## The Price of Peace

## Von chelle76

## Kapitel 43: The Banquet

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Chapter 42: The Banquet

"Eryn!" Stephen calls as he and Raisa come up to greet her and Chihiro.

"Hey!" she replies as the couple approach them. "I didn't know you were coming, since Nora is still so small."

"Aunt Elaine insisted on keeping her for us, so we could come to this. I hope mother and father don't mind that we came," Stephen replies.

Eryn chuckles. "First time without Nora?" she asks noting Raisa's uneasiness.

"Yes. I feel so guilty leaving her," Raisa replies.

"Do mother and father know you're here yet?" Eryn asks.

"Haven't spotted them yet. I saw you and thought we'd say hello before the guys start fighting over you," Stephen says with a smirk, making Eryn blush.

"Go away!" she says and slaps his shoulder playfully. "I seriously doubt I'll be the subject of any arguments tonight, Stevie," Eryn says using a name she knows he hates.

Stephen glares at her then rolls his eyes. "Whatever, sis. I still say you will have an interesting time tonight. I think I've seen a few shy guys looking your way," he says teasingly.

"All right you two," Raisa says holding an arm up to keep them apart. "There is to be no sibling rivalry tonight, or I'll make you both take it outside with swords, and Eryn, in that dress, I don't think you'd stand a chance."

Eryn starts to make a comment, but Chihiro touches her arm and shakes her head.

"Don't disappoint your parents tonight, Eryn. You can get him back another time," she says with a wink.

Eryn nods. "You're right, Chihiro," she replies. She then looks at Stephen and smiles her most polite smile, "I bid you good evening, sir." She takes Chihiros hand and they walk across the room, pointedly not looking back. Just across the room they break into a fit of giggles when someone walks up behind them and places their hands across Chihiro's eyes.

"What the?" Chihiro says and struggles free to find Dylan standing behind her grinning broadly. "Dylan! You came!" she exclaims excitedly, hugging him tightly. "But...How? I thought you were studying."

"Stephen convinced me to come," he says quietly, wrapping his arms around Chihiro. "You know I've been pretty much locked up in my room for two weeks. He threatened to drag me here by force if I didn't come willingly."

"Well, at least he's good to some people," Eryn states with mock-annoyance.

"Oh, come on, I honestly had no clue Dylan was coming. I planned on staying with you all night, and I still will," Chihiro says trying to console Eryn.

"I don't want to feel like a third wheel. You two go on and dance or something. I'm going to go get a drink and something to eat. I'll be close, so you can come and talk to me in a little, okay?" Eryn says. Chihiro looks between Dylan and Eryn, almost struggling with leaving her. "Go," Eryn says forcefully, pointing to the dance floor. "I'll save you a spot at a table, okay?"

Chihiro sighs in resignation. "Fine... But after this dance, we're coming to annoy you, got it?" Chihiro states getting a nod in return. Eryn then heads off towards the food and Dylan takes Chihiro out to the dance floor.

Eryn takes a drink and goes and sits at a nearby table, watching the others in the room with curious observation. Across the way, she sees her parents engaged in conversation with a man she's never met, but assumes him to be the King they were discussing earlier. Looking around more, she spots Stephen and Raisa conversing with a group of soldiers and laughing happily. Her eye catches a glimpse of Dylan and Chihiro dancing happily and she lets out a sigh and takes a sip of her drink before setting it down a bit harder than she intends. She watches them for several minutes before she realizes that someone is watching her. She looks up with a start to see a strange well-dressed young man standing next to the table eyeing her with curiosity.

"Mind if I join you, madam?" the young man says shyly.

Eryn shrugs. "Suit yourself, I'm saving these two seats though," she replies indifferently.

The young man chuckles and eyes her closely. "You are expecting a gentleman caller, are you?"

Eryn looks up startled by his directness. "Not tonight," she replies quietly. "The person I would have come with was unable to make it," she replies without thinking.

"That is his loss then. If he had seen you in the beautiful dress that you're wearing, I'm sure he would have forfeited his plans. I would for someone so lovely," the man says as he takes one of Eryn's hand and kisses it before setting it down again. "I am Prince Adrien of Jarre. It is my pleasure to meet you."

"My name is Eryn Rider; it is nice to meet you, Prince Adrien," Eryn says as formally as she is able.

