flight bay. We’re going to need Vipers and Raptors ready as soon as we complete the jump.”

“Yes, Sir,” replied Apollo. He gently lead the still smoldering Helo off the CIC.

On the Colonial One, Laura Roslin was having – not exactly a vision, certainly not anything like her previous ones. But there was a – a feeling. *I’ve got to be there*, she realized.

“Billy.”

Her aide turned to her. “Yes, Madam President.”

“Let me talk to the Captain. We’re going to make a slight alteration in the deployment of the Fleet.”