

## Chapter 21

Gaius Baltar had never heard the expression “sing like a canary,” but he did his best to emulate the canary’s tune.

“It started,” he said, “back on Caprica.” Six appeared to him, in the red dress. The straps kept slipping off her shoulders, revealing more than he needed to see right now. What he needed to see was the Zat in O’Neill’s hand. It wasn’t pointed directly at him, but close enough. Baltar remembered Agathon crumbled in a heap at the base of the Tel’tak’s ramp. “My company had been awarded a huge contract to design a new Colonial Command Navigation Program. It turned out to be a much bigger job than I anticipated. We were about to lose the contract.”

“Then a woman walked into my office. Slinking in, to be exact. Beautiful, blond hair, fantastic legs, great in be-” Focus, frak-it. Six was running her hands up and down his body, making it more and more difficult for him to speak. She seemed to be enjoying his suffering. *Damn, the woman is a sadist. How did I miss that?* “Anyway,” he continued aloud, “she said she worked for a defense consulting firm and had heard that I was having trouble with the CNP. She offered to help me with the program, if she was allowed to study it. That way, she said, her firm would have an edge on bidding for new contracts with the Fleet.”

“I don’t know Colonial law, of course,” said Jackson, behind him, “but I’m willing to guess that this was highly illegal.”

“Yes. Yes it was.” Baltar answered. “I didn’t care. My reputation was on the line, and anyway she was beautiful.” I wish you could see her now, you’d understand. “The fact that what we were doing was illegal kept me from telling anyone about her. After a while, I didn’t care about that anyway. We had an affair. I was in love. OW!”

Six had bitten. Hard. “If you were in love with me, Gaius, why did you keep sleeping with other women?”

The SG-1 team looked startled. “Let the record show that we didn’t touch him,” said O’Neill, obviously speaking to a hidden camera.

“No, no you didn’t,” said Baltar. “I have a condition ... ” Maybe I can plead insanity, perhaps they’d let me off. Or maybe they’d just, what was that, rendition? He took a deep breath and continued his story.

“The affair lasted two years. At the end,” after she discovered me with yet another woman, “she told me that she was a Cylon, that she had used her access to the CNP to disable the warning system, and that we were going to be attacked. Nuclear warheads started exploding all over Caprica. She

shielded me with her body. She died, I was saved. The last shuttle escaping Caprica took me, figuring that I should be able to help overcome the attack. Ironically, the shuttle was piloted by Lieutenant Valerii – the one who shot Commander Adama, not the one you have now.”

“So when that copy of Lieutenant Valerii came to you and asked to be tested, why did you not inform Commander Adama of the results of the test?” Teal’c sounded menacing. Maybe he always sounded that way.

“I, I, just felt that it would be better if I didn’t...” Trying to explain about Six would only make matters worse, he decided.

O’Neill’s comm came to life. “O’Neill, Wilkes. Respond please.”

“Hang on a minute Wilkes.” O’Neill turned to Baltar.

“Well,” said O’Neill, “you’ve been forthcoming.” He paused, apparently considering. “Teal’c, send in the guards. Ours, not Adama’s.” Baltar breathed a sigh of relief. O’Neill turned toward him. “Doctor, this cell is bugged – uh, not with real bugs, but it’s got cameras and microphones all over.”

“I had surmised that, General.”

“I can’t stay and listen, but what I want to you do is keep talking. Tell us the whole story. Well, what you can in a few hours. Tell us everything. We’ll show it to Adama and compare notes. If your story is believable, *then* I’ll decide about rendition. Otherwise,” he paused for just a moment, and nodded to the door, “the *Galactica* contingent would be happy to have you back, I’m sure.”

“I’ll talk. I’ll tell the truth. The whole truth, noth—” O’Neill wasn’t listening, he was out the door, Teal’c and Jackson behind.

Outside, O’Neill grabbed his communicator. Wilkes wouldn’t have interrupted if it hadn’t been important. “What’s up, Colonel?”

“Sir, we’ve got another bogey in-system,” Wilkes reported. “One of the X-307s was doing a routine patrol away from the planet,” joy riding, O’Neill deuphemized. “He came upon an inbound ship, escorted by six Vipers. They didn’t seem to notice him.” Ah, stealth fighters with reactionless drives. If he’d had the equivalent in high school he wouldn’t have lost his driver’s license.

