



[/u/MajorParadox](#)

# 1. Bar Talk

Dorian entered the bar and took a quick look around. There wasn't anything or anyone he was looking for in particular, it was purely a habit.

"How's it going?" Dorian asked a Zaxian as he walked further into the bar. He just mumbled. "That's great," said Dorian to himself as he continued walking. While many let the emptiness of space affect their personalities, Dorian was the opposite. He thrived on social interaction wherever he stopped. It annoyed him how hard it could be to strike up conversations at space stations.

Dorian reached the bar and ordered a drink. As he sat down, his ears started beeping. He waved his left hand and the beeping stopped. Looking around again, he saw a few more Zaxians, several Trokians, and a couple of Rayzers. After taking a sip of his neon orange drink, Dorian saw a girl he didn't notice earlier. He wasn't quite sure what she was, other than sharing a minor resemblance to his own physiology. While he had aqua skin, she had light pink and her hair was a shade of brown Dorian had never seen before. She seemed a bit distressed and kept darting her eyes around the room. When their eyes met, she quickly looked down at her drink. Before she could look up again, Dorian was standing in front of her.

"Hi there," he said.

"Hi," the girl responded, warily.

"I saw you staring at me from across the room." The girl's eyes widened. "I just came over to let you know it made me very uncomfortable."

"I- I wasn't staring at you," she said nervously.

"It's OK, I'm messing with you." The girl calmed down and gave Dorian a half smile. "I noticed you here and I just had to come to talk to you. I'm usually really good at placing people, but I honestly have no idea what planet you're from."

"That's not surprising," said the girl. "You probably never heard of my planet."

"Try me."

"How about we drop it?"

“How about I buy you a drink?” The girl looked down at her blue drink, which was almost full, and looked back up at Dorian. Before she could open her mouth, he pointed back to her drink. It suddenly appeared empty.

“H-how did you-?”

“Relax,” laughed Dorian. “It’s just a little bar trick of mine.” He pointed back at her drink, which had returned to normal. “I’m Dorian, what’s your name?”

“Kally,” she said, smiling.

“Nice to meet you, Kally.”

“Likewise.” Kally took a sip of her drink.

“Now that we’re better acquainted, can I ask you what planet you’re from?”

“You first.” Dorian raised an eyebrow.

“Well this is a first. You really can’t tell from looking at me?”

“Sorry, I’m not familiar with other planets yet. I’m kind of new to this space thing.”

“I’m a Dorxian. We’re one of the original planets of the Space Union.”

“Dorxian?” laughed Kally. “Dorian the *Dork*-sian!”

“I don’t understand what’s so funny.”

“Right, sorry. I keep forgetting how this universal translator works. It doesn’t lend well to phonetic jokes.”

“If you say so.” Dorian looked at Kally for a few seconds. “Are you going to tell me where you’re from now?”

“Um, well,” started Kally, looking behind Dorian. “I’m from Boston.” Kally looked at the ground.

“Boston?” asked Dorian. He looked behind him and saw a Rayzer had just entered the bar and was looking in their direction. “You’re right, I’ve never heard of that planet.” Kally positioned herself between Dorian and the bar. He turned around again and saw the Rayzer avert his gaze and start to walk in the opposite direction. When Dorian turned back, Kally was gone.

"Well that was rude," Dorian said to himself. Across the bar, he saw the Rayzer was talking to someone and then walked away and started talking to someone else.

Finishing off his drink, Dorian's ears started beeping again. "Might as well check it," he said, waving his right hand. Contacts over his eyes started glowing as a message appeared in his eyesight. "Wow," he said. He waved his left hand down, halting the glow.

"Excuse me," said the Rayzer who was now standing in front of Dorian. "My name is Fritz. Have you seen this girl?" Fritz stretched his right hand toward Dorian, which caused his ears to beep again. Dorian waved his right hand and a picture of Kally appeared in his eyesight.

"She's pretty," said Dorian. "What is she?"

"She's an Earthling," replied Fritz. "Have you seen her?"

"What's an Earthling?"

"She's from some planet called Earth. Have you seen her or not?"

Dorian waved his left hand down. "Sorry, Fritz. I can't help you."

Fritz mumbled and walked away. After watching him walk up to someone else, Dorian looked around the bar again. She couldn't have left, he thought. When she ducked away, Fritz was still at the entrance. Dorian turned around towards the bar and saw a shadow in the corner that didn't belong. On turning back, Fritz was looking in his direction. The person he was talking with was pointing at him. After a moment of thought, Dorian started walking toward the door.

"Hey, wait a second," called Fritz. Dorian kept walking. "Hey!" Dorian ran out the door and made his way to his docking port. As he entered his ship, he looked behind him and saw Fritz entering another port.

