

## Chapter 17

Paul Robbins knocked on Starbuck's door. "Lieutenant, General O'Neill says it's time for you to go home. If you'll come with me we'll make arrangements."

"About frakkin' time," said the pilot. "Let's see. All I need is my luggage. Oh, wait, I don't have any luggage. I do seem to remember leaving a Blackbird behind, though. You remember, stealth fighter, wings, rocket engines, big frakkin' missiles?"

"I'm afraid the *Blackbird* won't be able to make the trip, Lieutenant. Maybe later." Or not, he thought. He'd seen what was left after the techs had finished with it.

"Well, if you say so." *Liar*. Nevertheless, it was time to go home. "Let's go." They walked out of the dormitory and into a large hanger. Several versions of what Starbuck assumed were spacecraft were parked along the walls. She turned to Robbins. "I've never flown in one of your ships. What's it like?"

"Oh, you won't have to worry about the safety of our ships." If you'll just stand right there. He pointed to an area of the floor marked with a large circle. "No, right in the middle would be best." Bewildered, Starbuck complied. Robbins pulled out his comm unit. "Robbins to O'Neill."

"O'Neill here."

Robbins couldn't resist. "One to beam up."

"Rodger, Robbins." Robbins pushed a button on a control panel near where he was standing.

Starbuck looked in amazement as several large rings surrounded her, a bright light shown round about her, and Robbins vanished from sight.

O'Neill led his group onto the cargo deck of the Tel'tak. Tigh looked around. The deck was empty, aside from some control panels on side walls and a set of circular markings on the floor. He went over to look at them.

"Uh, Colonel Tigh, I don't think you want to be standing there right now," said Daniel Jackson.

"Why the frak not?" Tigh responded.

"It's really not a good idea," Jackson reiterated.

"Better do what he says, Tigh," ordered Adama.

Tigh was about to respond when he realized that O'Neill was talking to someone on his comm unit. He decided to save face by going over to see who the General was talking too.

“One to beam up,” squawked O’Neill’s comm.

O’Neill and Jackson winced, but O’Neill replied, “Rodger, Robbins.”

Rings rose from the circular markings in the floor, and a bright light appeared inside. When it subsided, Starbuck was standing in the center of the ring.

Starbuck let out a war whoop. “Oh my frakkin’ – ” she saw Adama. “That was quite a ride, Sir.”

*She’s back*, thought Adama. He was filled with relief. Then he realized what he’d seen, and why O’Neill had let him see it. He turned to O’Neill. “Very well, General, I’ll uphold my end of the bargain. Dr. Baltar will escort you to Colonel Mitchell’s – quarters.” He turned to Baltar. “Doctor, have the guards release Mitchell, then bring them all to the briefing room.” He turned back to O’Neill. “General, I hope you won’t take offense if I have Lieutenant Thrace checked out by our medical staff.”

“No offense taken, Commander.” O’Neill motioned to Baltar, who looked somewhat bewildered but who led the way off the deck. O’Neill turned to Jackson, “come on, Daniel, I’m sure these people would like to be left alone for a few minutes.” Off they went.

“Are you all right, Lieutenant?” Adama asked Starbuck. “Did they treat you well? What’s that on your lip?”

Starbuck came as close to attention as she ever did. “They treated me very well, sir. This,” she fingered her lip, “is just General O’Neill’s way of getting to know a girl.”

Tigh was gazing at the two of them. “While you two are discussing their mating rituals, you’re letting them roam the ship with only that scientist for a watchdog, and you’re releasing Mitchell! Are you mad!”

Adama turned to him. “He forced the exchange, Tigh. Don’t you see what he showed us here?”

Tigh thought for a minute, but Starbuck beat him to it. “As long as these rings are here, they can transport a nuke into the *Galactica*, and we can’t do anything about it.”

“Right, Lieutenant,” said Adama. “He doesn’t want to be held hostage, and if we try it, he’ll blow us all up.”

“Cylon behavior,” spat Tigh.

“No, they’re not Cylons, Saul.” Adama turned to Starbuck. “How many different types of humans did you see down there, Lieutenant?”

“Hundreds, Sir. Maybe thousands, I didn’t count them all.”

“There you have it, Saul. We’ve seen a limited number of models, and we know that there are many duplicates of some of them. If Cylons could build as many types as Starbuck saw, then they would have done it, and we’d never see a duplicate,” *and anyway*, his thoughts continued, *there are only twelve models*.

Tigh was obviously trying to find a hole in this line of reasoning. He knew it wasn’t conclusive, but ... “Oh, Frak it” He stormed out of the Tel’tak and off to find out what mischief O’Neill and Jackson were up to.

Mitchell looked up. Some kind of conversation was going on between the guards outside and someone at the door. That Baltar guy, from the looks of it. The door opened. “General! Daniel!” he shouted.

“Hello, Mitchell,” said O’Neill. “We’ve come to spring you.”