“ETA?”

“Approximately two hours, if they accelerate according to the *Galactica*’s pattern.”

“Has the *Galactica* noticed?”

“Unless they communicate on a radio frequency we don’t know about.”

Always a possibility, you couldn’t monitor everything. “I’ll be in control in a few minutes. Have a Tel’tak get in position to redock with the *Galactica* as soon as they get permission. We may want to ring up there quickly. Send a signal to Carter and Burkemeier telling them to watch their backs. Then tell contact Adama and tell him we need to talk.” He thought for a moment. “And have someone down here gather up the *Galactica*’s guards. Use zats – one shot – if you have to. O’Neill out.”

“I do not believe that you trust Commander Adama’s peaceful intentions, O’Neill,” said Teal’c.

O’Neill looked at the Jaffa. Sarcasm? No, a statement of fact. “I don’t trust anyone who keeps dropping spaceships into on of our systems unannounced.”

“Jack, maybe we should consider the possibility that this is whole innocuous – after all, the *Galactica* has been here for some time, perhaps the rest of the Colonial Fleet is simply worried about him.” Jackson had to pause to take a breath.

“It’s a possibility, Daniel, but I’m not going to bet on it.”

Two signals reached Dualla’s board almost simultaneously. The first was from the planet, saying that General O’Neill wanted to speak to Adama. She had just reported this to Adama when her board lit up again. “Commander, I’m getting another signal. Colonial recognition codes. It claims to be *Colonial One*. Codes match. President Roslin is on the line, sir.”

Great frakkin’ day, Adama thought. We’re surrounded by people with capabilities we’ve never seen before, they don’t trust us, and they want to overturn our religion. Then she drops in. Aloud, he said, “let me talk to the President, first, Dee. Tell General O’Neill that I’m in conference.”

“He may not want to wait, Bill,” said Tigh, who was studying radar signals. “One of the Tel’tak’s is approaching. They’re standing off a reasonable distance, and I’ve got two Vipers watching them, but I bet they want to come aboard, so O’Neill can ring in.”

Adama nodded. One more thing to worry about. Then he thought of another. “Find Mr. Gaeta, and assign him some guards to keep an eye on Carter and Burkemeier.” Finally, he picked up the handset.

“Madam President. What a surprise.”

“I’m happy to hear you as well, Commander,” came Roslin’s voice over the phone. “I see that you have discovered an alien civilization. Since your

ship is still in one piece I assume that they are not Cylons?”

“They don’t appear to be, Madam President,” Adama replied, “but they do appear to be human and they don’t entirely trust us. So, if I may ask, why are you here?”

“Because I had another dream, Commander. Please don’t snort into the handset. The dream said that I would find something here that would help us reach Earth more quickly.”

Frak, she got that right, Adama admitted to himself. If they let us have access to the Stargate, we could apparently be on Earth in minutes. Maybe Roslin’s visions weren’t all imaginary, he thought for the ninth or tenth time.

“They say they are from Earth, Madam President. I tend to believe them. However, they also have some disturbing information about beings they say became the Lords of Kobol.”

Roslin’s response was delayed by more than light-speed lag. “Well, then, Commander, I suppose I should see them. Do we have permission to dock when we arrive?”

Nice she should ask. There were times when she didn’t. “You have my permission, Madame President. Whether General O’Neill gives you permission is another question.” He hung up the phone.

“Commander Adama is on the line, sir,” said the comm-tech to O’Neill.

About time. The watching ships around the *Galactica* had picked up scrambled radio traffic. It didn’t take Carter’s brain to figure out who the ship was talking to. Aloud, he said, “Commander Adama! I understand you have visitors arriving. Wish you had let us know, we could have baked a cake, brought some wine ...”

“That’s quite all right, General,” came Adama’s response. “I’m sure the President will understand.”

That stopped O’Neill for a moment. Their President was here? Why now? “That’s very interesting, Commander, why don’t you all come down to the planet, we’ll roll out the red carpet.” Pause. “Oh, have you told her about her Vice President?”

