

The Price of Peace

Von chelle76

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Kapitel 1: Intro

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The Price of Peace: Intro

"We'll be arriving shortly, Fireball. I've just received clearance to land," Saber says, glancing over at his companion.

Fireball nods in acknowledgment, "Okay. I'll go and make sure Colt and April are strapped down in the sick bay." He says as he gets up and leaves the control area.

Saber casts a glance towards him as he leaves and shakes his head to clear it. Watching the screens for any signs of pursuit, he debates whether to call ahead and give Commander Eagle a warning of his daughter's condition. He hesitantly presses the com-link and a moment later Commander Eagle's face appears on the screen.

"Saber, I saw that you have clearance to land and have requested medics to meet you upon arrival," the commander begins, getting a grim nod in reply. "What is the status of your team?" he asks.

"Colt has broken ribs, and is currently on oxygen. I think he will be all right if he hasn't punctured a lung, aside from a few abrasions. April is the main concern, sir," Saber replies. "She took a hard hit and has a rather large laceration on her head. I believe her skull is exposed, but I'm not sure. We have her strapped down to try and minimize her movements. She is hooked up to oxygen and her vitals are erratic, I am worried that the outcome won't be good."

Commander Eagle's face hardens briefly as he fights back anger, his gaze then softens into worry, "The medics are already waiting. I'll meet you in a few minutes. Once everyone has been tended to, I want you to meet me in my office."

"Yes, sir," he replies and closes the connection, just as Fireball returns. "Well?" Saber asks giving him a concerned look.

Fireball shrugs, "They are both breathing, albeit with help. No sign of consciousness from either of them."

Saber gives him a brief nod, then focuses on landing, "We are landing now. You are to be checked out upon arrival." Fireball starts to protest. "Then you may go see about her." Saber adds, cutting off the protest.

"I will, Saber," Fireball replies quietly. "You should be checked too. I know that some of the blood on your suit is actually yours. Your head is bleeding too."

"I'm fine. You three are my priority." Saber says trying to sound as confident as he can. He lands the ship and opens the ramp. Almost immediately medics are rushing in and into the sickbay. Colt and April are taken out by a group of medics, Fireball following silently behind them. Saber watches them leave and is grabbing his helmet when he senses a presence behind him.

"You should be checked too, Saber. That head wound looks pretty bad," Commander Eagle says sternly.

"I'm fine, sir. Head wounds always look worse than they are," he replies curtly. "Once I know the status of the others, I'll be sure to get checked." He gets up slowly, trying not to allow the extent of his injuries to show. "You should be with April, not here talking to me," he adds quietly.

"She is being tended to by our best people. There is nothing I can do for her right now. I will get someone to come here and examine you if you'd prefer, but you will be getting checked out," Commander Eagle says forcefully, his eyes meeting Saber's gaze.

Saber sighs in defeat and immediately flinches in pain, "Yes, sir. Could we have someone come to your office? I don't think I'm all that serious," he replies sounding a bit weaker than he intends.

Commander Eagle nods slightly and turns towards the ramp, "I'll meet you in my office. I will find someone who can come and examine you." With that he rushes down the ramp towards the medical facility.

Saber lags behind a moment forcing himself to become more steady on his feet before heading down the ramp towards the commander's office. After several minutes, he makes his way through the familiar halls, finally reaching his destination. He enters and is immediately greeted by a nurse, who glances at him and quickly grabs a chair, indicating for him to sit. He goes to comply just as everything goes black.

Please Review :-)

Kapitel 2: The Waiting Game

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The Price of Peace
Chapter 1: The Waiting Game

The sound of constant beeping and the smell of disinfectant greet him as he slowly returns to consciousness. He looks around wearily and sees Fireball and Commander Eagle in the hall talking quietly. Managing to look around a little more, he sees a blond woman sleeping in a chair not far from him. He goes to speak and realizes he has a tube in his throat. He tries to move his hand a bit and the blond woman seemingly senses his movements and snaps awake.

"Colt?" Robin cries out in fear and relief jumping up and rushing to his bedside..

The commander and Fireball quickly rush into the room followed by a couple of nurses. The nurses are examining him and he points to the tubing.

One nurse nods, "Okay Mr. Wilcox, we'll remove the tubing, but you mustn't try and talk too quickly or you'll choke. I'll get you pen and paper." Colt lifts a hand in reply and the tubing is removed. Another nurse appears with a cup of ice chips and a pad of paper and a pen, "Here you go. Now go slowly. You've been out a while."

Robin fights back tears as she takes his hand, "Colt, we were all so worried. I didn't know what to think..."

Colt squeezes her hand gently and tries to smile weakly. He then takes the pen and begins writing, "How long?" He turns it so they can read it.

"Almost six weeks," the commander replies.

Colt glances at Fireball and notices he looks worn out. He quickly takes the page and starts writing again, "Are you o.k.? Where are Saber and April?" He then turns it back so they can read it.

The others give each other a worried glance and Colt feels a knot forming in his stomach. He watches them almost dreading the answer. "They are both still in a coma, Colt. They are fairly stable, but neither one seems to be improving as much as they should be. April seemed to be the worst when we arrived. But now she seems to be more stable than Saber. She may have some permanent brain damage from the head injury, but we won't know for sure until she wakes up," Fireball says quietly.

"As for Saber, he had some rather bad internal injuries as well as a rather bad gash to

the back of his head which caused some swelling around his brain. He tried not to let on how bad he really was, but he collapsed in my office. His head wound has healed, but he still has a pretty bad concussion, although the doctors did get the swelling down from his brain. He shows no signs of waking. He is still on a ventilator, but has begun to breathe on his own for short periods. As with April, until he's awake, I can't say just how bad things are," the commander says.

Colt nods slightly, looks to Robin and begins writing again, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you."

Robin gently places a hand on his shoulder, tears falling onto his hospital gown, "From what I've heard, all of you are lucky to even be alive. I'd be worse off if you had died, Colt."

Colt smiles weakly up at her and pats the bed. She carefully sits beside him and he taps the pen on the paper for several minutes, trying to think. "You said they are stable?"

"Saber seems to be a bit more touch and go. His pulse is strong, but his oxygen levels keep dropping, which isn't good. The doctors can't find any obvious signs of trouble that hasn't already been tended to, so we are hoping that it will correct itself given time. They are keeping him heavily sedated to keep him from hurting himself. He tried to pull out the tubes one time, and I don't think he was even fully awake. So until he is breathing better on his own, they will have to keep him sedated," the commander replies.

Colt nods, casting a nervous glance to the commander then looks to Fireball, "Are you o.k., Fireball?"

Fireball nods, "I've been better. I had a couple of cracked ribs, and a nice knot on my head for a while, but I've been through worse. I've been worried about you three though. I knew Saber was worse off than he was letting on. I should have made him go to the med bay when I first saw him."

Colt shakes his head and writes, "You would have had to club him."

Fireball laughs, "Probably so, Cowboy. I'm glad you seem to be okay."

"A little sore and quite hungry..." Colt writes with a weak grin.

Robin smiles and jumps up, "I'll go ask the nurse to get you something." She quickly heads out of the room glad to feel useful.

Colt watches her go and sighs, "Does she know what happened?" he writes, glancing between the two men. They both shake their heads. "What if she asks?"

"That's up to you, Colt. I only know some of what happened. Saber is the only one who can give us a complete picture. I was busy trying to get to April..." Fireball replies quietly, trailing off at the end.

Colt nods, "I don't remember much after I was hit. Just flashes of images. I'm not sure I want to remember everything. If she asks, I'll tell her only what I know for a fact. Nothing more. Not even the bits and pieces I think I remember." The commander and Fireball nod and Colt rips up and crumples up the paper, tossing it into a paper collection can.

Robin comes back in a few minutes later, followed by a young woman in a white lab coat pushing a cart. "Food's here, Colt." The young woman rolls the cart to his bedside, and after placing it on the hospital tray, she places the table in front of him. After making sure that he's comfortable, she nods to the group and leaves, pulling the door closed behind her.

Colt lifts the lid to see broth and jello and sighs.

Fireball chuckles, "Hey, your first bit of food in nearly two months. You can't have steak first thing, you might end up worse than before." Fireball quips amused.

Colt rolls his eyes, but slowly starts sipping the broth, then works on the jello.

Everyone sits on in silence for a while, each delving into their own thoughts, when Commander Eagle stands up, "I'm going to go and check on April and Saber. I'll be back in an hour or so unless something has drastically changed." The others nod and he leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

Colt looks between Fireball and Robin, then after swallowing more ice chips he asks, "How bad were my injuries?" he squeaks out hoarsely.

Robin looks to Fireball who shrugs, "Well, you broke several ribs and got knocked on the head pretty good. Because of the ribs, you punctured a lung, and long story short, you ended up with pneumonia, which caused a high fever, and such, which is why you're just coming around, I suppose. I was the luckiest one of all of us."

Colt nods, processing the information. "What happened, Fireball?" he finally asks.

"We were on Tranquility. There had been some sort of attack. Evidently, we hadn't destroyed all of the Outriders like we believed we had. Jesse Blue survived somehow," Fireball begins his voice dripping with rage. Colt nods and Fireball continues after calming himself, "Some of his crew had taken some of the villagers hostage. We came in to intervene and were ambushed. There was a series of explosions, April was in the process of rescuing some of the civilians, and was caught in the shock waves of one or two of the explosions. She was thrown against the side of a building and crumpled as a large amount of debris hit her. The person she was carrying died instantly. She at least had her suit to protect her. It is probably the only reason she's still alive. I was able to get in and get her out and back to the ship," Fireball's voice breaks slightly and he looks away.

"That's what got me too, isn't it, the shock waves? I remember I had just dropped off a few people from my bronco buster and was on my way back to meet April when there

was this huge blast, then darkness. I remember someone yelling my name, but I don't know who or where it was coming from. I remember seeing a few glimpses of mangled bodies...darkness and pain, then I wake up here," Colt finishes his voice barely audible. He takes the cup and sips on the ice water, making an effort to swallow. He then places a trembling hand on Robin's hand that is beside him on his bed.

Fireball looks back to the couple, "That's about all I can tell you, Cowboy. I know that Saber was further in when the explosions hit, but I swear, he seemed all right, other than the cut on his head. He came out on Steed and was covered in blood, but he went after you, got you out and carried you into the Bismarck. He then got us out of there as fast as he could while I tended to you and April."

A knock at the door brings everyone back to reality as it opens and Commander Eagle enters the room. Taking a chair, he sits down and looks between the rooms occupants before speaking, "Well, I suppose I could have worse news..." They all cast worried glances to each other as he continues, "April is breathing completely on her own, and this is good because it means that perhaps she won't have much if any brain damage. The doctors were confident enough that they have taken her off of the ventilator completely."

"That is good news. Maybe she'll wake up before too much longer," Fireball says, sounding a bit relieved.

"Then there's Saber's condition," the commander says, "he seems to be a little better, but the doctors are still hesitant about taking him off of the respirator since he still has fluctuating oxygen levels. He still has had some fever spikes too, although it's been almost twenty-four hours now without one." He looks to his watch, "Well, it's getting late. We should let Colt rest. Do you want to stay with April or Saber tonight, Fireball?"

"If you want to stay with April, I'd understand, sir. She is your daughter. I don't mind staying with either of them," Fireball replies honestly.

"I've stayed with her the past several nights. You can stay tonight," the commander replies.

Fireball nods, "Thank you, Sir. I'll let you know if anything changes with her condition." The commander nods and Fireball turns to Colt and Robin, "I'll come and see you in the morning, Cowboy." They nod. "Good night."

"Good night," they reply.

Commander Eagle and Fireball leave, each heading to their patient's room for the night.

Fireball enters April's room and quietly approaches her bed. He takes her hand and sits beside her, watching her closely. Eventually, he falls asleep, only to be jostled awake by something moving across his hand. He opens his eyes and tries to look

around, suddenly realizing his head had been resting on the bed, and he is now stiff. He manages to sit up and looks around groggily. He looks to the monitor, and sees nothing abnormal, no sign of a nurse, and starts to drift off to sleep again when he feels the motion across his hand again. He looks down and notices April is moving her hand, slowly, but in an obviously deliberate way. "April?" Her hand moves again. "Can you hear me?" Once again her hand moves. He gasps in shock then stands up and reaches for the nurse call button and presses it.

"Nurses station, can I help you?" A female voice says over a speaker.

"I think April Eagle is trying to wake up. Someone should come in here, please," Fireball replies.

"Yes, sir, I'll send for the doctor right away," the voice replies.

Fireball grabs his cell phone and calls Commander Eagle, "Sir, I think she may be trying to wake up. She's moving her hand in response to my voice." murmuring is heard in reply. "Yes, the doctor is on his way." More murmuring. "Okay, I'll see you in a minute, sir." He snaps his phone shut as April's hand brushes his once more. He takes his hand and places it on top of hers and squeezes it gently. She twitches her hand in response.

A knock is heard and the doctor comes in followed by a nurse and Commander Eagle. "You say she is responding to your voice, Mr. Hikari?" the doctor asks as he carefully examines her vitals.

Fireball nods, "Yes, Doctor. Watch this." He brushes his hand across hers, "April, can you hear me?" She moves her hand in reply. "See what I mean? The first couple of times, her hand just brushed mine. I had fallen asleep with my head like this," he places his head back into the position he had fallen asleep in, "and my hand was like this," moving his hand slightly. "I felt something brush across the back of my hand, and started looking around, and no one was here, so as I rested my head back she brushed my hand again. So I spoke to her and she responded like she did a moment ago."

The doctor nods, "This is good. She can form a physical response. Perhaps her outlook isn't as bleak as we initially feared. Keep talking to her, tell her about what is happening, how you are, talk about things you both like, try and keep her stimulated. That might get her to come around sooner rather than later."

Fireball nods and looks to Commander Eagle, "Would you like to talk to her for a few minutes?"

He nods and goes to the other side of her bed and places his hand gently on hers, "April, this is your father, can you hear me?" After nearly a minute, she moves her fingers slightly. "I'm here, April. So is Fireball." A shorter span of time passes before her hand moves.

The doctor watches with interest, "This is good. Perhaps she will awaken soon. Keep talking to her, or get some music or something. I'm going to check on the other patients, afterwards I shall come back. Tell the nurse if anything should change and I'll

be back sooner." They nod and the doctor leaves the room, followed by the nurse.

After another hour of talking to her, the commander and Fireball are both exhausted. "I'm going to try and get a little sleep, Fireball," the commander says as he heads for the door. Fireball nods slightly. "I'll be in Saber's room if something changes. Why don't you put the TV on and try and get a little sleep yourself?"

"I will, sir," he replies as he reaches for the remote, clicking on the TV before settling into the chair beside her bed. A few hours later, he awakes to daylight coming through the blinds. He sits up and looks around. April is sleeping peacefully and he relaxes a bit. He goes over and kisses her forehead lightly. "Good morning, April," she smiles slightly. He takes her hand and strokes his fingers across hers, her hand twitches in reply.

He watches her for a while and her father comes in. "Any change?" the commander asks.

Fireball shrugs, "Not really. Although I swear she smiled earlier though when I kissed her forehead."

The commander nods, "I'd say that's a good sign. It's a positive response, so that's better than nothing."

They continue chatting for a while and breakfast is brought in by Robin and Colt, who is being pushed in a wheelchair. The group talks a bit and Colt goes over and speaks to April, getting much the same response as Fireball and the Commander.

"Still no change in Saber?" Colt asks.

The others shake their heads. "No. I am trying to take the no news is good news attitude at this point," Commander Eagle replies.

Colt nods, understanding. "Would it be all right if I visited him?" He asks a bit hesitantly.

Commander Eagle nods, "I don't see a reason that you can't. As long as you remain in the wheelchair and someone stays with you."

"I don't see Robin abandoning him anytime soon, sir," Fireball says amused.

Colt grins, "Nah. I think she'd handcuff me to her if she could, just to make sure I don't try and do something I shouldn't."

Fireball starts to say something, but decides against it and nods towards the door, "Come on, I'll take you to his room." He leads them out into the hallway and towards another section, stopping to swipe his EBU through a reader before entering. "This way, third door on the left." He knocks and they enter. The room is dimly lit, they see Saber hooked up to several machines, Fireball gives the monitors a brief glance and nods slightly. "His vitals seem more stable, I suppose that's good."

A doctor comes in behind them, "Ah, Mr. Hikari, your observation is correct. He does seem more consistent now. I say that is a step in the right direction. Are you planning on staying a while?"

Fireball shakes his head, "No, sir. I am going back to April's room for a while. Colt here, is going to be in here for a bit. He has promised to not overdo it. Robin will come and get me if they need to leave before I or Commander Eagle return."

The doctor nods, looking closely over Colt before speaking, "Very well. If anything should change, hit the call button and someone will be here immediately."

Colt and Robin nod and the doctor and Fireball leave them alone in the room.

Colt and Robin move closer to the bed. "He doesn't look good, Colt." Robin says, barely above a whisper.

"I know," Colt replies grimly. "This is something I never thought I'd see. I guess someone can only keep pushing themselves for so long."

"Do you think he'll pull out of this and be able to work again?" Robin asks quietly.

Colt shrugs, "I don't know. I'm not sure if any of us will be allowed back onto full duty, at least for a while."

They sit quietly talking for a while, occasionally casting glances towards the unmoving figure on the bed.

Fireball enters April's room and the commander looks up as the door closes.

"How is he?" Commander Eagle asks.

"Maybe a little better," Fireball replies hesitantly. "His O2 stats seemed to be holding around 90 or so, a good thing. Maybe if he keeps that up, they can take him off the ventilator in a day or so." The commander nods. "How's April?" he asks, going to the opposite side of the bed and taking her hand.

"Her vitals are strong and she still seems to be responding to sounds and touch. Perhaps she'll wake soon." He replies, sounding hopeful.

Fireball nods, "I hope so. We could use a bit of good news."

Later that afternoon, Fireball is sitting in April's room, holding her hand and dozing when he feels movement. He looks up to see April looking at him a bit bewildered. He quickly gets up and smiles at her, relief washing over him. "April, how are you feeling?"

She attempts to speak, then rubs her throat. He nods and hits the call button for the nurse.

"Nurses station, can I help you?" A voice says over the speaker.

"Ms. Eagle is awake, please let the doctor know. She also wants some water or ice," Fireball replies as he pulls out his cell phone and hits a button. "Sir, she's awake. Yes, the doctor is on his way." He closes his phone just as the doctor enters followed by a nurse with a pitcher of ice water and a small cup.

The nurse hands her a cup of ice chips, "Just a little at a time, dear." April nods.

The doctor starts checking her vitals as she slowly works on the cup. "Ms. Eagle, It appears that you are doing much better. How is your head?" She nods in reply. "Are you feeling okay in general, other than stiff and sore?"

"Maybe a little hungry," she whispers, getting a kind smile from the doctor.

"I'll see what I can get for you. It won't be anything heavy at first. Clear liquids for a while to let your body readjust to food," the doctor replies.

April looks around the room, her eyes meeting her father's then Fireball's. "What happened? How long was I out?" she manages to ask hoarsely.

Just as Commander Eagle goes to answer, there is a knock at the door. "Come in," he replies and Colt enters with Robin pushing him.

"I heard you were up, Sleeping Beauty." Colt says with a grin.

April smiles weakly at him, "What happened to you?"

"Same thing as you, only you got it worse. I've been up for a couple of days now," he replies.

"How long have I been in here? How did I get here?" April asks.

"Going on seven weeks now. Fireball got you back to the ship," Colt replies.

April tries to hide her shock. "I've really been out that long?" she asks. Colt nods and she looks around the room. "Where's Saber?"

Commander Eagle takes her hand, "He's still in a coma, April. You were all pretty badly injured. You seemed to be the worst off when you arrived, but I think he was just as bad off as you were."

April nods, a look of concern on her face and she looks to Fireball, "How are you doing? You look tired."

He shrugs, "I've been here since we arrived back pretty much. They made me stay in bed for a couple of days, then I was allowed to roam between your rooms. I've been worried sick. The doctors were afraid you could have had brain damage or something,

I'm glad that you seem to be all right."

April is quiet for several minutes, processing everything and sipping from her cup, "I feel a bit groggy and a little dizzy, but as the doctor said, other than stiff and sore from lying here, I guess I'm all right."

"There is one thing I should warn you about, April," Fireball says slowly. "Your hair is a lot shorter than it was before." She gasps slightly, reaching up to her head. "But, it's grown back a lot. It's almost to your shoulders again." He adds quickly.

"They had to shave it to close up your head,. April. But at least it's growing back and you're doing better," Her father adds as she runs her fingers through her shorter hair.

"I'm glad you warned me. It would have been quite a shock otherwise," April replies, placing her hand back on her lap. They talk about various things for a while before deciding to let April rest a bit. They all return to Colt's room to finish their discussions.

There is a knock and the doctor enters. "Oh good you are all here. Mr. Wilcox, tomorrow, I think you should begin physical rehabilitation."

"What for, Doc?" Colt asks.

"You've not been up and around for a while, so to strengthen your body again, you will need to do some exercises," the doctor replies matter-of-factly.

Colt nods, "If it gets me out of here, I'll do it. I don't like being stuck here." The doctor nods. "Can I attempt some walking, with help between now and then, so long as I'm careful?"

The doctor thinks for a minute then nods, "I don't see that being a problem. It might be good for you to do so. Ms. Eagle should be moving around a bit too as soon as she feels she's up to it."

Commander Eagle nods, "I'll see to it that she's up and moving before too long, doctor."

Please Review :-)

Kapitel 3: Voices in the Dark

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 2: Voices in the Dark

Darkness. Emptiness. Pain. That's all that he could feel for a long time. Gradually other things became noticeable, the whirring of machines nearby, a constant beeping, and a steady stream of whispered voices. Searching his memory, he tries to make sense of the voices, trying to find one that's familiar to him. He wills himself to move, make a sound, anything that can be noticed, but it's like his mind is separate from his body. He could tell there were people coming into the room, but they always seemed to stay away, no one would come close enough for him to get their attention. It seemed like years he was trapped in this state. He was ready to just give in, when he hears someone enter his room again.

"Has there been any change?" A female voice asks hesitantly.

"Not really. The doctor said they may take him off the ventilator today. He says that then it'll be up to him. We can't make him hang on, April. He wouldn't want us to," a male voice says, concern evident in his voice.

April sighs, "I know, Fireball, but -"

"We've been over this, we all agreed." Another male voice says interrupting her. "I don't like it either, April, but we've done everything we can."

"I know, Father," she replies quietly. "I just wish we knew if he can even hear us," she says exasperated. She goes over to his bedside and she places her hand on his. "Can't you just find some way to snap out of it? You're better than this!" she says sounding more angry than she intends. She squeezes his hand tightly, and slowly releases it. "Damn it Saber, you're the one that's always okay. Come out of it already."

"April..." Her father begins quietly, placing a hand gently on her shoulder, "I know this is hard, but you're not completely well yet yourself, try not to get so upset."

She sighs and shakes her head, "I'm mad, father. I'm mad at him, I'm mad at myself, I'm mad at Jesse..." She makes a fist and punches the bed, close enough to him that his body moves from the impact. She turns and looks at the monitors, hoping for some sort of change, but nothing happens. "Come on, do something," she whispers.

Once more he begs his brain to get his body to do as he asks. He reaches out in the darkness and wills something, anything to move. He tries for a hand or finger, he

hears no reply from the people that he's sure are there, so he tries harder and focuses on moving a foot.

April is turning to face her father when just for a second she thinks she sees movement, "What?"

He's sure she saw something, so with all of his willpower he tries once more to move his foot.

"Look!" April says astonished, "I swear his foot just moved!"

Soon he hears other murmurs coming closer, so he tries one more time, managing a slightly more deliberate movement.

"I saw it that time!" one of the male voices states, the mix of excitement and relief evident in his voice.

"I'll go and get the doctor," the other male voice says.

He hears a door open and soon other voices are entering the room.

"Someone try and get him to move again." a new voice says.

"April, he seemed to respond to you," Fireball says.

April leans close to him and takes his hand, "Saber, if you can hear me, do something, anything to let me know that you can hear me, please."

The room falls silent and he imagines several people watching him for any sign of movement. After what feels like an eternity, he hears several simultaneous sighs of relief as he moves his other foot.

"Well, that is a good bit of progress. I was beginning to wonder if he was even still alive," the doctor says. "He seems to be breathing on his own right now, should we try and remove the tubes before he's fully awake?"

"I think so. Maybe then he would wake up on his own," April replies, her hand still grasping his. The doctor nods and she leans closer to him again, speaking softly to him, "Saber, I don't know if you can understand everything that's happening, but they are going to take the tubes out of your throat. Don't fight it, okay? It's not going to feel good when they do it, but it'll be better after they're done, trust me. If you understand, try and signal me."

Silence again while waiting for a reply. He wills himself to move a few fingers on the hand she's holding.

"He moved his hand. Not much, but I felt it. Can you work around me?" April asks.

He's suddenly aware of several people close to him. He feels more pressure on his

hand and tries to return the gesture. Then he feels like he's choking and struggling to breathe. Alarms start going off, and rapid beeping is heard.

"Saber, relax, it's okay. The tubes are out, slow breaths." April says soothingly as she , places her other hand on his chest. "Slow calm breaths. You can do this, come on."

The machines slowly start to become slower and more steady. He's still in darkness, but he can breathe. He makes an attempt to mouth words, but his throat is so dry it hurts.

"Don't try and talk yet. You need to get some ice chips down to wet your throat. We need to try and move you to a more upright position, if that's okay, can you squeeze my hand twice?" April asks.

He squeezes twice, the second time weaker than the first, but enough that it's noticed. Slowly he feels the bed changing his position.

"Here." April says and she places a spoon with some ice to his lips.

The cold is a shock at first, but then he manages to take some in and feels it going down. They repeat this for several minutes before he tries to talk again. "Dark" he finally manages to mouth.

"Dark?" April asks hesitantly. He gently squeezes her hand twice. "You can't see?" April asks a bit shocked. He squeezes her hand once to indicate no. "He can't see," she says to the others in the room.

Several gasps are heard and then he feels someone touch his other arm. "Captain Rider, I'm doctor Izumi. Does your head hurt?"

Saber squeezes April's hand twice. "Yes." April says in reply.

"A little or a lot?" Dr. Izumi asks.

A long pause, "Little. Dizzy," Saber manages to whisper.

"I'm going to need to run some tests. It could just be temporary as your body readjusts to functioning on it's own again. But we need to see if there is anything else going on that could be causing the blindness and dizziness." Dr. Izumi looks over him carefully, "I don't see anything actually wrong with your eyes, so this should just be temporary. Can you tell me your name?"

Saber takes a bit more of the ice water, "Saber," he replies his voice a hoarse whisper.

"Do you know where you are?" The doctor inquires.

"Hospital." he replies.

"Do you know what happened to you?" Dr. Izumi asks.

"Accident?" Saber replies hesitantly.

Dr. Izumi sighs, "You don't remember?"

"No," he admits quietly.

The others cast a nervous glance to one another. The doctor turns to the group, "I'm going to see about setting up an MRI and CAT scans, talk with him for a while and I'll be back." Dr. Izumi leaves the room and the others slowly approach the bed.

"Saber?" April begins hesitantly. He turns his head slightly towards her. "Do you remember who any of us are?"

He closes his eyes, thinking and nods slowly, "I know you are friends and that I trust you," he finally replies slowly some hesitation evident in his voice. "Although your names are a bit fuzzy. Right now, I honestly couldn't tell you my full name," he adds quietly.

Commander Eagle places his hand on Saber's shoulder, "I'm Commander Charles Eagle, don't try too hard to figure things out. Frustration might make your recollection come back more slowly. Yes, we are all your friends. April is the one to your right, holding your hand. She is also my daughter. We also have Fireball, who is standing behind me, and Colt is here with his wife, Robin. All of us are taking turns staying with you, you won't be alone."

"How long have I been here?" Saber asks.

"Almost three months, Saber," the commander replies.

Saber shakes his head a little, trying to process the information. "How...what happened?"

A long silence follows before Commander Eagle finally speaks, "You, April, Fireball, and Colt are part of an elite group of Star Sheriffs. You help keep peace. A colony called Tranquility put out a distress call, so you and your team went to see about it. Based on a brief report you sent while returning to Calvary Command, which is where you are now, you were ambushed. All of you were working to free some colonists. Taking different routes in, you met in the middle and began helping people escape capture. There was a series of explosions. April was caught in one and was thrown into a building which collapsed on to her. Fireball went to tend to her and got her out and back to your ship. Colt was caught in it as were you. You were closer to the center, you said you were thrown back and through a wall. According to the report, you hit your head on something and you were aware that you were bleeding, but didn't feel it was serious. You got out of the building you were in, saw Colt in trouble and got him back to the Bismarck and got all of you here. You made sure the others went to get checked, but collapsed in my office. All of you were in the hospital for a while. The others are still recuperating, but they are allowed to move about now. Once they know that everything is okay with you, I'm sure they will let you out too."

"The people we were rescuing?" Saber finally asks quietly.

The commander sighs, "Most were killed in the explosions. A few other groups of Star Sheriffs managed to rescue some of the people that were able to hide when they were invaded. The colony was pretty much destroyed."

"What about the people that attacked the colony?" he asks.

"They vanished. We have been unable to find any trace of them. We are still looking though," Fireball replies venturing closer to the bed and placing his hand on Saber's arm, causing him to jump slightly at the touch. "Sorry, I didn't mean to make you jump, I just wanted you to know that I'm here."

Saber nods slightly. "So which one are you?" he asks trying to sort out the different voices.

"I'm Fireball."

Saber nods. "So we have all known one another for some time?"

"Yes. My Father and I have known you a bit longer than Fireball or Colt, but we have worked together as a group for a number of years. We're like family," April replies.

Saber shakes his head a bit, trying to clear it. "This is just so..."

"Frustrating?" April offers.

"Yes." he admits begrudgingly. Silence follows for a while, no one sure what to say. "Do I have other family?" he asks to no one in particular.

"You did at one time, Saber. Your mother was ill and died a few years ago, during the temporary peace treaty of the Outrider war. Your father was killed near the end of the war, about a year ago. As far as we know, you have no other family. I'm sorry," Commander Eagle replies quietly.

Saber shrugs, "I just wish I could remember something, someone, anything."

A knock at the door and Dr. Izumi enters, "All right, Captain Rider, I'm taking you down for a few scans, is that okay with you?"

Saber nods slightly, "You ask as if I have a choice, Doctor."

Dr. Izumi chuckles, "I suppose technically you can refuse, but I would advise against it."

"Then let's go and get this over with, shall we?" he replies.

"Would you like someone to come along?" Dr. Izumi asks.

"If they want to come, they can. It's not like they can come in the room, right?" Saber replies.

"That is true, Captain." Dr. Izumi acknowledges and then turns to Commander Eagle, "Are you waiting here or coming along?"

Commander Eagle looks to the others and shakes his head, "If it's okay with you, Saber I think we'll stay here. We will be here when you're done."

"It's fine with me if you wish to stay. No point in coming that I can tell." he replies.

"Then let's go, Captain Rider," Dr. Izumi says as he arranges everything so that he can roll the bed to the rooms for the scans and then leaves with Saber.

Colt let's out a whistle, "He got clocked pretty good, didn't he?"

"Colt!" Robin admonishes.

"What?" he asks innocently.

"That's not appropriate." Robin replies.

Fireball chuckles, "I was thinking the same thing, Colt. I just knew better than to say it out loud."

April groans, glad for the temporary diversion, "Boys, I'm glad you didn't say anything while he was here. I just wish we could do something. What happens if he doesn't regain his memory, or if he is blinded permanently?"

"He was injured on the job April, Calvary Command would have to find something for him to do," her father replies. "Although if it turns out to be a more permanent hindrance, I don't see him allowing it to slow him down for long. If he can get his coordination back, he could easily be an excellent teacher blind or sighted."

"Is there anything we can do to help him with his memories, I wonder?" Colt asks aloud.

"Remember when Fireball lost his?" April replies.

"Not really," Colt replies sheepishly.

"You put me back in the Bismarck and tried to let me do things in the ship, hoping it would snap me out of it. We almost died because of my hesitation, but obviously, I remembered in time," Fireball says.

"Perhaps taking him to his estate would help? Once he's cleared otherwise, I mean." April offers.

"Not a bad idea, April. Something calm and familiar could prove helpful to all of you,"

Commander Eagle says approvingly. "They have access to good doctors there, so all of you could still be checked out should something happen, and it gets all of you away from here for a while. After we see how this turns out, I'll talk with Dr. Izumi."

Several heads nod in agreement and they veer off to various conversations. A couple of hours pass before a nurse comes in pushing an empty bed. They all look at each other with worried expressions when Dr. Izumi returns with Saber, who is now in fresh clothes and wearing sunglasses and in a wheelchair looking a little more relaxed than before.

"Welcome back, Saber." April says brightly. "You look a little better."

"It's amazing what a shower and fresh clothes will do to a person's disposition," he replies with a hint of amusement.

"How did the scans go?" Commander Eagle asks as they settle into the room again.

"Well," Saber begins, "during the MRI, I started seeing flashes of light, but the pain was excruciating, so they stopped the scan, and turned out the lights in the room while they went over the images they had. Next thing I know, they bring me these dark shades and I put them on and they turn the lights back on."

"So you can see?" April asks.

"Not really. Bits of light and some shadows, and that's not even consistent." Saber replies hesitantly.

"He still has some swelling near the sight of the initial head wound," Dr. Izumi states. "A small infection below the skin is what has been putting pressure on the optical nerves, causing the blindness. It could also be partially responsible for the memory loss, although I'm inclined to believe that the memory loss is from the concussion, and not the infection. He has been given an injection of steroids and a mass spectrum antibiotic, so hopefully, we can get rid of the infection completely and perhaps over the next couple of weeks have his vision return to normal. However, there could be other issues affecting his vision and/or memory, we will just have to wait and see."

"So what now?" April asks nervously.

"We wait and see what happens," Saber says sounding a bit irritated, causing April to smile.

Kapitel 4: Life's Lessons

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 3: Life's Lessons

Nearly six weeks later, they have all been released from inpatient care and have arrived at Saber's home colony to continue recuperation. "Well Robin, you've got your hands full. I'll leave them in your charge for now. Let me know if you have any problems," Commander Eagle says with amusement in his voice.

Robin smiles, "I will, sir. I'm sure there are people here that will help corral them if they become unruly."

The Commander nods, "I've talked with Thomas, who cares for the Rider's estate, he said that they will help in any way they can. I've explained the situation to him, so it won't be a surprise." Robin nods.

"Father, I'm sure we'll be fine. We're all able to walk around and such now," April states a bit annoyed. "It's not like we're complete invalids like we were a couple of months ago."

"I know, April. I'm sorry for sounding so overbearing. Take care of yourselves and relax," he replies. The commander goes and looks at Saber, "Don't fret over your memory or your lack of vision, it could all still come back in time. Just relax and enjoy the break."

Saber nods, "I know, sir. I'll try and not force anything. I just wish I could see again."

"I know you do," he replies quietly before looking over the group once more before they load up into a waiting vehicle that takes them to the Rider's estate.

Upon arrival, they are met by Elaine and Thomas, the head caretakers of the estate. "Welcome home, sir!" Thomas exclaims when they arrive. "I'm Thomas and this is my wife, Elaine." he says, placing a hand on Saber's arm.

Elaine rushes over to him and starts looking him over carefully, placing her hand in his. Saber looks a bit nervous, and Elaine realizes that he truly doesn't remember her and sighs. "I'm glad you seem to mostly be all right, Saber." She takes his things from him and nods towards the house taking his arm to lead him, "Let's lead you all to your rooms, shall we?" They all follow the couple into the house and go and get settled in.

Saber enters the room she leads him to and sits on the foot of the bed as Elaine places his things down. "This is my room?" he asks a bit unsure.

Elaine nods and smiles, "Yes, it is now. It was your parent's room before, but you're head of the house now."

He gets up and carefully walks around the room, carefully touching different things trying to find something familiar. He comes to a cluster of pictures and stops, studying them curiously.

"That's a picture of you as a young boy," she says as she runs his hands over the frame of the picture. "And this one here is one of your parents," she says, holding up a picture of a couple on the steps of the house.

He holds the picture for several minutes and sighs, "It just isn't coming back. Nothing seems...familiar." he mutters obviously frustrated. "What happens to me if I don't get my vision back? Or my memory?"

Elaine places a hand on his shoulder, "Don't force it, Saber. In time, it will come. You have been through a lot, just as the others have. Think of this as a vacation. You have no schedule, no worries, you can do anything you'd like and I'll fix you anything you want to eat, just ask." Saber nods, still holding the picture of his parents. "Perhaps later, I can show you the room you used to stay in. This is your first time staying in this room. Perhaps something in there will jog your memory a bit."

Saber looks to her and nods, "I'd appreciate it Miss Elaine is it?" he says hesitantly.

She smiles gently at him, "Yes, that's right. I'll let you rest a bit. Come downstairs when you're ready. Just call for someone and we'll help you, until you're familiar with where everything is." She looks over him once more then leaves, closing the door behind her.

He sits on the foot of the bed for few more minutes before lying on the bed and staring at the ceiling letting out a long sigh and running his hands through his hair. "I wish I could remember something, anything," he thinks to himself. A while later he gets up and heads out the door, almost walking into April. "I'm sorry," he stammers apologetically, realizing someone is there.

She stops startled, managing to avoid a collision and laughs, "It's okay. I was just coming to check on you to see if you were all right. You've been in your room for nearly four hours."

Saber gives her a surprised look, "I'm fine, all things considered. A little hungry though."

"Glad to hear it, because I think dinner is just about ready," she replies. "Shall we go down and join the others?" He nods and she takes his arm and they go downstairs.

They reach the sitting area where Colt, Fireball, and Robin are waiting just as Elaine comes out, "Dinner is served, come on in and sit down everyone."

A few days later, the group is out walking the estate grounds when Saber stops suddenly.

"What's wrong?" Robin asks concerned.

He looks around listening for a moment before answering, "I feel a bit uneasy. Almost like we're being followed."

The others all look around cautiously, their hands on their blasters. "I don't see anything, Saber," April says, her hand still on her blaster.

Saber looks around slowly, but doesn't relax, "There is definitely someone or something that's off. I'm just not sure what, who or why," he says quietly.

After a few minutes without a sign of anyone else close by, they continue walking the grounds back towards the house each person seemingly on alert for any sign of trouble. Just before reaching the house, a lone figure steps out from the direction of the house, "How are things going?"

"Hello Commander," Saber says hesitantly.

"Have you started to remember anything yet, Saber?" the commander asks as he approaches the group.

Saber nods slightly, "Some things are beginning to seem familiar. My vision still hasn't improved though., he replies. "Sir, have you been following us?" he asks.

Commander Eagle shakes his head, "No, I just arrived a few minutes ago. Why do you ask?"

"It has felt like someone has been following us," Saber replies a bit uneasily. "Or that something is...off. I just can't shake the feeling."

"Well, I've yet to see anyone, so let's just go inside," Colt says trying to ease the tension he feels building.

Commander Eagle nods, "Yes, let's go inside and chat a while," he says looking at each person as he turns towards the house. "Perhaps we can figure out what's causing that feeling."

Everyone goes into the house, Saber lagging a bit behind, giving the yard one last glance before carefully making his way inside and closing the door and joining the others.

"So, has everyone been resting?" Commander Eagle asks, looking to each person in turn.

Robin nods, "I've made sure that they have behaved, sir." she replies amused.

"Yeah, we've not been able to go anywhere alone," Fireball adds with a huff.

Robin glares at him and laughs, "I suppose I could let you go off in pairs, so long as you all promise not to over do it. I could use some quiet time myself."

"Yeah, with the cowboy," Fireball says, making both Robin and Colt blush.

"Like you wouldn't like some time alone with April," Colt quips in reply.

"I think that's enough, boys," April says amused. "I think all of us can use some time to ourselves. Could we maybe agree to not leave the estate grounds unaccompanied?" She looks to the others, who slowly nod in agreement. "How would you feel about that, Father? Would you be amenable to that?"

Her father thinks about it for a few minutes, "I think that would be fine." He looks to Saber, "I know you used to enjoy riding off on your own around here, so perhaps it would be good for you." Saber nods slightly and he continues, "I brought your horse, Steed with me this trip. I thought that you would be physically all right now to ride some. It might do you some good."

"I have a horse?" Saber asks surprised.

"Technically, it's a mechanical horse," April replies.

"A mechanical horse?" Saber says amused. "Perhaps that would jog my memory. I'm sure something like that would be memorable."

Commander Eagle smiles, "That's sort of what I'm hoping will happen. Spending time riding your horse, might be what you need. He's loyal to you and will help protect you if need be, so I think you'd be okay to go out alone some."

"Well, I don't feel quite as edgy as before, so perhaps after lunch, we can all do our own thing until dinner?" Saber asks the group, receiving mutters of agreement in reply. "How long are you planning on staying, sir?" he asks the commander.

"I planned on staying this afternoon. I want to talk with the doctors here, and to Thomas and Elaine, if you will permit it to get an opinion on your status. I might stay until after dinner, but then I would need to return to Calvary Command," he replies.

The doorbell rings and Thomas crosses through the sitting room, "Is anyone expecting a guest?" he asks.

"No." came the unanimous replies.

He continues to the door, the others standing up and moving closer to the door, hands ready near their blasters. He opens it and gasps in surprise, "Lady Sincia?"

"Hello, Thomas. I heard that Richard has returned." she replies. "I'd like to see him."

"Well, you are welcome to come in," he begins as he steps back, allowing her to enter the house, "but you should be made aware that he has some...changes, my lady." he finishes as she brushes past him and into the sitting room.

She spots Saber sitting in a chair and head for him, "Richard, I heard you had been injured..." she begins. Noting the sunglasses she stops, "Um, why are you wearing sunglasses inside?" she asks confused.

"I'm sorry, Miss. I can't say that I know who you are," Saber says hesitantly.

Sincia draws back a step, "Is this some kind of joke?" she asks looking to the others in the room.

"I'm afraid not, my lady, Master Saber has lost his memory and cannot see," Thomas replies. I was trying to prepare you, but you walked past me before I could advise you on the present situation.

Sincia stops in front of Saber and studies him for a moment. "You really have no clue who I am?" she asks fiercely.

Saber shakes his head, "I'm sorry, Miss. I can't say as I do. You seem to be familiar with me, so I suppose we know each other. Perhaps if I was able to see..."

"You're blind as well?" she asks a bit harshly. He nods in reply. "So how long will you be blinded?"

"I wish I knew." He replies barely audible.

She scoffs at the comment, "Well, this is rather convenient. I knew you weren't thrilled about giving up your position as a Star Sheriff, but I didn't think you'd stoop to something like this just to get out of our engagement." Saber goes to speak, but she interrupts, "I release you from our agreement, Richard. I can't deal with this type of drama. If you can't see, then you can't provide for me, so perhaps this is for the best. Good-bye, Richard." She turns in a huff and leaves, not waiting for a reply.

A long awkward silence ensues before Elaine comes up beside Saber, placing her hand on his shoulder, "If that is how she is, you deserve better, Saber. Your mother was never sure about her anyways."

"I suppose I'd be upset more if I knew exactly who she was. She called me 'Richard.' No one else has addressed me as that." he replies.

"Richard is your birth name. Everyone has called you Saber since you were a small child, so I hadn't thought of mentioning your birth name, since you didn't use it," Elaine replies.

"So who exactly was she?" April asks. "She surely didn't seem very nice, especially when she learned of Saber's condition."

"Her name is Sincia. She and Saber were betrothed as children. It had been agreed that they would marry when she turned twenty-one, but the war was still going on, then Saber's parent's passed, and her family decided that they would marry in about a year. That would have been about the time that all of you were injured, and things seemed to be bleak. She would call here on occasion to see if Saber had come home, but never inquired as to how seriously he was injured or anything. I know that Lord and Lady Rider were having doubts about the marriage, and were hoping that they could find a way to allow the children out of the contract that wouldn't tarnish either family's name," Elaine explains, getting some shocked looks from the others in the room.

"Saber, you never told us you were betrothed before," Fireball says.

"I suppose that it's a moot point now. Perhaps I had my reasons for not telling you at the time," Saber replies quietly.

"If she's always been like she was here, I can see why you didn't say anything," Colt says harshly.

"Colt!" April and Robin scold.

"Well, he deserves better than some uppity chick." Colt replies.

Saber shakes his head, "I suppose I had my reasons for not disclosing such information, perhaps I was looking for an out. If she was like that in private, as well around others I'm not sure I could have imagined myself with someone like that."

"Well, why doesn't everyone go off and do their own thing for an hour or so. I would like to talk to Thomas and Elaine for a while. Saber, if you wish to go riding, I can have Steed brought to you, although I'd like for you to stay and listen if you don't mind," Commander Eagle says trying to change the mood.

Colt, Robin, Fireball and April get up and head off. Saber nods, "I'll stay. I'm not sure about venturing off completely alone just yet."

The commander nods and Thomas and Elaine come and sit down, "I want all of your opinions here, I was thinking of seeing if you would be to having us hire you someone to assist you. Help you learn how to do things for yourself as a blind person."

"You don't think my sight is returning, do you?" Saber asks quietly.

"I am hoping it returns, but given the amount of time that has passed with little to no improvement, we need to plan in case it is indeed a permanent hindrance, Saber," the Commander replies sympathetically.

"It's been nearly five months since you've come out of the coma, sir, and since then, your sight has not improved. I do think your memory is slowly improving, so I am not discounting anything as permanent. I think someone that can assist you, and help you learn to do everything you did before, would make you feel better too. It would also

allow you to be more independent, something that I can tell you are desiring," Thomas says.

Saber sighs, "Somehow I get the feeling this has actually already been decided."

"Yes, we had decided that someone is needed, but you would still get the final decision. I am hoping to interview a couple or three people today. I would like for you to be present. You have usually been a good judge of character, so I feel that you can tell whether you'd be comfortable with the person," Commander Eagle says. "I think this is our best course of action at this point, Saber."

Saber nods, "I know that you are right. I don't like having to depend on everyone to get around and such. I am adapting somewhat, but I still feel like a hindrance to the others. When are the interviews?" he asks with a hint of resignation in his voice.

"The first one is any time now," the commander replies. "I figured a half hour between each one, then after dinner, we can discuss the prospects and decide whether to keep looking or choose one of the people today."

"That sounds reasonable to me, sir." Saber replies.

The talk for a few more minutes and the doorbell rings. Thomas goes and answers it. A young man, a few years older than Saber enters and Thomas leads him into the room. "Hello. Nice to meet you. I'm Aaron Walker," the young man says. He walks over to Saber and shakes his hand before sitting down across from him.

The others nod. "Well, Mr. Walker, I am Commander Eagle, the person who contacted you. I would like to know just how you think you can provide service here."

"Well, sir. I believe that anyone can be trained to adapt to being blind. I believe in guiding them to learn to use a cane and other such implements to get around without help. They have to learn that they are disabled, but not unable to do things. I think I can teach Captain Rider to do most anything he wishes to do."

The continue talking for a few minutes, and once the interview is over, Aaron gets up to leave. "We will be contacting you in a day or so to let you know of our decision, Mr. Walker. Thank you for your time," Commander Eagle says as he leads him to the door.

He returns to the group and sits down, "Well, what are your thoughts, Saber?"

Saber sits quietly for a few minutes in thought before answering, "I'm not sure, sir. He seems intelligent, but there's something...I'm not sure...there's an arrogance or something that I don't care for. I'm sure I could learn from him, but I'd like to see one or two other prospects before deciding anything."

Commander Eagle nods, "I agree with your assessment, Saber. Thomas, Elaine?"

They both nod. "I feel the same, sir." Elaine replies. "Something about him I just didn't like." The doorbell rings and she gets up and answers it, leading the next person into

the room.

"Hello everyone." An older woman says as she enters the room. She walks over to Saber and takes his hand, "You must be Captain Rider. It's nice to meet you. I'm Clara Dooley. "

He shakes her hand, "Nice to meet you too, Ms. Dooley."

She releases his hand and sits across from him, waiting for questions.

"So, Ms. Dooley, what kind of experience do you have working with someone who has lost their vision?" Elaine asks.

She thinks for a moment before answering, "Well, I helped my husband when he lost his vision after a car accident. After a few months, he could do most of the things that he used to do before he lost his vision. I feel that blindness doesn't mean that you are incapable, just that you have to take a different approach."

They all nod in agreement and chat a little longer before Commander Eagle stands up, "Thank you Ms. Dooley for coming today. We will be discussing our decision tonight, and should let you know in the next day or so what we have decided."

She nods, and stands up, heading for the door. She stops close to Saber and places a hand on his arm, "No matter your decision, sir, it was nice to meet you." He nods, not sure what to say and she goes to the door and leaves.

Commander Eagle returns to the group, "Well?"

"She is better than the first one. She seems nice enough," Saber says.

"But?" The commander asks.

Saber shrugs, "I'm not sure. I don't know what to be screening for."

"Well, I think you'll know when we find someone that they are the right person for you," Elaine says.

"How many more are there, sir?" Saber asks.

"I only have one more interview set up, but I know there are a few others that are interested in the position, if we don't like the next one either. I don't want you to settle on a person, just because no one else is scheduled for an interview. This is a person that you are going to have to put a good deal of trust into, so if you have any doubts, we keep looking, okay?" The Commander replies.

Saber nods, "I understand, sir. I sincerely appreciate the efforts you are taking on my behalf."

Commander Eagle nods, then he sighs, "Saber, if you could only remember everything

that you have endured to help protect the people of the new frontier, you would understand that I am not doing nearly enough. But I am doing all that I can."

The doorbell rings again and Thomas goes and answers it, a young woman comes in looking a bit nervous at the number of people sitting before her.

"Good afternoon. My name is Amanda Kelly. I'm here for the interview," she says pleasantly.

"Hello, Ms. Kelly. I'm Commander Eagle, the one who set up your interview."

"Glad to meet you, sir," she replies trying to hide her nervousness. She nods to Thomas and Elaine and then approaches Saber, "I hope that you will not be needing these services for long, sir. I'm sure this is rather degrading to you. I know I'd be mortified." She touches his arm briefly, then goes and sits down.

They talk for a while, then after some discussion, she is preparing to leave. "We will let you know either way once a decision is made. Thank you for your time, Ms. Kelly. Should be no later than the day after tomorrow," Commander Eagle says as he escorts out the door. A short time later, they are all sitting quietly, each lost in their own thoughts.

"So, do you feel that you should call a few more, sir?" Thomas asks, finally breaking the silence.

Saber looks up, "I don't know. I felt safe around the last two, but I liked the last one better, I suppose."

Elaine smiles and nods, "I have a good feeling about her."

"She wasn't afraid or thrown off by my condition. She didn't pretend that it wasn't there either. She seemed to be speaking honestly when she said how she'd feel in my place." Saber says quietly.

"That is what impressed me. She faced it head on, and didn't try and avoid the fact that you are uncomfortable," Commander Eagle says.

Saber nods, "Perhaps we should give her a chance, sir. I suppose if it doesn't work out, we can try again.

Commander Eagle nods, "It is your choice, Saber. If you are willing to allow it, then we shall call her tomorrow and let her know of the decision."

"I'll write out the letters of regret to the other two, sir," Elaine says.

Saber nods, and after talking a while longer, they eat dinner and go off their own directions. He goes into the study, quietly listening to music. Elaine comes in and sits across from him. He looks up in her direction, "Hello, Elaine," he says quietly, taking out the ear buds he was wearing.

"How did you know it was me, sir?" she asks astonished.

"I am learning to tell how different people walk. I also notice the perfume you're wearing," he replies indifferently.

"I came to see how you are. You've not said much since the interviews this afternoon," she says quietly.

"I suppose I don't know what to say...Admitting that I need this help makes it seem like everyone has given up. That scares me, Elaine." She gasps involuntarily as he continues, "I seem to be slowly remembering things, not as fast as I'd like. I want to think of this as a positive step, but the idea of having to depend on someone else to teach me how to do things I should already know..."

"Don't think of it like that, Saber. Think of her as someone teaching you to be independent again. She won't be here forever, just long enough to show you that you can still do almost anything you did before. You will be running this estate, and you can do something for Calvary Command, once you have your sense of self back."

"I am agreeing to do this, but I do not have to like it." he says bitterly.

Elaine shakes her head, "This will get better. Would you like me to see if she could come tomorrow? Perhaps starting sooner, rather than later would be good for you. I do have one other question regarding this whole matter."

"What's that?" he asks.

"Is she going to be living here, or just coming when you want? I figure I should get the details before we call her." Elaine replies.

"I hadn't thought about that. I suppose it should be her choice. I know we have the space for her. Or if you think it's improper, then don't say anything. I'll go with whatever decision is made on that front," he replies.

Elaine nods, "Then I'll go and make the call. I'll come and inform you of the decision she makes, so it won't be a surprise tomorrow."

He nods in reply and she leaves the room to make the call. He falls back into the chair he had been in and returns to the solace of his music.

Kapitel 5: The Student and the Teacher

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 4: The Student and the Teacher

The door opens and Elaine enters the room, "Oh, I see you decided to sleep here again last night." She comes over and nudges him, "Ms. Kelly shall be arriving soon, Saber, I suggest you get up and be more alert."

"What time is it?" he asks groggily.

"It's nearly nine. You should have eaten a while ago, but I decided you could use the rest. I was just on my way to wake you when I found you here. Now you need to get up and changed into fresh clothes," Elaine replies, nudging him up off of the couch.

"Okay, I'm up. I'll find my way to my room," he grumbles and heads towards the door cautiously.

"Now, Saber, come on. I'll take you up and help you get some clothes together. I know you can take care of changing for yourself." She leads him by the arm to his room, then after picking out his clothes and laying them on the bed, she leaves him to change, closing the door behind her.

He's in the process of changing when he hears the doorbell and sighs. He finishes dressing and heads downstairs, towards the voices in the sitting room.

"Ah, Captain Rider, I'm glad to see that you are able to get around here without too much trouble," Amanda says brightly.

Saber nods slightly and goes and sits down, "It's taken some time, but I have figured my way around most of the house, Ms. Kelly."

"If you don't mind, Captain Rider, I would prefer that you call me Amanda."

"Fair enough, Ms. Amanda." he corrects himself. "If I am to address you by your first name, then you should address me as 'Saber'." he states.

"Saber? I thought your name was Richard." Amanda says.

"Richard is my given name, no one actually calls me that," he replies quietly.

"Ah. Okay, then Saber, it is."

He stands up and turns towards her, "Have you eaten yet?" he asks.

"I ate a few hours ago," she replies.

"Well, I haven't eaten, would you care for some tea or something while I eat?" he asks politely.

"Sure. Perhaps then we can just talk and become better acquainted." she says brightly.

"All right. The kitchen is this direction," he turns towards the kitchen, almost tripping on a stool, but manages to catch himself.

They enter the kitchen and Elaine is there, cooking up breakfast for herself. "Are you ready to eat now, Saber?" she asks, a hint of amusement in her voice.

"Yes, please, if it's not too much trouble," he replies.

"Not at all. I figured you'd be coming, so I made extra. Would you like something too, Ms. Kelly?" Elaine asks.

"No thank you, Ma'am. I've had breakfast," Amanda replies.

"We would both like some tea if you can manage, Elaine." Saber adds.

"Of course. Sit down, I'll have it up in a couple of minutes." Elaine says as she finishes cooking the meal.

They eat and chat for a while before heading to the study. He is sitting in a chair, with Amanda across from him. "So, tell me the type of things you like to do normally." she says.

He thinks for a bit and shrugs, "I enjoy riding, I know I was once good at fencing, and I was an excellent marksman. I would like to have some of those skill back to some degree. I'm sure I'll never be as good as I once was."

Amanda nods, "Okay, we have goals. Now we have to figure a way to attain them. Suggestions?"

Saber sits for several minutes, not sure what to say. Finally, he sighs and shakes his head, "Not a clue to be quite honest."

"You're not exactly being very helpful, you know?" Amanda says amused.

"I wasn't aware I was supposed to be," he quips.

"I've never fenced before in my life, and I've only touched a gun once, so I suppose

you will be teaching me, as much as I will be you," Amanda says.

"Have you ever been on a horse?" he asks quietly.

"I think so...once. I was like five or six," she replies, trying not to laugh.

He smiles and shakes his head, "Then let's head out and ride," he says standing up.

She looks up startled, then nods, "Okay. Um, I'm not sure if I'm appropriately dressed for such an activity."

"What are you wearing?" he asks seriously.

"A long skirt and a tunic top," she replies, watching his expression.

He laughs, "No, that would not be comfortable for riding. Could you possibly go and change into jeans? The top should be fine."

"I can do that," she replies standing up.

"All right then, I'll wait here until you return," he says as she leaves.

A short time later, they are out back with Steed. "I thought you meant a real horse. What kind of horse is this?" Amanda asks confused.

"This is my mechanical horse. His name is evidently 'Steed' I'm not sure if it's something I came up with or if whoever made him programmed into him. Some parts of my memory are still a bit muddled," he replies. "Would you like to ride your own horse, or do you want to ride with me?"

"Well, would you mind if I rode with you?" She asks hesitantly.

He notices her nervousness but shakes his head, "It's fine. Do you want to sit in front or behind me?" he asks quietly, trying to calm her.

"Um, in front, I guess. I'm the one that can see, so wouldn't that make the most sense?" she asks.

He nods, "Up front you go then." He offers her a hand up, then after she's on, he gets on behind her, reaching around her to grab the reins. "I'm sorry if this is awkward, I can't think of another way to do this."

"It's fine," she replies, trying to sound confident.

He chuckles, "If you say so. Take the reins. I won't let go of them until I feel like you're doing okay with it." She places her hands on the reins, remaining tense from nervousness. "Good thing we're on a mecha horse, or you'd be on the ground already."

"Why's that?" She asks trying to relax.

"Horses sense fear, Amanda. So do predators," he adds quietly.

"And how would you know this Saber?" Amanda asks warily. "Are you a predator?"

Saber chuckles, "It all depends on the prey," he replies mischievously.

She strains to see his face, but can't quite turn far enough. "I'll try and remember that," she says ruefully.

"Shall we actually move, or are we just working on sitting on a horse?" Saber asks, the amusement evident in his voice.

"Let's go," She replies, and they start moving in a slow trot. She tenses up, gripping the reins tightly.

"You seriously need to try and relax, Amanda. Otherwise you won't be able to move tomorrow," he says, hesitantly placing his hands over hers. "Loosen your grip and then tug gently to the left or the right to turn, pull back if you want to stop. It's fairly strait forward."

She makes an effort to relax and he releases her hands, moving his hands carefully to her shoulders. "Better?" she asks.

"Yes, at least you're relaxing a bit." he replies and she laughs. "What's so funny?" he asks confused.

"I thought I was here to teach you, not the other way around." she retorts.

"Well, perhaps it'll be a little of both. I thought you were supposed to help me become better in this condition, or something like that," he replies.

"At least you don't seem as glum as you did this morning," she says lightly.

"I seemed glum?" he asks.

"Pretty much. I started having second thoughts this morning, but something made me stay," she replies.

"And what exactly did that?" he asks curious.

"I'm a glutton for punishment, I suppose," she replies amused.

Saber laughs, "I'm glad you're not afraid to speak your mind. This whole situation is bad enough as it is."

"I'm sure. I think I'd be pretty pissed, if I were in your shoes. I'm not sure if anyone could stand to be around me," she says.

He chuckles, "Surely you can't be that bad. You don't seem the type to have an attitude."

Amanda laughs as she pulls back on the reins and Steed comes to a halt. "Have you ever pissed off a red-head, Saber?" she asks curiously.

"Not to my knowledge. A brunette, yes, but not a red-head. Why?" he replies amused.

"We tend to have ferocious tempers," she replies ominously while trying to not laugh.

"I'll do my best to remember that, Miss," he says, chuckling.

They continue riding, throughout the afternoon. Around dinner time they return to the house, several people casting glances their way.

"So, Saber, how has the first day been?" April asks curiously.

Saber nods, "Better than I expected, honestly. I was able to teach her something, as opposed to her teaching me though."

"How do you know that that wasn't the goal for the day?" Amanda asks in a mocking tone.

April laughs, "I like you already, Ms. Kelly."

Amanda smiles, "I think we both can learn from one another. I can learn new things, and he can learn to teach them."

"So that's your game, eh?" Saber asks.

"Yes, it's all part of my diabolical plan," Amanda says laughing.

Saber and April laugh, Saber shaking his head. "And just how long has that been your plan, madam?" he asks in a mocking tone.

"About two minutes now," she replies.

"Ah," Saber replies.

"Oh, I was coming to tell you both that dinner is just about ready," April says.

"Thank you, April," Saber says.

They all eat and the next couple of weeks are spent with Saber teaching Amanda to ride. One morning Saber is just leaving his room when Amanda sees him and approaches him, "Good morning," she says brightly.

"Good morning," Saber replies. "To what do I owe this perkiness this morning?"

"You promised me today that we were going to meet your old fencing partner." she responds. "I'm anxious to see you attempt to fence."

"I'm sure it'll be a regular comedy of errors," he replies sarcastically.

"I think you'll do better than you think," She states as they head downstairs.

They eat a quick breakfast, then the doorbell sounds and a minute later Thomas comes in, "Master Sean McCully has arrived Sir."

"Please bring him in here, Thomas." Saber says.

"Right away, Sir," Thomas replies.

Thomas escorts Sean in, "Saber, I'd heard you'd done a lot of good out there, I was a little surprised to hear from you," Sean says.

"Yes, well I'm not sure if you'd heard, but I was injured in the fighting, and I'm working on my rehabilitation. I figured what better way to judge my progress than to test the skills I'd been training with since I was a young child," Saber replies.

"I'm ready when you are," Sean says confidently.

Saber gets up, "Just go easy on me."

"Are you crazy? You never went easy on me, even when I broke my fencing arm, I believe your exact words were 'Learn to use the other hand faster, Sean'" Sean laughs and grins.

The three of them head to the fencing room inside the mansion and get into their fencing garb, and their swords ready "Saber?" Amanda says quietly as he finishing getting ready, "Isn't this dangerous?"

Saber shakes his head, "I asked Thomas to put out the practice swords, they couldn't cut butter, and the masks protect our faces."

"Okay," Amanda says a bit hesitant. Then nodding in acceptance, she steps out of the circle and announces, "Begin!"

Saber stands stock still as Sean comes at him quickly with a thrust, and not sure if it's instinct, or what he deflects the blow and they start going back and forth, neither landing a blow on each other for several minutes. Then suddenly Sean gains the upper hand and hits Saber. "I won! Finally!" Sean exclaims excitedly.

Amanda goes to Saber and helps him to a bench and hands him some water, "I can't believe you fought like that, it was amazing!"

"I'm not entirely sure how I did that, it was almost like I could see the blade," Saber says astonished as he catches his breath.

"Wait? What do you mean as if you could see the blade?" Sean asks looking up in surprise.

"I told you that I was injured, and you didn't give me a chance to explain how," Saber simply states.

Sean sits down in complete shock. "Are you telling me that you're blind?" he asks. Saber nods. "That... that's impossible. There's no way that you could do that if you were blind."

"As I said, I'm not sure how I did it, I think I heard you move, and somewhere in my mind I knew what you were doing and was able to block, and then once I knew where you were I was able to strike, it felt weird."

"I'd never beaten you before, and I barely beat you this time. I just can't believe you're blind," Sean says still in obvious disbelief.

"I'm hoping it's only temporary, but at least I feel better knowing that I can fence blind," Saber says as he finishes the water he was given.

"If you practiced you'd be the best again, no question." Sean states with a hint of admiration in his voice.

"Shall we go again?" Saber asks.

"No." Amanda says, placing a hand on his arm. "I think that's enough for today. You're clearly exhausted."

"Come on Lady," Sean says agitated. "We can easily go again. He's not a child."

Saber clears his throat, "Her name is Amanda, and you'll do well to remember that Sean. She's been hired to help rehabilitate me, and if she thinks that I've had enough for the day then I've had enough. You are welcome to stay tonight if you like Sean." He turns towards Amanda, "I think I would like a shower. Would you mind helping me to my room? Now that I think about it I am a bit more tired than usual."

Amanda takes Saber's arm as they stand up, "Come on then." They leave and head toward Saber's room.

Thomas comes into the training room, "Will you be staying Master Sean?"

"Sure, why not?" he says with a grin as Thomas walks away. "Might get interesting," he says under his breath.

At dinner time that evening, they all sit around the dinner table. Sean begins telling stories from their youth, "So Saber goes riding off, sword in his hand, looking intent to kill the bas... idiot who hit my sister. He rides up to the guy, he must be 6 ft 4 and pure muscle and Saber says, 'I'm here to defend the honor of Kelly McCully'. The guy laughs

at him, and swings one big fist at Saber. He dodges it, and jabs him one time, right where it counts. He goes down crying for his mother not realizing that Saber had sheathed his weapon before he hit him, he thought that Saber had cut off his,"

"I believe they get the idea, Sean," Saber says quickly. " Please remember that there are ladies present." The others chuckle.

"Is that how it went, Saber?" April asks amused.

"I honestly don't remember," Saber replies. "But I wouldn't doubt it."

"Dessert!" Elaine comes in with a large, nicely decorated cake.

"Elaine, you make the best desserts," Sean says.

"I'll have to make sure to make you something extra for your trip home,Mr. McCully," she replies.

"I would appreciate that," he replies.

Later that evening Saber and Amanda are sitting in his room. "So I guess you and Sean grew up together huh?" Amanda asks.

Saber nods, "It's starting to come back to me, and those stories he told are true, or at least mostly true from what I can remember."

"So what, did you have a crush on his sister or something?" she asks curious.

"Maybe, I'm not really sure. I don't remember her all that well, but it wouldn't have mattered anyways," he says with a shrug.

"Why wouldn't it have mattered?" Amanda asks curiously,

"I was betrothed to someone else. I had been my whole life," he replies quietly. "But life moves on around us sometimes," Saber muses.

"Oh," she replies quietly. A long silence follows, "Well, I'd better head onto bed," Amanda says as she stands up.

"Just down the hall if I need you right?" Saber says.

Amanda smiles, "Yes, and as it's your home just come in if you need me. Although knocking first would be polite."

"Very well, just don't blame me if I actually barge into your room sometime then," he says with a chuckle.

Amanda shakes her head, "Good night, Saber." She heads toward her room.

Sean's standing in the hall when she leaves Saber's room and turns towards her room, "Hello there sweetheart. I can't believe Saber hired such a nice young filly such as yourself," he says looking her over seductively.

"I'm not your sweetheart, Mr. McCully, and I'm here to help Saber. He insists on me being reimbursed for my time, but I'd gladly help him for free," she states as she attempts to step around him and continue to her room.

"Especially seeing that you've gotten yourself such a sweet setup here," he states, pointedly blocking her way. "Free room and board, and you get to get close to Saber. Too bad he's engaged. So if you're looking to marry into money I'm available."

"I'll have you know that as soon as Saber no longer needs my services I plan on leaving. I am not as you so eloquently put it, 'looking to marry into money', sir. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to bed. Good night, Mr. McCully." she says curtly and goes into her room, the door shutting behind her with a bang.

Saber is sitting in his room and hears raised voices, then the bang of a door. Thinking it suspicious, he gets up to check out the noise. Out of instinct, he grabs his father's pistol from the desk, which is always loaded. Meanwhile Sean, not use to rejection, pauses for a minute; then lets his temper get the best of him and reaches for Amanda's door, to his surprise it easily opens. With a grin he enters the room.

"Saber, is that you? Just take a seat, I'll be out in a minute." Amanda says from the other room.

Sean grins evilly as he goes into the dressing room, "I'm not Saber." he says menacingly as he grabs Amanda from behind as she's changing.

"Get off me!" she says, trying to pull out of his grip.

"I think not, I'll have you one way or the other," he says against her neck as he drags her into her bedroom and forces her onto the bed. "This is going to be fun."

Amanda resists the best she can, "Help!" she screams as she continues trying to push him off of her.

At that moment Saber bursts into the room, pistol in his hand, "Amanda?"

"Saber!" Amanda cries out, "Sean's tr-"

Sean clamps a hand over her mouth, still pulling off the rest of her clothes.

"Sean" Saber says in a menacing tone, pointing the pistol towards Amanda's voice "Get away from her NOW!"

Sean laughs, "I will do nothing of the sort, you wouldn't dare shoot, you might hit your girlfriend."

Saber fires, the bullet barely missing Sean's head, "Now, get away from her," he growls.

"But you're blind?" Sean says, thrown off by the accuracy of the shot.

"Must be like fencing, a trained reflex," Saber replies, the gun still pointed towards Sean.

Sean lets go of Amanda, shoving her a bit in the process causing her to hit the floor, and backs away, "Fine have it your way."

"Now, I want you to leave my property and never return, do you understand?" Saber says as he steps closer to where Amanda's voice came from, the gun still in his hand.

Sean moves towards the doorway, and then suddenly leaps to attack Saber, and a shot is fired. "Who shot me?" Sean asks, clutching the wound, looking around wildly.

"I did," April says as she comes out of the shadows of Amanda's dressing room.

"April?" Saber asks surprised.

"We heard a commotion and came to investigate. The other's are waiting outside the room, none of them felt comfortable coming into Amanda's room not knowing whether she was dressed or not."

"Thank you for your help, April." Saber says quietly, trying to calm his anger.

"All well and good, now will someone get me a doctor?" Sean groans.

"If you don't shut up, I'm going to shoot you again, and you won't need a doctor afterwards," April says and Sean gets very quiet. She goes over to Amanda and helps her sit up on the bed, "Now, I know you're in shock, but do you think you can get yourself dressed Amanda?"

"I think I'll be okay, I'll have to burn what's left of the clothes he touched," Amanda mutters and Saber blushes and shakes his head, turning towards the door.

"Come on Saber, you and Sean have seen enough," April says taking him by the arm.

"Technically, I haven't seen a thing," Saber begins to protest.

"Only cause you're still blind," April says amused. "Now come on, and help me get him up and out of the room, I shot him in his right leg, so he'll have to lean on you for now."

Saber goes and grabs Sean, a little rougher than he has to, and gets him up and April pushes them out of the room. "Who's the woman that shot me?" Sean asks as they leave the room.

"From what I remember she's my team mate," Saber answers coldly.

"And my fiance," Fireball says, as he grabs Sean from Saber. "Come on, let's get that bullet taken care of." he looks to Colt, "You with me Cowboy?"

"Wouldn't miss it for the world," Colt says with a grin as they head off.

Kapitel 6: Mood Swings

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The Price of Peace
Chapter 5: Mood Swings

It's not quite dawn when Amanda enters the kitchen to find Saber sitting there with a cup of tea. "Up already?" she asks quietly, as she sits down across from him.

He nods slightly. "Are you all right?" he asks, concern evident in his voice.

"I will be," she replies, barely a whisper.

"Amanda..." Saber starts and sighs, "I'm sorry about what happened."

"Why are you sorry? You didn't do anything wrong," she replies.

"I thought he was a friend, I trusted him. If I had ever thought that he-"

"Saber, don't blame yourself for his behavior. I don't hold what happened against anyone but him," Amanda says, cutting him off.

"Would you like some tea?" Saber asks quietly trying to diffuse the tension he senses building.

"I can get it," she replies curtly.

"I'm fixing myself another cup, so it's no trouble," Saber offers trying to make peace.

"How many have you had?" she asks, the anger no longer evident in her voice.

"This will be my third," he admits with a smirk.

"Just how long have you been down here?" Amanda asks.

"Since they left with Sean," he replies barely audible.

"All night?" Amanda asks.

Saber nods. "I wanted to go and check on you a couple of times, but I thought that after...Sean, you might not want anyone bothering you," he says as he slowly fixes the tea and brings it to the table, setting both cups towards the middle. "I'm still not good at placement, so you'll have to bring it towards yourself." he says, pulling a cup towards himself after he sits back down.

"I haven't been able to sleep either," she says taking her cup and sipping the tea.

"Did he hurt you, Amanda? You know, physically," Saber asks concerned. Amanda is silent for a long time. "Amanda?"

She sighs, "I'm fine," she finally replies.

"That's not what I asked," he says firmly.

"I have a couple of bruises, but nothing more," she mumbles.

"I would understand if you wanted to discontinue your services here," Saber says. "No one would blame you."

Amanda glares at Saber. "Listen here Mr. Richard Saber Rider, I'm not going anywhere. I am under contract to be here to help you, and I'm not leaving until you no longer need me," she says forcefully.

Saber puts his hands up in a gesture of exasperation, "Fine, forget I ever mentioned it."

"And while we're at it, forget this entire episode with Sean; it never happened, and will never be mentioned again, are we clear?" Amanda says, her temper flaring.

"Yes, Ma'am. Crystal clear," he says coldly and gets up and heads out the back door, leaving his cup on the table.

Amanda watches him go and sighs, not sure what to say, the anger leaving as quickly as it appeared.

Saber goes out on Steed and rides across some of the estate. No real destination in mind.

A couple of hours pass and Amanda goes and knocks on Saber's door, "Saber?" She waits a minute, and getting no answer, she enters the room. She notices that nothing looks disturbed. "Saber?" Still no reply. Just then Elaine enters the room.

"Oh, hello Ms. Kelly." Elaine says. "I thought you were with Saber."

"I was just looking for him actually. I've not seen him for a couple of hours." Amanda replies.

"I've not seen him today, Miss." Elaine says. "I remember Thomas saying that the two of you went off on a ride this morning. Steed is still gone, so I was a bit surprised to find you here." Elaine says concern appearing in her voice as she places some clothes away.

"I'll go see if I can find him, Ma'am. I think I made him a bit mad this morning." Amanda says quietly and turns towards the door.

Elaine chuckles, "Pushing his buttons once in a while is a good thing. Not too many people are brave enough to do so. Just be sure that you do it for the right reasons."

Amanda nods, "Thank you, Ma'am," she replies before heading out to the back door and taking a horse, she leaves to find Saber. After nearly an hour of riding, she spots Steed near an old building, Saber nowhere in sight. She rides up close to him, and dismounts looking around. Steed neighs in greeting and she then hears sounds from inside the building. Curious and a bit worried, she goes to the door and carefully opens it. It's fairly dark and it takes her eyes a minute or so to adjust, but as she goes further in, she spots Saber. He's got some sort of stick and is practicing hitting something. He repeats several deliberate moves, then stops, switches hands and repeats. She watches in awe for several minutes before he finally stops and turns her direction.

"You can come closer, I'm not going to hit you with the stick, Amanda." he says quietly as he goes and sits down for a break.

Amanda timidly comes closer to where he is and sits down nearby. "Have you been here this whole time?" she finally asks breaking the silence.

"I've been here for a while," he replies quietly.

"I wasn't really mad at you," she says barely above a whisper.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Amanda." Saber says seriously and stands up.

"Where are you going?" she asks.

"To get some water. There's a well out back," he says as he grabs a small pail and heads for the back of the building to another door. He's almost to the door when he trip and falls, the pail clattering to the ground.

"Saber!" Amanda says jumping up and rushing to him.

"Damn that hurt," Saber mutters rubbing his leg as he sits up.

"Can I do something for you?" Amanda asks concerned.

Saber takes the pail and throws it randomly away from himself in disgust. "I just don't know any more. I feel like everyone is expecting me to act like nothing is wrong, but it's been six months, and I still can't see a damn thing. It doesn't matter how much I try to act like it's just an inconvenience, something as simple as a lip in the floor can trip me. I could've broken my leg there, or I'm sure I was close enough to the door that I could've broken my skull open. I don't know, I'll never know," he breaks down and cries into his hands.

Amanda goes to him and hugs him, attempting to comfort him. "Saber, it just proves that you're human," she says trying to comfort him and calm him down.

They stay that way for several minutes, neither one saying anything. He finally calms down and she releases him from the embrace and sits beside him. He sighs deeply and faces her, "I'm sorry." he says barely a whisper.

"Why? You have every right to be angry, Saber. I would be, if I were in your position," Amanda replies, placing her hand on his arm.

He places a hand on hers, "I've taken so much of it out on you. I've been...I could have handled myself better than I have." He gets quiet for a few minutes before continuing, "Perhaps I'd have been better off not remembering anything. I wouldn't care what I've lost then. It wouldn't matter., he says mumbling the last part.

"You are not completely inept, Saber. Hell, you protected me and you couldn't see. You have good instincts, you could be a great teacher. You might not ever get to fight again, but is that really all bad? You don't seem the type to just want to fight to fight," Amanda replies. "I saw how you were with the stick, your movements were those of someone with excellent skills. Your other senses have begun to adapt. In time, I'd be willing to bet you can do everything you could before. You've lost one of your senses, not all of them. I'm sure you didn't plan for your life to be this way, but sometimes, things happen for a reason."

"I'm sure my parents wouldn't be too happy about how things have turned out," Saber mutters bitterly.

"Why do you think that? You don't think they'd understand? It's not your fault that you were injured."

"The injury, I think they would have accepted, it's some of the repercussions that I'm not so sure about," he replies quietly.

"Like what?" Amanda asks, trying to understand.

"Like the fact that my fiance' left me when she found out I was blind," he mutters barely audible.

"Then you deserve better. Perhaps this was a favor to you then," she says firmly, then seeing him flinch, she recoils a bit. "I'm sorry, I crossed a line that I shouldn't have, Saber. I shouldn't have said that out loud."

He shakes his head, "It's okay," he sighs, "You're right, I suppose. I guess it was better to know before marriage that she is the way she is."

"Did you...love her?" Amanda asks hesitantly.

"I thought I did. I never knew that there could have been anyone else. We were betrothed as children. So I always knew she was the one I would marry."

Amanda shakes her head, "I don't think I could imagine knowing my whole life that I

had to marry a certain person. I just don't get it."

"Have you ever been in love?" Saber asks curiously.

Amanda thinks for a few minutes, "I loved someone once." she says finally.

"But?" Saber interjects.

"We were engaged, until someone else caught his eye. He left me and married her less than two weeks later." Amanda says matter-of-factly.

"Ouch," Saber replies. "Is that why you took this job?"

Amanda looks up at him, studying his face, "No. It isn't."

"Then why?" Saber asks.

"Because I felt like it would be a challenge," she says wryly.

Saber laughs, "A challenge? Seriously?"

"Yes. Reading the description of the position, I thought, 'okay, a soldier having to learn how to live after being blinded. should be a barrel of fun.' So I responded, and well, you know the rest." she replies with amusement in her voice.

"Yes. It's not exactly been easy, has it?" he replies.

"Actually, the job itself has not been as difficult as I thought it would be. You seem to be more...able than I think I'd be. Of course I'm not exactly what you would call 'graceful' by any means," she says with a laugh.

"Hmmm." He says to himself.

"What?" she asks.

"I thought you carried yourself just fine. You got riding down fairly quickly," he says.

"I had a good teacher. But you have yet to try and teach me anything else."

"Like what?" he asks.

She shrugs, "I don't know. Maybe how to use the stick like you were doing when I found you?"

Saber laughs, "You are a glutton for punishment." He shakes his head and sighs, "Thank you," he says quietly.

"For what?" she asks.

"For not patronizing me, and for letting me vent." he replies quietly.

She chuckles, "Well, it's what you needed to do. I'm pretty much the same way. I push and push myself until I snap, then whoever is nearby bears the brunt of it." He nods, but remains silent. "How's your leg?" she asks concerned.

"It hurts, but I don't think I broke anything." he replies seriously.

"Do you think you can stand?"

He nods, "Yeah, I think I just need to walk a bit and I'll be fine."

She stands up and takes his hand, "I'll help pull you up."

He tightens his grip of her hand and nods, "All right." She helps him stand, placing his hand on her shoulder to steady him.

"Are you all right?" she asks, feeling him a bit unsteady.

He nods, "I think so," he says as he slowly lets go of her shoulder. He manages to walk a bit, his leg a bit sore, so he's limping, but able to walk. "I think I'll be fine." he says with a bit more confidence.

"Are you up for trying to teach me to fight with the sticks? Or do you want to go back to the house and rest?" she asks seriously.

He thinks for a minute, still walking gingerly on his leg, "If we go slow, I should be fine. I would still like some water though," he says as he sits down on a stack of wood, using it like a bench and moves his leg a bit, stretching it. "If you wouldn't mind getting it," he adds begrudgingly.

She smiles and nods, picking up the pail, "Sure. I don't mind. You said it's just out back, right?" she asks, receiving a nod in reply. "Okay. I'll be right back." She leaves, coming back a few minutes later. "Do you just drink straight from the pail?" she asks unsure.

He nods, "Yeah. I don't recall there being any cups or anything. It's a spring-fed well, so the water's clean. It felt like the pail was clean, though I can't vouch for it after I threw it."

She chuckles, "It wasn't too bad. I rinsed it a bit before I got some to bring in," she says handing him the pail.

They sit and talk a while, then he stands up, "Are there two sticks close to the same size over there?" He says nodding in the direction he was earlier.

Amanda gets up and goes to look. After a minute, she finds two sticks about her height and brings them back to him, "Here, are these okay?" she says placing one in each of his hands.

He inspects them and nods, "They should do for our purpose. Are you sure about this?"

"Yes," she replies with certainty.

He lays one stick down and takes the other one and places it in her hand, "Are you right or left dominate?"

"Um, right." she replies.

He nods and steps to her right, and places his hands over hers, and shows her how to stand. She copies his stance and grips the stick tightly. "You need to loosen your grip or it's going to hurt like Hell when you hit something solid." She relaxes her grip slightly and he nods, his hands still on hers. "Okay, when you are attacking someone, how would you swing?" She starts to go up high and he grips her hands tighter and ceases her movement. "That's a good way to get your ribs broken. Try this," He moves her arms in smaller movements and slowly releases his grip and steps back. "Now, try swinging at the beam I was hitting before."

She does so and after several minutes, she stops. "How can you keep this up for so long?" she asks, practically out of breath.

He smiles, "Practice. That and usually, I'm hitting a moving object. The impact isn't usually as brutal then."

"Can we try that? My hands are starting to hurt from hitting the beam," she replies.

Saber nods and goes and picks up the other stick, getting into a ready stance, "I'll try not to hit you too hard," he says with a smirk.

Amanda laughs, "That'll just teach me to block, right?" she retorts and readies for his attack.

Kapitel 7: Falling Down A Spiral

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 6: Falling Down A Spiral

Colt and Robin are sitting talking in the sitting room when they see Amanda go past them and quickly out the back door. "I wonder what that's about?" Robin asks.