"Rider? As in General Rider?" Prince Adrien asks intrigued.

"Aye, the same," she replies with a nod.

"I was unaware that he had any children," Adrien states. "You must have a beautiful mother to have turned out so well," he adds, making Eryn blush slightly. "Would you like to dance?" he asks quietly.

"Um, I suppose it would be all right," Eryn says with a bit of hesitation.

"Well, you said that the person you planned on coming with isn't here, so why should you have to sit here alone?" he states as he stands and offers his hand to her. "I don't think he would mind a few innocent dances, Lady Eryn," he says firmly.

Eryn nods slightly and stands, taking the offered hand and he leads her to the dance floor amongst the other couples, and they soon begin to dance together. "Ah, about time," King Roland says. "I'm glad to see my son

has found himself a lovely girl to dance with."

Saber turns to look, and sees Eryn and Adrien dancing. "That young lady happens to be one of our eldest daughters." Saber says.

King Roland looks confused. "What do you mean one of your oldest? Either she's your oldest or she's not!"

"They're identical twins," Saber replies. "I honestly don't remember which one was born first."

"Ah, I understand," King Roland says. "They seem a good pair," he says sounding pleased.

"It's just a dance or two," Saber says. "I'm sure they're both rather bored," he adds as an afterthought, and they begin discussing other matters.

Adrien notices the adults divert their attention from them and spins her with one hand as part of the dance, and when he places his other hand back on her, he places it

closer to her waist than normal. Eryn a bit flustered from the spin doesn't notice. "You dance marvelously," Adrien says as the music ends and he escorts her back to the table. "May I bring you another drink?" he asks.

"Yes please," Eryn says. "I could use one after that."

Adrien goes off, and Chihiro and Dylan come and sit down with her, "Who were you dancing with?" Chihiro asks. "Won't Seth be mad?"

"Prince Adrien of Jarre," Eryn replies. "And, I fail to see how a few innocent dances at a dinner banquet, that he chose not to attend, should make any difference. I've been to formal functions at his house, as his girlfriend, and he's always had to dance with girls whom had much higher standing than me, and in my personal opinion more beautiful."

"And you've never said anything?" Dylan says shocked. "I can't believe you'd take that."

"It's not as if we're betrothed or anything," Eryn says dismissively.

"Unlike us?" Chihiro says with a smile, admiring the ring on her hand.

Eryn nods, "Exactly."

Meanwhile, Adrien sees the couple come to the table, and gets four drinks. Once nobody is looking he reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out an envelope. He opens it up and pours some of the powder inside into one of the drinks, then he pours a little into two of the other drinks with a smile. "I hope one dose will do it for each," he says to himself and goes to the table. "You must be Eryn's friends," Adrien says with a smile. "I saw you come to the table, and took the liberty of bringing you each a drink," he states, handing each of them one of the spiked drinks before taking his seat beside Eryn. "Oh, forgive me, where are my manners, I'm Prince Adrien of Jarre," he bows his head slightly.

"Dylan Rider," Dylan says. "Eryn's younger brother, and this is my fiance' Chihiro Hikari," he says nodding to her.

"It is an honor to meet you, Prince Adrien," Chihiro says.

"You two are engaged?" Adrien asks in surprise.

"Well, our parents won't let it be an official betrothal yet, but we've been together for years, so we consider ourselves engaged. I even bought Chihiro a ring," Dylan says and Chihiro holds up her hand showing a rather nice ring.

"Well, then I propose a toast, to your continued happiness," Adrien says holding up his drink, the others grab their cups and they all drink the drink down. The music starts back up, and nice slow song.

"Come on, Dylan, let's dance again" Chihiro says

"Of course, Chihiro" Dylan says and they both get up "Nice meeting you, Prince Adrien" they go and dance

"How about you, Lady Eryn?" Adrien asks "Care for another dance?"

Eryn looks very hesitant "It wouldn't be right for us to share two dances in a row, Prince Adrien"

Adrien looks to Chihiro and Dylan "What about those two, and what's right?"

"Everyone knows those two are practically betrothed, so no one cares"

"Next song then" Adrien pushes "I don't want to sit here all night"

"You're the Prince of Jarre, shouldn't you be dancing with as many eligible girls as you can find, hoping to find a suitable young lady?"