“Not yet, General. All in due time. But I’m afraid we can’t come down there right now. Why don’t you come up here. We’ll allow your ship to dock so that you can ring right up.”

O’Neill considered. Unless he wanted to threaten to blow the arriving ship out of the sky, this was probably the best offer he was going to get. The threat might not work, anyway. Adama had to know that he had superior

firepower for the moment. “Very well. We’ll be up as soon as the Tel’tak docks.”

Adama allowed the *Colonial One* to dock first, so it was some time before O’Neill and Jackson were allowed to go. In fact, they had to cool their heels for several hours. Probably because Adama wanted to brief his President as to what was going on, and why she was going to need a new Vice President. O’Neill had thought about taking the rest of SG-1, but at this point Mitchell and Teal’c would only be useful in a firefight, and they’d lose any firefight onboard the *Galactica*. So he left the two on Massilia, with orders to give Baltar the occasional menacing look.

The hanger was crowded this time. It was dominated by the President’s ship. More guards were in attendance. Some around the Colonial ship, but many around the Tel’tak as well. It would probably not be a good idea to draw the Zat this time, O’Neill decided. Nevertheless, he kept it on him. They probably wouldn’t take it away from him, and you never knew when it might come in handy.

O’Neill and Jackson were lead into the *Galactica*’s briefing room. It was dominated by one woman, to whom everyone, except Adama and Tigh, deferred. She was introduced as President Roslin. She looked, thought O’Neill, like one of my high school English teachers. She also looked tired, as if she had the weight of the world on her shoulders. O’Neill had met various Presidents. He knew the look.

“So, General,” she said, releasing his hand, “Commander Adama says that you are from Earth.”

“Yes, Ma’am, we are,” replied O’Neill.

“That’s nice. You know, the prophecy says that I’m to lead the Fleet to Earth.”

Whoa! Religious Fanatic Alert! Aloud, O’Neill said, “That’s ... interesting, Ma’am.”

“Oh, Commander Adama didn’t believe me, either, at first, but I did find the way, right Commander?”

Adama paused for a moment before answering, “Information that President Roslin gave us was instrumental in finding the path to Earth.”

“Interesting,” said Daniel Jackson. “This prophecy, it’s from the Sacred Scrolls?”

“Why yes, Dr. Jackson,” Roslin was surprised that someone not familiar with her religion would be interested. Adama had grown up with it, he

wasn't interested at all, except for the parts that served his purpose.

"It's a recurring story in on our world, as well," Jackson went on, "Moses, is the most prominent example, of course, leading the Israelites out of Egypt to Canaan. But there are other examples,"

While he was thinking of others Roslin quickly said, "How interesting," and changed the subject, "You say we must go back to Kobol? How will that be possible?"

"There is a way, Ma'am," broke in O'Neill, "we have a means of visiting other worlds – rather quickly."

"Would this have something to do we these 'rings' Commander Adama was talking about? I gather that they transported you from the planet directly to the *Galactica*."

"No, Ma'am, this is something different," O'Neill thought for a moment, then continued, "I suspect Colonel Carter could tell you all of the differences. However," he paused for another moment, "I don't think we have time for that now. As I understand it, since the Colonies were destroyed you've been running, and the Cylons keep catching up to you. Correct?"

Roslin and Adama both nodded. O'Neill went on, "then I think we had better consider ways to stop the Cylons, now. Right now, your fleet is undefended, and you're going to have to leave, soon. But the Cylons will almost certainly stop here, and if you found us," just how they'd been found was something learned from Baltar, who was still singing, "then the Cylons almost certainly will, as well. This system cannot be defended from a direct attack from the Cylons until we get reinforcements, and they won't be here for a few weeks."

"Even if you evade the Cylons, this planet is full of naquadah – tyllium, so it's a gold mine for the Cylons. I don't want them to have it. For one thing, we need it. So we have to explore other alternatives. Not to worry, we do this all the time. Daniel?"

Jackson adjusted his glasses. Oh, boy, thought O'Neill, here we go again. "Keep it short, Daniel, I'm sure the President has heard all about your last lecture." Roslin nodded.

