

Chapter 9

The base was already in a frenzy when O'Neill and Robbins returned with their prisoner. The welcoming committee included most of SG-1, but Burkemeier and Wilkes led the pack. They weren't happy.

"Where the hell have you been?" Burkemeier yelled at O'Neill. Wilkes gave him a look that said "if you weren't my superior officer, I'd strangle you right here and now."

"Don't you ever listen to your comm?" Burkemeier was practically in his face. Not pleasant, unlike former times.

"Now, Dee, ..."

"Don't 'Now Dee' me! A possible enemy fighter got past Mitchell – your hand-picked wonder-boy – and disappeared somewhere to the west of here. We've got no idea who, what, or if anything is out there – and then you and Robbins disappear, and we have to search for you as well." She looked for Robbins, so that he could be part of this lambasting, but Wilkes had identified him as someone *she* could rake over the coals. Burkemeier turned back to O'Neill. "So who is this?" pointing at Starbuck. "She's not one of ours."

Jack O'Neill wasn't the quickest thinker on the planet, but he could connect dots pretty well. "Well, Dee, I think this might be the 'who' you're looking for."

Burkemeier did a double-take and looked over Starbuck more carefully. A uniform, for sure, probably a fighter-pilot's, but not anything that belonged to an Earth force, and it didn't look like any of the Allies, either. Young, maybe thirty, good age for a pilot who could evade Mitchell with a rocket engine. Bloody lip, must have put up some kind of fight. And cuffed. O'Neill didn't handcuff people who didn't give him trouble. She looked down at Starbuck, and spoke in Goa'uld-Ancient: "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

Starbuck straightened in her seat and gave the correct reply: "Thrace. Kara. Lieutenant, Colonial Fleet. 674503219."

"She thinks she's a POW," said O'Neill, in English. "I don't know who she thinks we are, or why she thinks we're fighting her, but that's the situation. I figured if I didn't cuff her she'd try to escape and maybe get killed in the process – if she didn't kill Robbins and me first."

"If she's the pilot of that ship, then she's almost certainly got military training," said Burkemeier, also in English. "Well, if she wants to be treated like a POW, we can oblige." She turned to the MPs now surrounding the Humvee. "Take her inside. Find someplace you can lock her up. Make sure

there's nothing in there that she can use as a jimmy or a weapon."

As the guards pulled Starbuck out of the vehicle, Daniel Jackson came up to O'Neill and started talking. "Jack, do you think this is a good idea? I mean, this woman's obviously from a fairly advanced civilization, and if they can fly rocket-powered craft through the galaxy then they might have technology that we can use against the Ori and the remaining Goa'uld. Shouldn't we be friendly with her? We might be allies some day."

"We can be allies, Daniel, when we decide that she's not an enemy. She's already decided that we are."

Kara Thrace knew brigs. This wasn't one. It looked like officer's quarters, if someone had posted a guard outside the door and (she looked out to make sure) the window. Possibly there was a camera in one of the overhead lights, but it wouldn't do to go looking for it right now.

Doubts were beginning to form in her mind. Could there be so many types of Cylons? She knew that they repeated types – let's see, multiple copies of Valerii, Simon (she couldn't forget Simon), Conoy, Doral, and the one Boomer had referred to as "Six." But if all these people here were Cylons, then why did they use so many copies in the Fleet?

And then they were being, if not nice, at least reasonable with her. Of course, she'd been tricked by Cylons before – but so far, at least, no one was trying to convince her to have a baby. If she got free, she'd have to look for the Farms, and destroy as many as she could.

But were these Cylons, or people?

"So, what is she, Doc?" O'Neill asked the planets head MD.

"Well, sir, it appears she's human," replied Dr. Connors. "No signs of a symbiote, nor a pouch, no naquadah in the blood that I can detect. Genetically, as far as we can tell in the," she glanced at her watch, "fifty-two minutes since I got the skin sample, she's human. But I'll know for sure in a day or two."

"We may not have a day or two, Rebbecca," said Carter. "We don't know where she came from, but if she's the pilot of Mitchell's ship, then she can't be alone."

"Why not?" asked Jackson. "Vala had her own ship, after all. Others we know have, too."

"But this was not a long-range ship, according to Colonel Mitchell's reports, Daniel Jackson," said Teal'c. "As it did not originate in this system,

there must be other ships nearby which aided its arrival.”

“In any case, we’ve got to try to get some answers out of her.” O’Neill thought for a second. “Daniel, why don’t you try. Her language, when she was talking, had words in it that I didn’t recognize. Maybe you can place the dialect and tell us where she’s from. And maybe she’ll take a liking to you.” If so, he thought, heaven help her, considering what’s happened to your other girlfriends.