Colt shrugs, "I figure if something is wrong, she'd have stopped and asked for help."

"I would hope so," Robin replies.

"Hey, have either of you see Saber or Amanda today?" April says coming from the kitchen a few minutes later.

"Amanda just blasted out the back door a couple of minutes ago. Haven't seen Saber since last night, actually," Colt replies.

"I wonder if everything is okay. Did Amanda seem upset?" April asks.

"Didn't really get a look at her, to be perfectly honest. She blew through here so fast. She didn't even stop to say hello. But I figured that maybe she was embarrassed about last night," Robin replies.

April nods, "She was pretty shaken up. I thought I heard her and Saber talking earlier this morning in the kitchen, but I didn't stay around long enough to hear what was said."

"Maybe you should have," Colt says.

"I don't like eavesdropping on a private conversation, Colt," April says.

"I didn't mean that you had to listen to the entire thing. Just hang around long enough to see if they were just chatting or if one of them was angry or something," Colt replies.

April plops down on the couch and sighs, "Maybe I should go and check his room. Perhaps he said something to upset her, so she left for a while. He has been a bit moody lately."

"Are you talking about Saber?" Fireball says coming down the stairs.

"Yes. Have you seen him today?" April replies.

Fireball comes down and sits beside April, "Not since last night or rather earlier this morning," he replies. "He didn't seem to be in the mood to talk to anyone, so I left him alone. Last time I saw him, he was in the kitchen. That was around three this morning."

"What were you doing up at that hour?" Colt asks amused.

"I heard something downstairs and went to investigate. I entered the kitchen, saw him fixing something to drink, I asked him if he was okay, and he just nodded, never spoke, so I said good night and went back to bed."

"I heard him talking with Amanda about five, but I think she had just come down. I didn't stay around to listen, I thought they could use the privacy," April states.

"So no one has seen or heard from him since about five this morning, and you have only seen Amanda a short time ago. She left in a hurry and he wasn't with her?" Fireball states, getting nods from the others. "I think something is up."

"It's probably been close to an hour or so since we saw Amanda now," Robin says.

Just then the door to the kitchen swings open and they all turn to look, "Have any of you seen Saber or Ms. Kelly?" Elaine asks, trying to mask the concern in her voice.

"We were just discussing that very thing, Ms. Elaine. Why?" April replies.

"Well, she was looking for him about an hour ago. She had gone into his room hoping to find him. I entered to put away a few things, I saw the concerned look on her face and we talked. I said that I was surprised to see her because I thought that she was with him. Thomas said Saber had left earlier on Steed, and he was still gone. Ms. Kelly mentioned that she had said something that seemed to make Saber mad and he left. She was giving him time to calm down, but then she couldn't find him, so she went off looking for him." Elaine replies.

Colt let's out a whistle, "She actually got him mad? That's funny."

"Not really Colt, he could get hurt going off on his own when he's angry." April states. "Did she say what she said to him?" April asks.

Elaine shakes her head, "No, but I can imagine what was said. I heard her raise her voice to him this morning, but I didn't want to intrude, so I went about my chores. He was replying in a low voice when I got too far away to hear." she pauses before continuing, "I do know she used his real name," she adds with a chuckle. "Not too many people dare to do that."

The others look at her a bit shocked. "So he's been gone since around five and it's after noon now. She's been gone for over an hour, and we've not heard from either one since?" Fireball says. "I don't like it. Has anyone tried calling his phone?"

The others look to each other and shake their heads. "I tried a short time ago, Mr. Hikari." Thomas says as he approaches the group and everyone looks up. "He's not answering. Neither is she. I tried her phone as well."

"I say we go look for them," April says standing up and looking to the others.

"I agree., Fireball says as he stands up, Colt and Robin following suit.

"We still have three more horses, so you can take them to go and search for them," Thomas offers.

Fireball nods, "Let's do that."

Colt turns to Robin, "Why don't you stay here with Thomas and Elaine, in case they come back. Call us if they do, and we'll call if we find them."

Robin nods, "I can do that," she replies and sits back down. "I know only having one person per horse would make it faster."

Colt nods, "Thank you," he kisses her lightly. "We'll call as soon as we know something." She nods and he turns to April and Fireball, "Ready?" They nod and they leave to go searching for them.

They head off in a random direction and after about half an hour they stop. "Maybe we should have split up. The estate grounds are huge. We have no way of knowing if they are even in the same place," April says looking around at the expansive grounds around them.

Fireball nods, "Yes, maybe we should split up. We each have phones and com-links, so if one of us finds one or both of them, we can let each other know."

"Okay. Let's go," Colt says as he heads in a random direction. Fireball and April each head off into different directions as well.

Nearly an hour later, Fireball hits his com-link, "Hey guys, find anything yet?"

"Nope. I'm about to cut back towards the house, in case they passed behind me," Colt replies.

"April?" Fireball asks.

"I've not seen anything yet, but it looks like there's some sort of building up ahead, don't know why anyone would be way out here though," she replies.

"I've not seen anything, so I'm heading towards your location., Fireball replies.

"Okay Fireball. I'll be heading back after I scope out this-" she suddenly gets quiet.

"April?" Fireball says.

"Steed is here, and so is another horse. There are noises inside. Could be fighting. Should I go in?" April says quietly.

"No, I'll be to your location in about a minute, wait for me," Fireball replies.

"Okay. I'll get as close as I can without being noticed." She replies.

"Colt, are you still going to the house?" Fireball asks.

"No way! I'm heading towards you and April. If you get there and think you need to go on in, go ahead. I'll be right behind you," Colt replies.

Fireball arrives and April waves him over near the well. "It sounds like a physical fight in there. Do you think it's Saber and Amanda?" April whispers.

Fireball shakes his head, "We know for a fact Saber is in there, but the other horse could be anyone. I don't think Saber would hit a woman, no matter how pissed he is."

They move to the door and pull their guns, "Ready?" April asks, getting a nod from Fireball. "1-2-3" They open the door and enter, blasters first. Once their eyes adjust they stand there in shock. They see Saber and Amanda sparring with sticks. Just then Colt bursts through the other door, causing both Saber and Amanda to stop and turn towards him, sticks ready in a fighting stance.

"What the bloody Hell?" Saber asks in Colt's direction.

"Saber? Amanda?" April asks dumbfounded as she lowers her weapon. Fireball quickly holsters his weapon and they slowly approach them.

Saber jerks towards April's voice, still in a defensive position. "What is going on?" he asks annoyed, as he lowers the stick and goes to sit down. Amanda comes up and sits beside him, laying the stick on the ground beside her. Both look exhausted and are drenched in sweat.

"What's going on?" April asks shocked. "We were worried sick about both of you, you've been missing for hours!"

"We have?" Saber asks. "I suppose I lost track of time."

"So did I, I was caught up in learning from you," Amanda says.

"You know," Fireball says, "I thought you were here to teach him, not the other way around."

"Sometimes you learn more by teaching someone than by them teaching you," Amanda states as she grabs the pail of water and takes a drink before passing it to Saber.

Saber takes it and after drinking some, sets it down between them and sighs, "I'm sorry that we worried you. I came out here to clear my head. She came out later, looking for me, and found me here. We talked for a while, then we started doing the fighting."

"We tried calling your phone, and her phone, neither one of you answered," April states.

"I left my phone in my room. I left in a bit of a hurry this morning," Saber replies.

"Yes, so we gathered from Elaine," Fireball says trying to not sound angry. "What about your phone?" He asks looking pointedly at Amanda.

"Um, I guess I never heard it ring," she replies sheepishly and starts digging through her pockets. "Orrrrr I don't have it." she mumbles barely audible. Saber stifles a smile.

"I can't believe you two" April says annoyed. "Gallivanting around the estate without your phones."

"Last I checked it was my estate," Saber growls "And I never seemed to need a phone before this." Saber manages to stifle his anger before asking, "Are you implying that I am unable to take care of myself on my own estate?"

April stares at him in shock. "Um, no, that's not what I meant" she stammers.

"Oh really, what did you mean?" his resentment apparent in his tone.

"I'm just worried about you, that you..." April trails off.

"Might get hurt because I'm blind?" Saber suggests bitterly, and April blushes heavily at the dead on guess but remains silent. "So that's how it is? Even my friends doubt my abilities, is it just her, or is it all of you?" Colt and Fireball look away from Saber in spite of knowing he can't see them. "I find it very unusual that people that I have known for a number of years and consider my friends and teammates seem to think of me as an invalid, and yet Miss Amanda, a woman I've only known for a few weeks seems to have complete faith in me." He gets up and walks toward where he left Steed, finding his way blocked by the others. "Move," he says gruffly and they quickly move out of the way not sure what else to do.

Amanda gets up without saying a word and follows Saber and sees him mounting Steed, "Where you going?"

"I don't know," he says, trying to keep from snapping at her.

"Care for some company?" she asks hesitantly.

Saber sighs, "Sure, are you up to riding the horse you came here on?"

Amanda nods, then shakes her head, remembering that he wouldn't see her nodding,

"Of course" she mounts and they ride off.

Back in the building Colt is the first one to speak, "We are in deep trouble, aren't we?" April and Fireball look to each other in shock.

About an hour later Colt, Fireball and April arrive back at the manor and are immediately confronted by Elaine. "Well, did you find Master Saber and Ms. Kelly?"

April hangs her head as Fireball answers, "I'm afraid we might have made things worse."

"Well, you'd better come tell me everything," Elaine replies. They dismount and head inside, the groom takes their horses. They tell Elaine what happened over tea. "Saber will calm down, he and Amanda will be back, although knowing Saber it might take a day or two," she says reassuringly after hearing their story.

"He doesn't have any supplies," April says. "How could he possibly live for two days outside the house?"

"He once disappeared for an entire week, and claimed he never left the estate grounds, but nobody ever saw him until the day he walked into the house. He was well fed, and relatively clean. Never said exactly where he hid, or what he ate, but if he was able to do that then, I'm sure that even given his current limitations he'd be more than able to take care of himself and Ms. Kelly for several days."

"So what are we suppose to do?" Fireball asks.

"We wait. He'll come back when he's ready, I'm sure that she'll either be with him, or he'll have made her mad enough that she leaves outright," Elaine says simply.

Meanwhile, Saber and Amanda are sitting in front of a fire burning in a fireplace. "So nobody is aware of this part of the basement, huh?" Amanda asks staring towards the fire.

Saber smiles and shakes his head, "No. Apparently it was somehow walled off from the rest of the basement, and the only way in is the entrance that you were able to find," he replies.

"I can't believe how such minute details stick out in our minds, you were able to direct me to the hidden door by descriptions alone," she says, a hint of admiration in her voice.

"It was almost like I could see it in my head when I was describing it to you," he says quietly.

Nearly a week later, they are finishing up dinner when Amanda stands up without a word.

"Are you all right?" he asks concerned.

"Just tired and I have a bit of a headache. Thought I'd move about a bit," she says as she goes over and grabs another log and tossing it on the fire.

"Why don't you lay down? I'll be up for a while yet. Perhaps tomorrow we can venture back to the house?" he replies.

"You sure you don't mind?" she asks.

"It's fine, Amanda," Saber replies quietly. "I'm sorry that I've drug you into this. I should have let you go back days ago."

She chuckles, "I volunteered to come, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I don't figure you imagined that I would stay gone this long," he says seriously.

"I've actually enjoyed the peace here. I could use a slightly more comfortable bed though," she adds ruefully.

"Well, I promise, tomorrow, we'll go back. Okay?" he says.

"Okay," she replies and then goes to lay down on a makeshift cot, covering herself and closing her eyes, drifting to sleep shortly afterwards.

Saber stays up for a while afterwards, making sure to add more wood to the fire before retiring to a cot he set up closer to the entrance to the room they are in. A few hours later, he's restless, so he gets back up and sits by the fire again, noting that it was cooler in the room, so he adds more wood again. He starts a pot of water on the fire to make tea, taking care to not make a lot of noise. Going through the motions, he suddenly realizes that he can see dim light and gasps. He shakes his head to clear it, thinking that he's just overly tired, and continues heating the water. Carefully, he focuses on the fire and realizes that he really can see a dim light and the outline of the pot on the fire as he goes to remove it from the fire. He nearly drops the pot in shock, managing just to spill some of the contents and knocking over the cups he had set out. Quickly he rights them, hoping not to have awakened Amanda. He doesn't dare turn in her direction, afraid that he'll discover that it is just a dream. He finally pours some water in the cups and allows the tea to steep for a bit. He sits in silence contemplating what to think of the new development and debating whether to say anything.

"Tea?" Amanda says groggily as she wakes up a little while later.

"Your sense of smell is rather good if you managed to smell that over there," Saber comments.

"Maybe," Amanda admits as she gets up and stretches before coming over and joining

him for tea. "Good tea," she says after taking a sip.

"I try," Saber says as he sips his tea. "When we're done here let's clean up and then head on back to the house, unless I'm mistaken we should arrive early enough in the morning that the others might not even realize we're back."

"Going to keep them guessing until the end huh?" Amanda asks, some amusement in her voice.

"That's the general idea," Saber says smiling as he finishes his tea and then starts cleaning up. Shortly afterwards they head back to the main part of the house and find Elaine preparing breakfast.

"Saber, Ms. Kelly," Elaine says relieved, giving them a smile, "I knew you'd both be back." She hugs them both, "Hungry?"

"I'm okay" Saber says, "I think I'd like to take a shower and sleep in my bed."

"Me too," Amanda says quietly. Elaine looks as if to say something and Amanda shakes her head, to the unasked question.

"Very well, head on, get some rest, both of you." Elaine says.

"Oh, Elaine, please don't tell the others that we've returned just yet," Saber requests with a smirk.

Elaine smiles, "I don't know what you're talking about, I've not seen or heard anyone this morning. No one has come through here."

Saber nods satisfied and he and Amanda head quietly up the stairs. They arrive at his room, "I had fun these last few days," Amanda says sounding more tired than she intends.

"So did I," Saber admits. They stand at the door a moment neither of them knowing what to say. "I, um, will meet up with you later I suppose."

"Yes, of course," Amanda says and she heads to her room. She goes in and grabs some fresh clothes and takes a shower before going and laying down and falling into a deep sleep.

Saber enters his room, closing the door behind him and heads for the shower. After washing off he changes and plops down on the bed, his eyes closed. He doesn't move for several minutes, thinking back over the past several weeks. He remembers the glimpses from the early morning and opening his eyes, he tries to focus on the ceiling. For a while, he just sees a fuzzy light, but after several minutes, he begins to see the individual ceiling tiles and some of the decorative etchings in them. He blinks a few times, but the shapes are still there. Involuntarily, he gasps and slowly stands up and walks over to the dresser, where the pictures are. Picking up the frame holding the photo of his parents, he realizes that he can see, not clearly, but they are

recognizable. After several minutes of looking over the various photos, he returns to his bed, tired, but unable to sleep; afraid that if he falls asleep, he'll lose the vision that has returned.

Fireball and April come down the stairs and enter the kitchen. Elaine is setting out breakfast for them. "Good morning," she greets them as they sit down.

"Any word yet?" April asks hopefully.

Elaine looks away and shakes her head, "No ma'am. Not a word."

"It's been a week!" Fireball says exasperated.

"Yeah, and I've been out riding every day the last four days. The only trace I've found of either of them is that the horses have returned to the stables," Colt says entering the kitchen, Robin not far behind him. They join the couple at the table.

"So they don't even have their horses?" April asks concern rising in her voice.

Colt shakes his head, "Nope. The horses seemed well cared for, so I guess they are all right where ever it is they are hiding out."

"Maybe they went to her place?" Fireball muses. The others look at him surprised. "Well, she's local, they sent the horses back, who's to say they didn't go there?"

"I suppose that's a possibility," April admits. "Does anyone know where she lives?" They all shake their heads in reply. April sighs, "I suppose I should call my father. He should have her information on file, since Calvary Command is paying for her services."

"I say give them another day or so," Elaine interjects. The others look as if to protest and she holds up her hands to silence them, "Think about it, if the horses have returned, then they are most likely on the estate hiding out. They will be back soon most likely. Wait one more day, then if they have not yet returned, you have my blessing to call Commander Eagle."

Fireball nods, "It would be best to keep him out of this, if at all possible. I'm sure he has plenty of other things to be worrying over. He doesn't need this added to it." Slowly, the others nod their heads in agreement, and they eat, no one really saying much else.

After breakfast, they head out back and sit in the courtyard, chatting when Colt stands up, "I'm going to go back out and look for them again. Does anyone else wish to come along?"

"Sure." April says. Fireball nods and Robin stands up.

"Let's all go this time. Robin can ride the horse that Amanda had," Colt says and they

head to the stables. After prepping the horses, they all ride off together to look for Saber and Amanda.

Saber rolls over and looks out the window, squinting at the light. "I suppose it's almost noon now," he mumbles to himself. Slowly he stands up and stretches and looks around the room, he notices that things are still fuzzy, but he's grateful he can see. He goes to the door and quietly opens it. Looking in both directions, he doesn't see or hear anyone close by, so he makes his way to Amanda's door and starts to knock, but stops. He stands there for several minutes, silently praying that no one finds him there, then after much debating with himself, he quietly knocks on the door. After a minute, he hears no reply, so he reaches for the door handle and hesitantly tries it. The door opens and he slips in, closing it behind him. It takes a minute before his eyes adjust to the dimmer light in the room, he sees the shadow of a figure laying in the bed, covers pulled up. He starts to leave when she stirs, realizing that someone is in her room.

She rolls over, facing the door and tenses for a moment, "Saber?" she says barely a whisper.

He nods, "Yes. I'm sorry. I'll let you rest. I apologize for waking you," he says quietly, stepping back towards the door and reaching for the handle.

She notices his uneasiness, "Are you all right?" she asks concerned.

"I... don't know," he replies, still staying close to the door.

She goes to sit up, and quickly lays back down, "Ugh."

"Are you all right?" he asks, concern in his voice.

"I'm not feeling very well. But I'm sure it's nothing," she replies weakly.

"How do you not feel well?" he asks venturing a little closer to her, grateful for the darkness of the room.

"My head is pounding and I'm freezing. I think I may have a fever," she says barely audible.

He slowly walks over to the bed, "May I feel your head for fever?" he says hesitantly.

"Yeah," she replies quietly.

He touches her head gently, noticing she's drenched from sweat and burning hot to the touch. "I need to get Elaine," he says trying not to sound worried.

"Okay."

He turns and quickly leaves her room, stepping into the hall. He closes her door and glances in the direction of the stairs, squinting at the light. Begrudgingly, he goes to

his room and grabs the sunglasses he had worn when he first arrived back home. He then takes a back entrance to the kitchen. Upon entering, he doesn't see Elaine, so he goes to their quarters and knocks on the door.

The door opens and Elaine looks at him with a look of surprise. "Saber?" she asks seeing the serious look on his face. "What's wrong?"

"Amanda is burning up with fever. I think you should see about her, I think she needs a doctor," he says urgently.

"Take me to her," she says and they go back the way he came and go to her room, not bothering to knock. "Ms. Kelly?" Elaine says with concern upon entering the room. Amanda stirs slightly in the bed, shivering and the covers pulled up tightly around her. Elaine comes over and touches her head, "You're right, she is burning up, she says to Saber, who nods. "Go and ask Thomas to call the doctor. He's in our quarters."

Saber nods and heads back downstairs. He enters the servants quarters, "Thomas?"

Thomas comes around the corner from the other room, "Ah, good to see you back, sir."

"Thomas, please call for the doctor. Amanda is sick and has a high fever. Elaine is with her." Saber says trying to remain calm.

"Yes, sir. I'll go now," he says heading off to get the number.

"I'll be in Amanda's room, seeing if I can be of use to Elaine," Saber replies as he turns and heads back upstairs. He quickly returns and Elaine looks up, noting his look of concern.

"She's sleeping right now," Elaine says quietly.

Saber nods and sits in a chair not far from the bed. "What can I do to help?" he asks.

Elaine places a fresh washcloth on Amanda's head and turns to study Saber better. "Why do you have your sunglasses on?" she asks quietly.

Saber sits quietly for several minutes, thinking of how to formulate his reply, "Well, this morning, I was able to see bits of light. It was giving me a headache, so I went and got these to wear. It seems to help."

"So light is all you can see?" she asks curious.

Saber shakes his head, "At times, I can make out shapes, like now. It's dark enough that I can make out your outline and her figure on the bed." Elaine gasps in shock. "Not much more than that. I can't focus hard enough to see normally, it hurts my head," he replies quietly. "I first noticed it this morning when I was making tea over a fire. I thought I was dreaming."

"Does she know?" Elaine asks nodding towards Amanda.

Saber shakes his head, "No. I wasn't sure if it's temporary or permanent, so I was waiting to tell her. One of the reasons I came to see her was I was going to talk to her about it," he replies quietly.

Elaine nods, "Perhaps the doctor should look at you as well. You said that you have a headache too, right?"

Saber nods, "It started about the time I could see light this morning."

"Is it possible that you caught something from Amanda? I'm sure you've been in close quarters," Elaine says looking to see his reaction.

Saber sighs and shakes his head, "Nothing improper has happened, Elaine, if that is what you are trying to find out," he says a bit more harshly than he intends.

Elaine places a hand on his arm, "I didn't mean it like that, Saber. I was curious, but I noticed you went to your own rooms, so I figured nothing had ...happened," she replies quietly. "I'm sorry," she adds.

"It's okay. I know that you are looking out for me, and that you mean well," he replies, the anger subsiding. "Do the others know we're back?"

"No. They have gone off to try and find you both," She says with a smile as Thomas enters the room, followed by another man.

"Master Saber, this is Dr. Ferguson. He came as soon as I called," Thomas says, then he quietly leaves the room.

Saber nods to him. "Thank you for coming so quickly, Doctor. This is Amanda Kelly," he states, nodding towards her sleeping figure on the bed. "Her symptoms started late last night, I think. But she is much worse than even a few hours ago."

Dr. Ferguson takes out a medical bag and everyone moves back from the bed, so he can examine her, several minutes pass in silence as they wait for some sort of reaction. "Well, her fever is rather high. It's running dangerously close to forty one degrees." He takes a small pouch and places some of the contents in Amanda's mouth. "This should help with the fever. I'll come back later with some injections to give her if needed. I'll also bring some antibiotics." he turns to Saber, "Captain Rider, can you tell me what her earliest symptoms were, and about how long ago they started?"

Saber thinks about the last couple of days, trying to think of when she started acting differently. "Well, I suppose it was just after we ate dinner last night. She got up and seemed...off. I asked her if she was all right, and she said she was just really tired and had a bad headache. She went and laid down, and this morning, she seemed okay. She mentioned that her head was still hurting, but she came in here and laid down again. But she wasn't very talkative, so I suppose that's why I thought something was off."

The doctor nods, listening. "Have you had any of the same symptoms?" he asks.

Saber shakes his head, "I've had a bit of a headache, but nothing unusual."

The doctor comes over to him and feels his head, "No sign of fever, and your color is good, so perhaps you won't fall ill, as she has."

"Any idea what's wrong?" Elaine asks.

"It could be any number of things. That's why I'm putting her on a broad spectrum antibiotic. If we can get her fever down, I think she'll be fine. She may not feel up to anything for several days, so I would limit other's contact with her, just to be safe," he replies.

"What about us? We have already been around her," Saber asks quietly.

"I would limit it to perhaps you that are here in the room. The fewer people who come in contact with her, the less likely to pass this illness around," the doctor replies. Both Saber and Elaine nod.

"I can bring food up for both of you, if you don't mind sitting with her, Saber. I'll come and help her change and bathe, if she feels up to it," Elaine says.

Saber nods, "Thank you, doctor. Should we call if her condition worsens?"

He nods, "Yes, I'll be back later this afternoon to check on her and bring some more medicine. Give her some more of this powder, about half of what's left in approximately two hours. I should be back before she needs a third dose, and we can assess whether the treatment is working." He stands up and nods to both of them, "I'll see you later," he turns and heads downstairs.

Saber sighs, placing his head in his hands. Elaine comes over to him, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder, "She'll get better, Saber," she says with a smile. "I know you care about her." she adds quietly.

He looks up at her, almost confused by her statement, "How could I care so much for someone I've known only a short time?"

Elaine chuckles, "She's seen you at your worst, Saber, and yet she's still chose to stay. It's not often that a person meets someone that truly understands them. I think deep down, you know that. In time, you'll know what you feel, and you'll face it head on, like you do everything else. For now, focus that energy on helping her as she has helped you." She removes her hand from his shoulder, "I'll go and fix lunch for the others, then I'll bring the two of you up something, all right?" She hands him a washcloth, go and moisten this in her bathroom, then swap it out for the one on her head. Do that every fifteen to twenty minutes," she says.

He nods, "Thank you, Elaine."

"I'll be back in about an hour. May I let the others know you are both back, but not to be disturbed?" she asks, stopping at the door to await his reply.

He thinks for a minute and nods, "I suppose you should tell them what is going on. I'm not ready to talk to them yet." he pauses, then adds as an afterthought, "Please don't mention my change in vision to anyone just yet, I'd like to wait until I know how this plays out."

"Of course, Saber. You have my word," she replies and leaves the room, closing the door behind her.

Kapitel 8: Coming Out of the Dark

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 7: Coming Out of the Dark

Saber goes and rinses the washcloth Elaine gave him and swaps it for the one on Amanda's head, setting it gently down. He waits a minute, then carefully sits on the side of her bed, watching her for signs of trouble.

She slowly stirs, and turns towards him, her eyes looking up at him. "You're still here?" she asks weakly. He nods. "I thought you went to get Elaine?"

"That was an hour and half ago. The doctor has come and gone. He'll be back this afternoon to see how you're doing," he replies quietly. After several minutes he finally breaks the silence that has fallen between them, "How are you feeling?" he asks, the concern evident in his voice.

"Tired, not as cold, and my head doesn't hurt quite as much," she replies as she turns better to face him and gasps, "Why do you have sunglasses on?" she asks, obviously fatigued.

"We can talk about it later. You need to rest now." he replies gently. She nods and quickly drifts back to sleep.

Elaine is in the kitchen when the others return, worry obvious on their faces. "We're back," April says glumly as she plops down at the table. "No sign of either of them." April looks up and sees a couple of pots on the stove as Elaine places out a plate of sandwiches for them. "What else are you cooking, Elaine? Is that for dinner or something?" she asks as the others join her at the table.

Elaine shakes her head, "No. I am taking the soup upstairs in a few minutes."

April's face brightens, "They're back?!"

Elaine nods and they all go to get up and she holds out her hands to get them to stop, "Do not disturb them. They returned this morning, and Ms. Kelly is seriously ill. Saber is with her right now. The doctor has come and gone, and will return this afternoon. Until we know what is wrong, they are to have no visitors. She is running a dangerously high fever, so she is constantly being monitored."

"So where were they hiding?" Colt asks.

Elaine shrugs, "He didn't say, and I know better than to ask too many questions."

"I bet he comes down with this sickness too," Colt says with a smirk. "Camping out alone with a woman for a week, I can only imagine what went on."

"I sort of asked if he and Amanda were..." Elaine says. "But he told me that nothing improper happened. I believe him. Although I do think he's falling for her." she adds under her breath.

"I could see the attraction," April states. "Think about it, she's not afraid to tell him off, he respects that."

"And she's a nice looking woman," Colt adds, getting a glare from Robin. "Well, she is, but I'm quite happy with you," he says with a grin. Robin rolls her eyes.

"I don't think that falls into play in this case, Colt." Fireball says dryly.

Elaine shakes her head and dishes out the soups and a couple of sandwiches and places them on a tray. "I'll be down again in a while," she says as she takes the tray upstairs, entering Amanda's room quietly. Saber turns when she enters. "Food's here, Saber," she says placing the tray on the desk. "Come on and eat something." she comes over to the bed and studies Amanda carefully, touching her forehead gently, "Feels like her fever is down, but not gone."

Saber nods, "She woke up for a couple of minutes, but she went back to sleep. She doesn't seem to be shivering as much as she was either. Perhaps after she eats something, you could help her bathe and or change clothes?"

Elaine nods, "If she feels up to it. Go on and eat. I'll sit here."

Saber reluctantly gets up and goes to the desk and eats the soup. "This is really good, Elaine. Thank you for bringing it up."

He is eating when Amanda stirs again and turns to find Elaine next to her. "Where's Saber?" she asks quietly.

"I'm here." he says getting up and standing beside Elaine.

She turns and looks at him, "What smells so good?" she asks weakly.

"I've brought up some soup. Would you like some?" Elaine asks gently.

Amanda slowly manages to sit up, with the help of both Saber and Elaine. Elaine then goes and brings the tray and places it on her lap with the bowl of soup. She slowly starts eating, only managing to finish about half of the soup. "It's really good, but I just can't eat any more. Thank you for bringing it."

Elaine smiles and removes the tray from the bed.

"How are you feeling?" Saber asks.

Amanda turns towards him, "A little better. I think the headache is almost gone."

"I'm glad," he replies sounding a bit relieved.

"Would you like to change clothes? You were sweating out the fever earlier. That might make you feel better." Elaine asks.

Amanda thinks for a while, "That might be good."

"Can you make it to the dressing room?" Elaine asks.

Amanda nods, "I think so, with help."

"Let me take the tray downstairs, and get some fresh sheets." she looks to Saber, "Would you mind changing them?" he shakes his head. "Thanks, I can help her change while you're doing that." She takes the tray and leaves the room.

Saber sits down in the chair beside bed and Amanda turns towards him, "You never did tell me about the sunglasses."

He chuckles, "You must be feeling better."

"A little." She looks around at the dimly lit room, "Can we turn on a lamp or something. I want to be able to see you."

Saber nods slightly and mumbles, "Sure." He goes to the desk and finds the switch, clicking the light on and then having to blink several times to get his eyes to adjust before returning to the chair. He sits down and for the first time gets a good look at how sick she is and gasps in surprise.

"Something wrong?" she asks concerned watching him closely. He shakes his head. "You're acting strange."

"Just worried," he mutters, trying not to make it obvious that he can see her somewhat.

"You're hiding something," she says in an accusatory tone.

Just as he's about to reply, Elaine comes into the room with an armload of sheets and deposits them on Saber's lap. "Here you go," she says to him and turns to Amanda, "You ready to try and change?" She nods and Elaine helps her up and into the dressing room.

Saber lets out a sigh of relief and starts the process of changing the sheets after they shut the door to the changing room.

"What's wrong with him, Elaine?" Amanda asks as she gets help undressing.

Elaine chuckles, "I think he's just worried about you and isn't sure how to act." Amanda looks at her curiously. "Surely the two of you talked while you were away."

Amanda shrugs, "Yeah, mostly about our past life. How things were before we met," she says finally peeling off the last of her sweat drenched clothes.

"Would you like a quick bath or shower?" Elaine asks.

Amanda looks at herself and the mirror and nods. "I might can manage a quick shower, if you don't mind staying in case I fall or something."

Elaine nods, "Gladly, dear. I'm here to help you." Amanda chuckles. "What's so funny?" Elaine asks.

"You left Saber to change the bedding. Does he even know how?"

Elaine laughs, "Madam, you've spent a week with him and you aren't sure he's capable of changing bedding. Just where did you sleep?"

"On a cot on the ground," she replies with a smirk. "His cot was the far side of where we stayed, before you ask."

"I wasn't going to ask, Miss. I have already offended Saber trying to pry out such information, and he told me that in no uncertain terms that there was nothing anyone could deem as improper going on," Elaine says.

Amanda chuckles, "He has been a bit moody, hasn't he?"

"The two of you running off like that, didn't exactly help," Elaine says as Amanda finishes her shower and steps out.

"I had no idea he was going to be gone that long," Amanda says quietly as she carefully starts dressing.

Elaine assists her as she can with dressing, "Would you still have followed him had you known?" she asks curious.

Amanda stops and stares at her for a minute thinking and then nods, "Probably. I don't regret it. I got talk to him without boundaries, both of us just said whatever popped into our heads. He wasn't judgemental of my past, nor was I of his."

"So you know that he was engaged?" Elaine asks.

Amanda nods as she finishes dressing, "Yes. He told me. He also told me that he is no longer engaged. He said that after he came home to recuperate, she came to see him and found out he was blinded and had no memory. So she broke off the engagement." Elaine nods. "He deserves better than that," she says quietly. "He knows that I was once engaged as well."

"May I ask what happened, Miss?" Elaine inquires.

"He met someone else. He married her two weeks after he broke off our relationship." Amanda replies stoically. "So I suppose we both have been burned," she sighs, shaking her head.

Elaine stares at her for a minute, not sure what to say, then nods, "I can tell you care for him. Just tread carefully, he's never been one to openly express his feelings, but I think he may care for you too," she says with a smile.

Amanda blinks for a minute, not sure she heard correctly, "Thank you. I'll be careful, I don't want to hurt him. He's a good person," she finally says.

"Well, are you ready to go back out?" Elaine asks brightly.

"Yeah. I need to sit, I'm pretty wiped out now," Amanda says as Elaine opens the door and they enter the bedroom to find Saber sitting back in the chair and fresh linens on the bed.

He looks up when they come into the room and fights to keep a neutral expression. "Feel better?" he asks.

"Much, but now I'm pretty wiped out," Amanda replies.

"Well, do you want the bed or you can have the chair if you'd rather? I can always sit on the bed or get a chair from my room," he replies.

"I can sit on the bed," she says as she makes her way over and sits down with a sigh of exhaustion.

"Sounds like you did a bit more than you were ready for," he states, with a hint of worry in his tone.

"I'll be all right," Amanda replies.

"I'm going to take the old bedding down to be washed. The doctor should return in an hour or so. Try and rest until then. Call for me if you need me. The others are aware that you are both back, and not to be disturbed," Elaine says as she grabs the used bedding and heads downstairs.

"Do you really feel any better, Amanda?" Saber asks hesitantly.

"Yeah. Not totally better, but better than last night and this morning," she replies, sounding tired.

He nods, "Then rest. I'll be here if you need anything."

"We still haven't finished our conversation," she says quietly. He shifts a bit in his seat, but manages to school his nervousness on his face. "What is going on. Something is

up, I can see that plain as day, Saber," she states firmly.

He sits silently for several minutes, almost saying something, but stopping each time. "Last night I couldn't sleep," he says finally finding the words to start. "I felt uneasy, restless. Perhaps I sensed something was wrong with you, I...I don't know what it was. But anyways, I finally gave up and got back up and went to make tea. I was sitting there, waiting for the water to heat when I realized that I could see light." Amanda gasps, but he continues, "At first, I thought I was dreaming. I blinked a few times, figuring it was lack of sleep messing with my head, but then I noticed that I could see the outline of the pot on the fire. That was why I wanted to get back here early. The light seemed to hurt my eyes." Amanda nods. "We came back and went our separate ways, and I couldn't sleep. But, as I lay on the bed in my room, I was able to start making out some shapes and such on the ceiling. I got up and I found the picture of my parents on the dresser, I was able to see them. The images I see are still fuzzy, sort of like someone that needs glasses, I suppose, but I can see, in dim lighting at least. I came to tell you, I wanted you to know. That's when I came in and you were burning up with fever. I was scared for you, Amanda. I was afraid that I had somehow caused you to get sick, and I'm sorry." he sits quietly, unsure what else to say.

Amanda sits in stunned silence for several minutes, "So...so you can...see me right now?" she manages to say after finding her voice.

Saber nods, "Not well, but yes, I can technically see you," he replies nervously.

Amanda studies his face for a long time, "So, I suppose I'll be leaving soon."

"I hope not." he says quietly. "I rather like having you around. You aren't afraid to speak your mind to me. I admire that." Amanda smiles weakly. "This could only be a temporary reprieve. I could wake up tomorrow and be blind totally again."

She nods acknowledging the truth of his statement. "You still owe me some lessons, Captain Rider," Amanda replies with a weak smile.

"That's true, Ms. Kelly, I do," he replies trying not to laugh. "And I suppose I should apologize to the others for scaring them as I did by leaving."

"You don't owe it to them, but you would be the bigger person for doing so," she says tiredly.

Saber nods. "You get some rest.," he says, coming over and feeling her head for fever. He pulls out the pouch, "Here, take this first," He pours some in a drink and hands it to her.

"What is it?" she asks looking at the drink.

"It'll help keep the fever under control. Then after taking it, you should lay down and get some sleep," he replies. "The doctor will be back before too long to check on you."

She nods and takes the drink, finishing it. "Thank you," she says handing him the glass

and laying down.

“Call for me if you need anything, I’ll come and check on you shortly,” he says gently, then smiles, noticing she is already asleep. He quietly makes his way to the door and leave, closing it softly.

Kapitel 9: Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 8: Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid

"So they are here, and we can't see them because she's sick," Colt grumbles while taking a bite of his sandwich.

"At least they're back. God only knows where they've been. Maybe she got sick from being out in the elements or something," Robin says.

"Either way, we're going to have to explain to my father what has transpired. He's not going to be too thrilled, though I'm not sure who he'll be more upset with," April says.

"He knows how Saber can be, April. So maybe he won't be too hard on him," Fireball offers.

"It's not him I'm worried about," she replies. "I think he'll understand Amanda going with him, but the fact that we..." she trails off, not wanting to finish the thought.

"Started treating him differently, because he was blind," Fireball finishes.

April nods, "The very thing that my father wanted to avoid."

"Seeing that he hasn't spoken to us, I guess it's safe to assume he's still mad," Colt says.

Robin stands up and places her dishes in the sink, "So what do we do?"

"I wish I knew," April replies.

"Beg forgiveness?" Colt offers with a smirk.

"Not helpful, Colt," Fireball says.

Just then, Elaine comes through the kitchen and into her quarters.

"Great, is she mad at us now too?" Colt states as she breezes past without a word.

"She looked like she was going after something. I hope everything is okay," Robin says, staring off towards where Elaine went.

A few minutes later, Elaine comes out carrying sheets.

"Elaine, is everything okay?" April asks.

Elaine stops and faces them, "Ms. Kelly is awake, but she is still running some fever, but she has eaten some and wishes to change into some fresh clothes. I'm helping her with that and Saber is going to change the bedding. She was sweating quite a bit from the fever."

"Is there anything we can do to help?" April asks.

Elaine shakes her head, "Not at this point. I'll let you know if that changes."

"Thank you," April replies as Elaine turns and heads back upstairs. "Well, what should we do?" she asks the others after Elaine leaves.

They head into the sitting room and are talking about the past weeks events when the doorbell rings. Thomas comes through room, heading for the door. He answers the door and after a minute, he returns with Commander Eagle.

"Oh boy," Colt mutters under his breath.

"Hello everyone," the commander says upon entering the room.

"Hi," comes the unanimous reply.

He looks around and notices that Saber is absent, "Where's Saber?"

"With Amanda," Fireball answers truthfully.

"Well, at least she is working with him. Has he shown any improvement?" he asks.

"Hard to say at this point," April replies.

The commander looks to each of them in turn and after studying them he looks to April, "Is there something going on that I should know about?" he asks taking a seat on the couch.

They all cast a nervous glance to one another, none of them wanting to be the one to detail the events of the past few weeks.

"I'm waiting. Is something wrong with Saber?" he asks firmly, looking pointedly at April.

She swallows hard and takes a breath, "Um, well...there have been a few...issues," she begins.

"Okay," he replies, waiting for a further explanation.

"Saber is improving. He has worked on fencing, and has had some opportunity to work

on his shooting skills," April replies.

"What issues have come up then? Does he not get along with Ms. Kelly?" the commander inquires.

"I wouldn't say that, sir," Colt interjects, getting glares from the others.

"Then what would you say these issues are, Mr. Wilcox?" the commander asks beginning to get annoyed.

"Uh..."

"One of Saber's old fencing partners came by a little more than a week ago, his name is Sean McCully. Not knowing about Saber's blindness, he and Saber had a fencing match. He barely was able to beat Saber," the commander looks surprised and Fireball continues, "After the match, he was shocked to learn of Saber's condition, but seemed to take it in stride. We all had dinner and talked a while. He said he was going to his room for the evening and left. Saber and Amanda went off and were talking, at some point, Amanda was going to her room and encountered Sean in the hallway. Evidently, he made unwelcome advances to her and she blew him off and went to her room. He didn't like it and went in after her, and attempted to rape her. Saber hears the commotion, since he's closer than we are down here, grabs a pistol that is kept in his room, goes and enters Amanda's room. She tries to scream and fight Sean off of her. Saber orders Sean to back off. He refuses and Saber fires a shot, barely missing him. Sean shoves Amanda to the floor and says he's leaving and leaps towards Saber. April arrives at that moment and shoots Sean in the leg. This stops the altercation." Fireball states.

Commander Eagle sits in stunned silence for a few minutes, processing the information, "Is Ms. Kelly all right?" he finally manages to ask.

"She was bruised up and in shock, but could have been worse. Then the next morning, she and Saber had some sort of altercation. He left, and after a couple of hours, she went off looking for him. She found him and they were both fine. He was in the process of teaching her to fight with sticks when we found them after an extensive property search. After we found them, we sort of let on that we thought he was...incapable of caring for himself. That pissed him off and he and Amanda took off, they stayed gone for a week. Now she is evidently very sick with fever, he is upstairs with her," April explains.

"Sounds like life hasn't been dull around here." the commander says ruefully. "I'm not sure now that having you three and Robin come back with me for a couple of weeks for our doctors to do your physicals and psychological exams is a good idea."

"Why wouldn't you want us to go?" April asks.

"If Amanda is sick, he might need help," he replies.

"Don't let him hear you say that," Colt states.

"Perhaps it would be better if you gave him some space. Have you spoken with him since he's returned?" They all shake their heads. "Then maybe this would be a good time for you to get away."

As they are talking, Elaine comes through carrying the used bedding, she stops when she spots Commander Eagle, "Oh, hello Commander. I didn't know you were coming today."

"Hello Elaine. It sounds like you've had your hands full around here," he replies.

"It's been a bit more exciting than I'm used to, sir. But not too bad," she replies.

"I would like to speak with Saber, if you will allow it. I understand that he is a bit busy, it would only take a few minutes of his time," he asks.

Elaine studies him for a moment, then nods slightly, "All right. He never said that he wouldn't allow you to see him until he was ready. Go on up to his room, I'll fetch him in a minute."

"Thank you, Ma'am," the commander replies and heads up the stairs, As he reaches the top, he spots Saber leaving a room and closing the door behind him. "Saber," he calls.

Saber turns in the direction of the commander's voice, "Sir?"

"We need to talk, privately," the commander replies.

Saber nods and turns towards his room, "This way, sir," he says, leading the commander to his quarters and into the sitting area. They both sit down and after a few minutes, Saber breaks the silence, "So they called you in on this, eh?" he asks, sounding a bit amused.

"No. I was coming to see how things were progressing and to have the others return with me to get their quarterly physicals and psych evals done. I knew nothing of what had transpired here. I think you should be checked out too, but given the situation here, I think it can wait a little. We will go from the date you came out of the coma, as opposed to date of injury."

Saber nods, "I'll do whatever you think is best, sir. Although I will not leave until I know that Amanda is no longer ill. I feel partly responsible for her illness."

The commander stifles a smile, "So the insinuations the others were making are correct?" he asks amused.

Saber is silent for a minute, fighting to keep a neutral front, "And just what is it that they are insinuating, sir?" he asks in a slightly irritated tone.

"That you and Ms. Kelly may have-"

"We've done nothing wrong, sir." he states firmly, interrupting the commander's statement. "Yes. It is true that we disappeared for a while, but it was better for me to leave rather than to remain and most likely say something that could have caused some unrepairable damages to my relationships with the others. Amanda followed me when I left, she chose to remain with me. I openly admit that I enjoyed our time together. We talked a lot, about a lot of things. She also taught me that I can still do things, including most of the things that I did before. I am teaching her to fence now, and she can ride a horse also. So she is learning new skills, as I am learning to teach skills. As for the unspoken part of your question, I don't know what or how I feel about her. I do consider her a friend. I would like to maintain contact with her, regardless, as I do enjoy her company. Unlike everyone else, she isn't afraid to call me on something if she thinks I need to be knocked down a peg, as the saying goes."

Commander Eagle chuckles at the last comment, "Well, it sounds like she is keeping her end of the agreement." Saber nods. "Perhaps in a month or so, you can return to Calvary Command for a few days for tests, but for now, you shall remain here. I will tell the others to pack up and we will leave this afternoon."

"You do not have to rush them out on my account, sir. I am no longer angry with them. I've not spoken to them because of everything that has happened since we returned this morning, not because I'm angry. I would like to speak to them before the leave, and they are welcome to return after they are done there, if they wish to." Saber states quietly.

"If you aren't presently occupied, why don't you come on down and talk with them?" the commander says.

Saber nods, "Amanda is sleeping right now, and her fever is down, so I suppose I could go and talk with them for a little while," he replies.

Commander Eagle stands up, "Then let's go down. They really seem to think that you are still mad at them."

Saber chuckles, "Well, perhaps next time they will learn a bit of diplomacy." he says standing up and turning towards the door.

Commander Eagle places a hand on Saber shoulder, stopping him, "I have one more question for you, Saber."

"Yes?"

"Why are you wearing sunglasses?" the commander asks.

Saber sighs, "This morning I started seeing bits of light. I can't see much else, but the bit of light I can see makes my head hurt. Much like it did at the hospital."

"Well, that's some progress, I suppose," he replies and removes his hand, allowing Saber to leave the room.

"It's something. Whether it's temporary or permanent, has yet to be seen. I am aware it could go as fast as it came, sir. I'm well past hoping for a complete recovery," he says as they descend the stairs and enter the sitting room. The others looking up in surprise. "Hello everyone," Saber says in a neutral tone as he sits in a vacant chair.

Everyone is silent for several minutes, "How's Amanda?" April finally says breaking the uncomfortable silence.

"She's a little better. Her fever is finally down some, so it's not as dangerously high as it was earlier." Saber replies as he tries to focus enough behind the glasses to make out some facial expressions, rubbing his temples from the effort.

"Saber, we-" Fireball begins.

"Don't, Fireball," He says holding a hand up to silence him. "Just don't go there. It's over, it's done. I realize that what you were saying and what you meant are two different things. However, that being said, you should have thought about my mindset at the time. I had already left the house because I was upset, treating me like an invalid or a child did not help things. I was already feeling insecure," He hears several gasps at such an admission, but continues, "Yes, I am admitting that I am an infallible human, as Amanda pointed out a short time before you arrived. But as she was showing me when you arrived, I still can do things. Try putting yourself in my place. How would you feel? That is all I want you to think about before you make a comment about my current situation. Oh, and for the record, she and I have not..done anything. We slept in the same place, but not even the same area. I hope that satisfies your curiosity," He sits back and waits for any response to his speech.

"So...so do we just go on, like everything is fine now?" April hesitantly asks after a long silence.

Saber nods, "I am amenable to that, if all of you are. I don't feel like losing anyone as a friend. But I know when I have had enough and that I am liable to say something I would regret, so that is why I left when I did."

"You must have been really pissed, having stayed gone a week," Fireball states.

Saber laughs, "Actually, I was fine by the next morning."

"Then why did you remain gone?" Fireball asks.

Saber shrugs, "Honestly, I was enjoying the time with Amanda. We spent a lot of time talking about everything. I know about her past, she knows about mine. Including the fact that I had been betrothed as a child to Sincia. She also knows how that ended. We also worked on self defense techniques. I don't want what happened before to happen again. She might not be as lucky."

"Wow," Colt says surprised. "Do you know anything else about her?"

Saber nods, "Yes, I do. But I will not disclose that information. She told me in confidence. I don't plan on betraying that trust."

Commander Eagle clears his throat to get everyone's attention, "You four," he says nodding to Colt, Robin, Fireball, and April, "should go and pack. We should leave in the next hour so that you can rest for the tests they are doing tomorrow. They will take several days, but when you are finished, if you wish to return here, you may."

"So you are okay with us returning?" April asks, turning to face Saber.

"If you wish to return, I welcome you. I bear no grudge," he replies.

"Why aren't you coming too?" April asks.

"Commander Eagle said that they will do my testing in about a month's time. That way it's going from the date I came out of the coma, not the date of injury," he replies.

"That and you refuse to leave Amanda, I bet.. Colt adds with a grin.

"That is true, Colt. I do not deny that. I feel that I am at least partially responsible for her condition, so I will help tend to her. I owe her that. Just as I would do the same for any of you," Saber says simply.

The doorbell rings and Thomas goes to answer it. A minute later, he enters the room with Dr. Ferguson.

"Ah, Captain Rider, how is Ms. Kelly doing this evening?" Dr. Ferguson asks.

"She seems a little better. She still had a fever about an hour ago, but she has been up, she showered with Elaine's help and got into fresh clothes and managed to eat a little soup. She is currently sleeping, or she was about an hour ago. I was just about to go and look in on her," Saber replies.

The doctor nods, "Very well, shall we go up there and see about her?"

"Yes, sir. We shall in just a moment," He turns the others, "Please come and let me know before you leave. Just knock on the door and I'll come out," he says before turning towards the stairs. "This way, doctor." They head up to her room and enter quietly. Amanda is sleeping peacefully and Saber goes over and gently places a hand on her arm, "Amanda, the doctor is here," he says quietly.

She stirs at his touch and the sound of his voice, rolling over slowly and looking up to see Saber and the doctor standing beside her bed. "Oh, hello Doctor," she says weakly.

"Good evening, Ms. Kelly. I am Dr. Ferguson. I need to examine you and check your temperature, is that all right?"

She nods weakly and struggles to sit up. Saber goes to her side and offers a hand, she

takes it gratefully and sits up with his help. "Thank you," she says quietly.

"Now, Ms. Kelly," the doctor begins as he sticks a thermometer in her mouth, "I must say that you look better than you did earlier." The thermometer beeps and he takes it out and looks at it, "Thirty -eight degrees. That's a far cry better, but it's still a little high." He looks at her face, neck and arms, "Any signs of a rash anywhere?"

Amanda shakes her head, "No sir."

"I think I'd better do a full examination, if you have a rash, it could be something more serious," he turns to Saber, "I think you should leave the room, Captain Rider. It would be improper for you to be here, even though you can't see," Saber nods and starts towards the door.

"Could Elaine be present?" Amanda asks quickly. "I'm uneasy being alone with ..."

"I'll get her for you," Saber says quickly and steps out, leaving the door open. "Elaine?" he calls down the stairway.

"Yes, sir?" she replies, heading in the direction of the stairs.

"Please come up here for a minute, won't you?" Saber answers back.

"Coming!" she calls back. She arrives quickly, "Is something wrong?" she asks worried.

Saber shakes his head, "The doctor wants to do a full examination on her, and I don't think she feels comfortable being alone in the room with him."

Elaine nods, "I'll go in."

"I'll go downstairs and wait. Call me when he's done. I'd like to know if he finds anything."

"I will," she replies and goes into the room, closing the door behind her. "I'm here, Ms. Kelly," she says as she goes to the other side of her bed.

"Thank you, Elaine," Amanda says barely above a whisper.

Saber heads back down to the sitting room and find the commander waiting for the others.

"I heard you call for Elaine, is everything all right?" the commander asks.

"Yes, sir. The doctor wanted to do a physical exam on Amanda, she was uncomfortable alone, after the incident with Sean, so I asked Elaine to stay with her during the examination," Saber replies.

"Ah. How did she seem?" he replies.

"Hard to say honestly. She was still running a fever. Although it was down to thirty-eight, rather than the forty-one degrees that it was earlier."

"That is some improvement, but still not good." the commander says.

"I know, sir. But, perhaps a few days of rest and she will feel better."

They talk for a while longer and soon April, Fireball, Robin, and Colt come down with their luggage, setting down beside them. "We're ready when you are, Father."

The commander stands up and Saber does too. "Well, Saber, let us know if you need something before we return."

"I will, sir," Saber says.

"Please keep us posted on Amanda's condition, Saber," April says. Saber nods. She comes over and takes his hands, "I am sorry for the events that have transpired. I will make an effort to be a better friend."

Saber smiles, "All is forgiven, there is no need to bring it back up again."

"Thank you, Saber. We'll be back when we're done with these tests," she replies.

"I'll see you then. I'll let you know if her condition worsens, good luck with the tests," he replies. They all say their good-byes and leave. Saber sits back down and waits until Elaine calls for him. Going back up the stairs, he enters the room and sits down in a chair beside the bed where Amanda is sitting up.

"Well, Captain Rider, I have put her on an antibiotic. I think her fever will continue to level off and in a day or so, she should start feeling better. She will be on the meds for ten days, but it should help. If anything changes, or if anyone else shows symptoms, call me, otherwise, I'll dismiss her from my care."

"Thank you doctor," Saber replies. The doctor gets up and leaves, Elaine showing him out; leaving Saber and Amanda alone.

Amanda sighs after the door closes and shakes her head., "I'm glad that's over."

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah. evidently, I have some sort of bad infection or something. He seemed to think I'd be fine in a few days, since the fever was going down, and I had no other symptoms. God I hated being examined though. Thank you for getting Elaine to stay with me. After..."

"I understand," Saber says quietly. "You don't have to explain yourself, Amanda."

Amanda nods, "Thanks...for everything," she says quietly and then chuckles.

"What?" Saber asks.

"Can you see me well enough to know that I nodded? I did it without thinking."

He smiles slightly, "I can see you enough that I know that's what you did. I still can't see very well. I tend to see best in dim lighting."

"I'll remember that," she says with a laugh. "I might can use that bit of knowledge to some advantage."

"Is that a threat, madam?" Saber asks mockingly, trying not to smile.

"Nah, more like a promise, sir." she replies smiling. "If I feel and look as bad as I have today, I'll make sure to keep the lights a bit brighter."

"Why would you do that? I saw you today, and yet, I still find..." he stops mid-sentence, realizing he's admitted to more than he intended.

"What?" she asks.

Saber shakes his head, "Nothing."

"Um, okay," she says slowly, not wanting to push him.

He sees that she's nervous, and he sighs nervously, "I was just going to say that from what I have seen, I think you're attractive, but I didn't want to seem too...forward. I'm apologize if it comes across as such," he mumbles, afraid to look towards her. Amanda laughs and Saber blushes a bit. "I fail to see what's so funny," he mutters.

"We spend a week alone together and you think saying that you find me attractive is too forward?" Amanda laughs. "Oh that's a good one."

Saber smiles weakly as he gets the joke and laughs, "I suppose it is a bit unorthodox, isn't it? But I'm not accustomed to making such admissions."

"So in what way do you find me attractive?" she asks curiously.

"Well, um, you see" Saber stumbles, "I'd, um, rather not say if it's all the same to you. It's rather difficult for me to explain."

"No, Saber, I think I'd like to hear this. Exactly how much sight do you have?" she asks

"I can see shapes, and outlines for the most part," he stammers, not daring to look directly at her.

Amanda smiles, "So it's my shapes you find attractive?" Saber blushes unable to respond. "I'll take that as a yes."

"Occasionally I can see more...if I make myself focus, but it gives me a bad headache."

he adds quietly.

She shifts nervously. "So you do have some idea of what I look like?" He nods, daring a glance at her face. "Yet you're still speaking to me. Why were you hesitant to tell me?"

"I was afraid you'd leave," he replies barely above a whisper.

She looks at him a bit surprised, "I won't leave until you tell me that my services are no longer needed. I am not one to make assumptions, Saber. I thought that you would have known that by now."

He shakes his head, "I've never been in such a position before. I'm not sure what to think to be perfectly truthful."

"What do you mean you haven't been in such a position before?"

He swallows hard and looks towards the floor, "The position of having to sort out feelings," he mutters barely audible.

She blinks momentarily shocked then finally says, "I don't know what to think of all of this either. But now you know that I am not one to make assumptions," she states.

"So I do," he replies. They fall quiet for a few minutes, neither one sure of what to say. "Would you like something to eat or drink?" he asks, breaking the silence.

"A little of both might be good. It's nearly seven now. Have you eaten?" she asks.

"Not since lunch earlier. I'll go and find out what Elaine has and bring us both something," he replies.

"Okay," she replies.

Saber gets up and heads down stairs to the kitchen, "Elaine?" he calls as he enters the kitchen.

"Saber? Is everything all right?" she says concern in her voice.

"Everything's fine, Elaine. We are a bit hungry, so I came to see if you had anything I could take back upstairs for us to eat," Saber replies.

Elaine smiles, "Of course." She goes to the stove and dishes some soup into a couple of bowls and makes a couple sandwiches, placing them on plates and then onto a tray, "Go on back up, I'll bring the food in a minute. Would you like some tea too?"

"That sounds good. I'll take the tray up if you'd like, Elaine," Saber offers.

She smiles and shakes her head, "I can do it, Saber. I'll just finish the tea and bring it all up at once. It'll take another minute or two, that's all."

He nods, knowing better than to argue, "I'll go back upstairs then. Thank you." He heads back upstairs and knocks before entering.

"Come in," Amanda replies.

Saber enters the room to find it lit only by a single lamp, Amanda sitting on the bed, the covers still covering her. He heads to the chair beside the bed and sits, looking around. "You've turned off a couple lights," he states.

"Yeah. I thought it might make it easier on you. The lower light seems to help my head not hurt as much too, so I guess we both benefit," she replies.

He stifles a smile. "Ah. That was thoughtful of you. Thank you," Amanda nods. "Elaine is bringing up soup and sandwiches. She should be here shortly," he says, not sure what else to say.

Elaine enters the room carrying a tray, "Here we are," she says placing it on the desk, before setting up a tray for Amanda on the bed. "Yours is on the desk, Saber," she says.

"Thank you, Elaine," he replies as he goes and sits down to eat. They talk for a while, eventually Saber leaves and heads back to his room.

Kapitel 10: I Get Knocked Down

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 9: I Get Knocked Down

The alarm blares and April hits it with a groan, "Fireball, get up."

"Ugh, morning already?" he asks groggily.

"Yeah. We have twenty minutes until we have to report to father's office," she replies.

He sighs and slowly starts making his way out of bed. Slowly, he goes and dresses into his uniform, "Feels weird wearing a uniform after so long out of one."

"I know what you mean," April replies as she dresses. "Ready?"

He nods, "Let's go and get this over with."

They leave and arrive at the commander's office a few minutes later. Colt is there waiting for them, along with Robin.

"How did you get here before us?" April asks astonished.

"She made me get up and get ready early," Colt says pointing to Robin. "It was worth it seeing your faces when you came through the door," Colt adds with a smirk.

April comes over and playfully punches his shoulder and goes to make a remark when her father enters the office. They all stand at attention when he enters.

"At ease," he says looking them over closely. They relax and everyone takes a seat. "In a few minutes, I will be escorting each of you to your testing areas. You will be isolated from each other for the next couple of weeks. Robin, Colt will be coming home late, and reporting before dawn each day, so don't expect to see him much." She nods and he continues, "In a few minutes, I will be escorting each of you to separate quarters. None of you will know where the other is, and will have no communications with one another. At the end of the testing, you will meet here and we will discuss the outcomes of the tests and whether or not you will be fit for active duty again."

"How come Colt gets to see Robin, but Fireball and I don't get to see each other?" April asks.

"Robin isn't part of the crew that was involved in an incident that nearly killed them.

Part of this testing is having you talk about the events and how they unfolded. If you had a conversation between sessions, that could change your recollection of an event. It's part of the psychological profiling that is done. Think of it as a vacation away from each other. We have already crossed lines that shouldn't have been crossed by allowing the two of you to pursue a relationship with each other, so this is how it will be. Am I understood?"

Yes, sir!" the three reply.

They discuss the way everything will go and they are soon escorted to their new quarters, then led to the individual testing areas.

"Saber are you in here?" a quiet voice calls from the doorway. He stirs slightly, feeling a bit disoriented. "Saber? Shouldn't you have slept in your room?" the voice asks as she enters the study.

"Probably," he says still not fully awake. "What time is it?"

"Nearly four. You told me that you'd meet me at three. I waited an hour and you didn't show, so I went looking for you." the voice says.

He jolts awake. "I'm sorry, Amanda. I was down here and I suppose I fell asleep. I guess I was more tired than I thought I was. Would you care to eat first?"

She nods, "I was hoping we could. After not eating much more than soup the last week, I'm a bit famished."

He smiles, "I'll meet you in the kitchen then. I should go and change first."

"All right. I'll meet you there in a few minutes," she leaves, heading for the kitchen.

A few minutes later, he comes down, "What smells so good?"

"I decided to cook myself an omelet. Would you like one?" she asks casually.

"Is it safe?" He asks with a smirk.

"Possibly not, with that attitude," she retorts. "I'm putting ham and cheese in mine, what do you want in yours?"

"The same is fine with me. Make it easier, won't it?" he replies.

She nods and finishes making the food and they sit down and eat. A short time later, they are at the stables mounting up. "So where exactly are we going today, Saber?" she asks curious.

"I'm taking you to a place I would go when I wanted solace. It's rather pretty and peaceful. I thought you'd enjoy it," he states, as they head off towards the east.

"So you have another place besides the secret basement?" she asks amused.

He nods, "Yes, but I wasn't in good enough condition to be out in the elements at the time we left for a while before."

"But why do we have to be out here so early?" she asks.

"There is a view you can only see just before the sun comes up. We may not quite make it now, but I wanted to try anyways," he replies, pushing them to ride a little faster. They arrive not long before the first rays start to show over the horizon at a cliff with a waterfall. "Now, just watch slightly south of east as the sun comes up and you will see the most beautiful sunrise ever."

"Seriously?" She asks as the sun rises a few minutes later. "Wow. That is beautiful. But why show me this place now?"

"I wasn't sure how much I trusted you," he replies honestly.

"But you trust me more now?" she asks slowly. He nods. "I'm glad you do. Thank you for sharing this with me, Saber. I won't tell a soul about this place, although I may disappear here once in a while."

They spend the day there, sharing a picnic and practicing defense and fencing with sticks. Near sunset they head back to the house, arriving at the stables. "Why don't you head on to the house? I'll put up the horses and join you in the kitchen," Saber says as they dismount.

"Okay," she says, grabbing the basket from the picnic and her practice stick. "I'll go and empty the basket," she replies and heads towards the house.

Saber begins settling down Amanda's horse, removing the saddle and feeding him.

Amanda enters the house, "Elaine, we're back!" she calls, but gets no reply. "Elaine? Thomas?" she calls again as she enters the kitchen and places the basket on the counter. She looks around and doesn't see anyone, so she turns to head back to Saber. Pushing the door from the kitchen to the sitting room she nearly walks straight into Sean.

"Hello there, Ms. Kelly." he says menacingly pointing a gun towards her.

"S...Sean." Amanda says under her breath. "Where are Thomas and Elaine?" she asks with a bit more confidence.

He chuckles, "Unharmd...for now," he says with a smirk. "Where's your boyfriend?" he asks.

"What do you want? Saber told you to not return here," Amanda says glaring at him, anger kicking in.

"Simple. I want you to come with me. Let me show you what a real man can be like, He says eyeing her.

She shifts uncomfortably, "I am not leaving with you."

He steps closer to her, the gun still pointed at her, he runs a finger across her cheek and down her neck towards her chest, "Oh, you're coming with me. Like it or not."

"Get your hands off of me!" she says in a raised voice and pushes his hand away, trying to turn away from him.

He grabs her by her hair and throws her against a wall, hitting her shoulder hard against it, causing her to drop the stick. She yelps in pain and he laughs.

He approaches her, the gun still pointed at her, "Get up."

"No," she replies and lunges for his knees, throwing him off balance.

He wobbles a bit, but manages to kick her just as she tries to roll away. He goes to fire the gun and is hit hard in the hand by a blunt object.

"I told you to never return here," a low voice growls from behind him.

Sean turns around quickly only to be met with a stick to the side of the face by Amanda, causing him to lose his grip on the gun. He drops to one knee and scrambles to grab the gun again. Amanda hits it out of the way and Saber reaches him, placing a sword at his neck.

"Try anything and I WILL kill you, Sean." Sean manages to look up to see Saber's face. He's wearing the sunglasses, but makes it apparent that he can see. Sean looks at him in shock. "Where are Thomas and Elaine?" he asks forcefully.

"They are unharmed," he replies barely audible.

Amanda slowly gets up from the floor, leaning on the stick she hit Sean with. She makes her way to where Saber is standing, the sword still at Sean's throat.

"Are you all right, Amanda?" Saber asks quietly, never taking his gaze off of Sean.

"I'm hurting. I think my shoulder may be out of joint, but I'll live," she replies honestly.

He nods slightly, "Can you go and call the police?"

Amanda nods, "I'll go now," she replies and slowly makes her way to the kitchen. She's on her way back out when she hears a noise coming from the servant's quarters. She slowly makes her way there and cautiously opens the door. "Elaine? Thomas?" she says cautiously as she ventures further into their quarters.

"Why did you return here, Sean?" Saber asks coldly, his grip remaining tight on the

sword.

"I don't like being made to look like a fool. I've never had a woman reject me before, I don't plan on allowing it to happen again," he replies looking up towards Saber's face.

"She is well within her rights to refuse you," Saber says anger apparent in his voice.

"A woman's only purpose is to serve a man. They has no rights," Sean states coldly.

Saber starts to react in anger, but regains control, "That is your opinion. I disagree," he finally says in a neutral tone.

"Only because she's giving herself to you," Sean replies with a smirk.

"Actually, we're not anything other than friends, Sean," Saber says firmly.

"Yeah, you keep telling yourself that. I see plain as day that you want her," he states with a laugh.

Saber tenses up at the words, tightening the grip on the blade, "It wouldn't matter either way. I at least know how to handle myself around a woman, unlike you."

Sean notice him tense up and taking a chance, he ducks down and knocks Saber to the floor.

Saber manages to cut into Sean's ribs as he hits and rolls away from Sean, his sunglasses falling off in the process. The brightness in the room causes him to be completely blinded again and Sean goes for the gun. Saber hears the direction he goes in and charges him, hoping to surprise him. Just as Sean turns around, Saber swings at him with the blunt side of the blade. A loud crunching sound is heard and Sean gasps for air, the gun fires and Saber hits the floor.

The police are just about to knock when they hear the gunshot and they charge into the house, finding Sean to one side, bleeding and holding his ribs and gasping for air. A few feet away, they see Saber on the floor and bleeding from his abdomen. "Call paramedics," One of the officers says and the call is made.

Amanda enters the study of Thomas and Elaine's quarters and finds them bound, but apparently unharmed. "Are you all right?" she asks them quietly.

"Yes madam, we're fine," Thomas answers quietly. "Sean is here," he warns.

"Yes, I've already met up with him. Saber is holding him in the sitting room until the police arrive," She winces in pain as she turns around.

"Are you all right, Ms. Kelly?" Elaine asks worried.

"I'll be fine, just a little banged up," she replies. They hear a single gunshot and they all turn towards the exit. "Saber!" Amanda exclaims and starts for the door.

Thomas grabs her, "Ms. Kelly, you are in no condition to help him. We need to get out of here."

She wrenches her arm from his grip, "I'm going back out there. If you know another way out, then use it. Go hide in the stables until someone comes for you." She turns, and forcing herself to move past her pain, she rushes out to the sitting room, stick in a defensive position. She bursts through the kitchen door to find several guns pointed at her. She lowers her stick and looks around the room. She sees Sean on the ground bleeding and gasping for air. She then spots Saber, who is on the ground and also bleeding. She tosses the stick down. "Saber?" She rushes over to him, ignoring the police. She kneels down and places a hand on his. "Saber?" she asks hesitantly.

He stirs a bit and turns his head in her direction. "Amanda?" he asks, his breathing labored.

"I'm here." she replies, deeply concerned.

"Are you all right?" he manages to ask.

She smiles weakly, "Better than you." He gives her a weak smile. "Thomas and Elaine are in the stables, they are fine." The paramedics arrive.

"The Lord of the house is the worst. Take him first," One of the policeman says indicating Saber.

The paramedic nods and he and his partner come to where Saber is lying on the floor. "Sir, we need to move you. You need to get to a hospital now."

"Okay." He says weakly.

Amanda moves out of the way with effort, then once he's loaded onto the gurney, she comes back to his side, taking his left hand. "I'm coming with you, Saber. No arguments." He nods slightly, but doesn't say anything.

"Miss, you look injured, may we take a look at you?" A male paramedic asks, as he walks over to her.

"If you allow me to accompany him to the hospital, I will get checked out there, once I know that he is okay," she says firmly.

The man starts to argue, but sees the look in her eyes and nods. "Yes, ma'am. As soon as he is being treated, you will be seen to," he says firmly. She nods, her hand still gripping Saber's tightly. They get him strapped in, and start towards the ambulance.

Amanda is walking behind the gurney, trying to force the pain from her mind.

"Miss?" The head policeman says stepping into her path, forcing her to stop and release Saber's hand. "We need to know what happened here."

"I need to be with him, sir. Could you follow us and take a statement at the hospital?" she says anxiously looking to where they were taking Saber.

The man follows her gaze and sees the worry and pain in her face and nods, "Yes, ma'am. I'll follow you and meet you at the hospital. I need your name, please."

"Amanda Kelly, sir," she replies. "Oh, the caretakers of the estate, Thomas and Elaine! They are out in the stables. Could someone get them? They can tell you some of what has happened."

The policeman nods and call over to one of his officers, he explains the situation and the young man heads off towards the stables. "Now, let's get you to the ambulance," the cop in charge says to Amanda, guiding her out to the ambulance that they have just finished loading Saber into. "Go with him, I'll come and see you at the hospital."

"Thank you," she replies as one of the paramedics carefully helps her into the vehicle. He allows her to sit beside Saber and she takes his hand. She feels no reply and watches him with a worried expression. The doors close and they take off, sirens blaring towards the hospital.

The young officer finds the stables and carefully calls out for anyone there. After a minute, Thomas and Elaine cautiously come out. After speaking with the police, they decide to call Calvary Command and speak with Commander Eagle.

The police and the remaining paramedics take Sean out to be checked at the hospital, the police following behind the ambulance.

Commander Eagle is in his office when he gets word of a call from Thomas. Going to the phone, he picks it up, "Hello Thomas, what can I do for you?" Thomas tells him everything that has transpired, the commander nodding his head occasionally. "Please keep me posted on his condition. I'll try and come first thing tomorrow," Thomas talks a little more and the commander disconnects the call. He sits back in his chair and sighs. He picks up his phone again, dialing a number, "Dr. Izumi, I know it's late, but I need to speak with you. It's about Captain Rider." A voice replies on the other end. "Yes, I'll meet you shortly," he replies and hangs up the phone.

"Well Ms. Kelly, you are very lucky. You may need surgery eventually, but keep your arm in the sling for a couple of weeks and you should be fine," the doctor says, handing her some paperwork. "There is a prescription for some pain meds, take that to the pharmacy and fill it before you leave."

She takes the papers and nods, "Thank you doctor," she says quietly.

The doctor smiles at her, "Would you like me to take you to Captain Rider now? He's out of surgery, so I should be able to take you to the recovery area," she states kindly.

Amanda looks up at her relieved, "You'll let me see him?" she asks relieved. The doctor nods. "Thank you. I would like that very much, doctor."

The doctor takes her through several corridors, then swiping her card, she leads her to a surgical recovery area. Stopping at the nurses station, she finds out where he's at, then takes her through another hall to a room that is closed off. "He's in here, Ms. Kelly," she says opening the door slowly.

The room is dimly lit and she hears the beeping of several machines, pulling the curtain aside, Amanda steps further into the room, spotting Saber's sleeping form on the bed. She gasps, then goes over to him, placing her hand on his hand and sits carefully in the chair that is beside his bed. The doctor nods, satisfied and steps out, closing the door behind her as she leaves. Amanda sits quietly, watching the array of machines for signs of trouble, eventually, she drifts to sleep.

"Amanda?" a weak voice calls out, rousing her from her sleep. She sits up in a hurry, immediately regretting the motion. Fighting the urge to vomit, she looks around to see Saber turned towards her. She finally manages a breath and calms herself before speaking, "I'm here." she says quietly.

"I thought it was you," he says relieved.

"You can't see?" she asks hesitantly.

"No," he admits with a sigh. "Are you all right?"

"I'll be fine. I'm better off than you are," she says quietly. "I may eventually need surgery, but for now, I'm in a sling and have to be careful of how I move for a while."

Saber nods slightly, "Thomas and Elaine?"

"They are fine. Perhaps a bit shook up, but they were unharmed. Thomas tried to stop me from coming back out after the gunshot, but I got away," she replies.

Saber smiles, "Not much stops you, does it?" he asks amused.

"I try not to let anything stop me," she replies with a grin.

Saber chuckles, and immediately regrets it, "Please don't make me laugh, it's rather painful."

"I'm sorry," she replies sympathetically. "I wasn't thinking when I spoke."

"It's okay. I can just imagine the scene of Thomas actually trying to restrain you. I found it comical," he says with a smile. His features then turn serious, "Any word on Sean?"

"No. They hadn't even taken him out when I left with you," she replies honestly. "I don't think he was too badly injured."

"Too bad," he says coldly.

"Saber, don't dwell on it. It's over now. I'm just glad that you weren't killed," she starts to say more, but stops herself.

"I'm glad he didn't hurt you worse," he replies quietly.

"I was glad you came when you did. I'm afraid of what might have happened..." she says getting quiet. They are both silent for several minutes. "I was so scared, Saber. When I heard that gunshot..." her voice breaks slightly.

"Amanda..." he starts quietly, then stops, not sure what to say. He stretches his hand out, searching for hers. She sees it and places her trembling hand on his. He feels her shaking and holds her hand tightly, "I'm sorry that I worried you." he says barely audible.

She starts to say something when the door opens. "Captain Rider?" A female voice asks from behind the curtain, "You have a couple of visitors. May they enter?"

"Yes," he replies.

"Okay, I'll bring them in in a moment." The door closes and Amanda goes to pull her hand away and he tightens his grip.

"You don't have to let go, I don't care what anyone thinks, Amanda," he says softly.

She relaxes her hand in his grip. "Okay," she replies just as the door opens and the curtain is pulled back to show Thomas, Elaine, and Commander Eagle.

They enter the room, glancing first at Saber, then Amanda. "Saber?" Commander Eagle says hesitantly walking to the other side of the bed from Amanda.

"Sir?" Saber replies, turning in the direction of the commander's voice.

"What happened?" he asks.

"Amanda and I went out this morning," he begins.

"Yesterday morning now, sir," Thomas interjects.

"Okay, yesterday morning, we went out riding. We spent the day outdoors, practicing fencing with sticks, self defense, and talking. Towards sunset, we returned to the house. Amanda went inside to return our lunch basket while I tended to the horses. Evidently, Sean was there and tried to accost her. When I came in, I saw him there, and she was on the floor, so I held a sword to his neck. He went to turn to face me and Amanda hit him with her stick. That angered him and he went to react and I made it clear I would kill him if he tried anything. Amanda went to call the police, we struggled, which knocked off the sunglasses, the light blinding me again. The gun went off, but we were both injured. I remember Amanda talking to me, and other voices, being moved, then I'm waking up here," Saber explains.

"What were the extent of Mr. McCully's injuries?" the commander asks.

"I don't know, sir," Saber replies. "I'm fairly certain I cut him at least once."

"How badly were you injured, Saber?" Commander Eagle inquires.

"I was shot in the abdomen and evidently I've had to have surgery. I've not spoken to the doctors yet. Have they said anything to you, Amanda?" Saber replies.

"No. But since I'm not family, I don't expect them to," she replies.

"Saber," Elaine begins as she come up beside Amanda, "Thomas and I are the closest thing to family that you have, would you be opposed to us asking the doctor a few questions?"

"No. Not at all, Elaine. I'd like to know what all was wrong as well," Saber says.

"Saber, how is your vision? I notice that you aren't wearing the sunglasses," Thomas asks.

Amanda squeezes his hand slightly, he returns the gesture, "I can't see anything right now. I'm back in darkness," he replies barely audible.

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir," Thomas replies. "How are you, Ms. Kelly? I see you're in a sling."

"I've been better. I may have to have surgery eventually, but my shoulder is back in joint, and other than some bad bruises, I should be fine. I'm not nearly as bad off as Saber is," Amanda replies.

The commander turns to her and looks her over carefully, "Ms. Kelly, you have been unduly subjected to a lot more than you agreed to when you took this job. I would understand if you wish to take your leave of your position. I would see to it that you are well compensated for being put into harm's way so frequently."

"Thank you sir, but if it is all the same to you, I'd prefer to remain in my current position. Unless Saber wishes me to leave, I will stay," Amanda replies firmly.

Saber moves his hand onto her arm "I'm not letting you go that easy," Amanda blushes and places her hand on top of his.

The doctor comes in, ceasing any comment on the previous statement. "How are you doing Captain Rider?" the doctor asks.

"I've been shot, how do you think?" Saber replies sarcastically.

"At least your sense of humor is in tact," the doctor replies smugly.

"Excuse me, can you tell us the status of Sean McCully?" Commander Eagle asks.

"He has a gash on his side that needed forty some odd stitches, probably from Captain Riders' sword; and several broken ribs, from being hit with some sort of blunt object, along with a punctured lung," the doctor replies.

"How long until we can take him into custody?" Commander Eagle inquires.

"A couple days, to make sure there's no further problems," the doctor answers. "The local police have him under constant watch."

"I'll feel better when we have him in one of our cells on charges of assaulting a military officer, among other charges," Commander Eagle replies.

The doctor nods, "Feel free to have some of your soldiers take over guard duty, if you see that to be a better fit, Commander," the doctor states before turning his attention to Saber, "Now Captain Rider, I actually need to know you're feeling."

"I'm in pain from the bullet wound," Saber says "and..." he stops, not sure whether to continue.

"And what?" the doctor asks, "Any detail you can offer, no matter how trivial might make a difference."

"What vision that had returned since the incident prior to this is gone. I believe it happened before I was shot, but I'm not certain., Saber manages a weak chuckle, "At least I wasn't used to being able to see again."

"Perhaps we should do a couple of scans," the doctor replies.

Saber shrugs, "I'm not sure it would make much difference."

"Saber," Commander Eagle begins.

"If this about the bloody evals, shove it," Saber says gruffly.

Commander Eagle looks shocked then grins slightly, "Consider it shoved." he mutters. Everyone other than Saber and him chuckle.

"When can he go home?" Amanda asks trying to ease the tension and take the conversation in a different direction.

"I'd like to keep him until tomorrow, just to make sure he's okay," the doctor answers. "I'd also like to run some of those scans if I may."

"If it doesn't delay my getting out of here then fine, do the bloody scans," Saber says curtly.

The doctor nods, "I'll send someone to get you shortly, Captain Rider," he then turns

and leaves.

"Saber, you seem to be in a bad mood," the commander says.

"Someone broke into my home and assaulted me and my girlfriend. How the bloody Hell am I supposed to feel?" he replies irritably.

"Girlfriend?" all the others except Amanda say in disbelief.

"I um.." Saber stutters.

"We weren't ready to tell anyone yet," Amanda chimes in quickly. "I guess the truth is out now, huh?" she adds quietly.

Saber nods, "I suppose it is now," he replies with a smile.

Elaine smiles, "When did this happen?"

"Well," Amanda says. "Since we've been spending a lot of time together, it just sort of happened."

"I'm so happy for you." Elaine hugs Amanda. Amanda lets go of Saber's hand to return the hug. "And you, are in trouble Captain Rider."

"Elaine," Amanda begins, "it was my idea to not tell anyone. I wasn't ready to tell anyone. It's just that my last relationship ended rather badly."

"What happened?" Elaine asks.

"I'd rather not talk about, if you don't mind. It's rather personal." Amanda says and the others nod in response.

A nurse comes in, "Captain Rider, I'm here to take you for tests."

"Of course," Saber says with a sigh, "Let's go."

The nurse gets him into a wheelchair, "It's going to be a few hours before he's done."

"Why don't you all grab something to eat?" Saber suggests as he is wheeled off.

"I um, need to go and drop off this prescription at the pharmacy, I suppose I'll go and grab something after that," Amanda says standing up carefully.

"You really shouldn't be walking around by yourself, may I join you, Ms. Kelly?" the commander asks.

Amanda swallows nervously, but nods, "Sure. Thank you, sir." She looks towards Thomas and Elaine, "Are you coming along too?"

Elaine shakes her head, "No Ms. Kelly, I think we'll go on back home for now and try and get some rest. We'll return later to see if Saber can come home."

Amanda nods, "All right. I'm sorry for all of this trouble."

Thomas comes over to her and gently places a hand on her good arm, "My lady, you have no control over what Mr. McCully did. Do not blame yourself for any of this. I am sorry that it took something so bad to have something good work out for Saber, but he's never been one to do anything the easy way. So do not fret over what cannot be changed, all right?"

"Thank you," Amanda says quietly and Thomas and Elaine leave.

Commander Eagle watches her for a moment, then clears his throat to get her attention, causing her to jump. "Are you all right, Ms. Kelly?"

"Yes sir. I apologize. I was lost in my own thoughts," she replies sheepishly.

They head to the pharmacy, then to the cafeteria where they get their food and are sitting down eating, "So, you said that you and Saber are an item now?" he asks with a small smile.

"Yes sir, I suppose that's one way of putting it."

"How long has this been going on?"

"I can't give you an exact time, sir. As I said, it just sort of happened. I started to realize I cared for him after he got mad at me for copping an attitude with him because of the first incident with Sean. We were talking, and I just sort of realized that I felt safe telling him anything. I didn't feel like I was being judged by him. I tried my best to deny it. I know that it was foolish of me to follow him that time he took off and we ended up gone for a week, but I don't regret it. He was truly a gentleman. When I needed to change or anything, he went to a place that even if he could have seen me, that he wouldn't have been able to. He went out of his way to make sure I was comfortable. Then when I got sick...I remember thinking that he was acting strange. I guess that's when I realized that he liked me too. I know that doesn't fully answer your question, but it's the best reply I have," Amanda replies.

The commander sits quietly during her speech, nodding on occasion, then is quiet for several minutes, "When you and he left for that week, just where did you go to?"

"I cannot disclose that, sir. I gave Saber my word. I will not betray his trust," Amanda states. "Oh, and sir, you no longer need to pay me. I would gladly do what I have for free, even if there was nothing more than civility between Saber and myself."

He nods, satisfied, "I will not cancel your contract, Ms. Kelly. You have still fulfilled your duties as set out in the contract we made, in spite of these other events," They finish eating and he takes both of the trays, "Shall I escort you back to his room?"

"Aren't you staying to know how things pan out?" she asks curious.