"Okay, Fritz," said Dorian to himself now at his ship's helm. "Since you're probably tracking me, let's take a little ride." Dorian hit several buttons and the ship began humming to life. An alert popped up on the main screen, indicating a tracking signature. After pressing some more buttons, a map appeared on the screen, showing the positions of all the ships at the space dock. One was highlighted, which let Dorian know it was the source of the tracking. That ship was also preparing for hyper warp. He hovered his finger over a button, circling it in anticipation. Staring intently at the main screen, he slowly dropped his finger within inches of touching the nonspecific button.

"Come on," he said, starting to lose patience. "Jump." Suddenly the highlighted ship turned red and Dorian slammed his finger into the waiting button. The humming within the ship silenced and the main screen switched to a feed from outside the space station. A ship could be seen

moving slowly away from the station and then suddenly starting to stretch out. After a few moments, it disappeared in a flash of light. "Have fun on the other side of the galaxy, Fritz."

## 2. The Ride

Dorian entered the bar again and took a look around. His eyes immediately locked on Kally, who was talking to one of the Zaxians. As he walked closer, he was able to hear their conversation.

"Two hundred is all I can afford," said Kally.

"Two hundred?" asked the Zaxian. "That will barely cover fuel. Give me two thousand and I'll take you to Dracon 5."

"I can't afford two thousand. You've got to give me a break here." Kally caught Dorian in the corner of her eye and let out a smile. "Never mind then." She started walking away, but the Zaxian grabbed her by the arm.

"Not so fast, girl," he said, scanning her creepily from head to toe. "I'll cut you a break, but you're going to have to make up for it."

"I said never mind," she responded, pushing him away, which only prompted him to grab her by both arms.

"Excuse me," said Dorian now standing right next to Kally and her attacker. "Can I speak with you for a second?" Dorian motioned for the Zaxian to follow him. He let go of Kally, with a confused look on his face. Kally shared his confusion as she watched them walk away from her.

"What do you want, Dorxian?" the Zaxian asked.

Dorian put his arm around him as he walked them toward the bar. "I couldn't help but overhear your conversation."

"Yeah, what of it? It's none of your business."

"Well, you see, that girl is a friend of mine and I'm not too thrilled about how you were treating her." The two were now standing at the bar, Dorian still had his arm wrapped around the Zaxian's shoulders.

"Look, Dorxian, I don't think you-" Dorian suddenly slammed the Zaxian's face into the bar and he fell to the ground.

“My hero,” said Kally dryly, now standing next to Dorian.

“No problem, Kally,” he replied. “I hear you need a ride.”

Kally stared out the viewport as Dorian’s ship was traveling in hyper warp. The stars stretched out into long bright lines as they careened through space. Dorian was sitting at the helm and looked over at her.

“So, Kally,” he started. “You’re from planet Boston, right? Why have I never heard of that planet?”

“Actually, Boston is a city. I’m from Earth.”

“I see. So, why have I never heard of planet Earth?”

“It’s not part of your Space Union. It’s what you’d refer to as a ‘pre-hyper warp planet’.”

“You’re from a *primitive* world? How did you make it out here then?”

“Who are you calling primitive?”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to insult you.”

“It’s OK, I’ll get over it.”

Dorian paused for a few seconds. “Well?”

“Well, what?”

“Why are you out here?”

Kally looked back out the viewport. “Look, Dorian. You’re a nice guy and all, but I’m really not comfortable talking about it.”

Dorian didn’t respond. After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, he finally spoke up again. “Want something to drink?” he asked. “What were you drinking at the bar, the blue drink? I think I have some of that.” He got up, walked to the back of the ship, and started looking through some compartments. “Damn, where did I put it?”

Kally was still looking out the viewport, lost in thought. She stood up, looked over at Dorian rifling through his belongings, and then at the empty seat by the helm. She walked over to it and examined the buttons by the main viewer. While she didn’t have much experience with

spaceship controls, she had picked up a few simple commands. She looked over at Dorian, who was still looking for the blue drink, and then back at the screen. After pushing a few buttons, looking back at Dorian, and then back at the screen again, she scurried back her seat.

“Found it,” called Dorian, now walking back to his seat. With him was a bottle of the blue drink and two cups. He filled them up and handed one to Kally. She didn’t say anything, but just looked at him quizzically. After he took a sip of his drink, she took one of her own.

“So, Dorian,” she started, following another large sip. “How far away are we from Dracon 5?”

“We should be there soon,” replied Dorian.

“And that is where we’re going, right?” She finished off the rest of her drink.

“Yes, that’s what we discussed when you came aboard.”

Suddenly Kally stood up and slammed her cup against her chair. She looked at it and panicked when the cup was still completely intact.