"O-kaay," said Jackson, who immediately went into fast-speak. "As you know, we have your Lieutenant Valerii on the planet, for examination, and we found some interesting things. First, most of her DNA – I believe you call it gencode – is human. All of the usually active human genes are there, and turned on."

Roslin interrupted. "You deciphered all of this information in just a few

hours, Dr. Jackson?”

“Oh, not me, Dr. Steinhauer did all of the work. She had help from the Ancient and Asgard technology we’ve acquired over the years.”

“Interesting. I’ll accept that, for now, though you must tell me of the Ancients and the Asgard later.”

“Very well, Madam President. Let’s see. As you probably know, human DNA has myriad junk sequences – places that don’t do anything in a human cell. Valerii’s junk sequences are substantially different than any we’ve ever seen in a human or Jaffa. We even compared it with one of your guard’s DNA. His junk code is typical human. Yes,” Jackson said, as Adama looked interested, “it is a quick and reliable way of detecting Cylons, *if* all of them have code like Valerii’s. We’ll need more samples. But to continue,”

“Some of Valerii’s junk code is actually turned on. We don’t know exactly what it does, but we’ve found that her body occasionally emits a weak electromagnetic field.”

“She’s communicating with the Cylons!” shouted Tigh. “Frak, I knew it!”

“It’s undoubtedly involuntary,” replied Jackson, “I don’t think she can turn it off. However, the range is quite limited, at least so far as we’ve measured it.”

“We also examined the fetus. She – it’s a girl – has similar DNA to Valerii. The human part is somewhat different, probably because it was donated by your Mr. Agathon – I hope he’s recovered. The junk DNA is similar to Valerii’s but it also has some similarity to DNA found in the Jaffa. You’ve been told about them, right?” Affirmative nods. “This fits in with what I was reading about Saturn’s research before his ‘children’ revolted. A female human already has a place for a symbiote to attach – the uterus. When the child grows up, I think we’ll find that her uterus is designed to accept a symbiote, much like the pouch on a Jaffa. Except that uterus will have nerve endings which allow the symbiote to control the body. Given the increased strength and durability of the Cylons as compared to humans, along with the usual increase because of the presence of the symbiote, the child will be the perfect host for a Goa’uld.”

“Then the humanform Cylons were –”

“Designed for the explicit purpose of creating a new human host for the Goa’uld. One specific Goa’uld, in fact: Saturn!”

“Whoa, Daniel,” said O’Neill, “are you saying that that Goa’uld is still alive?”

“Yes. At least, he was alive when the humanoid Cylons were created. He created them, or at least had a part in it.”

“And the Lords of Kobol?” asked Starbuck, who had been listening in the background, “are they still alive?”

Jackson looked at her sadly, “Probably not. Goa’uld ordinarily live for several hundred years, no matter how many bodies they inhabit. They extend their lifespan beyond that by use of a sarcophagus, which contains machinery that can cure any disease we’ve ever encountered, including aging.”

“Records on this world state that there was only one sarcophagus, and that Saturn managed to hold on to it during the revolt. It vanished from this world when he did – the Jaffa looked for it, it would have extended their lifespan.”

Sarcophagus, thought Roslin, I wonder if it would help me? Her cancer hadn’t advanced, recently, but there was no telling when it would. Not like she could get more advanced treatment out here, anyway. So forget that. “But Dr. Jackson, what does this have to do with the current Cylon threat?”

“Glad you asked, Madam President. The Cylons want Lieutenant Valerii’s child because Saturn most likely needs it. He’s a very old Goa’uld by now, and the sarcophagus might not be helping very much. We’ve seen it in other Goa’uld. The new body might significantly increase his lifespan.”

“It follows that the Cylons are still controlled by Saturn. Eliminate him, and it’s like cutting off the head. Well, maybe the Cylons won’t die out, but it should hold them up for a time so that we can at least gather reinforcements.”

“And to find Saturn we need to go to Kobol?”

“Yes, ma’am, at least to find clues to his whereabouts. But I think he’s on Kobol, that’s where all his equipment was.”

“Then let’s go back to Kobol,” said Roslin. She paused a moment, and then asked the question O’Neill had been dying to ask, “but how do we get there?”