He shakes his head, "I'm afraid that I must return to Calvary Command. I know that he will be cared for, so I will await news there. I don't want the word to get around about this attack and have it leaked to his team mates, as that could skew their test results," he replies as they walk back towards the room. A short time later, they arrive back at the room, Amanda carrying her prescription. "Keep me up to date on any changes. I will see that some star sheriffs are guarding Mr. McCully's room, so if you need to reach me in a hurry, ask someone to contact them."

Amanda nods, "I will sir. Thank you." He nods and leaves. She enters the room and takes a pain pill before settling down into a chair, eventually drifting off to sleep.

Several hours later Saber is wheeled back into his room, Amanda is asleep in the chair, the nurse whispers to Saber, "Your lady is asleep, Captain Rider."

"Thank you very much for telling me," Saber whispers back as the nurse helps him into bed. The nurse leaves returning shortly with his meal. While he's eating Amanda wakes up.

"Hey, you're back," Amanda says sounding a bit tired. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I've been poked and prodded enough for two lifetimes," Saber replies "Thanks for saving me earlier."

Amanda blushes heavily, "No problem. You would have done the same for me I think."

Saber nods as he finishes his meal, he sits thinking quietly, not exactly sure how to begin his thought.

"Are you okay,?" Amanda asks concerned. "You've had such a serious expression since you came back."

Saber sighs, "I've been thinking, is all."

"About what?" Amanda asks.

"Are we a couple?" he finally asks after a long silence.

"You're the one who called me your girlfriend," she replies matter-of-factly.

Saber blushes heavily, "I spoke what I was going through my head, even though it wasn't necessarily true," he says quietly.

"So, I'm not your girlfriend?" she replies trying to clarify his response.

"I hadn't asked you to be, but I'd like it if you were," he replies quietly.

Amanda smiles, and gets up and gently leans over and kisses Saber on the cheek, "I'd

like that too."

Saber reaches up and Amanda grabs his hand and places it against her face. "I won't ever forget," he says.

She nods and sits quietly beside him, placing her hand on his beside him on the bed, "You should get some rest. It's been a long day."

He nods, "So should you. I could call the nurse and ask for a cot for you. You can't be comfortable in that chair. Especially with your shoulder in a sling."

"It's okay. I'm fine, Saber. I managed to fall asleep in the chair earlier."

A knock at the door interrupts them, "Come in," Saber replies.

"Sir, I have been ordered by Commander Eagle to stand guard outside your room," A young man states as he steps into the doorway, pushing the curtain aside.

"I thought they were sending someone to guard Mr. McCully, not me," Saber says.

"I was told to guard you, sir, There are two other soldiers standing guard at Mr. McCully's room. My instructions were that you were not to be disturbed, save for the medical staff," The soldier replies, nodding towards Amanda.

"Given the tone of your voice, I would assume you are referring to Ms. Kelly, who is presently here in my room, are you not?" Saber asks.

"Yes, sir," he replies.

"I suppose you were not informed that I am blind?" Saber states, hearing a gasp of shock from the soldier.

"No sir. I was unaware of your condition." the soldier states uncomfortably.

"Well, now you know. So be sure to fully state your business verbally with me from now on. As for the matter of Ms. Kelly here, she will remain with me," Saber replies.

"Yes sir! I shall just be outside the door if you need anything, sir," the soldier replies.

"Very well. What is your name, soldier?" Saber asks.

"Cadet Jackson Waller, sir."

"Very good, Mr. Waller, I will call for you if I need anything," Saber says and the soldier leaves the room, closing the door behind him. Saber lets out a sigh and slumps back against the bed.

"Are you all right?" Amanda asks.

"Just tired., he replies.

Amanda lets out a chuckle.

"What's so funny?" he asks trying not to smile.

"You sounded like quite a soldier with that guard. I think he was rather intimidated. I do wish you could've seen his face when you told him that you were blind. It was priceless." Saber laughs, then winces in pain. "He kept looking towards me, like he was waiting to see if I was going to get up and leave, then I think he saw my hand intertwined with yours, after that, he tried to not look at me directly."

Saber laughs again, "I'm sure it was amusing. I heard him gasp when I mentioned being blind. Most soldiers are acquainted with my achievements with Calvary Command as a Star Sheriff, so to see me in such a state probably is quite a shock."

"Evidently they don't expect you to be with a woman either." she replies amused.

"Most people never knew about my betrothal, so I guess no one ever thought of me being with someone. We travelled so much, it would have been nearly impossible to keep any sort of relationship anyways."

"Do you regret..." Amanda starts to ask.

"No. I am glad that I am not with her. I don't think it would have worked out anyways honestly. But, I would have tried, because it would have been my duty to do so," he says quietly.

"This won't come out right, no matter how I say it, but I'm glad that it worked out the way it did. I am sorry for the hardships that you have endured, but I'm glad that I know you and I hope that things work out with us," Amanda says, giving his hand a gentle squeeze.

He returns the gesture and nods, "At least I know that if I never regain my vision that you don't care. You don't seem bothered by it. I hope things work out for us too, Amanda. I feel drawn to you, like I can trust you in a way I've never trusted anyone. It's actually a bit daunting," he replies sounding more tired.

Amanda pulls his hand up and kisses it gently, then places it back down, "I know what you mean, Saber. Now, lets try and get some sleep. I can stay like this for a while," Saber nods, and quickly nods off to sleep, Amanda gradually drifts to sleep, still holding his hand.

Kapitel 11: More Than A Feeling

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 10: More Than A Feeling

"Here we are, Saber," Elaine says as she wheels him into the sitting room. "I'm sure you're glad to be home."

"Yes, I can safely say that I am, Elaine. It will be nice to sleep in my own bed tonight," he replies as he carefully moves from the wheelchair to the couch.

"I'm sure Ms. Kelly feels the same way," she states as she folds up the chair and places it in a corner.

"That I'll feel how, Elaine?" Amanda asks as she comes down the stairs.

"Glad to be home," Elaine replies.

"Oh, most assuredly. It will be nice to not sleep in a chair," she says with a laugh as she goes and sits beside Saber. "I was surprised they kept you that long," she says to Saber.

"Yes, I wasn't exactly thrilled about being forced to stay there two extra days," he replies gruffly, causing Amanda and Elaine to smile.

"It was for your own good, Saber. At least Amanda was with you, so you had company," Elaine says, trying not to laugh.

"True, I was in good company. That's probably the only reason I didn't attempt to force my way out," he says with a smirk.

"Oh yes, I could hear the commander calling and telling us about that. Perhaps he was afraid of that very thing. Maybe that is why he sent the soldier to guard your door," Elaine says laughing.

Amanda laughs, "I don't think he could have convinced me to go along with an escape plan. At least not unless I was uninjured."

Elaine shakes her head, "I'm going to go and finish up dinner. The two of you just relax for a while," she says as she heads off to the kitchen.

Saber smiles, taking her hand, "I might could have convinced you. I can be persuasive."

Amanda laughs, "I don't mind escaping from your friends and family, but I don't relish the idea of becoming a fugitive," she says mockingly. "Not even for you," she adds, kissing his cheek.

"Hopefully, you never have to make such a choice," He says with a grin. He gets quiet suddenly.

"What?" Amanda asks seeing his face become serious.

"How does the room look?" he asks quietly.

"Like it always has," she replies confused.

"No, I mean can you tell...The blood, the place where you hit the wall, is it cleaned up?"

Amanda gets up and walks around the room, to where she was, where the blood should have been, "I can't tell it ever happened, Saber," she replies as she comes and sits back beside him.

He nods, "Good. I'd hate for there to still be signs of it. Just knowing what happened here bothers me though. It probably bothers you more so than it does me."

"Actually, I'm not too bad. I admit, I was a bit hesitant about how I'd feel coming back in here, but I know that Sean is locked up at Calvary Command, so he can't come back now," Amanda says quietly. "Besides, being here with you makes it worth coming back for."

They talk for a while and before they know it, Elaine comes in from the kitchen, "Dinner's ready. Do you want to eat in here or the kitchen?"

"Kitchen," They both reply as they get up slowly and head for the kitchen.

"Sir, Mr. McCully has just arrived in the brig." A soldier says upon entering the commander's office.

"Thank you. I shall be down there momentarily," the commander replies. He picks up the phone, "Yes, as soon as they are released, send them straight to my office. Have them escorted, they are not to speak with anyone until I have spoken with them. I should be back in half an hour. Thank you." he sets the phone down and heads for the brig.

Upon entering he is met by two soldiers. He salutes them and goes into the holding area. There he sees Sean sitting in chains, he looks up when the commander enters.

"Came to make sure I made it here?" Sean says with a smirk.

The commander looks at him and pauses a moment before speaking, "I would lose the attitude, Mr. McCully. You have been charged with some extremely serious crimes. The stakes are high for you. You very well could lose your life," The commander states

firmly.

Sean rolls his eyes, "The bastard deserves what he got for defending that tramp of a woman. I wouldn't have attacked him if he would have not poked his nose in my personal affairs."

"And on what grounds do you get to call Ms. Kelly anything of the sort?" the commander asks.

"Simple. She's there for the money. Why else would some woman want to care for a blind soldier?"

The commander laughs, "You truly believe she is there for the money? You have no clue who she is, Mr. McCully. She probably has just as much money as he does, not that it matters. I didn't know it until I began investigating why she continually never cashed her pay vouchers."

"Okay, so if it's not the money. Why would she want to hang around someone who can't do anything for himself now?"

Commander Eagle shakes his head, "You are obviously the one who is blind, not Saber. I don't expect someone as self-centered and egotistical as you appear to be to understand. I'm not wasting anymore time with you. I came to see if you showed any remorse, obviously, you do not., he turns and leaves, the guards locking the doors behind him.

"I wonder why we were told to come here? I thought after we were done, we could go back to our quarters." Fireball states.

"I don't know. I've not talked to my father in a couple of weeks. Something seems off though. It's like everyone has been ordered not to talk to us. I was actually escorted here by a guard!" April says.

"So was I," Fireball says as Colt comes into the door and sits down with a puzzled look on his face. His escort closes the door and waits outside.

"Did we do something wrong?" Colt asks. The other two shrug.

The door opens and Robin comes in, followed by the commander, who has a serious look on his face. Robin sits down, a look of confusion passes to each of them as they wait, all of them watching the commander closely.

Commander Eagle sits down and looks to each of them before taking a breath, "Well, the doctors say that you have all improved significantly, however, none of you are ready for full duty again. You may never be." He sees the shocked looks of the group before him but continues, "That having been said, I shall see to it that you are still allowed to work within the command in some capacity. You will retain your current ranks as well."

April sighs relieved. "But what about Saber? Do you think they could even find something for him to do? I mean, he'll be tested in a couple of weeks, so what will they do to him?"

Commander Eagle shakes his head, "There have been a few changes occurring while you were isolated for your testing. Saber won't be testing for quite a while."

"What? Why?" Fireball and April ask simultaneously.

Commander Eagle holds up his hands to silence them, "Saber was shot nearly a week ago by Mr. McCully." They go to speak and he silences them with a look. "Mr. McCully returned to Saber's estate, tied up Thomas and Elaine. Saber and Ms. Kelly had gone off riding, so he waited for them to return. Ms. Kelly entered the house alone, while Saber put up the horses. She called for Elaine, and when she couldn't find Elaine or Thomas, she was heading back towards the stables when she ran into Mr. McCully. He attacked her. She put up a fight, but in the end her shoulder was dislocated and she has quite a bit of bruising. Saber walked in just as she was thrown into a wall, and confronted Mr. McCully. The police were called, they got there just as Mr. McCully made a move against Saber, who managed to cut him with his sword, and in the process a shot was fired, hitting Saber in the abdomen. He is home now, but will not be ready for testing now for a while. Also, during the course of the altercation his vision went out again. We don't know if it is a permanent or temporary issue."

A stunned silence ensues, each of them looking to the other and back to the commander. "Anything else we should know?" April finally asks.

The commander starts to say more, but decides not to. "No, that should cover what you need to know. Anything else you can talk over with Saber."

Colt shakes his head and grins, "We can't leave him alone for a minute."

The commander chuckles, "So it appears. Although technically he wasn't alone. Ms. Kelly was with him."

Colt starts to reply, but getting a look from Robin, he closes his mouth again and grins.

"So when can we leave to go back?" April asks.

"Tomorrow morning. I want them to have time to rest a little before you bombard them with questions. This hasn't been easy on either of them. It could have turned out much worse. We currently have Mr. McCully under our guard here and he is facing a multitude of charges from both attacks."

"Let me talk to him. We wouldn't even have to have a trial then," Colt says coldly.

"Mr. Wilcox, that sentiment is the very reason I want you all to return to Saber's home. I do not want any of you present at the trial. I share your sentiments, but I know how to separate my personal feelings from the matter," Commander Eagle admonishes.

April sighs, "Let's all go get some food and then some rest."

The next day, they are flying to Saber's estate and talking amongst themselves, "So Amanda is still there, even after all of this?" April asks to no one in particular.

"She seems to be a glutton for punishment, that's for sure," Fireball says.

"I think there is something more to this. No one in their right mind would stay after all of this happening. I wouldn't," April says.

"Neither would I," Robin says. "I probably would have left after the first incident. However, I had noticed a change in both of them since the day you found them in the barn and they took off for a week."

"How so?" Fireball asks.

"Well, for one thing, I think Saber had some of his vision return before he admitted it to anyone, including Amanda. I think he..." Robin starts.

"Started falling for her?" April finishes. Robin nods. "But, he doesn't seem like one that would," April says.

"I know, but it makes sense. When she got so sick, he wouldn't leave her side," Robin says.

"I thought it was because he felt guilty," Colt states.

"Perhaps that's how it started, but I think as they talked more, he realized he liked her. Why else would she hang around?" April says.

"Money?" Colt suggests.

"She doesn't strike me as the type," April says.

They talk a while longer and before long they land and start the ride to Saber's estate.

They arrive at the estate a short time later. "I hope Saber's still not mad at us," Colt says.

"It's Saber," Fireball says. "I don't think he'd hold a grudge like that. Besides, he told us we were welcome to come back."

"We'll see," Colt mumbles.

They enter the house, "Hello?" April calls out.

Thomas comes up to them, "Miss April, Mr. Hikari, Mr. Wilcox, Ms. Robin, I wasn't aware you were going to return so soon. Welcome back."

"My father didn't tell you we were going to return?" April asks.

"No ma'am," Thomas replies.

"I hope we're not intruding," April says.

"I'm sure it'll be fine ma'am. Come in, everyone's in the kitchen," Thomas says and leads them into the kitchen where Saber and Amanda are eating.

"Thomas, do we have company?" Saber asks, "I thought I heard other voices and footsteps."

"Well," Thomas begins but is interrupted by April.

"Hi. We're back," April says.

"So you've finished your testing," Saber says, "Welcome back."

"Saber about what I said before," April begins but stops when Saber raises his hand.

"Let's leave the past in the past and move on," Saber says. "Agreed?"

"Agreed," April says with a nod.

"Elaine," Saber calls, "Would you please prepare their rooms?"

"I cleaned them after they left, and left them ready on the chance that they would be returning before too long. I didn't see any reason not to," Elaine replies.

"Thank you. I'm glad you are so well prepared," Saber says.

"Do you require assistance in getting your baggage up to your rooms?" Thomas asks.

"I think we're all fine," April says and they take their bags up to their rooms.

"Are you sure this is a good idea Saber?" Elaine asks.

"They are my friends," Saber says. "They didn't mean to upset me, and I might of over-reacted a bit."

"A bit?" Elaine asks amused.

"Well, in the long run things have turned out okay, more or less. So perhaps everyone can finally move forward," Amanda says. "Besides, things very well could have turned out differently for both of us had he not gotten so upset over things. Of course I'd probably have reacted similarly, so I don't have much room to talk."

Elaine shakes her head and smiles, "So do you plan on telling them that the two of you

are together? Or are you going to make them guess?"

"Make us guess what?" April asks walking into the kitchen. Fireball walks in behind her.

"Well, I suppose we may as well tell you everything that has happened. Once everyone is together, so we don't have to repeat everything," Saber says.

April nods, "The others should be down in a minute."

"Let's head to the sitting room, since we're finished eating," Saber says.

Amanda carefully stacks and grabs the dishes and takes them to the sink, "Yeah, then we can discuss anything you'd like, since I'm sure you've heard about things here while you were away., She walks over to Saber, who takes her hand and they all head to the sitting area, Saber sitting beside Amanda just as Robin and Colt come down.

"How are the two of you doing?" Robin asks as they sit down.

"Yeah, we heard there was a bit of excitement here while we were gone," Colt adds.

"Excitement is not the word I'd use. At least not for the majority of it," Saber says dryly.

"Okay, so what happened?" April asks eagerly, glancing towards where Saber's hand is holding Amanda's.

"You heard about Sean coming back?" Saber asks.

"Yeah," they reply in unison.

"So you know that part of it. No need to recap what you already know," Saber replies.

April looks to Amanda and studies her closely for a moment, "Amanda, how is it you can still be here?"

"What do you mean?" Amanda asks confused.

"Oh, I know this is not going to come out right but, I have tried imagining myself in your place, and had the things that have happened to me, that you've had happen, I don't think I'd be able to stay. Even if I were offered more money, I just don't see how-"

"I'm not being paid to stay, Ms. April." Amanda interrupts, trying to answer before something is said that shouldn't be, "I have yet to cash any pay voucher that your father has sent. I don't need the money. I do fine with out it. My family was well off, I do this because I enjoy it. There have been a few times that yes, I thought about leaving. I will not deny that. But, by staying I have found more than I imagined I could. Saber has been a good friend to me. I know that I can trust him with my life. I've never

trusted anyone like that."

"So you're saying that-"

"We care for each other, April," Saber states. "Like Amanda, I tried to ignore that I felt something, but after everything, it just sort of happened." He turns to Amanda, "Of course I had no idea that you weren't taking money for this. You've more than earned it."

"As I said, I have no need for it, Saber. My family left me money. I also have made good investments. I took this job initially as a challenge, just as I told you before. I had no intention of..." Amanda replies, trailing off at the end.

"Falling in love?" Saber says barely a whisper.

"Yeah," Amanda replies quietly.

April laughs, "This is too funny!"

"What is?" Saber and Amanda say together.

"You two are so much alike." she replies smiling.

"So even though you originally denied it, I guess it's safe to assume that you've-" Colt starts to ask.

"No, we have not, Colt," Saber says before he can finish the question. "We've slept in the same room at the hospital, but she was in a chair. When and if that time comes, it will not be your concern anyways," he adds sternly.

Colt goes to say something in reply, but gets a glaring look from both Robin and April, so he decides against it.

"I'm happy for both of you. Maybe things will calm down for you now that Sean is locked up," Fireball says.

"I hope so," Saber says.

"Yeah, there sure has been a bit too much excitement. It would be nice to enjoy some normalcy," Amanda says.

"Whatever that is now," Saber replies. "So," Saber begins, trying to change the subject, "How did all of you come out from your tests?"

"Well, none of us are cleared for duty yet, but we've all improved quite a bit," Fireball replies.

"The doctor told me that I'll be undergoing extensive physical therapy in about a month's time, so I'm going to do my best to get ahead of it. He gave me some sheets

with the exercises that I'll be doing," April says.

"Yeah, that's pretty much what I was told also," Fireball says. "Maybe we can all workout together sometimes."

"Sounds good to me," Colt replies. April nods in agreement.

"I wish I could say we'd go out riding, but I don't think Amanda or myself will be doing that for some time, given the type and extent of our injuries," Saber states with a sigh.

"Getting a bit stir crazy already?" Amanda asks amused.

"Yes, I believe so," Saber replies. "I suppose it wouldn't be so bad if I could at least see things. I wouldn't feel as trapped perhaps, but knowing that I can't go out riding, it's rather annoying," he says.

"If you wish to go outside Saber, I can help you get outside. We just can't venture too far," Amanda says quietly.

"I know you could help, but you're not exactly in the best of shape yourself, Amanda. You've got one good arm, not exactly conducive for pushing a wheelchair, which if we were to go further than the patio I'd have to be in," Saber replies.

"You know, I'm sure we could ask for a powered chair or one of those scooter things, you could get yourself around then," Colt suggests.

Fireball laughs, "Um, Colt, I'm not sure a blind guy driving a powered anything is such a good idea."

"Why not? If I use it around here, I'd be fine. I rode my horse without much trouble," Saber says laughing.

"What's scary is that you actually make a valid point," Amanda says with a smile.

"I thought Colt coming up with a good idea was the scary part," April says teasingly, getting a laugh from everyone except Colt. "I'm going to make a call to my father and see if it can be arranged, if you are serious about wanting to try it, Saber."

Saber shrugs, "It might allow me more freedom. I don't want Amanda trying to do too much with her shoulder, and I don't really like the idea of having to have someone push me around. It actually makes sense enough to look into it. I may find I can't do it, I don't know."

"I'll go and call my father now, perhaps he could arrange for something to be here in the morning," April says and she goes off to make the call.

A few weeks go by and everyone is eating dinner when the doorbell rings. Thomas comes through and answers the door. A minute or so later, he returns followed by Commander Eagle. "Good evening, everyone," the commander says as he enters the

room.

"Good evening, sir." they all reply.

"We just sat down to dinner, would you care to join us?" Saber asks.

The commander nods, "Sure. I can talk to you over dinner," He sits down and Elaine brings him a plate.

"So what brings you here unannounced?" April asks between bites.

"I wanted to check on Saber and Ms. Kelly's condition. It is going to be necessary for them to come to Mr. McCully's trial, along with Elaine and Thomas."

"Are they going to have the trial already?" April asks.

"The only problem that we had is finding a jury of his peers that wasn't predispositioned one way or the other."

"I thought he was going to have a military trial," April asks.

"His lawyer requested that he have a civilian jury, seeing that the majority of the charges were against a military officer he thought that a military jury might be too easily swayed. We couldn't really come up with a good argument against it, so we found a civilian jury, but we have a military judge, and any sentence will be in accordance with military law,"

"I suppose I can understand that some concessions had to be made, we do want this to be a fair trial don't we?" Saber asks.

"I know what I'd like see happen to him," Colt murmurs.

"Is that why we need to testify?" Saber asks pointedly ignoring the comment.

"Yes, and you will be cross examined, so expect them to ask deeply personal questions to try and make you angry and make the jury disbelieve your stories."

"What do you mean?" he asks.

"I would not be surprised if they insinuated that Ms. Kelly was here for money," Commander Eagle raises his hand to stop the outburst he sees on her lips, "I know very well that is not the reason you are here at all, Ms. Kelly."

"Then I'll be sure to bring all my uncashed checks from Calvary Command, along with my financial records to show that I am financially independent," Amanda says fighting to keep her anger in check.

"That sounds like a good plan," the commander replies.

"When does the trial start?" Saber asks.

"Monday," Commander Eagle states.

"I'll need to go home and get some paperwork," Amanda says.

"I'd like to go with you," Saber says. "I'm sure we could have Thomas take us."

"We could ride Steed there, it might take the whole day, but I know the way, and you could ride behind me," Amanda offers.

Saber nods, "We could spend the night at your place, then return the next day. It'd be nice to take a ride before we left for the trial. We'll set out tomorrow."

"I'll be here to get all of you Sunday, and hopefully you should be able to return late Monday, or early Tuesday." the commander states.

"Who's going to take care of the Estate while we're gone?" Elaine asks.

"I think we can manage for a few days," April says.

Kapitel 12: The Trial of Sean McCully

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 11: The Trial of Sean McCully

Early Monday morning, Saber wearing his dress uniform, is being pushed by Thomas, who is in his best suit. Amanda is walking beside him, her arm still in the sling and is wearing a business-like shin length black dress. Commander Eagle walks behind them also in his dress uniform, Elaine is in a nice dress following slightly behind them as they enter the courthouse. They enter the courtroom and take their seats. They are only sitting for a short while when the Judge comes in and the trial starts.

"The charges against Sean McCully include trespassing, kidnapping, assault, assault on officer, assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder of a civilian, and attempted murder of an officer. How do you plead Mr. McCully?" the Judge asks.

"Not guilty, sir," Sean says.

The judge sighs, "Very well, Mr. Amberson, you may make your statement."

The lawyer that was sitting with Sean gets up, "People of the jury. Sean McCully is a fine upstanding member of his community, often giving money to various charities. Several weeks before the incident Mr. McCully was invited to Captain Rider's place of residence to participate in a fencing practice. Upon arriving at Captain Rider's estate he met Ms. Kelly, whom he was under the impression was a servant of the house. Later Mr. McCully and Captain Rider proceeded to hold their fencing practice. What Mr. McCully did not know was that Captain Rider was blind at the time and was hoping to make a fool of Mr. McCully by defeating him while handicapped. Fortunately it did not end the way Captain Rider intended, and Mr. McCully won. Captain Rider offered Mr. McCully to stay the night, and he accepted. Later that night he saw Ms. Kelly alone, and assuming that she was a servant, and being use to servants "taking care of his needs" he came onto Ms. Kelly and she rejected him."

"Sir," the Calvary Command lawyer speaks up, "How is any of this relevant to the case?"

"Mr. Amberson?" the judge asks.

"I'm getting there sir," Amberson answers.

"Make it quick."

"Of course, your Honor," Mr. Amberson says. "Mr. McCully was deeply hurt by the

rejection. He went home to try and calm down. He took a couple weeks to do so and then returned to apologize, and was attacked by Captain Rider, and fired his pistol in self-defense. That's what happened, ladies and gentlemen."

"Mr. Dunhill?" the judge asks.

The Calvary Command lawyer gets up, "I was not going to bring up the first incident in this trial as Mr. McCully was not charged with any crime at that time. However, since Mr. Amberson deems it necessary to bring it up, I will tell you what actually happened."

"Objection, your Honor!" Mr. Amberson says forcefully.

"On what grounds?" the judge asks.

"Relevance," Mr. Amberson replies.

"He brought it up, your Honor. I think the jury has the right to hear both sides of the story," The Calvary Command lawyer states.

"Over-ruled, Mr. Amberson. You may proceed counselor," the judge states.

Thank you, your Honor," He turns back to the jury and continues, "Yes, Mr. McCully was invited to Captain Rider's estate for fencing practice. Ms. Kelly, had been hired to help rehabilitate Captain Rider, and thought that an exercise that was physically familiar with a friend could prove to benefit and speed up the Captain's recovery. Mr. McCully happily accepted the invitation to practice with his old friend, having not seen him in a number of years. Upon arriving, he jumped right into wanting to practice, not even allowing Captain Rider or Ms. Kelly to tell him that the Captain was blind. Mr. McCully did defeat Captain Rider and when he was told that he was blind, was shocked. He seemed to be over the shock by the time dinner was served. They talked about old times, joked and told stories. Captain Rider retired to his room later that evening and Ms. Kelly was heading to her room when she was approached by Mr. McCully. She did not know his background, but made it clear that she was not interested in him. She then retired to her room, shutting the door a bit harder than usual. She went about her business, and Mr. McCully, not used to being rejected, was angry and entered her room and grabbed her, forcing her down onto the bed. She screamed and a struggle ensued. Captain Rider had heard the door slam and then heard Ms. Kelly scream, and out of instinct grabbed the only weapon close by, his late father's loaded pistol. He then goes to Ms. Kelly's room. Calls out to her, and hearing signs of a struggle, enters her room, the gun pointed towards the voices. He orders Mr. McCully to vacate the premises. He refuses and Captain Rider fires a shot towards him, missing him. Mr. McCully then leaves, after making an attempt to hit Captain Rider and is shot. Everyone present that night assumed that they would never hear from Mr. McCully again. They were wrong. Mr. McCully does return a few weeks later. He enters the house and ties up Captain Rider's servants, Thomas and Elaine, and then waits for Ms. Kelly and Captain Rider to return and attacks Ms. Kelly. Captain Rider hears the struggle and comes in and saves her, injuring Mr. McCully and getting shot in the process. That ladies and gentlemen, is what actually happened."

"Defense, do you have any witnesses?" the judge asks.

"No sir," Mr. Amberson says.

"Prosecution?" the judge asks

"We call Captain Richard Rider," Mr. Dunhill says. Commander Eagle gets up and pushes Saber in the wheelchair up to the podium where Saber is sworn in. "Captain Rider, would you please tell us what happened on the day in question?"

"Ms. Kelly and I decided to go for a ride out to some of the more remote parts of estate to have a picnic and practice some basic sword moves using sticks; upon returning to the house I took the horses to the stable and Ms. Kelly went inside with the picnic basket and her training stick." Saber states.

"Were you blind at this time?" Mr. Dunhill asks.

"I had limited vision at the time, sir. Anyways, I was tending to the animals when I heard a struggle. I ran into the house, and grabbed a sword that was hanging on the wall."

"Do you typically keep weapons hanging throughout your house, Captain Rider?" Mr. Dunhill asks

"Just that particular sword, it's ancestral, but when I heard the struggle I grabbed it anyway. I came into the sitting room and saw Mr. McCully about to shoot Ms. Kelly, so I struck him with the blunt side of the weapon. At this time, Ms. Kelly grabbed her stick off the floor and knocked the gun out of Mr. McCully's hand. At that point I told Ms. Kelly to call the authorities as I held Mr. McCully at sword point. I suppose that with my limited vision I missed his movements that would have indicated he was about to attack, and he lunged at me, knocking the sunglasses off my face, which with the light in the room, caused me to be fully blinded again. Without thinking, I slashed at him. I had just regained my balance when I heard Mr. McCully cock his gun, I lunged at him without thinking, and that's when his gun went off."

"Is that when you struck him in the ribs with the back of your sword?" Mr. Dunhill asks

"I was discombobulated from being blinded again, so I'm not entirely sure, I remember hearing a loud crack, and then Mr. McCully gasping for air. So I'd say that was more than likely what happened."

"And did you invite Mr. McCully to your home this time?"

"No, sir. In fact the last time that he was in my home I made him very aware that he was no longer welcome at my estate."

"And is the bullet wound that you suffered on that day is the reason that you are in a wheelchair today?"

"Yes sir, the bullet ripped into my stomach, and I had to have surgery to repair the damage. I am currently undergoing physical therapy to rehabilitate myself to a state where I no longer need the chair."

"Thank you very much." Mr. Dunhill says, "No further questions, your Honor."

"Mr. Amberson?" the judge asks.

"Captain Rider," Mr. Amberson begins, "I understand that you and Mr. McCully grew up together, is that right?"

"That is correct, sir."

"I also understand that the two of you learned to fence from your father, is that correct?"

"Yes, sir it is."

"You and Mr. McCully are friends then?"

"We were friends."

"Were friends?" Mr. Amberson asks "What changed?"

"The initial incident you mentioned in your opening statement, sir."

"Your Honor?" Mr. Amberson asks.

"Captain Rider, please answer the question." the judge says.

"Mr. McCully assaulted and attempted to rape Ms. Kelly." Saber replies.

"Why did you not bring charges against him then?"

"Objection!" Mr. Dunhill yells.

"Over-ruled" the judge says, "Please answer the question, Captain Rider."

"I was well aware of the way Mr. McCully was raised. I didn't think that he would consider Amanda a servant."

"Amanda, Captain?" Mr. Amberson asks.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Kelly. Her name is Amanda Kelly, sir." Saber replies.

So you say that Mr. McCully attacked Ms. Kelly and threatened you.?"

"Yes sir," Saber replies with a nod.

"So you were aware that Mr. McCully was used to receiving sex from his servants?"

"Yes."

"How do you know this?"

"He told me."

"Did you ever see him have sex with his servants?"

"No, but I did hear noises that many would consider congruent with sex coming from his room and a young maid leave his room shortly after, then upon entering the room saw no one in there other than Mr. McCully."

"Those noises could of been anything."

"I will not deny that, I'm just telling you what I heard."

"Did you ever have sex with one of his servants?"

"Of course not!"

"How about one of your own?"

"Objection!" Mr. Dunhill yells

"Sustained," the judge says. "Mr. Amberson, watch your line of questioning, you step too far I'll have you brought up on charges of contempt."

Mr. Amberson nods, "Of course, Your Honor," he clears his throat. "Now when you and Mr. McCully were friends you visited each other's homes often."

"Yes, but that was long ago. Once I joined Calvary Command I did not see Mr. McCully until the day he came over to fence with me."

"No further questions." Mr. Amberson says and Commander Eagle gets back up and wheels Saber back over to the seats.

"Next, the prosecution would like to call up Ms. Amanda Kelly," Mr. Dunhill says and Amanda gets up and goes to the stand and is sworn in.

"Ms. Kelly, could you tell us why you were at the Rider estate at all?"

"I was employed to help Saber learn to adjust to being blind." Amanda replies.

"Saber ma'am?"

"I'm sorry sir, it's a nickname that some people use for Captain Rider, is it okay if I use

it in court?"

"Mr. Dunhill?" the judge asks.

"I'm fine with it if the defense is fine with it," Mr. Dunhill says

"I have no objection to it, your Honor," Mr. Amberson says

"Now, Ms. Kelly, please tell us about how you were helping Captain Rider."

"Saber could actually function fairly well own his own, but I saw he needed to get his confidence up, so I let him teach me how to ride a horse, and how to fence." Amanda says and blushes a little. "Well, I suppose I still need some work in that department," she adds ruefully, getting a few chuckles from the jury and others in the room.

"Can you tell us about the day in question?"

"It was my idea to go have the picnic, and Saber agreed, anything to be out of the house. So we rode out and ate, then he started fencing drills with me. We practiced a good bit of the day and I suppose lost track of time, when we realized that it was getting late we returned. Saber said he'd take care of the horse and for me to go in and see about maybe getting us some food. I took the empty picnic basket and the stick that I'd been using with me. I didn't want to leave the stick because I'd finally found one that was comfortable in my hand for long periods of time. When I came into the kitchen I noticed that no one was there, which was strange being so close to dinner time. So I started to head back towards the stables to find Saber and that's when I ran into Sean."

"By Sean you mean?"

"Sean McCully, sir," Amanda affirms.

"Just so we are clear."

Amanda nods, "Sean pointed a gun at me and said, 'You're coming with me.' I told him that I wasn't and he threatened to shoot me if I didn't come with him right that moment. He said something along the line of never having had a woman reject him and he wasn't about to now. I went to get past him and he threw me into the wall, dislocating my shoulder. It was at that moment Saber came in and hit him with the sword, distracting him. I grabbed the stick I'd been using and disarmed him. Then Saber told me to call the authorities, so I left to call the authorities. I called them, that's when I discovered Thomas and Elaine tied up, and untied them. About that time I hear the gunshot and then I hear the police break down the door, and I rush back into the room to find Saber and Sean both bleeding and laying on the floor." she finishes, her voice breaking slightly at the end.

"Thank you, Ms. Kelly" Mr. Dunhill says, "No further questions, your Honor."

"Ms. Amanda Kelly" Mr. Amberson says as he approaches the witness stand, "Please

tell us exactly how you got the job assisting Captain Rider?"

"I saw an ad placed by Commander Eagle. I replied and was granted an interview. I came to the interview and said that trying to teach someone how to live while they are blind might be an interesting experience."

"So you had no previous experience?"

"Not professionally. I did help my father cope after a stroke."

"Did you tell them this?"

"Yes."

"Did you claim to have any professional experience?"

"No."

"Did Mr. McCully attempt to sexually assault you?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you press charges?"

"Saber apologized to me, said he'd forgotten that Sean had been raised to view servants the way that he does, I stated that I'm not a servant. And Saber said he knows that. But apparently Sean didn't, and he thought that he could get what he wanted from Saber's servants. So I agreed to drop it, as Saber told him never to come back. I'm regretting it now, if I'd pressed charges maybe he wouldn't have come back to the estate with a gun."

"Mr. McCully claims that you are and I quote, "A backstabbing, no good gold digging whore." How do you respond to this?"

"Objection!" Mr. Dunhill yells.

"Sustained," the judge says. "Mr. Amberson, watch your language, this is a court room."

"Let's just get to the main point then. Mr. McCully claims that you are only hanging around Saber to get his money from him and he came that day to help his friend not lose his fortune."

"I'll have you know that I have no need to work for money, sir," Amanda replies. "I've anticipated that this might come up, so I've taken the liberty of collecting some financial documents to show you the state of my affairs. Ms. Elaine, if you would please," Amanda requests and Elaine gets up and brings a folder to Mr. Dunhill who examines it for a second then hands it to the judge who examines it for a second before handing it to Mr. Amberson. "You'll also notice that in that folder are all the

checks that Calvary Command sent to me for helping with Saber, you'll notice that none of them have been cashed. After my first day trying to help Saber I decided that there was no way I was going to be paid for helping him, especially when most of the time he was teaching me."

Mr. Amberson puts the folder down, "Are you and Captain Rider in a relationship?"

"Objection, your Honor," Mr. Dunhill says. "Relevance?"

The judge looks at Mr. Amberson for a minute, "I'll allow it, but this had better be good."

"Yes we are," Amanda states simply.

"How long have you two been in a relationship?"

"Objection! Not relevant at all!"

"Mr. Amberson, you're starting to annoy me," the judge warns.

"Ok, how about this, were you in a relationship with Captain Rider on the day of said attack?"

"No, sir. We were not officially in a relationship at that time." Amanda replies.

"You say you weren't officially in a relationship, what's that mean?"

"Well, we spent a lot of time together, him teaching me new things and all, but we weren't actually a couple, even though sometimes it felt like it."

"I see," Mr. Amberson says, "So why did you turn my client down?"

"Excuse me?" Amanda asks.

"Why didn't you have sex with my client if you weren't dating Captain Rider?"

"Objection, your Honor!" Mr. Dunhill yells.

"That's it. I'm bringing you up on charges of contempt of court Mr. Amberson, there is no reason to ask questions like that," the judge states.

"Sure there is." Sean stands up and yells, "That filthy no good lying whore came onto me, and then cried rape."

The Judge bangs his gavel "Order in the court! Defense, I suggest that you quiet your client," He turns to Amanda, "Now Ms. Kelly, you may step down."

"I'm not done with her yet," Mr. Amberson says.

"Oh you're done son, you just don't know it yet," the judge says firmly. He turns to the jury, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have heard witness testimony, and the cross examinations given from both the prosecution and the defense lawyers. By law, anything that was deemed objectionable is considered inadmissible as evidence for you to base any decision you make in the status of the defendant. Please take due process and as is your duty, come to a unanimous decision on the fate of Mr. McCully. You must decide whether he is guilty or not guilty of each of the following charges: trespassing, kidnapping, assault, assault on officer, assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder of a civilian, and attempted murder of an officer. With these instructions, I send you to go and deliberate your verdicts. You may go begin your deliberations."

"My closing statement, your Honor," Mr. Amberson pleads.

"I don't want to hear another word from you, Mr. Amberson," the judge says and bangs his gavel, the jury is escorted to the deliberation chambers.

Several hours pass. Saber, Amanda, Commander Eagle, Thomas, and Elaine are all sitting in his office awaiting word from the jury.

"I wish we would just hear something already," Amanda says shifting in her seat.

Saber takes her hand and smiles at her impatience, "I'd rather the jury take their time. I don't want Sean having a chance to appeal the decision on basis of bias. I wouldn't want you to have to go through that again, Amanda." he says.

"It took all I had not to lose my temper with his damned defense lawyer," Amanda says coldly. "He seriously thought Sean was in the right."

"I saw the way they both looked at you, Ms. Kelly. They are from the same breed of people," Commander Eagle states. "I am glad you kept yourself in check. There were a couple of times I would have loved to have said something."

"You had to remain impartial, sir," Saber states. He sighs and stretches a bit in his seat.

"Are you all right?" Amanda asks concerned.

"I'm fine. Just need to move a little," he replies.

"I'm grateful that Thomas or I didn't have to testify. I probably would have told that lawyer off," Elaine says getting a chuckle from the others.

A knock at the door jolts them to attention and a soldier comes in, "The jury has decided a verdict. You should return to the courtroom now."

They all get ready and return to the courtroom. Sean is there and he turns and glares at them when they enter and head to their seats. Amanda makes a point of not looking at him. The judge comes in and they are all allowed to sit. Saber reaches over and takes Amanda's hand. Noticing she's shaking he squeezes it gently, she returns

the gesture and tries to calm herself.

"Has the jury come to a decision on the charges facing Mr. Sean McCully?"

"We have, your Honor," The jury chairman states and hands an envelope to a soldier waiting at the edge of the jury box.

The soldier takes the envelope to the judge and hands it to him. He studies it for a moment, reading it carefully before setting it down, "Mr. McCully, please rise while the verdict is read." Sean and his lawyer stand up and the judge reads the paper, "On the charges of trespassing, the defendant, Sean McCully is found guilty. On the charges of kidnapping, the defendant Sean McCully is found guilty. On the charges of assault, the defendant Sean McCully is found guilty. On the charge of assault on officer, the defendant Sean McCully is found guilty. On the charge of assault with a deadly weapon, the defendant is found guilty. On the charge of attempted murder of a civilian, the defendant is found guilty. On the charge of attempted murder of an officer, the defendant Sean McCully is found guilty." Sean starts to say something but the judge bangs the gavel down to stop him. "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury. This completes your service to this court and this matter. Mr. McCully, you are to be held in the brig at Calvary Command until I decide on your sentencing. Take him away," The judge says to the waiting officers.

Sean turns and glares at Amanda. She stands defiantly not showing any other emotion. He starts to say something but is stopped by the officers who come and handcuff him and start to lead him from the courtroom. "This isn't over," he mutters angrily as he passes them.

Amanda starts to reply, but Saber places a hand on her arm and shakes his head, so she says nothing. They watch him leave, and the lawyers pack up and start to leave the courtroom. Mr. Amberson stops in front of them and looks Amanda over, "You had a judge on your side today, Ms. Kelly. I will be appealing this outcome. Next time I won't be so nice."

Saber tightens his grip on her arm, telling her not to say anything. Amanda turns away from Mr. Amberson and towards Saber. "Are we free to go then?" she asks trying to control her anger.

Commander Eagle nods, "Yes. Let's go back to my office, and then I will see about arrangements to take all of you home." They nod and a short time later, they are sitting in his office. "So, I assume you wish to return as soon as possible?" the commander asks.

"I would, sir," Elaine replies. "I don't like being away longer than necessary."

They return to Saber's estate as quickly as possible, much to everyone's delight. They walk in and smell food cooking. "You know, that smells quite good," Saber says

"Shall we see who is cooking?" Commander Eagle asks

They go into the kitchen and find Colt and Robin cooking. "Well, now here's a surprise," Amanda says "Never pictured you as the cook."

"I'll have you know that when I was a bounty hunter I found the skill of cooking came in handy an awful lot," Colt says, "And I'm teaching Robin."

"Wait..." Saber says, "You're teaching Robin something Colt?" he asks amused.

"Yeah, you got a problem with that?" Colt retorts defensively.

"No, not at all, just found it interesting," Saber says forcing a neutral tone.

"You're not the only one who can teach his girl something you know."

Amanda starts to make a remark, but thinks better of it and stops herself.

"You know what I mean," Colt replies sensing her unspoken objection.

"I'm actually quite pleased that someone else is able to cook., Elaine says.

"I made the mistake of letting April try to cook breakfast," Colt says. "I'll buy you a new pan."

"It can't possibly have been that bad," Saber says.

"The pan is in the trash," Colt replies with a nod towards the trash.

"Elaine?"

Elaine goes over to the trash and looks into it and turns pale, Thomas rushes to her and grabs her before she passes out. "I assure you sir, it's that bad," Thomas says dumbfounded.

"Is Elaine okay?" Saber asks obviously worried.

"She fainted. I believe that may have been her favorite pan," Thomas says in shock.

"I'll replace it Saber," Colt says apologetically. "I shouldn't have let her cook."

"That's not necessary, Colt," Saber says. "Elaine can go and buy a new one. It'll give her an excuse to go shopping."

Colt chuckles, "If you're sure," Saber nods. "All right. Well, y'all get comfortable, dinner be in about 30 minutes."

"I could use a hand with Elaine," Thomas says, "I'd like to lay her down in our room."

"Oh Thomas I'm sorry," Saber says, "Amanda, do you think you could run up and get Fireball?"

"I'm right here," Fireball says coming into the kitchen. "Is everything ok?"

"Elaine seems to have passed out after seeing April's attempt at cooking, you don't suppose you could help Thomas get her to their room?" Saber asks

"Of course," Fireball goes and helps Thomas get Elaine to the room.

"I'd like to go change out of this dress," Amanda says.

"You know that sounds like a good idea," Saber says. "Don't want to ruin our good clothes." They head up to their rooms and change into everyday clothes, by the time they return the food is ready. They take their seats and Colt and Robin serve up the food.

As they eat. "You know Colt, this is really good," April says, "Where'd you learn to cook like this?"

"It's not important," Colt says with a blush.

"Robin, do you know?" April asks.

"He won't tell me either," she replies with a shrug.

"I know," Commander Eagle says. "It was in his Dossier." Colt gives him a look.

"Why would something like that be in his dossier?" April asks curious.

"Commander, you have no business telling them," Colt protests.

"Then perhaps you should, because you know April will eventually get me to tell," he says trying not to smile.

"Dang it," Colt sighs, "Fine, it was one of my marks."

"Mark?" Amanda asks confused.

"One of the people I brought in for a bounty," Colt explains. "I used to be a bounty hunter."

"Why would a mark teach you to cook?" April asks.

"She didn't have much choice," Colt says "I was chasing her for bail jumping after she was arrested for killing her husband. I finally tracked her down to this cabin in the mountains, on this little planet, can't even remember it's name now. It was winter, and I guess she saw me coming, so she ran, and fired at me, and I fired back, the resulting reverberations caused an avalanche, which broke her leg. I had no choice but to take her back to the cabin and tend to her. By that time it was night fall, and there was no way I could get back to my Bronco Buster until morning, so I bunked down for the

night. I woke up the next morning we were snowed in. The mark couldn't cook, cause she couldn't stand, so she told me what to do, and I made the meals. We were in that cabin for almost a month, you'd be amazed how much you can learn in that amount of time. When the snow melted I got her back to my Bronco Buster and got my bounty. I had to tell them everything that happened, to explain her condition. I suppose that's why it's in my dossier."

"And why is it just now that you're telling me that you learned to cook by spending a month alone with a wanted woman?" Robin asks obviously hurt.

Colt blushes heavily, "I was rather embarrassed."

"Why?" Robin asks suspiciously.

"I have no problem with having had learned to cook, it's just how I learned that bothers me," He replies. "Learning from an enemy. It just don't seem natural."

"If it means living or dying, sometimes you adapt, Colt," Fireball says. "I'd be proud that I'd learned. It doesn't matter how. If anyone asks, just say you learned it on the job and leave it at that. Unless you're hiding something else."

"No. I'm not hiding anything else. I did nothing improper with her, if that's what you're meaning, Fireball. It was strictly business," Colt says seriously. He turns to Robin, "I swear that's it."

Robin relaxes a little, "You should have just told me, Colt. I wouldn't have been so upset had you just been honest about it. I felt like you were hiding something far worse than that."

"I was just embarrassed that a woman I barely knew had to be the one to teach me. I'm sorry," Colt replies.

The rest of the meal passes with chatter about the trial and how everything went. Shortly afterwards, Amanda excuses herself and heads up to her room.

"Hey, is Amanda okay? She left in a bit of a hurry," April asks.

"Perhaps the stress of the trial is getting to her," Commander Eagle offers.

Saber nods, "I should go and check on her," he gets up and heads to her room, knocking softly on the door. "Amanda?" he says waiting for a reply. After a minute, he knocks again, still no reply so he reaches for the handle and the door opens, so he enters the room. "Amanda?" he asks as he enters and closes the door behind him. He doesn't get a reply, but hears her on her bed. He walks over to the side of her bed and can hear her trying to stop crying. "Are you all right?" he asks, carefully sitting down on the edge of the bed.

Amanda takes in a deep breath trying to calm herself. "I'll be okay," she manages to whisper. She is facing down on the bed, her back to him.

He reaches out and tries to lay his hand on her arm and she flinches. "Did I hurt you?" he asks concerned as he pulls away.

"Don't worry about it." she replies softly as she gradually rolls onto her back and wiping her eyes, "I'm sorry I took off like I did."

"It's not like you to just take off without a word, so I came to see about you," he replies, the concern evident in his voice.

"I am just really sore and feeling a bit stressed. I'll be okay in a day or so," she replies weakly.

He brushes a hand gently across her cheek, "Can I do anything to help? Even if it's leaving you alone for a few days, I'll do it. Whatever you ask."

She reaches up and touches his hand, "I don't want you to leave me alone, Saber. I just..." she sighs and slowly sits up, and rests her head on Saber's shoulder. "I just feel like I'm overwhelmed I guess. I need to find a way to get past the whole thing with Sean. I just don't know how to do that."

"How would you feel about leaving here for a few days?" Saber asks quietly, placing his arm gently around her.

"It might help." she replies.

"I just don't really have any suggestions. I don't know where to tell you to go," he replies.

"My place, I suppose. I really should go and put my financial records back and make sure everything is okay there. It's not as big as here, so I don't keep anyone to run the household in my absence."

Saber nods, "You can spend as long as you need to."

"You're not coming?" she asks.

"I thought you wanted to get away from everything that reminded you of the whole thing with Sean?"

"I don't really want to be away from you, Saber. Just maybe not be here or at Calvary Command for a few days. Not having to worry about someone asking me about the whole situation. I'd like it if you came with me. I would feel safer having you around."

"When do you want to leave?" he asks running his fingers through her hair and then resting his hand on the bed beside her.

"Early tomorrow? Before anyone gets up. That way we don't have to explain things to anyone," she offers.

He nods, "You should probably leave Elaine a note. Either on your dresser or mine. We should pack light, so we can just take Steed, I suppose. A small bag for each of us."

"If we're going to my place, then only you need to pack. I have things I can wear at my house," she states. "Oh, what should I say in the note?"

"That's true. As for the note, tell her the truth. We took off to get away from the stress and we will call in a few days."

Amanda nods, "All right. I guess it's late enough no one will bother me now. Do you need some help packing?" He shakes his head. "Then why don't you go pack and try and get a little bit of rest. It's almost eleven now, so how about we meet about four in the morning? So that way we can both try and rest before we leave. I'll get the note ready and bring it to your room."

"That sounds good. I'll pack and lay down for a bit. I'll see you in a few hours," he stands up and heads to his room to get ready.

Kapitel 13: Admissions

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 12: Admissions

"Well, here we are, Saber," Amanda says as they dismount at the back of the house. They lead Steed to a separate garage before going to a back door and entering the house through the kitchen. "Let's go and get your stuff put down upstairs," she says leading him through the kitchen and into a living room, stopping abruptly. "What the?" she looks around to see the place in shambles.

"I take it this is not your normal housekeeping," Saber jokes trying to calm her, grabbing and unsheathing his sword.

"No," Amanda replies dryly. "She looks around the room and sees a vase tipped over. The water has dried and left a stain on the table. "This happened at least a day ago, judging from the water stain on the table."

"We should still proceed with caution," Saber replies. They carefully go through every room. After checking all the rooms, and only finding them ransacked, they make sure all the doors are bolted shut and proceed to clean up the mess. After several hours they make the house livable again and Amanda plops down on a couch and starts crying. Saber comes over to her and pulls her against him, letting her cry.

"I'm sorry, Saber," She finally says after she calms down, her head against his chest.

"It's okay, Amanda. I don't know how you've stayed so upbeat as long as you have. Cry as long as you need to. I'm here and not going anywhere," he says and kisses her forehead.

She relaxes against him for a while, after a long time she sits up, "Are you hungry?" she asks.

He nods, "Actually, yeah. I know it's got to be well past lunch by now."

"How about we go into town and get something, seeing as I have no food here?" she suggests. "We can take my car. It needs to be driven anyways."

"Um, all right," he replies a bit hesitantly.

"What?"

"I just didn't think about you owning a car," he says amused.

"How do you think I got around before I met you?" she replies with a chuckle.

"I hadn't thought about it, actually. But since we're going into town, there is something I'd like to check on, if you don't mind," he replies.

"Okay. Sure. What is it? If I may ask," she replies.

"I had contacted a metal smith about having a sword made for you. I gave him the weight and height of the stick that you had been training with and a description of your stature, and he was going to forge a sword for you. I had intended it to be a birthday gift for you, since I know your birthday is coming up in about a month, but given the current situation, if he's completed it or is almost done with it, I think you should get it early and keep it on you for protection."

She looks at him shocked but eventually nods, "Um, sure. We can stop in," she replies finally.

They make their way to town and eat, talk with the metal smith and get a few groceries. By the time they return, it's late and they are both exhausted. They unload the groceries and head upstairs to her room. "I'm going to change in the bathroom. You can change in here, let me know when you're done and I'll come out once I'm ready." She goes and changes and a short time later they are sitting on her bed talking.

"I figure after lunchtime tomorrow we can go and pick up your sword, if you are okay with that," Saber says.

"Sure. That way, we don't have to get up too early. I'll even cook breakfast in the morning if you want."

He laughs, "At least I know you can do better than April."

She laughs, "Very funny, Saber," she says fighting a yawn.

"You sound tired. Why don't you get some sleep?" Saber says tenderly.

"I suppose I am a bit tired. You look pretty ti-" she stops.

"Amanda? Are you okay?" he asks concerned.

"Um, yeah," she mumbles.

"What's wrong?"

"I just thought of something," she replies barely audible.

"What?" he asks confused.

"I don't know where you're going to sleep." she replies embarrassed.

"There's a couch downstairs. I can sleep there. I noticed that your other bedrooms all had office type things in them, so I assumed I would be taking the couch," he replies simply stating the obvious solution.

"I don't like the idea of you being that far away and in a strange place. You still can't see very well, I don't want you to reinjure yourself," she says.

"I can make a cot here on the floor if you would prefer," he replies.

She starts to say something, then stops several times as she thinks the situation over. After a long silence she speaks up, "We're both adults. Are you afraid of sharing the bed? It's a king, so we could each have our own side. No strings attached. I just would feel weird you sleeping on the floor."

He sits in stunned silence for several minutes mulling over the suggestion. "I suppose that would be all right. If you are comfortable with it," he replies slowly.

She nods, "I am. I know that you would never force yourself on me, so I don't feel awkward suggesting it in the current situation. Besides, we're both clothed."

"Fair enough. Which side is mine then?" he asks.

"I normally sleep towards the this side," she replies.

"Okay. I'll go to that side then," he replies as he heads to the far side of the bed and sits. Feeling her slip into bed and noticing the light switch off he lays down and after great effort, he falls asleep. At some point during the night, he awakes to a pressure on his chest. He tries to move and realizes he can't. He starts to panic when he realizes that Amanda has moved against him in her sleep. After a few minutes, he moves his arm so that it is around her and she relaxes more against him. He feels her relax as he holds her and her breathing lulls him into a restful sleep.

He wakes to the smell of bacon cooking. Rolling over, he notices that Amanda is no longer there. He gets up and changes into day clothes before heading downstairs.

"Good morning," Amanda says cheerfully as he enters the kitchen. "Breakfast is just about ready."

"Good morning to you too," he replies. "Can I help with anything?" he asks heading towards her.

"Nope. Just grab a drink and take a seat," she replies as she dishes out what appears to be an omelet. Placing a plate in front of him and one in front of her seat before sitting down. "I promise you, it's safe," she says with a chuckle as she sees him inspecting the food.

"What?" he asks.

"Nothing," She replies as she takes a bite of her food.

He begins eating and they chat a while. "So, do you have any kind of set plan for today?" Saber asks.

"Not really, other than going back into town to get the sword at some point. And I was thinking, I'm going to put my papers in a safe deposit box I with the bank I use in town. Since I've not been staying here, I don't like the idea of them being left unguarded."

Saber nods as he stands up and takes the used dishes to the sink, "Well, other than getting the sword, I don't care what we do. I'll help you go through things here if you wish."

Amanda looks around and sighs, "I don't know where to begin. I still need to go through my father's things, but I've been putting it off for almost two years. Most of his stuff is in the one room we didn't go into yesterday. I just haven't been able to go in there."

"I understand," he says quietly. "I've still not gone through the last of my parent's things either."

"You've had an excuse. You've been away fighting," she replies. "I've got no such excuse. Other than procrastination."

He chuckles, "Perhaps I've used the excuse a bit to the extreme, but Thomas and Elaine actually handled the bulk of their possessions. There are only a few personal effects that I'm supposed to decide on. I'll help you if you decide you want to tackle it while were here." He sees her shift uncomfortably. "Or we can just laze around and not do anything," he adds with a laugh. "That was the intended purpose of this little trip."

She shrugs, "I suppose we could make an attempt at going through some things," she says with some hesitation as she heads to the living room.

He comes up behind her, placing a hand on her good shoulder, "I can tell you're not ready. Let's just rest, okay? We can attempt it another time," he says quietly. They head over and sit down on the couch. "Is there anything I can do for you? I feel like I should earn my keep while I'm here," he says quietly.

"Just you being here is enough, Saber," Amanda says. "I'm not sure what I'd do if you weren't here right now."

Saber takes her hand, "I don't plan on going anywhere. So I will be here if you need me. I'll do anything I am able to do for you."

"Just be with me, that's all I want," Amanda says. "Come on, let's go into town." she says cheerfully, trying to lighten the mood as she stands up.

Saber gets up a bit slowly, "This is going to be a long day isn't it?" he asks.

"Are you going to be alright without the wheelchair?" Amanda asks concerned.

"It won't be easy. But I'll be all right if we go slow, I think," he replies honestly.

"Would a cane help? I have a couple that belonged to my father," she offers.

"That might not be a bad idea," Saber answers.

Amanda goes and gets him one and hands it to him, "Better?" she asks.

He leans on it a bit then nods, "I think this will help a good bit. Thank you," Saber says and they go out to her car. Saber places his hand on the car. "This is your car? The same one we took last night?"

"Yes. It was my father's," Amanda replies with a smirk.

"It feels like it could use some work," he says.

"It's what's inside that's important," Amanda says as they get in, "Right?"

"Of course," Saber says as Amanda fires the car up, the engine sounds like it's in great condition. "It seems that it runs good."

"It runs great. My dad taught me how to take care of this car, the engine is almost like brand new," Amanda states as she pulls out onto the road.

"Let's get into town then," Saber says and they head into town.

Their first stop is the walk into the bank, and almost immediately an employee walks up to them, "How may I help you two today?" she asks.

"I'd like to get a safety deposit box," Amanda says.

"Do you have an account with us, Ma'am?" the employee asks.

"Of course I do, my name is Amanda Kelly."

The employee pales slightly, "Oh, I'm sorry Ms. Kelly, I wasn't aware of who you were, please right this way." She leads them to the safety deposit boxes, "By you asking for a safety deposit box I assume you are not aware that your father had one with us?"

"No, ma'am. I had no idea," she replies honestly.

"No offense, but I'm going to need to see some identification, just to verify who you are. Then I can get the spare key to your father's box. If the box meets your needs I'd be more than glad to shift it's ownership to you."

"I understand," Amanda says and pulls out the appropriate paperwork to prove her identity and hands it to the woman.

The employee looks over the paperwork and nods approvingly, "Please take a seat, I'll bring the key."

Saber and Amanda sit at a table, "You had no idea your father had a safety deposit box, did you?" Saber asks quietly.

"I don't know why he would," she replies.

"So you have no idea what he could have in it?" he asks.

"Most likely it's the same kind of thing that I'm looking to put into the box, I'd imagine," she replies.

A few minutes later the employee and a man dressed in a nice suit come in with a box, "Good day Ms. Kelly, I'm the manager here, John O'Brien," the man says extending his hand to her.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," Amanda says taking his hand and shaking it.

"I have some forms I need you to sign before I can let you open your father's box," John says handing Amanda the paperwork, then glancing towards Saber, "Um, I believe that your father's instructions were that you are to be the only person present when the box is opened, madam."

"He is here as my guest, Mr. O'Brien. Captain Rider is staying at my request."

John looks between the two and starts to object, "Did you say, Captain Rider?"

"I did, sir," she replies.

"No problem then, Ms. Kelly," John says, casting Saber a slightly nervous glance.

"Thank you," Amanda takes the paperwork and reads it then signs it and hands it back to John.

He takes the paperwork and nods to the employee who puts the box onto the table. He then hands Amanda the key to the box, "Just let us know when you're done and we'll return the box to it's resting place." John and the other employee then quietly leave the room.

"Thank you," Amanda says and she takes the key and opens up the box. "Looks like a bunch of paperwork," She mumbles as she starts going through it. "Let's see. This is the deed to our property, well, that's a relief. A bank ledger?" she says puzzled as she opens it "Oh my," she says obviously in shock.

"What is it?" Saber asks and when Amanda doesn't answer immediately, "Perhaps it's

not my position to know that."

"It's not that, Saber," Amanda says replies finally getting her voice, "My dad left an account worth almost a million dollars, and my name was the only other one on the account."

Saber whistles, "That's a lot of money."

"Yeah. I know," Amanda says. "That appears to be everything." She puts the box down.

Saber tilts his head to the side, "Wait, let me see that," he grabs the box and tilts it, a slight metal hitting metal sound can be heard. "There's something else in there, Amanda."

Amanda looks inside the box and sees the item in question and reaches in and grabs it, "It's a necklace, it looks very old, it looks like an old shield."

"A shield?" Saber asks interested.

"Yeah, there's something on it, I'm not sure what they are," Amanda replies.

"Let me see, maybe I can make them out," Saber says.

"Saber you can barely see," Amanda replies.

"I shouldn't need to. If I'm right, the items on the shield should be slightly raised. So I should be able to make out the shapes or number of them at least."

"You know what this is?" Amanda asks.

"Does it look something like this?" Saber asks as he reaches into his shirt and pulls out a necklace, a lion imprinted onto a shield.

"Yeah," Amanda says "But the design on mine is different. What is it?"

"A coat of arms," Saber says. "Mine is from the once Scottish royalty, I'm glad you're is different, otherwise we'd technically be related."

"I see. Yeah, that could be awkward," Amanda says and hands him the necklace. "Here."

Saber takes it and runs his fingers over the pendant, "Feels like three fleur-de-lis."

"You recognize it?" she asks curious.

"I believe it may be the coat of arms of the once French royalty," He replies astonished.

"Wait, are you telling me that I'm related to royalty?" Amanda asks in disbelief.

Saber nods, "If this is indeed the coat of arms that I believe it to be, then probably," he replies still inspecting the pendant.

"Probably?" she asks.

"Well, as you know it's not uncommon for jewelry to be stolen, but something like this would be hard to sell, and nearly impossible to fake, check the paperwork again, perhaps there's a letter from your father explaining the necklace."

"Okay..." Amanda goes through the paperwork again, more carefully this time. "I still don't see anything," she says annoyed.

"The box," Saber says thinking aloud. "Can you reach your hand in it and feel around?"

"I could but you couldn't," Amanda answers.

"Do it," he replies.

Amanda reaches her hand back into the box, "Wait, there's something here, it feels like it's taped to the side. I think," she grunts "I got it." She pulls out an envelope, opens it and pulls out a letter and begins to read it silently. "Oh God, Saber," she gasps. "The necklace belonged to my mother, and to her mother, and so on. It's exactly what you say. I'm related to the old French Royalty, my family is of noble blood," she finishes barely above a whisper.

"That's good news," Saber says. "Right?"

"Yes, now you don't have to worry about having fallen in love with the common rabble," Amanda replies with a chuckle.

"Amanda," Saber starts, "you know that I've never cared what your birth status was."

Amanda smiles, "I know Saber, I know."

"Let's do what we came here to do, then," Saber says.

"Right," Amanda says. "We should leave everything here for the time being."

"Probably not a bad idea., Saber replies with a nod.

Amanda puts everything in the box, including the financial information she came with and locks it up. "Let's go Saber," Amanda says and then they get up and leave the bank, stopping to let the manager know they are done.

They go and find a place to eat and after they finish, they head to pick up the sword. "Too bad we didn't know about your coat of arms sooner. I could have had it incorporated on the sword somehow," Saber says as they pull up to the shop.

"We had no way of knowing. Besides, things might not be what they are now between us if we had known all along," Amanda says as they get out. She hears a noise and reaches for her phone. "Damn it. My phone just died," she mutters under her breath.

"What made you think of checking it?" Saber asks.

"I thought I heard it ring, so I went to check and it had died. Maybe I heard the tone it plays when it turns off," Amanda says with a shrug. "I'll charge it when we get back to my place." Saber nods.

They enter the shop and see an older man behind the counter. He looks up as they enter, "Ah, good afternoon Captain Rider, I did the finishing touches on the piece this morning." He says as he heads towards the back, returning a minute or so later with a sword similar in style to Saber's. "This is for you, Miss."

He holds the sword out to her and she takes it, shifting it around in her hand slightly, "I like the weight. It feels about like the stick I've practiced with."

"That was the idea," Saber replies.

Amanda nods, "It's gorgeous, Saber. Thank you."

"You're welcome. I don't want you to go around unarmed. Especially the way things have gone lately."

She nods and turns back to the man behind the counter, "Thank you, sir."

He nods, "Not often I'm asked to make such a sword for a young woman. But when Captain Rider asked me to, I was not going to refuse."

Amanda nods, "Am I allowed to carry this?"

"Wear it, you mean?" Saber asks. She nods. "Yes. As long as you carry it openly, you should be fine. I believe you would have to apply for a weapons permit if you wanted to keep it hidden. That was the reason I wanted you to know how to use it. Do you want to try and wear it now?"

"Yeah. That way I can get used to it being there."

"Here Miss, let me help you with that," The man comes around the counter and shows her how to position the sword.

They leave the shop and are going back to the car when a young man starts following them. "Hey lady, nice piece you got," he steps in front of her, glancing towards Saber, who was headed to the passenger side of the car. "Give me the sword and I won't hurt either of you," he says menacingly.

"You might want to reconsider threatening people. You never know who you might misjudge," Saber says, slowly inching back towards the front of the car.

The kid rolls his eyes. "Please. A woman and a blind man? Give me the damned sword lady, or I'll shoot both of you," he says becoming agitated and flashing a gun.

"Fine. Here," she unsheathes the sword and makes to hand it to him. The kid goes to grab it and she knocks him to the ground with the blunt end, causing him to drop the gun. She kicks the gun under the car towards Saber. She points the sword at the kid's throat, "Now. As the gentleman said. I'd seriously reconsider your life choices. If you had attacked us, you would have been charged with attacking a military officer. You would have done time in a military facility. Had you actually injured him, you would have made things a lot harder on yourself. Get out of here and we'll pretend this never happened." She sheaths the sword and the kid jumps up and runs off, leaving the gun.

The owner of the shop comes running out, "Captain Rider, Miss, are you all right? I've called the police."

"We're fine. Thank you. No harm done," Saber says quietly.

Amanda comes around beside him and offers him an arm, "You've over done it today."

"Perhaps a bit," he admits begrudgingly.

"Let's go home then. I'll cook us something and you can rest, okay?" Amanda says leading him back to the passenger door.

He nods, and she helps him into the car just as the police arrive.

A cop comes up to the shop owner, "Are you the person who called us about a robbery?" The store owner nods. "What happened here?" the cop asks looking between the three people.

"Some punk kid tried to rob these two. She ran him off though," he replies with a laugh.

The cop turns to Amanda, "Is that what happened, Miss?"

Amanda nods, "Yes, sir. The gun is just under the edge of the car, here," she replies pointing to the ground. "He took off without it."

"Would you like us to run the prints and press charges if we can identify him?" the cop asks.

"No sir. I don't think he'll be giving anyone much trouble now," Amanda replies.

The cop nods, "Very well then. I bid you both good evening."

"Good evening, sir," they both reply and get into the car and drive back to her place. They get out and Saber carefully makes his way inside and flops down onto the couch,

physically exhausted.

"Are you going to be all right, Saber?" Amanda asks concerned.

"I think so," he says as if he isn't really sure.

"Will just sandwiches be okay for supper?"

"Sure. Fine with me," he replies.

They eat and after a while, they venture back up the stairs to the bedroom. "Are you going to be able to change by yourself?" she asks seriously, getting a curious look from Saber. "Yes, you look that tired," she says with a chuckle.

"I think I can manage. I'll yell if I change my mind," he replies managing a small smile.

"If you haven't passed out," she retorts as she heads for the bathroom to change. She comes out a few minutes later and finds him laying down, barely awake, but changed. She gets into bed and rolls over to face him after turning out the light, "I see you managed to get changed."

"Barely. Not sure if I put the shirt on right side out or not," he says with a chuckle.

"Well, it's dark and I'm the only one here, so I wouldn't dwell on it. Get some sleep. We'll figure out plans for tomorrow, after breakfast in the morning. Good night, Saber."

"Night," he replies barely a whisper before he falls soundly asleep.

The next morning Amanda wakes and sees Saber still asleep. She lays there for several minutes, not wanting to move. After a little while longer, she starts to roll over so she can get out of bed.

Saber stirs at the movement, "Morning," he says tiredly and reaches for her arm.

She stops and turns back towards him, "Good morning. I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't. I just woke up and you were still here," He replies. "I was glad you were, so I said good morning. Did you sleep well?"

She moves so she is right beside him and facing him again and nods, "Probably not as soundly as you, but yes, I slept well."

"I'm glad of that. I wasn't sure if you were actually comfortable with me...you know, being here," he replies.

"I wouldn't have asked you to share the bed if I didn't trust you. I've actually never..." she stops before saying anything else.

He nods, "I know what you mean, Amanda. Neither have I," he says quietly.

"Seriously?" she asks surprised. "But you were engaged to..."

He shakes his head. "I had never really shown her any sort of displays of affection. She was against such actions before marriage," he replies softly. "I could ask the same of you, you know. You were once engaged yourself."

"I didn't believe in being with someone before marriage. I mean, I won't lie, I did kiss him, and once in a while he would hold my hand, but...I don't know. It's different with you. I know we haven't even really kissed, but this... This doesn't feel weird to me." She shakes her head and chuckles, "God, I'm rambling." She flops her head onto her pillow.

He chuckles, "This is rather flustering, isn't it?"

She nods, "I'm so scared that you're going to think less of me."

"Why would I? I have no reason to," he replies.

She blushes, "Well, yesterday I evidently moved against you in my sleep. I woke up and I was sleeping with my head on your chest. I was afraid of how you would have reacted had you woken up. That you might have thought I was hoping for more than I was," she says mumbling the last sentence.

He smiles at her, "I know you were against me. I woke up and went to shift at some point during the night and felt pressure on my chest. At first I was disoriented and started to panic, but then I realized it was you and I moved so that my arm was sort of around you and I fell asleep. It was nice," he replies quietly. "I could get used to that," he adds barely audible.

Amanda nods, and moves a little closer to him, "So it doesn't bother you that I lay close?"

"No. Although I don't think I'm ready to go much further than holding you, I won't complain about you laying against me."

"Good to know," she says and leans toward him to kiss his cheek. He turns so that she kisses him on the lips. They stay that way for a minute before she pulls back and smiles. "I could get used to that," she says as she lays her head on his chest and he puts his arm carefully around her.

"So could I, Amanda," he says as he brushes some hair from her face. They lay there quietly for a long time, neither one wanting to move.

Please take time to comment. It is appreciated. :-)

Kapitel 14: Runaway

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 13: Runaway

"Saber?" Elaine says knocking on his door for the third time. "Come on, it's nearly nine. You really should get up." She opens the door to find the bed empty and made. She's just about to leave and close the door when she spots a paper on the dresser and goes over to read it:

Elaine,

Please do not be upset. We both needed some time away from everyone and everything to clear our heads after all that has happened. We are both fine. We will be gone for several days. We will call and check in after a few days, once we have a better idea of how long we will be gone. Please do not worry. We are safe and will be as careful as we can be. We hope you understand.

Saber and Amanda

Elaine folds up the note, placing it in her apron pocket. She leaves Saber's room and heads downstairs to the kitchen.

"Is Saber still asleep?" April asks.

"No, ma'am. Evidently he and Ms. Kelly left sometime early yesterday morning. I thought it odd we hadn't seen either of them at all yesterday, but I thought they just wanted to be left alone. But after not seeing them this morning, and no sign of dishes being used, I went to wake Saber. Having no answer, I went into his room. They left a note saying they would be back in a few days. I know that Ms. Kelly was rather upset after the trial. Maybe she went to leave and he decided to go too. I'm not exactly sure. The letter wasn't too clear on the how it came to be that they left, just that they left."

"Who left?" Colt asks as he enters the kitchen.

"I'll give you two guesses, and the first one doesn't count, cowboy," April says.

"They ran off again?" Colt asks. April nods. "Amanda looked pretty worn out and upset the other night. Maybe he took her home or something."

The phone ringing causes everyone to jump. "Hello, Rider residence," Elaine says picking up the phone. Murmuring is heard. "No sir, neither one is here right now." Murmuring continues. "They left yesterday before anyone woke up. I don't know

when they are coming back or where they went." More murmuring. "Yes, sir. We'll see you then. Good-bye." She puts the phone down, looking worried.

"What is it?" April asks concerned.

"That was Commander Eagle. He wanted to tell Saber and Ms. Kelly to stay put here. Evidently Mr. McCully's lawyer is not a good loser. He's afraid someone might try something."

"But Sean is in prison. Do you think his lawyer is that insane?" April asks.

"They are of course appealing the conviction and trying to get Mr. McCully released until a new trial is set up. He said that this wasn't over," Elaine replies barely a whisper.

"We need to try and find them., Colt says.

"I suppose we could try calling them," April suggests.

"Saber's phone is here. It was plugged in charging on his night stand. I've not been into Ms. Kelly's room yet," Elaine says.

"Forget about privacy. This is an emergency," April says as she heads up the stairs and enters Amanda's room. Looking around, she looks for clues as to where they've gone.

"Allow me. I used to be a bounty hunter, maybe I can figure this out," Colt says stepping into the room.

"What's going on?" Fireball says from the doorway. "Why is everyone in here?"

"Saber and Amanda took off at some time early yesterday morning. We don't know where they went to and Saber doesn't have his phone," April replies. "It doesn't look like Amanda really took anything with her. At least not that I can tell. So either they are staying somewhere she already has things at, like her place, or they are somewhere on the property."

"I don't see any sign of her phone, other than the cord to charge it," Elaine says.

"They must have stayed close then. That or they were in one huge hurry," Colt states.

"Has Sean escaped or something? Why is everyone up in arms over this?" Fireball asks confused.

They look for clues and try Amanda's phone. "Phone out of range? How?" Colt says slamming down the receiver.

The doorbell rings and Commander Eagle is escorted in, "Judging by the looks I'm getting, I suppose it's a safe bet that you still have not been in contact with them?"

"No, April replies. "It's been all day now and no sign of them. We've checked everywhere."

"Here's the note they left, sir," Elaine says passing it to him.

He reads it and sighs, "No clues either." Perhaps we can wait until tomorrow and try calling her phone again. Mr. McCully will remain locked up at least that long, so they should be fine for now. I don't think the lawyer will win on the allowing him to be free until the new trial, if he is granted one."

"Then why are you worried about their safety?" Colt asks.

"A couple of the guards came and told me they overheard some of the discussions the lawyer and Sean were having. They couldn't pick out much, but they said it sounded suspicious, so they reported it to me. He is now under tighter security as well. Everything he does and says is monitored and recorded."

"It's late, lets try and rest. We'll see if we can follow Amanda's phone signal at all when we try and call it tomorrow. Perhaps that will give us a clue as to where they are," April suggests. The others nod and they all retire to bed for the night.

The next morning everyone meets in the kitchen. Elaine is serving breakfast and no one is saying much. "I've got my computer hooked up so we can try and trace Amanda's cell phone signal. Even if she doesn't answer, it should try and ping the phone. We should be able to get some idea of where they are at least," April says as she finishes her meal.

Commander Eagle nods, "We should try calling first. I don't want to panic them, but they should be aware of the situation."

"Yeah. We don't want to cause them to go further away. Amanda seemed rather upset," Fireball states.

"And Saber seemed rather concerned about her," Colt says. "I think there is more going on between them than they are letting on."

"Colt!" April says. "How much more could there be? Neither one is in any kind of physical condition to..."

"I'm sure they've talked about it at least," Colt interrupts. "Maybe that's why they went away. They didn't want anyone prying."

Elaine shakes her head, "I don't think that's it, Mr. Wilcox. If they do start a more physical relationship, that isn't our business, but I don't see them trying to run off to do so. Saber is in charge here, he pretty much can do whatever he pleases. I think the stress got to her and to him, so they wanted to go some place quiet. They spend a lot of time talking." Colt gives her a disbelieving look. "Yes, talking Mr. Wilcox. She seems to know him on a level that no one else does or ever has. I don't think she is in this for trying to raise her social status. I've seen her financial statements, she wouldn't need

to be with Saber. I think she truly does love him."

April look up confused, "If she doesn't need the money, then why did she take the job?"

Elaine chuckles, "Saber asked her that one time. She told him because it sounded like a challenge."

They all start laughing. "Now that is an understatement!" April says with a smile. "Saber isn't exactly easy to live with at times. None of us are."

"He has been a bit moody since losing his sight," Colt says. "But since she's been around, he's been more tolerable. She seemed to take the brunt of his bad moods, and yet she actually wants to be around him. That blows my mind."

"Love can make people do things, Mr. Wilcox," Elaine says with a smile.

"But does he feel the same way?" Robin asks.

Commander Eagle nods, "I think so. The way he is around her, the tone he uses when he talks to her, I think he is in love with her. I think they both were trying to deny it for a while, but after everything that's happened, I think it's made them closer."

"I agree, Commander. I'm glad someone else sees what I did," Elaine says. "Sometimes I was tempted to just ask him outright, but I have stopped myself. The night at the hospital when they inadvertently admitted their relationship, I'm not sure they were quite to the point they claimed to be."

Commander Eagle laughs, "I got the same impression. I think Saber said more than he intended, realizing too late what he had said. Amanda didn't want anyone making the issue worse, so she stepped in and saved face." Elaine nods and he continues, "I talked to her for a while that night and she was rather noncommittal about the whole thing. But the next time I saw them together, it was obvious that there was something deeper there, so I figured they talked after no one was around."

"What did Saber say?" April asks intrigued.

"I had made a comment about him being a bit moody, and he snapped back saying something like, 'How would you feel if someone broke into your home and assaulted you and your girlfriend?' When Thomas, Elaine, and I all asked if he was referring to Ms. Kelly as his girlfriend, he sort of panicked, realizing just what he had said. Amanda covered for him rather quickly, saying that they hadn't wanted anyone to know yet, or something like that." Commander Eagle replies, getting shocked and amused looks from the others.

"Oh I wish I had been in the room." Colt muses laughing.

"Okay, back to the current situation. We don't know where they are. We have an educated guess, but we need her address." April says trying to get everyone back to

the present. "Father, can you get that for us?" April asks. He nods and heads to his room to retrieve the information. She then looks to Colt, "Can you try Amanda's phone again once we're in the sitting room and I get the laptop ready?" Colt nods. "Good, let's move to the other room." she says getting up and heading to the sitting room. She plugs in her laptop and some other equipment and starts booting everything up.

A few minutes later, Commander Eagle comes down holding some papers. "Here's her address, April." he says as he hands the papers to April.

"Well, at least we have it, although I have no idea how far that is from here," she replies looking over the papers.

Elaine comes over and looks over her shoulder, "That's about an hour's drive from here. Not a lot out that way for another thirty minutes past there for stores and such."

"A good place to go if you want to be alone," Fireball says.

"A good place to be attacked and not have anyone notice right away," Colt says quietly. The others look up. "What? It is. If I wanted to get a mark, I'd wait until they were off in a place like that. Less likely to put up much of a fight if they know help is too far away," he states matter-of-factly, getting a worried look from Elaine.

April starts to speak when Commander Eagle holds his hands up to quiet everyone, "No need to panic just yet. They both have good instincts, and I will be informed if there are any changes with the case or if his attorney or anyone else contacts Mr. McCully. The note they left said they would contact us in a couple of days, right?" Elaine nods. "It hasn't quite been two days yet. Let's get everything set up to try and track her phone, then after lunch, once I've talked with the people at Calvary Command, if we still have not heard from them, we will try and track them down." Everyone shifts uneasily, but nods. "Okay, we're agreed. I'm going to make a few calls, then after lunch if there is still no word from them, we'll decide on our next course of action."

Later that afternoon they meet up again. "Now, can we try calling them again?" April asks impatiently.

Commander Eagle holds up a hand, "I should let you know what is going on with Mr. McCully. The lawyer is appealing the convictions. The judge however refuses to release him. Saying that he is a flight risk, among other things."

"That's good, right?" April asks.

He nods, "It just means we don't have to directly fear him. However, I had some people looking into his lawyer. The lawyer is actually his uncle. So this is a family that takes the conviction personally."

"That explains the lawyer's attitude towards Ms. Kelly." Elaine says thinking aloud.

"Yes, and that makes me a little more uneasy about the two of them being off without some sort of protection," Commander Eagle says. "Now April, are you set up to try and trace the call to Ms. Kelly's phone?"

"Yes Father, I am," April replies and then turns to Colt, "Anytime you're ready, Cowboy."

Colt nods and takes the phone and dials Amanda's phone. Ringing is heard then voicemail picks up. "Damn!" He mutters. A beep is heard. "Saber, Amanda. If you get this, call home immediately. We need to know that you're okay." Colt says and then hangs up. "Did you track it?" he asks looking to April.

April nods, "It is not exact. I lost the signal, almost like they went into a place that's encased in metal or something."

"So where are they?" Colt asks impatiently.

"In the town Elaine was referring to about two hours from here," April replies. "But now that I've got her phone's signature, I should be able to see where they go once they come out of whatever building they're currently in."

"Good. Let me know if they start leaving the town and heading away from Amanda's place. I'm going to head towards her place," Colt says standing up.

"Colt, give me a few more minutes and I should get an exact ping on their location," April says. "It'll save time in the long run if you know the route they're on."

Colt sighs. "Fine. I'm going to go pack a few things. I'll come see if you've tracked them before I leave," he heads upstairs.

"So, can you actually watch their movements, April?" Fireball asks looking over her shoulder.

She nods, "Yeah. See right here?" she points to a blinking red dot on the screen. "That's their last known location." As she points to it, the dot turns green and starts moving. "Now they've started moving again. The dot is green when they are moving."

"Cool. Looks like they didn't go too far. Should we try calling again, while the dot is green?" Fireball asks.

"Yeah. Hit redial and see what happens. It's worth a try." She replies not looking up. Fireball dials and the phone rings once and goes to a fast busy signal. "The dot just vanished," April says annoyed.

"Not good," Commander Eagle says in a worried tone.