“What are you doing?” asked Dorian. “Did you want some more?”

Kally aimed her unbroken cup at Dorian threateningly. “You lied to me. Why are we going to Space Command?”

Dorian extended his right arm toward the main viewer and a picture of Kally appeared. Underneath it read:

REWARD: 40 MILLION CREDITS

“I saw this after you ducked away,” said Dorian. “You have a bounty on you. I’m a bounty hunter.”

“So, you’re just another bounty hunter. I really thought you were a nice guy.”

“Hey, I’m not the bad guy here. You are a fugitive after all, aren’t you?”

Kally dropped back down in her seat, continuing to clutch her cup. “I am, but... it’s not that simple.”

“Forty million credits. That’s a ridiculously high bounty. They must *really* want you.”

“They want to kill me like they killed the others.” Kally was now on the verge of tears.

“What others?”

Kally turned back to the viewport. “What do you care? You’re just in it for the money, aren’t you?”

Dorian continued looking at Kally until the main viewer started beeping. The long bright lines began shortening, eventually returning to their normal starry form. A giant space station appeared ahead, much larger than the bar they came from. Dorian took control of the ship and piloted it toward an area that began opening. As the ship landed inside, the opening began to close. After fully closing, a door opened inside and a Starkian entered the air lock, followed by three guards.

Dorian stood up and walked over to Kally. “Come me with, please,” he said. Kally didn’t respond. “Let’s go,” he said, pulling her up.

“Dorian,” said the Starkian as the two walked out of the ship. “I should have guessed you’d find her. You’ve never let me down before.” The guards had their weapons drawn.

“Right, Trent,” said Dorian. He turned to face Kally and then back to Trent. “What did she do, anyway?”

“None of your concern, Dorian.”

“This whole situation is bugging me. She’s from a primitive world and-”

“Do you want your money or not?”

Dorian paused for a moment. “Yes, please.”

Trent stepped forward until he was face to face with Dorian. Meanwhile, one of the guards advanced next to Kally, securing her. The other two guards lowered their weapons.

“40 *million* credits, Dorian,” said Trent, extending his hand. “Congratulations, you’re about to be very rich.”

Dorian looked at Trent’s hand and then at Kally, who was more distressed than ever.

“What are you waiting for, Dorian? Shake my hand so the transfer can occur.”

Dorian began slowly extending his hand toward Trent, but then stopped midway. He suddenly jerked it to the side, pushing away the guard’s laser rifle from Kally’s direction. Before anyone else could react, he was already wielding his own laser pistol and numerous shots were fired. All three guards fell to the ground.



“What are you doing?” yelled Trent, backing away as fast as he could.

“I don’t know,” Dorian responded, eyes fully widened. “Probably making the biggest mistake of my life.” He turned to Kally who was just as shocked. “Get back in the ship.”

### 3. Admission

Dorian’s ship was back in hyper warp and there was nothing but silence inside. Dorian was staring at the main screen while Kally was staring at Dorian. After what seemed like an eternity, Dorian finally turned around to face Kally and their eyes locked.

“Thank you,” said Kally, finally breaking the silence. “I can’t believe you did that for me.”

“This is so stupid,” said Dorian. “What was I thinking? They’ll probably send out a bounty for me too. We’re both fugitives now.”

“I know, but you did the right thing. I should have given you more credit earlier. I’m sorry for that”

Dorian leaned in closer. “OK, so *this* is it now. No more skirting around it. What happened to you?”

Kally let out a deep breath and proceeded to tell Dorian the story of the last six months of her life.

It was nearing the end of summer on Earth and Kally was just returning home from work. She was living with her teenage sister, Haley, in their parents’ house.

A few years before, their parents were tragically killed in a car accident. Unfortunately, they didn’t have any other living relatives; the two of them were all that was left in their family. Kally was already over 18, but Haley was still 14, meaning she was facing foster care. That is, she would have been if Kally didn’t step up and take custody for herself.

“Haley, are you home?” asked Kally as she entered the house.

“Yeah, I’m here,” called Haley from upstairs. “I’m just finishing my summer book readings.”

“OK, Hay, I’ll get dinner started.”

“Can we get pizza?”

"We had pizza last night!"

"Can we get pizza again?"

Kally looked towards the kitchen and then at the couch. "Maybe." She dropped onto the couch and closed her eyes. While their parents' left them an adequate inheritance, Kally still felt obligated to work while she was in college. It didn't seem fair to her sister to use it all for her own education, as much as it would help both of them in the long run.

Kally's eyes shot open. Did I just sleep through the night? she thought. The clock on the cable box confirmed she had only been asleep for 20 minutes. She picked up the phone, ordered a cheese pizza, and returned to her nap.