Adrien looks around. "Do you see another unaccompanied young lady here?" he asks.

Eryn sighs. "You're not going to give up until I agree to another dance, are you?" she asks in defeat.

"Not a chance," he replies.

"Fine, one more dance, next song, but no more after that," Eryn says firmly.

"Agreed," Adrien says as the song ends, and is followed by another song shortly after. "Come on, you promised," Adrien says, as he gets up and offers her his hand. They head out onto the dance floor not noticing that Dylan and Chihiro are nowhere in sight.

As they dance Adrien slides his hand lower on Eryn's hip. "Is it hot in here to you?" Eryn asks as the drug Adrien gave her courses through her system and she feels a bit light-headed.

"There are a number of people in this room, perhaps we should move to another room?" Adrien suggests as he gently nudges her toward a smaller room.

"Maybe just to cool down," Eryn agrees as they head out the room. Once alone Adrien grabs Eryn and kisses her fiercely.

Seth enters the banquet hall shortly afterwards. He walks up to the table with all the adults, "Forgive my tardiness, I am Seth von Rohr, Eryn Rider invited me," he says looking around trying to spot her.

King Roland looks at Seth, "Didn't your parents teach you that it is rude to come late to a dinner banquet?"

"Yes, sir," Seth responds apologetically. "And I wouldn't have been late, except..." he pauses and looks to the floor.

"Mister von Rohr, is something the matter?" Amanda asks.

"My grandmother passed on this morning. I had gone to see her before coming here, and she passed on right in front of me," Seth says nearly in tears.

"Oh, you poor thing!" Amanda exclaims and gets up and hugs him, then blushes realizing the boy doesn't even know who she is. "I apologize, I'm Brigadier Colonel Amanda Rider, Eryn's mother. This (points to Saber) is General Rider, her father, and this (motions to King Roland) is the guest of honor, King Roland of Jarre."

Seth bows to King Roland. "I apologize again for my tardiness, your majesty," he says sincerely.

"If I may ask," King Roland says. "Why did you go see your grandmother today anyway?"

Seth blushes heavily, "I went to go ask her for her engagement ring, so that I could offer it to Eryn, with General and Brigadier Colonel Rider's consent of course," he replies.

"We'd be more than happy to discuss a formal betrothal between the two of you, if she accepts the ring," Amanda says "So, go ask, she was dancing with King Roland's son, Prince Adrien." She turns and looks across the dance floor. "That's odd, I don't see her, or Prince Adrien." She pauses as she scans the floor, "Chihiro and Dylan are also missing," she states concern becoming apparent in her voice.

"I will find them, Ma'am," Seth says "They may have just gone for a stroll or something."

"Very well," Amanda says. "Good luck," she adds with a hint of uneasiness.

Seth starts looking for the missing children, and he discovers Chihiro and Dylan, locked in a passionate embrace in a dark corner of a side room, clothes starting to come off as he spots them and clears his throat rather loudly, getting their attention. "I suggest that you two separate, this is hardly the time or place," he states getting their attention. They turn and look at him dully for a second and he gasps, "you've been drugged." They return their attention to each other and Seth turns back to the main hall. "Brigadier Colonel!" Seth shouts, as he grabs Dylan and pulls him off Chihiro, trying to stop them from doing something they'll regret.

"Mister von Rohr, this had better be..." Amanda trails off as she sees the situation. "What's going on here?"

"I believe they've been drugged and whatever it was is strong," Seth says "They barely reacted when I confronted them."

Fireball and Colt come in a minute later. "What's going on?" they ask seeing the teens being forcefully pulled apart. Amanda holding Chihiro and Seth holding tightly to Dylan.

"Chihiro and Dylan have been drugged" Amanda states as she struggle to subdue Chihiro.

"I'll get April, she'll take care of Chihiro," Fireball says as he heads back to the main hall.

"I'll take care of Dylan," Colt says and takes Dylan away from Seth.

"I'm really concerned for Eryn," Seth says as he keeps looking around for any sign of her.

"Please, locate her immediately, Seth," Amanda says. "I'll go and let her father know she may be in trouble.

"Yes, ma'am," Seth replies and heads off in search of Eryn. A short time later, he finds her discarded dress just outside another small room, and then he hears her.

"No!" Eryn says slurred.

