

## Chapter 14

Mitchell hadn't had much experience with brigs. Hospital rooms, yes, but not brigs. This, however, was obviously a brig, complete with a bars, a thin mattress, and a toilet in full view of God and everyone.

Not to mention an unarmed guard outside the cell, and armed guards just outside the cell block door. At least he wasn't handcuffed and collared, like the woman he'd seen in the next cell on his way in. *Jeez, I just started a shooting war. Wonder what she did?*

It didn't hurt to ask. The wall between them kept her from sight, but the cells were open (except for the bars) in the front. "So what are you in for?"

He expected the guard to tell him to shut up, but that worthy was settling back reading a magazine. Maybe he was just lazy, or maybe they allowed prisoners to talk, in the hope they would reveal something. The whole cell block was undoubtedly bugged.

The woman sounded tired. "I'm a toaster, and one of my copies shot the Commander."

Toaster? That was Starbuck's description of her enemy. Which meant that this woman must be ... "You're a Cylon?" Mitchell tried to keep his tone light.

He must not have succeeded. The woman's voice took on a mocking tone. "Yes, a Cylon. Destroyer of worlds. Killer of babes and small children. Able to crush a man with one hand. And, if you plug me in, I'll even make a nice piece of toast."

She stopped for a moment, apparently considering whether or not to continue. When she did, her voice still had the mocking tone. "So what did you do, rob a bank?"

Mitchell tried to keep his tone light. "No, I started a shooting war with these people. And they want to see if I plug in, too."

"They think *you're* a Cylon?" The tone obviously implied that he would be a very ineffective robot, indeed.

"They think all of my people are Cylons."

"And are you?"

"Well, no, at least I'm pretty sure. I remember my parents, and my mother insists that I was born. I remember growing up. I've never seen anyone give birth, but I've seen lots of pregnant women who later show up with small babies."

"That doesn't mean anything," said his neighbor. "I'm pregnant, myself." Her voice took on a more serious turn.

*Holy Conception, Batman!* A pregnant robot? How could *that* happen. As far as he knew, neither the mechanical SG-1 team that Harlan had created nor the humanoid replicators had been capable of giving birth, though he wouldn't have put it past the replicators. This was something new, for sure.

"So is the father another toaster, or maybe a microwave oven?"

The woman gave a short, high-pitched laugh. "No, the father is a human. That's one reason I'm tied up like this. Otherwise, I might pick the lock and start seducing half the fleet."

"Well, as I understand it, and I don't understand much, you are in a war with these people. They probably don't want a spy running around loose."

"The war is over."

"I didn't hear it that way," though come to think of it, Starbuck had never said one way or another. She'd just made it known that the Cylons were the enemy.

"The war is over. How couldn't you know that? We destroyed all twelve colonies. This fleet is the last remnant of the human race. Good riddance to them."

*Jesus H. Christ!* Mitchell wasn't a church-goer, but he didn't usually blaspheme, either. Starbuck had said that some colonies had been destroyed, but not all of them. No wonder she saw Cylons everywhere. From her point of view, the only humans that had been left alive by the attack that hadn't escaped with her ship must have been disguised Cylons. For that matter, other Cylons might be hiding here on the *Galactica*.

If this woman – toaster – Cylon, oh whatever, was telling the truth.

Aloud, he said, "I think you might have missed a few."

In the Commander's quarters, Adama turned away from the comm-set and turned to Tigh. "If he's faking it, he's good. He doesn't seem to know anything about the war."

"Cylons." Tigh almost spat. "Look at Valerii. Worked with us, lived with us for years. We never knew. He's hiding it, Bill."

"Maybe. I'm not so sure. Have you seen his ship? It's like nothing we've ever seen. No obvious source of propulsion. And the way the ships moved. Did you see that on the tape? They flew like they were gliding in the atmosphere. No Cylon or Colonial ship ever moved like that. They disobeyed all of the laws of physics."

"So the Cylons developed something new."

“Then it’s less than four months old. If the Cylons had this before the attack, they would have used it, and we wouldn’t have escaped. You know, the only reason we were able to beat these two fighters was because we outnumbered them and caught them by surprise. And we still lost as many men as they did.”

“Men.” Tigh’s voice was bitter. “They didn’t lose any *men*.”

“Well, maybe they’re not men. But whatever is in the brig is of value to someone, so we can use him to our own ends.”

“What do you mean?”

Adama didn’t answer, directly. Instead, he picked up his phone, pushed a button. “This is Adama. Bring the prisoner – Mitchell, isn’t it? – to the CIC.” He pushed another button on the phone. “Miss Dualla. Find the frequency the enemy used for that transmission, and set up the radio to broadcast on that frequency. I’ll be there shortly.” He turned to Tigh. “Come on, we’re going back to the CIC.” He left this quarters. An uncomprehending Tigh followed.