There was suddenly a great deal of commotion. Panicked cries and angry shouts filled the room. Kally opened her eyes and saw what could only be described as a humanoid anteater. "You're not the pizza guy," said Kally.

The human-eater responded with garbled nonsense.

"Do you have any idea what's going on?" a young girl asked Kally.

Kally had a sudden realization she was not dreaming and took a look around. She was in a weird room with five other people. Two men, two women, and the girl, none of whom she'd ever met before. "I'm not sure, sweetie," she said. "But I'm sure we'll all be OK. What's your name?"

"Britney," the girl said.

"Nice to meet you Britney. I'm Kally."

The human-eater grabbed Kally and positioned his hand over her ear. She felt a sharp pinch followed by a few seconds of complete silence. When her hearing returned, she was shocked that the human-eater's rough, grainy chatter had become smooth, pleasant speech. Speech she could understand.

"There, that's better, isn't it?" the human-eater asked gleefully. He then proceeded to perform the same action to everyone else in the room. After some confused looks, he addressed finally addressed them. "Welcome everyone!"

"Where are we?" yelled one of the men in the room.

"How did we get here?" yelled another.

"My name is Gallow," said the human-eater. "You were all chosen as representatives of your planet. Up until now, you most likely had no idea there was intelligent life on other planets. That is not true. There is a Space Union of many different planets and yours has been selected for admission."

"You took us without asking," said Britney. "That's not nice."

"Be quiet," said one of the men. "This is the greatest moment in human history. And we're part of it!"

"Yes," said Gallow. "This is the greatest moment in your history."

"What do we have to do with admission into this Space Union?" asked one of the women.

"Good question," answered Gallow. "You will be interviewed and investigated. If everything about your people meets our requirements, you will be granted admission."

"What does admission mean?" asked Kally.

"An even better question," said Gallow. "Admission means knowledge sharing between your world and the others in the Space Union. This includes providing you with the ability of faster-than-light travel, which will allow you to journey through space as the rest of us do. It also means sharing with us any advances you've made that may value others. Additional benefits include protection under Space Command and an appointed representative in the Chief Tribunal Panel."

"Chief what?" asked Britney.

"The Chief Tribunal is made up of five high judges, called Chiefs, who oversee space laws, mediate disputes, and facilitate New Planet Admission, which is where you are now. The panel has representatives from every planet in the union, whom the Chiefs confer with on important issues. There will be time for more questions later. For now, we must commence with the interviews and investigations."

Kally went on to describe a haze of questions and tests, which seemed to affect her consciousness. She seemed to remember some explanation of memory probing, which allowed them to better see Earth's history through their eyes as they learned and experienced it. Eventually things became clear again and she found herself back in the original room with the five others. They were all lined up on their knees and Gallow could be heard behind them.

Kally tried to turn around, but couldn't. She noticed a glowing box in front of her, which seemed to be stopping her from moving anything but her eyes. She could tell her human counterparts were next to her with similar boxes restricting their movements. She was all the way on the left.

"I'm sorry, Earthlings," announced Gallow. "You have failed our admission process."

Kally tried to ask what would happen to them, but couldn't speak.

"Unfortunately," continued Gallow. "This means our time together is finished."

Kally heard a loud buzzing sound followed by a thump. She tried to stretch her eyes as far they would go, but it only blurred her vision. Another buzzing and thump followed. This time there was something in the corner of her eye. She prayed it wasn't what she thought, but some part of her knew what was happening. Another buzz and thump confirmed it. One of the men was now lying on the ground to her right. She considered the fact that she was still dreaming, but she knew it was impossible when she saw Britney fall next. She fell right into the box near Kally, which shifted her body so they were facing each other.

"Oh god, Britney," she wept. Her thoughts fixated on her sister Haley, who was going to be all alone. When it occurred to her that she just spoke, she felt something prod her neck. She ducked as the laser rifle shot into the ground.

"What the...?" yelled Gallow, as he swung the rifle toward Kally's new position. Before he could fire again, Kally had lunged at him, knocking him to the ground. After punching him more times than she could count, she picked up his laser rifle and started beating him with it. She stood up, shot his unconscious face, and made her way out the door.

She may have just avoided death, but what Kally found in the hallway almost killed her anyway. The doors seemed to go on forever. In each one she looked into, she found six dead bodies lined up like she had been previously. It was a massacre.

Dorian was now holding Kally in his arms. She was in tears.

Kally had managed to find her way to a space dock and miraculously escaped on one of the ships. Since then she had been working odd jobs and chartering rides to other planets and space stations in the hopes of finding better opportunities. She knew they'd be looking for her, so she tried to remain as low key as she could. She didn't bother trying get a ride back to Earth, since it would only draw attention to her. After all, it was illegal to travel to 'primitive' planets. Her remaining hope was to raise enough money for her own ship, and the training she'd need to pilot it, so she could make it back on her own.