"It could just be that her phone died," April says trying to ease the tension that's building. "Remember her charger is still in her room."

About an hour later Colt comes down in his uniform suit a pack over his shoulder and is obviously armed.

"Expecting much trouble, Colt?" Fireball asks looking him over with a smirk.

"I would rather be over prepared. I don't know who I'm fighting, so I would want to be ready for anything," Colt replies.

"Colt, I think your best plan is to head towards Amanda's. If you get there and it's obvious that they have been there, head towards the other town where they were last known to be. Maybe you'll get lucky and pass them on the road. It'd be rather hard to miss Steed with two passengers," April says.

"I know how to track people, April," Colt says annoyed. "I did this for a living. I was considered one of the best on the New Frontier."

"I'm sorry, Colt. I'm just worried."

"I'll find them. I give you my word," He says nodding to her.

"Keep your com-link open. If we find any news or hear from them we'll let you know," Commander Eagle says. "Take care."

"Sir!" Colt says, then goes to Robin and kisses her lightly. "I'll be back." He turns and heads out the door.

Several hours pass and no word from anyone. Everyone is edgy. Elaine comes in and offers tea and cake, "We need to not focus on waiting will mess with your heads. It's after dinnertime now. The cowboy is probably on his way towards town now. Has anyone tried contacting him?"

"I'll try getting him on his com-link," April says and activates her link. "Hey cowboy, anything to report?"

A minute passes before a reply is heard, "So impatient. I didn't have any real news, so I hadn't called yet. I am fairly certain they are staying at Amanda's place. The house looks like it has been lived in recently. There is fresh food and lights on. However, they are not currently there. I found Steed in an out building, so whatever mode of transport they are using, it's not him. I'm heading towards the town now. But there is a lot of traffic on the road, so there is a chance I've passed them, given I have no clue what type of vehicle to look for. It's getting dark, so I may stay in town tonight and do some poking around. Perhaps I'll find out where they've been and what they've been up to."

"Okay, Colt. I'm sorry for bothering you. I'll call back if we hear anything. We'll try and take the no news is good news approach. April out," she closes the connection. "Well, what now?" she asks looking to her father.

"As you said. Take the wait and see approach. We know they have access to a safe

place, and that they are eating, so we'll hope Colt catches up to them soon. As for now, it's getting late. I say we take turns watching the monitors and listening for contact from Colt. Tomorrow, we can decide what to do with any information he uncovers," Commander Eagle replies.

"I'll take first watch," April offers. "I'll be okay until one or two."

"I'll take the second then," Fireball states.

They all make arrangements and then head off for the night, leaving April to do her stretch of the watch.

Kapitel 15: Just Another Day In Paradise

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 14: Just Another Day In Paradise

"Amanda, did you ever charge your phone?" Saber asks as he heads into the kitchen.

She looks up from the stove, "Oops. I never did find my charger. I think I left it at your place."

He chuckles as he comes over and kisses her cheek. "I left my phone charging on my dresser, so I bet we get yelled at when we return," he says amused.

Amanda leans against him, "I'm sorry. I can go and put it in the car to charge. I have a car charger."

"I can do that for you. You finish cooking, it smells rather good," he replies.

She hands him the phone from her pocket, "Thank you. It should only take a couple of hours to charge."

He heads out and finds the charger in the car and connects the phone, placing it in the console before heading back in, just as she places the food on the table, "What are we having?"

"Potato soup and fresh bread," she says as she pulls a loaf from the oven.

"You spoil me, you know that?" he replies with a smile.

"I try," she replies back grinning.

Later that evening they are changing for bed. Amanda comes out of the bathroom and sits on the bed beside Saber. "Oh damn. I forgot the phone," she says with a sigh and starts to get up.

Saber laughs. "They can wait another day. But we'd better call first thing in the morning, and be ready to be lectured," he says amused, pulling her against him.

She snuggles against him and nods, "The yelling I can handle. The hardest thing for me is going to be sleeping in my own room again. When we go back."

He holds her tighter and kisses her lightly, "Why would you have to? I'd dare anyone to

raise an objection. You are welcome to share a room with me when we return, if you wish," he says quietly, brushing a hand through her hair.

She looks up to him and smiles, "Seriously?"

He nods. "I'm completely serious, Amanda," he leans down and kisses her again then she snuggles her head against his chest. "Good night, Amanda," he says into her hair.

"Goodnight, Saber," she replies sleepily.

A sound downstairs jolts Saber awake. He jostles Amanda gently. "Wake up, Love, I think someone is in the house," he whispers as she stirs. She's instantly awake and slips out of bed, grabbing her sword. He does the same. They meet at the foot of the bed. "Go to the door and open it slowly. Keep the light off," he says quietly.

"Okay," she replies in a low whisper. They get to the door and she opens it slowly. Making their way to the stairs, she holds a hand out to stop him, leaning close to his ear, "Try to step on the third step against the railing. Otherwise, it'll squeak," she mouths. He nods and they make their way down slowly.

They get to the door to the kitchen and hear movement. Gripping his sword, he pushes the door open quietly. Amanda enters first, slinking in behind the intruder. Saber comes up to the intruder, placing his sword to his throat. "Turn around arms extended," he says firmly.

The intruder stops and turns around slowly, arms in the air. "You can still sneak up on me, even blind, eh Saber?" Colt replies amused.

"Colt?" Saber and Amanda say simultaneously.

"Sorry for the intrusion. But you two are hard to get a hold of," he says grinning.

Saber and Amanda lower their swords. "Let's move to the living room, where we can sit more comfortably," Amanda says quietly.

"So how did you find this place?" Amanda asks as they sit down.

"Well, I got the address from Commander Eagle. I came here yesterday, but you weren't here. I could tell that you had been here. April tracked your cell phone to the town about an half an hour out, so I went snooping for you. From what I discovered, you two have been busy. To the bank, to buy a sword, a few restaurants, groceries, oh, and some kid tried to rob you," Colt says with a chuckle. "I heard you scared him off, Amanda."

"And this is a crime?" Saber asks annoyed. "You wake us in the middle of the night for this?"

Colt looks between them a smile growing on his face, "Did...did I get the two of you from something?"

Saber sighs, "Yeah, a good night's sleep, Cowboy. Now, could you please call the others and tell them we're fine. You can sleep on the couch tonight. We'll talk more in the morning." Colt starts to make a comment. "After daylight, Colt. Now make the bloody call."

Colt grins and nods and activates his Com-link. Fireball replies. "What you got for me, Cowboy?"

"I've found them. They are safe and armed," he adds with a chuckle. "Not too happy that I woke them up in the middle of the night, but-"

"Can we please talk in the morning?" Saber interrupts annoyed.

"Yes, if you promise not to run off during the night, I'm amenable to that. I want the two of you to return here first thing, Captain Rider., Commander Eagle says firmly over the com-link.

Saber sighs, "Yes sir. We will head out after breakfast. Thank you," Saber replies a little less hostile.

"Very good. Eagle out."

The connection terminates and Colt looks back to Saber and Amanda. "Got any blankets?" he asks with a smile.

"I'll get them," Amanda says and heads up the stairs, coming back a few minutes later carrying an armload of blankets and a pillow. She tosses it to him. "Good night, Colt," she says as she turns back to the stairs, Saber getting up to follow.

"Try not to make too much noise. I hear everything," Saber says.

"Where are you sleeping, Saber?" Colt asks.

"Upstairs," he replies as he makes his way up the stairs. He enters the bedroom and heads to the bed, resting his sword on the floor against the side of the bed before stretching out on the bed.

Amanda slips into bed and snuggles against him. "Guess we're going back tomorrow, huh?" she asks sounding disappointed.

He wraps his arms around her and sighs, "So it appears. I was hoping we'd get a chance to return to the bank before we returned to my place. I wanted you to get your coat of arms. I was going to have it cleaned so you could wear it, as I do mine."

"Not likely they'll let us out of their sights now," Amanda says quietly.

"I know," he replies with a sigh. "I get the feeling something is off. Why would they go to all of that trouble to find us after only a couple of days?"

"I guess we'll find out in a couple of hours," Amanda replies. "Good night, Saber," she says barely awake.

"Good night, Amanda," he replies barely a whisper, kissing her head before falling asleep.

The next morning they wake to the smell of food cooking. "Colt must be in a hurry to leave," Amanda groans pressing her head firmly against Saber's chest..

"I suppose we should head down there," Saber says with a sigh.

"We could make him come and get us," Amanda suggests with a smirk.

"I'm sure that would go over well," Saber says smiling.

"True." Amanda sighs, "Let's get dressed before he comes in here," she says as she reluctantly gets up.

A few minutes later they head downstairs to the kitchen. "I was just about to come and get you two, sleep well?" Colt asks.

"Yes, very well," Amanda says. "And you Colt?"

"I'll sleep better tonight," he replies.

"I'm sure you will," Saber mutters and they all sit and eat.

"Colt," Amanda says. "We have some unfinished business in town."

"No way, we have to get back to Saber's place," he says interrupting her.

"Colt, what's going on?" Saber asks.

"Look, someone heard Sean and his lawyer talking, and it sounds like they may have something planned. They're trying to have a retrial, and trying to get Sean out until the next trial. Also, it turns out that the lawyer is his uncle, so we got worried about you, especially after we couldn't get a hold of you."

Amanda gasps, "That explains why my place was ransacked when we arrived."

"What?" Colt says surprised.

"When we got here my place had been turned over, stuff was everywhere," Amanda replies.

"And you didn't think that was a bit odd?" Colt asks.

"I thought maybe some city kids came out here looking for something valuable to

sell," Amanda says.

"Happen before?" Colt asks.

Amanda nods, "Last time was when my dad was alive. He loaded some buckshot into his 12-gauge and shot near them," she chuckles. "Hadn't had a problem since."

"Well, after what it took for me to find you, I'm not letting you two go into town alone," Colt says between bites.

"Then you can come with us and play bodyguard," Amanda says.

"That's not what I meant," Colt says.

"Well, we're going into town, Colt," Saber says, "If you don't want us to go alone, you'd better get moving." Saber and Amanda head toward the car.

"Dagnabit!" Colt says, tossing his hat to the ground in frustration, then hearing the car start up grabs his hat and runs out after them. "Wait up!" he yells at the car as it's backing out.

Amanda stops and he jumps into the back. "He told you to get moving," she says after he's in and shuts the door. She then backs out and starts towards town.

"So what y'all need in town?" Colt asks. "You two goin' to elope?" he says teasingly.

"You know," Amanda says. "I honestly hadn't thought about that."

"Certainly not the worst idea you've come up with, Cowboy," Saber says with a smirk.

"I believe we need a witness to elope," Amanda says fighting the urge to smile.

"We just happen to have one in the back of the car," Saber states, pointing towards Colt.

"Hey, wait I was just kidding," Colt says quickly.

"I believe the courthouse opens at eight," Amanda says.

"Yes, and what time does the bank open?" Saber asks.

"Nine," Amanda says. "We should arrive right after opening and get what we need, then we can go to the courthouse, and elope. We can use your place for the honeymoon, since I'm sure we won't be allowed to leave for a couple weeks anyways," Amanda says as she pulls up to the bank. "See, just like I said, right after nine."

"Guard the car, Cowboy, and don't go far, we're going to need you as a witness," Saber says as he gets out of the car and he and Amanda enter the bank.

"You know he's going to call the other's and tell them what we said," Amanda says grinning.

"Do you think they'll believe a word of it?" Saber asks.

"Not a chance," Amanda replies laughing.

"April, Fireball, Commander Eagle, somebody come in," Colt says frantically into his com-link.

"Colt?" Fireball says through the com. "What's the matter? Why aren't you back here with them yet?"

"I have a bit of a situation here," he replies.

"What's the matter?" Fireball replies worried. "Is something wrong?"

"I think Amanda and Saber are going to elope!" Colt says and then he hears nothing on the com-link. "Fireball, do you read me?"

"Yeah," Fireballs says, trying not to laugh. "I'm going to get April."

"Fireball!" Colt screams. "Oh come on, I don't have all day here!"

Saber and Amanda come back out of the bank, and get into the car. "We need to go to the jewelery store now," Amanda says as she backs out of her spot.

"What?" Colt says shocked. "Why?"

"Why else would we go to a jewelery store, Colt?" Saber asks nonchalantly.

"But... but... but," Colt stammers.

"Here we are," Amanda says as they park at the jewelery store.

"We'll be right back, Cowboy, stay put," Saber says as they head inside.

"You know, we're being really mean," Amanda says.

"Nothing that he doesn't deserve," Saber says with a smirk.

"Colt?" April says over the com. "Are you there?"

"Oh thank goodness," Colt says "I'm here April, you have to help me!"

"What's the matter Colt?" April asks.

"Saber and Amanda, I think they're going to elope. They're in a jewelery store now," Colt says practically in a panic.

"A jewellery store?" April asks. "What are you talking about?"

"They said they had some errands they had to run in town, so I came with them. On the way, I jokingly asked if they were going to elope, and they seemed to like the idea, said they needed a witness, and that it was me. Then they went to the bank and then they went to the jewellery store, what do you think is going on?" he replies exasperated.

"I hardly think that Amanda and Saber are going to elope, Colt." April says over the com. Elaine is walking past and hears the last part of the conversation.

"What's that you say?" Elaine asks. "Saber and Amanda are going to elope?"

"That's what Colt claims," April replies.

"Saber's father would roll over in his grave if he did," Elaine states quietly. "If they wish to marry, they should do so properly."

"Wouldn't the thought of that make Saber do it anyway?" April asks.

"I didn't think about that. I suppose it's possible," Elaine says.

"Listen Colt," April says over the com. "You have to stop them if they try to elope, you hear me?"

"Roger that, April," Colt says as he closes the connection. He looks up and sees Saber and Amanda exit the jewellery store and bump into someone that looks sort of familiar to him.

"Richard?" Sincia says. "Is that you?" she asks surprised.

"Sincia?" Saber asks hesitantly.

"So you remember me now?" Sincia asks coldly.

"Yes, most of my memory has returned," he replies simply.

"And what of your vision?" She asks looking him over.

Saber shakes his head, "Still not very good."

"Who is this?" Sincia asks eyeing Amanda as if she were diseased.

"My name is Amanda Kelly, nice to meet you, ma'am." Amanda says flashing a polite smile. Saber tightens his grip on Amanda's arm, pulling her a bit closer to him.

"I see. So Sean was telling the truth," Sincia mutters looking between Saber and Amanda. "Well, I'd like you to meet Sven Swadjen, my fiance."

"Swadjen?" Saber says. "The descendants of the Swiss Royalty?" he asks surprised.

"Ja," Sven says.

"Congratulations. I wish the best for you, Sincia," Saber says civilly.

"I'm sorry Richard, but we are in a hurry, perhaps some other time we could catch up more?" Sincia asks.

"Of course, I'll look forward to it," Saber says trying to remain civil.

"So will I," Sincia says. "Good meeting you, Ms. Kelly."

"Good meeting you too," Amanda says and she and Saber head to the car and get in.

"Was that Sincia?" Colt asks.

"Yes it was," Saber answers.

"Well, nobody's dead, so I guess it went well," Colt says.

"Come on, let's go," Amanda says and they head off.

"You guys aren't really goin' to elope are you?" Colt asks worried.

"Don't worry Colt," Amanda says. "If we elope we won't include you."

"That's good," Colt says relieved. "Hey wait a minute!"

Saber and Amanda both laugh. "Don't worry, Colt. We aren't eloping...today," Saber says taking a breath. "We don't want someone to come after you for not being able to stop us."

"You two had me going. That's not very nice, ya know," Colt says a bit dejected.

"I'm sorry we drug you along for such a long time, Cowboy. It wasn't fair to you. But it was funny as Hell watching you squirm," Amanda says, flashing a mischievous grin.

Colt shakes his head, "You two deserve each other."

They arrive back at Amanda's and she pulls into the garage. "I thought we were going back to Saber's?" Colt asks.

"We will. After we get a few things from the house. We have to take Steed back anyways," Saber replies as he gets out of the car.

They head into the house and Saber starts to head upstairs.

"Where do you think you're going?" Colt asks.

"To get my bag. Amanda didn't really bring anything, since this is her place," Saber replies.

"I'll go and get it for you. I don't think going up and down the stairs after all of the walking you did is such a good idea. What room is it in?" Colt says.

"The bedroom at the top of the stairs on the left," Saber says and goes to sit down on the couch. "Everything is packed, just need to bring it down."

Colt nods and heads up the stairs.

"Where's Colt?" Amanda asks coming from the kitchen.

"He went to get my bag. He was rather insistent," Saber replies.

"Ah. I wonder if he'll notice that we both have been in the same room?" She asks amused.

Saber shrugs, "I don't care if he does. I dare him to make an issue of it. I'm not ashamed of being with you."

"I know that, Saber," she says, sitting down beside him.

Colt enters the bedroom and looks around. He sees that Amanda's bed clothes are tossed onto a chair and then he spots Saber's bag on the bed. "Looks like two people were sleeping here," he says with a smirk. He shakes his head and grabs the bag, and heads down the stairs. "Is this everything?" he asks holding up the bag.

"Yes, that's all I brought, Colt," Saber replies as he and Amanda stand up. "Would you mind loading it into your Bronco Buster? It would make it easier to travel without it."

"Sure thing," he says with a smirk, eyeing them closely. "You two go on and mount up, I'll load up and follow you."

About an hour later, they arrive back at the Rider's estate. Everyone is finishing lunch when they arrive. "I'm glad you're both back safe, sir," Thomas says as he takes Steed to the stables.

"I'm sorry if we worried you. It was not our intention," Saber replies.

Elaine comes over and looks both Saber and Amanda over carefully, "I must admit that you both do look a bit more relaxed, although a little tired. Come inside and have some lunch. I saved you some." She leads them inside, Saber limping a bit more and leaning on the cane.

They reach the dining room and he plops down into a chair. "I think riding may not have been the best thing to do. I'm really sore now," Saber says the fatigue obvious in

his voice.

Elaine comes over to him, setting a plate down of sandwiches and two empty plates for him and Amanda, who just enters the kitchen, her arm back in the sling and sits down beside him. "So, did you two manage to get some rest?" Elaine asks casually

"Yes, we did, Elaine," Saber replies sounding a bit irritable.

Amanda places a hand on his arm, "Are you all right?"

"I'm hurting more than I have the last couple of days. It makes me a bit annoyed," Saber replies.

"Do you want to take something?" Elaine asks.

"After I eat. I may take something and lay down," Saber replies.

"I suppose I spoiled you with the car. I'm feeling all of the driving now that I've stopped," Amanda says as she finishes her sandwich.

"Why don't you both go and rest. I'll bring your pills to you," Elaine offers.

"I've got some in my dresser, Elaine. I'll just take one of those," Saber says. "Perhaps you could wake one of us a little before dinner?"

"I took one just before I came down, so I'll be fine once I rest for a little. I do think I'll take an ice pack with me though, if that's okay," Amanda says.

Elaine looks between them a moment and nods, "Of course. Both of you go and rest. I'll make sure no one bothers you."

"Thank you," they reply in unison.

Amanda stands up and offers her hand to Saber, "Want me to help you upstairs?"

He stands up and takes her hand, "Sure. Thank you."

They make their way upstairs and she stops at his door. "Here's your room, Saber," Amanda says quietly.

"My offer stands, Amanda. You may join me here if you wish. I don't care what anyone thinks or says," Saber says, still gripping her hand.

Amanda nods, "If you're sure," he nods and they both enter his room and kick off their shoes before climbing into bed. She snuggles against him and he kisses her lightly, "Sleep well." They both quickly drift to sleep.

Commander Eagle is just coming up the stairs when he sees both Saber and Amanda enter Saber's room. Curious, he walks to the door and listens for a moment. He hears

soft talking, then nothing after about a minute. He looks around and heads towards the kitchen, looking for Elaine.

Elaine is cleaning the kitchen when Commander Eagle walks in. "Ah Elaine, I see that Saber and Ms. Kelly have made it back safely," he states as he walks in.

"Oh, have you spoken to them, Commander?" she asks as she finishes washing the dishes.

"No, but I just saw them head to Saber's room," he replies.

She stops and looks up. "Both of them?" she asks.

He nods, "Yes. They were just entering the room and closing the door when I reached the top of the stairs. I don't think they even saw me."

"Perhaps there was some truth to what the Cowboy said earlier," she mumbles to herself more than to him.

"What truth would that be?" the commander asks curious.

"That Saber intends to marry Ms. Kelly," she replies.

"I know they slept together at her place," Colt says as he enters the kitchen.

"For a fact?" the commander asks.

Colt nods, "Yep. I went to retrieve Saber's bag and it was in Amanda's room. There was only one bed and it was obvious that they both had been in the bed."

Elaine shakes her head, "I know he loves her, and I want him to be happy. I just know his father would be so mad right now at him," she says quietly.

"His parent's aren't here now. I say let him run his own life," Colt says looking between the Commander and Elaine.

"I'm inclined to go with your opinion on this, Mr. Wilcox," the commander says. "However, Saber is from a different culture, sometimes here things are different," he adds looking to Elaine.

Elaine nods, "But as you said, his parents are gone, and the one he was betrothed to broke off their contract by no fault of his, so I guess if his parents were alive they might allow the relationship."

"That Sincia lady ran into him today. When they were coming out of the jewelry store," Colt says.

"Oh?" Elaine asks looking over to him.

Colt nods, "Yeah. She was with some other man. They seemed to be very cozy. She seemed to grab onto him tighter when she realized Saber was there. I wish I had been where I could have heard what was said. I asked him if it was her when they got back in the car. All he replied was 'Yeah.' So I guess she's with someone else."

"So perhaps he's doing this out of spite," Commander Eagle says.

"I don't think so, commander. He and Amanda were already sharing that room before they met up with her. It was a totally by chance meeting," Colt replies. "Besides, I think he really cares for Amanda, I don't see him as the type to sleep with someone unless he loved them."

Elaine nods, "I'm rather fond of her myself. She seems to have a good head on her shoulders, and as you said, seems to be genuinely concerned for his welfare. Perhaps after while I will go and try to talk to him. I don't want them running off and doing something either one of them would later regret."

"Would you rather I talk with him, Elaine? It might come better from me, as a superior. Rather than you as a sort of mother figure to him," Commander Eagle offers.

Elaine thinks for a minute. "Let me try first. If he seems resistant to talking with me, I'll let you know. I'm not going to tell him they can't be together, I think it's well past that. I just want them to go about things properly." Commander Eagle nods. "I'll finish the dishes and a couple other things, then see if he's awake," Elaine says as she heads off.

Colt looks to Commander Eagle, "Any news on Sean?"

"Not a thing," he replies as they head into the sitting room where April and Robin are talking. They sit down. "I am glad that they are back here where we can offer them some protection."

"They seemed to be fine at her place. They both had swords," Colt replies.

"Both of them?" April asks. "I thought Amanda had never touched one before."

"I think Saber had it made for her. They went to a shop and picked one up. The owner told me it was a custom order, but wouldn't say anything else about it," Colt replies.

April laughs, "I guess he does love her. I don't see him buying something so personal unless he was serious about her. A sword instead of a ring," she laughs.

Colt laughs, "I could see that. More his style."

April laughs, "If we find out that it is the case, I am so going to tease him."

Elaine takes the back stairway to Saber's door and knocks softly. "Saber?" she says waiting for a reply. After a minute, she hears some sort of reply and tries the handle. It's unlocked so she enters the darkened room, closing the door behind her, "Saber?"

"Elaine?" he responds sleepily. "Is it dinner time already?"

"No, but I wanted to talk to you." she says heading towards the window.

He can tell she's headed for the window, seeing her shadow, "Elaine, can we talk like this?"

She stops and turns towards him, "Are you all right? Is the light bothering you more?"

"Well, somewhat. But I don't want you to wake Amanda. She's sleeping peacefully finally," he replies quietly. "Can you just pull a chair up and we'll talk. I already have a good idea what this is about."

"Um, sure," she says hesitantly as she pulls a chair up to the bed beside him. "Are you..."

"Dressed?" he offers, "Yes, Elaine. It's not like that. We are not...physically intimate, if that is what you want to know. We share a bed, but that is all. At this point anyways," he adds as an afterthought.

Elaine nods, "I know things have been happening fast, but I don't want you to make a choice that could hurt either of you. I am fond of Ms. Kelly and do not want her to be hurt more than she has been already."

Saber sighs, "I don't intend to do anything to hurt her, Elaine. And I'm well aware of the objection you have but you won't voice to me."

"And what is it you think I object to?" Elaine asks.

"Her social status," he replies quietly.

"I honestly want you to be happy, Saber. I'm not sure what your parents would think of the past year's events, but perhaps they would have understood. You had every intention of fulfilling your duty. I know that."

"Yes, I would have tried, Elaine. But this is different. Also there are some things that I want you to know. But I want you, Thomas, Amanda and myself to discuss them, and not while we're like this." Amanda stirs a bit and Saber whispers to her, "Amanda, Elaine is here. How are you feeling?"

Amanda moves a bit more and looks around, "Huh?" she asks half awake.

"How is your shoulder?" Saber asks.

"Still sore, but I'm not throwing up from the pain now," she replies weakly.

Saber nods, "Do you think you're up to that conversation we knew was coming?"

Amanda sighs, "It really is unavoidable, isn't it?"

"Yes," Saber says.

"I'm ready as I'm going to be then," Amanda says.

"Are we going to have this discussion here?" Elaine asks.

"Let's go to the study," Saber says. "That way we can all be comfortable. Would you mind getting Thomas and

Commander Eagle too? I'd like to get this over with as quickly as possible."

"Of course," Elaine goes to get the others. A while later they are all sitting in the Study.

"Saber, I want you to know that I don't object to you and Ms. Kelly having a relationship, which I'm sure is what you are thinking." Elaine begins.

"Okay. I want you to speak freely here," he replies hesitantly, waiting to see where the conversation goes.

"What I object to is that you keep taking off alone together. We know so little about you, Ms. Kelly that we need to know about your family, your background, your education, just more than we know now. I know that you are not here with the intent of improving your social status. I saw the records you submitted at the trial. But because of who Saber is, an unfortunate problem is that he must choose wisely who he is to spend his life with."

"It is how his family has survived for so many centuries," Thomas adds quietly. "It is why most are betrothed as children. To insure the integrity of the family lines."

Saber sighs in thought, trying to decide how to begin, "Amanda is a good person. She has more than proven her loyalty to me and this family. If my parents were still living, and I had been injured as I was in the fighting and released from my betrothal from Sincia, as I am now, I think they would understand my choice." Elaine goes to speak and he holds up a hand to stop her, "That having been said, you are correct, you know very little about Amanda. Amanda has learned some things about herself these past few months and in the past week. One of your...objections is that she is not of noble blood, correct?"

"Actually, since she is financially independent that doesn't really become an issue. But not knowing her background could become a problem for future generations," Thomas replies.

Amanda looks to Saber, tugging at her chain giving him a look. He nods and she pulls out the necklace from under her shirt. "Perhaps this will help shed some light on my background," she says as she removes the necklace and hands it to Thomas.

He takes the necklace and studies the pendant, "This looks...authentic. I thought that family had died out years ago." He passes the necklace to Elaine who looks between Thomas, Saber and Amanda after studying the pendant.

"We had it inspected, it is authentic," Saber says.

"Wh... Where did this come from?" Elaine asks as she returns the necklace to Amanda.

"It was my mother's ma'am. Evidently that necklace has been passed down between firstborn daughters for several generations. My mother died when I was an infant. I was raised by my father. He had stowed the necklace in a safety deposit box along with a letter explaining it's significance with the intent on me finding it when the time was right. I had no idea. I never knew my mother's family. He said they lost contact with them after they married. My father taught me a lot of things. So yes, I am rather self-sufficient. Financially and otherwise. As for my intentions with Saber, I hope we end up together, but I will not force the issue. I am willing to leave if that is what everyone feels is best. It is not my desire to complicate matters."

Saber places a hand on her arm, "My desire is to be with you, Amanda. Regardless of what they say. I do respect each of your opinions, but as it is my life, I am free to decide my fate. And since circumstances are what they are, and I have fallen in love with you, my desire is to hopefully make a life with you, Amanda." There is a stunned silence in the room for several minutes.

"Saber, are you proposing to her?" Elaine asks after finding her voice.

Saber nods slightly, "I suppose I am."

"Seriously Saber?" Amanda asks taken aback.

"I'm afraid that I don't have a ring or anything right now," Saber says quietly, "But I'm quite serious."

"Saber..." Amanda says "Of course I'll marry you," she kisses his cheek.

"If you two are going to insist on following through with this, then you'll need to retrieve the ancestral engagement ring," Elaine says.

Saber looks confused, "Ancestral engagement ring?"

"It has been used for the official engagement of your family for generations," Elaine says.

Saber nods, "Of course, tradition should be upheld when it can be. Where can I find this ring?"

Elaine looks down at her hands, "Well, sir, um..."

Saber sighs, "Sincia has it, doesn't she?"

"Yes sir," Elaine says quietly.

"We'll just ask her to return it, right?" Saber says.

"I'm afraid that I'm not letting either of you leave the grounds until we know more about Mr. McCully's situation. I have reports of his lawyer talking to some shady people, none of which are known clients of his," Commander Eagle says.

"I understand," Saber says. "We'll remain here, sir."

"What about the ring?" Elaine asks.

"I'm not letting it go that easy," Saber says. "Thomas, you would be able to recognize the ring if you saw it, right?"

"Of course sir," Thomas says. "I was there when your parents gave it to Sincia's parents to make the betrothal official."

"Could you go to Sincia's in my place and get the ring?" Saber asks.

"I'd be honored, sir," Thomas says standing up.

"Sending him out would not be the best idea, Saber," Commander Eagle says. "Mr. McCully's associates might be waiting for an opportunity like that."

"I was going to ask one of the others to escort him," Saber says.

"I suppose that would be all right," Commander Eagle says.

"Where are the others?" Saber asks.

"I believe Colt and Robin went out to the range, and that Fireball and April went to training room to try some of their exercises," Elaine answers.

"So I take it you have no further issues with this?" Saber asks.

"I don't like the fact that you two are sharing a room, and not married," Elaine says and sees the look Saber gives her. "But, she's good for you, so as long as you're willing to go about everything else properly I'll ignore it."

"Thank you, Elaine," Saber says as he gets up. "Amanda, would you like to come with me to talk to the others?"

"Of course," Amanda says as she gets up and they head out. "So who are you going to ask first?"

Saber sighs, "Colt. From what I gather he's in the best shape."

"Let's see how that goes," she says wryly.

They walk to the firing range where Robin has just finished setting up some target's for Colt, who is blindfolded. She walks over to him and removes the blindfold, holds up a stopwatch "Go!" she starts the stopwatch as she says the word. Colt turns around, drawing his gun as he does and fires off six shots in rapid succession, knocking down the targets. "Fifteen seconds," Robin says.

"I'm back up to par," Colt says with a grin. "Thanks for the help," he kisses her.

Saber claps, "Well done, Cowboy."

"Well, if it isn't the two practical jokers," Colt says mockingly. "To what do we owe this visit?"

"I've come to ask you a favor," Saber says hesitantly.

"Excuse me?" Colt says shocked. "I don't believe I heard that quite right."

Saber sighs, "I said I need a favor."

"Okay, what is this favor?" Colt asks looking between the two of them.

"I need someone to escort Thomas to retrieve something from Sincia," Saber replies.

"What is he retrieving?" Colt asks suspiciously.

"A family heirloom of mine that she has," Saber states.

"I'm sure it can wait." Colt says.

"Please Colt?" Amanda asks.

"It can't be so important that it can't wait a few weeks. You've gone without it for this long," Colt says

Robin sees the look that passes between Saber and Amanda and gasps quietly and whispers, "It's an engagement ring."

Colt looks at his wife and quietly says, "You've got to be kidding me."

Robin shakes her head and whispers, "What else could Sincia have that Saber would care about so much?"

Colt shakes his head, "I need to know exactly what I would be going after, Saber."

"When our parents made the arrangements for our betrothal, her parents were given an ancestral engagement ring. I need you and Thomas to retrieve it," he replies.

"You plannin' on putting it on someone more deserving?" Colt asks. Saber nods and Colt looks between the two of them.

"I've already said yes, Colt," Amanda says seeing the look.

"I just don't know," Colt says. "How do I know you two aren't yanking my chain again?"

"Colt, I wouldn't ask you to leave the safety of the estate for a joke, you know that," Saber says.

"Then why don't you two tell me what you were doing at the jewelery store?" Colt retorts.

"We found an old piece of jewelery in a safety deposit box that my dad had left for me," Amanda says. "We went to get it cleaned."

Colt scoffs, "Sure, like I'd believe that."

Amanda pulls the necklace out from under her shirt, "The jeweler did a wonderful job on it."

Colt looks at the necklace and whistles, "Wow, you weren't kiddin' they don't make necklaces like that anymore. It was tough getting the gold for our rings, getting gold for a necklace would be near impossible."

"Colt, go and escort Thomas," Robin says. "Make sure he's safe, that's what you do, right?"

"But I just got back, baby," Colt says pitifully.

"I'm sure you won't be leaving til tomorrow." Robin says with a smirk.

Colt grins, "Alright Saber, I'll escort Thomas for you."

"Thank you, Colt. Thank you, Robin," Saber says and he and Amanda go back inside.

Later that evening everyone has finished dinner and has moved to the sitting room. They have gathered and are talking about the unofficial announcement of Saber and Amanda's engagement. "I can't say that I'm surprised," April says smiling. "After the prank you pulled on Colt, I figured it was only a matter of time."

"He set himself up for it," Saber says laughing. "The snide comments, and then when he asked us outright, it just sort of came out. He reacted, so we kept it going for a while."

"He really did make it too easy. The more he squirmed, the more fun it was to play it out," Amanda says.

April laughs, "You two sure did have him stirred up. I thought he was going to have a

panic attack. He almost had me convinced that you two were eloping."

Saber shakes his head, "I had no idea he'd take it so seriously. But the errands we needed to do just worked out to fuel the ploy. It was too convenient, I suppose."

"So why didn't you just ask for the ring when you saw Sincia the other day?" Colt asks suddenly.

Saber looks at him blankly for a moment, "Oh, to be perfectly honest, I had forgotten about the ring. I had only been told about it. I've never actually seen it. It has been in her family's possession since we were children. Besides, I was in a bit of shock from running into her. I also hadn't thought about asking Amanda to marry me at that point. I was only trying to live in the present. I had not given much thought to the future."

Colt nods, "I suppose that was a bit of a shock. And a bit awkward for you, eh?" he asks looking to Amanda.

She shrugs, "A bit strange, but she was with someone else, it's not like I felt threatened by her or anything."

"Not much does threaten you, does it?" Colt asks grinning.

"Not really. Especially now that I'm armed," she adds with a smirk.

Colt laughs, "Yeah, I've met the business end of that sword of yours. Nice piece. Not a traditional engagement gift."

"It wasn't intended as an engagement gift, Colt. I actually intended to give it to her in about a month for her birthday," Saber replies.

Colt looks at him with a blank look for a moment, confused, "You seriously hadn't planned on asking her to marry you before today?"

Saber shakes his head, "I suppose subconsciously I knew that I wanted to be with her, but until we were talking with Thomas and Elaine, I had never actually consciously thought about it."

"So why are you going through with it if it's something you just blurted out?" April asks confused.

"Because it is what I want," Saber replies simply. "If I had taken my time and thought it out, I think I could have planned a little better, and I could have come up with a more formal way of asking Amanda to marry me." He turns and faces Amanda, "And for that, I do apologize."

Amanda shakes her head, "No need to, Saber. You made your intention clear, that's all that matters, isn't it?"

"I suppose you're correct," Saber says.

Early the next morning Colt and Thomas go to set out. "See y'all in about a week," Colt says.

"You stay safe, Cowboy," Saber says shaking his hand. "and thank you," he adds sincerely.

"You can thank me when we return," Colt says.

"You take care of yourself," Robin says as she kisses Colt on the cheek then looks a little pale.

"You okay?" Colt asks concerned.

"Yeah, just think breakfast isn't sitting so well," Robin responds.

"Go lay down, baby," Colt says. "Take care of yourself, I'll be fine."

Robin nods and goes to lay down. Elaine comes up to them. "You'll watch out for Thomas, won't you Colt?" she asks.

"Of course," Colt says "And you'll keep an eye on Robin for me, right?"

"Of course," Elaine says with a nod.

"Come on Thomas, let's go," Colt says and he and Thomas get into the car and head off.

A couple of hours later, a call comes in over the com-link. "Saber, you there?" Colt asks.

"Yeah, I'm here," Saber answers. "What's up?"

"We're just passing Amanda's place, and I don't know how to say this partner, but uh..."

"What is it Colt?"

"It's been torched, the entire estate from the looks of it, you want us to stop and investigate?"

"No, you continue with your mission," Saber says. "We'll get someone to check it out."

"Roger that, Colt out."

Saber sighs and heads to his room, "Amanda?"

Amanda groans, "Is it my turn to listen to the com-link already?"

"No, I'm afraid I have some bad news," he starts hesitantly.

"What?" Amanda asks, suddenly more awake as she sits up.

"Colt and Thomas just passed your property and Colt said..." Saber stops and sighs, "he said it looked like it had been torched."

Amanda sighs "Of course," she just breaks down in tears and Saber sits down beside her and holds her.

At that point Commander Eagle just happens to walk past Saber's room and sees them, "Saber? Is everything okay?"

"No, sir." Saber responds, "Colt just radioed in with some disturbing news."

"Were they attacked?" Commander Eagle asks, obviously concerned.

"No, they were making their way past Amanda's property, and Colt said it appeared like it had been torched," Saber answers.

"No!" Commander Eagle says astonished. "I'll contact Calvary Command, have them send someone to investigate."

"Commander Eagle, sir," Amanda manages between sobs. "I need to go, to see if there's anything left."

Commander Eagle looks conflicted then says, "I'm coming with you."

"No disrespect sir," Saber says. "But when's the last time you used a weapon?"

"Why would you ask that?"

"I figure you want to come with us because you're expecting trouble."

"After you're last expedition, I more just want to make sure that you safe," Commander Eagle says. "And to answer your other question, I still go to the range every week."

"Fine," Saber says. "Get us a car, so that we're all comfortable, and we'll leave in the morning."

Commander Eagle nods, "I'll take the next com shift. You two get some rest. I will contact Calvary Command to see about having a forensic team come to see if they can ascertain a definite cause of the fire. Hopefully, we can get them there tonight, with instructions to set aside anything that could possibly be of any value for you to go through."

"Thank you, sir," Amanda says weakly.

"I'm truly sorry, Ms. Kelly. If we can pin this to anyone even remotely having to do with Mr. McCully, we will prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law," Commander Eagle replies, then heads downstairs.

April looks up to see her father descending the stairs, "What happened to Saber? It's his watch isn't it?"

"Saber is upstairs with Ms. Kelly. Colt called in and said that it appears that her house has burned down. She is rather upset, so he is with her trying to calm her," the commander replies.

"Arson?" she asks.

He nods, "That would be my guess, in light of recent events."

"Thank God they weren't still there," April says.

"I am going to send for a forensic team to investigate the fire. In the morning, Saber, Ms. Kelly, and myself will be going to her place to see if there is anything she can salvage. I am hoping that there will already be a team working when we arrive. I want to get to the cause of it as quickly as possible."

"Would you like us to come along as well?" April asks.

The commander shakes his head, "No. I think you and Shinji should remain here to protect the grounds here as well as Ms. Elaine and Robin. This might just be a ploy to draw Ms. Kelly out in an attempt to harm her. Having you here as back up seems to be a safe plan."

April nods, "We'll do our best to keep this place secure, father."

Kapitel 16: Caught In the Crossfire

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 15: Caught in the Crossfire

The next morning they are pulling up to Amanda's property. There are several trucks and a lot of people all around. Crime scene tape is blocking the entry and they are halted at the edge of the drive by a soldier with a gun, "This is a crime scene, miss. You need to leave."

"This is my property, sir," Amanda states.

Commander Eagle rolls down the back window and holds out his EBU, "I believe this will get us through, soldier."

The soldier looks over the EBU and stands at attention, "Sir! I apologize, I didn't know who you were."

"It's fine. You are doing your job." Commander Eagle replies. The soldier moves the tape and waves them through, "Thank you. Go ahead, Ms. Kelly."

Amanda nods and they continue up the drive, getting as close as they can to the charred remains of the house. "It's all...gone," she says barely a whisper as she fights to remain calm.

They get out of the car and a soldier approaches them, "We believe the fire began over this way " he says as he leads them towards the place where the garage once stood. "From what we have been able to determine, we believe that an accelerant was used to help the fire spread quickly from this building to the main house. If there was anyone in there, they most likely did not make it out."

"There shouldn't have been anyone here. I lived here alone and was away the past several days," Amanda says, looking around at the damage. "May I go through what's left of the house?"

The soldier looks between her and Saber and the commander, "I'm not sure it's really safe for you to be doing, ma'am. You look a bit off balance, and I'm not sure you could find much in there anyways. Whatever they fueled the fire with, heated up extremely fast, so there isn't much left that's even recognizable."

"So you can verify that it was intentionally set?" she asks.

"Yes, ma'am. Of that much we are certain. We are working as fast as we can for any clues to find out who did this. We have a small pile over that way," he nods towards a small area that has been cleared, "of items we think you might be able to recognize. You're welcome to go through it."

"Thank you," she replies and starts to head towards the pile.

Saber reaches for her arm and misses, realizing she's already past him. He sighs, and struggles to make his way in the direction that he felt her turn in. He continues slowly, using the cane to steady himself and check for obstacles. After a minute or so, he hears Amanda crying and makes his way to her. He slowly manages to sit down on the ground beside her and places an arm on her shoulder. "I'm sorry," he says barely a whisper. He feels her sobs continue and sits there holding her, not sure what else to do.

Several minutes pass before Amanda calms down and looks up at him, "I'm sure you're rethinking wanting to be with me now."

Saber shakes his head, "Quite the opposite, actually. It reaffirms that I should be with you. In a way, I sort of feel responsible for this."

She looks up at him and shakes her head, "This is not your fault, Saber. I'm just glad that we weren't still here. Sure, I lost material things, and a lot of priceless memories, but I'm alive. I have no regrets. Except for losing the car," she adds with a smile.

He chuckles, "Understandable. Perhaps we can find you another car to work on. Once your shoulder heals, that is. Maybe you could teach me how to work on them. I've never had a reason to learn."

She smiles weakly, "Seems like a fair trade. You've taught me so much, I'd finally be able to teach you something."

"You have taught me things, Amanda. You gave me self confidence, something that I was lacking after I was injured. You taught me that losing my vision isn't the worst thing that could happen. You've taught me to live. For all of that I cannot repay you. I just wish you didn't have to go through this." She manages a small chuckle. "What?" he asks.

"I suppose I don't have to worry about cleaning out my dad's things now," she says bitterly as she sifts through the few items in the pile that are somewhat recognizable. "I'm glad that I put those papers in the deposit box now."

"Yes. That was a good thing. Especially considering this," Saber says with a sigh.

"Hey, Saber, you there?" April's voice says over the com-link.

"Yes April, I'm here. What's going on?" Saber replies.

"I hadn't heard from anyone and I wanted to be sure you got there safely," April says.

"We're fine, all things considered," he replies.

"How bad is it?" she asks.

"There's really nothing to salvage," Amanda says aloud. "It's just a charred heap of trash now."

A long stunned silence on the other end. "I'm so sorry, Amanda," April finally says. "Are...are you guys coming home soon?"

"I don't see much reason to stay here," Amanda replies.

"We'll see you soon then," April replies and they end the call.

Commander Eagle walks over towards Saber and Amanda, "Would you two like to head on back to your place, Saber?"

Amanda nods and looks to Saber. "I don't see much reason to remain on the premises, sir," Saber replies.

"Then why don't you and Ms. Kelly go on back? The soldiers have found a few things I want to follow up on. I will catch a ride back with one of them. I don't think the two of you hanging out in the open like this is such a good idea. Can I trust you to go straight home?"

Saber fights the urge to smile, "I think we can behave for that long, sir. We will go straight back to the estate."

Commander Eagle nods, noting the tired look on Amanda's face, "Are you up to driving, Ms. Kelly? I could have a soldier drive the two of you back."

"You don't want me to drive, sir?" Saber says with a grin.

Amanda chuckles and shakes her head, "If you're driving, I'll stay here." She smiles and look up at the commander, "Perhaps you should ask someone to drive us. I'm not sure I'm up to it, sir."

Commander Eagle laughs, "I could not in good conscience allow you to drive, Captain Rider." He looks to Amanda and nods, "I'll find someone that we can spare for a couple of hours to drive you back." He heads off.

"So, you're the infamous Captain Rider?" the soldier asks as they start back towards Saber's estate.

"I am sir," Saber replies.

"I've heard of your skills. Rumor has it that you're still good with a weapon, even without your vision," he states.

Saber shrugs, "That is a matter of opinion."

"Well, I heard you were injured trying to save civilians, that you and your team were actually."

"All of us have shown some improvement. They have all improved far more than I have. I am hopeful that they can return to active duty before too long."

"What will they do about you, sir?"

"That has yet to be determined. I know that I will never be recalled. I will not get my vision back. I have long since resigned myself to that fact. There is talk of allowing me to teach or something. I suppose I could manage that."

The soldier lets out a whistle, "You are taking this far better than I would be, sir. I probably would have ended my life after something like that."

"There was a time that I would have said the same thing."

"But now?"

"Now I know there is more to life than being a soldier."

"And who might you be, miss?" he asks glancing at Amanda in the rear view mirror.

"My name is Amanda Kelly, sir."

"Are you a friend of Captain Rider's, ma'am?"

"She is my fiance'," Saber replies. "The house you just left was hers."

"Oh. I'm sorry for your loss, ma'am."

"At least I have somewhere to go," Amanda says

"Being Captain Rider's fiance I can imagine," the soldier says as they drive away from Amanda's property. "So, tell me..." the soldier driving goes silent and the car starts to go off the road.

"What's going on?" Saber asks.

Amanda gasps, seeing the bullet hole in the windshield, "The driver's been shot!"

Saber without thinking pulls the soldier out of the driver seat and into the passenger seat and jumps into the front seat, wincing in pain as he does and stops the car. He quickly grabs the soldier's sidearm. "Get down!" he says and both he and Amanda do so right before a steady stream of bullets rip through the windshield.

"What's going on?" Amanda screams over the bullets.

"I would guess that Sean's lawyer found some thugs to deal with us," Saber says.

"What are we going to do?"

"Be glad that this is a solar car," Saber muses, "Otherwise we'd be blown up."

"Funny." Amanda says. "I meant long term."

"I thought of waiting until they ran out of bullets, I'm sure we happen to be just far enough from your property that the people there aren't going to hear any of this."

"Any idea where they are shooting from?"

"Let me stick my head up and look," he replies sarcastically.

"You don't have to be so cynical, I was just curious," Amanda snaps back.

"Sorry, it's been awhile since I've been shot at," he replies apologetically.

"Do you think you could get the car moving without them being able to hit you?" she asks.

"No. Damn thing, you have to be seated in order to start it, and when the car came to a stop it shut off from the pressure drop from me moving the soldier. I suppose if I'd been thinking I could've attempted to turn it around and head back toward your property, but at the time I was just thinking about stopping the car," he replies.

The bullets stop, "Are they out of ammo?" Amanda asks quietly.

"They're probably waiting to see if we're dead or not," Saber says, "I need a hat or something to hold up."

"Here," Amanda says. "It was the soldier's hat." She hands him a hat.

Saber carefully pulls out his sword, and gently places the hat on the tip, then lifts the hat over the steering wheel, as soon as he does a barrage of shots are fired. "See?" he says quietly.

"So, now we just wait?" Amanda asks.

"Hold on," Saber presses the button to open up the passenger door and kicks the soldier's body out, more gunfire is heard, Saber pressed the button and the door closes. "Now, we wait." a few hours go by and more gunfire and a screech is heard.

"What was that?" Amanda asks.

"My guess would be the Commander," Saber replies.

"You don't think..." Amanda stops, as she unconsciously looks to slain soldier laying right outside the door.

"I certainly hope that's not the case," Saber replies grimly. "Now, try to rest, we have a couple more hours until nightfall, that'd be the best time to make our move."

"Saber, are you crazy?" Amanda says. "We'd be better off just staying here until help arrives, Fireball and April will come from the other direction first thing in the morning when we don't show."

"True," Saber says. "And we still have plenty of water."

Amanda chuckles slightly, "Leave it to us to get put in the car with the fold down seat that leads to the trunk and it be full of water and MRE's." They lapse into silence for a long time, "What about the Commander?" she asks quietly.

"We don't even know if it's him for certain. Or if it is, if he's alive. We'll just have to wait and see," Saber replies as he tries to find a semi-comfortable position.

Nightfall comes upon them quickly. "I need you to carefully look and see if you tell the condition of the other car," Saber says. "It's lights should come on automatically at night."

"Okay," Amanda says and moves herself so she's behind the driver's seat and carefully looks out the windshield. "The glare of the light makes it easy to see the car, but not in it."

"Good," Saber says. "That means that they probably can't see us either."

"That's odd," Amanda says. "The lights seem to be malfunctioning, they're going on and off."

Saber moves to where he can see the lights and chuckles, "The Commander's alive, and it turns out he's rather crafty."

"What do you mean?" Amanda asks curiously.

"That's Morse code," Saber says and starts reading the code, "Alive. Shot in arm, Eagle. It repeats." he stops, thinking for a moment. "I need a knife," Saber says and starts feeling around on the floor and seats.

"I think I saw one fall out of the soldier's pocket before you pushed him out," Amanda replies.

"Got it," Saber says grabbing it and climbs into the back and worms his way into the trunk.

"What are you doing?" Amanda asks.

"Responding," he makes his way to the tail light and makes quick work of stripping the wire. "OK. Saber, Amanda, alive. Driver dead."

"The light's are flashing something different, I can tell that much," Amanda says trying to watch the other car.

"Remind me, when we get out of this to teach you Morse code," Saber says as he climbs out to read the message, "No word from April, Shinji, or Colt. Plan?" Saber sighs. "Damn, we don't have any backup coming."

"Come on Saber, you can think this through," Amanda says, trying to remain positive.

"Okay, I've got an idea." Saber says as he crawls back into the trunk. "Need a diversion, any ideas?" he climbs back out, "I'm really going to hurt when this is over, you know?"

"At least we'll be alive then," Amanda replies sympathetically,

"Good point." Saber replies and looks at the message. "Trunk full of grenades"

"What?" Amanda asks. "Do you people come to investigate a civilian fire and expect a full out war?"

"Well, we are in the middle of a war with the outriders, you can never be too prepared," he replies with a chuckle.

Amanda sighs, "Why'd I know you'd say something like that?"

Saber grins and climbs into the front of the car, "I can't see well enough, too many wires here."

"What are you trying to do?" Amanda asks trying to get close enough to see.

"Disable the pressure switch," he replies.

"Let me try," Amanda says and they switch places, "I do know a thing or two about cars."

"True," Saber admits.

"There, I got it," Amanda says.

"Get ready," Saber says and crawls to the trunk, "In 5, start throwing grenades opposite our direction, we'll take advantage and pass them, and double back." He crawls out and waits for the reply, "Acknowledged." Saber sighs, "Amanda, in 5 minutes start driving toward the gunfire."

"Great, we're insane," Amanda mutters under her breath, and right at the 5 minute mark she starts to drive, keeping her head down, the gunfire starts, but then the

grenade goes off, and the gunfire moves to the other car, and she's able to look where she's going, after a minute of this there's a large bump, and then the car stops. "Battery's dead," she grumbles.

"We'll have to attempt to double back on foot," Saber says as another grenade goes off. "I hope Commander Eagle doesn't go through all the grenades." They get out of the car, and carefully head the way they came, when Saber trips.

"Saber?" Amanda asks concerned.

"Well," Saber says as he gets up "Judging from the weapon this person had on him, I'd say we have one less attacker," he grabs the person's weapon.

"Did I...With the..." Amanda asks in shock.

"Yes." Saber says, "I need you to stay with me here, we need to get through this." He goes to her and places a hand on her shoulder, "Amanda, I need you to help me, I can see well enough, but I need you to make sure I don't miss anything," he pauses to make sure she understands and she nods, "Now every time someone fires you should be able to see the flash of the barrel, look around and tell me if you see that." Another explosion and a round of gunfire.

"Twelve o'clock," Amanda says and they head in the direction of the gunfire.

They sneak up on the man, and Saber takes out his sword, "Lay down your weapon, or lay down your life." Saber says. The man puts down his weapon. "Good choice, now how many of you are there?" another explosion, and some more gunfire, then exactly 5 shots.

"There were seven of us starting out," the man confesses. "Please don't kill me."

"I have no intention of killing you." Saber says then hits the man with the back of his sword, knocking him out. Another grenade goes off, this time no gunfire. "Come on, we'd better try and get to the Commander," Saber says. They walk carefully towards the vehicle the Commander was in.

"Saber," Amanda says a few minutes later. "The grenades have stopped."

"Commander!" Saber says and they rush the best they can to get to the car.

Right as they get to the car they hear a familiar voice, "Well, look who decided to join the party."

Kapitel 17: Action

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 16: Action

The morning after Thomas and Colt left, Saber, Amanda and Commander Eagle left before anyone else got up. Not long after they had left, Elaine cooked breakfast for all that remained, and noticed that Robin hadn't come down yet. Thinking that the young woman might just be missing her husband, and not want to see the other couple, she takes her a plate up to her room, and that's when she hears her retching. "Ms. Robin?" Elaine asks concerned as she enters the room. "Is everything okay?"

"No, Elaine it's not." Robin says, nearly in tears.

"What's the matter?" Elaine asks sympathetically.

"I didn't feel well yesterday, so I went and laid down. I felt better for a bit, but then I felt sick again," Robin says. "I wasn't running a temperature or anything, so I just rested, and ate what I could. Now, today I'm sick again, and I fear..."

"What do you fear?"

"I think I might be pregnant," Robin says fighting back tears.

"That's a good thing," Elaine says and sees Robin's face, "Isn't it?"

"Colt..." Robin begins, "he doesn't want to have kids."

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"He says, that leaving me is hard enough," Robin says. "But he's got to keep fighting to make the universe a better place, he's not sure if he could do it if we had kids."

Elaine gets down and hugs Robin, "It'll work out for the best, you see. From what I've heard they want all of them to have teaching jobs, they don't want to break up a good team."

"Who told you that?" Robin asks surprised.

"I overheard Commander Eagle talking on the phone," Elaine says, "Amazing thing about being the help, is that people tend to forget you're around."

"So maybe Colt won't have to leave?"

"Maybe," Elaine replies.

Robin dries her tears, "Elaine, I need to get a pregnancy test, I need to know for sure."

"I'm sure that could be arranged," Elaine says, "I'll go to the store, I need some other things myself and I'll pick it up while I'm out."

"Thank you, Ms. Elaine. I'm sorry for the trouble," Robin replies as she gets up from the bathroom floor.

Elaine pats her gently on the shoulder, "It's no problem. I'll head out in a few minutes, so I can get back in time to cook dinner. I'll pick you up some saltines and soup as well." She heads downstairs and finds April and Fireball manning the com-link. "Any word from anyone?" she stops and asks.

"Colt said they have retrieved the ring and will be heading back shortly. They might be back tonight, if they don't run into too much traffic." April replies.

"What about from Saber?"

"Father said that he was sending Saber and Amanda back with a driver. That there really wasn't much they could salvage, and they were pretty tired," she replies. "So they should be back in about an hour or so."

Elaine nods, "I am running to the store. Do you need anything?"

"I'm not sure that's a good idea, Elaine," Fireball says standing up. "Why don't I go with you?"

"I'll be fine. You should stay in case a call comes in and one of you needs to leave, so that one of you is still here manning the coms. Miss Robin is upstairs resting. She is feeling a bit under the weather. I'll be getting some soup for her as well. I should be back before anyone else gets back."

Fireball starts to argue, but April stops him, "I suppose she's right, Fireball. I don't like it, but we don't have much of a choice."

"Call me if you need me before I return," Elaine says and heads out to the store. She does her shopping and is in the car heading home when two men pop up in her back seat and place guns to head.

"Tell anyone we're here and you'll be dead before you can blink," One of the men say. "We're back here. You continue home as you normally would and we won't harm you."

Elaine stiffens up and nods, "Okay." she replies and drives back to the estate. She is waved in by a Calvary Command soldier who doesn't give her a second glance.

"Good, now get out slowly. We have our guns pointed at you." the man says.

Elaine does as instructed and they escort her into the house. She is forced into the living room and April and Fireball turn around only to find armed men pointing guns at them.

"Hands on your heads, and don't try anything., the taller man says holding a gun to Elaine's head. They comply and the other man goes and ties them up. The door opens and the guard at the gate is led in by a third man. The guard is bleeding from a cut on his head and looks a bit disoriented.

"He put up a good fight," the third man says, as he shoves the guard towards the others.

They take Elaine and tie her to a chair. "Is anyone else here?" he asks her, gun pointed at her.

She hesitates for a minute, "Upstairs. She is ill and in bed. She won't be a problem., she replies quietly.

The taller man nods to the others, "Go and get her."

The other two head up and a few minutes later, they carry Robin down the stairs, hands bound behind her. "I think we could've just locked her in. She keeps throwing up." the third man says.

"She could be faking it," the first man says eyeing her suspiciously.

"I don't think so, but you're in charge. What are we going to do if she does throw up again?"

"Hold out a bucket, or a trash can or something. I don't want them left alone."

Robin starts shaking and the one man notices and takes a garbage can to her and she throws up again, "See? I don't think she's faking it."

April looks at her concerned., "Can't you just lock her in her room and guard her or something. She's miserable."

"We weren't ordered to kill them, so why not?" one of the men says to the leader.

The leader sighs, "Fine. Take the sick one back to her room. But take any electronic device out and lock the door so she can't get out."

The quiet one nods and gently takes Robin back to her room, and after removing all electronic devices and searching for weapons, he unties her and sets the garbage can inside the door, "Now stay put. I don't want no trouble or I will shoot you. Do you got it?" Robin nods and runs off to throw up again. He closes the door and wedges something between the floor and handle so that it can't be opened from the inside and stands outside the door.

The com-link comes alive and Commander Eagle's voice is heard, "April, Shinji, can anyone hear me?" No reply comes and he asks again. Still no reply. "The soldier that took Saber and Amanda has yet to report back, have they arrived back there yet?"

April looks to Fireball and he looks back, "We can't reply," she says quietly.

"Yeah, I know." Fireball says with a sigh.

"I hope they're all right," Elaine says concerned.

"Oh, if the guys did their job, they're already dead, madam," the leader states with a grin. "They'll get a good price too"

.

"April? Fireball? Anyone there?" Colt's voice comes in over the com a few hours later. "If you can hear me we're stopping by Amanda's I want to see if Saber and Amanda are ready to come back. See you in a couple hours."

"Warn the others that the cowboy is coming through. Tell them to kill him if he puts up a fight," The leader says to the remaining man.

The man pulls out a cell and texts the message and closes his phone again, "That should give them ample warning."

"Mr. Wilcox, I don't like it that no one has replied to your calls," Thomas says. "Perhaps we should head towards Ms. Kelly's house and seek out Commander Eagle?"

Colt nods, "I don't like it either. Something ain't right. I can't get anyone on the com-link." They drive for another hour before arriving at Amanda's place just before dark. A soldier stops them at the gate.

Colt holds out his EBU for the soldier to see, "I'm looking for Commander Eagle or Captain Rider, have you seen them?"

"No sir, not for a while. Captain Rider and a young woman left this afternoon. Commander Eagle left a couple of hours ago."

"Did he say where he was headin'?" Colt asks the soldier, an uneasy feeling building.

"Back to Captain Rider's home, I believe," the soldier replies.

"Thank you," Colt replies and they back out and start driving back towards Saber's. "I don't like this," he mutters under his breath. "This reeks of trouble."

"Yes, it appears there are some bad things going on, Mr. Wilcox. How are we going to handle this?" Thomas asks.

Colt glances towards him and slows the car down, "You see that?"

"What, sir?" Thomas asks.

"The flashes of light. There's a gunfight up ahead. Looks like maybe some firecrackers or grenades too," Colt says pointing towards the road ahead.

Thomas glances in the direction he points and sees a large flash followed by several smaller flashes, "So I see. What are we going to do?"

Colt pulls off onto a side road, "Switch places with me. Stay here and leave the car off. I'm going to get close enough to see what's happening. I'll call you and tell you what to do next. If I'm not back here in fifteen minutes, drive back to Amanda's place and get help." He hands Thomas his EBU, "Show them this and they should come."

Thomas nods, "Yes, sir." He hunkers down in the car and Colt heads off into the darkness towards the fighting.

After several minutes Colt approaches some trees close to the car. He sees a person toss out a grenade, a flash and then gunfire. He watches this for several minutes, mentally noting where the shots are fired from. He sees seven, then there are six. "Looks like someone out there is on our side," he mumbles and slowly continues his approach. A big flash and more shots. "Now five." He watches once more and then fires five shots in the directions of where the shots were fired from. Another big flash and then nothing. He cautiously approaches the car the grenades were being thrown from, seeing someone inside, he opens the door and points his gun at them.

Commander Eagle looks up, covered in blood and weak. "I guess you took them out?" he asks weakly.

Colt nods, "Yes sir." He lowers his weapon and starts looking around for any sign of other people before tending to the commander. He grabs a first aid kit from the under the seat and bandages up the wound as best he can. "We need to get you to a doctor, sir."

"Saber and Ms. Kelly are still out there, Colt. We need to find them first. I'll be okay," the commander replies, getting slowly out of the car with Colt's help.

Colt slowly looks around, "I don't see any sign of them. I need to get Thomas to come here." He grabs his phone and calls Thomas. "He'll be here in a couple of minutes, sir." Just then they hear the sound of footsteps rushing towards them. "Well, look who decided to join the party." Colt says sarcastically.

"Colt?" Saber and Amanda reply.

"Good to see you too," he replies with a grin. "Ya'll did pretty good to not get yourselves killed."

"Our driver wasn't so lucky," Saber replies solemnly. "Oh, and we left one of the guys

unconscious over there," he says pointing towards the direction they came from. "Amanda took out another attacker with the car."

"So that's what happened to two of the shooters," Colt says grinning.

"The one we knocked out says there were seven of them," Saber replies.

"I'll go and get 'em," Colt says and heads off in the direction they left the man in.

Commander Eagle looks over them carefully, "You both look exhausted, but otherwise relatively unharmed."

"You should get your arm checked, sir." Saber replies.

Thomas arrives with the car. "Master Saber, Ms. Kelly! Thank God you're all right," he says relieved.

Colt arrives dragging the unconscious attacker over his shoulder and plops him onto the ground, "You knocked him out good, Saber."

"I didn't care to be shot at again, Cowboy," Saber replies.

Commander Eagle hangs up his phone, "I have reinforcements coming now. They will take care of returning the soldier's body to Calvary Command for a military funeral. As well as doing what they need to do to get this mess cleaned up."

"Sir, I've been unable to raise anyone at Saber's place. I can't get anyone on a cell or the com-link," Colt says.

"That's not a good sign," Saber says darkly. "I hope they're all right."

"We need to wait for the reinforcements," Commander Eagle states.

"I'm not so sure that's a good idea, sir," Amanda says speaking up. They all turn to look at her. "Think about it, if these people have breached security and taken the grounds, and we show up with a bunch of soldiers, it could be a bloodbath. They obviously are not against killing someone. We need to assume that since no one is replying to us, including the possible intruders, that they are alive." She sees them all nod and she continues, "Saber, I know the house has all kinds of secret places, is there some way to get to the house from a secret entrance or something? Like maybe from the place we camped that time we were gone for a week?"

Saber studies her for a moment and nods slowly, "I'm not sure if it will open, but there is a passage to the house into our bedroom in the dressing area, come to think of it."

"What? How?" Thomas asks astonished.

"Being an old castle, there are lots of unknown passages. I used to enjoy finding them and investigating them as a child. The exterior entry to the walled off part of the

basement is hard to find and we can reach it relatively unseen from the side of the property. If we can get in there, and pray that the secret doors work without a lot of noise, we might be able to infiltrate the house and cut down on the resistance," Saber says, and then he looks to Amanda and smiles. "What made you think of such a thing?"

"As you said, your home was once a castle. Every story that I've ever read about castles say they are full of such secret places. I thought it was a logical thing to ask," She replies simply.

Saber looks to the others, "Can we agree to this plan?" They all nod. "Good. Then we should be going."

"What about this guy?" Colt asks nudging the captive.

Saber looks to the commander, "Sir?"

Commander Eagle looks down at the captive on the ground, "He may yet be of use. Let's wait until the others arrive and leave him with them. I don't think toting him around with us would be a good idea."

Some soldiers arrive a short time later and they tend to the commander's injuries before they load up into Thomas' car and drive back towards Saber's estate. As they approach, they notice that the gate is guarded by someone other than a soldier. They turn down a road before getting too close and stop the car a good distance from the gate, around towards the side of the property. "We'd best go on foot the rest of the way," Saber says sounding more tired than he intends as he gets out of the car, followed by the others.

Amanda casts him a concerned look, "Are you going to make it?"

"I've come this far." he replies. "How are you holding up?"

"I hurt like Hell, but as you just said, I've come this far," she replies.

He casts a glance to the others, noting that everyone, save Colt looks exhausted. "I hope we can do this," he mutters as they slowly make their way towards the secret area of the house. After what feels like an eternity, they find the hidden entrance to the basement and go in, closing the door behind them. A few seconds later, Amanda lights a lamp and everyone blinks to allow their eyes to adjust.

They all look around at the sparsely furnished room, noting the two cots and some firewood and canned goods. "I see how you two managed to do all right down here," Colt remarks looking around. "Now, any clue where the door might be, Saber?"

Saber concentrates, trying to study the room as best he can, "I want to say that it is over this way," he states, running his hand along the wall for a minute before stopping and feeling around. "I think it's here." He runs his hands along a groove before hearing a soft click. "There we go." Suddenly, the wall shakes a bit and a door appears. "We need some kind of light."

"Here," Colt says handing him a small flashlight. "It's not much, so you might want one of us to be in the lead."

Saber messes with it for a moment and nods, "Probably a good suggestion. You want to go first, Cowboy?" he asks.

"Sure thing," Colt replies and takes the light back from Saber. They make their way through the narrow passage way, taking care to make as little noise as possible. After several minutes and a large number of stairs, they come to a wall. "What now, Saber?" Colt whispers into the darkness.

"There should be a raised bump or something that should activate the door into the the dressing room," Saber whispers in reply.

Colt nods and feels around until he hears a click and the wall slides to the side, and light filters into the corridor temporarily blinding them. "Let's go." he whispers and they enter the room.

Saber turns and fumbles for the trip that closes the wall to hide the entrance before facing the group again, "Okay, we've made it in. We need to try and separate to cover more ground." The others nod in agreement. "Colt, you and I take back stairs and then the main path through the kitchen. We'll try and see how many are down there." Colt nods. "Commander, you and Amanda take the hallway to the bedrooms and see if anyone has hidden up there."

"Saber, she's unarmed," Commander Eagle protests.

"Actually sir, I'm not. I do have a sword," Amanda says quietly partially unsheathing it and wincing as she does.

"Okay, but you're in a good deal of pain," he replies. "Could you pull it if needed?"

Amanda nods hesitantly, "Saber, could you help me transfer it to be pulled left-handed?"

Saber nods, "Do you think you can manage it left-handed?"

"I think right now it'd be easier. You taught me to fight with either hand. I see the logic in that now," she replies.

He smiles slightly, "Come here and let's move it." She comes over and he helps her adjust the sword on the belt. "It's not made to be worn like this, but I think it'll work in an emergency." She nods. "Now Thomas, I'll need you to stay here until you know it's clear. If it sounds like things go badly, take the passage back and go for help. You have a firearm, correct?"

"Yes sir. One that your father gave me. In light of everything I've kept it close," he replies.

"Keep it on you and stay hidden. If anyone besides one of us comes into here, shoot first and ask questions later," Saber states. He nods and Saber turns back to the others. "Are we ready?"

They all nod and Saber and Colt enter the hallway first. Seeing no one in the immediate vicinity, they wave the commander and Amanda on and he and Colt descend the back stairs quietly. In the hallway, Amanda stops the commander and points to the guard a good ways down the hall outside of Robin's door. He's sitting against the wall, apparently asleep. Amanda looks to the commander who nods, and they quietly make their way towards the sleeping guard. Once they are upon him, Commander Eagle places his gun at the man's throat, startling him awake. "Move and you're dead," he whispers. Amanda comes and takes the gun from him and hands it to the commander. He orders the man up and the man complies, placing his hands on his head. Amanda then leads him into Robin's room and finds Robin asleep on the bed, the rope on the floor. She grabs the rope and they tie the man up and wake Robin.

"Where's Colt?" she asks worried seeing the harried condition of the commander and Amanda.

"He and Saber are trying to get the people downstairs. Do you know how many there are?" the commander asks.

"Three, I believe," Robin says trying to remain calm.

"Robin, Colt is unharmed. So calm down, all right?" Amanda says, placing a hand on her shoulder. Robin nods. "We need to see if we can help them. Can you guard him while we go and try to be of assistance?"

Robin nods hesitantly, "I think so." The commander comes over and hands her the gun from their captive. She hesitates, but he gives her a look and she takes it.

"I know you don't like guns, but if he even looks at you wrong, point and shoot," Amanda says calmly.

"How are you so calm, Amanda?" she asks trying to fight back tears.

"I'm too pissed to be anything else right now," she replies. "This will hit me later once the adrenaline wears off." She turns to the commander, "Shall we see how things are downstairs?"

The commander nods and they head out of Robin's room and quietly start for the stairs when they hear two shots. They stop after the shots and then they hear April's voice, "Colt, Saber, you're okay?"

"Are you guys all right?" Colt asks as he's uniting them.

"Yeah. Robin is upstairs." Fireball replies.

"She's fine. A little shook up, but she'll be fine," the commander says as he and Amanda come down the stairs.

Colt nods and rushes up the stairs to see about her.

"Where's Thomas?" Elaine asks finally calming down enough to speak.

"Oh, he's in my quarters, Elaine," Saber replies weakly.

Elaine nods, "You should sit down, Saber, you don't look well."

"I'm just worn out, Elaine. It's been a really long day," he replies.

Commander Eagle comes over to Elaine, "Come on, I'll take you to see Thomas and I'll call for some reinforcements to come here." He leads Elaine up to Saber's room.

"Saber, Amanda, are you two all right? You both look awful," April asks concerned.

"I plan on going and collapsing into bed as soon as I know it's safe to do so," Saber replies.

"As do I," Amanda says. "Right after I take something for pain."

"Yes. A pain pill would be good about now," Saber adds.

A knock at the door causes them all to pause. Fireball takes his gun from the dead intruder on the floor and goes towards the door, opening it slowly. On the other side are several soldiers from Calvary Command along with a group of local police. "Sir, we have word that there has been a home invasion at this address. Is that the case?" one of the local policeman asks.

Fireball holsters his weapon and nods. "Yes, we are fine now. But there were some people that broke in and held us hostage." he says as he steps aside so they can enter. "Their bodies are in here, save the one that is tied up upstairs."

They all enter the house and begin a search. Commander Eagle comes out and the soldiers start talking to him. Shortly afterwards, the head of the local police approaches him, "So you're the commander with Calvary Command, sir?"

"Yes. I'm Commander Charles Eagle. I'm the one that called you. I suppose you have been briefed on the firefight about a half hour from here that happened overnight?"

The police officer nods, "Yes, and we have a Mr. Amberson. Evidently, he was one of the people paying to have a few people 'taken care of'. That is according to the one living shooter from the firefight."

"Well, we have one more shooter for you," Colt says as he leads the man that Amanda tied up downstairs at gunpoint, Robin following behind him. "You might have to cut him out of these ropes. The lady knows how to tie knots," Colt says glancing to

Amanda with an amused look.

The cop nods, fighting the urge to smile as he takes the man from Colt's custody, "I'm glad that it appears the most of you folks seem relatively unscathed. I suppose they chose the wrong people to try and intimidate."

"So what happens now, sir?" Saber asks from the couch.

The cop turns to him, "We will bring these two up on a slew of charges, including murder of a military officer, arson, attempted murder, and false imprisonment, for starters. Once our investigation is finished, we may have more charges to bring up. There are others that we are also searching for that may be involved, so you might want to have more security here until we're sure we have everyone involved."

Saber nods, "Thank you, sir. I apologize for the trouble."

The cop laughs, "Your people are the ones cleaning this all up. I'm helping them by fetching the living perps. These boys are going to military prison. Keeps them out of our hair."

"I've got some fresh soldiers coming in for security detail, Saber," Commander Eagle says as he comes over to where Amanda and Saber are sitting. Saber looks as if he wants to object, but a look from the commander silences his objection. "I do not want to lose any more officers, active or otherwise."

Saber nods, "Very well, sir," he replies quietly.

Thomas and Elaine make their way into the sitting room, "Saber, I am so sorry about this," Elaine says as she comes and places a hand on his shoulder.

"Elaine, this is not your doing., she starts to protest and he holds a hand up. "They would have found some way in regardless. Things could have turned out much worse, for all of us. Do not place blame on yourself." Elaine nods slightly and he turns to Amanda, who is looking rather pale. "Amanda, are you all right?" he asks concerned.

"My shoulder is really hurting. I think it may have dislocated again," she says quietly while trying not to vomit from the pain.

Elaine sees her and comes over to her side, "Can you make it to the bathroom in my quarters?" she asks. Amanda nods slightly and slowly tries to get up. Elaine leads her towards her quarters as quickly as she can, barely making it before she starts vomiting.

Saber comes in a few minutes later, barely able to walk, "Is she all right?" he asks Elaine who is just coming out of the bathroom with a shirt.

"She needs a new shirt and a doctor. Her shoulder is out of joint. That much is visible," Elaine replies.

Saber cringes from the thought but nods, "I'll see if April can get her a shirt. I don't think I can go up and down the stairs again."

"I'll go. I think I can actually move faster than you right now. Take a seat, she's still throwing up. I'll be right back," Elaine says as she heads out the door to the main living area.

Saber sits down in a chair not far from the bathroom, waiting for Elaine to return. He hears Amanda whimper from pain. "Amanda? Can I get you anything?" he asks unsure of what else to say to her.

"No. Elaine went to get a doctor," she says before throwing up again.

Saber looks up as April comes in with a shirt, "Elaine sent me in to bring this for Amanda. It's a button up, so maybe I can get it on her." she offers a smile, "I stole it from your closet. I figured it would be looser on her."

He chuckles, "Good idea." He sighs, "She's still throwing up though. I hope the doctor comes quickly," he says glancing worriedly towards the bathroom.

April goes into the bathroom and talks quietly to Amanda. A little bit later the doctor comes in and goes into the bathroom, followed by Elaine. Commander Eagle comes over and sits in a chair close to Saber, "She's hurting pretty bad from what Elaine says." Saber nods. "She handled herself well given the circumstances. She was able to keep her head even when things got bad. Not always a quality one finds from a civilian. She was great with Robin, who was practically frantic," Commander Eagle says quietly.

"I know sir. She is rather resilient. I know it has taken all she has not to flip out during all of this. I had to calm her when she killed the one guy with the car, but it was like a switch. I told her that I needed her to stick with it, and she did. She has a good mind for logistics, as you saw when we broke back into here. I admire her ability to keep pushing, but one can only push so hard. I'm afraid she's found her limits. I just hope she comes out all right in the end."

Commander Eagle nods, "I hope so too. I also firmly believe that your parents would approve of your choice, Saber, for what that opinion is worth. I know that Sincia would not have survived such an ordeal. Keep her close Saber. I think you both will need each other in the coming months. We may yet have to have another trial, or two in light of recent events." He looks at Saber and studies him closely, "How is your vision? I know it's not back, but you have a little, don't you?"

Saber nods, "I have a little. Mostly shadow and outlines. If I try really hard I can make out things for a moment or two, but I know it's not getting much better, if any better from what I have now."

The commander nods, "Once this is over, and you have had time to rest., perhaps we can see about a teaching job for you. You seem to have taught Ms. Kelly quite a lot. I think you could be utilized as an excellent teacher."

"I'm not sure if I'll feel up to returning, sir," Saber replies quietly.

The doctor comes out and approaches Saber, "Captain Rider, I was able to get Ms. Kelly's shoulder back into joint, and I've wrapped it so that she shouldn't be able to move it much. It should remain in the sling for the next month. I will return to check on her in a week, if the shoulder swelling hasn't gone down, we will need to do surgery. I have given her a shot of cortisone and something something for pain and nausea. I will help get her upstairs so that she may rest. Then I would like to examine you before you get some much needed rest."

"Okay," Saber replies exhausted.

Fireball and Colt come in and they go in and get Amanda to help take her upstairs. "We'll take her to your room if you want," Colt says.

Saber nods, "The bed is larger, so she can find a way that's the most comfortable for her."

Colt goes to make a comment and Fireball shakes his head, "Don't Colt. He's likely to hurt you if you say what's going through your head," he mutters under his breath, silencing Colt. They take Amanda carefully leading her up the stairs.

The doctor looks over Saber, trying to appraise his condition, "I think I'm going to need you to lay down, Captain. So that I can see your injuries and check for any complications that may have arisen from overexertion."

Saber sighs, "Then I suppose I should head upstairs. Perhaps I should lay down in Amanda's bed."

"I don't think we'll bother her too much, if you'd rather get to where you can just rest after we're through," the doctor replies.

Saber nods and slowly gets up, "Then lets make our way upstairs to my room." He slowly works his way upstairs and the doctor follows him into the room.

A little while later, the doctor comes down to find the others waiting in the sitting room. "Well?" April asks concerned.

"He is resting," the doctor replies looking between the people waiting for news. "All things considered, he is doing well. I do however recommend that he and Ms. Kelly get plenty of rest. I doubt that either one of them will feel like moving for the next day or so. Ms. Kelly may yet need surgery to repair her shoulder. She is rather strong-willed to have been able to hold up as she evidently has during this ordeal."

Commander Eagle stands up and approaches the doctor, "Thank you for coming. We will call if we need you before you return in a week."

The doctor nods, "Call me if your arm becomes inflamed. It looks like a minor injury,

but the way you people seem to push yourselves, even something simple could become complicated," he adds with a smile before leaving.

Kapitel 18: Back In the Saddle...Unit

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 17: Back In the Saddle...Unit

"So what time are they supposed to arrive?" Colt asks pacing the floor.

April laughs, "You're not anxious to see Robin are you?"

"It's been a month!" he protests, getting a grin from April. "Besides, I want to make sure she's okay," he adds defensively.

"I'm sure everything is fine, Cowboy," April says trying to placate him. "She's almost three months along, so she shouldn't feel as bad as she did the last time you saw her."

"I just don't like being away from her," Colt mutters.

"You'll see her in a matter of an hour or so," Commander Eagle says as he enters his office. "They just received clearance to land."

An hour later they are at the landing dock when the ship lands and Robin comes out, followed by Saber in his daily uniform and Amanda. "Colt!" Robin says as she runs over and hugs him.

He returns the embrace and visibly relaxes. "You act like you're feeling better," he says kissing her lightly.

She nods. "I am. I don't feel sick much now and the headaches have eased off. Now I'm just eating constantly," she says grinning.

Saber and Amanda make their way to the group, Amanda still in a sling, Saber using a cane. "I must say that you both look better than the last time I saw you," April says teasingly.

Saber chuckles, "That doesn't take much, does it?"

"Not really," April replies. She looks them over carefully stopping when she notices Amanda's ring. "So you're officially engaged now?" she asks smiling.

Amanda nods, "Yes, we are now officially engaged."

"Do you have a date yet?" April asks.

They both shake their heads. "Not yet," Saber replies. "We're trying to wait until we're a little better physically. I don't want her to be in a sling when we get married."

"Yeah, not the way I want to remember our wedding," Amanda adds. "I got the staples out of my shoulder a couple of days ago, so I'm improving. I'll probably be stuck in this sling for a few more weeks."

"Much to her dismay," Saber adds with a smirk. "She can be rather impossible when she's flustered."

"Look who's talking," Amanda retorts with a laugh.

The others laugh and they talk a while longer as they meet in the Commander's office. "We have a room for the two of you that will be ready within the hour, Saber. I'm sure you'll want to rest before too long," Commander Eagle says.

Saber nods, "This is the most we've done these last few weeks. So we do tend to become tired rather quickly. What time does everything start tomorrow?"

"Sean's initial sentencing is at eight. His lawyer's is at nine, with the others being done consecutively after that. Then Sean's other sentencing will be immediately following the others. So hopefully by lunch time it's all over and done with," Commander Eagle says and Saber nods. "We are also keeping an escort with both of you at all times." Saber goes to protest and the commander holds up his hands. "You do not have a choice in the matter, Richard." Saber flinches at the use of his birth name. "I will not allow any opportunity for either of you to come to harm. It's not like they will be in your room, but they will inspect it before you enter and remain outside the doors while you are in there. If either or both of you wish to go someplace, you will be escorted by two guards. There is no room for discussion. It has already been arranged."

Saber sighs in resignation. "Yes sir, thank you. We appreciate the efforts that have been taken for our welfare," he replies quietly.

The sound of the phone ringing jostles him away and he carefully reaches for it, trying not to disturb Amanda. "Yeah?" he says quietly into the phone. Murmuring is heard. "Okay. Yes, we'll see you shortly." He closes the phone and sighs. He carefully reaches down and kisses Amanda's forehead. "Amanda? Wake up, Love. We have to get going. It's nearly seven."

She stirs and mumbles incoherently. "Already?" she manages to ask sleepily.

"Yes," he replies with a chuckle. "Commander Eagle is on his way here to take us to the courtroom."

Begrudgingly she gets up, with his help and they both dress, managing to barely be ready when the commander arrives. "Good morning," the commander says as he enters their quarters.

"Good morning," They reply quietly.

"Hopefully after today you can put all of this behind you and move on with your lives," he says noting their attempts at hiding their uneasiness.

"I hope so," Amanda says quietly as they are escorted towards the courtroom. They are joined by Colt, April, and Fireball on the way.