When contact with Mitchell and Bridges was lost, Wilkes had ordered the X-307s to track the mother ship, with strict orders not to engage. Finding the behemoth was relatively easy, given that they knew where it had been and had a good idea of where it was going. The stealth fighters communicated only by FTL, giving the *Galactica* no knowledge of their presence.

O’Neill, Burkemeier, Wilkes, and the remainder of SG-1 looked at the video feed from the fighters. Nothing to see, really, except that the mother ship was decelerating quickly – for something propelled by rocket engines.

“Eight gees, according to telemetry, for over an hour,” said Carter. “They must have some form of inertial damping or artificial gravity field to counteract it, or they’d be plastered against the bulkheads.”

“The craft piloted by Lieutenant Thrace had no such equipment,” said Teal’c.

“Right, but it’s possible that their field generator is too big for a fighter. We don’t know the limits of their technology.”

“We also don’t know what happened to Mitchell and Bridges,” said O’Neill. “I’d rather know that than find out how they survive big gee-forces.”

“We may find out very soon, Sir,” said Carter, “on their present trajectory, with that deceleration, they’ll be in orbit in three hours.”

“The X-302s are in position, General,” said Wilkes. “We can attack at any time.”

“Not yet, Colonel,” said O’Neill. “So far we have no evidence of any hostile acts on their part.”

“Just two missing pilots.”

“There’s that. But for now we wait.”

They didn’t have to wait long. The tech at the comm panel turned to them and said, “Sirs, we’re receiving a transmission from the direction of that ship, on the frequency we used to broadcast our message.”

“Put it on the speaker,” replied O’Neill.

“Governor Burkemeier,” came the voice from the speaker, “I’m Commander Adama of the *Galactica*.” Male, with an accent similar to Starbuck’s. “I believe that I have something you want, and you have something I want.”

“What would that be, Commander?” Pause. The tech held up three fingers, indicating the light-speed delay time.

“Hello, Dee,” Mitchell’s voice came over the speaker. “How are things on Massilia?”

“Mitchell! Report!” shouted O’Neill.

“Not now, whoever that was,” came Adama’s voice. “Interesting that it isn’t the Governor who is asked for the report. Speak to me, whoever is in charge down there.”

Everyone looked at O’Neill, who shrugged and said, “I am, Commander. General Jack O’Neill, head of Homeworld Security.”

“I don’t think this is your homeworld, General – there aren’t enough people,” came the response.

“I travel a lot. You have Mitchell, Commander. I’d like him back. You said we have something you want?” Dollars to donuts, it would be

“I believe you have one of *my* pilots, General. A Lieutenant Thrace.”

“We might.”

“I’d like her back.”

“And then we get Mitchell?”

“After the inquiry.”

“Excuse me, Commander,” replied O’Neill, “why do you need an inquiry?”

“To determine why one of my men and one of yours is dead.”

*Shit*, thought O’Neill.

“They fired first, General!” came Mitchell’s voice over the comm. “Then Brid—” his voice was abruptly cut off.

“Where we come from, General,” Adama said, “we don’t shadow visiting ships without notifying them that they are being watched.”

O’Neill made a decision. Reveal all. “Where you come from, Commander, I understand you don’t even bother to talk to toasters.”

“Ah, you have met Lieutenant Thrace. Well, General, I happen to believe that you are not a Cylon.” In the background, a startled cry could be heard, quickly cut off. “That belief is not universally shared, but it’s based on knowledge that I have. I can confirm if I can meet you and your command crew in person.”

“And where should we meet?”

“Right here, on the *Galactica*.”

“And why should we do that?”

“Because this ship is the biggest weapons platform in the system, General. If you had more firepower, it would be out here right now. Come on, let us talk. We need to discuss why two of our pilots are dead, and I need to see several of you to make sure that you aren’t Cylons. So come up here after we make orbit.”

O’Neill considered. Adama was right, the *Galactica* probably out-gunned anything in the system. If he could keep them talking, they might be able to stall long enough for reinforcements to arrive.

If they arrived. Fortunately, he had communications channels Adama didn’t know about. He made a slashing motion across his throat. The tech cut the comm link.

“Send a signal to the Stargate – tell them we’ve made contact with a space faring civilization, and getting reinforcements here is priority one – 302s, 307s, 301s if any are available. Then reconnect me with Adama.”

The tech nodded, and O’Neill continued, “Very well, Commander, we’ll meet you shortly.”

“One more thing, General,” replied Adama, “bring up at least twelve of your people – if you wish, most of them can be guards, but I need to see twelve. No identical twins, either.”

O’Neill was mystified. He considered asking about identical triplets, but decided against it. “Twelve of our people? Any particular reason for that number?”

Adama paused, for a moment, as if he was thinking, and then answered, “Think of it as a religious requirement.”