"Dorian?" asked Kally, after some labored breaths.

"Yes?"

"Will you... will you take me home?"

## 4. Fugitives

“Something’s wrong,” said Dorian. They had just landed by an old abandoned bridge in Boston, and had hidden the ship underneath it.

“What is it?” asked Kally.

“These atmospheric readings are showing undesirable results.”

Kally took a look at the screen and laughed. “Come on, it’s fine.”

Dorian and Kally exited the ship and Dorian started shivering. “It’s so cold!” he yelled.

“Yeah, it’s winter,” said Kally.

“And you Earthlings live in a climate where it gets this cold? Are you crazy?”

“We stay inside a lot. And we wear lots of layers to stay warm outside. Man up, Dorian!” Kally started walking.

“I am a man.”

“Wait a minute, Dorian,” Kally stopped walking. “What if someone sees you? They’re going to freak out. I don’t think we want to draw that kind of attention.”

“It’s OK,” said Dorian. His skin suddenly started fluctuating. The usual aqua pigment changed to a shade of pink matching Kally’s own skin.

“Wow, you actually look like one of us now. How did you do that?”

“It’s just like my bar trick on your drink. I can change colors of objects in my vicinity. I made the blue drink so clear that it seemed to disappear. I can use the same trick to change my skin color.”

“That’s amazing.” Kally started shivering herself. “Let’s get going. We should really get something warmer to wear.”

The two walked to Kally’s house, where she found a “For Sale” sign buried in snow in the front lawn. They entered the house, but found it empty. While she knew Haley wouldn’t be there, she hoped she’d find her there anyway.

"We need to find my sister," Kally told Dorian. She provided him with some of her father's old clothes and a jacket and then changed her own. They walked outside again and something caught Kally's eye. At the park across the street, there was a giant wall that was never there before. She led Dorian there and was amazed by what she found. It was a memorial.

THIS STANDS FOR THOSE WHO DISAPPEARED – AUGUST 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

Kally scanned the wall, which was full of names, and quickly found her own. Her heart almost stopped when she saw it was under her sister's name. "She was there," was all she could say. "She was *there*."

"I'm sorry, Kally," Dorian said, embracing her.

"Let's just go home," she said after a long silence.

They returned to Kally's house and sat on the couch together in silence. Dorian found some food in the kitchen and brought it to her, but she refused it. When it got dark, she set him up in the guest room and then went to her own room to sleep.

Meanwhile, in space, Fritz was still in hyper warp attempting to follow Dorian from when he left the space station bar. A message appeared on his screen. It showed a picture of Dorian, labeling him as an accomplice to the girl. His reward was listed at 20 million credits.

"I knew following that Dorxian was the right move," said Fritz to himself. "My instincts are as sharp as ever." Fritz sat there with a giant grin on his face, thinking of all he would be able to do with reward money. An incoming call interrupted his contemplation. It was from Trent.

"Trent!" yelled Fritz, after answering the call, which displayed Trent on the main screen. "Long time no see."

"Likewise," answered Trent, who appeared quite perturbed. "Listen Fritz, you're my second best bounty hunter-"

"Second?" screeched Fritz.

"Yes, Fritz, but I'm giving you the chance to become first."

"Does this have to do with the Earthling and the Dorxian?"

"Yes, I'm sure you've seen the new bounty by now. While the two bounties are open to everyone, I am in need of real time updates, which is why I'm talking with you now."

“Updates?” Fritz asked, astonished. “That’s highly irregular. Any updates I report will only hinder my progress if you pass that information onto other bounty hunters.”

“I am aware of that,” answered Trent, annoyed by Fritz’s relentless questioning. “We are prepared to offer you alone an additional 20 million credits on the contingency that you keep us in the loop and provide us with both marks.”

80 million credits, thought Fritz, whose gleaming smile had now returned.

“Well, Fritz? I can’t tell you how important this job is to the union. These orders are coming directly from Chief Bront of the Tribunal.”

“You have a deal, Trent. I am already aware of the Dorxian’s involvement with the Earthling and have been following his hyper warp all day since he left Space Station 11A.”

“What do you mean *all* day?” asked Trent frustratingly. “He *just* shot up Space Command a few hours ago!”

“That’s impossible!” howled Fritz.

“He probably gave you the slip. We were able to track his hyper warp destination when he left with the girl. It indicated he was heading toward Dracon 5, but he’s too smart for that. He probably used a cutoff switch in the middle of his trek and switched course.”

“So how do I find him?”