"You don't mean that," Adrien says, "It's no big deal. Besides, we've already gone this far, why not all the way?"

"It's not right!" Eryn says, sounding a little more like herself.

A smack is heard. "You bitch, if I can't take you willingly, I'll have you anyway," Adrien says menacingly.

"No..." Eryn says, her voice too weak to scream.

Seth rushes in, pulling the dagger from his belt. "Get away from her!" he says holding the dagger toward Adrien. Adrien backs away, it's then Seth realizes that they are both completely naked, he can see the look in Eryn's eyes that the drug is wearing off. "Cover yourself, Eryn, I'm going to castrate this... thing", he says tossing her his jacket.

"Seth..." Eryn manages weakly as she fumbles for the jacket and manages to cover herself. "I thought you weren't coming," she says weakly, fighting back tears.

"We'll talk later," Seth says to her as he grabs Adrien. "Out front, NOW!" he says shoving him out of the room.

"But my clothes," Adrien says.

"I don't care, walk, or so I swear I'll castrate you," Seth says and they head out of the room. "General Rider, I've made a citizen's arrest," he says when he spots Saber and

several other adults approaching the scuffle.

King Roland stares his son. "Have you gotten yourself in trouble again son?" he asks obviously amused.

"It is all a misunderstanding, father. The wench I was dancing with changed her mind, that is all," Adrien states with a smirk. "No harm has come to her, and I've got diplomatic immunity, so there is no real issue here," he adds cooly.

Seth moves the dagger to Adrien's genitals, "I suggest you waive your so-called diplomatic immunity, because I don't care if I go to jail, I will see that you are punished for drugging and attempting to rape Eryn," he says while trying to hold back his anger.

"I suggest you drop the dagger, boy," King Roland says glaring at Seth. "You're already going to be arrested for holding a member of Jarre royalty hostage, isn't that right General?" he says looking to Saber as if nothing is wrong.

Saber looks toward King Roland, managing to hold in his anger and keep a straight face, his tone neutral he replies, "I apologize King Roland, but my sight has gone. I see no hostage situation, all I hear is a threat to hurt him, I cannot arrest him solely on a threat."

"He has a dagger!" Roland says forcefully, his anger building quickly.

"I don't see a dagger, in fact I don't see anything."

"Then I'll just end this," King Roland says as he pulls out a gun, and just as he goes to shoot it, the gun is cut in half.

Saber holds his sword in his hand. "No guns are allowed here, Your Majesty."

"I thought you were blind, Rider," the king replies.

"I am, Roland," Saber says. "I've learned to be able to do things without seeing, I heard the click of the hammer of your gun, I had no choice. Also, I'd like to remind you that you don't have diplomatic immunity here. Everyone here is held accountable to the intergalactic laws, regardless of their social status as we are a neutral territory for the New Frontier and herald no Monarch. So I'll be having both of you arrested."

"Me? On what grounds?" Roland asks becoming more irate.

"Last I checked you didn't have permission to carry a firearm on a military establishment," Saber states simply.

Stephen comes over with Adrien's clothes, "Let him go, I'll take him."

Seth removes the dagger and pushes Adrien toward Stephen. "Eryn?" he asks looking around for her obviously worried.

"My wife, Raisa is with her, they're still in the other room," Stephen replies.

Seth nods. "Thanks," he replies as Adrien gets dressed and Stephen takes him off. Seth goes to the room he found Eryn and Adrien in. "Raisa, Eryn, it's Seth, may I come in, please?" he asks hesitantly.

Raisa looks to Eryn who nods. "She's decent, so come on in," Raisa replies.

Seth enters the room and looks at Eryn, "You okay, physically?" he asks concerned, noting a slight bruise forming beneath her left eye.

Eryn nods, tears still streaming down her face. "Yeah," she replies before looking to Raisa, "Could you step out for a minute? I don't think Seth will try anything," she asks.

Raisa nods. "I'll be right outside if you need me," she says gently as she steps out of the room.

"Do you mind if I sit?" Seth asks hesitantly.

"Go ahead," Eryn responds quietly, not bothering to look up from her hands in her lap. He sits down beside her and they fall into silence for several minutes. "I'm sure you must hate me," she states finally, afraid to even face him.

"You were drugged, Eryn," Seth says quietly. "I took a class on recognizing the signs of someone on drugs as part of basic training. You were drugged, as were Chihiro and Dylan. Most likely with an aphrodisiac of some sort," he adds quietly.