They walk most of the way in silence, Saber holding Amanda's hand in a show of support. They enter the courtroom and Sean is already there, a new lawyer standing beside him. He looks up when they enter, watching Saber and Amanda closely, as if he's gaging their physical conditions. Saber feels Amanda tense and squeezes her hand gently. They take their seats behind the prosecution, the Commander and the others filing in near them. It is then they see that the other defendants are being escorted into the room, all looking a bit bewildered. The judge enters the room and everyone rises and then takes their seats. The judge looks at the various people in the room. He stops looking over Amanda and Saber carefully. "Ladies and gentlemen," he begins, "We are here today for the penalty phase of several cases. The primary case is the charges against Mr. Sean McCully. Initially, I was going to speak to the groups at designated times, but as I have learned that all of these charges have stemmed from the original charges against Mr. McCully, I have decided to do something a bit unprecedented. I will be sentencing first the other defendants in the latter cases." Several people begin talking at once and the judge bangs his gavel to cease the objections. "All of the defendants have been found guilty of their charges, so it really makes no difference what order I go in. Will all of the defendants please rise, save for Mr. McCully, Mr. Amberson, and Mr. Finnegan." They rise, all looking amongst themselves not sure what to think before turning to the judge. "Each of you have been found guilty of numerous crimes against the military. They include murder of a military officer, attempted murder of more than one military officer, attempted murder of a civilian, arson, destruction of government property, kidnapping, and false imprisonment. Each of those charges carries a minimum life sentence in a civilian court. Here, on just the one count of murder, you can be sentenced to death. Given the extreme circumstances of the situation and the magnitude of how the threats were carried out, I am passing down a mandatory death sentence for each of you." Several of the prisoners drop to the floor in shock, only to be pulled back up by their guards. "Mr. Finnegan, please rise." He stands and looks nervously to the judge, and the judge continues, "Your life is being spared only because you showed mercy to the people you help to hold prisoner. At the request of the said captives, because of that kindness, your life shall be spared. You are sentenced to twenty years in prison." Finnegan drops to the floor in relief and he looks towards where Saber and the others are sitting and nods in gratitude before. The judge then turns his attention to Mr. Amberson, "Mr. Amberson, you have proven to be a disgrace to your so called profession. You have shamed your family as well. For your hand in the charges against these other men, you are hereby sentenced to death." The lawyer remains expressionless as his sentence is handed down, and the judge turns to the guards, "Please remove these men from my courtroom to their cells to await their fates. Their deaths will be within the next three days. He bangs the gavel and several soldiers approach the prisoners and lead them out of the courtroom. Only Mr. Amberson turns to face Saber and Amanda, giving them a glare that could have been construed as a

threat if he were not being led away in chains. Once the courtroom is cleared from wailing relatives of the condemned people, the judge turns to face Sean. "Mr. McCully, I know that you honestly believe that you are separate from these other men, but you are not. It is because of you that they will die." He watches for a reaction but gets none, so he continues, "You have also been condemned because of the crimes that you directly committed. For your crimes you have been sentenced to death. Yours will be carried out tomorrow morning, twenty-four hours from now." He bangs the gavel and the soldiers come and grab him to take him from the court room. He wrenches from their grasp just as an explosion happens and several outriders appear from a side door, close to where the prosecution desk is.

Sean uses the diversion to get close to Saber and Amanda, "This isn't over. You will never know peace as long as I'm alive. You will have to watch your backs for the rest of your lives. I will get what I deserve." he says looking at Amanda then turns and vanishes with the outriders. Alarms start blaring and soldiers come from every direction armed and ready to fight.

"They're gone, sir," A soldier says as he approaches Commander Eagle. "We're on lock down, but so far there's no sign of the outriders or Mr. McCully."

Commander Eagle nods and turns and looks to Saber and Amanda, "We need to get you home and quickly. I want you to take the Bismarck. It can at least serve as some protection against anything the outriders have. I will do my best to get a team together to help man it once you are safe. We have some promising cadets, so it should only be tomorrow before we get to you. Go now before someone over-rules me," he says looking to the four of them and Amanda.

"Sir!" they say and start for the hangar where the ship is stored.

Saber takes Amanda's hand, "Let's go." They follow April, Fireball, and Colt through the maze of corridors struggling to keep up, but managing to. They arrive at the hangar and see a couple of soldier standing guard. "Let us through. We are under Commander Eagle's direct orders," Saber says with as much authority as he can.

"Sir!" the guards reply.

"Get the doors open fast! We need to go after the outriders who attacked," Saber calls back as they head up the ramp. The ramp closes behind them and without thinking Saber heads to his saddle unit. Amanda follows him and stands behind him. "Hold on tight, Amanda we have to take off before someone figures out that it's us taking off without proper medical clearance," Saber says hitting miscellaneous buttons as the others run their checks.

The ship starts forward and Amanda grabs on as best as she can. Soon the ship enters orbit and they steady out. "Are we considered fugitives now?" she asks quietly.

"No," Saber replies. "We might get into some trouble, but seeing as he directly threatened you and I, we have the right to go after him. We will head home as ordered, eventually. The commander never said how quickly we had to get there,"

Saber says flashing her a weak smile. "Come and sit with me. We can sort of share the seat. I can use some help knowing what is on my screen, as I'm still not able to see well enough to decipher individual objects or type," Amanda comes and sits close to him and he places an arm gently around her. "Can you tell me what's on the screen? You should see a blue dot, that would be us, and a red dot, that is most likely the outriders and Sean."

Amanda studies the screen for a minute and then sees a red dot appear on the screen, "It's at about ten o'clock from our position, Saber."

"You get that Fireball, Colt?" Saber asks.

"Got it," they reply.

"Heading that way now," Fireball says as he directs the ship in the general direction of the other ship.

"Let's go and get us some outriders," Colt says.

Kapitel 19: Meanwhile...

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 18: Meanwhile...

Commander Eagle is heading back towards his office when a couple of military policemen approach him. "Sir!" One of the two men yell, causing him to pause and turn towards the voice. "Captain Rider and the other members of the Bismarck crew have taken off in the ship! We believe they are in pursuit of Mr. McCully and the Outriders."

Commander Eagle takes a breath and thinks a moment before formulating his reply, "I am aware that they have taken their ship, soldier. I authorized them to do so."

"But sir," the soldier begins.

Commander Eagle holds up his hand, "Meet me in my office in ten minutes. There is someone I need to get and bring there to inform them of the current situation."

"Yes, sir!" The two soldiers reply and rush ahead of him towards his office.

He stops and turns down a corridor, pausing in front of a door and knocking.

The door opens and a worried looking Robin looks out to see the commander with a serious expression. "C...Commander, what is going on?" She asks looking behind him for the others.

"Ms. Wilcox...Robin, I need you to come with me to my office. Can you leave right now?" Commander Eagle asks.

"Um, sure, sir," she replies hesitantly as she steps out of the door allowing it to close behind her. They walk towards his office. "Commander, what is going on? I've heard all kinds of alarms and such going off."

"That is some of what I want to talk to you about. I suppose I should tell you some of it on the way, so that you aren't blindsided when I tell the soldiers." He glances towards her and sees her nod so he continues, "Mr. McCully was sentenced to death today. As he was being led away, a group of Outriders attacked and took him with them. His last words were basically a threat towards Saber and Ms. Kelly." She gasps in shock. He stops talking as he opens the door to his office and finds several people waiting, including Dr. Izumi. "Ah, good everyone is here, so I won't have to repeat this." He begins after escorting Robin to a chair, "As all of you know, Mr. McCully escaped this morning with the help of some Outriders. Evidently, he made a few friends in prison."

During his escape, he made a direct threat to Captain Rider, as well as his fiancée. He has made a couple of attempts on their lives already." A soldier raises his hand to speak and the commander silences him with a look. "I am the one who authorized Captain Rider, Mr. Hikari, Ms. Eagle, and Mr. Wilcox to take the Bismarck and pursue Mr. McCully. I am aware that they have some physical limitations, but they are still the best crew suited to pilot the Bismarck at the current time. They are under my directive to attempt to stop Mr. McCully, even if that means killing him. They will land at Captain Rider's home colony after giving due effort to capture or kill Mr. McCully."

One of the military policemen raises a hand, and the commander acknowledges him. "Sir, I believe that they allowed a civilian onto the ship with them. That is in direct violation of intergalactic laws."

Robin gasps, placing a hand over her mouth and the commander nods. "Yes, there is indeed a civilian woman on the ship with them. She is the fiancée of Captain Rider and was directly threatened by Mr. McCully. Captain Rider still is not physically up to being on active duty. He still cannot see. His fiancée has helped him fight off people before and I think will be an asset as opposed to a liability. She can be his eyes and I believe the others trust her as well. So I have authorized her to be on board the ship. I am currently about to escort Ms. Wilcox back to Captain Rider's estate. I think she will be more comfortable there. I have also increased the number of people guarding his place after the threat was made. I will be staying there as well and I will be setting up a mobile command center from there, so that we can be in constant communication. We will be leaving here in one hour. Does anyone have any questions?"

Dr. Izumi steps forward, "Sir, I can attest that Mr. Hikari, Mr. Wilcox, and Ms. Eagle are all physically able to pursue Mr. McCully, but I have my doubts about Captain Rider's abilities. I have yet to run any of the tests on him that are long over due, given that he has continually been reinjured in some way."

"And all of his subsequent injuries were in some way related to Mr. McCully. Either directly or indirectly. As for Ms. Kelly, I have seen her in tense situations with him and she knows him and understands his thought processes. She has fought beside him and helped rescue me when I was pinned down by multiple gun men after being shot. I feel she is more of a help to all of them, rather than a hindrance. Captain Rider knows that we are not responsible if he is injured while in pursuit of Mr. McCully, given that he has not been cleared for any sort of official duty."

Dr. Izumi nods. "I would like to examine him after all of this is over, sir. But I would also like to ask you a few things without the others here," he says glancing to the other soldiers.

Commander Eagle nods, "The rest of you prepare for battle. Be ready at a moment's notice. Get me a squad together that will leave with me in about an hour to stay at Captain Rider's place. We will meet in the hangars then." The other soldiers leave, and the commander is alone with the doctor, except for Robin, who is sitting quietly watching all of the activity and trying to remain calm. "Now, Dr. Izumi, what is it you want to know?" Dr. Izumi looks towards Robin, and Commander Eagle shakes his head. "She stays. She is aware of the Captain's condition, so it is fine if she hears what is

discussed."

The doctor gives her a wary glance but nods, "You believe that Captain Rider's sight is not going to return, is that correct?"

"Yes, that is correct. He has shown intermittent improvement since the initial injury, but it has not ever improved beyond basic outlines and shadows. That being said, he has shown remarkable abilities in spite of the lack of vision. He can still wield a sword, is still fairly accurate shooting a gun, he has taught Ms. Kelly to use a sword and to defend herself. He can also get around on a horse. I think he would be a good teacher, but I know that after this is over, he will never return as a star sheriff. He is resigned to that now. He does not pretend that he will improve more. I am glad he has regained most, if not all of his memories."

Dr. Izumi is quiet for several minutes before speaking. "I suppose the only reason you allowed this is because you know he can function, especially with the woman's help?" Commander Eagle nods. "That and it is personal. I know that technically should be a huge reason to not allow that team to go after Mr. McCully, but from what I've heard about what he has done to the Captain and his fiancé, I cannot fault you for letting them go. I will not raise another objection, sir."

"I just hope that General Whitehawk agrees with you. I know I will get in some trouble for this, but in this instance, I think it is better to ask forgiveness rather than waste precious time getting the proper permission."

"He know that the crew is tight. He also knows that it isn't the first time that one of them has been severely injured and still trying to perform their duties. I believe that on an occasion or two both Mr. Hikari and Mr. Wilcox joined the fighting while technically not cleared medically," the doctor says with a smile. "And yet they are all still here."

"It is because they are the best at what they do. They work well as a unit. That is not something that happens often," Commander Eagle replies.

"If the General starts questioning things, I will talk to him, Commander. I will tell him what you have told me. Perhaps that will be enough to keep any of you from getting into trouble," Dr. Izumi offers.

"Thank you, Dr. Izumi." the commander turns to Robin, "Are you ready to gather your things so we can leave?" She nods. "Good. Let's get going then," he says offering his hand to her. She gets up with his help and they return to the quarters she shared with Colt and she grabs a bag. He brings one he had packed from his office and they proceed to the hangar area where several soldiers are waiting for orders.

They arrive at Saber's estate with a convoy of soldiers. Thomas comes out to greet them. "Commander Eagle, Ms. Robin! Where are the others?" he asks looking around for them.

"We need to talk. Let's go inside," the commander replies. Thomas nods and starts for

the door. The commander turns to the soldiers, "Set up however you need to. Spread out along the grounds so that there are no places that someone could sneak in. There are several buildings that can be used for shelter, but be considerate of the grounds and cause as little damage as possible. The com center will be inside. We had a temporary one set up. I want someone to go and set up one there again while I update the others that live here on the current situation."

"Sir!" the group of soldiers say and they disperse, going about their work.

Commander Eagle heads into the house, catching up to Thomas and Robin. Elaine joins them in the foyer. "Where are the others? Where are Saber and Ms. Kelly?" she asks concern evident in her voice.

"Please, we need to sit down and talk. There have been some, developments that you need to be aware of," Commander Eagle replies leading them to the sitting room where they all take a seat.

Thomas and Elaine look over to him nervously. "Have they been injured?" Elaine asks hesitantly.

"No. Not to my knowledge at least. However Mr. McCully has escaped," Commander Eagle states. Elaine lets out an involuntary gasp. "He directly threatened both Saber and Ms. Kelly. He then vanished with the Outriders."

"Those are the creatures that you have been fighting for years, aren't they?" Thomas asks.

"Yes, they are. Evidently Mr. McCully made a few friends in prison. Some that liked that he had a grudge against Saber. The fact that he has one against Ms. Kelly is just seen as another way to get to Saber," the commander replies.

"So where are Saber and Ms. Kelly now?" Elaine asks.

"They are with the others on the Bismarck. They have left to go after them to try and end this," Commander Eagle replies.

"But Saber can't pos-" Elaine starts to protest.

"He has Ms. Kelly to help him and the others will do all they can, Elaine. From the time I spent with Ms. Kelly, I can tell she thinks things out as he does. If they get in a bind, they are a good team. They are as safe as if he were sighted, I'd bet," Commander Eagle interjects. "I don't see any one of them giving up until they take care of Mr. McCully, to whatever means they need to use to do so. We need to stop seeing Saber as an invalid or disabled. He isn't. He just does things differently than he used to. He has proven that he is more than capable. I'd be willing to bet that putting the two of them together could be dangerous, especially now that he has openly threatened them."

"They won't stop until he's captured or dead," Thomas states.

"I know. I just hope it doesn't get them hurt worse or killed," Elaine says quietly. "I wish they had gone ahead and gotten married before they left. Then if something happens..."

"I'll do my best to see if we can arrange something, should something happen to Saber, Elaine. I feel that she has more than proven to be loyal to him."

"So what now? Have you spoken with them at all?" Robin asks.

"Not since they left the courtroom. If I know them, they will not risk communication unless they need assistance. They seem to do their best when they remain focused on their tasks at hand and not worrying about what else is going on elsewhere." Robin nods nervously, and the commander continues, "We can however track their position with this computer I've got being set up now. I am thinking about commandeering Ms. Kelly's property temporarily to use as a larger-scale command outpost. She has a good bit of land, so we could set-up temporary shelter and electronic devices there. I would ask to remain here, so that I can keep all of you abreast of any changes."

"Of course, commander. You may stay as long as you wish. I'd much prefer having you close anyways. I do like your idea of utilizing Ms. Kelly's property, I don't think she's got much use for it in it's current state, so you might as well use it," Elaine says as she gets up and heads towards the kitchen then stops, "Oh, commander, should I prepare something for your troops to eat? I could make a stew for them tonight. I don't think I have enough to feed them everyday, but I could tonight at least."

Commander Eagle smiles, "Ms. Elaine, if you are so inclined, I know the stew would be greatly appreciated tonight. After that, they will have ways to prepare food for themselves. I don't want this to become an inconvenience to you."

Elaine nods, "Then I'll go start a few pots. I need to get rid of the meat anyways and get more that's fresher to store. I'll be in the kitchen if anyone needs anything," she says as she leaves.

Robin looks to the commander and starts to speak a few times before sighing and standing up, "Sir, do you honestly think they will be all right?" she asks nervously.

The commander walks over to her and places a hand gently on her shoulder, "Yes, I have no doubt that they will be fine, even with Saber in his current condition. Between he and Ms. Kelly, they have one able body. The others will help as needed. If I had doubts, I wouldn't have told them to leave," he replies gently.

Robin nods satisfied with the answer, "Thank you, sir. I'll be in my room if you hear anything."

"I will. I promise you that," he replies and she heads upstairs. He sits down on the couch and starts setting up the various computers and communication equipment. After a while the doorbell rings and he gets up to answer it, pulling his blaster out in case of trouble. He runs into Thomas in the foyer. "Let me get it. I don't want you

getting hurt if someone breaches our security." Thomas nods and the commander opens the door, his blaster ready. His eyes widen in shock as he is met by General Whitehawk. "Sir?" he says returning his blaster to its holster. "Please, come in," he steps aside and the general enters and is led to the sitting room. "I suppose you're here because of what has happened, sir?"

The general nods, "I have been in non-stop meetings since your team went off after the Outriders and Mr. McCully, Charles. I have spoken with Dr. Izumi and I have quelled the talk of court marshalls and other such penalties. I think the council understands why you allowed them to go. I know they are the most qualified to fly the ship. The thing that I wasn't sure how to handle is the fact that a civilian woman was allowed to accompany them."

"May I remind you sir, that Shinji Hikari and Bill Wilcox were both technically civilians the first couple of times they flew with the Bismarck? It was after they fought against the Outriders on Yuma that they returned to Calvary Command and were officially instated as star sheriffs. Sometimes things happen too quickly and you find it's better to beg forgiveness than fight for permission. I firmly believe that this was and is one of those times. "

General Whitehawk listens attentively as he speaks then watches him for several minutes, "Tell me about this woman, Charles. Who exactly is she? Is she military trained at all? I need to know all I can to be able to keep any of you from legal ramifications from this."

Commander Eagle nods, "Well, her name is Amanda Kelly. She is a local woman who came to know Saber by virtue of applying and getting the job as his...independent living assistant. Her job was to help him learn to function as normally as possible after having lost his sight. He has had on occasion some sight, but not enough to read or anything. I doubt that he will ever fully regain what he's lost." The general nods and he continues, "Anyways, she was selected and began her position here. Saber was rather resistant at first to the whole situation. I wasn't sure how it was going to work out, to be quite honest. She didn't give up though. She decided to try a different approach. She got him to start teaching her things. He taught her how to ride a horse, and eventually he began to teach her self-defense and fencing. She is good enough now that he has bought her her own sword. Not a gift to be taken lightly in his family. Anyways, through a series of circumstances, they began a close friendship. He can talk to her. Perhaps it's because she's not afraid to call him on his attitude, nor is she afraid to tell him off should he deserve it." He sees the look of amusement on the general's face and chuckles. "Yes, it has been quite a show around here. One time, after she had been here about a month or so, she wanted to prove to Saber that he was capable of doing things, such as fencing. So Thomas suggested that they invite Mr. McCully over for practice. He came and after the competition, he found out that Saber was blind. At that point, he had no vision at all. He seemed to get over the shock quickly and later that evening was telling stories from their youth, much to Saber's dismay, I'm sure. Later that evening, Ms. Kelly was heading to her room and Mr. McCully made an advance to her. She refused him and went on to her room. After a few minutes, he was angry, so he entered her room uninvited and attempted to force himself on her. Saber heard the commotion and went in, grabbing a pistol from

his room on the way. He enters the room and figures out what's going on and orders Mr. McCully to vacate the property. He refuses and Saber fires a shot close to him. Mr. McCully shoves Ms. Kelly to the floor and makes to leave. As he's heading to the door he turns to attack Saber and is shot in the leg by April, who had also come to investigate the commotion. The next morning, Ms. Kelly and Saber were talking in the kitchen. Evidently Saber said something that enraged her, so he left on his horse. A few hours later, Ms. Kelly went looking for him and found him. They worked out their differences and became close friends, eventually becoming more than friends. They are now engaged. As for her particular skills, sir, she is the one who came up with the plan to reenter this house after it had been taken. She also took out one of the men shooting at us when we were ambushed. She has a strong will and a good mind. If there was a civilian I'd want on my team, she would be it. She understands how Saber's mind works and can explain what she sees to him quicker than any of the rest of us. So I sent her without hesitation, sir. I should also mention that throughout all of this, she has refused any sort of payment from Calvary Command. She has returned all of her pay vouchers. I figure you should know that as well, as it is likely to come up once they know how she came to be involved in all of this."

The general nods and sighs, "This is quite a predicament, but I trust your judgement, Charles. And I know that the others would not have permitted her to accompany them if they did not trust her. I hope that knowing that will be enough to keep things from being made into yet another legal battle. I will say that I am surprised to hear that she and Saber are engaged. How long has that been the case?"

"They have been unofficially engaged for a couple of months. It was after I returned to Calvary Command this last time, but before they came for the sentencing that they became officially engaged. He has given her his family's ancestral ring. I don't think they have set a date as of yet., he replies.

"How do you mean they were unofficially engaged? You either are or your not," the general asks confused.

Commander Eagle chuckles, "Well, he sort of was talking to us about the situation and how they were sort of becoming more than friends when he inadvertently let on that he hoped to spend his life with her. Ms. Elaine asked if he was proposing, since he directed the statement more to Ms. Kelly than the rest of us. He looked confused for a moment, then nodded. Saying that in a way, he was. She said that she felt the same, but they agreed that they wanted to do it properly, so Colt and Thomas had to go and retrieve the ring from the woman that he had once been engaged to, and that is when this last set of events happened. The fire, the gunfight, all of that."

"Saber had already been engaged before?" General Whitehawk asks surprised.

The commander nods, "He was betrothed as a child. After he was injured and came home to heal, the woman came to call on him and at that time, his memory was still sporadic and he had no vision. She became enraged, accusing him of purposely getting injured so severely to get out of the marriage. She broke off the engagement and left. It took a while for the matter to sink in with him once his memory returned, and when it did, he was upset for a while. But eventually he decided that it must have

been for the best. I think it is for the best from what I've heard about the woman."

"I suppose things are done a bit differently here. I never knew he had been engaged."

"He hadn't said a word to anyone, even the others on his team. They were quite shocked as well," the commander replies.

Elaine comes out and stops when she spots the general, "Oh, good evening, sir. Will you be staying with us tonight as well?"

General Whitehawk looks up, "If you have the room for me, ma'am, I would like to stay for the night. I have meetings in the morning, and I feel I might get more rest here, rather than back at the base."

Elaine nods, "I'll get you a room ready, sir. I'll put you next to the commander. That way you can talk and whatnot as long as you wish. Dinner is just about ready. I've just returned from passing out the stew pots. You were right. The troops were quite appreciative. The bread was a good addition as well." She heads upstairs and prepares a room, then after a bit, comes out and they all eat.

Kapitel 20: Showdown

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 19: Showdown

"Do you think they know we're following them, Saber?" Colt asks as they lie in wait after landing on an asteroid that seems to be some sort of base.

"They may not know that it is actually us following them, but I'm sure they know that someone came after them," Saber replies, shifting uncomfortably in his saddle unit.

"Want me to move?" Amanda asks quietly.

"No," he replies. "I need you to be here."

"Um Saber, several red dots have appeared all over the screen. A dozen or so of them, and they look to be heading our direction," Amanda says suddenly. "How did they get so close without me seeing them before?"

"Cloaking, most likely," Saber replies quietly.

"Well, they're here now. And there's a lot of them," Amanda says dryly.

Colt hops into his saddle unit, "Got it, Ms. Amanda. I'm ready for shootin' practice."

"You're always ready to blast things, Colt," April replies as she hits a series of buttons and they see several robots heading towards them, along with small fighter-style ships. "We're a bit outnumbered, Saber."

"Let's setup for challenge phase. I think we stand a better chance that way," Saber says.

Fireball nods, "Yeah, I think you're right, Saber. Get ready."

"Amanda, hold onto my waist with your good arm, we're going to shift a little. I'll keep you from falling, okay?" Saber says as they get ready for battle. Amanda nods and grabs him firmly and he places an arm around her, to keep her from shifting too much. "Once we've completed the phase shift, we can resume how we were sitting."

They enter battle phase and just get repositioned when they are hit with several blasts, shaking the unit. "They're everywhere!" Amanda says as she struggles to remain seated without using her injured arm.

"Okay, Colt, start shooting at will!" Saber says as they start fighting three of the robots and attempting to dodge the fighters.

They manage to knockout about half the robots quickly, only to have more fighters show up. "They keep coming! I swear they're just multiplying," Amanda says annoyed.

"We'll get 'em," Colt says confidently.

"We need to do something quickly or they are going to pin us down!" April says.

"I'll try and get us off this rock," Fireball says kicking in the thrusters and heading towards space.

"We need there to be more of us," Saber says frustrated.

"I can call for reinforcements," April offers.

"They won't get here in time," Saber replies, standing up.

"Where are you going?" April asks.

"To get Steed," he replies heading for the cargo bay.

"Like Hell you are, Saber!" Amanda says forcefully. "You are in no condition to go out there!" She gets up and stands defiantly in front of him.

Saber starts to say something, but Colt intervenes, "I'll go out in the Bronco Buster. Saber, you can shoot, right? Especially if Amanda tells you the direction." Saber nods. "Then cover me. Amanda be his eyes and don't let him shoot me, got it?"

"Got it, cowboy," Amanda replies and Saber heads to Colt's saddle unit and she returns to his.

"Amanda, do like you did before, to tell me where to hit, okay?" he states as if the previous confrontation never happened. "Colt's unit should show up as a blue dot on the screen."

"You got it," she starts spouting off directions and he begins firing. after several minutes, they begin to make some headway when they are hit hard and she is knocked out of the saddle unit and yelps in pain.

"Amanda?" Saber says turning towards her.

She gets up slowly and fights the urge to throw up and sit back in the unit. Gaining control again she manages to speak, "I'll be fine. Keep shooting. We need to turn about one hundred and eighty degrees, that last hit came from behind us." she says through her clinched teeth.

Fireball casts her a worried glance, but sees she is determined and does as she says.

"Okay, what have we got-" he stops mid-sentence as he sees what hit them.

"That thing is huge! What is it?" April asks shocked.

"Some sort of new renegade unit, I think," Fireball says.

"Amanda, you should see a button with a barcode looking symbol on it to your left. Hit it and see if it tells you any information on your screen," Saber says.

"Got it," She hits the button and several things pop up onto her screen, "You're right. It's some new renegade unit. It's a lot stronger than the old ones. It's a prototype unit and it's firepower is fifty times the old one. It's specialty is close-range combat and has a single pilot unit." An alarm starts beeping and Amanda gasps as something pops up on her screen, "It's locking in on us!"

"Fireball, can you get us away from it, quickly," Saber says urgently.

"Already on it," he says throwing the ship into full drive and backing away as quickly as possible. He destroys several fighters in the process, ramming into them with the ship with it's shields up. "Colt, get out of there!"

"I'm way ahead of you! We'll regroup away from here," Colt replies as they retreat. They get far enough away that Colt is able to join them again and they come out of the challenge phase and back to the transport phase of the unit. "Where do we go from here?"

"Home for now, I suppose," Fireball says.

"They'll only follow us there. Then we'd be putting all of the people on the ground at risk," Amanda replies, not looking away from the screen.

"She's right. We can't go back until we finish this," Saber confirms as he returns to Amanda's side.

"They're already trying to track us," Amanda states. "They're a good distance away, but they are in pursuit of us."

"Well, it looks like we can rest for an hour or two. If we take shifts," April says glancing to Saber and Amanda. "We can watch for trouble the two of you need to rest."

"What about you?" Amanda asks.

"I didn't just ram my bad shoulder," April states. "The two of you go and rest. We can rest here. We'll call for you if something happens."

"Yeah, Colt does it all the time," Fireball quips.

"Hey!" Colt protests getting a laugh from April.

"Perhaps they're right, Amanda. We should rest. They are much better off physically than we are," Saber says quietly.

Amanda sighs in resignation. "Okay, I suppose you're right. Thank you," she says getting up slowly. They head to the sleeping area, the doors closing behind them.

"Do you think he's mad at her?" Fireball asks after a long silence.

"Why?" Colt asks.

"Well, she basically went against him in front of us, and technically he's the superior officer," Fireball states.

"I think he was mad for a second, but then realized that she was right," April replies.

"If one of us had said it, he would have probably went off on us," Colt states.

"But he knows that she is speaking from personal knowledge, not as a soldier. Perhaps that's why he didn't argue back," April states.

They lapse into their own thoughts for a while, taking turns watching for trouble. "Hey, the ships are starting to get closer again., Fireball states watching the screen in Saber's unit.

Suddenly the com-screen is activated. "Do we answer it?" April asks.

"I will," Fireball replies and hits the button to connect.

Sean's face appears on the screen. "I should have known it was you people. Corporal Blue said it would be."

"Corporal Blue?" They all ask in reply.

"Yes, the new leader of the Outriders. Nemesis is dead, and those that survived have regrouped. You are all marked for death. I will personally take care of Saber, and as a bonus, I'll get Amanda as well. The rest of you I'm going to kill just for fun. Perhaps then I can move up in rank in the Outrider regime as we take over the entire new frontier."

"You really think that the Outriders are gonna let some human join their ranks?" Colt asks defiantly.

"They have already told me that if I kill all of you, that I will become an officer," Sean says coldly. "Just the offer is enough motivation to me. They kept me from being put to death for some heinous so-called crime that is really a personal matter. I never should have been charged in the first place."

"You tried to rape Amanda! That is a crime," Colt says fighting back anger.

"She should have not fought me and done as she was ordered. It wouldn't have been rape then and none of this would have happened," he says simply. "But that time is gone. She will learn that you don't make a fool of me. I'll kill you, then I'll go after them." He closes the connection and suddenly more ships appear and start gaining on them.

"He doesn't know that they're on this ship! We hopefully can use that to our advantage," Fireball states.

"They're gaining on us. We need to get them back here to help," April says getting up and heading for the sleeping quarters. The doors open and she almost runs into them.

"We were listening from here. He doesn't know we're here. Let's use that to our advantage," Saber says as they head to his unit as Fireball jumps out and heads to his own.

"Ready to go to Challenge Phase?" Fireball asks.

"Saber?" April says glancing his direction, "Should we try the challenge phase 2?"

Saber looks over to her with a surprised look, "We've not tried it before. Are you sure it's a good idea to do so now?"

"I know it's a risk, but that renegade unit out guns us in the phase we're used to. While we were all out of commission, I had a few upgrades done. We'll have stronger armor and more firepower. It will also have a bladed weapon, well a laser-type sword. So if needed, you can take control of that, Saber."

"Where..how...how did you manage to get all of that done?" he asks completely astonished.

"I was bored while you were still in a coma, and not being able to do a whole lot, I had some time to think. I came up with some rough schematics, and the rest was taken care of by the development team. Why do you think they're having a hard time training people to fly this thing?" she says with a smile.

Saber shakes his head, "Let's try this out then. Ready, Fireball?"

"You got it. Entering Challenge Phase 1," he says as he hits the button and activates the challenge phase. "Now what?"

"Hit the button again and it should turn blue," April says watching her screens.

He does as instructed and hits the button again and the phase activates. After the transformation, they can see that the blaster from before is different. It has a stronger setting and that several other beams are able to be fired. Next to where the blaster is stowed is a sheath for the sword. "Let's stop them before they have time to figure this out," Colt says. "I'm itchin' to try out the new guns."

"Let's face Sean head-on," Saber says. "I don't think he'd expect a head-on attack."

"You got it," Fireball says as he turns the ship towards Sean's unit.

"We have a dozen or so fighters heading right for us!" Amanda says. "I don't think they like that we're coming back to them."

"I see them," Colt replies as he starts shooting.

"Let's try the chest cannons," Saber says. "Perhaps we can wipe out several at once."

"Roger that!" Colt replies and fires the cannons. Suddenly about six ships disappear from the screen.

"Looks like you're making headway. I just lost six dots from the screen., Amanda states. "Four more coming at us at two o'clock!"

Colt fires and they are wiped out, "Just a few more."

"Four o'clock and eleven o'clock, Cowboy." Amanda says.

Colt fires and they disappear.

"Let's go for Sean now," Saber says coldly.

"Right." Fireball replies. "Amanda?"

"One o'clock, Fireball. And he's closing in really fast."

"Then let's get him first," Colt says pulling out the blaster and firing.

It makes a solid hit and knocks him back a bit. Sean's unit stops and pulls out a laser beamed sword.

Colt fires again and the shot is deflected back towards them. "Evade!" he yells as Fireball struggles to move the unit fast enough.

"Hit the purple button next to the phase button!" April says and they are hit, but it activates a shield that softens the blow. "Now, we will need to try the sword. I'm going to shift weapons control to Saber's unit. We can't fire at him and risk another deflection. By using the sword, we activate the phase shift armor that will deflect laser weapons without depleting our power. Amanda, can you sit behind Saber so that he can reach the controls, and still see well enough to guide him visually?"

"I'll try," Amanda moves so that she is on her knees behind Saber, sort of bracing herself between him and the back of his unit.

Saber takes the controls, "Ready, April." She shifts the controls and he grabs the sword, activating the phase shift armor. A couple of fighters start firing, but the shots

are deflected and one of them is hit and blows up. Sean continues his approach and swings first. Saber evades the attack and slashes back towards him as they pass one another. He misses and turns around, ready for a second shot. Sean launches forward attacking head on.

"He's coming right at us, can you duck down and roll him over us?" Amanda asks.

"I'll try. Say when," Saber replies.

"Ready...Now!"

Saber ducks down and reaches up, throwing the other unit off balance and tossing it behind him. They turn and are on him quickly, sword ready to strike. Sean's unit tries to right itself, but they stab through the unit and then pull back, severely damaging it. He manages to get up and tries to lunge for them.

"Nine o'clock!" Amanda says, and Saber swings hard with the laser sword, slicing the unit in half. It falls to a planet not far below, catching fire as it returns to orbit. "It's burning up in the atmosphere of that planet."

"Follow it, Fireball. I want to know he's dead," Saber says coldly.

"Got it," he turns the ship and they follow the unit down, landing near the craters it created when it crashed.

"I'm going out," Saber says and stands up.

"Not without me," Amanda says getting up behind him. Saber starts to protest, "I've been hurt by him too. You are not the only one he's threatened, Saber," she states firmly meeting his gaze.

He nods. "You're wearing a suit that April gave you, correct?" he asks quietly.

"Yes. It has a helmet, so I can breathe if the atmosphere is different. My sword is attached. I am coming with you."

Saber sighs and nods. "Let's go. We'll take Steed. I'll help you on," he says deciding it best not to waste time arguing with her.

April lowers the ramp and they descend on Steed. Approaching the crater, they are almost immediately fired on. They manage to evade the shot and get behind some nearby rocks. They dismount.

"Looks like we're better on foot," Amanda says quietly.

"So you were the one fighting me, Saber. I should have known you would be on that ship," Sean says coldly. "Too bad you didn't finish me off. I'll kill you and whoever else is with you on that ship. Then I'll find that woman and kill her too, after I get what I want from her."

"You won't be leaving here today," Saber says stepping out from behind a rock, sword in hand. "Nor will I be killed."

"That's what you think. It's a shame that you're so misguided. You would have enjoyed the life I've led. You could have had any number of women," Sean says as he lunges to attack.

Saber parries the attack and they fight back and forth for a while. "I don't need any number of women. One is quite enough for me," Saber retorts as they fight.

"She only wants you for your money. She's not like us," Sean says as he gains the upper hand.

Saber is starting to tire, but presses on. "Actually, she's from an old French Family, not that it matters," he swings again, managing to land a hit on Sean.

Sean grimaces in pain, but sees Saber wearing down. "A few more minutes and you're dead, Rider," Sean says as Saber trips and hits the ground, dropping his sword. He goes to finish him off when he feels a sharp pain in his back and sees a point come from his chest and drops his sword.

"No Sean, you're dead. This ends now," Amanda says coldly as she pulls her sword back out and Sean drops to the ground as Saber manages to roll out of the way. She kicks Sean's sword away from him and he gasps for air, blood trickling from his mouth as he collapses on the ground. She goes to Saber's side. "Are you all right?" she asks concerned.

He nods slowly in reply. "Did you?" he manages to ask.

She looks to where Sean is lying on the ground and nods, "He's dead," she replies barely audible.

"We need to get back to the ship," Saber says as he stands up slowly. "Can you make it?"

"Yeah," she replies quietly and slowly stands up, wincing in pain as she does so. "Let's go."

Saber grabs Sean's sword and they make their way back to the ship, Steed along side them. They enter the control room and everyone looks at them expectantly. "He's dead," Saber says to the unasked question and goes and plops down in his saddle unit, setting Sean's sword on the floor at his feet.

Amanda walks over beside him, "May I go and lie down?" she asks barely audible. He nods and she turns and heads to the sleeping area without another word. She removes the helmet and the sword and collapses on the bed crying.

The four of them sit in silence as they take off. "Are we going to your place?" Fireball

asks after a while.

Saber nods. "I would assume so," he replies quietly.

They begin heading towards Saber's home and after several minutes Colt speaks up, "So how did you kill him?"

"I didn't," Saber replies simply. "He was about to kill me and Amanda..." The others gasp in shock.

"Is she all right?" Colt asks.

"I don't know. I think she's in shock," Saber replies.

"We'll be okay here. Why don't you go and see about her," April says quietly.

"Thank you," he replies as he gets up and heads to the back.

The doors close behind him and Colt lets out a low whistle. "I can't believe it," he says a hint of admiration and shock in his voice.

"I think Saber is shocked too," Fireball replies.

"She killed that thug that was shooting at them before. Didn't she?" Colt asks.

"Yeah, but that I don't think was entirely on purpose," April states.

"This time she did it on purpose to save Saber," Fireball says.

"Wow. I'm not sure Robin would have had the guts to do such a thing. Even under those circumstances," Colt says.

"Amanda has been a bit different from the start. I just hope she's okay. She looked pretty upset," April says.

"She just killed a man. How would you feel after killing someone?" Colt asks.

They fly in silence for a while. "Should someone try and contact Commander Eagle?" Fireball asks breaking the silence.

"I'll do it," April says and heads over to Saber's unit to make the call.

Saber enters the sleeping area and heads to his quarters. He hears Amanda crying and heads to her. Sitting beside her he places an arm around her, being careful of her shoulder. "I'm sorry, Love," he finally says quietly. "I'm sorry for bringing you into this."

She tries to force herself to stop crying and manages to sit up and face him. Her face is tear-stained and her eyes red from crying. She looks at his face and sees the concern he has and lays her head against his chest. He pulls her closer and kisses her forehead.

"I know I shouldn't be upset like this. I'm sorry," she says barely audible.

Saber sighs, "Amanda, Love, you have every right to be upset. You have faced so much since you've met me. You have killed someone protecting me. I would have died had I gone out alone as I intended to do. I owe you my life. I am sorry that it came to this. That you were put in the position of having to make the conscious decision to kill another human being," Saber replies.

She looks up at him and shakes her head, her hands are shaking and tears are still falling down her face, "Saber, I would do it again if it meant saving you. I would probably do it again to save anyone of your friends, to be honest." He goes to say something and she places a finger to his lips, "Will I consciously make the decision to kill again? I hope I never have to, but if it came down to protecting the people I care about, I would do it."

Saber nods and runs a finger across her face, stopping the tears momentarily. "I am here, if you need to talk, or just want someone to cry against, okay?" he says and she nods and snuggles against him.

"Thank you," She says as he holds her gently rocking her to try and calm her. She suddenly realizes that he's rocking her and chuckles.

"What's so funny?" he asks confused.

"You're rocking me," she replies quietly.

He stops and chuckles, "I didn't realize it. I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I just thought it was kinda funny," she takes a few breaths and manages to calm down almost completely. "I wonder what the others are talking about right now."

"Probably wondering if you're going to be all right. They were all shocked when I told them what happened."

"Am I going to go to jail for this?" she asks suddenly.

"Why would you think something like that, Amanda?"

"Because I murdered a human being," she replies, her voice breaking a bit.

He shakes his head, "No Love, you will not go to jail. You killed a man that threatened your life and has tried on more than one occasion to take it. At the time you killed him, he was going to kill me, so you did it to save me, if nothing else. He had already been sentenced to death for his crimes, you just saved Calvary Command the manpower of doing it themselves. No one would dare convict you, even if they tried to prosecute you. And believe me, they won't. Commander Eagle knew that we would kill him, that's why he let us go after him," Saber replies seriously.

"I can only imagine his reaction to how this played out. I hope he isn't in too much trouble for letting us take this ship," Amanda says quietly.

"I'm sure he can handle himself," Saber replies and he holds her close. "Would you like to lay down and rest a bit? I should go and see where we are going from this point."

"May I come along?" she asks hesitantly.

"Of course. Why would you think otherwise?"

"I wasn't sure how they would act after..."

"Trust me. They are fine with it, Love. Colt seemed rather impressed," he adds with a chuckle. "Although we should have your sword cleaned properly when we return home."

Amanda nods. "Okay. Let's go and see what they're doing then. Maybe we can go home and rest," she says. They get up and head back out to the control room.

"Yes. Sean is dead. I don't want to give you the details over a com connection. We are heading back towards you," April says.

"How are they doing?" the commander asks.

"We're as good as can be expected, sir," Saber replies, walking carefully up to his unit. April moves so that Saber can be seen, Amanda hangs back behind him a bit.

The commander nods, "I want a full report when you return."

"Yes sir," Saber replies quietly. "We shall see you soon." The connection terminates and Amanda comes up beside him silently.

April comes over and places a hand gently on her good shoulder, "You did the right thing, Amanda. You were brave. It's never easy to take a life. I just hope you never have to make that decision again."

Amanda looks up to meet her gaze, struggling to not break down, she nods slightly. "Thank you," she manages to whisper.

"We're about forty-five minutes out. If you want, you can rest, Amanda," Fireball says.

"I'd like to sit out here, if it's okay. I'm afraid if I lay back down, I'd sleep for days," she replies.

"Sure. You're welcome to be out here with us anytime you wish. You should know that we were all impressed that you were able to do what you did. So please don't feel like we fear you or something. We don't," Fireball says, trying to help her feel better.

Amanda nods and goes and sits beside Saber. "We'll be home soon," Saber says

quietly into her ear and takes her hand.

They go the rest of the way in silence and land as close as they can to Saber's property. They are met by a group of soldiers and several vans. They load up and arrive at the estate a short time later, greeted by Commander Eagle and Elaine. They head into the house and stop suddenly when they see General Whitehawk waiting for them in the sitting room.

"Sir!" The four say and salute him, Amanda hanging back a bit.

He returns the gesture and nods, "Please, sit down. We have a lot to discuss," the general says.

They glance nervously to each other, but each take a seat. Robin hears them arrive and comes down the stairs and rushes to Colt, who hugs her briefly. "We need to discuss what's happened Robin, perhaps you should go to the kitchen or back upstairs. Some of it isn't pleasant," Colt says quietly.

Robin glances to the others and notices how tired everyone looks and nods. "I'll be in the kitchen," she replies quietly as she gets up and leaves.

They all sit in silence, no one wanting to be the one to open the discussion. Finally, the general speaks up after studying the faces of the people before him. "Commander Eagle tells me that Mr. McCully has been dealt with. Is that correct?" he asks.

"He is dead, sir," Saber replies quietly.

"He was sentenced to die anyways for the crimes against you, Captain, among other crimes. So despite the way you and your crew went about it, I suppose you did us a favor," the general replies.

"So we aren't in trouble?" Colt asks confused.

"That all depends, Mr. Wilcox. I need to know exactly what happened, and how Ms. Kelly, whom I presume you to be," he says looking towards Amanda who nods slightly, "ended up on the ship with you."

Saber sighs, trying to think of how to begin his explanation. "Amanda and I arrived for the sentencing I guess it's been three days ago now. We entered the courtroom and things progressed normally. All of us were there, the commander, April, Colt, Fireball myself, and Amanda. The others were sentenced and led away, then it was his turn. Sean was sentenced and was being led away when the Outriders attacked. He was in the process of escaping, but stopped to tell me that no matter where I was, that he would find Amanda and myself and he would make us pay. I took that as a direct threat, sir. April, Fireball, and Colt jumped up to go after him, but he had already vanished with the Outriders. That is when Commander Eagle told them to take the Bismarck. I told him I was going with them and he said to go to my estate and we'd regroup there. All of us went to the ship. Amanda stayed with me, I felt it was safer to keep her near me, in the event of a direct attack on us, her life had also been

threatened by Sean. Once in the air, we got a fix on the Outrider's ship, so instead of going directly to my place, we followed the ship. April had a spare suit that fit Amanda, so she helped her change, so that she could be somewhat protected if we were attacked. Amanda has no formal military training, I'm sure by now you are aware of that fact. She acted as my eyes, relaying after some instruction what was on the screens. We fought a couple of different times with some fighters and renegade units. Then we entered the Challenge phase 2, something we had not done before. The unit that Sean was piloting was a good bit stronger, so it gave us no choice but to do so to even our chances. We fought, and ended up slicing his unit into two parts. It fell thorough the orbit of the planet below us and crashed, making two craters in some mountainous terrain. We followed it down and landed, I decided I would go out to be sure he was dead. Amanda insisted on coming along. Trust me, I know better that to argue with her on certain points, and this was one of them. We took Steed and landed close to one of the craters and we dismounted. Almost immediately we were fired upon. After trading fire with Sean for a bit of time, I engaged him in combat with my sword. We fought quite a while, each gaining an advantage at some point. He then managed to disarm me and just as he was about to kill me, Amanda impaled him from behind, he dropped to the ground and died fairly quickly. She saved my life, sir. We then took his sword and returned to the ship, where we contacted Commander Eagle and then returned here," Saber says recalling the recent events.

There is a stunned silence for several minutes as the two commanding officers process the information presented to them. Finally General Whitehawk manages to find his voice, "So none of you that were trained formally were the one to take his life?" several heads shake no in reply. He looks to Amanda, "And how is it that you came to have a sword, Ms. Kelly?"

"It was a gift from Saber, sir." she replies quietly not looking up from her hands on her lap. "He taught me to fence and had decided I was good enough to receive one. I wear it openly, it is not concealed," she says nervously. Saber reaches for her hand and squeezes it gently, trying to calm her nervousness.

General Whitehawk looks between them, "What is the nature of your relationship with Captain Rider, Ms. Kelly?"

"We are engaged, sir." she replies daring a glance to him.

"Is this true, Captain?" the general asks.

"Yes sir," Saber replies.

General Whitehawk shakes his head and smiles slightly, "Don't worry, Ms. Kelly, you will not be prosecuted for any wrongdoing. You acted in defense of your life and Captain Rider's. For willingly risking your life to save his, we could easily give you a medal. Not many would so boldly face the danger that you did in going after Mr. McCully as you did."

"I don't think we could have restrained her, sir," Colt says with a smirk. "She is not afraid to tell Saber he can't do something if she believes it would endanger him."

The general nods, hiding a smile, "I'm sure Captain Rider can handle himself."

"I would not be here now were it not for Amanda. I have no qualms in saying that. It is good to have someone that is not afraid to speak their mind to me. Just as she knows I will speak my mind to her," Saber replies.

Commander Eagle stands up and looks over them, "I think all of you can do with some rest. Why don't you make your way upstairs and lie down. We can come and get you once the food is ready."

"Dinner won't be for a couple of hours," Elaine says as she comes into the room from the kitchen. "If you wish something before that, let me know and I'll fix you something."

Colt gets up and heads upstairs, followed by April and Fireball. Saber and Amanda hang back, watching them leave.

Commander Eagle comes over and studies Amanda's face. "Are you all right, Ms. Kelly? You look rather pale," he asks concerned.

Amanda looks up startled momentarily. "Um, yes...yes sir. I'm all right," she replies hesitantly. "I'm in a good deal of pain, but I'll be okay."

"I want you both to know that I knew you'd go after him, given the opportunity. I am glad that he can no longer threaten either of you," Commander Eagle says looking between them. They nod in agreement. "I also want you to know Ms. Kelly, that I admire your resolve throughout this ordeal. You would have made a good soldier."

Amanda smiles weakly, "Thank you, sir. I know that coming from you that is indeed a compliment. Oh, and if it's all the same to you, please call me Amanda."

The commander nods, "I'll try and remember that, Amanda," he replies with a smile.

"What will we do about Jesse and the Outriders, sir?" Saber asks quietly. "Once they know what happened with Sean, they could very well attack at any time."

Commander Eagle nods, "A valid point, Saber. I have sort of commandeered your property, Amanda. It is just charred land anyways, and you were otherwise occupied. We have set up a temporary command outpost on your property. It is large enough to support a large number of troops and there is enough land to enable ships to come and go a few at a time."

"Calvary Command will pay you nicely for the use of the property, we are not taking it from you outright," General Whitehawk adds. "Seeing as nothing about this situation is normal, we took an abnormal approach to getting the land we needed. We will be keeping the Bismarck here, as the only people who can fly it are you and your team, Captain Rider."

"I beg your pardon sir, but I have not been even remotely cleared for duty, and given my lack of sight, I doubt that I will be. The others should be fine, but I don't see how I can continue as the Captain of the Bismarck." Saber replies.

"Just as you have these past few day, Saber," the general replies with a chuckle. "That is if Ms. Kelly is willing to accompany you and your crew."

Amanda nods, "If he is needed and wants to fight, then I will go with him. At least until you can train someone to replace him."

"The two of you seem to work well together, so if something comes up before we can get someone else prepared to fly with the Bismarck, then I am relieved to know that you are willing to help and from what I've heard, you will be an asset," he replies.

"Sir, if she is willing to fight, then shouldn't she be instated somehow?" Saber asks hesitantly.

"He has a point, General. If we are asking her to willingly take such risks, she should be instated as a proper soldier, just as Mr. Hikari and Mr. Wilcox were those years ago," Commander Eagle states.

General Whitehawk nods, "You would be correct, Saber. Give me until the morning to work out the legalities and we shall do something first thing tomorrow."

"Yes, sir. Thank you," Saber says and then turns to Amanda., "Shall we go and make an attempt at lying down?"

"Could we get a snack first? I need to take something for pain, but I need to eat something," Amanda replies, obviously tired and in pain.

Saber nods, "Let's go into the kitchen and see if Elaine can help us find something." They get up and head into the kitchen.

"Well sir, what is your feeling on this situation?" Commander Eagle asks after Saber and Amanda leave.

"I'm actually impressed by her. I think considering everything that you've told me that has happened, she has one very strong resolve to still be here," the general answers honestly.

"Perhaps it hasn't completely sunk in yet that she has killed Mr. McCully, " Commander Eagle replies.

"I think it has. Her eyes show more than she wants us to know. But I also can see why Saber is attracted to her. She is strong willed, and she won't compromise her personal beliefs for anyone. I wish she had been a soldier, she would have made a good one. She will make a good one, even if for a brief time," General Whitehawk states and pauses, "She has had surgery on her shoulder, correct?"

"Yes, a few weeks ago. But I believe she may have re injured it during the pursuit of Mr. McCully. She seems to be in a lot of pain. We should have a doctor look at it." Commander Eagle says.

"Do you still have her information from where you had hired her as Saber's assistant?" General Whitehawk asks.

"Yes, sir I do," the commander replies opening up his laptop. He searches through some files before opening up her file. "Here we go. Kelly, Amanda G. Age 23, Female... This should be all we need to make an EBU and such for her," he says as he continues typing.

Elaine looks up as Saber and Amanda enter the kitchen and comes over to them, "I was so worried when I'd heard what happened. I'm glad you both made it home safely."

Saber places a hand on Elaine's shoulder, "I'm glad we made it back too. If Amanda hadn't been there, I wouldn't have made it," Saber says quietly.

Elaine looks over to Amanda and sees her expression and hugs her gently, "Oh, I know you have been through it, but things will be better." Elaine says. "Maybe you two should go on and get married," she adds as almost an afterthought.

"What?" Saber and Amanda say simultaneously.

"You both are obviously committed to each other, why not just do it?" Elaine states. "Perhaps even Commander Eagle or the General could marry you."

"What brought this on, Elaine?" Saber asks surprised.

Elaine looks down, "I overheard everything about what happened. I know how Sean died," she says quietly looking to Amanda, who looks away nervously. "I figure he got what he deserved. And that if she is willing to do that to save you, then you should just go on and get married. You would not find another woman that would go through what she has and still be with you. Your Mother and Father would have been honored for you to be with such a woman."

Saber looks shocked for a moment then glances to Amanda, who is sitting there staring at Elaine with a look of shock on her face, "Amanda?"

"I'm all right. I'm not against the idea, but I don't want you to feel -"

He chuckles, "Amanda, I would have eloped with you the day we were teasing Colt. I want to be with you for the rest of my life. I owe you my life. If you are willing to get married, then I will gladly do it whenever you wish. Be it sooner or later," Saber says.

Amanda looks at him and smiles. "I would have married you that day too, Saber. I'm not opposed to the idea of getting married sooner rather than later. I would at least like a day to rest and maybe get a nicer dress than what I have. Oh, and a shower," she

adds with a smirk.

"Ah, you're no fun," Saber replies with a grin. They eat a light snack and talk a bit more. "Perhaps I should go and ask Commander Eagle or General Whitehawk if either one of them could marry us, if you have no objections, Love."

"None at all, Saber," Amanda replies stifling a yawn.

He smiles and kisses her forehead. "Perhaps we should rest first. And ask them after while," he suggests.

"I'll be all right for a few more minutes. I think it would be fair to give them some time to think about it. So let's go ahead and ask them, then we can go and rest for a while," Amanda replies.

Saber nods. "Okay, let's go and ask them then," he says as he takes her hand and they head back to the sitting room. The two men look up as they enter.

"I thought that you two would be out cold by now," Commander Eagle says as they approach.

"We'd like to ask a favor, sir," Saber replies a bit hesitantly.

"I'll do what I can, what do you need?" Commander Eagle says looking between them.

"We were wondering if either you, or General Whitehawk could marry us?" Saber replies, looking between the two men.

General Whitehawk casts a knowing look to the commander and smiles, "How soon were you wishing to be married, Saber?"

"Perhaps as early as tomorrow evening, but most likely a couple of days, sir," Saber replies.

"I would like to have time to get a nice dress, sir. The nicer dresses I had were destroyed when my property was burned," Amanda says quietly.

"Given all of the uncertainty of our current situations, we just want to go ahead and get married. Everyone that I'd want here is here," Saber says.

"And I have no family to invite, so everyone I'd ask is here as well," Amanda adds.

The commander and the general look to each other and nod. "I think we can arrange it, Saber. I will perform the ceremony whenever you wish. I would like to have enough time to get my dress uniform to do so," General Whitehawk says with a smile.

"Thank you, sir. Both of you," Saber says sincerely. "I think we shall go and rest now. We'll see you later."

"Go and rest. We'll work on arrangements with Thomas and Elaine and get with you once you've had time to rest," Commander Eagle says as Saber and Amanda head upstairs.

About an hour later, everyone save for Saber and Amanda are downstairs talking and eating dinner. "Shouldn't we go and get them?" April asks.

"No. Let them rest. They were down here with us for quite some time after the rest of you went to lie down," Commander Eagle replies.

"Why? I know they had to be exhausted," April asks.

"We were talking about things. Including what to do if the Outriders attack and we still don't have another crew that can pilot the Bismarck."

"And what was decided?" Fireball asks in between bites.

"That we will be instating Amanda as an official member of your crew. She will do as she did during this last outing and basically serve as Saber's eyes. The only difference is she will now be sanctioned to be there," Commander Eagle replies.

Colt nearly spits out his drink. "Seriously?" he asks in surprise.

"Do you have a problem with that, Mr. Wilcox?" the general asks.

"No sir. I'm just surprised that she agreed to do it."

"She was a bit hesitant, but she told us that if the need arises and that if Saber is needed, she will accompany him as she did this time. I am working on getting her an EBU put together as we speak. I have only met Ms. Kelly today, but from the stories that I have heard and they way Saber is with her, I feel confident that I am making a good call," General Whitehawk states.

"You are sir. She has my admiration for what she's done. It's not too many that can tell Saber off and live, nor is it often that a woman would willingly go into danger to help protect you. I'm sure my face was priceless when I found out that she was the one who killed Sean, and did it to save Saber's life," Colt replies honestly.

"Oh, do each of you have your dress uniforms here?" the general asks.

"Yes sir. We do. We just need to have them cleaned. Why?" Fireball asks.

"You may need them in the next couple of days. So see that they get cleaned and are ready to be used by tomorrow evening," he replies and gets up from the table.

"Father, what is going on?" April asks.

"You'll find out as soon as we know something for sure. We have already spoken to Saber, so he knows to be sure that his is clean as well," he says. "I've got a few things

that I am looking into. I'll be in my room if anyone needs me," he says before getting up and heading upstairs.

"I wonder what's going on?" April asks to no one in particular.

"Maybe they're gonna give Amanda some sort of medal or something," Colt replies. "She did save Saber's life during a battle."

"Well, we'd need the dress uniforms for that. That's probably what it is," Fireball says.

Saber is lying awake after a few hours of sound sleep, replaying the past few days events over in his mind. Repeatedly he sees where Sean gains the upper hand in their fight and the smug look he has as he's about to end it. Then the look of shock when he's stabbed from behind. Saber then spots Amanda and realizes what has happened. He recalls the look of shock and fear on her face. It's then he realizes that he was actually able to see clearly, in those few moments and sighs running a hand over his face. He feels Amanda tense up against him in her sleep. She seems restless and he instinctively holds her tighter. He then realizes that she's crying and he shakes her gently, "Amanda?" he whispers and she stirs a little. "Wake up, Love it's only a dream." She stirs a bit more and her eyes pop open and she looks terrified. He holds her tightly and kisses her head. "It's okay, Love. It's over," he whispers trying to calm her.

She starts gasping for air, then suddenly seems to realize where she is and relaxes a bit. She sees the concern on Saber's face and presses her head against his chest and starts sobbing. "I'm sorry. I...I..."

"Shhh. Shhh. It's all right," he says quietly trying to calm her. He holds her tightly against him, running his fingers through her hair. "I'm sorry, Love."

"It's not your fault, Saber." she finally manages to say after calming down. "I just keep seeing it over and over. Sean...you...you're fighting and then you trip and he's about to kill you and I just...reacted. It took me a minute to even realize what I'd done. My only concern in that moment was protecting you. I still remember the feeling of the sword piercing him and then pulling it back out. I don't think I'll ever forget that feeling, no matter how hard I try to." She lays against him quietly, not sure what else to say.

He nods slightly, "I can imagine. I've not killed a human before, but I've killed plenty of Outriders, including several that looked human," he says quietly. "Taking anyone's life is never easy, Amanda. But sometimes it comes down to the greater good. You or them and that's when you have to make those hard decisions. I wish I could say that it gets easier, but it doesn't. Especially if it's a one on one situation. Those are always more personal. I'm just sorry that you ended up in that situation of having to decide. I never wanted that to happen. I wanted to be the one to protect you," he adds quietly.

Amanda looks up at his face, "You have protected me, many times since we met. I'm glad I was finally able to return the favor. I just had no idea how bad it was going to get with him. He was insane, Saber," she says her voice breaking a bit.

"Yes, indeed he was. Had I known that he was as bad as he was towards women, I

never would have allowed him to come here."

"You had no way of knowing, Saber. It had been years since you'd seen him."

"Aye, but I knew how he had been, and I should have remembered and warned you and made sure that he knew you were not to be treated as he treated you. "

"Your memories were still a bit muddled. You can't go on blaming yourself for his actions, Saber. So look at me," she moves so she is looking him directly in the face, her eyes meeting his, "This is NOT your fault. Got that?" she says forcefully, poking him in the chest with her fingers.

He manages not to smile much and nods, "Yes ma'am," he replies as seriously as he can and kisses her. After a minute he pulls back and looks at her. "When Sean...was about to kill me, just before you stabbed him, I was able to see clearly for the first time since the accident," he says quietly.

She gasps her eyes widening in shock, "You...you can see again?" she whispers.

He shakes his head. "Not now. By the time we got back to the ship, my vision was back to the blurred focus and shadows and outlines again. But I wanted you to know that it happened., he replies quietly. "It's the only time I've seen you clearly."

She nods slightly. "Thank you for telling me," she replies sounding unsure.

"What's wrong, Love?"

"I'm afraid of what you think now that you've seen me. Especially because of when you saw me," she replies quietly.

Saber chuckles, "I'm still here aren't I?" she nods. "It's never been about the physical attraction, Amanda. I love you because of who you are. How you act, not what you look like." she smiles weakly at him. "Although I do think you're beautiful," he adds barely above a whisper and she blushes slightly.

She snuggles against him and sighs, finally calming down. "So are we going through with the wedding then?"

"If that's what you want, I surely won't complain," Saber replies with a smile.

Amanda chuckles, "Then I suppose in the morning we should go into town so I can get a dress of some sort."

"You don't have to wear a dress, you know? You can be in shorts for all I care," Saber replies.

"I want to wear a dress. Not the frilly kind of traditional wedding dress, but something nice. Especially since the general is doing the ceremony. I figure you'll be in your dress uniform."

He nods, "Yes. I need to take it with us and see about getting it cleaned. I suppose the others will want to as well. I guess that means we'll have to tell them beforehand what we're up to," he replies with a sigh of disappointment.

Amanda laughs, "You weren't going to tell them, huh?"

"I was thinking of waiting until right before to tell them," Saber says mischievously.

Amanda smiles at him and kisses his cheek, "We still could."

"And just how would we pull that off?" he asks curiously.

"Simple. Tell them that we're going into town and that you're dropping off your uniform to be cleaned. Ask them if they need anything. If they reply that they want to drop theirs off as well, we can offer to do it for them. Maybe Elaine could accompany us, so that I have a female opinion on the dress I choose too. They won't think anything of us going to town with her to run errands, I don't think. At least not if Elaine agrees to go."

"You are a devious thing, aren't you?" Saber asks laughing.

"I can be," Amanda replies grinning. "We could talk to Elaine in a bit and see if she's agreeable to it. If she is, we could make the offer to the others before bed, so that they have time to get everything out and ready to be dropped off. Then in the morning get up and leave right after breakfast."

Saber nods, "That could work, if Elaine is amenable to it. What if they require an escort to accompany us?"

"Are you borrowing trouble?" she asks.

He shakes his head and is about to speak when a knock is heard at the door. Amanda sighs. "Who is it?" Saber asks loud enough to be heard.

"It's Elaine, Saber," she replies.

"Come in," Saber says as he sits up in the bed.

Elaine comes in and sees them both awake, "Ah, I was just coming to see about the two of you."

"We were just about to come looking for you, Elaine," Saber replies.

"Oh? What do you need?" Elaine asks taking a seat in the chair beside the bed.

"Well, we wanted to know if the others are aware that we're getting married so soon," Saber replies.

"No, Commander Eagle told them they need to look into getting their dress uniforms cleaned because they might need them in a few days, but he wouldn't commit to what purpose. They have guessed a few things, but not a wedding. Why do you ask?"

"Well, we would like for you to accompany us into town tomorrow, if possible. Amanda needs a dress and some other clothes, since she lost a good deal of hers in that fire, I also need to get my dress uniform cleaned," he replies and turns to Amanda, "Oh, and I'd like to get wedding bands while we're out if we can find some we like." Amanda nods.

Elaine smiles, "I think that would be fun. A nice change of pace from the recent string of events."

"I'd like for you to help me choose a dress, Ms. Elaine. I've not gotten anything formal in a very long time," Amanda says quietly. "And I could use a woman's opinion."

"I'd be delighted to, Ms. Kelly." she replies and looks to Saber. "I'll see if the others would like me to take their uniforms to the cleaners as well, since we'll be in town anyways. I'll tell them that I have other errands to run and you two are coming to get out of the house. That way, they hopefully won't suspect anything. I think the Commander and the General want to surprise them too." Elaine says smiling.

"I suppose I should go and make some sort of appearance downstairs for the evening. I probably should mention our plans to Commander Eagle, in case they have an objection we need to rectify before we leave in the morning." Saber says as he moves so he can get up. "Do you wish to remain up here, Love? I'd understand you not wanting to be asked questions right now."

"Please, Ms. Elaine, call me Amanda." she says to Elaine who nods. "I was thinking that if Elaine wouldn't mind, she could maybe help me shower and find some fresher clothes. I know I need to have my shoulder re wrapped before we go out tomorrow anyways. That way, you can do what you need to when you come back and not have to worry about putting me out. I'll probably be asleep again before long," Amanda replies.

"I'll help you, Ms. Amanda. That's no trouble at all." Elaine replies.

Saber nods. "All right then, I'll head down stairs and I'll hope to be back up before you go to sleep." He leans over and kisses her lightly and gets up and heads downstairs.

Saber is heading down the stairs when he hears his name and stops, turning around. "Oh, good evening, Commander."

"How's Ms. Kelly?" Commander Eagle asks as they head down the stairs together.

"I think she'll be okay eventually. She was having nightmares a while ago. It took a bit of talking to calm her down," Saber replies quietly. "I actually was hoping to find you alone, sir. I wanted to ask you about something."

"What's that?" Commander Eagle asks as they go and sit down.

"In the morning, Amanda and I want to go into town with Elaine, who has a couple of errands to run. We plan on dropping the my uniform and the others off as well if they want us to, to be cleaned while we do some running around. Amanda wants to get some clothes, and a dress. We would also like to go and get rings and file the appropriate paperwork at the courthouse," Saber replies.

"I'm not sure I like the idea of you going without an escort." the commander states.

Saber nods. "I figured you would say that, sir. That is why I was going to ask if either one of the other soldiers could come, or if you could come. I'd like to keep this low key for as long as possible," he states.

Commander Eagle chuckles, "Don't want Colt to come calling us in a panic again?"

Saber smiles, "That could be fun...but we'd like to take our time and make a day of it."

"So you'd want to get married the day after tomorrow then?" the commander asks.

Saber shrugs, "Honestly sir, I'd just as soon go to the courthouse and be done with it, but because of family tradition I have to go through some sort of formal ceremony. I would have married her the day we were teasing Colt, but it wouldn't have been acknowledged by my family then."

"I thought you were the last of your family, Saber."

"Technically, I am. Supposedly I have some far distant cousins that live elsewhere, but for the family line to remain noble blood, we must uphold certain traditions. A proper wedding ceremony being one of those traditions. So depending on how long it takes and how we feel afterwards, we could possibly get married tomorrow evening."

The commander shakes his head, "I suppose I just don't understand all of this. I married Natalia just after she was out of high school. We went to the courthouse and got married as soon as we were both of legal age. We were happy. We eventually had April. And when Natalia died, it was hard, but I never looked for anyone else. But to be told your whole life that you are going to marry a person, just because of who their parents are. I just can't understand it. What happens to those who don't follow through with the agreement? What if you had run off and married someone while you were on another colony or something?"

Saber sighs and rubs his hands together, trying to think of how to explain things, "It would depend on the extenuating circumstances. In my case, Sincia broke off the engagement because she feared the stigma of being with a disabled person."

"But you're not disabled, Saber." the commander interrupts.

"But it can be seen as such. I saw it as such at first too, sir. I really thought my entire life was over when I realized that I'd most likely never see again," Saber admits

quietly. "I was practically suicidal, to be honest. God knows what I'd have done if I hadn't met Amanda. She has been good for me in more ways than I could have imagined, and she has suffered immensely for knowing me," he finishes getting a look of shock from the commander from his admission.

"That is totally circumstantial. You can't dwell on what has happened. Both of you need to focus on what's ahead. Build your lives together. I honestly never thought you'd be fulfilling your station as Captain again after the accident, but evidently being blinded hasn't stopped you too much." Saber goes to speak, but the commander continues, "I am well aware of how Amanda was on the ship. From the discussions I've had with the others I know that she understands how you think and can relate to you without much instruction. She's also not afraid to tell you that something is beyond your abilities. I think the others admire that in her. They all seem to be quite taken with her. So yes, things have turned out quite differently than you planned for your life, but I think it has overall been for the better, Saber."

Saber nods, "You're right, sir. Things have turned out nothing like I always thought my life would be. Do I wish I could see? Of course, but in a way I see things more clearly than I did before. I can see people for who they are, not how they appear. If I went by appearances and the known social status of the time, Sincia would have been fine for me. Although personality wise, I don't think it would have worked. But duty would have forced me to remain with her," Saber says quietly.

"Well then, look at the situation as a blessing and make the best life you can with Amanda. I don't see much of anything keeping you from a perfectly normal life. I think you will be happy with her and she with you." Saber nods and the commander continues, "Why don't you go and get some rest. I'll get the others to get their uniforms together for Elaine so that in the morning, you can slip off in peace. I'll have two soldiers ready to leave here by seven. I'll also make sure to go ahead and have Amanda's name changed on her EBU, so that we don't have to immediately turn around and give her another one. I would also like to talk with Thomas about the proper protocols for the wedding ceremony, so that we properly uphold your family's traditions. He seems to be well schooled on such subjects."

"Thank you, sir. I'll see to it that we are ready just after seven in the morning to leave. Good night," Saber replies.

"Good night, Saber." the commander replies as Saber retires upstairs.

Comments greatly appreciated! :-)

Kapitel 21: The Best Laid Plans

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 20: The Best Laid Plans

"Well, the uniforms won't be done until late in the afternoon, so we can literally take the day to do whatever you want, Love," Saber says as they leave the cleaners.

"Well, I still need to get some clothes and a dress, along with some new shoes. I've just about worn these out," Amanda replies. "So where ever you want to start."

Saber looks to Elaine, "What all do you need to get, Elaine?"

"Oh, a couple of things at the grocery, but I can wait until on the way home to get that. I would suggest that you go and look at rings first. That way, if they need to be re-sized or something, there is time to have that done," Elaine replies.

"Sound advice. Shall we go to the jeweler's first?" Saber asks, looking towards Amanda.

"Sure. Then perhaps we can take my sword to be cleaned?" Amanda replies.

"You know, I'd forgotten about that," Saber says. "Let's go and look into that first. The man that made your sword owns a small shop here. I believe his son runs this store. He is still learning his craft, so the father still makes the swords himself." They walk a ways down the street and enter a small shop.

A young red-headed man looks up as they enter. "Can I help you folks?" he asks eying them as they approach the counter.

Saber takes the sword and places it on the counter. "We'd like to have this sword cleaned, sir," Saber replies.

The man picks up the sword and inspects it, "Very rare to see a woman's sword this fine." He unsheathes the sword and looks at it. "It's seen use recently. Tell me what kind of use has it seen."

"It was used to defend our lives. The blood on it belonged to a man that had threatened to kill us," Saber replies quietly.

He looks between Saber and Amanda, "I see. I need your name, sir."

"Captain Richard Rider," Saber replies.

The man pales and looks at him in shock. "Yes...yes sir. I'll have the sword cleaned within an hour."

"Oh, and would it at all be possible to have my family's coat of arms be added to the sheath?" Saber asks.

"Oh, yes, sir. That would be no problem at all," the man replies. "Although it might take an extra hour or two for that to be done, sir."

"Thank you kindly, sir. We shall return then," Saber replies and they leave the store.

Elaine looks over to Saber amused, "What was that about? You never give your full name."

"I didn't want him asking too many questions. My name usually scares most people into asking fewer questions, so I used it," he replies simply.

Amanda shakes her head, "You don't seem the type to do that."

"Not on a normal basis, but I saw that in that case, it would be to our advantage to do so," Saber replies. "Pretty soon, you'll be able to use my name to get people to leave you alone, Love. You might even get away with it now."

"I don't see why I'd want to, but I'll keep that in mind," Amanda replies as they arrive at the jewelry store.

They enter the store and immediately a salesman comes to their side, "May I help you?" he asks eying the group a bit nervously, noting the two soldiers following behind them.

"We'd like to look at wedding bands, please," Saber replies.

"Oh, yes, sir. Right this way," the man replies. He leads them to a display of wedding rings. "May I see the engagement ring, so that I may show you something in similar style." Amanda holds out her hand and the man studies the ring, "Ah, from the old clans. We don't keep a lot like those nowadays." He leads them to a corner display where there are a few more ornate sets on display. "Something more like these are a bit closer to keeping with the family traditions." He unlocks a case and takes out a set very similar in style to the ring Amanda is wearing. "Here we are, these are made by hand the old way." He pulls out the rings and holds them up, they are white gold bands etched with Celtic knots engraved around the outer edges of the band in onyx. "On the inside, we typically put the family name with the bride and the grooms first names, otherwise, this is what they look like." He hands a ring to Saber and one to Amanda.

Saber takes the ring and studies it carefully, "It appears to be made very similarly to your engagement ring. What do you think, Love?"

Amanda looks at the ring and nods, "They're beautiful. But I'm happy with anything we get. It's the meaning of the ring that I care about."

"Let's see how they fit then," Saber replies and he takes his ring and places it on his hand. "Mine fits perfectly," he says as he pulls the ring back off of his finger. "How's yours, Love?" he asks.

Amanda places the ring on her finger, "I think it needs to be a little bigger, can you do that without messing it up? Or do you have one like it in a slightly larger size?" she asks.

The man comes over and looks at her hand with the ring on it and nods, "Yes, ma'am I can add to it rather easily and it not lose the integrity of the design." He holds up some sizing rings, "Let's see what size you need. The ring as it is now is a seven and a half." He takes the next size ring and holds it up to her, "Try this one on, Miss."

Amanda takes the ring and tries it on her finger. "It seems to fit pretty snug," she replies as she struggles to pull it off.

"You might want to go up to the next one then. If your fingers swell at all, you might wind up losing a finger. I'd hate to have to cut it off of your hand," The salesman replies as he hands her the next size up.

She takes it and tries it, "This feels better. It's not too loose that it falls off." she takes the sizing ring and hands it back to the salesman.

"Yes, ma'am. I'll go and see if I have one in the back," the salesman replies and heads to the back.

"What is your take on them, Elaine?" Saber asks.

Elaine nods, "They seem appropriate, Saber."

He chuckles, "A rather non-committal answer."

"It's your decision Saber, along with Ms. Amanda. I think they're very pretty and they go well with the engagement ring. But the decision is between the two of you," Elaine replies.

The salesman comes back out carrying a box. "Well, I have the size below what you need. If you give me until this afternoon, I can have this one sized for you and both ready to go by then."

"Amanda? What do you think? This is something that you'll hopefully be wearing for a long time," Saber asks.

Amanda nods, "I like them, Saber. I think it's nice that they look alike as well."

"Then if you would sir, size the ring for us and we'll return this afternoon to pick up

the set," Saber says turning back to the salesman.

"Of course, sir. I need your names for the engravings."

"Richard and Amanda Rider," Saber replies.

The salesman nods. "Ah, Captain Rider. Congratulations to you. I'll have the rings ready after three o'clock. You may come by anytime after that to pick them up."

"Thank you," he replies and pays for the rings. They leave and head for the clothing store.

A while later they are sitting down having lunch. "The dress should be ready in about an hour," Amanda says between bites.

"That should work out about right then. We can go and pick it up, along with the other clothes you bought and the uniforms, when we're finished here. Then load up the car before heading back to get the rings, and then pick up your sword," Saber replies.

"After that, we can stop by the grocery and then head home. We should be home in plenty of time for dinner," Elaine says. She turns and looks to the two soldiers sitting quietly at the table. "You two have hardly eaten."

"We're on duty, ma'am," the taller soldier replies.

"All the more reason for you to eat something. It will keep you more alert," Saber says, glancing at the two soldiers.

"Yes, sir," they reply and slowly begin to pick at the food in front of them.

"So all of the paperwork is filed at the courthouse, correct?" Elaine asks.

Saber nods, "Yes, once we go through the ceremony and the general signs off on the certificate, everything will be in order. It will save us from having to make multiple trips out here."

Elaine nods. "I'm glad things are working out for you. Have you decided when you want to do the ceremony?" Elaine asks looking between Saber and Amanda.

Amanda looks to Saber who shrugs, "I'd be happy doing it tonight. If we get home in enough time for everyone to change, then we could have the dinner be the reception."

Amanda nods, "That was sort of my thought too, but I don't want you to be over tired. We've done a lot of walking today."

"Believe it or not, I don't feel too bad. Sore, but that is becoming a common occurrence, so I'm learning to ignore the little bit of constant pain," Saber replies. "How is your shoulder?"

"Sore, but I think I could do without the sling for a couple of hours. I might have to ice it afterwards, before bed. But It's getting better, I think," Amanda replies.

The taller soldier is watching the conversation with interest, "Excuse me, Captain?"

Saber looks over towards him, "Yes?"

"What exactly are you planning? It sounds like some sort of wedding."

Saber nods, "Yes, I plan on getting married this evening to Amanda here," he replies nodding to her.

The soldier looks between them, "I see. So why the secrecy?"

"Because we weren't sure when we were going to get married. But after everything that has happened, we have decided that sooner is probably better than later. And the other members of my team have been teasing us about the whole thing, so to get back at them, we decided not to tell them until they arrive for the ceremony."

The two soldiers laugh, "That's rather mean, sir," the one soldier says. "I had heard you were rather serious and reserved, so for you to pull off a stunt like this is rather funny."

Saber chuckles, "I've heard that many cadets are a bit afraid of me. Even more so since I was blinded."

"Blinded, sir?" the younger soldier asks hesitantly.

Saber nods, "Aye. I have very limited vision. Technically, I'm legally blind. It's actually how Amanda and I met."

"But you were just out on the Bismarck, weren't you?"

"Yes. It was with Amanda's help that I was able to do the job I had done for years," Saber states.

"Impressive, sir. I'm not sure I would be able to function as well as you have."

"I've adapted. It's not always easy," he replies.

The server arrives and Saber pays the bill, and they talk for a little longer. "Is everyone ready to go?" Saber asks. The others nod and they get up and head back to the clothing store. After getting the dress and other clothes, they go and pick up the rings before heading to get the sword.

"Ah, Captain Rider, I have just finished with the sword, sir," the young man says as they enter the shop. He goes to the back and brings out the sword. "I am assuming that you are the owner, Miss?" he says looking to Amanda.

"Yes, sir," Amanda replies.

He offers her the sword and she takes it and unsheathes it, inspecting the work. "It looks like you did a good job, sir."

The man nods. "It is a rather unique sword. I was careful with it. Was it a gift?" he asks.

"Yes it was," Amanda replies.

"Rather unusual to receive such a gift. Those gifts are usually only given to nobility."

"It was her engagement gift, sir," Saber replies.

"Ah, you must trust her immensely. Not many men would give a woman such a gift," the salesman says with a smile. "I'd never give my wife a bladed weapon as a gift. I might end up on the receiving end of it."

Saber chuckles, "I trust her with my life. She has on more than one occasion proven herself worthy of such a gift. We must be going now, as we have other things to do." He pays the man and they leave for the car.

A couple of hours later, they arrive back at the estate. The two soldiers help carry in the packages and then leave to report to Commander Eagle, leaving Saber and Amanda alone. Amanda plops down onto the bed next to Saber, who puts his arm around her. "Are you okay, Love?" he asks eying her with concern.

Amanda nods. "Yeah, just a little tired," she replies, placing her head on his shoulder.

"Would you like to rest for a while?" he asks.

She thinks for a minute and shakes her head, "No. I want to find out what the plan is before I decide what I'm going to do."

"Plan?" he asks.

"Well, we had talked of possibly getting married tonight, but I wasn't sure if you had decided to wait until tomorrow or what. You look pretty tired yourself," Amanda says.

Saber smiles, "I'd like to marry you tonight. Provided that the general and the others are up to it."

"I wouldn't complain. At least then the little quips from Colt would end."

"I seriously doubt that. They're liable to get worse," he replies and kisses her cheek.

She smiles at him, "Should we go and see if we can find out the plan then?" she asks. He nods and they get up and head downstairs.

Commander Eagle looks up as they enter the room, "Ah, there you are. I was

wondering where you were. Your escorts have already left. General Whitehawk arrived about a half hour ago. Elaine says dinner will be ready in about two hours."

"Well, we'd like to know if everyone is amenable to us doing the ceremony tonight. All we'd have to do is change pretty much. Elaine would have to help Amanda change into her dress and wrap her shoulder while I changed into my uniform. I suppose we'd also have to tell the others to get ready. So it'd be about an hour before everyone was gathered. The basic ceremony is rather short from what Elaine has told me, so time isn't an issue for that."

Commander Eagle nods, "Let's find General Whitehawk and see what he thinks. I believe I saw him heading for the kitchen a short time ago to talk with Thomas and Elaine," he says and the trio head into the kitchen and find Elaine, Thomas, and General Whitehawk in deep discussion.

They stop talking and look up when they enter, "Ah, Saber, Ms. Kelly, I was just discussing things with Thomas and Elaine. Have you decided when you would like to have the ceremony?"

"We were hoping to do so this evening, sir." Saber replies.

A knowing glance passes between the others and Thomas nods and gets up and heads to his quarters returning shortly with a small box and a clothing bag. "How soon would you like to do the ceremony?" he asks, looking to Saber for a reply.

Saber looks to Amanda and she nods slightly, "We were thinking that as soon as everyone is ready that we could, if that is agreeable."

"Then I shall go and tell the others to get ready and then prepare myself. I'm not telling them why until the two of you come out together. I think then they will have no doubts," he says with a mischievous smile.

"Thank you, sir," Saber says. The commander and the general leave to get ready for the ceremony, and Saber turns to Thomas. "What's in the box?" he asks curiously.

"Something I will explain to you while you are getting ready. It concerns part of the wedding ceremony traditions for your family. Normally your father would normally explain everything, but since he is not here, I was schooled in this, to pass this to you when the time came."

Saber nods, "Then let's go upstairs," he says to Thomas. He then goes to Amanda and kisses her lightly. "I'll see you soon, Love," he whispers quietly to her. She nods and he and Thomas head up the back stairway to his bedroom.

"Come on, Ms. Amanda. Let me get my dress on and then I'll come to your room and make you up proper, all right?" Elaine says smiling.

"Um, yes ma'am," Amanda says a bit nervously, making Elaine chuckle. They go to Elaine's quarters and Elaine changes into a nice dress. "Now, let's go and get you

ready," she says and they head to Amanda's room and she bandages her shoulder and then helps her change into her dress.