“Happy to be sprung, Sir.” The guard unlock his cell. Mitchell practically skipped through the door.

“Who’s this?” O’Neill asked him, pointing toward Valerii, still chained, cuffed, and collared.

“They say she’s a Cylon, sir.”

“Really?” wondered O’Neill, “I was expecting someone taller.”

“Well, Sir, she claims to be a Cylon, and they say she’s a Cylon, so I’d think she was a Cylon as well, except that everyone says she’s pregnant.”

“Pregnant?” asked Jackson. “How?”

“I don’t have the slightest idea. I thought maybe you and Sam could tell, if you get to examine her.”

“Uh, you know, I might have some feelings about this,” said Valerii from her cell. “I know, we wiped out all of the Colonies, but what did we ever do to you guys?”

“All the Colonies?” Jackson turned to Mitchell. “*All* of the colonies? We knew that the Colonials were at war with the Colonies, but I thought that the battle was still going on.”

“No, I’m afraid not,” said Mitchell. “These are the last human survivors of the Colonies of Kobol.” (“I’ve heard that name,” said Jackson.) “She says that there’s a whole fleet of people out here. Did you see any of them?”

“No, said O’Neill, “only this ship. But how come they let you get all of this information out of her?”

“I think I can answer that, General,” said Baltar, “I suggested it, as a way to determine if Colonel Mitchell was a Cylon himself. Conversations

between the two of them might have revealed that fact.” *And saved me from having to use my Cylon detector.*

“Why Gaius,” said Six, who appeared to be caressing O’Neill’s face, “I do believe you have been saved. Adama believes these people are human, you won’t have to test him.” She studied O’Neill more closely. “You know, this one is rather cute. I think that maybe I’ll keep him as a pet.”

Baltar shook his head, and the vision vanished. Thank all the Lords of Kobol he’d had the wits not to respond to her. Still, they were looking at him strangely.

Then Mitchell turned to O’Neill. “Sir, one thing. She,” pointing to Valerii, “says that the Fleet is looking for Earth.”

“Well, that would make sense,” said Jackson. “According to what Starbuck told us of Kobol and its colonies, Earth was the thirteenth Colony. So if the other twelve were wiped out, then they might head for Earth, if they knew where it was.”

Had Baltar been a dog his ears would have been standing straight up. “You mean, Earth really exists?”

“Yes, Doctor,” said Jackson, “we’re from Earth.”

Starbuck filling in the story for Adama. “So they really are from Earth?” he asked.

“That’s what they say, Sir.”

“Rubbish,” said Tigh. “They’re Cylons.”

“No,” said Starbuck and Adama, together.

The three were in the *Galactica’s* briefing room. Apollo had joined them, in his capacity as President Roslin’s military liaison. Might as well let her know we’re on the up-and-up, thought Adama. Lee can report everything to her, and she’ll know we’re not hiding anything. Except, of course, what he chose to hide from his son.

The team from Earth came into the room. Obviously Mitchell had told them what he knew. Equally obviously, they’d gotten enough information from Starbuck to put two and two together.

The team from Massilia (Earth?) sat down. “All right,” said O’Neill, “let’s put our cards on the table.” He turned to Jackson.

“One,” said Daniel, “you’re the last survivors of a civilization of twelve colonies, destroyed by the Cylons, who are robots who can look like humans.”

“Two, you’ve got a fleet stashed away somewhere. Probably with thousands of people aboard.”

“Three, you’ve got a captive female model Cylon, who claims to be pregnant by a human father.”

“And four, you’ve been looking for Earth.”

“And five,” continued O’Neill, “I’m not going to let you get there.”

“Why not?” asked Adama.

“You’ve got a race of homicidal adding machines after you. If I let you go to Earth, you’ll bring your war there. We’ve got enough problems.”

“All of us,” replied Adama, “You, me, Tigh, even that machine in the brig, are descended from the people of Kobol. Can’t you help your brothers and sisters?”

“Actually, Commander, that turns out not to be the case.” All heads turned towards Jackson. “There is ample evidence that humans, your people included, evolved on Earth. Your people were settled on Kobol by a race of beings known as Goa’uld ... ”

“Blasphemy!” Everyone turned to Starbuck, who for once in her life looked embarrassed. “I’m sorry, but what you say is not what is in the Sacred Scrolls.”

“*Life here began out there,*” Adama quoted. “It’s possible, Lieutenant, that what they say is true. But,” he turned towards O’Neill, “that doesn’t mean we don’t need your help.”

“But the Lords of Kobol,” said Starbuck, “Zeus, Apollo, Athena, ... all of them, created man and gave him Kobol. Later, we had to leave Kobol, we settled the Twelve Colonies, and Earth.”

“Zeus, Apollo, Athena, ...” Jackson turned to O’Neill. “Jack, I think I know how Kobol was settled. And I might have an idea about what part the Cylons play in all of this. But,”

“What?” It came from Adama and O’Neill simultaneously.

“We have to go to Kobol.”