Eryn gasps. "Adrien, he got us all drinks not long before..." she trails off.

"I suspected as much," Seth replies coldly.

Eryn is quiet for a minute, "I'm glad you came when you did, you saved me," she says quietly, venturing a glance to his face.

Seth nods. "I'm glad I saved you. I'm glad I got here when I did."

"I thought you couldn't make it though?" Eryn says confused.

"I wanted my coming to be a surprise," Seth replies.

"Why?" Eryn asks in confusion.

"I... I was going to ask you to marry me, Eryn," Seth admits. "I even have a ring for you, it was my grandmother's," he adds quietly.

"Not anymore I suppose," Eryn mumbles.

"Well, I hardly think that this is the appropriate time," Seth replies honestly.

"Would you still want to after..." Eryn attempts to ask, but is unable to bring herself to finish the question.

"Of course, Eryn, I love you, and I know that what happened tonight wasn't by choice," Seth replies, reaching over and wiping some of the tears from her face. "I want to marry you, Eryn Blaire Rider," he says quietly, looking directly into her eyes.

Eryn smiles weakly. "So you still want me to have the ring?" she asks hesitantly.

Seth looks surprised by the question, but takes the ring, and places it on her finger. "If you want to be with me," he adds.

She looks down at the ring and back up to him and smiles. "I would've said yes before you saved me, now there's no way I could say no," she says quietly.

Seth smiles and kisses her cheek. "Then I suppose we should talk with your parents," he replies. A knock at the door causes both of them to look up. "Come in," Seth says and Saber and Amanda enter the room, closing the door behind them.

"Are you all right, Eryn?" Saber asks quietly.

Eryn nods. "Yes, sir," she replies barely audible. "I'm sorry for disappointing you both," she adds.

Saber goes over and carefully kneels down beside her, and turns her face to look at her. "Eryn, this was not your fault. From what I can tell all three of you were drugged. Thankfully, this young man discovered it before anything too bad happened with any of you."

"What do you know happened, Eryn?" Amanda asks sitting down beside her.

Eryn shrugs. "I remember agreeing to dance with him, then afterwards I went and sat down. He said he'd go and get us a drink. He wasn't gone long at all, so I had no reason to be suspicious. While he was gone, Chihiro and Dylan came over to take a break from dancing. He came back and had drinks for all of us, so I figured he saw them sit down. He offered each of us one and he took the last one. All of us had a drink, we talked a bit. And I remember Dylan and Chihiro getting back up to dance again. He asked me to and I tried to decline, but he was rather insistent, saying something like there weren't any other single girls so I finally agreed to one more dance. I started feeling hot, so he suggested going out to the courtyard to cool off, we started that way, and things kinda get fuzzy. Next thing I really remember is him trying to..." she trails off and Amanda puts her arm around her.

"Eryn, I heard you tell him no. You started trying to get away and he hit you, that's why I busted in the way I did," Seth states. Saber stiffens and forces himself to control the rage he feels building and remains silent. "I was not angry with you. I had already found Dylan and Chihiro, and it was obvious that they were not really aware of themselves. Once I got them help, I started looking for you. Obviously I found you," he finishes quietly.

Eryn notices her father's reaction and glances down. "I should have done better at fighting him off. You trained me better than that," she says quietly.

"Eryn," Saber says with a sigh. "you were not yourself. Your mind was muddled from whatever drug you had been given. I do not hold you accountable for what happened, nor should you blame yourself. I will be requiring you to press formal charges against Prince Adrien, just as I will against King Roland for carrying a concealed weapon on the premises without proper permits. Why don't you go with your mother and change. You can talk more tomorrow, after you've had time to sleep off the effects of the drug."

"Okay," Eryn replies and she gets up with Amanda, who leads her out of the room by the arm, leaving Saber alone with Seth.

Seth shifts a bit uncomfortably noticing the anger still visible in Saber's countenance. Saber stands up and slowly makes his way to sit across from Seth he tries to force himself to relax, when he notices the boy's uneasiness. "I have no qualms with you. I am grateful that you were able to protect my daughter," he says breaking the heavy silence.

Seth looks up at him and nods. "I am glad that she was not hurt worse, sir," he replies quietly.