“Dammit, Fritz. What kind of a bounty hunter are you that you don’t know basic techniques? You need to follow his trail and trace where the cutoff point was. From there you should be able to track his final destination.”

“OK, Trent. I’m on it.”

Back on Earth, Dorian was lying on his bed in the guest room, unable to fall asleep. The full consequences of what he did finally sunk in, which left him wondering how his life was going to change. Would he be hiding on Earth forever, pretending to be one of them? Would he return to space a fugitive, always looking over his shoulder and escaping capture whenever they found him? Would Kally come with him?

That last question hit him with the realization of how close the two have gotten in such a short period of time. He knew there was some kind of attraction there since he first met her at the space bar. He also knew that now wasn’t the time to do anything about it. She was going through too much already.

Dorian became sick of the thoughts circling around in his mind and decided he needed to clear his head. He went to the closet and grabbed two of the heaviest jackets he could find. Quietly, he exited the house and started walking.

It was late at night, but there were other people walking around. They seemed to be focused around an establishment, where loud noises could be heard. Dorian walked in and immediately knew where he was. It was a bar, which was rather comforting. Dorian didn't expect anything on Earth to remind him of his life in space.

"Hey, dude!" a man exclaimed to Dorian as he walked into the bar. "What's up, buddy?"

"Not too much," answered Dorian. The man's expression reminded Dorian they weren't speaking the same language. While he had a universal translator, nobody else on Earth had one, besides Kally. This meant, while he could understand others, they wouldn't be able to understand him.

"What is that, Swedish?" the man asked. "Welcome to America!"

America? thought Dorian. I thought this place was called Boston. Maybe America is just another name for it.

Dorian walked to the bar and the bartender approached him.

"What would you like?" the bartender asked, putting a coaster down in front of him.

"I don't suppose you have orange drink here?"

The bartender just shrugged, unsure what Dorian had just said. Dorian looked around and saw many others holding cups with an amber-colored liquid. He pointed to one of them and the bartender quickly filled him up a glass.

After having a few glasses of the drink, and some more failed attempts at communicating with other bar patrons, Dorian stood up. The bartender placed a piece of paper near his empty cup, which he quickly determined was the bill. Dorian extended his hand and the bartender shook it, but there was no fund transfer. Here he was buying drinks without any Earth money. Was he going to get in trouble on his first night on this new planet?

"Here you go," said Kally, who dropped a twenty on the bar. "Keep the change."

"Thanks," said the bartender. "Have a good night you two."

Dorian turned to Kally and smiled. "How did you find me here?"



"I figured I'd find you in a bar. That is where we first met after all."

"Are you doing OK?"

"Yeah, I'm feeling a little better now that I found you. I went looking for you in the guest room. I don't want to be alone right now."

"You're not alone, Kally." Dorian put his arm around her and she wrapped both her arms around him.

"Thank you, Dorian," she said, leaning in for a kiss.

If Dorian had any doubts in his mind about Kally, they were gone the moment their lips met. He knew no matter where he ended up, he didn't want it to be without her.

"Hey," called a man next to them at the bar. "Did you... did your skin just turn green for a second?"

Stupid, thought Dorian. I lost my focus and my skin reverted back to normal for a moment.

"No it didn't," said Kally, who grabbed Dorian and led him out of the bar. "Let's go home, OK?"

"Sure," said Dorian. "I just want to say--"

Dorian was interrupted as a giant flash of light shone in the night sky. Everyone looked up and saw a trail of flames falling in the distance.

"Is that a UFO?" asked someone.

"It's probably just a meteor," said someone else who was recording it on his phone.

Dorian grabbed Kally's shoulder. "Let's get back to your house, *now*."

After Kally walked into the house, Dorian stopped at the door.

"What are you doing?" she asked. "Come inside."

"I'm sorry Kally," said Dorian. "They found us."

"You mean that light-?"

"Yes, it was a ship. You'll be safe as long I stay away from you. They'll be able to track my signature, but you'll be alright. They won't be able to tell you apart from everyone else."

"No, Dorian. You can't leave me."

"I'm not going to leave you, Kally. I'm going to find them before they find me. I'll be right back."

Kally embraced Dorian and wouldn't let go.

"It's OK, Kally. Everything will be OK."

On the other side of the city, Fritz was exiting his ship.

"What the hell?" he exclaimed before running back inside. "How do people walk around out there when it's so cold?" He put on some extra layers of clothes and went back out.

Fritz waved his hands around, which brought up a map in his eyesight. "There you are, Dorxian," he noted as he saw a red dot appear. "Wait a minute, it's moving in my direction. He knows I'm here."

Fritz pulled out his laser pistol and aimed it in the direction of the dot. It stopped just before reaching his vicinity. "Where are you Dorxian?" he shouted.