Saber finishes putting on his dress uniform and Thomas is looking him over and nods approvingly. "Normally Saber, you would be wearing your Clan's Kilt, but since you are being married by General Whitehawk, your dress uniform is appropriate. However, you still need to display your clan colors, so I want you to wear this swatch of cloth below your ribbons," Thomas says he as takes a small swatch of cloth and pins in below the military ribbons on Saber's uniform. "Now, there is a second swatch of cloth here. After you say your vows and exchange rings, you are to pin this onto Lady Amanda's dress. This marks her as a member of your clan for life. She then is entitled to any privileges that your clan has and any relative of yours is also hers. Normally a member of your clan plays the pipes as the two of you make your way to the alter, or in this case to where you will stand with General Whitehawk. Since you have no close family, I will do this, unless you object, sir."

Saber places his hand gently on Thomas' shoulder. "You and Elaine are family, just as I consider the crew members of the Bismarck my family, Thomas. It is an honor to me that you are willing to do this for Amanda and myself. You have always been like a second father to me."

Thomas nods and smiles at him, "Then let's not keep your young lady waiting. Let's go into the hall and wait for her and Elaine."

Saber nods and they head into the hall. Thomas goes and knocks on Amanda's door and Elaine answers. She nods and Amanda comes out in a simple white dress trimmed in dark blue and silver. Her hair is pulled back from her face, save a few loose strands that frame her face. Saber smiles when he sees her and takes her hand. Thomas nods to them and heads downstairs.

Elaine smiles and nods satisfied. "I'll see you downstairs in a couple of minutes. You wait here until you hear Thomas start playing the pipes."

"All right, Elaine. Thank you for everything," Saber says quietly. Elaine kisses Amanda's cheek and heads down the stairs.

Commander Eagle comes out from the kitchen in his dress uniform to find the others similarly dressed, except for Robin, who is in a nice dress; all looking a bit perplexed and talking amongst themselves. He nods as they all look up to him when he enters the sitting room.

"Father, What is going on?" April asks confused.

Commander Eagle smiles, "Everyone will know soon enough. Now, I want you three to come and stand here," he says indicating a place for them to stand by the fireplace. "Ms. Robin, you may stand beside Colt if you wish."

"Assigned spots? What are we doing?" Colt asks.

"As I said, you'll know momentarily," Commander Eagle says with a mischievous smile.

General Whitehawk enters the room carrying a Bible and some papers, followed by Thomas, who has some bagpipes. Elaine comes down the stairs and takes a place to the opposite side of General Whitehawk, Commander Eagle comes and stands beside her.

Thomas goes to the opposite side of the fireplace and back a bit from the people and nods.

"Now, I suppose I should tell you what's going on," General Whitehawk says to the confused group beside him.

"It would be nice," Colt mutters.

April suddenly has a look of realization her face, "Are Saber and Amanda-

"Yes, April, they are," Commander Eagle says before she can finish her question.

April smiles. "I knew it!" she then stops. "Wait are they getting married now?"

"Yes, we are starting in just a moment," General Whitehawk replies giving a nod to Thomas.

Thomas nods and starts playing the tune Highland Wedding and Saber and Amanda come down the stairs holding hands and stop in front of General Whitehawk. He smiles at them and begins reciting the wedding rites.

A few hours later, everyone is chatting around the dining room table happily. Cake has been served and everyone is laughing and talking about various things. Colt comes over to Saber and Amanda and places a hand on Saber's shoulder. "Glad to see you two didn't elope," he says with a smirk.

Saber laughs, "I wanted all of you here, Colt. You are my family. Besides, had we eloped, it would have tainted the bloodlines of my family and our marriage not recognized as a true one, so we did what was required...albeit barely."

Colt turns to Amanda and smiles. "You look rather pretty, Ms. Amanda. I can't believe you got to wear white," Colt says and laughs.

Amanda rolls her eyes and laughs. "I was still able to do so, Mr. Wilcox," Amanda says with a defiant grin.

Colt smiles and shakes his head. "I must say, you two are bound to do well together. You've already survived so much. Now we just need to get April and Fireball to get hitched. They may as well be married."

April hears her name and comes over. "What were you saying about me, Cowboy?"

"Nothing much, just that with as long as you and race boy there have been together, you should already be married," Colt replies with a grin.

April glances towards Fireball and blushes slightly. "Perhaps one day," she says quietly. She then turns to Saber and Amanda and smiles broadly. "Congratulations. I can't believe you two got this planned and ready without us knowing."

"It wasn't us really. Thomas and Elaine took care of most of the arrangements," Saber replies. They all talk for a while longer and Saber notices how tired Amanda looks. "Are you ready to go and lie down, Love?" he asks her quietly.

She nods slightly, "I'm starting to feel rather tired, and a bit sore," Amanda replies.

He nods and they excuse themselves and head into the kitchen where Thomas and Elaine are eating and talking. "I was wondering where you two disappeared to. Why didn't you stay out with us? You are family," Saber says as they enter the kitchen, the door closing behind them.

Elaine smiles, "We wanted some peace and quiet." She looks to Amanda, "Lady Amanda, I took the liberty of moving all of your clothes into Saber's room. That way, you don't have to hunt for anything when you need it. Over the next couple of days, we'll work on moving you completely into your new bedroom, all right?"

Amanda nods, "Thank you, Ms. Elaine. That was thoughtful of you."

Elaine nods, "You look rather tired, are you all right?"

"I'm a little sore and tired, but I'll be fine. We were coming to get an ice pack and then going to change and retire for the night, if that is all right," Amanda replies.

Elaine nods, "Of course it is," she says as she fetches an ice pack and hands it to her. "You two go and rest. We'll see you sometime tomorrow. Good night," she says and kisses Amanda's cheek.

"Good night to both of you and thank you for everything," Saber says as he leans down and kisses Elaine's cheek. "We'll see you tomorrow." He takes Amanda's hand and they head up the back stairwell to their bedroom. They close the door behind them and Amanda goes and sits on the bed. Saber comes over and sits beside her, eyeing her with concern. "Are you all right, honestly?"

Amanda nods, "I'm okay. Just worn out. We've done quite a lot today," she adds with a chuckle.

"Aye, we have." Saber replies and kisses her gently. "You look beautiful. Even though I can't see clearly, I can see well enough to know that."

Amanda smiles weakly. "Do you think you could help me change? I can't get this on or off without help because of my shoulder," she asks a sounding a bit embarrassed.

Saber nods, "Of course." She stands up and he helps her out of the dress and into a silk nightgown, being careful of her shoulder. He then changes and they climb into bed and she snuggles tightly against him. He smiles and kisses her, pulling her against him.

Kapitel 22: Revelations

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 21: Revelations

"The cadets seem eager to out do one another, sir," Saber says as he and Commander Eagle talk in his office.

"Yes, it seems that the motivation of possibly being selected as one of the crew members of the Tirpitz is causing quite a lot of competition. I'm glad that you and Amanda were able to come and visit for a week."

"Well, the chance to see April and Fireball actually get married was a huge bonus, sir," Saber replies laughing.

"I know they have been with each other for a long time now romantically, and that they've known one another since they were children. I don't know why they waited so long. Everyone knew that they were...close," Commander Eagle replies.

"Yes. I almost asked them what prompted the wedding, but decided that I was better off not asking. I don't care to make Amanda a widow after almost ten months. I'd like a bit more time with her," Saber says.

Commander Eagle laughs, "I actually asked if their sudden interest was motivated by certain circumstances and they both have sworn that it wasn't. Of course I'm surprised that it isn't, but I wouldn't say that to April. She has been quite busy with the design and production of the Tirpitz. I'm glad to say that we have several qualified candidates. April is helping to choose the first test crew. I was hoping you might give some of your thoughts on her picks, I can give you all of the files of the ones she has picked. There are eight of them. We need four for the first run."

Saber nods, "You do realize that I'll have to allow Amanda to read them as well, sir?"

"Yes, I am well aware of that. I know that she can remain objective, and that you will not let any opinion she offers be your sole source of information."

"Then I suppose you can send me the files and we can go over them tonight while we're here. Perhaps later this afternoon we can come and observe the candidates in the VR rooms to see how they react in situations. That is if Amanda is feeling up to it," Saber replies.

"Is she all right?" the commander asks concerned.

"She's just been a little tired lately. She's had nightmares again, so she's not sleeping as well as she should be. She said she felt queasy the other day, but never actually threw up, so perhaps getting away for a bit will help her feel better. I told her if she's still not sleeping well when we go home, she has to talk to the doctor. Maybe he can give her something to help."

"Have the nightmares been about Sean again?" the commander asks quietly.

"Yes, sir. She keeps seeing the whole fight I had with him and then where she kills him before he can kill me. I wish I could make it stop, but all I can do is console her and pray it goes away on it's own," Saber replies quietly.

"She's a strong woman, Saber. I think she'll be fine in the long run. Perhaps getting her to a doctor sooner would help. Not getting enough sleep for any length of time isn't a good thing."

"Perhaps while we're here I can get her to agree to see the doctor. She is technically a soldier," Saber says.

"She's your wife anyways, so they would see her regardless. Go and check on her, and after lunch, meet me back here, unless she agrees to get checked. Then I'll take you with me to observe the training."

"Yes, sir," Saber replies and he gets up and heads back to his quarters. Upon entering he hears Amanda in the bedroom and goes in to see about her. "Hey Love, how are you feeling?" he asks concerned.

Amanda finishes changing and nods, "A little better. I didn't manage to get anymore sleep. I couldn't get comfortable. These beds are much harder than the one at home."

Saber chuckles, "Aye, that they are. How would you like to come observe some cadets this afternoon?"

"Sure. I think I'd feel up to it. What are we observing them for?" Amanda asks.

"We get to help hand pick the crew for the Tirpitz. I should have an email now with the soldiers' information and academy records on what their specialties are and such that we can go over this evening. I thought it would be nice to go in unbiased and then compare our observations with what's on paper," he replies.

"Sounds like a good idea to me. Maybe tomorrow we can catch up to the others and compare notes or something," Amanda offers.

Saber nods, "Yes. April has already been observing them. She has chosen the top eight cadets that she feel are the best choices. Our job will be to help narrow it down to four. Commander Eagle wants us to meet him after lunch if you're up to it."

"You mentioned I wasn't feeling well to him?" she asks.

"Yes I did. He recommended that you be checked while we're here, but unless you get worse, I won't force the issue. I don't like that it's been nearly a month now since you've had a decent night's sleep," he says firmly. "I hate that I can't stop the nightmares from happening," he adds barely a whisper.

Amanda comes over and places a hand on his shoulder and he turns and pulls her against him, "It's not your fault, Saber. It will pass eventually," she says quietly. "I tell you what, if I have another bad night tonight, I'll go and see the doctor here tomorrow, okay?" she says looking up at him.

He nods and kisses her lightly, "Okay. I can agree to that, with the stipulation that if you start feeling bad before we retire for the evening you'll go sooner," he counters.

"Deal," she replies and kisses him.

He reluctantly releases her with a sigh, "I figure we should go and get lunch before we meet the commander."

She smiles at his reluctance and grabs his hand. "Let's go," she says dragging him towards the door.

A couple of hours later, they are at the commander's office and April and Fireball come in. "Are you coming to observe too?" April asks.

Saber nods, "Your father asked us to come and observe. I hope you don't mind," he replies.

"Why would I? Colt should be here too, but you know he's always late," April replies.

"It's like since he and Robin had Wil his brain has gone dead. He has no sense of time," Fireball adds with a laugh.

"So you're saying he had a sense of time before?" Saber adds laughing.

"Better than now," Fireball quips.

"That's rather a scary thought. He was pretty much consistently late anyways," Saber says dryly.

A few minutes later, Colt comes in. "Sorry everyone., he mutters.

"It's all right. We're getting used to it," Fireball says with a grin.

"Wait until you have kids. Then you'll understand ," Colt retorts.

Commander Eagle enters his office and they all turn and salute him. "Well, the cadets are in the VR rooms for training. I have an observation room set up for us. We will have sound and visual on all of them. I allowed them to break themselves off into two teams, that way we can see how their team dynamics are." The others nod. "Come on."

He leads them into a room and after everyone is seated, he activates the screens. You can see people in every direction. Their voices coming through unseen speakers. The commander begins explaining everything, "Each cadet has been assigned a letter. They are on the vests they are wearing. The files that I have sent to each of you will give the cadet's letter, followed by their files, including their names. They all have previous battle experience as pilots of the fighters in the recent skirmishes." He falls silent as everything activates and they become engrossed in watching the screens.

"It's like we're beside them," Amanda states quietly as she starts looking over the soldiers and involuntarily gasps.

"What's wrong?" Saber asks her concerned.

"It's nothing," she replies barely a whisper, her eyes following one of the cadets.

"Please tell me," Saber says quietly.

"I'm sure I'm mistaken, but I thought Cadet 'G' looked familiar. He reminds me of someone that died years ago."

Saber nods, "Fair enough. Let me know if you start to feel too bad."

"I will. I promise," she replies.

They all continue the observations for the next couple of hours. Each person making notes into their PDA type devices.

Later that evening they are all sitting in the commander's office discussing the cadets. "So, Amanda, you think you've seen cadet 'G' before?" Commander Eagle asks.

"I'm not sure, sir. He sort of reminded me of someone, but that person died before I was born. I can't tell you why that popped into my head when I saw him though."

Commander Eagle nods, "Has everyone gone through the files I sent?"

"Still going through them, sir," Saber and Amanda both reply.

"Not a problem. Does anyone have any initial thoughts?"

"I think G, B, E, and A. They were grouped together and seemed to be able to think well as a group and independently," Fireball replies.

"Yes, the dynamic seemed to work as well. They are evenly matched as far as genders and their scores and such rate them rather high," April comments.

"The other group was good too. Their weapons guy was quick and seemed to be the leader of the group. But as you said, there is something about the others. They kinda remind me of us," Colt says.

Saber looks up. "They also seem to be a good mixture of people. One is from my area, he appears to be a weapons specialist. The girl from the German colonies seems to be the scientist of the group. The other two are from the Asian colonies, and they seem equal in piloting and strategic response."

Amanda nods, but continues reading. "Well, I fairly sure that I don't know cadet G. Nothing on his file seems familiar to me," she says aloud to no one in particular.

"Who did he remind you of, Love?" Saber asks curiously.

"A brother that died before I was born. Father kept a picture of him on the mantle. He used to talk about him once in a while. He said it's why he spoiled me so much," she adds with a smile.

"Well, I'm glad that's cleared up. What are your thoughts on the cadets?" Commander Eagle asks.

"The others make valid point, sir. I would agree with them. The second group is good, but the others seems to work a little better together," Amanda replies honestly.

"Well, that being said, I want all of you to meet with the group in a while. They are getting ready for a trial run of the Tirpitz. I'd like for all of you to be there when they take it out for the first time. If everyone is agreeable to that, we can go on to the hangar area now," the commander says looking to the group.

"Yes sir," they all reply and everyone gets up and they head to the hangar area. The cadets are standing around talking and fall into formation and salute them as they enter. They all return the salute and the commander steps to the front of the group.

"All right, as of this point on, you are the crew of the Tirpitz. I want to introduce you to the crew of the Bismarck. They will be observing you on your test run and can give you advice if needed." He points to a young Asian looking female who salutes them, "This is Erika Kawamura." She nods and steps back to her crew. He then points to the young Scotsman, who steps forward and salutes them. "This is Alex Mackenzie." He nods to them and his eyes stop when he spots Amanda. He looks to say something then decides better of it and steps back to his crew. Saber casts a glance to Amanda but doesn't say anything. The commander looks in her direction, but since no one says anything, he continues with the introductions, "This is Yuri Hido." He steps forward and salutes them before returning to the others. "And finally we have Gabrielle Weber." She steps forward and salutes them before returning to the others.

They all talk for a while and the crew leaves on a test flight. After a bit of practice, they return to the hangar and agree to meet in the morning to practice more. They all disperse and Saber and Amanda are just about back to their quarters when someone calls to them from behind.

"Captain Rider!"

Saber stops and turns, "Yes?"

"Sir. I would like to speak with you and your wife," Alex says stopping as he catches up to them.

Saber looks to Amanda and she nods. "Sure, please, come in," Saber replies and they enter their quarters, followed by Alex. Once they are seated Saber looks to the nervous cadet. "What can we do for you?" he asks.

"Um, well. I..." he stammers then takes a breath and looks to Amanda. "Ma'am, have we met before?" he finally manages to ask.

Amanda shakes her head, "Not that I recall, sir. You remind me of someone, but I don't remember ever having met previously," she replies.

"Well, I know this is going to sound weird, but you look like my birth mother," Alex says.

"Birth mother?" Amanda asks.

"Aye. My birth mother died when I was almost five. She died in childbirth. I was upset and ran away. I ended up getting lost. I was nearly dead when my father found me. He and his wife took me in and adopted me as their own. They were unable to have children of their own, so they took my arrival as a sign from God. A couple of years ago, my mother died. Then about a year ago my father fell ill. On his deathbed he told me that I should find my birth family. He gave me a name and address, but when I went to see him, I found the place burnt to the ground and being used as a temporary command center by Calvary Command," Alex replies.

Amanda gasps. "Impossible," she mutters under her breath.

"What was the name he gave you, sir," Saber asks.

"He gave me the name of Richard Kelly. My birth mother's name was Catherine Kelly," Alex replies.

Amanda looks shocked and Saber feels her tense up and grabs her hand, "Are you all right, Love?"

"You...you're?" she stammers.

"My father told me that my name had been Alexander Kelly. But he didn't know that until just before his death. Long after they had adopted me as their own," he replies quietly.

Amanda nods, "I see. Um, well my father died a few years ago. I'm sorry that you've never been able to meet him."

"So um, what do we do? I'd like to know for sure if we are really related," Alex asks.

"If you are both agreeable to the idea, we could go to the med bay and have the doctor run a DNA analysis. That should tell you whether you are or are not related," Saber offers.

"I'd be okay with that," Amanda replies as a knock is heard at the door.

"I'll get it," Saber says and heads to the door, finding the commander on the other side. "Ah, good evening, sir," he says as he steps aside to let him in.

The commander enters the apartment and sees Alex talking with Amanda. "Mr. Mackenzie?" he asks surprised.

Alex stands up and salutes, "Good evening, sir."

"At ease, Mackenzie," the commander says and Alex relaxes as the commander comes in and sits down. "I would however like to know what you're doing here."

"Sir. I...When I saw this young woman this afternoon, I thought I was seeing my birth mother. But my mother is dead. So I came to ask if she might have been related, and after talking with her, we think that we might actually be related."

"Well, that makes things interesting. I know that since this didn't come up before the decision was made for you to be a Tirpitz crew member, so that this possibility doesn't play into the decision, so you are to remain a crew member. I would like to be informed of the results."

"Of course, sir," Amanda replies.

"When were you going to have the test done?" the commander asks.

Amanda looks to Alex who shrugs, "I can go now if you are willing to."

"Let's go then. I'd like to know and then I can come back and rest," Amanda says.

Saber eyes her with concern, "Are you not feeling well?"

Amanda shakes her head, "I'm sure it's the shock, but no, I'm not feeling too good right now. So let's go and get the test done, then maybe, if the doctor has time, he can check me, fair enough?"

Saber nods, "Yes. Let's go."

The three of them head down to the med bay and after some searching, they find Dr. Izumi. "Ah, Captain and Mrs. Rider. Commander Eagle just called and told me to be expecting you. Good evening to you as well, Mr. Mackenzie." Alex nods to him. "Now, I understand that the two of you," he says nodding to Alex and Amanda, "would like me to run a DNA test. Is that correct?"

"Yes, doctor," They both reply.

"Very well, right this way," he says as he leads them towards a couple of chairs and takes blood first from Alex, then Amanda. "Mrs. Rider, I would like your permission to take an extra vile of blood from you. Commander Eagle said that you've not been feeling well and having trouble sleeping. I would normally run a blood profile before prescribing anything for sleep issues, so since you're here, I think it better to do it all at once."

Amanda nods, "Yes, please do. I rather dislike needles, so it's better to get it over and done with."

Dr. Izumi nods and takes the blood. "Well, it will be tomorrow morning before I know anything I'm afraid. The lab is a bit backed up," he says apologetically.

"It's no problem, doctor. If we've gone this long, what's a few extra hours?" Alex says.

Dr. Izumi nods, "I will however run your blood profiles, Mrs. Rider, and if I find anything abnormal, I'll contact you. Those should be done first thing in the morning. Should you start to feel worse, please come back sooner, even if I haven't called you."

"I will, thank you," Amanda replies quietly.

Saber is lying awake when the security alarms start blaring. He shakes Amanda and they quickly get up and change into uniforms before heading to the commander's office. They arrive just after April and Fireball. "What's going on?" Saber asks when they arrive.

"We're under attack. I've deployed the crew of the Tirpitz to join the fighters. They should be able to hold them off and end the skirmish quickly. For now, you should just be on standby. This is the first time they've gone into combat with the ship," Commander Eagle replies.

Colt comes in during the commander's explanation and is watching the screen in front of him with great interest. "I don't like the look of those renegade units," he says quietly. "We should be out there helping them."

Saber comes over to him and places a hand on his shoulder, "I know you don't think anyone but us can handle this, Colt, but none of us truly have any business fighting if we can help it. This is their chance to prove themselves, as we did all those years ago. At least we are available should they need the help. A luxury that we didn't have."

Colt sighs, "I know. I just feel so...useless not being out there."

"Easy Cowboy, don't be asking for trouble. You should be proud of everything we've accomplished, not dwelling on the fact that others are beginning to take the helm," April says.

They all stand quietly watching the battle. The Tirpitz starts losing ground against two larger renegade units, but then transforms into a large robot and quickly takes one of

the two enemy units out. After a long battle, they finally finish off the other unit, and the few remaining enemy fighters retreat. The crew all return to the hangar, along with their support fighters. Then they make their way to the commander's office.

"Very good job," Commander Eagle says as they enter and salute their superiors. The others all return the gesture. "You are doing well. Everyone should go and get some rest. They could return with reinforcements any time."

"Yes, sir," The crew members reply and they turn to leave, followed by the others.

Everyone returns to their quarters, when Saber and Amanda reach theirs, they find the doctor waiting for them. "Dr. Izumi. Isn't it a bit early to be coming around?" Saber asks as the three of them enter the apartment.

Dr. Izumi nods, "Typically, I would agree with you, Captain, but seeing as the entirety of the base was roused from their sleep, I figured I'd come to speak with you both about some of the lab results," he replies as they make their way to the sitting area and sit down. "I'm afraid that given some of your test results, I am unable to prescribe a sleep aid for you, Mrs. Rider."

"Why? What's wrong?" she asks nervously. Saber takes her hand, trying to comfort her.

"Well, technically nothing, other than stress," he replies slowly, trying to figure out how to explain.

"Then what's the problem, doctor?" Saber asks concerned.

"Well, Mrs. Rider, it appears that you're pregnant," Dr. Izumi replies. Seeing their shocked faces he chuckles. "And judging by the hormone levels in your blood, I'd guess you are close to nine weeks along. Of course I should run a couple of other tests and do an ultrasound to confirm the gestational age of the fetus, and make sure that there are no other issues. All of which are standard procedure and nothing to worry about," he adds seeing their nervousness.

"But...but I've not had the symptoms like Robin had," Amanda protests.

"I assure you ma'am, I am one hundred percent sure about my diagnosis. Not everyone always presents the same symptoms that are typically associated with pregnancy. I'd like to perform the ultrasound as soon as possible though so that you don't have to explain your absence for medical tests unnecessarily."

Saber places his arm around her and kisses her cheek, "Are you up to having the test done, Love? Perhaps then we can decide what to do."

"I guess so. But if he's right, what will we do?" Amanda asks.

Saber shrugs, "Deal with it and think of it as a blessing. Sure, we weren't planning this, but I suppose we didn't exactly try and prevent it either." Amanda smiles weakly at

the comment and he continues. "I'm not against having children, the thought just had not occurred to me as a possibility so soon."

Amanda nods, fighting back tears, "Let's go and do the test then." Saber nods and they get up and follow the doctor to the med bay.

It's mid-afternoon and Saber and Amanda are in their quarters having just gotten up after a long night and are eating lunch. "So what are we going to tell the others?" Amanda asks quietly between bites.

"I personally feel that we should wait a few more weeks to tell them. Unless something comes up that could cause a problem. I'd like to go back home, but I get the feeling that we're needed here right now."

"Aye. I feel that way too. Can you imagine how Elaine is going to react to the news?" Amanda says with a laugh.

Saber chuckles, "She'll be as excited as any grandmother I'd bet." A knock at the door halts their conversation. Amanda gets up and goes to the door and finds Dr. Izumi with Alex with him. "Ah, come in," she says and they enter the apartment and they all take a seat. Saber comes over and joins Amanda.

"Well, I just received the results of your DNA tests, so I thought I'd bring you all here to hear it together." Dr. Izumi says as he takes out a sheet of paper. "According to the test results, you two are indeed brother and sister."

Amanda gasps, placing a hand on her mouth.

Alex looks shocked for a moment then nods, accepting the information.

"I hate to give you such a shock and then leave, but I have rounds to make. I'll check back with you later, Mrs. Rider," Dr. Izumi says as he stands to leave.

"Thank you, doctor," Amanda replies quietly. The doctor then quietly leaves.

"So what do we do now that we know, Mrs. Rider?" Alex asks after the door closes.

Amanda studies him for a minute before answering, "Well, I suppose I owe you some of the inheritance. But I would like to get to know you too, as a brother. Perhaps we can become friends?"

Alex shakes his head, "I don't need money. My father left me well off. I just wanted to know for curiosity's sake. I'd like to get to know you as well. I'd also like you to meet my wife and child, if you're agreeable to that."

Amanda nods, "That would be nice. But please call me Amanda, okay?" Alex nods.

"The only exception to that would be in formal company, such as the commander or the general," Saber adds. "Then you should address each other by your last names."

They both nod in agreement.

"Could we possibly meet up later, so you can meet my family?" Alex asks.

Amanda glances to Saber who nods, "I don't see a problem with that. Could we all meet here? Amanda hasn't felt her best recently so I don't want to venture too far from the apartment when we can avoid it."

"Of course, Captain Rider. Maybe we can meet in about an hour?" Alex asks.

"That should be fine," Saber replies. "Oh, and since we're technically family, you may call me Saber when it's just us, all right?"

"Thank you, sir," Alex replies and then he gets up and heads for the door. "I'll be back in about an hour." he leaves and Amanda flops back onto the couch.

"Are you all right, Love?" Saber asks concerned.

"I can't say as I'm completely shocked by the news. I suppose the combination of news today overall is a bit overwhelming though," she replies honestly. "I mean when I saw him, the first thing that popped into my head was a picture that had been on the mantle of the house. It was taken just days before I was born. Dad always told me that he was dead, even though they never found a body to bury. He even had a marker made to place beside mother's. I used to lay flowers on it when I went to mother's grave. I just can't believe that after all this time..." she says, her voice breaking a bit.

Saber gently pulls her against him. "I know this is a lot right now. But at least you've got family. Perhaps you will be good friends with him and maybe his wife. That's a good thing, isn't it?" he says trying to comfort her.

Amanda nods, her head against him. "Yeah. I think so," she replies.

They stay snuggled for nearly an hour when a knock at the door awakens them. Saber gently awakens Amanda and then gets up to answer the door. "Hello Alex," he says as Alex enters followed by a woman and a little boy that looks close to three years of age. They enter the room and Amanda stands up to greet them.

She looks up and has a startled look when the woman makes her way over. "Amanda?" the woman asks hesitantly.

Amanda regains her composure and nods, "Sarah. How surprising to see you again," she says quietly.

Sarah nods, "You're the last person that I expected to run into. What are you doing here?" she asks in surprise.

"I'm here with my husband," Amanda says nodding towards Saber. "So how are things with you?" she asks trying to sound casual.

"The two of you know each other?" Saber asks curiously.

Amanda nods. "Yes, well we did a few years ago," she replies.

"She was once engaged to my brother Derrick," Sarah replies, getting a look of surprise from both Alex and Saber. "She should have been my sister-in-law. Until my idiot brother left her for that."

"Sarah. Let's not bring up that here," Alex interjects trying to diffuse the situation. The boy coming out from behind him and over to Sarah.

"You're right, Alex. I'm sorry Amanda. I'm sure you don't care to bring up such a bad memory," Sarah says apologetically as she scoops up the child.

"It's okay, Sarah. You seem like you've made a good life for yourself. I'm glad to see that," Amanda replies.

"Funny, I could say the same thing about you. How long have you been married?" Sarah asks.

"Not quite a year," Amanda replies.

Sarah nods, "We've been married for a little over three years." The little boy starts squirming in his mother's arms.

"Congratulations," Amanda says. She smiles at the boy, "Hi. What's your name?"

"Tyler Mackenzie and I'm three years old," he says proudly.

"Hi Tyler. I'm Amanda." He waves at her and wiggles down from Sarah's grip and makes his way to Amanda, sitting at her feet and watching the adults talk.

"So, you're the infamous Captain Rider?" Sarah says to Saber.

"I am Captain Rider," Saber confirms.

"So how did you two end up together?" Sarah asks.

"I suppose if you know of me, then you know that I was severely injured nearly two years ago?" Sarah nods and he continues, "Well, one of the injuries caused me to be blinded. Evidently permanently."

"You're blind? Seriously?" Alex and Sarah both ask obviously surprised.

"Legally, yes. I can see some outlines and shadows, but not much else. I thought the sunglasses were a bit of a giveaway," he says with a chuckle. "But to answer your question, we met when Amanda came to teach me to live and function as a blind person."

"Turns out that he taught me as much or more than I taught him," Amanda says.

"I didn't know you worked in such a capacity, Amanda," Sarah says.

"I didn't. Professionally, at least. I worked with my...our father the last few years of his life after he had his first stroke that left him totally blind and partially paralyzed. I actually enjoyed helping him learn to do things for himself again, so when I saw the ad for the position to help someone who had lost their vision, I thought it would be fun."

"Fun?" Alex laughs. "You have a warped sense of fun, Amanda," he says with a grin.

Amanda laughs, "I suppose I do. Especially considering all that's happened since I met Saber. However, I'd probably do it all again if I had to."

They all talk for a couple more hours before retiring for the night and promising to meet up again. Amanda gets in bed beside Saber and snuggles against him and sighs, "What a day," she says sounding completely exhausted.

"Aye, that it was." he replies.

Kapitel 23: To the Rescue

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 22: To the Rescue

A few days later they have returned home, and they are down having breakfast when Elaine comes in and sits with them. "Lady Amanda, are you feeling better than you were before you left?" she asks studying her closely.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm sleeping a little better. I'm not having the nightmares like I had been. I'm hoping that's a new trend," Amanda replies.

Elaine nods, "I'm glad to hear that. I was going to suggest that you see a doctor if you were still not sleeping well."

"I talked with Dr. Izumi while I was at Calvary Command, at Saber's insistence. He said he was hesitant to give me anything," she replies between bites.

"Well, I'm glad you seem to be feeling a bit better. Maybe you were at the end of a virus or something. You seem to even be eating better than before you left," Elaine replies.

"Well, it was an interesting trip, to say the least," Saber says.

"Oh? How so?" Elaine asks.

"Well, we decided on the crew for the new ship, and Amanda found a brother that she thought had died, among other things," Saber replies.

"A brother?" Elaine repeats not sure if she's heard correctly.

Amanda nods, "Yes. When I was born, I had a brother that disappeared from the grief of our mother dying while having me. Evidently, a couple found him nearly dead, and took him in as their own. Through the years, they searched for his birth parents, but it wasn't until recently when his father was on his deathbed that he discovered the likely identity of his birth parents. He came searching shortly after everything was burnt up and had given up, until he saw me. He said that I looked like our mother," Amanda explains.

"But how can you be sure he's telling the truth? He could be after your inheritance," Elaine asks.

"We had a DNA test done. It confirmed that we are brother and sister. He also said he

doesn't want any money. That his family left him well off."

Elaine nods, and comes over and hugs her neck, "Then I'm happy for you."

Amanda hugs her back and smiles, "I also met my sister-in-law."

Saber laughs, "That was a little awkward."

"No kidding!" Amanda replies.

"Why?" Elaine asks.

"She was almost my sister-in-law before," Amanda replies.

Elaine stops and ponders the statement for a moment then a look of realization comes across her face. "Your former fiance's sister?" she asks in shock.

Amanda nods. "Oh, and we have a little nephew named Tyler. He's really cute," Amanda says.

"A little quiet though," Saber adds.

"Well, maybe in a few years he'll have a little cousin to play with," Elaine says causing Saber and Amanda to tense up for a moment. Elaine notices and studies them carefully for several minutes, noting that neither one will look directly at her. "Lady Amanda, are...you?" she asks a smile growing on her face.

Saber chuckles, "I'm surprised it took you this long to figure it out, Elaine."

Elaine comes back over and hugs both of them, "How long?"

"Almost three months now. We didn't know until about a week ago. I didn't really feel sick like Robin did, so the possibility had never occurred to me," Amanda replies.

"Well, I've heard that dreams can be rather strange when you're pregnant, so perhaps that's why you've been having the dreams," Elaine says as she starts clearing the dishes. "Do the others know?"

Saber shakes his head. "You are the only one besides us and Dr. Izumi. I think we'll wait a couple more weeks before telling the others," he says.

"So you're waiting until you're through the first trimester then?" Elaine asks.

Amanda nods. "We figure that everyone has enough going on right now, so it'll give us some time to adjust to the news before letting them in on it," she says.

Elaine nods, "I understand. I suppose it was a bit of a surprise for the two of you," she says looking between the couple.

"That's a bit of an understatement," Saber says with a chuckle.

"I'm sure our faces were priceless when Dr. Izumi told us," Amanda adds.

Several days pass by and Saber and Amanda are outside enjoying the weather when his com-link goes off. "Go ahead, commander," Saber says.

"The Bismarck is on it's way to get you and Amanda. The Tirpitz was ambushed by a unit similar to the one you fought when you went after Mr. McCully. They have taken heavy damage and put out a distress call. Be ready to leave in about half an hour. Commander Eagle out." The connection terminates before Saber can reply.

Saber looks to Amanda, "I don't think you should go, Amanda. I don't want to risk you or our child," Saber says firmly.

"Fine, but then you can't go either. You need me to be your eyes, Saber. Besides, what would you tell them?" Amanda replies defiantly.

Saber starts to say something a couple of times and stops himself. Finally, he sighs in resignation, "I don't want to start an argument with you, Amanda. Just promise me that you'll be careful," he says quietly.

Amanda nods, "You should too, Saber. I don't want to raise this child without you."

"Fair enough. Let's try and get this done as quickly as possible. If things start to get too bad, as soon as we can get the crew of the Tirpitz to safety, we'll need to talk to Commander Eagle and tell him that we can no longer fight with the Bismarck and the reason why," Saber replies.

Amanda nods, "Agreed. Let's go." They go and change into their uniforms and get to the landing area just as the ship is landing. The ramp lowers and they board, taking off quickly.

"So, what happened?" Saber asks as he sits down in the saddle unit and Amanda comes up behind him.

"Earlier this morning the crew of the Tirpitz went out to check on a distress call from a convoy that was headed from Yuma to Tranquility. Upon arriving at the location the call came from, they found the ships abandoned and they were ambushed. They managed to hold off several smaller fighters and renegade units, but then they were cornered by two larger ones. They have crashed somewhere on Tranquility. The sporadic communication we get indicates that at least a couple of them are injured, and the ship is cornered and unable to fight off the attackers. We should be arriving to the location within the next fifteen minutes," April says bringing them up to speed.

Saber nods, "Amanda, do you see any sign of fighters or anything close?"

Amanda scans the screens, "There are some fighters a good ways from us, but they are closing in. I see the beacon signal from the Tirpitz. It's down and to our left at

about seven o'clock. The fighters are closing in from about one and two o'clock. I think we could get to the Tirpitz before the fighters get to us."

Fireball starts turning the ship in the direction of the Tirpitz when they are suddenly hit by something, tossing Amanda onto the floor.

"Amanda!" Saber says.

"I'm fine," she replies quickly as she gets up and goes back by Saber. "What the Hell hit us?" she asks scanning her screens. I don't see anything that close."

"I think it came from about nine o'clock," Colt replies.

"But there's nothing on my screens," Amanda says.

"Fireball, turn away from the Tirpitz. We need to know what we're up against before we get too close to them and risk making their situation worse," Saber says trying to remain focused. "I'm going to try and get someone from the Tirpitz on the com-link. This is Captain Rider from the Bismarck, Erika, Yuri, Gabrielle, Alex, any of you come in. We need to know your status," he says and waits for a reply.

After a minute or so Alex's voice comes in, "We're here. I'm injured, but not badly, Yuri is the worst. We have separated to try and hide out until help arrives. Erika I think had a bad hit to the head as well. I've not heard from her or Gabby, sir."

"Okay, we will do what we can to get to all of you as soon as possible," Saber replies and closes the connection before turning to Colt. "Colt, can you get a fix on what hit us?"

"Not yet," he replies.

"I think I just did, and it's not good," Amanda replies, hitting a few buttons on the console to pull up a visual. "Look at that."

"Two huge renegade units," Colt grumbles.

"Similar to the one Sean had, if I'm not mistaken," Amanda replies.

"Saber, should we go to Challenge Phase two?" Fireball asks.

"I think it's our best chance. Let's do it., he replies with a nod.

"Right," Fireball replies and activates Challenge Phase one, then two.

"Amanda, do you have a fix for me?" Colt asks.

"Sending it now, Cowboy," she replies hitting a few buttons.

"Got it!" He says and they engage the closest unit. He manages to blast it, causing it to

crash near the Tirpitz. It moves back towards them, blade engaged. "April switch to sword, now!" Colt yells.

"On it," she replies as she hits a few buttons and tossing the control to Saber's unit.

Saber takes the controls. "It's coming almost strait at us. Take it down, then up, Saber," Amanda says guiding him. The swords hit, pushing both units back from the force. Amanda struggles to remain in the unit behind Saber. "Okay, he's coming back at about eight o'clock." Saber shifts and the blade hits the ship, causing it to crash into the wreckage of the Tirpitz. "It looks like it's down," Amanda says watching the screen over his shoulder. "Hey, Alex said that the crew is off the ship, right?"

"Yes. Why?" Saber asks.

"April, can we blow up the ship remotely?" Amanda asks.

"Are you insane?" Fireball asks.

"Probably, but I don't want to die today and that other unit is closing in fast. There's no way we can take two of those things on at once!" Amanda replies.

"We just got the ship. We can't just blow it up," Colt says in protest.

"She's right. It's our best shot," April says. "Give me a minute. I think I can override the system and make it self-destruct."

"We need to warn the crew," Fireball says.

"We can't. We have to trust that they're far enough away from it by now. Otherwise we risk the enemy unit finding out our plan," Saber says solemnly.

"Here it comes again," Amanda says.

"I'll knock it back down, toss control to me, April." Colt says.

"On it," she says hitting buttons rapidly. "Go."

Colt fires and knocks the renegade unit back to the ground.

"Here we go. Five seconds," April says as the computer counts down, then a series of explosions that knock the Bismarck back from the shock wave, destroying the Tirpitz and the first unit with it.

Fireball manages to steady them just before the second unit fires at them.

"Damn it!" Colt mutters, "Can't we catch a break?"

"One o'clock, Cowboy," Amanda says as Fireball turns the ship towards the second renegade unit. It fires again and the shields go up, deflecting the beam.

"About time that kicked in," Fireball says.

"I was busy trying to destroy the other ship, Fireball," April retorts. "Here it comes. It's got a double bladed weapon."

"Saber, you're in control. Fireball, duck us to the left and then back up, and then Saber, you try and do like you did with Sean. The angle should be almost identical," April says.

"Right," they both reply and do as they're told.

"Amanda, tell me when to cut up," Saber says quietly.

"Wait for it...ready...NOW!"

Saber pulls up and slices the unit in half. It falls to the ground, but the pilot ejects.

"We're gonna have to go and find him," Colt says.

"Yeah, as well as try and find the Tirpitz crew members," April says.

"Let's go out in our vehicles. Amanda and I can take Steed and send you a signal if we find any of the crew. We'll let you know if we find that pilot as well. Colt, Fireball, you should both head out too. April, see if you can get some back up from Calvary Command. We have some fighters that could come to our aid if more renegade fighters show up," Saber says taking charge.

"Got it," They all reply and head out, leaving April to man the Bismarck.

The hunt goes on for nearly an hour before Colt picks up a signal. He starts following it and eventually he finds Gabby. She is bleeding heavily from her head and semi conscious. "Hey, I got one of 'em. I think it's Weber. She's hurt pretty bad. I'm heading in with her," Colt says to April.

"Roger that, Colt. I see you approaching," April replies.

Fireball starts following some tracks in the dirt. Leading to a small bit of underbrush, he readies his blaster as he approaches. A shot is fired at him and he dodges, barely getting out of the way in time. He squats down behind some rocks and shrubs, "This is Shinji Hikari of the Star Sheriffs, come out with your hands up." Slowly the other person tosses their weapon towards him and stands up. Their head is bleeding and they almost immediately hit the ground after standing. It's then that Fireball spots the other person on the ground unconscious. He hits his com-link. "April I need some assistance. I've got two more here. Neither one is in good condition. I think I've got Mackenzie and Kawamura. I need Colt to come and help me transport them."

"He's on his way, Fireball. I've not heard from Saber or Amanda and there's still one more person unaccounted for aside from that renegade pilot."

"My concern is to not get myself or the other's killed right now. Saber and Amanda are on their own for the moment."

"They'll be fine. They will defend each other if it comes down to it," Colt retorts. "I'm coming for ya, Fireball."

"Do you see anything, Amanda?" Saber asks as they move carefully through some woods.

"Nothing yet," she replies.

"It's too quiet. Be on alert," Saber says. They continue a while longer when suddenly Steed is hit by something causing him to rear up and tossing both Saber and Amanda off. "Amanda?" Saber says concern in his voice. His head hits the ground stunning him a bit.

"Ow. That hurt," she mumbles as she tries to get to where Saber landed. "Are you all right?" she asks quietly, looking around for any sign of what hit them, her blaster ready in her hand.

"My head hurts, I think I hit it on a root or something, but I should be all right. We need to find cover." he replies quietly as he tries to look for who hit them.

"There's a grouping of trees that way. Let's head for it," Amanda replies quietly. She takes his hand and they start making their way towards the trees. Suddenly, another shot is fired, narrowly missing her, but hitting a tree next to them, causing a large branch to fall. Saber trips and hits his head again, knocking him unconscious. Amanda starts looking for refuge, dragging him by the arms as best she can. She turns around to search for her pursuer only to see the pilot in front of her, his blaster pointed at her. "You could have killed me already. Why didn't you?" she asks defiantly.

The pilot lowers his blaster and pulls out a sword. "I'd rather finish you off up close. Anyone with Calvary Command deserves to die for so ruthlessly prosecuting another race that is just trying to survive. I see you are wearing a sword, pull it and fight or surrender," he says as he lifts his visor and gets into a fighting stance.

Amanda gasps as his face is revealed, "Derrick?" she says surprised.

"How do you know me?" he says suspiciously, ready to charge.

Amanda raises her visor and his eyes widen in shock. "Amanda? What..How?" he stammers in shock then his features harden into anger, his eyes narrowing.

"Why are you fighting for the Outriders? They are trying to wipe out all of the human race, so we have to fight back," Amanda asks.

"You've been lied to, Amanda. I don't know what you're doing here or how you ended up as a soldier, but surrender to me and I won't kill you. Nor will I allow the Outriders

to kill you. I can't say the same for your friend there," he says nodding to Saber. "If that is who I think it is, killing him would really get me accolades with Jesse Blue. Of course if I bring him in alive, they could torture him first and then kill him. He's already unconscious, so he shouldn't be a problem. Now, surrender, Amanda. I don't want to have to fight you, but I will." He readies to fight again and she gets into a defensive stance.

"No harm will come to him, not unless you kill me first, Derrick," Amanda says defiantly, standing between Saber and Derrick, her sword ready.

Derrick sighs, "You've sealed your fate Amanda, you're no swordsman," he charges her and she immediately parries, pushing him away from Saber. They fight evenly for some time, ever so slowly she inches him further from where Saber is lying on the ground. This goes on nearly a half hour and they both are tiring.

"You've been trained well. Most people can't fight me this long. I applaud your efforts," Derrick says as he gains the upper hand.

Amanda continues to back away from Saber, but can tell she's losing ground, "As I said, to get Saber, you have to kill me first. He's taught me well." She manages to land a hit, cutting his ribs and making him wince.

"Saber huh? You talk as if you know him personally," He says as he cuts her arm.

"He is my husband, Derrick., she replies as he cuts her and she winces in pain and almost drops the sword, but manages to swap hands and sort of block the attack. She is tiring fast but refuses to give in. He laughs as he charges again and slices her just under her breast. She nearly collapses from the pain, but manages to drop to her knees refusing to give up she readies for his next attack, hoping to drop and roll away from him, causing him fall down in the process. He becomes over confident and hears someone call her name causing him to trip as lunges for her, sword aimed at her chest.

Colt and Fireball Arrive just in time to see her drop, "Amanda!" Colt manages to yell, causing Derrick to falter, she moves slightly and the sword misses her chest and cuts her upper arm. She instinctively points her sword towards him and pushes it into him, piercing his stomach. He drops to the ground and drops his sword and collapses on the ground gasping for air as he bleeds from his wound. Amanda near exhaustion manages to get up and taking her sword, pierces him from the back, killing him. Then collapses on the ground beside him. Colt and Fireball freeze in shock, then realizing what has happened, they rush over to Amanda and help her up.

"Get Saber," she says weakly. "Over there," she points to where he is near the trees.

Fireball nods and heads over to Saber, "Saber!"

He stirs a bit, "Fireball? Where's Amanda?" Saber says trying to sit up.

Fireball helps him sit up, "She's hurt, but I think she'll be okay. She's been cut a few times by the pilot's sword."

"The pilot?" Saber asks.

"She killed him," Fireball states simply. "She had no choice, Saber."

Saber nods slightly and sighs, "I think I'm all right, other than a bad headache. Please help me get to her," Saber says quietly.

"If you think you can manage," he replies and offers him a hand up and Saber takes it, managing to stand with help. They come over to where Colt and Amanda are. Amanda's laying on the ground, eyes closed, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Saber gets down beside her and reaches over and brushes her cheek gently, "Amanda?" he asks quietly.

Her eyes fly open and immediately she regrets it, she turns away and vomits from the pain.

"We need to get her to the ship fast," Colt says as he carefully picks her up and takes her to his bronco buster. "Saber, ride with Fireball, Steed will follow," Saber nods and they load up and return to the ship.

They get Amanda to the sick bay and are immediately met by medics from Calvary Command.

"When did they get here?" Saber asks as he follows Colt.

"They arrived while we were out," Colt replies. "They are checking on the other crew. Erika found us and is being checked out as well." The medics take Amanda and start checking her. Saber stays beside her and she finally looks at him.

"I'm sorry," Amanda says quietly. "I may have hurt..."

Saber places a finger to her lips and shakes his head, "Don't. Don't think about that right now," he replies quietly. "I want you to be okay. Judging from where you're cut, the baby could be all right, I think."

The medic working on her stops and looks between them. "Ma'am, you're pregnant?" he asks quietly.

Amanda nods slightly. "Twelve weeks, sir," she replies barely audible.

The medic turns to one of the other medics and nods for them to come over. "We need to move her to another area. We can't use just anything on her," the first one tells his superior.

"Why?" the other medic asks.

"She's twelve weeks pregnant, ma'am," the other medic replies in a hushed voice.

"No one else knows yet," Saber says quietly.

The female medic nods, "Let's get her into the break room. We can work on her and talk better there." The two medics carefully move her to another bed and roll it into the break room, shoving the table aside. They close the door after they have entered the room, Saber staying close.

The male medic goes to stop him. "I'm sorry sir. You need to remain outside."

"She's my wife, and carrying my child. Like Hell I'm waiting out here, sir," Saber replies pushing his way in. Amanda looks up when he enters, fear and shock on her face. Saber comes over and kisses her forehead, "No matter what happens, Love. We will get through this, okay?" he says trying to calm her.

"Saber, the pilot..." Amanda starts.

"He's dead," he says quietly.

Amanda closes her eyes fighting back tears, "I...I knew him...he was human," she says barely a whisper as tears start falling. "I've now killed twice. I've known both of them," she says quietly.

"Ma'am, please try and calm down. I think your baby is okay, but I need to get you stitched up so we can have a better look," the female medic says soothingly.

Amanda takes a deep breath and resists the urge to vomit again. She sees the concern on Saber's face and closes her eyes, trying to calm herself. She manages to slow her breathing and he gently runs his fingers through her hair.

A little bit later, the female medic sighs, "Okay, we have you stitched up. You are going to have to move carefully. Lucky for you the cuts are on one side. Now, let's see if I can hear your little one's heartbeat." She takes a stethoscope and places it on Amanda's abdomen, listening carefully. After a few minutes, she nods slightly. "The heartbeat sounds like it's within normal limits. But once we are back at Calvary Command, you are to have a more thorough examination. You said no one else knows that you're pregnant?"

"Just Dr. Izumi. No one else. We were waiting a few more weeks to tell them. We wanted her to be out of the first trimester," Saber replies.

The female medic nods, "Technically neither of you should have gone into that fight. Not under the circumstances you were under and are now under." She looks to Saber, "I know very well who you are, Captain, and I know that the only reason she went was because you did." She looks to Amanda, "Although from what I've heard, it wasn't worth arguing with her," she says with a smile.

Colt watches from across the room as Saber, Amanda, and the medic are talking. He sees the one medic signal for his superior. They talk, then suddenly they put Amanda

on a board and move her into the break room, grabbing a field medic kit on the way. He watches as Saber tries to follow, then argues with the male medic before forcing his way into the break room. He chuckles to himself at the thought of someone trying to restrain Saber to keep him out.

Fireball comes over to him. "Why'd they take her in the other room?" he asks concerned.

Colt shrugs, "I don't know. They were talking, Saber said something, they asked some questions I think and then got the head medic and then they were moving her. I don't know what's going on."

"Maybe she was hurt worse than they thought," Fireball says.

"Or maybe it's hitting her that she killed a second person," Colt replies. "And they don't want her scaring the others."

"It was in self-defense, Colt. He was going to kill her, and probably Saber too," Fireball says.

Colt nods, "I didn't say she was wrong for killing him,. She was totally in the right. But she took killing McCully pretty hard. So she may take this one pretty badly too. She looked pretty upset. And Saber looked pretty worried."

"We're about to land, boys. So you'd better get seated. You should go and tell the others first. I'm headed back to the control area." April says and she heads off to the control room.

Colt and Fireball go and alert the others, helping to strap down the wounded and then knocking on the break room door and shouting a warning before joining April in the control room.

"So how's Amanda and Saber? I didn't see either one of them in the med bay. Are they laying down?" April asks as the other two sit down.

"I think something is up with Amanda. Saber looked really worried, and they took over the break room to work on her. He followed the two medics into the room. I've not seen him or spoke to him since before that," Colt replies.

"I know Fireball said she was cut in a couple of places," April states.

"She's also upset that she had to kill that pilot," Colt says.

"What?" April asks as she lands the ship. The ramp opening up.

"She tried to talk him out of fighting, but he came after her, nearly killing her before she managed to get him. I was ready to shoot when she stabbed him and he fell. I wasn't close enough before that," Colt replies. "There's going to be a lot to tell Commander Eagle after everyone is stable."

April lowers the ramp and several medical personnel board the ship and start tending the wounded, relieving the ones that had been on board the ship. She sees them place Amanda on a gurney and take her out first, Saber and a couple of other medics with her. She notices the worried look on his face and sees her father come up to him and they talk as he follows them. Commander Eagles features show shock, then turn serious and he follows Saber without another word. "That's not good. Father just went with Saber. Whatever Saber said to him got his attention. Let's help get the others into the sick bay, then try and find my father. Maybe then we can find out what's going on," April states.

Kapitel 24: Repercussions

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 23: Repercussions

A couple of hours later, they are waiting outside the sick bay trying to catch Commander Eagle. "I don't care, what those nurses say, I'm going in!" Colt says and shoves the door open and enters the Critical Care Area. He grabs the first person he sees. "Where is Commander Eagle?" he demands of the first person he sees.

The startled nurse looks at him frightened, "He's down the hall on the left. Last room," the nurse stammers.

Colt releases the nurse and she runs off. He nods and Fireball and April follow him. They go to the room as directed and open the door to find a smaller room, with a larger room on the back. In some chairs Commander Eagle is sitting talking with Dr. Izumi. They look up when the trio enter.

"How did you know to come here?" the commander asks.

"I drug it out of a nurse, sir," Colt replies.

"You shouldn't be here. Any of you," he replies forcefully.

"They are our friends, father. We want to know what's going on," April says concern in her voice.

The commander sighs, "I'm not able to tell you, April. I'm sorry."

The door opens and Saber comes out looking very fatigued. He stops and gives the commander a questioning look when he sees the others.

"They found out where you were. I've not told them anything, Saber," he replies to the unspoken question.

Saber comes over and plops down heavily into the chair. He looks at each of his friends watching him with concern in their eyes. "Sit down, we need to talk," he mutters nodding to some vacant chairs. They do as they're told and Colt starts to say something when Saber holds a hand up to stop him. "Please, let me speak first," he says quietly, not bothering to mask his fatigue or worry. Colt nods and Saber searches for the words to start, "Amanda and I will not be returning to the Bismarck. I cannot in good conscience allow her to continue to fight given her situation. I never should have allowed her to go this time. But she and I had both agreed to try and minimize what

we did. And yet, in the thick of it, we did the very thing we said we wouldn't do. And now...we have not only risked our lives, but the life of our unborn child. We will not risk that again." He hears the collective gasps of shock from his closest friends. "Our intention was to tell you after the end of the first trimester, which would have been next week. We only found out a week ago and we have still been adapting to the idea." He pauses, trying to think of how to continue, "Amanda is physically going to be okay, as is the child. The cuts she received were not where the baby is, so they both were lucky. However, the emotional and psychological trauma from this..."

"Amanda is strong. She can get through this, Saber," April says.

"Yeah. She's one of the strongest women I know," Colt says.

"The man she fought against and killed was her former fiance," Saber says quietly. "I'm not so sure she will be okay at this point, at least not mentally. She hadn't even gotten over the fact that she had killed Sean, then to have to kill someone that she had..." he stops, afraid of breaking down.

"All any of us can do is be there for her and show her and you support, Saber," the commander says quietly. "I think all things considered, you both have been lucky that things are not worse. Had I known that she was pregnant, I never would have allowed either of you to go out. I would have gone in your place."

"There is more to tell you, but I need to talk to Amanda first. I'm hoping that the doctors can give her something to help her relax a bit, so that she doesn't completely lose it. I know she is close to breaking down completely, and I also know that stress can harm the baby."

"Are you okay, Saber?" April asks after a period of silence.

"Physically, I've been worse. I've got a rather bad headache and a cut on my head, but it didn't even need stitching this time. I'm mentally exhausted. I feel like I should have been able to prevent this. That somehow, I should have come around sooner and killed him myself. That's twice now she has had to kill, and I know that this time was worse than the last, because of who she killed."

"Saber, you can't go on blaming yourself for this. Amanda is going to need you to be her support. To show her that in spite of everything you love her and that she can continue living. That will not be easy regardless, but trying to put on a positive front while punishing yourself for something you had no control over isn't going to help you do that," April says, coming over and placing a hand on his shoulder.

Saber looks up at her and nods, "You're right, April. I know that. But I still just feel so..."

"Helpless?" she offers and he nods. "Look, things have not worked out the way you thought they would, but think of it like this, Saber. You taught her to defend herself, she would have died otherwise, and she is strong, but I'm sure right now she is totally overwhelmed. Had we known about her condition we never would have had either of

you come along. We would have gotten someone, like my father to help. It would have worked out."

Saber goes to say something when the door to the room Amanda's in opens and a nurse comes out, "Captain Rider, your wife's awake and has asked for you," the nurse says quietly.

"Thank you," he replies and gets up, "Excuse me," he says as he takes a breath and heads into the room, closing the door behind him.

Upon entering he sees her look up and he manages a weak smile as he comes over and takes her hand. "I'd ask how you're feeling, but..." he starts to say.

She squeezes his hand, "I'm numb," she says barely a whisper.

"I'm sorry, Amanda. If I could I'd take back everything that has ha-"

"Saber, we can't take it back. We have to try and move on. I know that, but I'm not sure how to do that. I've done things, seen things that I never imagined I would. I know that I had no choice but to do what I did if I wanted to live. He was severely misguided, I was hoping I could reason with him, but he was too far gone," she finishes tears falling down her cheeks.

"I'm not sure I could have done what you did, Love. Had it been Sincia, I'm not sure I could have killed her, no matter how misguided she was."

"My thoughts were in protecting you and our child, Saber. That is the reason I did it. I want to live so we can have this child. I want this child to have a chance to grow up happy and loved. Perhaps the nightmares will go away. I know in my head that I did the right thing. It's just harder because at one time I did love him, although the love I felt for him is nothing like what I feel for you," she says sounding tired.

Saber leans over and kisses her forehead. "So do we just try and move on then? Try and look at this as a thing we have to get through to become stronger?" Saber asks aloud.

Amanda nods slightly, "I want to try. But I cannot guarantee that I'll be okay all the time. I'd be lying if I said that, and I can't lie to you."

"Well, I need to tell you something about what's happened," Saber says a bit nervously.

"What?" she says quietly eyeing him with concern.

"Evidently, when I got hit in the head or whatever that was that happened that knocked me out, my vision has actually improved a little," he says with a hint of a smile.

Amanda looks at him shocked and then smiles weakly. "So you can actually see more

than outlines?" she asks.

He nods, "Although I am still sensitive to light. So perhaps if I can get some sort of tinted prescription glasses I'll be able to see well enough to do more than what I've been doing. I don't think I'll ever feel safe driving, and reading may still be difficult, but it's better than it was. I know it could still be temporary, so I'm not getting my hopes up. But, Dr. Izumi has said he wants to run a few tests on my eyes and see if he can get some glasses made for me that might help."

"Do the others know..." she pauses, "about your vision and about our child?"

"Not the vision, but I have just told them that you are pregnant," Saber replies.

"How did they take that news?"

"They were a bit shocked," he replies with a smile. "I wish you could have seen their faces."

Amanda smiles, "I bet it was good." she falls silent for a few minutes in thought, "How about Commander Eagle? I have a vague recollection of him coming in with you and you and him talking quietly, although I couldn't make out anything that was said."

"Well, he was rather stunned about the entire situation. I've not mentioned the increase in my vision to him, so unless Dr. Izumi has said something, he doesn't know about that. He is not angry that we went. He understands why, he just wishes that we hadn't gone, because of the risk to the child."

"Well, I assure you that I have no desire to go back out to fight. It isn't worth the risk to our little one or our lives. I want us both to be here for this child," Amanda states.

A knock at the door causes them to turn, "Come in," Saber says.

Commander Eagle enters and studies their faces, "How are you feeling, Amanda?" he says as he approaches her bed.

"I've been better, sir. I'm going to have good and bad times, I know that. But I am determined to get past all of this. The good that has resulted from this outweighs the bad in the long run," she replies quietly. "I do think I'm going to be rather sore for a while though."

He nods, "If you need anything, Amanda do not hesitate to say something. If it is within my power, I'll see that you get whatever you need."

"Thank you, sir," she replies quietly. "How have the others taken to our news?"

He chuckles, "They were a bit shocked, to say the least. They all were saying they had no idea because you didn't act like Robin did."

"How have they been regarding the other situation, sir?"

"A lot better than you have. Colt thinks quite highly of you. He saw the end of the fight. He was about to shoot when you..."

"Killed him," Amanda finishes, the commander nods. "Well, I didn't know that he was there, not that he could have done much. I tried to reason with him, but as I told Saber, Derrick was too far gone. He was not the man I used to know. Not at all, so I suppose in a way that has made it a little easier to bear. I just don't know what I'm going to tell Sarah."

"Who's Sarah?" the commander asks.

"Derrick's sister. But she is also Alex Mackenzie's wife," Amanda says quietly.

"Mackenzie? He's the one that turned out to be your brother, isn't he?" the commander asks, getting a nod in reply. "So she is your sister-in-law, either way." he pauses in thought, "I will talk to her and to Mr. Mackenzie if you wish. Perhaps hearing the news from me would be better. I might be able to just tell her that he was killed, and not tell her how."

"I'd rather her know now, otherwise, if she finds out later, she will think I was trying to hide it from her. That might ruin what bit of a relationship we do have," Amanda replies.

"Then I'll go and talk with with Mr. Mackenzie and his wife. He was injured, but only has a mild concussion and a few minor lacerations. I think he'd do all right talk to me for a while. The others would like to come and see you. Are you up to that yet?" the commander asks.

Amanda thinks for a minute and sighs, "I suppose it would be okay, if you're amenable to it, Saber."

Saber nods, "I've already talked with them some, so if you are fine seeing them, it's fine with me."

The commander nods, "I'll send them in when I go to see Mr. Mackenzie," he says as he turns to leave, stopping at the door. "Remember my offer, that goes for both of you," he states before leaving and letting the door close behind him.

Amanda slinks back against her pillows and lets out a dramatic sigh and wipes the last of her tears away. "I hope they let me out of here soon. I'm sick of hospitals," she says grumpily.

Saber chuckles and kisses her lightly, "As soon as they make sure that you and the baby are all right, I'm sure they'll release you. They will probably keep you another day or so, since they want to monitor the baby as well." Amanda looks disappointed and he smiles, "I promise, Love. The moment they release you, we'll go home and I'll do anything for you ask."

Amanda grins, "I am not going to let you wait on me. I'm not an invalid."

Saber starts to make a remark, but sees the look she gives him and thinks better of it. "I don't think of you as an invalid, Love. But I owe you my life, so if you need something that you can't do or just don't want to do for yourself I'll help, okay?"

Amanda smiles, "Okay, I'll accept that." She starts to say more, but a knock at the door halts their conversation.

"Come in," Saber says and the door opens and Colt, April, and Fireball enter.

"Hey," Colt says cheerfully coming up to Amanda's bedside.

"Hi," Amanda replies quietly.

April comes over beside Colt and smiles, "Congratulations. I hope everything is okay with the baby."

Amanda nods, "As far as the doctors can tell, we were lucky."

"I'm glad to hear that," April says.

"It was a bit of a shock though," Amanda says quietly. "I never got really sick like Robin, so I thought the being tired and the irritability was from having trouble sleeping."

"So it wasn't exactly planned?" Colt asks with a grin.

"No Colt, it wasn't," Saber replies. "But we've decided to make the best of it. I'm not against the idea of children anyways, even though we hadn't really discussed it before we found out."

A knock on the door is heard and everyone turns to see who it is as it opens and Dr. Izumi enters the room. "Ah Mrs. Rider, you look a little better than you did earlier, that is encouraging. How are you feeling?" he asks as he comes up to her bedside opposite of Saber, shooing April and Colt out of his way in the process.

"A little better than earlier, both physically and mentally," Amanda replies honestly.

The doctor nods, "That's good." A nurse knocks and enters the room pushing a cart with a machine, and pulling a smaller machine on wheels behind her. "Ah, here we are," he turns to April, Fireball, and Colt. "I'm afraid I have to request that you three wait outside. I need to examine her and hook up a couple of things. You may return when we're done." They nod and file out quietly. "Now," he says to Saber and Amanda, "Let's hook up this fetal monitor and do an ultrasound, shall we?" he asks as the nurse begins hooking up the equipment.

"That machine looks different than the last ultrasound machine," Amanda says hesitantly.

"It is. This one I can use just on your stomach. You're far enough along now, that we can see the baby better this way, although it's still too early to see the gender just yet. You have about eight to ten more weeks before we can check that, if you even want to know before the child is here."

"I suppose that's something else we'll have to think about, doctor," Amanda says and Saber nods in agreement.

"Very well, let's get on with this for now then," he replies as he turns on the fetal monitor. Almost immediately you can hear the quick heartbeat of the baby. Amanda looks over to Saber and smiles, the relief evident in her face. He holds her hand and she squeezes it, with him returning the gesture.

"Everything sounds good, so let's try and get a look at your little one," the doctor says as he runs the ultrasound probe across her abdomen. After a minute, a blurry image appears on the screen, causing both Saber and Amanda to gasp and the doctor to chuckle at their reaction. "I suppose this makes it a bit more real, doesn't it?" They both nod and the doctor smiles. "Just think Captain, if I can get you those glasses, you'll see even a little bit better than you can now," Dr. Izumi says watching Saber's reaction.

Saber nods, "Yes, I was going to ask about that. When did you want to attempt to do those tests? I was hoping we could go home before too long."

"I was going to suggest that you come with me when we're through here. Once we do the tests, I can get the glasses made up in our lab. That should only take a couple of hours, especially if I put a rush on it. Perhaps the others that were here could keep your wife company while you come with me?"

"That would be fine with me, Saber. I think you getting the glasses are a good idea, maybe then we can get home sooner."

"I'll go and get them then, if we're through here, doctor," Saber says. The doctor nods and Saber heads out the door, coming back a short time later with the others in tow. "All right doctor, let's go and do these tests," Saber says and he and the doctor leave.

The constant sound of the baby's heartbeat resounds through the room and Colt looks at the monitor and smiles, "It sounds like a good heartbeat."

Amanda nods, "The doctor said it's within normal range. We got to see the baby on an ultrasound too. That was great. It made it all so real, more definite."

"So, is Saber okay?" Fireball asks.

"Yeah, why do you ask?"

"Well, he left with the doctor for some tests. I was thinking maybe he was having problems again or something."

"No, just routine stuff, since he had his head knocked around again. We're trying to get all of the necessary tests out of the way so that we can just go home and rest. I think both of us would relax better there."

"I'm sure you'd be more comfortable," April says.

"I suppose all things considered, the pregnancy itself hasn't been too bad. It's just everything else that has been a bit insane."

Colt laughs, "I'm surprised that you haven't lost it, Amanda. I think even I would have in your place."

"That's not a far stretch for you anyways, Cowboy," April retorts, making Amanda laugh, but immediately regretting it and wincing in pain. "I'm sorry, Amanda. I didn't mean to make you hurt."

"It's okay. He left himself open for that one," Amanda says with a weak smile.

"Hey!" Colt replies mimicking being hurt.

Amanda grins and Colt shakes his head. "You've been around the others too long," he says with a laugh.

Amanda smiles and visibly relaxes a little, "I'm glad you all came. It makes things seem a bit more normal."

They talk a while longer and eventually Saber returns with Commander Eagle. "Well, it looks like you are faring better than earlier, Amanda," Commander Eagle says.

Amanda nods, "I'm feeling a little better, sir. I've got a long way to go, but I know things will be all right. I've been injured far worse than this."

Commander Eagle laughs, "Yes, but you weren't pregnant then either."

"That is true, sir," Amanda replies.

"Okay, I want you three to give them some peace for a while and come with me to talk to the other Tirpitz crew members."

They nod and after saying their good-byes they leave with Commander Eagle.

Saber sits on the edge of the bed and turns so he can face Amanda, "So how are you really feeling, Love?"

"I'm okay. I guess I'm still in shock over the whole thing, but hearing the baby's heartbeat has actually helped me calm down and sort of accept that what is done is done. I know that if I had not killed him, me, our child and you would have died. Knowing that is helping me to not lose it mentally," she pauses and studies his

expression carefully, "How did you come out?"

"Well, in a couple of hours, Dr. Izumi is going to bring me some prescription sunglasses. They are a sort of transitional pair. Inside, they won't be quite as dark as they will get if I go outside. So they won't be quite as dark as I've got now when I'm inside, but with the prescription lenses, I should be able to see almost normally. It was a rather strange thing to be able to decipher letters on a page after a couple of years of not being able to read."

Amanda smiles, "So you'll be able to see the baby when it's born? The doctor thinks it's most likely a permanent thing?"

Saber nods, "He seems to think so," he replies smiling and then kisses her briefly.

A knock at the door draws their attention. The door opens and Alex walks in not waiting for a reply.

"Alex?" Amanda says surprised.

"I'm sorry for not waiting, but I didn't want to be seen entering your room," Alex replies.

"Why?" Saber says his guard going up and he protectively places himself between Alex and Amanda.

"Because they would have tried to stop me. When I asked to see you earlier, I was told you were to have no visitors. But we need to talk. I know what happened to Derrick." Amanda starts to reply and he holds up a hand to stop her, "Sarah also knows that her brother was killed and the manner in which he died." Amanda looks away and Alex ventures closer. "Neither one of us hold you accountable for his death, Amanda. We have talked with Commander Eagle, Mr. Wilcox, and Mr. Hikari. The latter two said told us what happened in detail. They said they were witness to it. You did all you could, we cannot fault you. Mr. Wilcox said that you tried to reason with him, but that he continually attacked you and then threatened your life."

Amanda nods, tears streaming down her cheeks again. "And by threatening my life, he threatened the life of our unborn child," she replies and sees Alex's eyes widen in shock.

"You're pregnant?" he asks in surprise. Amanda nods. "Then why did you even go out?"

"To protect our way of life and to help all of you," she replies quietly.

Alex shakes his head and sighs, "If I had known, I would have fought you coming out."

"Good luck with that. She is rather persistent. I don't even argue with her if I can avoid it. I've learned that it usually does little good," Saber says with a chuckle. "However, in hindsight, I should have told her that neither of us were going."

"So you knew she was pregnant and still you both went?" Alex asks, the anger apparent in his voice.

Saber nods, "We had just found out. It was a bit of a surprise. I suppose we were still in shock about it."

"So how far along are you?" Alex asks forcing his anger to retreat.

"Three months," Amanda replies.

"And you just found out?" Alex asks in disbelief.

"A little more than a week ago, yes," Amanda admits.

Alex shakes his head. "Unbelievable," he says. "I do have another question, Sarah would like to talk to you, would that be all right?" Amanda gives Saber a nervous glance. "She's not mad at you, she wants to check on you, actually. She was more worried about you than her brother," Alex states.

Amanda nods hesitantly, "I suppose it would be okay. When did she want to come?"

"Whenever you would permit it," he replies.

"Where is she? I can go and bring her here. That way you don't have to sneak in again," Saber offers.

"She's in the main waiting room. I came back when the desk person was responding to someone else."

Saber nods, "I'll go and get her. Will you be all right, Love?"

"I'll be fine," Amanda says and Saber heads out the door, leaving Amanda and Alex alone.

Amanda watches Alex nervously, "So, you really aren't mad at me?" she asks breaking the uneasy silence.

Alex looks up, "No, you did what you had to do, Amanda. I respect you for having the guts to do it. I'm not sure I could have if it had been me in your place."

"Not the first time I've heard that today," she says quietly. "Even Saber said that he might not have been able to if it had been his former fiancée."

"He was engaged before?" Alex asks surprised.

Amanda nods, "Yes. He and another woman were betrothed as children. When he was injured, she released him from their engagement because she didn't wish to be married to a disabled person."

"Sounds like he's made out better then," Alex replies. "He doesn't come across as so disabled to me."

Amanda smiles, "He isn't. Although at the time she saw him, he didn't even know her. He had lost his memory as well. It has since returned, obviously. So I'm sure for her it was quite a shock. Her loss was my gain though. Even despite all of the bad things that have happened, I am glad that I am with Saber."

Alex nods, "You seem like a good match."

The door opens and Saber comes in followed by Sarah. "Hello, Amanda. Are you all right?" Sarah asks, the concern evident in her voice and on her face.

"I'm okay," Amanda replies. "I'm sorry about Derrick," she adds barely audible.

Sarah comes over to the other side of her bed and hugs her gently, "Amanda, I have heard what transpired, you did your best to not do it, but it could not be helped. Derrick chose his fate when he attacked you. Although I will say that I was unaware you knew how to fight with a sword."

Amanda hugs her back and then releases her, "I didn't know how to fight when you knew me before. Saber taught me to fight. It was one way that I was working with him. I had him teach me to do things that he had skills in, so that he would see that he could still function."

"Well, it seems to have served both of you well," Sarah says with a weak smile.

"She became good enough that I got her a sword. It ended up being her engagement gift, although that wasn't my thought at the time I decided to get her one," Saber says chuckling. "I never dreamed she'd get so much actual use out of it."

Alex laughs, "Remind me to not make either of you mad. I cannot fight well with a sword."

Amanda smiles weakly feeling the exhaustion hit her from the past day's events.

"Perhaps we should go and let you rest. I don't want to cause you any more stress. We'll see you again soon, okay?" Alex says noting how tired Amanda looks.

Amanda nods, "Yes, I hope we can see one another again soon. Thank you both for coming," she says obviously tired. They nod and leave quietly.

Saber sits down on the bed beside her with a worried look. She leans up and lays her head on his shoulder and he gently places an arm around her. "Are you all right?" he asks quietly.

"I guess," she replies barely a whisper. "I'm just really tired and a bit hungry."

Saber chuckles, "Well, I'm glad you want something to eat. That's a good sign, isn't it?"

She looks up and smiles weakly, "I suppose it is."

"What would you like?" he asks.

"Some kind of soup maybe?"

Saber nods, "I'll go and see what I can round up. I could use something to eat myself." She lays back against her pillows and he gets up and heads out the door towards the nurse's station, where a young woman is sitting doing paper work. "Excuse me, Miss?" he asks.

The nurse looks up, "Yes, Captain?"

"My wife and I would like some food. Would it be all right if I went and got both of us something? She said that she'd like some kind of soup."

The nurse hits some keys on her keyboard and scrolls through some files and nods, "I don't see where they want her to be fasting for any reason, so something like soup should be fine."

"Thank you. I'll return shortly," Saber replies and the nurse nods. He heads for the cafeteria.

"Ah, there you are, Captain!"

Saber stops and turns around to see Dr. Izumi coming towards him. "Oh, hello, doctor," Saber says.

"I want you to try these on for me," Dr. Izumi says as he hands Saber some glasses.

Saber takes off the darker shades he's wearing and puts on the new pair. He blinks several times and slowly his eyes adjust and he nods. "I've not seen this clearly in a couple of years. They seem dark enough that the lights aren't hurting my head either," he replies.

Dr. Izumi smiles, "Well, that's good to hear. I'm going to have a back up pair made as well as a pair that is a bit darker in case you start with the headaches again."

"Thank you," Saber says.

"How is your wife doing?" Dr. Izumi asks.

"A lot better than I expected her to be, given how she was when we arrived. I think knowing that the baby is okay has helped a lot. She has stated that she knows there was no choice in having to kill the renegade pilot. The fact that she was at one time engaged to him I think is what made it more traumatic."

"She was engaged before to the pilot of that unit?" the doctor asks in disbelief.

Saber nods, "Yes. The pilot was human, doctor. But evidently he broke off the engagement after meeting someone else. I don't know all of the details, nor do I need to."

"Well, I'm glad to hear she is doing better. I'll be by in a little while to check on all three of you."

"That's fine. I was on my way to get us some food. She said she would like some soup."

"That is good to hear. Soup is probably the best thing for her right now."

They go their separate ways and Saber returns to Amanda's room a short time later with soup, and finds Amanda asleep. He places the soup on her bedside table, then goes over and kisses her gently. "Wake up, Love. Food is here."

Amanda stirs slightly and then looks up and smiles weakly. "Hey," she says sitting up so that she can eat as Saber moves the table in front of her and then they eat.

Kapitel 25: Discoveries

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 24: Discoveries

"Saber, the others will be arriving any time. Are you coming out anytime soon?" Elaine calls from the bedroom door.

Begrudgingly Saber comes to the door and opens it. "Amanda is almost ready. I'm waiting for her so we can come down together," he replies.

Elaine nods, "How is she today?" she asks quietly.

"She seems all right. She had a nightmare again last night, but after she calmed down she slept peacefully," he replies.

"How are you doing?" Elaine asks.

"I've got the darker glasses on, but with them I can still see fairly well. Not as clearly as before, but perhaps it will come and go a little. I've still got more vision than I expected to have after the accident," Saber replies as Amanda comes up behind him.

"Did you think we weren't coming down, Elaine?" Amanda asks smiling weakly.

"I came to see if you were up to company, Lady Amanda. I know you've not felt your best since you've come home."

"I'm doing a bit better than last night or even the last few days. I even felt the baby move some this morning," Amanda replies as Saber goes back into the room to finish getting ready.

Elaine smiles broadly, "That is exciting, and good to know. After everything that has happened, I'm sure that makes you feel better knowing your little one is active."

Amanda nods, "Yes, it does. I'm just feeling a bit more tired, but I know that part of that is from not sleeping well." She looks to see where Saber is and notices he's in the dressing room, "I am a bit worried about Saber though. His headaches have returned. He says not to worry, but I can't help it," she says in a hushed voice.

"Perhaps I'll get Thomas to talk with him later. Maybe he can get him to be checked by the doctor," Elaine replies quietly. The doorbell sounds and Elaine turns towards the stairs. "I'll tell them that you'll be down shortly. We'll talk more later, okay?" Amanda nods and Elaine heads down the stairs.

Amanda returns to their room just as Saber comes from the dressing room, "Are you sure you're up to seeing people today?" she asks.

Saber nods, "The headache isn't as bad as it was earlier, Love. With the darker glasses I should be fine. I can still see fairly clearly, so I'm not too worried about it. Besides, it's been nearly a month since we've seen everyone, it'll be nice to see them when no one is currently fighting. Besides, you're starting to show a bit now, so that should make it a little more real to them," he says as he wraps his arms around her from behind, placing his hands on her stomach.

She leans into his embrace and relaxes against him, "Pretty soon we'll be due for another ultrasound. I'm hoping you can still see well enough to see the images clearly."

"So do I," he replies quietly and turns her so that she's facing him and kisses her lightly then reluctantly releases her with a sigh. "I suppose we should get down there."

"Aye. Don't want them waiting too long, Colt might come up with some sort of remark," she replies as she heads for the stairs.

He follows her and they go down to the sitting area where the others are waiting.

"Morning, you two," Colt says with a grin.

"Good morning," they reply as they take a seat on the last empty seats.

"So, how are things at Calvary Command?" Saber asks casually.

"Not too bad. We are in the process of upgrading the current Bismarck ship and creating a new version of the Tirpitz. After a lot of grueling hours, we decided to come and annoy you," April says.

"Since you've returned here, instead of staying at Calvary Command to recuperate," Colt adds.

"I couldn't be there any longer. Not after everything," Amanda says quietly.

"Also, those military beds are rather uncomfortable at times," Saber quips.

"You're not the one that's pregnant," Amanda says with a smirk.

"I do have some bad news," April says, in a serious tone.

"What's that?" Saber asks.

"We finally got the invoices from that convoy that the Outriders ransacked," April replies.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Fireball asks.

"I wanted to tell everyone at once," April replies.

"Well, what was on it?" Colt asks impatiently.

April sighs looking exceedingly nervous, "Explosives."

"What sort of explosives?" Saber asks.

"High-power bombs," April replies.

"Why would a convoy have those?" Fireball asks.

"They are relics of an old war, and were being taken to be destroyed. They may not even be any good."

"But there's a chance that they may be fully effective?" Saber inquires.

April nods.

"How powerful of bombs are we talking about here?" Colt asks nervously.

"Also how many?" Saber asks.

"They're old nuclear warheads, and enough to disintegrate Calvary Command, or a colony."

"NUKES!" Colt exclaims. "I thought that those were out-lawed by the New Frontier Securities Council years ago!"

"They were," April says

"Why weren't they destroyed years ago?" Saber asks.

"The then President of the former United States hid them, and then the secret was passed down from President to President until the current head of the New Frontier Alliance decided that they needed to be destroyed. The convoy was on it's way to the last nuclear weapon disposal site still in existence," April replies.

"Who knew what that convoy was carrying when it was attacked?" Saber asks.

"Why?" April asks.

"Well, it is now evident that that convoy was attacked purposely." Saber says and the other gasp. "I believe that there's a traitor inside Calvary Command."

"Impossible!" April says in disbelief.

"How could that happen?" Colt asks.

"It's possible, that in a rush to get the amount of soldiers necessary to fight against the Outriders before we defeated Nemesis, that somebody slipped in and was probably in training when we defeated Nemesis. Then they waited until Jesse showed himself again."

"You're talking about a sleeper agent?" April asks. Saber nods. "But that could be anyone," April says exasperated.

"We can limit the suspect pool down considerably if we can find out who all knew what was on that convoy before it was attacked," Saber replies.

"My father should be able to get us that information," April says. "Want me to go and call him and ask him to send us the information?"

"No. Any call we make could be recorded or intercepted," Saber says.

"Ask him to come here. That way we can talk with him without the risk of unwanted people hearing," Amanda suggests.

"Yes, he should be able to access anything we would need remotely," Saber adds.

April nods, "All right. I'll go and call him then," she says getting up and pulling out her phone and walking out of the room.

Saber sighs, "I sincerely hope that I'm wrong about this," he says quietly.

"We all hope you're wrong," Fireball replies. He turns and looks to Amanda, "So, how are you feeling?" he asks trying to find a more pleasant conversation.

"Well, for the most part, not too bad. I'm still having nightmares, though not quite as frequently. I've not really felt sick, just a bit more tired than usual," she replies.

"And you've had a bit more of an appetite," Saber adds with a smile.

Amanda laughs, "True. I could probably out eat Colt right now."

Fireball laughs. "That I'd like to see!" he states.

Colt shakes his head and laughs.

April comes back into the room and sits down, "Father should be here in a couple of hours. He might bring Dr. Izumi with him."

"Why would he do that?" Saber and Amanda ask at the same time.

"Because I used you as a scapegoat, Saber. I told him that you're wearing the darker glasses again and that I was concerned. So he said he'd call Dr. Izumi and see if he

wants to come with him to check you out here. Otherwise, he might make you return there for a check up."

"Well, at least if someone was listening they shouldn't suspect anything. It sounds like a valid reason for a visit," Saber says, not sounding too thrilled.

"Hey, I was thinking fast, and didn't want it to seem suspicious. I noticed the darker glasses and said the first thing that popped into my head, that would seem like a reason to get him here without rousing suspicion," April says.

"I know, April. It was a good ruse. I'm sure Amanda will feel better having my eyes checked anyways," Saber says.

Amanda nods, "Yes, it will make me feel a bit better," she replies.

Elaine comes out from the kitchen, "Would any of you like something to eat?"

"I could eat something, Elaine," Amanda replies.

Colt goes to say something, but the look from Amanda stops him.

Elaine comes back a few minutes later with a cart with tea and some small cakes on small plates. "Lunch won't be for a little longer, so I brought this out for those that would like some," Elaine says handing Amanda a plate and placing a cup of tea in front of her and one in front of Saber on the small coffee table. The others each take a plate and she passes out tea before returning to the kitchen.