"You saw the place he struck her?" Saber asks. Seth nods and Saber releases a heavy sigh.

"You can see sir?" Seth asks hesitantly.

"Mostly shadows and outlines," he replies. "I've learned to compensate quickly when my vision goes out."

"So you knew I had the dagger?"

"I did not think he was lying, and it was obvious that you were holding him against his will. I did not realize he was unclothed right away. I would assume Eryn was as well?"

"Yes sir," Seth replies. "I gave her my jacket to cover herself with. She was back in her dress by the time you arrived. Her sister-in-law tended to her while I removed the Prince from the room."

"Eryn said that you were not able to come, you had planned on coming late or did it just work out for you?" Saber asks curiously.

"What I said before was the truth. I had gone to see my grandmother and planned on being back for the banquet, but she passed away while I was there, so I was delayed. I didn't want Eryn to get her hopes up, so I told her I couldn't come. I called the house to see if she wanted to come with me, but Marianna told me she had come along with you, not realizing I wasn't here."

"So you knew your grandmother was in ill health?" Saber asks.

"She was old, but her death was unexpected. I had gone to see her for...other reasons," Seth replies nervously.

Saber manages not to smile and nods. "I assume your other reasons have something to do with Eryn?" he asks.

"Yes, sir," Seth replies. "I'd gone to ask my grandmother if I could have her engagement ring, so that I could offer it to Eryn."

"Oh, that's right, I remember you saying that when you first arrived and asking for permission to ask her."

"And Lady Rider, err, I mean Brigadier Colonel Rider, gave me permission to offer her the ring," Seth points out.

"I assume that after this evening's events that idea has passed?" Saber asks.

Seth blushes heavily. "Um, actually..." he stammers nervously.

Saber looks surprised "You asked Eryn after she was nearly raped?"

"I didn't intend to ask tonight after that. Although I still intended on asking her," Seth admits. "But she asked me why I came, and I don't ever want to lie to her, so I didn't."

"You told her you'd come to ask her to marry you?" Saber says.

Seth nods. "I told her that I'd gotten my grandmother's ring, and that was why I was late, although I have yet to explain the full story," he admits. "She asked if I'd still want to marry her after what happened with her and Adrien and I told her of course, because I love her, then she did something unexpected."

"What is that?" Saber asks.

"She asked if she could still have the ring, and then I said of course and I put it on her," Seth responds, with a smile. "I suppose that means that sometime later we need to discuss a formal betrothal, if that's all right."

"Seth, as far as I am concerned you could marry Eryn tomorrow, no questions asked," Saber says "What you have done for this family tonight won't soon be forgotten."

Seth nods. "I'll have to discuss with Eryn on when she wishes to get married sir, but I seriously doubt it'll be tomorrow," he says. "Perhaps the next day," he adds with a grin.

Saber chuckles and shakes his head. "You know that her mother and I were like that, don't you?" he asks.

Seth looks at him confused. "Like what, sir?"

"We married after a few days of being officially engaged. Of course, we didn't tell the others until we showed up to be married. Only General Whitehawk, then Commander Eagle, and Thomas and Elaine knew beforehand."

"Why did you do that?" Seth asks with a hint of amusement.

"They teased us constantly, so it was our way of getting them back," Saber replies simply.

"So you got them back," Seth states. "How did you know?"

"That I wanted to marry Amanda?" Saber asks, getting a nod in reply. "I realized that I was happiest when she was near me. That I could talk to her about anything, and that it didn't matter to her if I could see or not. She is my equal," he replies. "Why? Are you rethinking your decision?"

"No sir, but I wasn't sure that she feels the same way. What if she said yes to spare my feelings or something?" Seth asks.

Saber chuckles. "I seriously doubt she would do such a thing. She is a lot like her mother, she will say what she feels, no matter what you think. It is one of the things I admire about my wife," he adds with a hint of amusement. "I suppose we should go. I need to see about my Dylan before returning to my quarters. Why don't you talk to Eryn tomorrow, when she's a bit more clear-headed. I think you will find her answer to be the same as it was tonight."

Seth nods. "I will, sir. Thank you for speaking with me. I'll call before coming over, so I don't disturb anyone," he replies.

Saber stands up and nods. "Good night," Saber says.

"Good night, sir," Seth replies before they head their separate ways.