A laser shot knocked Fritz's pistol out of his hand and Dorian appeared out from behind a car. "Right here, Fritz," he said, pointing his pistol in his direction. "Get your hands where I can see them." Fritz did as he was told. "Who knows you're here?"

"Trent knows. I've been providing him updates."

"That doesn't make any sense, Fritz. Why would you send reports on your bounties before you obtain them?"

"This isn't just any bounty. I'm on track to make 80 million here. The two of you are wanted by a Chief on the Tribunal."

"What Chief?"

"Chief Bront. I don't know anything else. Listen, you are in no position to claim the bounty on the girl yourself now. If you let me go and hand her over, I'm sure I can still take part of the reward and I'll split it with you fifty-fifty."

Dorian walked right up to Fritz, still aiming his pistol. "That's *not* going to happen."

“How about if we-” Fritz swung his arm at Dorian, knocking his laser pistol to the ground. He then proceeded to kick Dorian in the stomach, which knocked him to his knees. After a hard windup, Fritz punched him across the chin, bashing him to the ground.

Bluish blood covered Dorian’s face as Fritz was standing over him with his laser pistol. “You’re now my prisoner,” he said. “Tell me where I can find-” A laser shot interrupted him, and he fell to the ground. Dorian looked up and saw Kally wielding his pistol.

“I’m right here,” she said.

“Kally?” asked Dorian. “I told you to stay away.”

“Aren’t you glad I didn’t?” she responded, helping Dorian to his feet. Sirens could be heard in the distance.

“Go back home, Kally,” said Dorian, picking up Fritz’s unconscious body.

“No, I’m staying with you.”

“No, you’re staying here. I’m putting an end to this now.” Dorian dragged Fritz and dropped him in his ship. He went back to Kally and hugged her goodbye. “I’ll be back soon.”

Kally watched as Dorian piloted Fritz’s ship into the sky. As comforting as his tone was, she wasn’t sure she’d ever see him again.

## 5. The Chief

“Wake up, Fritz,” said Dorian. Fritz was positioned in a seat, starting to regain consciousness, while Dorian sat at the helm.

“Where are we going?” asked Fritz, once he was fully awake.

“We’re going to Space Command,” answered Dorian. “You have some bounties to collect.”

Fritz looked around the ship. “What do you mean? The girl’s not here.”

“Well, you’re not really collecting them. We’re just going to pretend that’s why we’re going there.”

“This will never work.”

Dorian didn’t respond. Instead, he composed a new message and entered the following:

EARTHLING AND DORXIAN ARE IN MY CUSTODY AND ON THE WAY TO SPACE COMMAND. 100 MILLION CREDITS DIRECTLY FROM CHIEF BRONT ON ARRIVAL OR WE TURN AROUND.

"I need you to send this, Fritz," said Dorian. If Dorian sent it himself, Trent would know it came from him.

"No way, Dorxian."

Dorian got up and walked over to Fritz, with his laser pistol in hand. He pressed a button that changed its usual blue glow to red. "It's not my style to kill unnecessarily, Fritz. But if you don't send this message, I'm willing to make an exception. Do you want to live through this ordeal?"

Fritz stood up and stretched his right hand toward the screen, causing the message to send.

"Thanks, buddy," said Dorian.

A message appeared a few moments later stating the terms were acceptable and Chief Bront would be at the space dock waiting for them.

"Hey, it worked," said Dorian, joyfully.

Fritz's ship reached Space Command and the dock opened up to let them enter. Dorian opened up the ship, but then made his way to an exterior cargo chute. After some time waiting, Space Command guards were ordered into the ship to find an unconscious Fritz lying on the ground. "Something's wrong here," they called, as they carried him out of the ship.

Dorian had exited the ship through the chute and made his way to another nearby ship, hiding behind it. He looked on at the awaiting party. Trent was there, as well as twenty or so guards. Towering above them was Chief Bront. He was easily twice Dorian's size.

"Tell me what is happening!" roared Bront. His deep, authoritative voice echoed through the entire space dock. "My fellow tribunal members are already upset with me for leaving our session. Nothing else can go wrong here to alert them of my whereabouts."

"Chief Bront," said Dorian, revealing his location. "I need a word with you."

Bront looked in the direction of Dorian's voice and saw him walk out of his hiding spot, his laser pistol aimed directly at him. The guards aimed their laser rifles at Dorian and ordered him to drop his weapon.

"You are highly outnumbered," said Bront. "Drop your weapon in the next three seconds or I'll order them to shoot."

Dorian dropped his pistol to the ground and raised his hands above his head. Fritz's ship began to hum.

"Stop what you're doing," commanded Bront, who then turned to one of the guards. "Shoot him," he commanded.