They chat and talk about things for a while when the doorbell rings and Thomas goes to answer it. He returns a couple minutes later followed by Commander Eagle and Dr. Izumi. "Good afternoon, everyone," Commander Eagle says as he enters.

"Good afternoon, sir," they all reply.

Thomas returns with a couple more chairs and the commander and Dr. Izumi take their seats.

"So, Captain Rider, I hear that you're having a bit more trouble?"

Saber nods slightly, "Yes, Dr. Izumi that is correct. About a week ago, I started with the headaches again. I've also been a bit more sensitive to light the last couple of days. I can still see fairly clearly, but it is becoming a bit of a nuisance."

Dr. Izumi nods, "Would you object to coming with me to your room, so I can do a few tests?"

Saber shakes his head, "No sir. That would be fine. I'd much rather remain here."

"Very well then, let's head upstairs, shall we?" he replies and he and Saber head upstairs.

Amanda watches them go and sighs.

"Hey, I'm sure it's nothing," April says before turning to the commander. "We need to talk to you father, but we couldn't risk doing it over the phone."

The commander immediately tenses, "Why? Is there something more seriously wrong?"

"Well, you could say that," April says hesitantly. He gives her a look and she takes a breath and continues, "We fear that we may have a traitor within Calvary Command," she says getting a look of shock then anger from her father.

"That is an extremely serious accusation, April," he says trying to keep his anger in check.

"Yes, I know it is, but once we discovered what was on that convoy that was attacked and then stripped of its contents, it became obvious to us that the most likely thing is that the Outriders wanted what was being transported."

Commander Eagle looks around the room to the others, trying to read their features, he notices that each show anger and fear. "So what exactly was on the convoy, April? I've not yet read the reports. I intended to do that today before this trip came up," he asks.

"Old nuclear warheads," she replies quietly.

He doesn't even try to hid his shock, "I thought all of the nukes had been disposed of years ago," he says in disbelief. "How many are we talking about?"

"Enough to kill millions. Easily decimate Calvary Command and probably a colony or two," April replies. The commander shakes his head, "Father, we need to know who all knew what that convoy was carrying. But we can't let on that we're trying to find a traitor. That is why I had you come here and not say something over the phone. It could be anyone at this point."

"So there is nothing wrong with Saber?" he asks.

"Um, actually sir, that was just a convenient solution to get you here. He has been having more trouble recently with headaches and such, so when April used him, I was relieved. He's a bit stubborn and didn't want to return to be checked out," Amanda says quietly.

Commander Eagle smiles slightly, "I know he can be rather stubborn, so I suppose some good will come of this trip. I'll need to hook up my laptop and do some digging to find out who all knew what was on those ships."

"Well, we still have the basics here from the when the command center was set up, so you are welcome to hook up where ever you wish. If you would like some privacy, we

can set you up in a bedroom upstairs," Amanda replies.

"That would probably be for the best, Amanda. The fewer people who know why I'm actually here, the better. Do not mention this to Dr. Izumi. We can find a way to stall his return if we need to. Even if we have to have him give you a check up as well," Commander Eagle replies.

Amanda nods and stands up, "I'll go and get Thomas and ask him to make sure a room is ready for you." He nods and she heads towards the kitchen.

A short time later, Elaine comes down followed by Amanda. "Your room is ready, Commander. Would you like to join us for lunch shortly, or would you prefer I bring you something upstairs?" Elaine asks as Amanda goes and sits back down.

"Did you go and check on Saber?" April asks.

"I was going to but I heard he and Dr. Izumi talking, so I didn't want to interrupt," Amanda replies. "I just hope everything is all right. I don't mind if he can't see. I know he's capable of living with out it, I just hope that there isn't something else wrong," Amanda says quietly.

"I'm sure if there was something bad going on, they would have called you up to hear about it," April says coming over and sitting beside her. "I'm sure it's just the pregnancy making you more nervous right now," April adds trying to comfort her.

Amanda nods slightly, "I'm sure you're right," she replies unconvinced.

"Amanda, can you come up here for a few minutes, please?" Saber says as he comes down the stairs.

She casts a nervous glance to April who pats her arm gently to reassure her, "I'm coming," she replies as she gets up and they head back up the stairs.

They make their way up the steps and Saber sees her uneasiness, "Amanda, do you not feel well?" he asks concerned.

"I'm fine, just tired," she replies, not daring to look at him.

He sighs, but decides against pushing her to talk and they enter the bedroom where Dr. Izumi is waiting in a chair.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Rider. How are you feeling?" he asks as she sits down giving him a nervous glance.

"I'm all right, doctor," she replies. "The dreams are less frequent than they had been."

Dr. Izumi nods and studies her closely, "Is there something on your mind? You seem to be rather tense."

Amanda swallows and takes a breath, "Just things, it's nothing to be concerned with. I'm fine," she replies quickly.

He smiles and shakes his head, "You're worried about Captain Rider, aren't you?" he asks.

She nods slightly, "Yes, of course."

"Don't be too worried. I think this issue will be an intermittent problem. I don't feel that he will lose his vision completely again. He can still see rather well, he is just a bit more sensitive to light and it makes him have headaches. I'll just order him a darker set of glasses, then he should be fairly normal."

Amanda allows herself to relax in relief, "Thank you," she manages to say.

Dr. Izumi smiles, "Don't worry, I'd tell you if something was wrong. I actually wanted to do a brief check up on you, if you would allow it. I brought a portable ultrasound machine, so we can see and hear your child, if you would like."

Amanda smiles, "I wouldn't mind," she replies. "You are staying in here, right?" she asks Saber.

He nods, "You couldn't kick me out of here, Love," he replies with a smile and kisses her cheek. "Amanda, if there was something wrong with me, I swear, you'll be the first person that I will tell, okay?"

"Okay."

"Now, let's get you to lay on the bed and I'll set up the machine," he begins setting up the ultrasound machine while Amanda settles onto the bed.

Saber goes into their bathroom and brings a couple of towels and sits down beside her as she raises her shirt and repositions her pants so that the doctor can perform the ultrasound.

After a few minutes, they hear the rapid sound of the heartbeat and start to see an image on the screen. "That looks different than the last time," Amanda comments sounding a bit uneasy.

Dr. Izumi goes slowly with the probe and has a look of disbelief on his face, "How could I have missed it before?" he mutters under his breath.

"Is there something wrong, Dr. Izumi?" Saber asks trying to remain calm given the doctor's facial expression.

"Well, not really," he replies slowly as he continues to rub the probe across her abdomen.

"Then why do you look so..."

"Because Captain, I think we may have to alter the due date a bit."

"Why?" Saber asks.

"Because apparently you are having twins," Dr. Izumi replies.

Saber and Amanda stare at him in shock as they process the information, then slowly, they turn and study the ultrasound screen. "Twins?" Amanda finally manages to whisper.

Dr. Izumi chuckles, "Yes, twins. However, that means you aren't quite as far along as we thought you were, Mrs. Rider."

"Um, okay, then how far along am I?"

"Judging by the measurements I'm seeing today, I'd say you're about twelve weeks now. Not the approximate sixteen weeks that we had figured before."

"How...how did it not show up before now?" Amanda asks.

"Well, it's actually not that uncommon an occurrence. Usually, in the case of twins, one of them isn't noticed until around the end of the first trimester. It's when they really start becoming more of an individual. I could tell that there were two the moment I heard the heartbeats today. Before, they were more in sync, now they are totally separate. It is probably why you are noticing an increase in appetite and feeling a bit more tired than most women do at this point in their pregnancies."

Amanda lays there a couple of minutes, processing the information and dares a glance at Saber, who has yet to say anything and is just staring at the ultrasound screen. "Saber, are you okay?" she finally asks.

Slowly he nods and looks away from the screen, "I'm fine, Love. I just can't believe...twins. I don't remember ever hearing of any in my family before. But there it is, plain as day before us," he says quietly and smiles at her.

She smiles back weakly and nods, "So it is. What do we do? How do we tell everyone this bit of news?"

Saber chuckles, "Well, given how things have been lately, I think they would welcome the distraction."

Dr. Izumi hits a couple of buttons and soon a group of pictures come out and he hands them to Amanda and Saber, "Here you go. The first pictures of your little ones," he says smiling. "Now they won't think you're playing some kind of joke on them, like when you decided to get married."

Saber chuckles, "Yes, I suppose this would be irrefutable proof, wouldn't it? I can already imagine Colt's reaction."

Amanda groans as she sits up, "Just make sure he's not eating or drinking anything when we tell him." She shakes her head smiling as she turns to sit on the edge of the bed.

Dr. Izumi laughs, "Yes, please don't kill him when you spread the word. We may yet need him from what I've heard. At least until the new ship is completed."

"Aye. I just hope it's completed before it's needed. It's been too quiet for too long since the last attack," Saber says quietly, the feeling of dread returning.

Amanda stands up and stretches a bit. "I suppose we should head back downstairs," she says as they hear a knock on the door.

Saber get up and goes to answer it. Opening it, he finds Elaine on the other side.

"I was coming to see if you would prefer to have your lunch up here or with the others," Elaine says quietly.

"We were just about to come down," he replies. "Would you mind coming in for a minute, please?"

Elaine nods and Saber steps back, allowing her to enter. She comes into the room and walks over to where Amanda is on the bed and looks at her nervously.

Saber follows her back over to where Amanda is and places a hand on her shoulder, "Please Elaine, sit down," he says quietly.

Elaine does as requested and looks between them, trying to read their expressions.

"There's nothing wrong, Elaine, but we thought that you should be the first to know," Saber says handing her the pictures.

Elaine takes them and studies them for a moment, a look of realization comes across her face and she looks first to Saber, who nods, and then to Amanda, who smiles at her and nods. "Twins? You're having twins?" she asks, the excitement evident in her voice. They both nod and she smiles, "So does that mean you're having them sooner or later than you thought?"

"Probably later, Ma'am," Dr. Izumi says. "She's actually only about twelve weeks along, as opposed to the nearly sixteen that we thought based off of the hormonal levels of her blood."

Elaine nods, "Well, I am excited. Although I wish I had been here to see your faces," she adds amused. "Thank you both for telling me aside from the others." She gets up and hugs both of them and returns the pictures. "I suppose it was quite a shock for the two of you, wasn't it?"

They both nod, "Yes, it was. I thought the doctor was joking at first," Saber replies.

Amanda laughs, "I thought that perhaps you had put him up to it, Saber. I thought it was all a joke until I saw your face."

Saber smiles, "I would never joke about something like that, Love. At least not with you."

Elaine smiles and stands up, "I'll head on down and get lunch on the table. I'll let the others know that you will be down shortly."

"Thank you, Elaine," Saber says and she heads out the door. He turns to Dr. Izumi, "You are staying to eat with us, aren't you?"

Dr. Izumi looks up from packing his equipment and nods slightly, "I don't see where I really have a choice. I don't think Commander Eagle will be ready to return to Calvary Command so soon, so if you have enough food, I would love to eat with you."

"Of course we do, doctor. Leave your things and I'll have someone take them down for you. Come on down with us."

Dr. Izumi nods, "Very well then, let's head down then."

The trio head down the stairs and enter the sitting room. The others look up at them nervously. "Everything is fine," Saber says noticing their looks. He sees them visibly relax and then realizes that Commander Eagle is not in the room. "Where's the commander?" he asks.

"He's in his room doing some research. He'll join us later," April replies just as Elaine comes in and announces that lunch is ready.

They all eat and after lunch return to the sitting room just as Commander Eagle comes down, a serious expression on his face. April looks up at him expectantly. He comes and takes a seat and looks between everyone before turning to Dr. Izumi, "Dr. Izumi, I have decided that I will stay here for a few days. I think I need a bit of a break, and it is a lot more restful here, than back in my office. Perhaps here I can get more work done without interruption. I have asked Thomas to take you back to the ship at our outpost. There will be a pilot there waiting for you whenever you wish to head back."

Dr. Izumi nods, "I would like to head on back rather soon, I do have rounds to make and I need to get the lab going on some new glasses for Captain Rider, as well as update his and Mrs. Rider's medical records."

"Well, let Thomas know when you wish to leave, and we will make sure you get to the outpost," Saber says.

Dr. Izumi stands up, "Where would I find Thomas? I think I would like to head on, although I do wish to thank you for lunch."

"I am right here, doctor," Thomas says. "Are you ready to go, sir?" Dr. Izumi nods and

Thomas leads him out to the car and they leave for the outpost.

"So..." the commander begins as he studies Saber for a moment, "How did you come out?"

"All things considered, not too bad, sir. The headaches will evidently be an intermittent problem, but is from the light sensitivity, that may be an ongoing issue. However, that is easy enough to deal with. I can still see fairly well, so he is just getting me another pair of darker glasses that start at this tint and become darker outdoors. He thinks that is our best solution. I am happy with it."

The commander nods, "I am glad that things are not getting worse again for you."

"If everything was okay, why did you ask Amanda to come up to talk with her?" Colt asks.

Saber ventures a glance to Amanda who nods slightly, "Well, he wanted to do another check up on Amanda while he was here. That's all."

"Then why did you look to her before you answered, is something wrong?" April asks looking between the two of them.

Saber chuckles, "No, nothing is wrong. The doctor did learn that she isn't quite as far along as he initially thought, but that is nothing to be concerned about," Saber replies. "He did give us some nice pictures to keep though." He takes the pictures and passes each person one of the pictures and waits for a reaction, taking Amanda's hand.

They all study the pictures in their hands for a minute before Colt looks up in disbelief, "No way! This has to be a joke!"

"It's no joke, Cowboy," Amanda says. "That's why he had to change the due date. My hormone levels were correct, but not knowing what we know now, skewed the time frame."

Colt shakes his head and Commander Eagle looks up and smiles, "I bet this was quite a shock."

"That's a mild way of putting it, sir," Saber says.

Commander Eagle chuckles, "And a welcome distraction for me from less pleasant situations," he adds grimly.

"I take it you have the list then?" Saber asks, getting a nod in reply.

"Time out. I still don't know what is going on with you two!" Fireball says exasperated.

"They're having twins," Colt says as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. "Can't you see that from the picture?"

"I've never seen an ultrasound picture before. I didn't know," Fireball quips.

The realization of what Colt said hits him and April at the same time, "Twins?" they both ask in shock.

Amanda smiles and nods, "Yeah. Talk about a shock."

"So how far along are you?" the commander asks.

"About twelve weeks, as opposed to the sixteen weeks that we thought I was this morning," Amanda replies.

The commander nods, "So it was even more dangerous for you when you went out that last time than you thought it was."

"Aye, so it was," Amanda replies quietly. "So, how long is the list, sir?" Amanda asks trying to take the attention back to the present situation.

"Well, not very long," he replies. "General Whitehawk, the crew of the Tirpitz knew, their back up crew, and the crews of the convoys knew. The convoy crews were all killed when they were attacked, so that unfortunately leaves the Tirpitz crew and their back up members as our prime suspects."

Saber sighs, "I thought that all of them had background checks?"

"They did. I've even gone back over everything and I can find nothing that flags any of them, nor any of the other Tirpitz candidates." He looks around to the people before him and sighs, "I am open to any ideas that you might have to help catch the traitor or traitors."

"Suppose we send out another convoy of weapons?" Saber suggests.

"But then if they get it, we're in even more trouble," Colt argues.

"I didn't say they had to be functioning weapons, Colt. We could load up a convoy with empty boxes, or boxes full of scraps or something, label it as some sort of experimental top secret weapon and say it's being transported from an outer colony to Calvary Command. Only don't tell anyone that it's not a real shipment. Even have the crew of the convoys believe it's the real thing. Have the Tirpitz crew act as an escort, then if they are attacked, we can see if it leads us to someone as a traitor."

Commander Eagle listens as Saber explains and slowly nods, "I think we could try something like that. The only issue that I can see is that the Tirpitz isn't quite ready to be used yet."

"Well, we have a couple of other battleships that could be used as an escort. They have a good caliber of weapons on them. Tell the crew that this is another test of sorts, that you are checking their general skills, and not just how they do in an advanced weaponry ship," Saber offers. "That after the last incident, you don't want

such a convoy left unguarded."

"What if they ask about using the Bismarck?" Fireball asks.

"It's still being upgraded," Commander Eagle replies. "Neither ship would be ready to go before this convoy had to make it's drop."

"We can be on guard if things get bad, and use our vehicles, if needed," Fireball says.

"Actually, the Bismarck is currently on Amanda's property being worked on. So if need be, you could take it," the commander states. The others look to him in surprise. "I believe in being prepared. It's crew is here, so I had it brought here. Only myself and the people working on it know this." He looks to Saber and sighs, "Of course I'll need to know your thoughts on a few things, Captain."

Saber nods, "If it comes down to it sir, I will accompany them in the Bismarck." Amanda goes to protest and he holds up his hand to stop her, "Please, hear me out before you object, Love." She nods and he continues, "I know that I said I would not fight again. But given that I can see fairly well with the glasses, I think I can get by in an emergency. It will depend on my current situation should the need arise. If I am having more trouble than I am now, I will not risk my life or any of yours by going. I suppose in that instance, you would have to go with them, sir." The commander nods. "The fact that the Outriders now most likely have nuclear weapons at their disposal changes a lot of things. No one is safe, not even here. Any place in the New Frontier is a potential target. I want our children to have a chance at living. If that means fighting again, I will, if I am able."

Amanda nods slowly, "I don't like it, but I understand, Saber," she says quietly, trying not to allow her fear to show. "You are right, of course. No one anywhere is safe if those weapons are indeed in Outrider hands, I know that. You are one of the best, even when blinded, so I will support you in whatever decision you make."

Saber takes her hand and squeezes it gently, noting that she is forcing her fear back from her face. She returns the gesture, not daring to look at him directly.

"How soon should we attempt this?" Commander Eagle asks.

"Fairly soon, sir. We don't want someone to become suspicious, or notice that the Bismarck is no longer at Calvary Command," Saber replies. "We could even set it up so that the convoy ships aren't actually manned by anyone. Patch the communications through to here and one of us can reply. You could tell the crew that we are the ones transporting it because of it's cargo. You could have a cargo ship take off from Jarre remotely and arrange for the Tirpitz crew to meet it there. Keep the radio signal to us, so we can talk to them as if we were on the ship. From the outpost, we could actually be on board a cargo ship, so if they wanted to video conference for some reason, they would see us in a cargo ship. It would endanger the least amount of lives that way."

"I see now why you are a good securities specialist, Saber," Fireball says quietly. "It makes sense. We could send them out as early as tomorrow."

"Yes, a quick mission would make it seem highly important, also more secretive. Not telling anyone until just when needed. Also cutting out the window of opportunity for the Outriders to be let in on the plan," Saber replies.

Commander Eagle nods, "I'm going to set this into motion now, unless any of you have objections or more input." No one says anything, so he gets up and heads to his room to make arrangements.

Kapitel 26: Business As Usual

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 25: Business As Usual

"I don't like this, Amanda. It seems too risky," Robin says as she sips her tea.

Amanda nods, "I'm not exactly thrilled either, Robin. I am glad that Dr. Izumi got the glasses back to Saber. He even got him some contacts, but he didn't seem too inclined to use them. I wish I could be with him, but since pretty much everyone knows I'm pregnant, I can't even try and slip out to go with him."

"Well, it's fairly obvious that you're pregnant now. People can tell just by looking at you," Robin says with a smile. "Although you do look a little bigger than I did at sixteen to seventeen weeks."

Amanda looks at her confused, "Colt didn't tell you?"

"Tell me what?" Robin asks.

"I'm not sixteen weeks pregnant. I'm only thirteen weeks along," Amanda replies.

Robin looks at her in disbelief, "No way! You're already showing!"

"I'm carrying twins, Robin. We didn't know until almost a week ago. It's why my hormone levels were off."

Robin shakes her head, "Twins! I can't imagine it. I have a hard enough time keeping up with Wil. I can't imagine trying to keep up with two at the same time. Do twins run in your family?"

"Not to my knowledge. And, according to Thomas, there apparently is no history in Saber's family of twins either," Amanda replies.

"So I guess it was really a surprise then. I do remember Colt saying that you didn't know that you were even pregnant."

Amanda nods, "Yes, it was a bit of a shock, but I'm glad it's happened. I just pray that Saber and the others don't get hurt during this."

"Well, so far so good, Saber," April says. "The convoy is halfway to Calvary Command."

"I hope this means that perhaps it was just dumb luck on the part of the Outriders,"

Colt adds.

"It's too quiet, if you want my opinion," Fireball says looking over Saber's shoulders at the monitors.

"Yes, it is a bit too quiet for my liking as well, Fireball," Saber replies, not bothering to look up. "It's almost as if somehow they knew this was a ruse."

The ship continues on for a while longer, when suddenly it is surrounded by other ships. "Hey, Captain Rider, we're under attack here! Keep going, we'll try and cover you." A female voice says over the com-link.

"Roger that, Kawamura, Rider out," Saber replies and closes the connection. "Showtime, Colt." He turns to April who nods, "Colt, fire at will. Fireball, keep that ship pushing forward."

"I've got the sensors activated, Saber. If it gets hit, we'll know so we can react accordingly over the com-link," April says as she scans the various readings on her screen.

"Good, at least that seems to be going according to plan," he replies.

"Saber, I think they're trying to destroy the ship!" April calls out, "Put out a distress call!"

"This is Captain Rider, we've taken heavy damage here. What is going on?" he says over the com-link.

Erika's voice come in, "We're trying to draw their fire, sir. Hold on!"

The screen starts showing more and more damage, then it goes dark. Saber kills his outbound connection, so they can't be heard. "April?"

She stares at the screen in shock, "We're dead. The ship...it's gone," she replies barely audible.

Colt lets out a whistle, "So technically we just died?"

Saber nods, "So it would seem," he replies quietly.

"So what now?" Fireball asks after a long silence.

"I'm not sure. I didn't think things would go the way that they have," Saber replies honestly.

Commander Eagle enters the control area, obviously in shock, "Well, we need to get you four somewhere besides here and quickly. I did not anticipate them trying to take you out of the picture."

"Sir, we could go back to my place," Saber begins. The commander goes to protest, "We can stay in the hidden basement area. We are the only ones that know about it. It'll be a bit cramped, but we can get food and stay in contact with you that way."

The commander thinks for a moment then nods slowly, "That may be your best option. I'll stay at your place so that I can break the news to Amanda and Robin. I just hope they can go with this."

"Amanda knows, sir. She'll do what is required."

Colt pales, "Oh God, Robin doesn't know what exactly is going on."

"A bit too late for that now, Mr. Wilcox. I'll try and talk her into staying in the bedroom with Amanda. Perhaps that will help console her a little," Commander Eagle states. "Let's go. The others are on their way here." They all get out and follow him to a waiting vehicle that takes them to a rear entrance to Saber's estate. They head to the secret entrance and they try and settle in. "I'll come down the back way and update you as soon as I can," the commander says and he goes back out to the vehicle and heads back towards the command center.

A while later, he returns to the estate accompanied by General Whitehawk and some other soldiers. The soldiers follow the two men to the enter the house and Thomas leads them into a sitting room where Amanda and Robin are sitting and talking. They turn and look up and as soon as they see the men's faces Amanda pales. "What happened?" she manages to say.

"I think we should talk elsewhere, Mrs. Rider," General Whitehawk says somberly. "Somewhere more...private."

"Upstairs then, sir," she replies and slowly gets up.

"Come with us, Mrs. Wilcox. This involves you also," Commander Eagle says.

Robin nods, afraid to speak and gets up and follows them upstairs. They enter Amanda and Saber's room and they sit on the foot of the bed, the two men taking the two chairs and sitting across from them.

Amanda looks at their faces and takes a deep breath, "Things didn't go as you had hoped the would?" she finally says breaking the overbearing silence.

Commander Eagle shakes his head, "No, they didn't," he manages to reply quietly.

"What is going on?" Robin asks nearly in hysterics.

Amanda glances to Commander Eagle, who nods, "Tell her the plan before we tell you the new information."

Amanda nods and takes a deep breath, "There is most likely a traitor within Calvary Command," she begins. Robin nods and forces herself to calm down, so she continues,

"Saber, Colt, April, and Fireball are part of a trap set to try and lure out the traitor. Evidently, things did not go as expected. That is why you're here, isn't it?" she asks looking to the commander.

"Yes Ms. Amanda, you are correct. How the two of you handle this could very well be the key to finding the traitor. As far as everyone knows, save us in this room, Saber, Mr. Wilcox, April, and Mr. Hikari were on board a cargo ship that was transporting a new weapon." Amanda nods and Robin looks between them before nodding hesitantly and he continues, "They were actually not on the ship, they were controlling it remotely. I am glad now that ended up being the case. As expected, the Outriders attacked the convoy. What was not expected is that instead of trying to take the cargo ship, they destroyed it, and presumably the four with it."

Amanda lets out an involuntary gasp and covers her mouth. "So everyone believes that they are..." Commander Eagle nods. "And those soldiers are their Honor Guard because you two came here to tell..." she trails off and tears begin to fall as she struggles not to lose control of her emotions.

Robin starts crying and Commander Eagle comes over and places a hand on her shoulder, "They are safe, Robin. But no one can know that. You must act as if he is gone. Can you do that?" he asks gently.

Slowly, Robin looks up at him and nods slightly, tears still falling down her face. "I don't think it'll be too hard to do sir, I will do my best."

He nods and looks to Amanda, he notices she is upset and trying not to show it, and places a hand gently on her shoulder, "You have already dealt with so much, but I need you to go with this. You know what can happen if we don't stop this."

"I do sir. And I will do whatever you need for me to do. I only ask that you allow me to talk to Elaine and Thomas. I will just tell them to trust me and to go along with whatever you tell them until otherwise instructed. Would you be amenable to that, sir?"

Commander Eagle looks to the General and the General nods, "A reasonable request, Mrs. Rider. I feel we can accommodate that. Perhaps we can send for them under the guise of having Ms. Elaine bring something up for the two of you, and then we can tell them what has transpired. Keeping the two of you in closed quarters up here as much as possible can be helpful as well. Given your present state, the less stress you are under the better."

Amanda nods, "Thank you, sir," she says quietly.

Commander Eagle gets up, "I'll go down and ask both Thomas and Elaine to come up here," he says as he heads out the door and down the back stairwell to the kitchen. He enters the kitchen just as Elaine comes in from the other way with a worried expression. "Ah, Ms. Elaine, could you and Thomas please join us upstairs. We need to talk," the commander says trying not to worry her.

"It's about those soldiers out there, isn't it?" she asks, her voice breaking slightly. He nods and she gives him a nod and turns to her quarters to get Thomas. A couple minutes later, they both come out from the room, Thomas wearing a serious expression.

"Ms. Elaine, do you have something you could bring up for Ms. Robin and Ms. Amanda? Something that won't take long to prepare."

"Yes sir, I was going to bring them up some soup and a sandwich. It's ready now, all I need to do is dish it out."

"Would you do that, please? Make a point of going through the living room with it and taking it upstairs. Thomas and I will meet you in Ms. Amanda's room and then I'll explain things to you," the commander says.

"Of course sir," she replies and goes about preparing the food.

Thomas follows the commander up the back stairs, Elaine joins them a few minutes later and looks a bit startled to see both Robin and Amanda visibly upset. "What has happened?" she asks as she places the tray on the desk.

"Please, sit down, both of you. What you are about to be told does not leave this room, is that understood?" General Whitehawk says as they sit on the bed either side of Robin and Amanda. They both nod.

"Good," he replies and looks to the commander, "Charles, you have a better rapport with them, why don't you explain things."

Commander Eagle nods, "Yes sir," he replies and takes a deep breath before beginning. "As far as the rest of the New Frontier knows, Saber, Mr. Wilcox, April, and Mr. Hikari were killed this morning when the ship they were using to transport a new secret weapon was attacked by the Outriders and destroyed."

Elaine gasps, placing her hand over her mouth and then looks to Amanda and starts to speak. Amanda holds a hand up to silence her, "Please Elaine, hear all of it first." she says trying to remain calm.

Commander Eagle continues, "What you will know that the others do not, is that they are actually safe." Elaine looks at him with a confused expression, but he continues, "That being said, you should know that they are here. They are in the hidden part of the basement. We must minimize contact with them, so as to not let on that they are alive. There is a traitor or possibly traitors within Calvary Command. We are hoping to flush them out. Just evidently not the way we intended."

"So you need us to act as if this has actually transpired, correct?" Thomas asks finally speaking up.

The commander nods, "Yes. I am hoping to not have to go through with funerals and such, but I will if need be. I will also need you to make sure that they have food and

things that they will need while they are down there."

Elaine nods. "I'll do anything that you require of me, sir." She then looks to Amanda, "Lady Amanda, you will be considered the head of the house now. We will however have to get you some appropriate clothes. Black of course is the traditional garb, but we will have to get you a Tartan sash made for you to wear for clan representation, as you are now the head, Thomas will also get you the house ring, just in case any of his distant relatives come trying to lay claim as head of the house."

Thomas goes to their dressing area and takes a small box from Saber's dresser and opens it, pulling out a ring, "You must keep this on you at all time, Lady Amanda," he says as he returns the box to the drawer and brings the ring over to her to see. "It bears the family's coat of arms. I don't think it will fit on your finger, so you may wear it on your necklace with your coat of arms." He then hands her the ring before turning to Elaine, "I'll see to having the Tartan made, Elaine. If you can find her some clothing to wear," Thomas says quietly as Amanda removes her necklace and adds the ring to it before putting it back around her neck.

"Thank you, Thomas," Elaine says. "I may have a few things that will work for now, my lady," she says to Amanda who nods. "Commander, when would you like me to get some food prepared for them? I know they still had some things down there and can cook over a fire if they have to. Perhaps later tonight, after some of the people have left?"

"I think that later tonight would be good. Perhaps we could allow Ms. Robin to see her husband briefly, if she is willing to help you take the food down." Robin nods quickly and he turns to her, "Just remember, you must act as if he is gone. If seeing him makes that too difficult, I will not allow you to do so. I am willing to allow it as a courtesy to you," the commander replies.

"I can and will act as if he is gone when I am not down there, sir," Robin says firmly.

The commander nods satisfied and looks to Amanda, "You however, should minimize going through the secret stairwell as much as possible. You have already been under extreme stress, and constantly going up and down might do more harm than good. I do think one trip down would be all right, if you eat something first. I cannot allow you to go at the same time, that might arouse suspicion."

Amanda nods, "Knowing that he is safe helps, sir. I can wait a bit to see him. Why not let Robin see Colt first, before little Wil wakes up. It would be harder for her to go down with him awake. I can go tonight with Elaine if necessary."

"Very well. Ms. Robin, would you like to go down now, before your son wakes up?" Commander Eagle asks.

Robin's face lights up and she nods, "I would like to very much, sir."

"Then let's go. General, would you like to go down as well?"

"I would like the opportunity to speak with them, Charles."

"Very well, why don't you and Ms. Robin go down for a short time. I'll stay here while Thomas and Elaine see about their duties and necessities for Ms. Amanda," the commander says as Robin and the general stand up. He leads them to the dressing room and shows them how to open the door and hands the general a flashlight. "Follow it down slowly, the stairs are rather steep. Do tell Saber that Ms. Amanda is doing as well as can be expected, and that Thomas and Elaine will be sure protocol is followed."

"I'll make sure to tell him," General Whitehawk replies. "Are you ready, Mrs. Wilcox?" She nods and they descend the stairwell, closing the door behind them.

A few hours later Amanda wearing a black pantsuit, ventures down the back stairs to the kitchen and spots Elaine cleaning up the kitchen, "Are the people still in the sitting room, Elaine," she asks as she plops down onto a chair at the table with a sigh.

"Aye, they are. I think they'll be here for a few days yet," she replies, getting a groan of dread from Amanda as she rests her head on the table. She casts her a bemused look, then eyes her with concern, "How are you feeling? You don't look well, my lady."

Amanda looks up and sighs, "I shouldn't look well, should I? I've just lost my husband and my closest friends," she says, her voice breaking slightly.

"True. I am just concerned for your welfare. Can I fix you something to eat?"

"Some tea might be good. I don't feel much like eating at the moment," Amanda replies.

Elaine nods. "I won't push you to eat right now, since you had the soup and a sandwich earlier. Later though, I will be a bit more insistent," she says as she fixes the tea and brings it to the table. She sits down beside Amanda and gently places her hand on top of hers, "You have handled yourself well, let me know if I can do anything for you."

"Elaine," Amanda begins as she turns her hand and grasps Elaine's, "you and Thomas have been nothing but wonderful to me. Without you, I would be lost. I've started to think of you like the mother that I never had. Thank you, for everything."

"You have more than proven yourself, Lady Amanda. Honestly, if I had gone through half the things that you have, I would not have stayed around. You have a good heart and a strong spirit and loyalty, all of which will serve you well in the coming weeks. Sabers parents would have been proud to call you their daughter."

Amanda smiles weakly and goes to say something when the doorbell rings.

"I wonder who that could be?" Elaine says as she gets up to answer the door. She is met in the foyer by Thomas and steps back to allow him to open the door.

"Ms. Sincia?" Thomas says in shock as he steps back hesitantly and allows her in.

Sincia steps into the foyer, her husband beside her. "I've come to find out if what I heard was indeed true," she says quietly as she notices the soldiers in the sitting room. "Is Richard really..."

Thomas nods, "I'm afraid so," replies somberly.

Sincia gasps. "I'm...I am sorry to hear that. He...he was a good man," she replies. "What will become of this place and all of you? He had no other family, did he?"

"His wife will become head of the house. Eventually, their children will inherit the estate," Thomas replies.

Sincia's eyes widen in shock, then she regains her composure. "Wife? Children?" she finally asks after a stunned silence.

"He was married nearly a year ago. His wife is currently carrying twins. She has taken this rather hard, but is trying to be strong so as not to lose the children as well," Elaine says. "Would you like to come in for few minutes?" she asks politely.

"I suppose it would be proper to offer her our condolences. I've known Richard my entire life," Sincia replies with a nod.

Elaine nods, "I shall go and get her. Thomas will lead you into the sitting room," Elaine says and turns towards the kitchen.

"This way, please," Thomas says and he leads them into the sitting room where the commander is talking with the soldiers.

He looks up when they enter and nods to some soldiers who quickly move to make room for the guests. "I take it you're here to see Mrs. Rider?" he asks as they take a seat.

The couple nod. "Yes. I was a childhood friend of Richard's," Sincia replies.

"Ah. I'm sure your kind gesture will be appreciated," the commander replies quietly.

"Lady Amanda?" Elaine says as she enters the kitchen.

"Yes, Elaine?" Amanda replies quietly.

Elaine hesitates for a moment, "Lady Sincia and her husband came to express condolences," she replies quietly, as she watches for a reaction.

Amanda stands up, looking a little surprised but nods, "Showtime," she mutters under her breath and turns towards the sitting room, suddenly looking and feeling more tired.

"Thank them and nod politely, that is all that you have to do, my lady," Elaine says

giving her hand a gentle squeeze before allowing her to leave the kitchen.

Amanda returns the gesture and nods slightly before passing from the kitchen and into the sitting room. Several soldiers stand up and salute her as she enters. She nods and they return to their seats as she walks over to Sincia and Sven.

Sincia has a look of shock when she sees Amanda and her slightly swollen belly. She recovers quickly and notices the pained look in Amanda's eyes and her gaze softens and she stands to offer her hand in greeting, "I am sincerely sorry for your loss Mrs. Rider."

Amanda accepts her offered hand and nods slightly, her eyes meeting Sincia's. "Thank you for coming, Lady Swadjen. I'm sure Saber would be glad to know you took time to remember him," Amanda says quietly.

"I thought Richard was done fighting. Why was he out on a ship?"

Amanda takes a deep breath, "He had recently regained some of his vision and had agreed to help out with one last mission to give them a little more time to replace him. No one expected things to turn out the way they did," Amanda says quietly as they take their seats.

"So...you and he married," Sincia says and Amanda nods. "Did he have vision then?" she asks.

"Not more than when you last ran into us. Just shadows and outlines. We had little hope of him regaining any sight," Amanda replies simply.

"And yet you married him. Why?" Sincia asks honestly curious.

"Because I loved him. He was non-judgemental of me and my faults and we had common interests. It didn't matter to me...," Amanda says, her voice breaking a bit and she struggle to fight back tears.

"I'm sorry, but I think that you should go and rest, Mrs. Rider," Commander Eagle says as he comes over to Amanda. "You really shouldn't work yourself up, ma'am."

Amanda nods, "You're right, Commander," she replies and turns back to Sincia, "I apologize, but it has been a rather long day and I am tired. I thank you for coming," she says as she carefully stands up, feeling a little light-headed. The commander notices and offers his arm to steady her and she takes it, giving him an appreciative glance.

Sincia and Sven stand and nod to her, "Please keep in touch. I am sincerely sorry for your loss," she says as they turn and leave out the front door.

"Are you all right, Amanda?" Commander Eagle asks genuinely concerned as they leave.

"I think I need to go upstairs, sir," she replies weakly.

"Can you walk up there if I help you?" he asks. She nods and he turns to a nearby soldier, "Go and ask Ms. Elaine to meet us in Mrs. Rider's bedroom immediately." The soldier salutes and quickly heads towards the kitchen. the commander carefully helps her up the stairs and into her room and they are met by Elaine, who looks worried as soon as she sees Amanda.

"Lady Amanda! Are you all right?" Elaine asks as the commander helps her to lay down.

"I...I don't know, Elaine. I feel really tired all of a sudden. Perhaps I just need something to eat," Amanda replies sounding exhausted.

"I think perhaps you've worked yourself up a bit too much over this whole thing. Eating something might help, but so should some rest. I'll bring up some left over soup and some crackers. After you eat that, you should try and lie down and sleep a while," Elaine says.

"I wanted to see..." Amanda starts to say.

"I'll see how you're feeling after while. I make no promises, judging by your appearance right this minute," the commander says, stopping her protest.

Amanda sighs in resignation and Elaine brings her some soup. She eats and changes into night clothes and lies down, drifting to sleep quickly.

The general and Robin find the end of the stairwell and eventually find the release for the door into the hidden basement. The door opens and they come face to face with the Bismarck crew, all of their blasters aimed at the door. "Glad to see you all were prepared," the general says with a hint of amusement. They quickly all put away their blasters.

Robin immediately runs to Colt, "Colt!" she hugs him tight and tears of relief fall down her cheeks and onto his uniform.

He holds her in a tight embrace and feels her relax. "I'm sorry, Robin. I should have told-"

She places a finger to his lips and shakes her head, "No, as much as I hate to admit it, it was better this way. I know I may not see you for several days now, but knowing you're this close will help me through this."

"Any news, sir?" Saber asks.

General Whitehawk shakes his head, "The Tirpitz crew was to return to Calvary Command to await further instructions. I'm not sure just what to do next, to be honest."

"How is Amanda, sir?" Saber asks, the concern obvious in his voice.

"She is doing okay, all things considered. She was still rather upset, but that is probably a good thing, it makes everything more believable. I am just glad that she is strong, otherwise, she might risk losing your children," the general replies. "I am rather impressed with how she has handled everything, Saber." He turns to all of the crew, "Elaine will be down in a while with some food for you. One of us will come with her to pass on any news we have. We will find a way for you to see Amanda, Saber as soon as we can, even if only briefly."

They nod and Colt reluctantly lets go of Robin and they take the passage back upstairs. Robin leaves and goes to check on her son, and the general goes to his room to make a few calls to see if there is any progress.

Comments welcomed and MUCH appreciated! :-)

Kapitel 27: Betrayal

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 26: Betrayal

"The cargo ship just...they destroyed it." Alex states obviously in shock. "The entire Bismarck crew is...dead," he says quietly.

"The other ships have stopped their attack," Yuri says scanning the screens. "How strange."

"Ma'am, it appears that the enemy is attempting to board our ship!" Gabby says urgently as she turns to Erika.

"So it seems," she replies calmly. "Yuri, Gabby, try and head them off. Secure the ramp any way you can."

"Yes ma'am." Yuri and Gabby reply and they rush off towards the ramp, their blasters ready.

Alex grabs the remote security flash drive from his terminal and rushes towards the rear entry. He comes up on an Outrider, he knocks him out and drags him into the sleeping area. Removing the Outriders outer garb, he disguises himself as an Outrider and heads back towards the control room. He is just about to enter when he hears Yuri's voice.

"You can't do this!"

"I can. Now be quiet," Erika's voice replies. Yuri goes to protest and Alex hears a shot, then a thud.

"Yuri!" Gabby yells. A struggle ensues and he ventures towards the control room to see Yuri slumped on the floor dying or dead, and Gabby break loose and head for the ramp.

"After her! If she gets away it's over before we can do this!" Erika yells as several Outriders rush after her in pursuit.

Alex rushes after the other Outrider soldiers and hops into a fighter. He takes off and quickly breaks from the chase, casting a glance towards Gabby, "I'm sorry, Gabby. I'll do what I can to stop her." he says to himself as he rushes towards the closest outpost. Some time passes and he can see no sign of pursuit, so he hits his com-link, "Mackenzie calling Commander Eagle, come in."

A long silence is heard before the commander voice replies, "This is Eagle. Go ahead, Mackenzie."

"Sir. I need to speak to you securely. Where can I meet you?" Alex asks.

"Come to the Outpost where your sister's property once stood."

"Yes sir," Alex replies. Then after a pause, "Sir, I am in an Outrider fighter. There should only be me. I see no sign of any others on my screens."

Another silence, "I've got you on radar. Land to the back of the property and be prepared to exit the ship with your hands up and guns pointed at you. We cannot take chances," the commander finally says.

"As you wish, sir. My ETA is approximately one minute." The connection terminates and Alex lands the fighter and comes out in a surrender stance. He is met by several soldiers, all with their weapons trained on him.

Commander Eagle comes forward and disarms him, "You may lower your hands, Mr. Mackenzie." Alex does as told, but stands at attention. Slowly the soldiers lower their weapons. "Why were you in an Outrider ship?"

"There is a traitor on the Tirpitz, sir. She and I are the only survivors, and she hopefully thinks I'm dead," Alex replies quietly, so that only the commander can hear. "I have the remote security drive," he adds holding up the flash drive.

Commander Eagle nods, "Come with me. I need to see what is on this drive." They quickly go to his office and Alex places the drive into the computer. The commander watches for several minutes and then stops it and removes the drive. He hands it to Alex, "Come with me. There are some others that need to see this and we need to have someone pull up the current feed from the Tirpitz, so we know what is going on." They get in a car and head towards Saber's estate.

"Where are we going, sir?" Alex ventures to ask.

"To Saber's place. As I said there are some people there that need to see this," the commander replies, keeping his focus on the road.

"But it's the middle of the night, sir. Shouldn't you call first?"

"No. They will know it's important. I don't want anyone to know we left the outpost just yet. Not until I have more information."

They pull up to the main entrance and the commander pulls up to the gate, met by an armed guard pointing a gun at him. He holds out his EBU and the guard nods and lowers the gun. The guard hits a button to open the gate and they drive on, parking the car and going up to back door and knocking loudly.

A minute passes and Thomas answers, gun first. He quickly lowers it, "Commander?" he asks in surprise.

"I need to see Amanda and the others, now," the commander says.

"Come in. Elaine went to tell Lady Amanda that someone was here," Thomas replies and moves aside to let the two men in. "Let's head upstairs the back way," he says as he quietly leads them towards the stairs in the kitchen.

"Amanda?" A familiar voice says with concern as she slowly starts to wake.

She feels someone sit on the edge of the bed, then gently brush some hair from her face. She slowly opens her eyes, "Saber?" she asks confused, not sure if she's dreaming.

"Hello, Love," he says quietly. "The commander said you were in no condition to come to see me, so I waited until everyone should be in bed and came up with Elaine. I can't stay long."

Amanda goes to sit up and he helps her. Tears start falling and he wraps his arms around her. "I'm so glad you're safe," she says quietly against him. "I'm not sure I would have lived if you had actually died," she says barely audible.

"Well, I didn't. From what I've heard, you've done well," he says watching her reaction closely.

"You're referring to the visitors earlier?" she asks. He nods. "That was so hard. But I admit, it sort of made it feel more real. I thought I was going lose it. I am glad the commander stepped in and told me that I should come and rest when he did."

"I must say that I was surprised to hear that she came. I would not have expected her to."

Amanda smiles weakly, "She looked rather shocked to see me. Especially in such a state," she replies placing a hand to her belly.

Saber chuckles, "I'm sure she was. I don't think she expected us to actually be together."

"I bet it killed her when Thomas and Elaine called me 'Lady Amanda'," she says with a smile.

"I got the impression from Elaine that it seemed to shock her when you came into the room very obviously pregnant. Perhaps she thought they were joking or something."

A knock on the door startles both Amanda and Saber. Saber stands up and quietly heads for the dressing room. "Come in," Amanda says hesitantly.

Elaine enters the room and closes the door behind her. "I apologize, Lady Amanda, but

someone has just knocked on the door. I thought I should warn you," Elaine says. She looks around the room, "Has Saber left already?" she asks quietly.

"I'm here, Elaine," he replies barely a whisper his hand on his sword.

The sound of footsteps just outside the door causes him to shrink back into the dressing room just as another knock is heard and the door opens. Thomas enters followed by Commander Eagle and Alex.

"Commander? Alex?" Amanda asks in surprise.

"I apologize for the lateness of the visit, Amanda, but Mr. Mackenzie has some information that all of you must see. I believe we know who the traitor is. I need to go and get the others," the commander replies apologetically.

At those words Saber steps out from the dressing room, causing Alex to gasp in shock. "Hello, Alex. I am relieved you don't seem to be the traitor. I'll go and get the others," Saber says and heads back into the dressing room and takes the passage to the basement.

Alex looks between the commander and Amanda, the confusion apparent on his face. He drops to his knees in shock, "How?" he manages to say after a minute.

"They were piloting the ship remotely, Mr. Mackenzie. They knew there was a traitor, they were hoping to have them try and take the ship, not destroy it," the commander replies. "The others will be joining us momentarily."

"Well, I am relieved that they are alive. I just hope we can stop whatever it is the Outriders are planning," Alex says, managing to regain his composure just as the others come out from the dressing room wearing serious expressions.

"All right, now that everyone is here, we need to upload the information that Mr. Mackenzie has, so you can see what has happened," the commander says.

Saber pulls the desk over to the foot of the bed and activates a computer. "Now Alex, what information do you have for us?" he asks.

"This for starters," Alex replies handing him a flash drive.

Saber takes the drive and puts it into the computer and inputs his password, "So exactly what are we looking at here?"

"After the freighter was destroyed we were boarded," Alex begins. "Erika told Yuri and Gabby to secure the ramp. I grabbed the DataDrive and went around the back way, as is protocol. On the way I encountered an Outrider, subdued him and stole his uniform in an effort to blend in, in the event the others were captured. As I continued along I heard Yuri say, 'You can't do this!' and then a shot. I looked into the control room and saw Erika holding the gun and Yuri in a heap on the floor."

Saber presses some keys, "Here's the video, you can see Erika shooting Yuri," he says quietly.

Alex nods. "Shortly afterwards Gabby managed to get free and steal a fighter. Disguised as I was as an Outrider, I was able to steal a fighter without them knowing any better. As all of the other fighters went after Gabby, I separated and came here to tell the commander what has happened."

"So what's the plan?" Colt asks

"We need to get the Bismarck ready for action," April says.

"We have the technicians working on it now," Commander Eagle states.

"April," Saber says, "Do you think you can find the Tirpitz?"

April thinks for a minute, "I suppose with the right equipment I could probably find it. Why?"

"We need to find it, and destroy it. We have to consider the fact that the enemy may try and use it against us."

"Saber," Amanda starts to say quietly, he turns to face her and she continues, "I know this may sound kind of petty, especially with the fact that Colt's still going out; but right now I can't stand the thought of you going out. It was hard enough on me having to pretend that I lost you, I don't think I could deal with actually losing you right now."

"That's fine Love, I understand." Saber replies. "My vision has been having good and bad days lately, so I would be risking every one's safety by going. Besides, I believe I've found someone who is capable of replacing me."

"Who?" Fireball asks.

"Alex," Saber says nodding towards Alex who is looking at him obviously shocked. "While you've had only a little experience in the Tirpitz, I believe that the only reason that there have been so many problems is that Erika was sabotaging you. Starting first thing in the morning, I will be teaching you how to use a sword. You'll most likely need the challenge phase 2 to take out the Tirpitz, and the sword is the primary weapon in that phase of the Bismarck." Alex goes to protest and Saber shakes his head, "This is not optional training, Alex. If I can teach Amanda to wield a sword, and she had no prior military experience, I can teach you. I would however like to get some rest, as should you. The others will rest and do what they need to do. We can put you in a room here for tonight."

Alex nods in resignation, "Yes sir. I will do as you say, Captain. I would like to contact my wife, to let her know that I am safe."

"I'm afraid that I cannot allow that, Mr. Mackenzie. It could lead to a security breach. If Ms. Kawamura realizes that you're alive, she may come after you. We cannot risk that."

You will be allowed to speak with her as soon as this is over," Commander Eagle says.

"I understand, sir," Alex replies quietly.

Amanda gives him a sympathetic look, "Alex, it will be better that she not know anything right now. So far, no one knows that the Tirpitz has been compromised, so she will think things are normal. Other than the ship that Saber and the others were in being blown up. When you don't return right away, she may figure that you have gone after the Outriders in retaliation for blowing up the cargo ship. I think she will be okay for a little while longer."

Alex nods, "You are right, Amanda. I know that you are speaking from experience. Thank you," he adds quietly. "I'm sure this has been hard for you, hasn't it?" he asks noting how tired she looks.

Amanda nods, "Indeed it has. I pray that Sarah never has to endure what I have during the last couple of days. It helps that I had an idea of the plan, otherwise, I'd have been inconsolable."

"I suppose I should let you get some rest. What time should I report to you, Captain Rider?" Alex asks.

Saber thinks for a moment, "Well, it's almost one now, so about four thirty should be good. That gives us both some time to rest," he replies. "May I suggest that everyone take a couple of hours to rest, since we don't know what is going to happen. I will be available as a consultant, but I will not go back out to fight. All of you could go to your previously occupied rooms here. Alex, I can take you to a room that you may use for now."

Commander Eagle nods, "Yes, let's work on resting for a time," he replies before looking to Colt, Fireball, and April, "You three also be ready to head to the outpost about four or so when I leave. You can work on training exercises while April tries to find the whereabouts of the Tirpitz."

"Yes sir!" the others reply and they disperse.

Saber takes Alex quietly down the hall to a vacant room and they enter. Alex looks around and nods, "Thank you, Captain," he says quietly.

Saber comes over and places a hand on his shoulder, "I have put my faith in your abilities, Alex. I know you can become a good member of the team. Listen to them and keep an open mind. You can learn from each of them."

Alex nods, "I will do my best to take your place, sir. I know you have been beneficial to the Bismarck crew. I am sorry that things have turned out the way that they have for you."

"I'm not, Alex. I don't regret it."

Alex looks up in confusion, "What don't you regret?"

"Everything. I lost my vision for a reason. Perhaps I needed to learn that when things don't go as planned, you can adapt. If I hadn't lost my vision, I wouldn't be with Amanda, and I am glad that I am. Never did I imagine I would be with someone like her. She is strong and I admire that. She also isn't afraid to speak her mind," he adds with a smirk.

Alex laughs, "Yeah, I noticed that. I could just see her trying to restrain you if you said that you were going back out to fight."

Saber smiles, "She would do her best. I could see her pulling her sword on me to stop me, if she had to."

"Seriously?" Alex asks amused. Saber nods and Alex shakes his head. "I'd heard she was brave, but from what I've heard of your skills, that's practically insane."

Saber chuckles, "She knows I would not harm her. But as I said, with my intermittent vision problems, I'm too much of a liability anyways without her being with me. I feel that you are a good match for the team. I would not have suggested that you take my place. It will be an adjustment for all of you, as you learn each other's strengths and weaknesses and how to fill those gaps, but I believe that you will learn." He sighs and shakes his head trying to clear it, "It has been a very long couple of days. I am going to go and rest. Good-night, Alex," Saber says and he turns and leaves the room, quietly returning to his room to find Elaine and Amanda talking quietly.

They look up when he enters and Elaine smiles, "I'll leave you both to rest, Saber. I'll try and be up in a bit to make you all something to eat before they leave. I'm glad you can stay in here tonight."

"As am I, Elaine. As for the food, don't worry too much about it. We can all manage. Get some rest, you deserve it," Saber says as Elaine gets up.

She nods, "Very well. Good night to you both." They reply in kind and she leaves.

Saber changes and gets into bed beside Amanda, who scoots against him and they quickly fall asleep.

Comments are welcomed and MUCH Appreciated! :-)

Kapitel 28: Covert Ops

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The Price of Peace
Chapter 27: Covert Ops

"I just can't seem to get this!" Alex groans in frustration as he stops to catch his breath.

"Keep trying, Alex. This could mean saving your wife and child," Saber replies as he comes at him with a stick again.

Alex blocks, but is still grazed by the attack, "I'm too slow," he gripes.

"You won't get any sympathy from him, Alex. He was just as hard on me," Amanda says as she comes out to the practice area carrying a couple bottles of water. "It's why he's a good teacher."

They take a break and walk over to Amanda, both take the bottles and down them quickly. Amanda looks to Alex and smiles. "He never claimed it would easy to learn, but I know you can do it. I can see one thing you're doing is like I was, you're too stiff. Hold the stick loosely, then your hands don't hurt as much when you hit something," she says.

"You talk like it's easy to fight like this," Alex retorts.

Amanda laughs, "Not hardly. Would you rather fight me?" she asks, her expression serious. Alex looks at her in shock and Saber goes to protest but she holds a hand up to stop him. "I wouldn't go as hard as you do, Saber. Perhaps going slower through the motions would help him get used to the movements better. I'm not an invalid, and I'd be careful. I will not risk harming the children," Amanda states.

Saber ceases his objection but looks her over carefully. "I am not opposed to you showing him how to do this, I just worry that he could accidentally hurt you," he replies quietly. "Although I know better than to try and stop you if you have made up your mind."

"Could you find me some gear? I swear to you, I will be careful. You can stay here and watch. If it seems that I'm putting myself into danger, or you think I've over done it, tell me and I'll stop. Fair enough?" she asks.

Saber nods hesitantly, "Fair enough. I'll go see what I can find for you to wear. Don't let yourself get dehydrated, all right?"

Amanda nods and Saber heads off to find her some protective gear. Alex stands there

is shock. "You two can't be serious!" he finally says after Saber has left.

Amanda looks to him and shrugs, "Afraid of being beaten by a girl?" she taunts.

Alex laughs and shakes his head, "That's not my objection. I don't want to hurt you or your children. I don't have good control yet," he replies. "If I was beat by you in your present state, I know I'd get teased mercilessly."

"So don't let me beat you," she says simply as Saber returns with some gear and several bottles of water in a bag.

"Elaine is not pleased about this. Thomas practically had to restrain her to keep her from coming out here," Saber says with a hint of amusement, plopping the bag onto a bench.

Amanda grins, "Well, I won't do anything to hurt myself or the children, I know how to block." She looks to Alex, "Do you?"

"I am learning," Alex replies. "It's not quite the same as hand to hand."

"No, it isn't," Amanda says as she takes one of the two sticks and hands Alex the other one. He reluctantly takes it and she immediately swings at him, hitting him in the ribs.

"Ow!" Alex protests.

"I told you to learn to block."

"I wasn't ready."

"Do you think an enemy is going to wait for you to be ready?" Amanda asks as she starts another attack.

Alex manages to block it, only getting his fingers hit. He goes to parry the attack and is blocked and she taps his head.

"Don't let your guard down."

"You're worse than Saber," Alex says and Saber starts laughing. Alex proceeds to try and attack Amanda, she fends off his onslaught, but has to put forth a bit more effort.

This goes on several minutes before Amanda hits him with a solid shot and they break for water. "You're doing a little better, Alex," Amanda says as she sits down on the bench. Saber hands her a water and she starts sipping it.

"Are you okay?" Alex asks.

Amanda nods. "Yeah, but I think I'm done. I don't want to over do it," she replies.

Alex nods. "I think I have a better idea of what to do now, at least. I was trying to

mimic your movements somewhat," he says.

"Good. That is what I was hoping. I made myself slow down some, so that you could see what I was doing. But I wasn't going to cut you much slack. Saber was merciless with me when he was teaching me, and he couldn't see at that point. Of course what I've learned from him has become very useful in saving both of our lives," Amanda says as she drinks some more of the water.

"Do you think you're ready to fight me again, Alex?" Saber asks.

Alex chuckles, "You ask as if I get a choice in the matter."

"I suppose you could say no, but then you might run into trouble when you go to fight the Tirpitz. The Bismarck has a second challenge phase that uses a sword as its' primary weapon. You don't have to be completely proficient, but having some idea of how to properly wield one would help," Saber replies.

"Well, I'm as ready as I'm going to be, sir," Alex says as he sets his empty water bottle down and picks up his stick.

Saber nods and they move back to the open practice area and he quickly begins his attack. Alex manages to block and parry a few of the attacks, faring much better than his first attempt. "It seems you did learn a bit from Amanda. Good to see that," Saber says as he lands a blow. Alex cringes, but tries harder to block and nearly lands a hit. They continue for nearly half an hour before Saber calls break.

Alex returns to the bench and gratefully takes the water offered to him by Amanda and plops down on the ground drenched in sweat. "How often did you do this?" he asks her nearly out of breath.

"I don't think you want the answer to that, Alex," Amanda replies fighting to hide her amusement.

"Yes, I do actually," he replies.

"Well, some days we started at dawn, and would go until dusk, only taking water and meal breaks," Amanda replies.

Alex's eyes widen in shock. "You would go at this that long?"

Amanda nods, "And sometimes we'd get up the next day and start again."

Alex groans, "I don't know how you can do that."

Amanda chuckles, "I'm not as old as you are," she says with a smirk.

Alex throws his empty bottle at her and laughs. "Not funny."

Amanda catches the bottle and tosses it back at him, "Well, in a way, it's the truth isn't

it? Five years can mean a big difference in agility."

"She's right, Alex. I don't think she meant in to be mean, she was teasing you, but what she says has some truth to it," Saber says. Alex goes to comment, but Saber continues, "We also don't have the luxury of time here. I worked with her for a week just on how to hold the stick. It was nearly a month before I let her hold a practice sword. So to be fair, you are being given a bit more of a crash course than she was."

"Well, that makes me feel a little better," Alex says with a smile. "At least I'm able to block some of the attacks now."

Saber nods, "You have improved, I just hope it's enough. Shall we try again?"

"Sure," Alex replies getting up and they head back to the practice area.

"Okay, I think I've finally got a fix on the Tirpitz, father," April says causing the commander to look up from his computer.

He gets up and comes and looks over her shoulder. "An abandoned asteroid?" he asks curiously.

"It could be an Outrider base," April replies while hitting a series of keys. "I'm trying to use one of the nearby satellites to run a scan of the asteroid. Then we should be able to see what all is actually on that chunk of rock."

"Could you pull up a live video feed?" he asks.

She shakes her head in reply, "No. At least not with the satellites that are there now. We could send Fireball or Colt out to one of the satellites and have them install a camera, but that would probably be noticed by someone nearby."

"Well, just knowing what all is on that asteroid could help us decide what we need to do."

"Give me another minute or two and I should be able to get us an infrared image scan," April says as she hits a series of buttons and an image comes up on her screen. At first it's rather fuzzy, but then the pixels smooth out. "It's a base of some sort. It's not huge, but it's substantial enough to be a problem." She looks over a few more images and gasps. "I think I know where the nukes are," April says quietly.

The commander turns and looks at the screen and pales, "They're putting them on the Tirpitz."

"So does she think she's going to just waltz back to Calvary Command and then obliterate it?" April asks aloud.

"Something like that does seem plausible."

"We need to get back to Saber's and discuss what we've found out," April says quietly.

"Yes, I am interested on his take of this. Can you save the images to a DataDrive?" the commander asks.

"Got it now," she replies as she disconnects the drive and holds it up before placing it in her pocket. "Let's get the boys and head out."

"Ms. Elaine, this dinner is wonderful," Alex says between bites.

"I'm glad you like it, sir. I know they've pushed you rather hard today," Elaine replies.

"I only pushed him a little," Amanda protests. "Enough to give him a chance to defend himself against Saber," she adds with a smile.

"Yeah, I still feel some of those pushes," Alex says rubbing the back of his head.

Saber chuckles, "At least she didn't draw blood, Alex."

There is a knock at the kitchen door and Saber immediately heads for the back stairwell, his hand on his sword. Elaine goes and cautiously opens the door. "Oh, good evening, commander," she says as she steps aside to allow the four visitors in.

"We didn't want to be seen just yet, so we came the back way," the commander says in reply to the curious glances cast to him from Alex and Amanda. "We need to talk. We have some new information."

"Let's go to our room then," Saber suggests coming from the back stairwell. "The soldiers in the sitting room won't see us then." Amanda and Alex get up and start for the stairs. "I'm assuming we are still dead at this point, since you took care to come in the back way?" Saber asks quietly as they enter his and Amanda's bedroom, closing the door after everyone has entered.

The commander nods, "Technically, yes. There are a few people who know otherwise, but they have been instructed to act accordingly."

April comes over and hands the DataDrive to Saber, "All of you need to see this."

Saber takes it and nods. He boots up his computer and inserts the drive. After entering his password, the images of the base appear on the screen. He sees the base, then realizes that the Tirpitz is there. "Are those the stolen weapons that are being loaded on to the Tirpitz?" The commander nods grimly and Saber sighs. "This is worse than we thought then," he states quietly.

"So the Outriders plan to basically use the ship as a huge nuclear bomb?" Amanda asks.

"So it seems," the commander replies quietly.

"But if they load all of those onto the Tirpitz, they don't even have to get onto the

ground to do a lot of damage. They could just get into the atmosphere and set it off and millions would die," Amanda says in shock.

"Yes, and with no one knowing that the rest of the crew save Ms. Kawamura and Alex are dead, she could conceivably get close enough to do just that," Saber says. "And we can't get close enough to that base to blow it up where it is now."

"At least not without alerting the Outriders to the fact we're onto where they're hiding," Colt states.

Everyone is silent for several minutes each wrapped up in their own thoughts. "Hey, we still have that fighter, don't we?" Alex asks looking to the commander.

"Yes, and the uniform," the commander replies. "Why?"

"Well, one of you could dress up like an Outrider and have me as your prisoner and we take the fighter back to the base." Fireball goes to interrupt, but Alex holds up a hand and continues, "You could say that you broke off to follow another fighter that split from the group and shot it down. You went searching for the pilot and captured me. That it took a few days to find me and get me back there. It's believable. There was total chaos when they went after Gabby. They think all of you have been blown up, so they wouldn't be looking for you. Then if someone did notice me splitting off, it's explained and they should be less suspicious. They know the other two are dead."

"Okay, but what would you do once you were on the base?" The commander asks.

"We plant some sort of explosives on the ship to rig it to blow once we've escaped. Or possibly some on the nukes themselves. They're old, so I doubt they are extremely stable. It shouldn't take much to set them off. We could conceivably take out the base and be rid of the nukes all at once."

"And what if you're caught before you can escape?" Amanda asks.

"Then we have a predetermined time frame allowed before someone sets them off remotely and I guess we die too," Alex replies with little emotion. "It would be worth two lives to save countless others, would it not?"

The others all look at each other with uncertainty. "He's right," Saber finally says with a sigh. "Logistically speaking, the plan is a good one. I don't like some of the possible outcomes, but it makes sense. I don't see any other real way to get anyone that close to the base."

"We need to find someone that Ms. Kawamura is unfamiliar with to take you, Mr. Mackenzie," the commander states.

"What?" several people say at once.

"Simple. If we send you back as a prisoner out of the blue, they might get suspicious. Ms. Kawamura may focus on our current people and possibly recognize one of you

and blow the entire plan open before you have a chance to set the explosives." April and Saber go to interject and he gives them both a look to silence them. "I say we pull someone from the back up crew of the Tirpitz. They have received most of the same training as Alex, so they would be better than a typical cadet. Also, they typically did not associate with the crew that was chosen, so she should have very little chance of recognizing one of them as easily as they could one of you. The down side is that we have to choose soon and base it off of what you already know of the candidates from their files. We would have to update them on some of the information, not necessarily all of it. They would know that Mr. Mackenzie is alive, but I don't see where they would have to know about any of you, especially if I only have them sent to the outpost."

Saber nods, "You make a valid point, sir. Of course you would have to acknowledge the danger that the soldier would be placing himself in. If they are not willing to make such a sacrifice, we would then need someone else in a hurry."

"Each of you knew the dangers of joining up with Calvary Command when you joined our ranks. Some of you have faced that danger on several occasions. It is a risk that comes with being a soldier. I am not at this point willing to continue risking the same group of people every time we have something come up. The soldier chosen will be briefed when they arrive. Perhaps we should pick two, on the chance that our first choice tries to back out of their duty. I know that it is a lot to ask, but each person here has already done more than their share of sacrifice. This will be their chance to prove themselves, just as each of you has," the commander replies. "Now, I am going to go and contact General Whitehawk. He needs to know what is going on. Perhaps he can return under the ruse of funeral preparations. I'll be in my room." He stands up and quietly leaves. The others looking amongst themselves, no one sure what to say.

"I'd go," Fireball says breaking the silence. "I understand the risks." April goes to protest and he shakes his head, "I can think quickly and adapt better than someone that hasn't done this before. I don't think we should send someone out with Alex that is inexperienced."

"But Fireball, we just got married. We're finally building a life together," April protests, her voice breaking slightly.

He looks at her, his eyes meeting hers and sighs placing a hand on her shoulder, "That's why I am determined to come back. I have someone worth doing this for. I am also the most physically able of the rest of us and can pilot most anything, so I could steal a ship to get us out of there if I needed to. I plan on both of us making it back alive. To me, failing is not an option."

"I'm not sure that you could convince my father to let you go, Fireball," April says quietly. "Not that I'm exactly thrilled about this, but I can tell I'm not going to be able to talk you out of this."

"So you understand?" he asks hesitantly.

She nods, blinking back the tears she feels forming. "Yeah. But I still don't like it."

"What is it you understand?" Commander Eagle says as he enters the room with General Whitehawk behind him.

She looks to Fireball and to the others before returning her gaze to her father, "Why Fireball wants to be the one to go with Alex," she replies.

The commander looks to Fireball, "I thought that I made my feelings rather clear on the matter."

"You did, sir," Fireball replies. "However, I feel that I would be the best person to go with him. This being his first real mission, he should have an experienced person to rely on, not another person with even less experience than he has. I have gone undercover among the Outriders before. I feel that I can blend in, and as I just told the others, I am also capable of flying just about anything, so I'd have the best shot of getting us out of there if things go bad."

Commander Eagle goes to protest when the general speaks up, "His points are valid, Charles. I know you have more personal reasons for him to not go, but if he is willing, and knows the risks, I feel that he is correct in stepping up to go on the mission."

Commander Eagle looks to each of the people in the room, trying to read their expressions he finally sighs in resignation, "I can see that the rest of you agree with his statement, so I suppose I won't try and argue the point."

"Fireball makes a valid argument, sir," Saber says. "Even though it pains me to say it, I feel he is correct. I don't like knowing the risks that either of them are taking, but I see the bigger picture and know that they are acting for the greater good."

General Whitehawk nods, "I agree with you. I think we need to do this as quickly as possible. The longer we wait, the more likely to raise suspicion."

"Um, where do we get the explosives, sir?" Alex asks.

"We have everything we need at the outpost, Mr. Mackenzie," the commander replies. "When are we to leave?"

Fireball takes April's hand and squeezes it for a moment then nods, "I say we leave now. We could be on our way in about an hour then." He turns to Alex who nods.

"I'm ready," Alex says with more certainty than he feels.

Fireball nods and hugs April tightly, "I'll be back, I promise," he whispers into her ear. She nods and he reluctantly releases her and he turns to the commander. "Ready, sir."

They take the back stairs out to the kitchen and quietly leave for the outpost.

"Okay, Alex. I may have to be a bit rough on you when we arrive at the base, so I apologize now," Fireball says as they cruise towards the Outrider base.

"No problem. I've already taken a good beating today from Saber and Amanda," he replies quietly, eliciting a chuckle from Fireball.

"Glad to know you can take some force. Now, my story is going to be that my communicator is busted, that's why I haven't reported since I left. I purposely left my com-link at the outpost, so that it doesn't suddenly go off. You've got your explosives, right?" Alex nods. "Good. So do I. Do you have any other questions before we get too close to talk?"

"Not that I can think of. I just hope this goes better than the last plan."

"So do I. And I will do everything I can to make sure that both of us make it back alive."

They fly the rest of the way in silence. Upon landing, they are met by armed Outriders. Fireball leads Alex out at gunpoint and the apparent leader of the other soldiers approaches him. "What are you doing? This is a secured area!"

"I caught one that tried to get away and warn the humans of the plan, sir," Fireball replies, poking Alex a bit with the gun.

"So our scanners were correct about a second ship. Why did it take you so long to return?" the leader asks suspiciously.

"I had to find him after I shot him down, sir. I would have called it in, but the communicator is busted. He got a few shots on me before I got him," Fireball replies.

The leader looks Fireball over carefully and after several minutes he nods, "Take him to the brig with the other human. We can decide what to do with both of them later. We can use the help loading the cargo into their ship."

"Yes sir," Fireball replies. He then shoves Alex forward, "Get moving human or you won't live to see your companion."

Alex stumbles forward and the pair head towards the complex. They are just inside when they are stopped by another Outrider. "Another human?" Fireball nods. "I just knocked the other one out. She talked too much. I'll go and toss this one in another cell. You head back and help with the cargo."

"I was ordered to deliver him myself, sir," Fireball says.

"I outrank that no good hustler out there. You do as I tell you!"

"Of course, sir," Fireball replies and goes to forcefully pass Alex to him.

Alex stumbles forward and trips the Outrider, sprawling to the ground and he grabs the gun. Fireball fires it and stuns the guard. They quickly take him towards the cells and Alex swaps clothes with him and tosses him in the darkest cell. He glances over and sees Erika badly beaten and opens the door to her cell. "If you can move on your

own, we've unlocked your cell, the rest is up to you. Come with us if you want," he says quietly and the two grab their explosives and head towards the docking area. They separate and start stacking crates and such near some of the weapons that are being prepped for loading and they casually start placing explosives among the cargo, trying their best to be inconspicuous.

After nearly hour, Alex is helping to load some of the crates onto the Tirpitz. He starts casually looking around and places a couple of small explosives in the circuitry of the ship. He is leaving the ship when he is approached by one of the guards.

"What were you doing wandering around the ship?"

"Just looking at how human ships differ from ours, sir," Alex replies as casually as he can.

The guard eyes him suspiciously and starts for his gun. Alex makes to run when the guard is suddenly hit from behind and falls to the floor of the ramp.

"Run!" Erika says holding a pipe and nods towards the landing docks.

"Let's go!" Fireball says as he runs up from the opposite direction, guards firing at him from behind.

They break for the landing docks and see a couple ships. One is being worked on, so they rush to the other one. Suddenly they realize they are being shot at and they split up trying to draw fire away from one place. "I'll head for the controls. Try and close the ramp quickly!" Fireball calls as he continues towards the control bridge.

Just as the ramp is closing Alex is nearly shot. Erika catches up and shoves him further into the ship and hits the button to close the ramp. He stumbles back and the ramp closes. Looking down, he sees Erika bleeding from her neck and stomach.

Fireball takes off and Alex slowly works his way to the bridge, covered in blood.

Fireball looks over, "You were hit?"

"No," Alex replies quietly.

"Then what happened?"

"Erika saved me. She's on the floor near the ramp," he replies quietly. Fireball casts a glance in the direction of the ramp. "I think she's gone. She managed to close the ramp before she collapsed, I can't do anything else for her. I was unable to find a med kit or anything." Alex finishes.

"Outriders don't need med kits. They just die if they are shot," Fireball says. He glances at the screen and swears under his breath. "We've got company coming."

Alex looks at the screen and groans. "Great. We have no clue what kind of firepower

this thing has either," he says. "Well, I think I found a few weapons." He starts firing at the ships in pursuit, managing to hit a few of them. "Well now we just have a couple dozen ships coming after us, instead of nearly three dozen," he says sarcastically.

"They have to have better weapons than this damned cannon on here," Fireball says as he continues towards the outpost. He hits his com-link, "Hey, this is Fireball someone come in!"

"This is Saber, what's wrong?"

"We've gotten off the base, barely. We're in a transport ship of some kind, not a lot of firepower and we're being pursued. I'm not sure how long we can hold them off."

Silence on the other end for a minute, "We see you now on the screen, Fireball. I can tell your ship from your com-link signals. That is helpful. We've sent up some fighters, you should see them momentarily. Hopefully, that should give you enough time to get back here."

After a few minutes, Fireball replies back, "We see them. They're starting to make a dent. We're continuing to the outpost."

"Roger that, Fireball. See you soon."

The pair continue towards the outpost when several larger blips appear on their screen. "What the?" Fireball asks. "Alex, can you get a fix on what just appeared?"

"Trying to, sir," he replies as he hits several buttons. "Oh 're in a heap of trouble."

"What?" Fireball asks.

"Three renegade units and the Tirpitz are coming. I'm not sure if we can make it back or not."

"Damn," Fireball mutters. He hits the com-link, "Hey, we've got a problem, rather four of them."

"I just pulled up the screen, Fireball. We're getting ready to send in the Bismarck. Keep your heading, but don't venture into orbit."

"Got it, we'll go past there if we have to."

Saber closes the connection and looks to the others. "What now?" he asks. "You can't launch with two people."

Amanda stands up and studies the screens. "You can see well enough right now, can't you?" she asks turning to face Saber.

He nods hesitantly, "Fairly well, yes."

"You can pilot the ship?" He nods. "You just need someone to run nav, right? I can do that." He immediately goes to protest and she places a finger on his lips. "It's risk this or we risk all of our lives, Saber. Do I want to risk our children or our lives? No. However, if by risking us few, we can potentially save millions, at this moment, it is worth the risk. I feel that we can do it and carefully. Perhaps we can draw the renegades close enough to the Tirpitz that we can blow all of them up at once. But we would have to be out there to try to do that, on the chance that the Bismarck would have to engage at least one of the Renegade units."

"Amanda, I cannot in good conscience allow you to go out. I don't want to risk you our unborn children," Saber says firmly.

"Who else can go that knows how to work your systems on such short notice?" Amanda counters, her eyes meeting his.

Saber goes to say something several times, but stops himself each time. He looks to April who shrugs, unable to come up with a valid argument.

"My father could go, but he's not trained on the systems, Saber. We could call for one of the other four cadets, but that would take time that we don't have," April states apologetically. "I really can't come up with an argument against what she's saying, as much as I really want to right now."

Commander Eagle looks between them, "Mr. Wilcox?"

Colt looks to all of them and shakes his head, "I'm with April on this. I don't like it, but she's speaking a truth none of us want to hear."

"Perhaps you three should be the ones to go out, leaving her here. In theory, you can work it with three, even in challenge phase one, correct?" the commander asks April.

April nods hesitantly, "Theoretically, yes. However, the renegades have been stronger, and we've needed challenge phase two to manage to overtake them. If they have figured out the Tirpitz, and there is a chance that they have, then we would surely need four people. We can't go on the assumption that we will be able to get to Fireball and Alex before we are engaged. Personally, I'd rather not see Saber or Amanda go out, but I feel that at this point in time, we don't have another viable option," she finishes with an apologetic glance to Saber, who is struggling to keep his composure.

"We're wasting time here. Let's just load up and go. Let them both go. They both know the risks. They can sort out their difference in opinion later, if we survive this. The longer we wait, the less likely it is," Colt says frustrated.

Saber sighs. "Fine. Let's go get suited up," he says without emotion. Amanda flinches, but goes and changes into her suit which barely fits without another word.

"I'd hate to be Amanda right now. I think he's actually mad at her," Colt says after they leave for their temporary quarters.

"It's not that he's mad Colt, he's worried. He's mad at the situation," April replies as they head for their quarters to suit up.

Amanda finishes suiting up and Saber comes up behind her and places a hand firmly on her shoulder. She flinches slightly but turns to face him. She starts to speak and he shakes his head, "Don't, Love," he says barely a whisper. "If I could have come up with a viable alternative, believe me, I would. I don't want to be going back out, and I sure as Hell don't want you out there, but I know that we are in this together. As soon as this is done, we will not do it again. Alex will be available, as will Fireball." Amanda nods and he hugs her tightly against him. "I'm not angry with you, I'm angry that we're in this situation," he adds quietly.

She looks up and nods, forcing back tears. "We'd better go," she says quietly.

He nods and places a hand on her belly and smiles, "Just barely able to wear this aren't you?" he asks with a hint of amusement.

She nods and smiles weakly, "Another week and I wouldn't be able to. Then I would have had to stay put."

He chuckles and releases her reluctantly, "Let's get going." They head back to the commander's office just as Colt and April return.

Colt looks up and nods, seeing that they both look better than when they left and grins.

"What?" Amanda asks.

"You just barely got into that suit," Colt says getting a glare from Amanda.

"Remember cowboy, I am armed," Amanda says with a smirk. "And hormonal," she adds as an afterthought.

Colt chuckles, "Yes, ma'am. I'll remember that."

"Let's go," Saber says as he starts for the landing area.

The others follow him and load up into the Bismarck. Each person takes their place. Saber looks around, acclimating himself with the different controls before glancing to Amanda who nods. "I'm ready when you are, Saber," she says to his unasked question.

He nods. "Let's do this and get it over with," he says as they head for the ship.

Kapitel 29: It's All Part of the Plan

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 28: It's All Part of the Plan

"We're approaching the ships, Saber," Amanda calls as she scans the screens. "The closest fighters are at about two o'clock, but I don't think they are quite in range just yet."

"Can you tell what types we have out there?"

"Looks like three renegade units, about a dozen fighters and the Tirpitz. The Tirpitz is hanging back though. Perhaps they weren't expecting to see us."

"We need to get rid of as many fighters as we can first, before we try to engage the renegade units. With any luck, perhaps we can get Fireball and Alex into the ship with us," Saber states. He turns to Colt, "Think you can wipe out a few of the fighters, cowboy?"

"Sure thing. We've got some amped firepower now. Let's see just how much better it is," Colt replies as he starts firing at the fighters. He makes quick work of more than half the fighters, but that draws the attention of the Renegade units. "Shit! Here they come."

"I'm going to try and get us closer to Fireball and Alex. Perhaps they can dock the ship inside our cargo bay. Then we only have to worry about protecting ourselves," Saber says as he cuts back towards the Outrider ship that Fireball is piloting. "Amanda, try and get him on your com-link."

"Got it, Saber," she replies and clicks her com-link. "Fireball, this is Amanda, come in."

A pause then Fireball's voice comes over the line, "Please tell me you're not on that ship."

"Yes we both are. I need to know if you think you can dock that ship in the cargo bay if we can get close enough to you," Amanda replies.

"Yeah, It'll be tricky, with the renegades coming, but I think I can do it," Fireball states.

"Roger that. We're on our way to you. Let's hope this works."

Saber focuses on trying to move closer to the transport ship and April just lowers the ramp when they are hit, knocking them a good distance back. "What the bloody Hell

was that?" Saber asks, glancing to Amanda to check on her and seeking a reply.

Amanda manages to stay in the saddle unit and once they are righted, she starts hitting buttons in rapid succession. "I can't tell what hit us. I guess one of the renegade units. It was too strong to be one of the few fighters that remain." Her screen starts going haywire and alarms start going off. "We need to move and fast. It's the Tirpitz firing at us!"

"On in!" Saber replies and he cuts away from their current position sharply. "I thought Alex said they stripped the ship!"

"Evidently not completely," Colt quips. "We need to do something and fast."

"If we hit it, we're as good as gone!" Amanda says.

"Unless we move back a good distance," April replies.

"What?" the other three ask in unison.

"Our weapons system has been upgraded. We can be three times the distance we were able to be before and still hit a target. If we can get to challenge phase one and fire the cannons and the big gun, we now have the ability to pull up the armour like we do in phase two. That should help shield us. Start a minor offensive on the Tirpitz, the renegades should move closer to protect it. They don't want it to blow up close to them if they can help it. They want it closer to Calvary Command or at least one of the colonies. If we time it right, Fireball should be able to slip on. I've left the ramp down. He will have about sixty seconds."

"If he doesn't?" Colt asks.

"Let's not think like that, Colt," Amanda states. "Fireball, did you get all of that?"

"Yeah. I got it. We're cutting back to you now. We'll try and loop in from below. You focus on firing at the other ships," he replies.

"Okay, in sixty seconds, I'll initiate challenge phase one," Saber states. "Colt, keep your fire going towards the ship. Fifty nine...fifty-eight..."

Fireball cuts sharply down, causing Alex to fall from his seat. He then pulls up quickly and they hear a thud. Alex glances back and sees Erika's form slide across the floor and into a wall. He flinches at the sight and turns his focus back to the screens before him. "Do you think we can make it, sir?" Alex asks, obviously nervous.

"I sure hope so, otherwise we're going to get hot really fast and die. Not the way I want to go out," Fireball replies as he pulls closer to the Bismarck.

"Thirty-two...thirty-one...thirty..." Saber continues his countdown.

Colt keeps firing towards the Tirpitz, two of the renegades moving closer to try and

draw his fire away from the ship. "Just like you called, April." He continues firing at the ship, occasionally at the renegades.

"Where did the other one go?" Amanda mutters as she scans her screens. "It's like it just vanished." Suddenly a blip appears above them. "Damn it! Colt, shoot straight up and fast!"

Colt switches the main cannon up and manages to hit the unit just before it strikes them. "Gotcha! Good job, Amanda."

"That was too close. Sorry about that. Fireball, hurry up!"

"Five...four..."

"Landing now. Killed the engines, close the ramp!" he replies.

April closes the ramp just as Saber hits the button "Going to challenge phase one...now!" he calls.

The ship begins its' transformation and the renegade units break for it.

"Colt, use the blaster!" Saber calls as they complete the shift.

Fireball comes running into the control room, "I'm here! Where do you need me?"

"Here!" Saber calls as he moves so Fireball can take control.

Fireball climbs in, "Alex is still in the other ship. I think he's in a bit of shock. We have Erika," he says as he takes over the controls.

