

Lt. Briscoe held the shuttle in a parking orbit in the upper atmosphere. A solid sea of clouds would have hid the shuttle had anyone been looking for them. The Newton Six was full to capacity with the eight students and three Starfleet officers.

"That's everyone but Mr. Smith." Lt. Wong reported.

Briscoe was having trouble hearing him over the chatter of the students. She turned the pilot's chair and yelled at them "Everyone sit down and shut up."

"There aren't enough seats." One of the students said.

"Then sit on the floor." Briscoe snapped and turned back to the console. "Tell me something good, Aaron."

"I've got transporter lock on him." Lt. Wong said. "But he is not alone."

"Damn."

On the planet, Lt. Mirek signaled the newly materialized survivors to be quiet and duck into the foliage. They did. After a minute, she whispered to Captain Karim "They are moving away from the shuttle slowly. We should be able to take possession of it soon."

"Mirek." Dr. Shimerman carefully made his way to her as quietly as possible. "Praag was returning when we beamed out. Briscoe may not be able to get Smith out."

"The prime directive." Mirek nodded more to herself than the doctor. She opened her communicator. "Mirek to Briscoe."

"Briscoe here."

"What about Mr. Smith?" Mirek asked.

"He's not alone." Briscoe said. "We are maintaining transporter lock. As soon as we can get him out we will. What is your situation?"

"An apparent hunting party either from the same village we were in or related to that village is inspecting the escape pod and the shuttle." Mirek said. "We are waiting and hoping they will simply leave it. Everyone here is ok, but we need Mr. Smith. He is our pilot."

"I can fly that shuttle." Karim said.

"I'm working on it, Ellen." Briscoe said. "Advise when you've taken possession of Newton Three."

"Aye." Mirek closed her communicator and adjusted her tricorder again.

"What does your tricorder tell you, Lieutenant?" Karim asked quietly.

"There are still two individuals in the area of the crash site." Mirek said. "The others have moved on."

"Only two?" Karim asked. "Then let's go. We can take them."

Mirek grabbed the Arkarian pilot's arm. "The prime directive is in full effect. We will not harm these people. We will not change their lives."

"I don't give a damn about your prime directive." Karim had trouble keeping his harsh voice down to a whisper. "They did harm to me. I will not sit idly by."

"Yes, you will." Mirek ordered. The human lieutenant's pale blue eyes held the Arkarian captain's cold hazel eyes. Neither backed down.

From Mirek's other side, Dr. Shimerman asked softly. "How did they harm you?"

Karim did not answer. He was still staring at Mirek. One of the other older Arkarian spoke up instead. "The banging."

"What do you mean?" Shimerman asked.

He must have been a member of the crew. He wore a jacket similar to Karim's. "They swarmed around the escape pod, banging those damn poles against it and singing something."

"Chanting." One of the students offered.

"Yes, chanting." The crewman nodded. He smiled when he added. "You should have seen them jump when the hatch opened."

"You opened the hatch?" Mirek asked Karim.

"Not me." Karim shook his head and finally lowered his eyes.

"One of those kids." The crewman said. "What an idiot! Said he couldn't stand being cooped up any longer. Had no business being on a space ship of any kind."

"Well." Mirek checked her tricorder again. "I think we can go to the shuttle now. But quietly please. The villagers are not that far away."

Mirek took the lead followed by Karim. Dr. Shimerman waited until all the civilians had followed before he brought up the rear. They crowded into the ship and secured the door. Karim and Mirek sat down at the forward stations.

"Newton Three to Newton Six." Mirek called.

"You're in the shuttle?" Briscoe asked.

"Affirmative." Mirek said. "What about Tomas?"

"Stop worrying, Ellen." Briscoe said. "As soon as he's alone, we'll get him. Now, I understand you have the G'Nex pilot with you."

"Yes."

"Can he handle the shuttle?" Briscoe asked.

"Of course I can." Karim answered.

"Then lift off and rendezvous with us as soon as possible." Briscoe ordered.

"Maggie."

"Lt. Mirek." Briscoe said. "You have your orders."

"Aye." Mirek terminated the communications and turned to Karim. "What is your rating?"

"G-7." Karim said. "I haven't been in a military vessel since my days in Akaria's Defense League, but I know what I'm doing. Of course you'll have to give me the Starfleet codes."

"Of course."