Before the guard could fulfill the command, Dorian swept his hands in a giant circle and the ship began auto-firing its lasers at the guards. Dorian ran back to the nearby ship for cover and watched as every guard was shot at and fell to the ground. Trent fled from the room as Bront was hit. Bront didn't react and remained standing.

After the remaining guards were taken out, and the firing ceased, Dorian leapt out of his hiding spot, grabbed his laser pistol, and took several shots at Bront. None of them made any impact.

"Oh, crap," exclaimed Dorian as Bront ran full speed toward him. Before he could move out of the way, he was rammed into the nearby ship, which almost crushed him. He got up and took a swing, but nearly broke his hand when his fist connected with Bront's leg. Bront picked him up and threw him across the room, knocking him into another ship.

"You're going to tell me how to find the girl," started Bront. "Then you're going to tell me how to find the others. And then I'm going to kill all of you with my bare hands."

"Others?" asked Dorian, struggling to breathe. Dorian attempted to stand up again, but couldn't. Bront began walking slowly toward him. Upon reaching Dorian, he lifted his colossal foot, ready to crush him.

"Bront, stop!" yelled a voice sharing Bront's own intensity. Dorian looked up and saw four more Chiefs standing at the entrance, two male and two female, all just as massive as Bront. "We have been made aware of your transgressions and are here to relieve you of your command from the Tribunal."

"Made aware?" asked Bront. "By whom?"

"Sorry, Bront," a voice said from behind the Chiefs. Trent walked around them into view. "This whole situation was bugging me from the start and I finally decided to do something when I witnessed Dorian's desire for justice."

"Come with us," said one of the Chiefs.

Bront let out a yell that nearly deafened Dorian, who was still on the ground from the earlier throw. Bront charged toward his fellow Chiefs and began pummeling them. They tried to fight back, but they were no matches for his ferocity.

Meanwhile, Dorian excruciatingly pulled himself up and dragged himself to his laser pistol. He picked it up and switched it to red. After a few deep breathes, he dashed at Bront and hurdled onto his shoulders. As Bront tried to shake him loose, Dorian jammed his pistol into his face and pulled the trigger as many times as he could.

Bront let out a violent squeal and toppled over. Dorian jumped free and landed on his feet in the middle of the other Chiefs.

“Thank you, young man,” said one of the Chiefs. “My name is Holden. And these are Felton, Hildi, and Tracer.”

“Nice to meet you guys. I’m Dorian.”

“We’re going to begin a deeper investigation into Bront’s crimes, but in the meantime, you and everyone else involved will be safe.”

“You might want to call off the bounties in that case.”

Holden motioned to Trent, who left the room. “It will be taken care of.”

“And what about Earth?”

“Bront’s methods for New Planet Admissions were highly irregular and inhumane. Please understand that is not how we introduce ourselves to new worlds. There is very little that scares us away from allowing planets into the union, and we certainly wouldn’t resort to Bront’s actions if we didn’t accept them. He had his own agenda, and we are ashamed to admit we were unaware of it.”

“So Earth is going to be given another chance? I’m not sure they’re going to want to hear anything you have to say after they lost all those people.”

“All we can do is apologize and try to make amends. If she would be willing, we believe the one named Kally Klein would be the best representative in these proceedings. If we can make peace with her, she may be the bridge we need to begin a fresh start with her planet.”

“Well, I’ll try to talk to her about it.” Dorian began walking back to Fritz’s ship when Trent returned to the room. He transferred Holden a message.

“Just a second, Dorian,” called Holden. Dorian turned around. “Bront mentioned something about ‘others,’ correct?”

“Yes, who are the others?”

“It seems one of the other interrogated groups from Earth also made an escape. The name of one them will be of interest. Haley Klein.”

“Haley? Where *is* she?”

“Their whereabouts are currently unknown, but we will do everything in our power to locate them. If you would be willing, we’d appreciate the help. Trent tells us you’re the best at this sort of thing.”

Back on Earth a while later, Kally was sitting at the bar. After finishing her beer, the bartender asked if she wanted another.

“You wouldn’t happen to have any blue drink, would you?” she asked.

“I can make you a Blue Hawaii,” said the bartender.

“No thanks, I’ll just take another beer.”

“I think I still have some blue drink in my ship,” said a voice behind her. She swung her bar stool around and was ecstatic to see Dorian standing there. “Need a ride?” he asked.

Kally jumped out of her seat and into Dorian’s arms, and the two of them toppled over. Everyone in the bar suddenly became quiet and were staring in their direction. Kally looked at Dorian, whose skin had reverted back to its natural aqua color. She nudged him, prompting him to change it back.

They both spoke up in unison. “No it didn’t.”