Someone was knocking on Starbuck’s door. She looked up from the bed, then sat up. Hmm. She’d seen him as they were leading her to this place. Kind of cute, but pretty good-sized muscles. Wearing glasses? Could a Cylon wear glasses?

“Hello,” said the figure at the door. “Can I come in?” She could understand him better than most of the others she’d contacted so far. (And didn’t Cylons speak the common tongue?)

“Thrace. Kara. Lieutenant, Colonial Fleet. 674503219.”

“I know, I know, you’re a POW and you’re not supposed to talk to your captors. But,” continued Jackson, “I’m not in the military, and I’m not one of your captors.” Not directly, anyway. “I just want to get to know you. My name is Daniel Jackson.” He waited a moment. “Can I come in?” he asked again.

Starbuck nodded. Jackson entered the room and sat on the chair. “So,” he started, “are you Thrace Kara, or Kara Thrace. I’m assuming ‘Colonial Fleet’ isn’t part of your name. What people call us is important, isn’t it?” Jackson was talking faster, though not so fast as to not be understood. “Take Teal’c. That’s the big Jaffa with the gold brand on his forehead, you might have seen him when you came in. He always calls me ‘Daniel Jackson.’ And he started by calling Sam ‘Captain Carter’ until she got promoted and then it was ‘Major Carter’ and now it’s ‘Colonel Carter.’ It’s very important to him that he get the name just right. Now with me, I prefer to call people what they want to be called. For example, I call General O’Neill ‘Jack,’ because we’re good friends and I’m not under his direct command, I’m not military, I think I mentioned that, and I call Colonel Carter ‘Sam,’ that’s short for Samantha, because that’s how I was introduced to her and because I don’t think of her as an officer, I think of her as a scientist and a woman. And”

And on he went. Lords, could a Cylon babble on so much? If so, then their thinking must be so muddled that it wasn’t possible that they could be a threat. But Cylons were a threat. And a very subtle one, at that. This

‘Daniel Jackson’ could be very good a deception, like Simon back on Caprica. However, she had to do something to stop this constant yapping.

“... Now Dr. Burkemeier, the military all call her Dr. Burkemeier, but I call her Dee, because she’s a physicist and most physicists are on a first-name basis with others who have a Doctorate, and”

“Starbuck”

“Excuse me?”

“They call me Starbuck.”

“OK, Starbuck, I’m Daniel.”

Might as well play along, Kara decided.

“Please to meet you, Daniel.”

“So, Starbuck, where are you from?”

One of the Colonies, obviously, you frakkin’ toaster. But what could it hurt. The Model Six I killed on Caprica knew who I was. She must have heard it from the Boomer on *Galactica*. So they already know all this stuff. This must be some kind of setup to get me to reveal something they *don’t* know. And the only way to find out what they don’t know is for me to play along. Frak, I’ve already fooled that Simon-Cylon, so I can do this, too.

Jackson was expecting the “Thrace, Kara” routine. So he was surprised when Starbuck looked at him and said “Caprica.”

“And where is that?”

OK, she shouldn’t play too dumb. Self-respect was involved, after all. “It’s one of the colonies you destroyed, you fake human!”

Jackson looked confused. “What do you mean, we destroyed one of your colonies? When? Where was it?” *Shit*, he thought. *I’ve always worried about this. We go along destroying suns, connecting Stargates to black holes, broadcasting Ancient energy blasts throughout the galaxy, we’ve probably destroyed hundreds of worlds without knowing it. And this one found us here.* Something else occurred to him. “And why do you call me a fake human? Or one of the Replicators? Or something like the robots Harlan created?”

“You’re a frakkin’ Cylon!”

Jackson had no idea what frakkin’ meant, but he got the general tone. But, “What’s a Cylon?”

“A machine! You’re nothing but a frakkin’ machine! We built the first models! You’re a machine that killed billions of humans!” How stupid did they think she was?

“No, I’m not,” Jackson replied, calmly. “I’m pretty sure about that.”

This was getting silly, though Starbuck. I mean, I'd have to be completely stupid to fall for any of this. (But all of those different types of people – Cylons – out there. *Could this be another Colony? That would make it ...* “Right,” she said aloud, “then tell me where you're from. When you were born. Who your parents are.” *A good Cylon would have that backstory, but let's see what he wants me to believe.*

Jackson thought for a moment. No reason not to tell her. “I was born on Earth, in 1970. That's thirty-five years ago, though of course your year probably doesn't exactly match ours.” You're going into explain-it-all mode. Stop. “Uh, never mind. My parents – died when I was young. My only surviving relative is my grandfather, and he's off in the galaxy somewhere.”

“Earth?” Doubts filled Starbuck. Was this the fulfillment of the prophecy? No. He's just a Cylon. Good patter, but a Cylon.

“Yes, Earth. We call ourselves humans, but out here we're known as the Tau'ri. You might have heard of us. We've been battling the Goa'uld for the last ten years, and we're the original home of humanity – Ancient and modern varieties.”

“Liar. Humanity comes from Kobol.”

“No, I think if you visit Earth you'd find a convincing fossil record, showing that mankind evolved on Earth.”

“Evolved?”

“Developed from earlier life-forms.”

“The Lords of Kobol created us. We created you. You revolted.”

Jackson sighed. Great. A fundamentalist who think she's a robot-master. But, from her race's point of view, she was probably correct about the first part. Some Goa'uld had transported her people to a terraformed record. There would be no fossils record on her world. Everything would look like it just – appeared.

“Sometime I'll show you Earth. We'll go to a dig. Then maybe you'll believe me. Humanity began on Earth. Then we were scattered throughout the Galaxy by the Goa'uld.”

Starbuck remembered the beginning of the Sacred Scrolls. *Life here began out there.* Could it be true? But, wait. He called his homeworld “Earth.”

“Earth was the thirteenth Colony of Kobol! The Sacred Scrolls say so! What you say can't be true!”

“We did. I can prove it, when you come to Earth.”

“Liar.” But, they were on the way to Earth. Could Earth be reaching out, back home? Maybe they'd forgotten Kobol, thought that they were the

only humans.

Jackson was having similar thoughts. Obviously Starbuck's people had forgotten their origins. Many civilizations had preferred to forget their enslavement to the Goa'uld. Even those as advanced as the Tolan and the Aschen. OK, bad examples, but still it was possible that Starbuck knew nothing about how her people got to – Kobol?

To Starbuck, he said "I'm not a liar, but I don't really expect you to believe me right now. Why don't you tell me about your colonies?"

"You know everything about them already, tin man."

"Tin man?"

"You're a Cylon."

"Oh, yes, you mentioned that. Well, if you think I'm a Cylon, then pretend I'm one that has had its – you use the impersonal pronoun when you talk about them, right? – suppose I've had my memory wiped. Tell me what you think I should know."

"Why should I do that?"

"Maybe you can persuade me not to be your enemy."

Probably a trap, thought Starbuck. *But how am I going to get and information out of him – it – if I don't play along?* Aloud, she said, "All right. I was born on Caprica."

"Which is one of the Colonies of Kobol, right?"

"Yep. One of the twelve. Well, thirteen, if you count Earth."

"So how many people live on Kobol?"

"None."

"None?"

"No, the planet was abandoned when the Colonies were founded."

"I suppose there was some reason for leaving? Invasion?" Starbuck snorted. "A big asteroid impact?" Jackson continued, "Environmental problems?"

Starbuck quoted the Book of Pythia, "And the blaze pursued them, and the people of Kobol had a choice. To board the great ship, or take the high road through the rocky ridge."

"We have similar stories on Earth. And your people boarded the great ship?" asked Jackson. When Starbuck nodded, he continued, "What happened to the people who took the high road?"

"I don't know. I only know that the road is lined with gravestones."

"Oh, so you've been there?"

Starbuck considered. Did the Cylons know that the fleet had visited Kobol, and had directions to Earth? Yes, if Caprica-Boomer was in contact with them. She'd obviously been in contact with the *Galactica*-Boomer, somehow, so why not these Cylons? And there might be other spies in the fleet, as well. So play along.

"Yes," she answered, "not long ago."

"Why was that?"

Oops. Maybe he didn't know. Better end this before I start telling him *Galactica's* access codes. "I don't think that's something you need to know, Mr. Jackson."

"Dr. Jackson," he replied. "But I said you can call me Daniel."

"You know, Daniel, I'm really tired. Can we continue this later?"

Hmm, thought Jackson. Something about Kobol touched a nerve. Maybe I should go find out what information Sam's gotten from the ship. If we can find the location of Kobol there, maybe we can pay a visit and learn more about the Colonies. Aloud, he said, "OK. Well, there's everything you need here to make yourself comfortable. I'll come back in the morning."

Out the door went Daniel Jackson, but the guards remained.