Saber nods and heads to his unit, "Amanda, could you-"

"On it," she says as she climbs out of his unit. "I'll see what I can do to help him." She turns and heads back to the docking area and boards the ship.

"Alex?" she calls and stops when she sees Erika's slumped form on the floor and Alex looks up at her unsure of what to say. She comes over and manages to kneel down beside the pair. "Is she?"

"I thought she was...but I think I saw her move a little," Alex replies quietly.

Amanda nods and starts feeling for a pulse. At first she can't find one, but then she feels a faint, but erratic one. "I've got a pulse. Get me a med kit, now," she says. Alex stares at her still in shock and she sighs, "Alex!" she says forcefully, snapping him out of his stupor. "Med kit! Go down the ramp and get one of the kits!"

"Right," he says sheepishly and runs out of the ship. He comes back quickly, a med kit in tow. Kneeling down he opens the kit, "What do you need?"

"She's having trouble breathing, we need to intubate her. Have you been trained to do that?" Amanda asks as she goes through the kit.

"No. We were not trained for that. Just basic first-aid," Alex replies.

Amanda sighs in frustration. "Well, we're about to attempt it," she says curtly. She takes a deep breath to calm herself, "I need you to hold her arms down with your knees and keep her head still with your hands. Do not let her move once I start this. I've only seen it done," she says as she reads the brief directions from the kit.

Alex nods and moves into position, bracing her arms against her and then cupping her head in his hands. "I've got her as best I can, Amanda," he says.

Amanda nods and carefully begins inserting the tube down her throat. The tube goes in with little trouble, only gagging her once, and she places the bag on it and begins forcing air. Erika's eyes fly open and she starts to struggle. Alex tightens his grip, not allowing her to move much. "Erika, I'm Amanda Rider. I'm trying to give you medical attention, please stop fighting me. When you can breathe without help, I'll remove the tube."

Erika relaxes and ceases struggling, so Alex loosens his grip slightly. "We need to get her to the med bay, Alex. We can strap her down there and work on her. Did you see a board we can put her on or anything?" Amanda asks.

Alex thinks for a minute then nods slowly, "I think I saw something we can use. Will you be okay for a minute or two?" Amanda nods and Alex jumps up and heads back out of the ship, returning a couple minutes later with a back-board. He places it beside Erika and kneels back down beside her next to Amanda. "How do you want to do this, you can't be picking her up."

"We don't have a choice, Alex. Besides, you'll help with the weight distribution. I'll be fine." The ship is suddenly jolted and it tosses both of them across the floor. Amanda manages not to land too hard and Alex gets up quickly and gets the board and lays it to where Erika slid. "We'd better hurry. This can't be good for her. Things could be getting worse, and I'd rather be in slightly closer quarters to have something to grab to brace with," Amanda says as she gets back beside Erika.

Alex nods. "Let's get her on the board," he says and leans down close to Erika's head. "Erika, we're moving you to a board to get you to a safer place. Don't fight us or you might hurt yourself or us." He looks up to Amanda who nods and they move her to the board then carefully pick it up and head down the ramp. The ship shakes again, though not as violently and they manage to continue walking after a minute. They get into the med bay and place her on a table there and strap her in.

"Okay, her breathing seems to be fairly stable. Let's get the trach out so that we can put her on oxygen," Amanda says as she removes the bag. "Erika, we are taking out the tube, it won't feel good, but I'll do it as quickly as I can," Amanda says as she pulls out the tubing. She then grabs an oxygen mask and places it on Erika's face. "Now, we need to see how badly she's wounded. It looks like she's been shot a couple of times.

One in her neck, once in her abdomen. We need to get these clothes off of her."

Alex looks shocked for a second then nods, "I'll do whatever you tell me to, Amanda."

Amanda nods and starts carefully removing the blood stained clothes, cutting most of the uniform off of her. "I'm sorry about this. We'll find you something to put you in later," she says to the unconscious Erika.

Alex forces his face to remain neutral and hands Amanda things to wash the wounds.

Amanda cleans the areas as best she can then leans into inspect them, "The neck wound isn't as bad as I feared. She may not even need to be stitched. Some skin glue and a bandage. Lucky for her, the artery looks to be intact." She then moves to examine the abdomen, "I don't think she's going to be so lucky here. There's a lot more blood, and she may have internal injuries. Alex, see if she is running a fever, would you?"

Alex does as he's asked. "Thirty-eight."

"A little high, but not to be unexpected, considering her injuries. It appears she's been beaten a good bit too."

"She looked it when we found her in a cell. She saved our lives though. Perhaps she tried to stop whatever it is they were planning and they beat her for it?" he says thinking aloud. "I know that won't excuse what she's done, but perhaps it will spare her life."

"If she lives through this," Amanda states as the ship is rocked again and she is knocked off balance. Alex manages to keep her from falling.

"Good thing she's strapped to that bed," he says.

"We've gotten her as stable as we can. I suppose we should find someplace to sit and buckle in ourselves," Amanda says.

"I think I'll stay here. There's one seat I can fasten into," Alex says. "I'll call for help if I need it. I don't think she's going anywhere."

Amanda nods. "I'll head to the break room. I can fasten down there."

"Do you need me to help you get there?" Alex asks.

"No, I'll be fine. Thank you," Amanda replies as she heads for the exit.

Alex nods and fastens himself in, "I'll be here."

"Okay," Amanda says and she leaves heading towards the break room. She detours to the control area and stops in the entrance to the control room. Glancing at the screen, she sees them deep in battle with two renegade units. She clutches onto the door

frame to maintain her balance, unable to turn away from the battle.

"Okay Fireball, we need to take out these units. Or at least draw them to the Tirpitz again," Saber says.

One of the units fires at them and they barely manage to evade the shot. Colt returns fire and hits one, knocking it back a good ways. They turn to fire at the second one only to see the third unit return. "We need a better plan or we're gonna get killed out here!" Colt says as he continues firing in rapid succession.

"That or we'll blow up the Tirpitz ourselves," April adds.

"I think that may be what they're trying to do," Saber adds dryly.

Fireball shifts quickly and they fire with full cannons towards the third renegade unit, causing it to explode. The other two act quickly, firing close to them. "We need to go to phase two," Fireball says.

"Not yet. I think I can knock off one more of those pests," Colt quips as he fires towards one of the remaining two. He knocks one back but the other fires and hits them knocking them back a good bit.

Saber gets knocked around in his unit, hitting his head. "Damn it! That was a solid hit."

"I hope Amanda and Alex are okay," April says quietly.

"He's with her. She'll be fine," Fireball says glancing over to Saber. "We can't keep this up, Colt."

"I know, I know."

"The longer this draws out the closer to the colonies that ship gets," Saber says as he shakes his head trying to clear it from the impact.

They fight back and forth for several minutes, each player taking minor hits, but no one really gaining the upper hand. Suddenly another hit tosses them again, but they are able to minimize the damage, getting a shield up in time.

"Go to phase two!" April says. "We don't have a choice."

Fireball hits the button and they shift into phase two. "You're in control Saber," April calls.

They draw the sword and the renegades attack. "Go at them directly, Fireball. I need to be as close as you dare to get," Saber says.

"What? Are you insane?" Fireball says as he charges one of the units.

"I may well be, but right now, I'm having trouble seeing my screens. I hit my head a bit

ago. I can tell up, down, left or right, but we have to be close. I'm relying on you to get me close enough."

"Damn it! Okay I'll do my best," he replies and they move in dangerously close.

"Fireball, pull back. Saber, cut to seven o'clock now!" Amanda calls from the doorway. Fireball does as she says and Saber cuts in the direction she says and they manage to damage the unit. The other one attacks from behind, pushing them forward with enough ferocity to knock Amanda off balance and cause the others to grab the sides of their units to stay in.

"Amanda!" April and Saber yell simultaneously.

Amanda gets up fairly quickly and makes her way to Saber's unit. "I'm fine," she says with as much certainty as she can muster. "Here it comes again."

"I see it," Fireball says as Amanda grips tightly to the edges of Saber's unit, positioned so she can see the screens over his shoulder. Fireball again charges the unit.

"Get ready to duck, Fireball. Saber, on three swing, up at one o'clock. One...two...three!" Amanda says and Saber swings, managing to severely damage the unit and it charges towards them. "The other one is coming from the back and one from the right. Wait until they're close and fly up as hard and as fast as you can. Perhaps they'll hit and we can send them towards the Tirpitz."

"Right," Fireball says. The two units come close and he pulls them up, barely getting grazed by the two enemy units before they ram into each other. Fireball flips around as quickly as he can and shoves the two damaged units towards the Tirpitz before backing off as quickly as he can. "April pull up our shields and get ready to detonate the Tirpitz. I'll keep backing up as fast as I can. As soon as you think we're far enough, go for it."

"On it, Fireball," April replies and hits several buttons. "Five...Four...Three...Two...One..Ignition!" She hits the detonator and the Tirpitz ignites in a series of explosions, taking the renegade units with it. The shock waves from the blasts hurl the Bismarck backwards.

After a minute or so, Fireball is able to stabilize the ship. "Well, it looks like they won't be using those nukes," he says after a long silence.

"Aye," Saber replies sounding exhausted. "I suppose you could say we were successful." He gets up and looks to April, "Did you also detonate the explosives on the base?"

April nods. "They were all set to the same detonator, so they should have gone off at the same time the ones on the Tirpitz did," she replies. "The only way to be sure, will be to access the satellites when we get back."

Colt releases a long sighs and slinks back into his seat. "I hope we finally get a break,"

he mutters as he tips his hat over his eyes.

Saber comes around to where Amanda is standing silently and gently places his hands on her shoulders, "Are you all right, Love?" he asks into her ear.

She nods slightly. "I think I want to go and lie down," she says barely a whisper.

"All right," Saber replies and releases her.

Amanda heads for the sleeping quarters and lies down on one of the bunks and starts crying, the stress finally hitting her.

"Let's go home," Fireball says and turns the ship back to the outpost.

"Yes, I think all of us could use a break," April says.

Saber nods and then starts for the back. "I'm going to go and check on Alex, Erika, and Amanda."

"I'll check on Alex and Erika. You go on and see about Amanda, Saber," April says.

"Okay," he replies and goes back to the sleeping area. He hears Amanda before he sees her and he goes to the bunk and sits beside her. "Are you in pain?" he asks the concern obvious in his voice.

Amanda takes several minutes to get herself under control before she turns to face him, face red and eyes swollen from crying. "Maybe a little, but it's not too bad, all things considered. I'm just really stressed. I suppose everything just hit me all at once."

"I'm sorry," he says quietly as he pulls her into an embrace. "We're going home now. As far as I'm concerned, we're through."

"I've heard that before," she says with a weak smile.

He chuckles and sighs, "Aye, so you have. But if there is any choice, I will not go back out. They have Alex now, and the other cadets can also be trained. I do not see any reason we should have to go through this again."

"How is your head?" she asks quietly watching his face for a reaction.

He thinks for a minute before replying, "It's not as bad as it once was. I think once I rest I'll be better. I'll get checked if you wish. The headache I had is subsiding, and the vision seems to have improved slightly from what it had been when we were fighting." She nods and he continues, "I'm grateful that you came in when you did. It probably kept us from being decimated by those renegades."

"Well, I saw a solution that seemed a bit safer, so I called it. I'm glad that the others respect me enough to trust my judgement on a whim like that."

"You have more than proven yourself capable, Amanda. You have caught on quicker than any of the candidates. If you weren't pregnant, I'm sure that they would ask us both to stay on. You have a strategic mind, not something just anyone can do."

Amanda smiles weakly, "I actually learned from you. I picked up on how you think things through. You taught me that when you taught me to fight and defend myself."

"Then it has served all of us well," he replies.

"How is Erika?" Amanda asks after a long silence.

"I've not heard anything. I suppose I should go and check to see how she is. I don't even know the extent of her injuries," Saber replies honestly.

"I had to intubate her when I got to her. After I snapped Alex out of his shock. She was alive, barely. I got her breathing on her own again and treated the gunshot wounds, but she may have more damage that I can't see. I'm not a trained medic, so I did what I could for her," Amanda replies.

"You actually intubated her?" Saber asks surprised. Amanda nods. "That's no easy feat."

"It came with directions," she replies matter-of-factly. "Alex said that she saved them. That she helped them get away."

"Fireball said much the same thing. Perhaps that will keep her from death, if nothing else," Saber states.

Amanda slowly gets up, "If you think it's safe to move about, I think I'll go and check on both Erika and Alex."

Saber nods. "I think it's all right. Would you mind if I came with you?" he asks quietly.

Amanda looks at him surprised by the question, "Why would I mind?"

Saber shrugs, "I don't know. I thought maybe you needed some time by yourself. You've been under a lot of stress."

"I'm fine. A bit tired and a good bit sore, but I'll be okay," Amanda replies. Saber stands up and they head towards the med bay. Upon arriving, they find Alex quietly sitting near Erika's unmoving form. He looks up when they enter. "Any change?" Amanda asks.

Alex shakes his head, "No change that I can tell. Her breathing seems to be about the same, and she hasn't really moved at all other than breathing."

Saber ventures closer to inspect her, "She looks like she took a pretty good beating. She's lucky the shot to the neck didn't pierce an artery. She would have bled out a

long time ago."

"I think she may have liver issues," Amanda says coming up beside Saber.

"Why do you say that?" he asks.

"Look at her skin. It's taking on a yellowish hue. That's a sign of liver failure. It could be from the shot to the abdomen. If she's turning this quickly though, she needs real medical attention and quickly."

"How would you know such a thing?" Saber asks curiously.

"My father went through renal and liver failure. I'm familiar with the signs," she replies quietly.

Saber nods and turns towards the door, "I'll go see what our ETA is."

"I'd like to come along," Amanda states.

"Sure. Come on."

The two leave the room, leaving Alex alone once again with Erika. They approach the control to find April and Fireball talking and Colt dozing in his unit, hat over his eyes. Amanda manages a weak smile at the sight of him. The couple look up when they enter.

"Are you okay, Amanda?" April asks.

Amanda nods hesitantly, "Just sore and tired."

"What's our ETA, Fireball?" Saber asks.

"Less than half an hour. I've been given clearance to land. I told them that we have Erika and that she needs medical attention. Commander Eagle said they will have medics waiting," Fireball replies. He glances towards Amanda, "Do you need to be checked out? I know you've taken a few falls while on the ship."

"I'm fine. But I want them to check on Saber, as a precaution."

Saber goes to protest, and thinks better of it and nods. "I'll be sure to be checked, Love."

Amanda nods, satisfied and goes and sits quietly in Saber's saddle unit.

April watches her and comes over to where Saber and Fireball are talking. "Do you really think she's okay, Saber?" April asks quietly.

"I think she's just tired. I don't think she would endanger herself of the children, so if she says she's okay, I'm not going to push the matter. The doctor may insist on a check

up regardless, and that I would enforce, but as for me making her go just because I think she should, no. It's not worth getting into an argument over," Saber replies quietly, glancing over in her direction.

The rest of the return to the outpost is uneventful and upon landing, they are met by medics. They quickly take Erika out from the med bay and rush her to the makeshift triage area. A couple of other medics come to assess the other crew members, but then head back towards the medical facility, leaving them to walk freely to the commander's office.

They are met on the way by Commander Eagle who eyes them all carefully. "Let's talk in my office. I can call for medics if it is warranted," he says as they all enter his office.

They all take a seat and he looks to each one in turn, waiting for someone to speak. Finally Saber takes a breath and sighs, "Well, it appears that we have destroyed the nukes, sir. Fireball and Alex were successful in their mission and they brought Erika back. She was instrumental in helping them to escape. I would be interested in speaking with her once they deem her fit for interrogation. Our ship took a good deal of damage, so it will need repair. Otherwise, we are fairly unharmed. I knocked my head when we were hit one of the times, so my vision isn't as good as it was, and I have a bit of a headache, but that appears to be improving slowly."

The commander nods, pondering the information before choosing his words carefully, "There have been a few... developments here as well while you were all away. Things may not be entirely what they have appeared." They all look at him confused and he manages a small smile. "I thought that might interest you." He turns to Saber, "When we finish here, I want you to have a thorough check up, including scans of your head."

"Yes, sir," Saber mutters.

The commander then looks to Amanda, "That goes for you too. A full check up. I don't want you to have complications because of this."

"Yes, sir," Amanda replies quietly.

"The rest of you should at least be checked by the doctor, just as a precaution." The others nod and he takes a deep breath and pauses a minute before deciding how to begin. "While you were away, we had an Outrider fighter come onto our radar screens. It was flying erratically, and managed to crash land at the back of the property. It was met by half our forces all armed and weapons trained on it. When the hatch opened, we found two humans inside. Neither one was in any condition to move." Everyone looks up in shock, but he continues before anyone can say anything, "The two people inside were Yuri Hido and Gabrielle Weber. They both needed extensive medical attention. How Mr. Hido is even alive is a mystery. I saw the same video you did. He was shot. However, from what the doctor has said it may have been a stun blaster set to it's highest setting, rendering him unable to move for an extended period of time. As for Ms. Weber, she had numerous physical injuries and some internal ones. Neither one has been awake since they have arrived. I am keeping them all separated, I do not want them to communicate with one another until after

our investigation. At this point, they may not even survive, we will just have to wait and see."

"So they...all of them are alive?" Alex finally asks breaking the stunned silence that had fallen amongst them.

"Yes Mr. Mackenzie, they are. At least for the moment. After the others leave, I would like to talk with you about what happened on the Tirpitz, and also what happened on the Outrider base."

Alex nods. "Yes, sir. I will tell you everything I know."

The commander nods and looks to the rest of the group, "The rest of you go get checked. Saber, Amanda, if the doctor says it is safe for you to do so, you may return to your place. I know Amanda would be more comfortable there. The rest of you, I want to stay here for a few days, while I talk with you about everything that has transpired. I will talk to Saber and Amanda eventually as well. Also, keep in mind that some of you are still presumed dead, so be careful what areas you walk in and try and keep to your quarters. You are dismissed."

"Yes sir!" they all reply and they get up and head for the medical area.

Fireball and April follow Saber and Amanda out the door, Colt drags along after them. They all stop a bit down the hall, "Well, I suppose we should go and see the doctor," Saber says. "Are any of you going to be checked?"

The others shake their heads. "I'm going to call Robin, so she knows we all made it back. I'll have her tell Thomas and Elaine if you wish."

Saber nods. "I appreciate the offer, but if Elaine finds out that we actually went out on the ship, she's liable to have some choice words for the two of us when we return. I didn't tell her that we might be needed to go out," Saber says quietly.

Colt laughs, "I'll try and not let on then that you two were with us."

"Thanks," Saber says dryly. The others go their separate ways and Saber and Amanda quietly make their way to the medical office.

"Ah, Captain and Mrs. Rider. I thought you might be coming by. Come this way, please," Dr. Izumi says leading them quickly to a back area close to his makeshift office. "Now, I need to know what if any issues you two are having."

"Well, I hit my head again and since then I've had a headache and my vision has been hindered a bit. It seems to slowly be easing off and the vision improving, but Commander Eagle was rather insistent that I be checked, as was Amanda," Saber replies.

Dr. Izumi nods and looks to Amanda, "And you, my dear?"

"I got bounced around a bit, so I have a few bruises, nothing too bad. I think I'm fine, other than being totally exhausted, but the commander and Saber both wish for me to have an exam to check on myself and the babies."

"Very well. Let's start with you first, Captain."

Kapitel 30: Truths and Consequences

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 29: Truths and Consequences

"Sir?" a soldier says as he steps into Commander Eagle's office.

Commander Eagle looks up from his screen, "Yes, soldier?"

"Dr. Izumi sent me to find you. Ms. Kawamura is waking up," the soldier replies.

Commander Eagle nods and hits a few more keys before standing up. "Thank you. I will be there in a moment. You are dismissed," he says. The soldier salutes him and he returns the gesture and they both go their own ways. He heads for the hospital ward of Calvary Command, swiping his card to gain entry to the critical care section. After passing a nurses station, he enters the room where Dr. Izumi is examining Erika.

Dr. Izumi looks up when he enters, "Ah Commander, thank you for coming so quickly. I'm not sure how long she will be awake."

Commander Eagle comes up to the side of the bed and nods to Erika. "Well Ms. Kawamura, how are you feeling?" he asks.

She looks at him quietly for a moment before replying, "I don't feel much of anything, sir."

"What do you mean?" he asks confused by the statement.

"I am unable to feel my legs, nor can I move them."

"The abdominal shot went through and hit her spinal column. I believe she has suffered some paralysis because of it," Dr. Izumi explains. "Her liver functions are close to normal once more, and her other blood work is coming back within normal limits, so other than the paralysis, she seems to be in pretty good shape medically speaking."

"So why has she been asleep for nearly three months, if everything is doing so well?"

"Her organs were damaged sir, the coma allowed her body to rest so that it could repair itself to put it simply."

He nods, accepting the explanation and returns his focus to Erika, "Do you know what has happened?"

"I screwed up sir. I had a lapse in judgement and it has killed several people needlessly," she replies fighting back tears.

"You haven't killed nearly the number of people that you believe you have, Ms. Kawamura."

She looks up at him in confusion, "But I'm responsible for killing the Bismarck crew, and Gabby. I swear sir, I didn't know the Outriders were going to just blow up the ship they were on." She breaks down crying.

Commander Eagle waits for her to calm down again before speaking, "Ms. Kawamura, the crew of the Bismarck is very much alive. The ship was a decoy. We lost nothing but a shell. The crew was piloting the ship remotely."

Erika looks up at him in disbelief, "But they were responding as if they were there! How...how could they do that?"

"We had sensors that sent signals to another location, so that they could reply in kind as if they were under attack. We knew that someone had passed on information, we had to figure out who and why. We know you are the who, but I want to hear your reasons for doing so."

Erika is silent for several minutes, pondering her explanation. She finally takes a breath and starts trying to explain herself, "A few months ago, shortly after we were selected to be the Tirpitz crew, I had a chance meeting with this man in a bar. We were talking about the Outriders and the war and how it seems to be a never-ending battle. How just when you think it's over, they reappear with some new weapon or tactic. I asked aloud just why they wouldn't give up, even though we continually beat them. He said it was because what they want is a way to exist away from us, but that they need some sort of power source. Something that they could use away from us, something outdated for us even." She pauses her face hardened in thought, "I immediately got suspicious and tried to back away from the man. I realized that he was either a sympathizer or an Outrider in disguise. He grabbed my arm and forcefully pulled me back into the chair I had just vacated. He gave me a threatening look and indicated he had a gun, so I didn't fight back. There were too many civilians nearby, I didn't want to risk someone getting shot. He told me that he had heard rumors of some old nuclear power sources that were being sent to a disposal site. He said that if I could help him find out when it was going out, he could make sure they got it to use as an experimental power, and that it could end the war. That if it worked like they hoped, the Outriders could go live some place away from the humans and we could all go back to normal lives. All I had to do was give the time and location of the one convoy." She stops and fights back tears and takes several breaths.

"Take your time, Ms. Kawamura. I need every detail, your life may very well depend on what you tell me."

"Obviously, that isn't what happened. After the one convoy was attacked and they stripped it and killed the crew, I knew that I had been lied to. It was a day or so later

that the same man found me again and told me they needed one more convoy and then I'd be done. I told him I would have to think about realized something was bothering me and he pressed to explain what was bothering me. So I told him just what I told you. He thought long and were still debating what to do when we were told that the Bismarck crew would be taking a convoy of weapons in a freighter and that we were to escort them in the Tirpitz. Yuri told me to tell them of the convoy, and tell them that we were told it was the final shipment. I did, and we carried on as if nothing were amiss. The morning we were to leave, Yuri met me at my apartment and told me that if we were attacked to shoot any of us I had to. He swapped weapons with me. He gave me his blaster and told me it was set to the highest stun level. It would appear that I killed whoever I shot, so to only fire once. Perhaps then we could figure out what the Outriders were planning to use the nukes for. It sounded like a good plan, so I went with it. I didn't know it would technically cost the Bismarck crew their lives." She stops and takes a few breaths as she fights back tears again before continuing, "After the ship was destroyed, the Outriders boarded us. I actually didn't think they would. I thought they were just going to flank us and steer us to wherever they were taking us, but they got violent. Yuri gave me a signal and I told him and Gabby to try and cut them off at the ramp. Alex did as he should have and took the data drive and got away through an escape hatch. He wiped the security systems and such so that if the ship was taken, the Outriders wouldn't get too much info from the computers. I was glad of that. At least one of us was going to make it out. It was then that Gabby and Yuri were led back into the control room by the Outriders. He started yelling, so I did as we agreed and shot him. I honestly thought I had killed him. They just left him there. Then Gabby made a break for it and I told them to go after her. Most of them did, but one thought better of leaving me unattended and held me at gunpoint. They had me drive the ship to their base. Shortly after landing, I noticed that Yuri was nowhere to be found. I hoped that meant that he got away. They took me to their leader of the base. By then I saw that they were making weapons and I tried to rush the ship and get away. They captured me and beat me until I blacked out. The next thing I remember is Alex coming into my cell wearing some Outrider outfit and telling me to follow him if I wanted to get away. There was some other Outrider with him, so I guess he had someone helping him get in. Then we separated and were going to meet at the ships on the landing dock. He was about to be discovered, so I came up and hit the officer from behind and we took off. The Outrider who was helping him went to pilot the ship and I saw them about to shoot Alex and screamed for him to close the ramp. He hesitated, so I shoved him in and hit the button and got shot two or three times. That's the last thing I remember until Mrs. Rider telling me to stop fighting her and relax. She said something about a tube and I blacked out and woke up here."

The commander nods, "Well, that seems to match up with what the others have said. Ms. Weber is alive. Her ship was shot down and she crashed onto an asteroid. When she didn't eject the ship, they assumed her dead. She was actually unconscious. A few hours after that, Mr. Hido, who had escaped through an escape ship spotted her com-link signal and found her unconscious in the ship. After assessing her condition and the condition of the fighter, he got in and took off for the outpost. He crashed the ship and in the process caused himself and Ms. Weber more harm. They are currently doing well, but it has taken a good bit of time for them to heal."

"So the only people that died were the four crew members of the first convoy?" Erika asks quietly. The commander nods and Erika sighs relieved. "I know that I'm still in a heap of trouble for that, but at least I haven't killed as many as I thought."

"We are discussing what actions to take against you, I will not deny that. But you have done some good even if you went about it in the wrong way. That will be enough to keep you from death. There is talk of a court martial, but then allowing you to live as a civilian. This is a viable option given your medical situation. The doctors do not feel that you will ever walk again."

Erika nods, accepting the statement. "I will do whatever you deem necessary for my punishment, sir. I know that even though my intentions were noble, I should have come to you when the man contacted me. I suppose I was not thinking clearly."

"Well, what is done cannot be changed, Ms. Kawamura. When you are deemed well enough to be released, you will be confined to your quarters until the matter of your punishment is resolved," the commander states.

"Yes sir," she replies quietly.

The commander nods then turns and heads out of the room towards his office. Plopping down into his chair he clicks on his computer and begins catching up on his communications.

A couple of weeks later, the commander is in his office when he hears a knock at his door. "Come in," he replies, not bothering to look up from his work.

The door opens and April walks in, "Hello, father," she says brightly.

He finishes reading then looks up to her in greeting. "To what do I owe this visit, April?" he asks giving her a tired smile.

"I came to ask how Erika is doing. I heard that she is awake now," April replies.

The commander nods slightly and sighs, "She has been awake for a couple of weeks now and I have discussed her version of the events."

"And?" she asks.

"The stories seem to match. At least close enough that I believe they are all being truthful."

"What's going to happen to her?"

"The current discussion is that they will court martial her and then allow her to live as a civilian. She would have to agree to some sort of monitoring, and live under certain guidelines, but given her physical limitations, I feel that is probably the heaviest penalty they can force upon her, given the statements of the others involved," he replies.

"What was said?" April asks genuinely curious.

"I cannot give you all of the details, April. I can tell you that the others have all made points about how once she realized that she had been used that she went to great effort to stop the plans the Outriders had made. Even nearly losing her life to save Mr. Mackenzie and your husband. If she had not intervened, I don't think things would have turned out as well as they have for any of us. I have made that case to the council, so they will take that into their consideration when they decide on her punishment."

April nods, "Fireball won't even tell me what all happened on that base. He said that perhaps after all of this is over he may tell me, but until then, he can't."

"That is correct. I'm sure you are familiar enough with the regulations to know that he speaks the truth?"

April nods, "Yeah. I know." An uneasy silence falls between them and April walks over to the window and looks out over the vast complex known as Calvary Command. "I think Alex is coming along well with his training. He seems to be picking things up more quickly now."

"It sounds like you are surprised," the commander says.

"Perhaps a little. I don't think anyone could replace Saber. Except for maybe Amanda," April states quietly.

Her father resists the urge to laugh out right and nods slightly, "I had no idea that she would prove to be so useful when I hired her, I guess it's been over three years ago now."

"It seems like she's always been around us, doesn't it?"

"At times, I am inclined to agree with you. Other times it seems like yesterday when Saber contacted me that you were in dire need of medical attention. I still remember how hard he tried to hide the severity of his injuries. I really had no idea he was injured until I arrived on the control deck, and even then he had me convinced it was minor."

"We all were pretty bad off, weren't we?"

The commander nods, "And yet, in spite of how things were all of you have continued to fight."

"We're a rather stubborn group, aren't we?" April asks with a laugh.

The commander laughs, "To put it lightly, yes." He falls silent a moment before getting up and standing beside April, "The day that you first responded to us while in the coma, I was elated. A relief washed over me that nearly made me drop to the

floor," he admits quietly. "And then, when you got so angry at Saber for not waking up, I realized just how much all of you look to each other for support. I saw the hurt and the fear in all of your faces when you realized that he was blind and could not remember anyone. And yet, none of you would abandon him. All of you became rather protective. I don't think anyone can fill such a void in your group dynamics."

"We will do what is necessary. Saber feels that Alex can learn, and I am inclined to agree with him. He has proven himself able under pressure when he got off that ship to bring us the information, most cadets could not be that clear-headed under such circumstances. Saber is a good teacher. Perhaps a bit unorthodox in his methods with Alex, but look at how Amanda turned out, and she had no formal training. He was rather tough on her too from what I've heard."

"I had also heard that. Of course she wanted him to be, perhaps that was her point."

"What do you mean?" April asks, turning to look at him.

"Well, at the time he began teaching her self defense and sword fighting, he was not feeling like he could handle doing much, right?" April nods and he continues, "Well, I heard her say that sometimes, you have to allow the person to prove to them self that they are still capable. In his case, she got him to teach her skills that he has used for his entire life. An almost natural ability, if you will. It brought up his confidence, I noticed a change in him after a couple of weeks. And then after Sean attacked Amanda, he became more determined to teach her to fight. After they had the argument or whatever it was, they both seemed to have some sort of unspoken understanding of each other. Perhaps it was that she treated him as an equal, and not like he was some poor person thrown into a disability that made him respect her. I suppose I could ask him, but I'm not sure he could honestly answer me."

"I figured it was because she would stand up to him. I think he admired that in her. We were always hesitant to argue with him, because we knew that most of the time, he would end up winning an argument. But Amanda seem to take that as a challenge. It almost seemed like he welcomed the intellectual sparring she gave him. She was not afraid to tell him off, that much is for sure," April states.

"I'm sure that even now they have some rather heated discussions. Or rather passionate discussions. But, as you stated, they seem to thrive under such debate. I think it makes them closer in a way."

April laughs, "There were a few times I would have loved to have been within earshot of them." Her father gives her a curious look and she grins before continuing, "Well, that day they disappeared after we found them in that outer building sparring, for instance. He was angry with her when he left that morning, but something happened when she found him. I would have loved to have been privy to that conversation, because whatever was said, that was the beginning of how their relationship developed." The commander nods and April looks back out the window before speaking again, "Have you heard from either of them in the past couple of weeks?" she finally asks.

"About a week ago I talked with Amanda. Saber was resting, his headache was back again. She had called Dr. Izumi and they talked, and then he transferred the call to me. We talked a bit. She's worried about him, but he has tried to not show her how bad he's feeling. It worries me. Dr. Izumi was going over there this morning to do a check up on both of them. As far as I know, he has not come back yet."

"I see. Perhaps it's good news then," April says trying to sound positive.

"I hope so. All of you have gone through enough for two lifetimes," the commander replies.

Amanda is sitting downstairs when Dr. Izumi comes down from the bedroom. He comes and sits beside her, "Well, I think the medication will help his headaches. I should have the results of his scans in a couple of hours. From what I could tell, I don't see anything major. He most likely has another mild concussion. If he can manage to not get knocked around for a few months, he should be back to where he was before you went out this last time."

Amanda nods, looking relieved. "I will do anything I have to to prevent him from going back out. Although I don't think he will put up much of a fight."

Dr. Izumi smiles and then looks her over carefully, "How are you feeling?"

"Tired, sore, hungry all the time. I suppose all of that is normal. I figure that I'm almost seven months along now. I do hate that my balance is so thrown off, it makes the stairs harder to navigate."

Dr. Izumi laughs, "All expectant mothers tend to feel the same way about stairs. I will say that you look well, especially after everything that has happened. I do need to be getting back, please do not hesitate to call me if you or Captain Rider begin to feel bad. I will call you once I have the results of the scans." Amanda nods. "I'm sure that Commander Eagle is waiting for a report. I think he wishes to speak to you, but wanted to make sure you were both up to it before coming here."

"I think it would be fine. I figure I'd leave Saber to rest for a while and just stay down here. He is welcome to come any time he wishes," Amanda says as Dr. Izumi stands up. She stands up and they walk into the kitchen where Thomas and Elaine are talking.

They look up when the two enter and Thomas stands up. "Are you ready to leave, doctor?" Thomas asks, getting a nod in reply. Thomas grabs the keys and they head out the door.

Amanda comes and sits down at the table and sighs as she plops into the chair.

"Are you feeling alright?" Elaine asks eyeing her with concern.

"I'm fine, just tired. Dr. Izumi said he'll call and let us know how the scans come out within the next couple of hours."

A knock at the door causes April and her father to turn towards the door, "Come in," the commander says. The door opens and Dr. Izumi enters. "Ah, we were just discussing whether you had come back yet."

"I've been back about half an hour, sir. I've got the test results for Captain Rider and Ms. Kawamura," Dr. Izumi says as he comes and places three folders down on the desk. April hangs back, but the commander walks over to look. Dr. Izumi look over to April with a questioning look.

"If it's all the same to you, it's fine with me if she stays," the commander replies.

Dr. Izumi nods and April comes over to the desk to look at the contents of the folders. "Well, I'm sure you want to know about Captain Rider first," he begins. The two nod slightly and he continues, "I see evidence of some trauma to his temporal lobe, that could be causing the vision disturbances and headaches. However, I compared it to the scan a few months ago, and the size of affected area has actually decreased. So hopefully, if he can manage to not get in a situation where he hits his head for a while, he should return to how he was before he went out the last time. He will most likely still have some light sensitivity, but he should have good enough vision to do more focal things like read, at least with the glasses I've had made for him. He should be checked every six months for the next few years, on the off chance that a hidden issue comes up." He pauses and then after being sure that neither person had any questions, he continues. "As for Mrs. Rider, she is doing rather well. The usual aches and pains of pregnancy, but overall, I am pleased with her progress. From the ultrasound images everything appears fine with both children. Although I do not think she will make it to the forty week mark. I give her maybe five more weeks." April smiles broadly and the doctor chuckles. "Of course I didn't tell her that, as she is too worried about her husband," he adds, hinting not to say anything.

"I won't say a word, doctor," April replies.

"And now for Ms. Kawamura," the doctor states with a sigh. "Her spinal cord was nearly severed. The likely hood of her ever walking again is extremely low. After her release, I assume the proceedings for her court martial will convene?" Commander Eagle nods. "Well, I would like to go on record as saying that I recommend that she be dishonorably discharged and then allowed to live in a nearby colony with electronic monitoring for the duration of her life. She may still need health care on occasion, and since she was injured while trying to save fellow officers, I recommend that she be allowed annual check ups with me. I am aware of her situation and it would be better to be able to keep a close eye on her."

"That seems to be the general consensus of the council from the members that I have spoken with. If you think she is as physically able as she can be to come to the hearing, she should. A few of the others wish to speak on her behalf, and the council has allowed time for them to do so."

"When are they wanting to have the hearing?" Dr. Izumi asks.

"Friday morning at eight."

The doctor nods, "She should be able to attend without much difficulty. She is doing better on managing to get around in the wheelchair I have provided for her."

Friday morning arrives and the council chamber is packed with people. The council is seated and everyone falls silent. General Whitehawk comes up to the podium and begins speaking, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have come this morning to decide on the fate of cadet Ms. Erika Kawamura. She has been charged with treason." Several murmurs are heard and he holds up his hands to silence the crowd. "That being said, I want all of the circumstance that led to the events to be brought here before the council. I feel that given the unique circumstances this case is not entirely as cut and dry as most cases of this nature tend to be. So I will be asking those that have previously told me they wish to speak, to come forward at this time." Fireball, Alex, Yuri, and Gabby all get up and approach the general. "Mr. Hido, Why don't you give your statement first."

"Yes sir," Yuri replies and steps up to the podium...

It is mid-afternoon and everyone has just come back from deliberations and they bring Erika to the front to face the council. General Whitehawk steps up to the podium and takes a breath before speaking, "After much deliberation and some rather heated debates, we have decided to allow a medical discharge for Ms. Kawamura." He looks to Erika, who looks surprised for a moment, then nods accepting the decision and he continues, "As for her punishment, it has been taken into account that she took steps that has most likely saved millions, so she will not be given a dishonorable discharge." Several people gasp in surprise, but he presses on, "Obviously given her medical state, she is unable to serve as a cadet. Since we are giving her a medical discharge, we will not give her prison time. She will be release as a civilian, but has agreed to electronic monitoring indefinitely. We feel this is a reasonable punishment given what the circumstances are. Ms. Kawamura, we have found you an apartment that is wheelchair accessible. It will be ready for you on Monday. Until then you are confined to your quarters. You may have visitors. You will report in an hour to Dr. Izumi to receive your monitoring device. You may travel freely within the civilian colony you are placed, but will have to apply for permission if you wish to leave the colony. Do you have any questions, Ms. Kawamura?"

"No sir," she replies.

"Very well, we are adjourned," the general states and the crowds begin to disperse.

Hope you like this so far :-) Let me know.

Kapitel 31: A Few Adjustments

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 30: A Few Adjustments

"Okay Alex, let's see how you do in this thing," April says as he acclimates himself to the pilot pod and the controls.

Alex fastens his harness and nods as he grips the controls and hits a series of buttons. "Everything looks good so far, April," he replies.

"Then slowly bring it out of the hangar," April replies.

Alex does as instructed and slowly he manages to get the machine to move forward. "I don't see how this can possibly be equivalent to the renegade units that the Outriders have," Alex grumbles as he stumbles out of the hangar.

"From the intel we have from the wrecked units and the data boxes, the weapons should be as good as what they have. We just need to work on making them more simple to control," April replies. "It seems like it shouldn't be hard, but so far, I'm not liking the results."

Alex manages to steady the unit and begins walking at a more stable pace. "I think I've almost got the hang of this," he says as he moves a bit faster.

"Looking a little better, Alex. Think you can pull the blaster?" April asks.

"I'll try," Alex replies hesitantly as he hits a few buttons and manages to pull the blaster.

"Good, now try and hit the target."

Alex aims and fires, barely hitting the target, and nowhere near where he thought he was aiming. "I don't think I'm too good at this," he grumbles.

"Try again. It takes practice, Mr. Mackenzie," Commander Eagle says over the com.

"Yes sir." Alex tries again, getting much the same results.

He continues practicing for nearly an hour before April tells him to return to the hangar. He climbs out of the machine drenched in sweat and removes his helmet. "Can't you make it cooler in there?" he asks as he walks over to where April and the others are.

April shrugs. "I suppose it's possible, though it shouldn't be too bad in there. I'll look into in a bit to check the temperature readings. Perhaps the cooling system is not quite right yet," she says not bothering to look up from her screens, that are quickly flashing different readings. She sighs in frustration. "It seems like it should be simple enough for any one of us to operate."

"Want me to try, April?" Fireball asks placing a hand on her shoulder to try and calm her.

April sighs, "Not yet. I need to look into the temperature readings. I don't want one of you to burn up in there. That would sort of defeat the purpose of having the unit, if the pilot is rendered unconscious from being overheated."

"I suppose there's a bit of truth to that. Take a break. You've been working on this non-stop for three days. I know you've not taken more than an hour's break at a time. Step back and let the computers do their readouts and look it over after you step away for a while," Fireball says as he turns her towards him.

April nods, suddenly feeling the exhaustion of the last few weeks hitting her. "I just feel that we need to get this done, Fireball," she says quietly. "I don't want them to gain the upper hand. We might not come out as well as we have before again."

"I know, April," Fireball replies. "But killing yourself to make it happen isn't doing us any favors either. If they attacked right now, I'm not sure you'd be any use to us in the Bismarck, and I need you to be able to help us. Alex isn't fully trained yet. He's doing well, but he's still not up to speed. We are all still having to learn to adapt to his different skill sets and adjust how things are run accordingly."

"You're right. Let's go and get some food, then maybe I'll take a brief nap," she says and they turn to head out of the hangar.

Later that afternoon, Alex, Colt and Fireball are at the hangar with April. "Okay, I think I've got the cooling system fixed. So hopefully, you two won't have the same problem that Alex did. I also think I managed to make the controls a bit less touchy. Which one of you wants to try it out?" April asks looking between the men.

Colt and Fireball look a bit apprehensive, but Fireball steps forward and nods. "I'll try," he says with a grin. "Maybe then I can finally get you to take a real break."

April nods and turns to the screens. "Climb in and let me know when you're ready through the com-link, okay?"

"Roger that, April," he replies as he gets into the unit. He fastens in and turns on the systems. "How's it look so far?" he asks.

April nods satisfied, "So far, so good, Fireball. Start moving when you're ready."

"Okay." He hits a few keys and the machine slowly starts walking forward. He isn't

steady at first, but quickly adjusts. "It's still a bit touchy, but easy enough to compensate."

"All right. I've got the targets ready for you. Fire when ready," April states.

Fireball moves a bit to familiarize himself with the controls then goes and fires at several targets in rapid succession. After firing, he stops and turns toward April in the hangar. "How'd I do?" he asks.

April scans the targets and nods, "Better than Alex, but you've had a bit more practice. How did it feel to you?"

"Not as easy to maneuver as the Bismarck, but after some practice I could adapt to it, I think," Fireball replies.

April sighs, "I'm trying to make it easier to maneuver than the Bismarck, not harder. You care to take a stab at it, Cowboy?" she asks turning to Colt.

Colt nods, "Sure thing, April," Colt replies and looks to Fireball. "Let's see if I can do better than you did, Raceboy."

Fireball laughs. "If you can do better, more power to you. It would make my life easier. I'd get my wife back," Fireball retorts and Colt laughs as he suits up and gets into the unit.

Colt buckles in. "Let me know when you're ready for me to move, April," he says as he hits several keys and studies the various controls.

"Anytime you are, Colt," she replies.

Colt hits a few buttons and heads out of the hangar. "Not too bad, so far," he mutters to himself. It takes a minute to move steadily, but he figures it out quickly and is moving faster than the other two had previously.

"Showoff!" Fireball retorts over the com-link.

Colt laughs. "Told you I'd do better," Colt says with a smirk. "I'm ready for shootin' practice whenever you are, April."

"Fire at will, Colt," April replies as she triggers several targets to pop up at random locations around him. Colt fires as they come up and hitting all of them. A few of them are directly on target. "Good Job, Cowboy!" April exclaims as Colt returns to the hangar.

Colt climbs out a minute later and removes his helmet. "It's still a little awkward to move. Almost like the sensors are slow to respond or something. But after watching Alex and Fireball, I knew to purposely wait to fire a second or so later than I would normally. It gave the suit time to get to where I intended it to be when I fired."

April nods and types everything in as Colt is speaking, so that she has notes to work on. "How was the temp? You still look a little red in the face," April comments.

Colt shrugs. "Perhaps it is a little warmer than I'm used to. It could be because it's tighter quarters too. You have to concentrate more and pay attention to everything, where as on the ship, each of us look at certain things and can make adjustments as needed. In the suit, you have to be alert to everything. It takes a big toll on ya if you aren't used to it," he replies honestly. "If you made the cockpit any bigger, you'd need more than one pilot, and the controls would be more difficult than they are now, so maybe we'll have to get different suits made to wear when we pilot in these new units. That is, if you ever get one past the prototype phase. Suits that have a cooling core or something, maybe."

April types the comments into the computer and nods. "That might not be a bad thought, Colt," she says sounding impressed. "I had not thought about us wearing a different suit in the fighter. Not a bad idea."

"Now, would you please come and take a real break?" Fireball asks.

April continues typing, but finally looks up. "I guess I could once I finish inputting this data. All of you could use a rest too, I'm sure." The three men nod and she smiles. "How about we go and eat after I'm done?"

"Would you mind if Sarah came along?" Alex asks hesitantly.

"Sure. She's welcome to come along. I'm sure Colt is bringing Robin, right?" April asks looking to Colt who nods.

Alex smiles, "Thank you. I think she's been a bit stir crazy. We've been so busy these past few months that she hasn't gotten to see much of me other than at night."

"Are you leaving Tyler in the child center or bringing him along?" Colt asks casually.

Alex looks confused for a moment, "I have a choice?"

"Sure. If you bring him, I'll bring Wil and we'll have to eat some place that's family-friendly, otherwise, the boys stay at the child center and we all go out to a more adult-centered place," Colt replies.

"Adult-centered?" Alex asks hesitantly.

Fireball laughs, realizing what Alex is asking. "Not that kind of adult, Alex. He just means some place they serve alcohol," Fireball replies after he stops laughing.

"Of course with Colt, one can never be too sure," April adds with a smirk, causing all of them to start laughing.

After a few minutes, they all calm down and April looks to all of them. "I say let's meet in a couple of hours. How does that sound?" she asks, getting nods in agreement from

the others. "Okay. Meet back here then." They disperse and go their own ways.

"So, has anyone talked with Saber or Amanda lately?" Alex asks the group as they sit around chatting and sipping on their drinks after dinner.

"I talked to Saber about a week ago, I guess," April says. "He said they were doing okay. His vision still isn't as good as it had been, but he can see well enough with his glasses. Amanda is pretty much on bed rest now until she has the twins."

Colt laughs, "I don't see that going very well. She's the type to keep moving."

"Yeah, I know. I wonder if Saber is going to survive this or not. He sounded rather fatigued," April says allowing the worry to show in her voice. "I hope she's not having problems that he doesn't want to tell us about."

"I'm sure he'd tell us if there was something wrong. Maybe they just aren't getting much sleep. I'm sure with the twins, she can't be too comfortable. She's due any time now, isn't she?" Fireball asks.

April nods. "I think Saber said that the doctor was going there tomorrow, unless she went into labor sooner than that," she replies.

"I would hope that someone would call us to let us know if she does, I'd like to know," Colt says.

"Father said that he would keep in touch with Thomas and Elaine, so if anything happened, I'm sure we'd hear about it, unless he was instructed not to tell us for some reason," April replies.

"Well, I don't think they wouldn't want us to know, so let's take it as if everything is fine. Maybe we can see about going to visit them tomorrow," Fireball says as he finishes his drink.

They pay their bill and chat as they return to Calvary Command. As they pull in Commander Eagle is approaching the front gate. "I was just going to tell the guards to send for you. The com-links are down, we don't know why. We have had a sighting of possible enemy ships nearing Saber's home colony. I think you should launch in the Bismarck immediately to investigate."

"We'll meet you at the hangar, father," April replies and Fireball floors it after being allowed onto the base, the Commander having already left ahead of them.

Alex looks at Sarah, "I'm sorry, but I have to go," he says apologetically after getting out of the car near the hangar.

"I know you do, Alex. I'll go and get Tyler and we'll wait for you," Sarah replies. "Just please be careful." Alex nods. "I will," he replies and kisses her briefly before turning and heading towards the hangar after Fireball and April.

"You know the routine," Colt says to Robin, who nods.

"Yeah. I'm used to it. I'll get Wil and we'll be fine. Go do what you do and come back safely," she replies.

Colt kisses her and smiles, "You know I will," he says before turning and running after the others.

Robin gently places a hand on Sarah's shoulder. "You never get used to it, you just learn to accept it and pray that they return in as good as condition that they leave you in," she says quietly.

Sarah turns to Robin, tears close to falling and nods. "I don't know how you manage to stay calm, Ms. Robin. I want to drop to the ground crying."

"I did that once," she replies with a chuckle, "It doesn't do either of you any good. You both feel worse for it. He feels worse for leaving you, and you feel worse for making him feel worse. It's better to focus your energy on praying that they all come back, than to focus on their departure. Also, having the boys will be a nice distraction." Sarah relaxes a bit and Robin takes her hand, "Come on, let's get the boys and we can go to my place and they can play a while."

Sarah nods and squeezes Robin's hand in thanks, "Okay," she replies before releasing Robin's hand. They head off to pick up the children.

"Load the prototype onto the Bismarck. If there's time, take it down to the Outpost there and store it there, in the event we need it," the commander states as Colt arrives. The soldiers nearby do as they are ordered.

"It's not entirely cleared yet," April protests as the prototype is loaded onto the Bismarck.

"We have a good team there that can work on it. You have your notes, send them to the team at the outpost with instructions to be making the necessary changes. That way, if we have to, we can try and utilize it. I am hoping it won't come to that."

"Yes sir," April replies and clicks several buttons and closes out the computer. "Ready." The others nod.

"Good. Besides, if this is all for nothing, you should be there when Amanda has the twins, which could be any day now. Dr. Izumi left this morning to do an examination on her and to see how Saber is doing. I've yet to hear back from him, so I am hoping everything is fine," her father replies.

"Let's hope all is well on all fronts," Fireball says as he turns and enters the ship.

"Yeah, all of us can use some good news for a change," Colt states as he goes in behind Fireball.

Alex nods as he files in, April going in last and closing the ramp behind her. "Ready boys?" she asks.

"Ready," they reply and Fireball takes off from Calvary Command.

"We're approaching the place where the enemy ship was sighted, Fireball," Alex states after scanning his screens. "So far, I've not seen any sign of of the enemy ship."

"It's around here somewhere, keep an eye out," Colt states.

"We'll keep heading to the outpost, unless something shows up," Fireball says.

Alex nods and continues scanning the screens. About a half hour passes when the alarm starts sounding. "What the?" Alex mutters as he starts hitting several keys.

"What is it, Alex?" April asks.

"Something is coming and fast from behind us! I can't get a fix on it for a visual," he replies.

"It's got a lock on us!" Colt says as he hits several buttons.

"Pulling up our shields as fast as I can," April states just as the ship is hit and they are all knocked out of their saddle units.

They scramble to get up and Alex runs a scan of the area. "It looks like some sort of renegade unit," he says.

"It sure hit like something stronger than one," Colt says as he gets seated once more.

"Yes it did," Fireball replies.

"Here it comes again!" Alex says. The unit fires at them and they barely manage to evade it.

"That was too close. Going to challenge phase!" Fireball exclaims and he hits the button to begin the transformation.

"Challenge Phase I complete," Alex says as the renegade fires at them again.

Colt grabs the blaster and fires back, cancelling out the enemy fire. "Well, what now?"

The unit charges for them, pulling a laser-bladed weapon. "Damn! Fire with everything we've got and move back quickly!" Alex says as Colt fires and they narrowly manage to thwart the attack. "I think we need to go to Phase II," Alex says.

Fireball nods. "Right," he replies as he hits the button and they go into Phase II.

Alex pulls the blade just as the unit comes at them again. It swings and they manage

to block the bow, but then are hit by a second blade, which causes a good bit of damage. Alarms start going off and power flickers. "Where did that come from?" Alex asks aloud. "I didn't see the second blade." He starts hitting buttons and then gasps in shock.

"What?" April asks.

"It's a different type of unit," he mutters. "It can't be!"

"What, Alex?" April and Fireball ask simultaneously.

"It has weapons from the Tirpitz," Alex replies in shock.

Colt lets out a whistle, "That's not good."

"No kidding, Colt," Fireball retorts as they manage to breakaway from the unit momentarily.

"We need to get away from this thing. It could do us in!" April says urgently.

"I'm trying but it's not letting up. Whoever is piloting that thing is relentless," Fireball says as Alex parries another attack.

"Well, we've got to do something," Alex says. "It has to have some sort of weak spot."

"We just need to find it," Colt states.

"I've got the scanners running, so we can see how it's made and what weapons it has," Alex says as he continues fighting with the sword.

"Won't do us any good if we die here!" Fireball quips.

"I'm doing the best I can! If you think you can do better, then get over here and do so!" Alex says frustrated, just as they are hit hard with a beam then the sword.

The ship starts falling. "I can't pull out of this!" Fireball says as the alarms continue blaring. "We're either going to crash on the colony or get blown up."

They are hit again by an array of beams, one causes an explosion and a minor fire. A sprinkler system quickly douses the fire. "Our shields are down," April says as they are hit again and start spiraling towards the colony.

"I'm trying to get some control of this ship!" Fireball says as he fights to right the ship. "I think I can crash us near the outpost. Buckle in, it's gonna be a hard landing." Everyone straps in and braces for impact. Fireball manages steer them towards a vacant area not far from the outpost. "Here goes." The ship hits the ground hard and catches fire and the crew is knocked out from the impact.

Kapitel 32: Worth Fighting For

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 31: Worth Fighting For

"How are you feeling, Love?" Saber says as he enters the room carrying a tray.

Amanda looks up and sighs, "Better than I was. I am still a bit tired, but hungry."

Saber chuckles as he places the tray down on the desk. "Good thing I brought some food, then," he says as he brings a plate on a tray and places it on her lap.

Amanda accepts the food gratefully and immediately takes a bite. "Thank you for bringing this up here. Maybe after I eat something, I'll feel like getting up and moving around," she says between bites of her sandwich.

"I don't want you to over do it, Amanda. I know it's getting harder for you to get around," Saber replies.

Amanda rolls her eyes and nods. "Yeah, I know. I feel so useless," she mutters.

"You're not, Love. You're just a bit more...off balance," Saber says, getting a look of disbelief from Amanda. "What?" he asks innocently.

She laughs as she pushes the tray aside, "Nothing. I suppose this is just how it is to be pregnant with twins," she says sounding a bit frustrated. "I can't even put on my own shoes, not that I can go anywhere right now," she adds as an afterthought.

"Do you want to go downstairs for a while?" Saber asks. Amanda nods. He comes over and offers her a hand to help her up. She takes it and gets up with his help. "Then let's go." They head downstairs just as Elaine comes into the sitting room.

"Ah, I see he's finally letting you out of your room, Lady Amanda," Elaine says with a hint of amusement.

"I didn't forbid her from leaving, Elaine," Saber retorts defensively.

Amanda chuckles, "I just haven't felt like doing much. But I'm rather bored, so I asked him to help me come down here for a bit. At least this is a change of scenery," she says as she plops down onto the couch.

Elaine nods. "Can I get you anything?" she asks.

"No thank you. I just really wanted to get out of bed for a while. I just ate, so I'm good for now," Amanda replies.

"Well, let me know if you change your mind. I'll be in the kitchen," Elaine says as she heads back into the kitchen.

Saber sits down beside Amanda and sighs, running his hands across his face.

Amanda looks at him with concern, "Are you alright, Saber?"

He shrugs, "Just a bit tired. My headache is a dull constant pain, but at least I can still see. I'm also worried about you," he adds quietly.

"I'm fine, Saber. A little uncomfortable, but I don't think I'm having any medical issues," Amanda replies.

"You're still having nightmares," he says quietly, casting her a sideways glance..

Amanda looks down and nods. "Yes, I am," she admits quietly before looking up to meet his gaze. "But eventually, I'll get past them. I can't make them stop, Saber. I don't have that much control over my dreams. I wish I did, but I don't," she says obviously frustrated. "I am sleeping, perhaps not as much as I should be, but it's enough. I also worry about you. I know you're feeling worse, you tell me otherwise, but the look in your eyes betrays you."

Saber starts to object, but thinks better of it. "I would tell you if I thought it was much worse, Amanda," he states quietly. "Yes, I am still having the headaches, and yes, they have been a bit worse than I've admitted to you. I have told Dr. Izumi, and he is going to come as soon as he can and do some scans and tests, just to make sure something isn't going on that we don't know about. But I am also worried about you. Most nights, you are crying in your sleep and you're restless. The couple of times I have awakened you, it was because you were trembling and screaming. I feel partly responsible for that. It is because of me that you have been put in the situations that have made you so distraught in your dreams," he says, his voice breaking as he finishes his statement.

Amanda studies his face for some time, trying to find the words she wants to say. Finally, she takes a breath, "It is because of you that I have this life I have now, Saber," she says firmly. "Do I wish I could have met you under different circumstances? Yes, but it was not to be. Going through the things we have together, I feel has made us closer. I don't think I would have as strong a bond with anyone else as the one that I share with you. I have learned that if something is worth anything, you have to fight for it. You understand me in a way no one else can, sometimes, I think you know what I'm thinking before I do." Saber smiles weakly at her comment, but she continues, "I honestly don't know what my life would have been like had I not met you, but I don't think I would have ever met anyone that I can trust like I trust you. I don't think I would have ever considered having children if I had been with anyone else, and yet with you, it seems like something that is just a natural occurrence." She chuckles and smiles, "I suppose now I'm rambling," She sighs to catch her breath. "I'm sorry," she mutters as an afterthought.

Saber reaches over and takes her hand, "I just wish things had not been so hard for you. I do not regret that we met under the circumstances that we did. Had we not, we most likely would not have ever had the chance to know one another. If I lose my vision completely again, I know that you don't care, and that puts me at ease around you. I know that probably sounds strange, but it does."

"I understand what you mean, and it doesn't sound strange to me at all. I know that the odds are that eventually, you will most likely lose some, if not all of your vision, and I am resigned to that. I hope and pray that it doesn't go completely, but I know that if it does, we can and will adapt. We have before, and we can again." She takes his hand and rests it on her stomach, not letting go of it and he moves so she can lean against him. They sit quietly for some time, eventually both drifting off to sleep. The sound of the doorbell jostles them awake. They look up to see Elaine beside them smiling.

"I was just about to come and wake you for dinner," she says.

"Dinner?" Saber asks, still not fully awake.

"Aye, dinner. You two have been asleep for a couple of hours. You both looked peaceful, so I didn't try and wake you," Elaine replies with a hint of amusement in her voice.

"I thought I heard the doorbell?" Amanda asks groggily.

"Oh, Dr. Izumi has arrived. Thomas is helping him put his things in his room and they are setting up another room for the scans."

"So he plans on staying a few days?" Saber asks as Amanda shifts to sit up a bit more.

Elaine nods. "He said that he'll be staying now until the babies are born," she replies, getting a look of surprise from the couple.

"But that could be weeks away," Amanda says confused.

"Aye, that it could, but I don't think it will be," Elaine says giving them both a smile and heading back towards the kitchen. "Dinner will be on the table in about ten minutes," she says as the kitchen door swings closed behind her leaving the couple looking blankly after her.

"She seems in a mood," Amanda comments.

"Aye, she does. At least she's cheerful," Saber adds dryly.

"I wonder why she thinks that I'll have the babies sooner than the due date? I don't feel any different. Besides, I think I have like seven more weeks or so."

"You noticed the glance she gave you when she said that, didn't you?" Saber asks.

Amanda nods. "Then perhaps Dr. Izumi has said something to her."

"I suppose that's possible. But I don't feel like I'm going into labor or anything," Amanda states.

Saber shrugs, "I say just blow it off and let's go eat. Things will happen as they happen. No use on worrying, right?"

"You're right," she replies with a nod as she moves enough so that Saber can help her up.

Saber gets up, then helps her up and they go into the dining room, where Dr. Izumi and Thomas have arrived.

"Ah, there you are. Good evening to you both, I apologize for not arriving sooner, but I had to run a few checks on some soldiers at the outpost." Dr. Izumi says cheerfully, as he sits down at the table.

Saber and Amanda make their way to the table and sit down just as Elaine brings out the food.

"Here we go," she says as she puts the final plate in front of Saber.

"Elaine, won't you and Thomas join us? It would make our conversation easier if we all know what is going to be happening," Saber asks.

Elaine looks like she is going to object, but meeting his gaze, she decides against it and nods. "Of course, Saber. We'll be out in a moment," she replies before heading back to the kitchen.

"Dr. Izumi, you said you had to check on some soldiers at the outpost, is everything okay there?" Amanda asks.

"Oh, yes. They evidently had spread around a virus that several of the cadets caught. Nothing serious, but I put them all on some anti-viral medicine. Nothing really to worry about, it just delayed my arrival here, so for that I apologize."

"Not to worry. We are glad you found time that you could come here. I'm afraid I don't travel too well as of late," Amanda replies.

A couple hours later, Dr. Izumi and Saber come out of the study, Saber is wearing a darker pair of glasses, but seems to be moving normally. Amanda looks up from the couch her concern evident, "Are you okay?" she asks.

Saber nods. "Just a little more light sensitive. He dilated my eyes, so he could do a more thorough exam," Saber replies as he sits down beside her. "He is changing the prescription slightly, he thinks that may be the cause of the headaches. He didn't really find anything else wrong."

Dr. Izumi comes over and sits across from them in a vacant chair and looks Amanda over. "You look rather well, Mrs. Rider. How are you feeling?"

"Other than tired and helpless, not too bad," Amanda replies, getting a kind smile from the doctor.

"Well, I would like to do an exam on you, if you are up to it," Dr. Izumi says.

Amanda nods slightly. "I suppose that would be all right. Where do you want to do it?"

"I think you'd be most comfortable on your bed, but if you'd rather stay downstairs, we could use the couch in the study so that you have some privacy."

Amanda thinks for a minute before answering, "I think perhaps the bedroom would be best. That way I can rest afterwards."

Dr. Izumi nods, "Then why don't you head on to your room, and I'll get the portable ultrasound machine from my room and bring it in." He turns to Saber, "You are coming too, Captain?"

"Yes sir, I plan on being there," he replies as he stands up and helps Amanda get up. They leave and head to their room and Amanda gets ready and lays down before Dr. Izumi comes in.

"Well, Mrs. Rider, everything looks good. You have dropped a little, which could be a sign of impending labor, but unless the children turn, we will have to deliver via cesarean. In the case of twins, it isn't uncommon, but we will wait and see. Technically, you are not due for five or six more weeks, but you are within what we refer to as a safety zone timewise. If you delivered anytime now, you and the children should not have any ill effects. They seem to have fully developed lungs and such and are a good size for their gestational age. So unless something comes up, I plan on staying here until after you have the babies," Dr. Izumi says as he cleans up from the exam and looks her over. "I'll be down the hall if you need me for anything."

"Thank you, doctor," Amanda says sounding fatigued.

Saber gets up from his chair and escorts Dr. Izumi to his room, pushing the ultrasound machine in front of him. "So everything seems fine?" Saber asks quietly as they make their way down the hall.

Dr. Izumi stops and smiles at Saber. "Yes, Captain Rider, your wife is doing fine. In spite of everything, she is doing perfectly normal," he replies as he opens his door and enters the room, Saber following behind him. "I will however warn you that she could go into labor at any time."

Saber stops suddenly and looks at him with a surprised expression.

"I don't think she has more than a couple of days to wait, if you want me to be honest."

"But you told her a few weeks," Saber says after finding his voice.

"I don't want to alarm her over every little pain. If she knows that she's closer to labor than she believes, she'll more than likely worry herself into a more premature labor. I'm telling you, so that you will keep a closer eye on her. It is the reason that I am staying here. I don't see the point of leaving, just to have to come right back." He notices that Saber tenses up and comes and places a hand on his shoulder. "She'll be fine, Captain. After all that she has been through, this should be nothing," he says trying to be reassuring.

Saber relaxes a bit. "Thank you, doctor," Saber says quietly. "I'll let you know if anything changes."

Dr. Izumi nods and takes the machine and rolls it into a corner. "Goodnight, Captain Rider."

"Goodnight, sir," Saber replies and returns to his room.

Several hours later, Saber is jolted awake by the ground shaking from a powerful force and what sounds like several explosions. He sits up quickly and looks around. Amanda is awake and looking around as well.

"What was that?" she asks hesitantly.

"I'm not sure," he replies as he gets up out of bed and flicks on a lamp. "It didn't sound close, but I'll go see if I can find out anything."

Amanda nods. "I think I'll wait here."

Saber nods and steps out his room and looks around. He sees Dr. Izumi come out from his room looking confused.

"What is happening, Captain?" Dr. Izumi asks as he walks over to Saber.

"I'm not sure. I'll go see if Thomas has heard of anything," Saber replies as he starts down the stairs. Dr. Izumi follows him and they are met in the sitting room by Thomas and Elaine, both wearing worried expressions.

"You heard it too, sir?" Thomas asks as they meet up in the sitting room.

"Aye. But I have heard no air raid sirens or anything else warning us of some sort of attack," Saber replies.

"Perhaps it was just a meteor," Elaine offers.

"It would have to be a rather substantial one, to cause such a shake," Saber states. "But I wouldn't rule out the possibility." The group goes to the back porch and they all study the sky silently for several minutes. "I don't see any signs of anything

abnormal," Saber says to no one in particular. "No flickering lights, so I don't think a battle is going on, I suppose that whatever it was is over. Unless we hear otherwise, I say we should go back to bed."

The others mutter in agreement and they all go their separate ways. Saber is just passing Dr. Izumi and heading back to his room when the doctor gasps suddenly. "Are you all right, doctor?" he asks.

"Yes. I just remembered that I never called to report in to Commander Eagle," Dr. Izumi replies.

Saber chuckles, "I would just wait until morning now. If you called him this late, he would think that something was wrong."

"I suppose you're right. I'll call him first thing, after I check on your wife's progress."

"Progress?" Saber asks.

"Yes, she basically is in labor now, though just not active labor yet. Of course that could change at any time, so do not hesitate to come and get me if you feel you should need me."

Saber nods. "Thank you, doctor. I'll let you know," Saber replies and he goes on to his room, closing the door behind him.

Amanda looks up nervously as he enters the room, "Is everything okay?" she asks.

Saber nods, "So far as we can tell. I figure that we may as well try and get some rest," he replies sounding fatigued. He climbs back into bed beside her and she moves slightly closer to him. He relaxes a bit and reaches over and flicks off the lamp before eventually drifting off to sleep.

"Saber?" Amanda says urgently. He stirs a bit. "Saber, please wake up." Amanda says again fear creeping into her tone.

He realizes her tone is different and he opens his eyes quickly and looks around, a little bit of daylight coming into the room from around the curtain. "Amanda?" he says looking over towards her. He can tell from her face something isn't right. "What's wrong, Love?" he asks instantly fully awake.

"I'm not sure. I feel sick, like I want to throw up and I hurt really bad," she replies honestly, not bothering to hide the fear evident in her voice.

Saber gets up quickly. "I'll get Dr. Izumi," he says calmly and steps out of the room and rushes down the hall, knocking on the doctor's door.

Dr. Izumi comes out quickly, "What is it?" he asks upon seeing the concerned expression on Saber's face.

"I think something is wrong. She says she feels sick and is hurting rather badly," Saber replies.

The doctor nods. "Let me get my bag and I'll be right there. Go and get Elaine, I may need some assistance. You may be there, if you wish," he replies. Stepping back into his room he changes quickly and comes out carrying a bag. "Go, I'll be with her."

Saber nods and rushes down the stairs as the doctor heads into the room he shares with Amanda. He goes through the sitting room and enters the kitchen. Elaine comes into the kitchen from her quarters.

"Good morning, Saber. You're up a bit early, aren't you?" she asks.

Saber nods. "I think Amanda may be in labor. Dr. Izumi asked me to come and get you. He said he might need some help," Saber replies, fighting to remain calm.

Elaine looks shocked for a moment then nods. "I'm going to change, then I'll be right up. You go ahead, I can tell you want to see about her," Elaine says with a smile.

"Thank you, Elaine," he replies and he rushes up the back stairs to his room. The doctor looks up when he enters, Amanda laying flat on her back at the edge of the bed. "Elaine is on her way," he says to the unasked question. He then comes up to the other side of the bed and looks at her face, "Are you alright?" he asks quietly.

Amanda grimaces in pain, causing Saber to flinch and he instinctively grabs her hand, she takes it and squeezes it hard, trying to fight off her pain. "I'm sorry," she finally says weakly. Elaine comes into the room and offers what help she can.

After a while, Dr. Izumi looks to Saber, "We're going to have to do a cesarean. The babies don't have room to turn and her water has broken. Are you going to stay in here?"

Saber nods. "I'm not leaving her," he says firmly.

Dr. Izumi nods. "Then your job is to keep her calm. Keep your back turned from us, and pay no attention to what Ms. Elaine and I are doing. Everything will be fine," he says to Saber. He then looks to Amanda, "Mrs. Rider, I have to give you a shot that is going to numb you for a while. You should feel some pressure when I cut you open, but nothing more. Tell me if you feel anything worse than pressure, okay?" Amanda nods. "Good. I promise, everything is going to go fine."

Thomas is in the sitting room when the doorbell rings. He casts a glance to the upstairs then gets up and answers it.

"Hello Thomas, I need to see Dr. Izumi immediately. He's not answering his phone," Commander Eagle states as he steps inside the foyer.

"Dr. Izumi is unavailable at the moment, sir," Thomas replies as he leads the commander into the sitting room.

"Why? Is he not here?" the commander asks confused.

Thomas shakes his head, "Oh, he's here, sir. But Lady Amanda has gone into labor. It began about three hours ago. There have evidently been some complications, given how long I've been waiting. Elaine and Saber are both with her and the doctor."

Commander Eagle sits down and sighs. "I can really use him, but I am glad that he is here. We have pulled a couple of the civilian doctors in to help us."

"What has happened, sir?" Thomas asks concerned.

"The Bismarck was engaged last night on its way to the outpost. It came to investigate an enemy ship that had been spotted near here. During the fight, it sustained heavy damage and crashed just outside of the property."

"So that is the shaking and explosion we heard and felt last night," Thomas says quietly.

Commander Eagle nods and then continues his explanation, "The crew is alive, but injured. Several other people were burned while getting the crew out of the ship. The ship is pretty much decimated. We did manage to save the prototype weapon that it was transporting to the outpost."

Thomas shakes his head. "That is not good news. However, I don't think it is wise for me to interrupt them at the current time, sir," he says.

Commander Eagle smiles, "No, I don't think so either. I am glad he is here. Please let him know that I am here as soon as you are able."

"I will, sir," Thomas replies. "It has been a good while since Elaine and Saber went back to the room. I've not heard much noise or commotion upstairs, that is a bit worrisome. I trust that Elaine would come and tell me if something were wrong, so I am going on the assumption that things are going as well as they can be."

Thomas and Commander Eagle talk for awhile when Elaine and Saber come downstairs. "Oh Thomas!" Elaine says happily, "Come look at the wee ones."

"I take it everything went well?" Thomas says as he gets up, Commander Eagle gets up with him.

"Amanda did well," Saber replies. "Doctor Izumi is doing the final checks on her now, but she's sleeping soundly." He looks up from the baby in his arms, "Commander Eagle! Thomas must of called you," Saber pauses and looks around, "Where are the others?"

"The babies aren't why I came, Saber," Commander Eagle says, "But congratulations," he adds with a smile. Then with a more serious expression, "I came looking to see Doctor Izumi."

Dr. Izumi is coming down the stairs and hears his name. "Commander? What's going on?" he asks.

"Doctor, I need you to come with me, there's been an incident," Commander Eagle replies.

"What's going on?" Saber asks.

"The Bismarck got into a battle and ended up crashing near the outpost," Commander Eagle replies.

Saber gasps in surprise, "Are the others..." he stops afraid to finish his thought.

"As far as I'm aware they have all survived the crash, but I need all the medical personnel I can get to help."

"Let me grab my bag," Dr Izumi says as he turns to head back up the stairs. "Amanda should be fine now, and Elaine knows what to do if there's a problem," he adds as he heads up the stairs.

"While we're waiting for him why don't you introduce me to the two newest members of your family Saber?" Commander Eagle asks looking at the two little ones.

"This one here is Moira Grace," Saber says holding the baby in his arms up slightly, "And Elaine is holding Eryn Blair."

"Twin girls?" Commander Eagle says surprised.

"Evidently," Saber replies with a chuckle.

"Well, congratulations again," Commander Eagle says placing a hand on Saber's shoulder.

Dr. Izumi comes down with his bag, "I'm ready, I hope you have coffee," he says as he comes up next to Saber.

"Plenty of the Cavalry Command special," the commander replies dryly.

"Ah, more of that swill that could replace motor oil," the doctor mutters.

"Don't worry, Doctor," Commander Eagle says laughing from the comment. "You can return as soon as possible to check on her and maybe get some rest."

"I think that would be a good idea," Dr Izumi replies. He turns to Saber, "Call my phone should anything seem wrong and if nothing, I'll send a civilian doctor to check on her." Saber nods. "I'll come back as soon as I can to personally see about her," the doctor says before quickly leaving out the door with the Commander to a waiting car.

"Don't worry, sir," Thomas says turning to face Saber, "I'm sure that everything will work out okay."

"I hope so Thomas," Saber says quietly. "It's just that a part of me wonders if this would have happened if I'd been on the Bismarck with them. And another part of me thinks I should've gone with them."

"Don't go blaming yourself, Saber," Elaine says as she rocks Eryn in her arms. "You have your family to worry about now."

"I know Elaine, but if something happens, they may not get a chance to grow up, and that worries me," Baby Moira cries a bit in his arms. "Shh. Little one, it's ok. I'll do everything I can to protect you," he says softly as he rocks her in his arms.

Kapitel 33: Decisions

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 32: Decisions

"Well, it looks like all of your crew was lucky, Commander," Dr. Izumi says sounding exhausted.

"I'm sorry that I had to get you, but as you can see, we really needed you," the commander replies apologetically.

"The burns on Mr. Wilcox and your daughter are minor. They were all lucky to have escaped with just the few broken bones and bruises. I don't think they will be in any condition to fight for a while."

"That's what worries me. They were the only ones who had any experience piloting the prototype weapon. I doubt any of the other cadets would be able to handle it in a battle if something should happen and we need it."

Dr. Izumi is silent for several minutes before taking a breath and slowly releasing it. "It does put you in quite a predicament, Commander. I suggest that you not borrow trouble needlessly. The troops all need some rest, as do we," he says turning and looking out the window.

"Perhaps I could send the Bismarck crew to visit Saber. I've not yet told them that the twins were born yesterday. They could rest there and free up a few beds for those more severely injured," Commander Eagle says.

"I think that is a good idea, sir. I do suggest running it by Captain Rider before saying anything to them. I would request to be allowed to accompany them personally, if you feel you can spare me now," Dr. Izumi says.

Commander Eagle thinks for a moment before nodding, "I think that is a wise suggestion, doctor. I'll call Saber now. Why don't you go and change into some fresh clothes and meet me in med bay in a few minutes."

A couple hours later, April, Alex, Colt, Fireball, and Dr. Izumi are in a van being driven by another soldier from the outpost and on their way to see Saber and Amanda.

"Are you sure they won't mind us visiting, doc?" Colt asks as the van drives closer to its' destination.

"Commander Eagle called and asked them before telling you of the option," Dr. Izumi

replies. "He said that Captain Rider was more than happy for us to come. I am also bringing him some new glasses I had made while at the outpost. He should stop having the frequent headaches now, which should make his wife more at ease over his situation."

"Well, I think I can recover better in the peace and quiet of Saber's place far better than all of the commotion at the outpost," Fireball mutters as they arrive at the main gate and are greeted by a soldier. The driver shows his EBU to the guard and they are waived through.

They get out and are greeted at the door by Thomas. "Ah, I'm glad to see that you made it safely," he says as he helps them into the house and into the sitting room. They all take their seats, with the exception of Dr. Izumi.

"Thomas, are they upstairs?" Dr. Izumi asks, getting a nod in reply. "Then I shall go and see how things are and then retire to my room. I've not slept since I left here yesterday." He heads up the stairs and after knocking, he enters Saber and Amanda's room to find Amanda sitting in a rocking chair holding Moria, and Saber coming from across the room where two small cribs are set up. "How are you feeling?" he asks Amanda quietly after closing the door.

Amanda smiles, "Tired and sore, but not too bad. How are the others?" she asks quietly, so as not to wake the sleeping child in her arms.

"They are downstairs. Things could have been much worse. They can all get around, although it is a little difficult. They will not be fighting for a few months at least," Dr. Izumi replies. "I've not mentioned that you have had the twins to them. I thought I would allow you to surprise them. They could use a bit of good news."

Amanda smiles, "I suppose we should go and see them."

"Are you up to going down, Love?" Saber asks.

Amanda nods, "If I go slow, I'll be fine. I'd ask you and maybe either the doctor or Elaine to carry Moria. I need my hands free for the railing right now."

"Well, do you mind taking one of them, doctor?" Amanda asks. "I can hold her once I'm sitting down again."

Dr. Izumi smiles, "I'll gladly carry one of the little ones down, Mrs. Rider. Which one would you like me to take?"

"I'll get Eryn for you," Saber replies as he walks over to the crib and scoops up the sleeping child and carefully hands her to Dr. Izumi. He carefully cradles the child in his arms and Saber goes and helps Amanda carefully to her feet before taking Moria from her arms. "Are you sure you're up to this?" he asks her again.

Amanda nods. "Yes, it'll be nice to move around a little," she replies. "Besides, I want to see their faces when they see you come down holding a baby," she adds with a

smile.

Saber chuckles and turns for the door. "Very well, let's go then," he says as they make their way down the hall and slowly down the stairs.

The others are talking amongst themselves when Colt spots Amanda walking carefully down the stairs. "Hey there, Amanda. How are yo-" he starts to say and stops when he sees Saber coming behind her, a baby in his arms.

The others look up when he stops and April gasps, breaking into a huge smile. "You had the twins?" she asks excitedly.

Amanda nods as she comes all the way down the stairs and over to a chair, sitting down carefully. "They were born yesterday morning," Amanda replies quietly.

Dr. Izumi brings Eryn over and gently places her in Amanda's arms. "If you don't mind, I'm going to go and rest for a while," he says quietly.

Amanda nods, "You look like you could use a break. Please, go and rest."

"Thank you. Do not hesitate to come and get me if any of you feel that I am needed," he says looking to the others in the room. They all nod in reply. "Thank you," he says quietly and retires upstairs.

"So, what are their names?" Colt asks as he moves to get a better look at the baby in Amanda's arms.

"I've got Moria Grace," Saber replies moving over so the others can see the sleeping baby in his arms.

"I'm holding Eryn Blaire," Amanda says as Colt carefully makes his way over to look at her.

"They're very pretty," April says quietly. "I thought babies are all pink after they're born."

"They had to be cut out," Amanda explains. "There wasn't room for them to turn and be born safely, so Dr. Izumi did an emergency cesarean. I had started having contractions, so even though they are a little early, he said it was safer to do that."

Colt shakes his head. "Were you awake for it?" he asks.

Amanda nods. "Yes, but I didn't really feel anything. He gave me something to numb me and then something to make me sleep after they were born."

Colt shudders slightly, and Amanda chuckles. "You were there when Robin had Wil, weren't you?" she asks amused.

"Yeah, but she had it easy. She pushed him out in less than an hour. There was no

surgery or drugs," Colt replies and walks over to Saber. "Were you there for all of it?" he asks hesitantly.

Saber nods. "I wasn't going to leave her," he replies.

"Did you see her cut open?" Colt asks shifting a bit uncomfortably.

Saber chuckles, "Not really. I saw some out of the little peripheral vision I have, but my focus was on Amanda and keeping her calm. I did turn and look when he brought Moria out, and then Eryn. To be honest, I wasn't bothered by it. I was too focused on Amanda and the babies to care about anything else."

April laughs, "I can imagine."

"I'm sure I'd hit the floor," Fireball says shaking his head.

"After everything you've seen, I'm sure if you were in the situation, you'd be fine. You would be too focused on other things, as I was," Saber says. Moria starts to fuss and he starts rocking her in his arms and after a few minutes, she settles. He moves her so her head is against his shoulder and she sleeps peacefully against him. "I heard the Bismarck was destroyed," he says after a long silence.

April looks up and nods. "Yeah. We were ambushed," she replies.

"The renegade pilot had a few new tricks," Colt says coldly.

"Oh?" Saber asks. "What kind of tricks?"

"It had the weapons from the Tirpitz," April replies.

Saber doesn't bother to hide his shock. "That's not good," he says quietly.

"Did you manage to get the unit?" Amanda asks.

"No," Alex says finally speaking up.

Amanda looks over and studies his face. "Alex, do not blame yourself for this,"

"But had I done a better job of planting the explosives-" Alex starts.

"Do not blame yourself for something you had no way of knowing," Saber says firmly, interrupting Alex. "We need to be discussing options. Not dwelling on how it might have remotely been avoided."

Alex goes to protest, but a look from Saber stops him and he nods in resignation, "You're right, Captain," he mutters in defeat.

"Alex," Amanda says quietly, causing him to look in her direction. "Don't dwell on the past. Focus that energy on figuring out a solution."

"None of us can fight. If that renegade unit comes back we're done for!" Alex says angrily. "There is no one that can fly the new unit. None of us could even do very well in it."

"New unit?" Saber and Amanda ask at the same time.

"Oops," Alex mutters embarrassed at his slip.

"It's a single pilot unit," April explains giving Alex a quick glance. "It's only a prototype. All of them have tried it, but it has some glitches. The timing is off with the movements, so aiming the weapons is a bit harder. There are also some issues with it getting too hot and the pilot possibly becoming overheated in battle. I have the development team looking into those issues now, since they were able to save it from burning up with the Bismarck. It's more like a renegade unit, than anything else I've designed or helped to design."

"So what are you going to do?" Saber asks. "What if the enemy shows up again?"

"I don't know. I don't think any of the other cadets have a prayer of using it. We have the best chance and even that hasn't been ideal," April replies.

Saber looks at the child cradled against him then to Amanda, who nods to his unspoken question. "Let me try using it, April," Saber says quietly. The others quickly go to protest and he holds a hand up to silence them, "I'm well aware of the risks. But if they have such technology that one suit was able to inflict the amount of damage as was done to the Bismarck, no one is safe until they are stopped. I want my children to have a chance to grow up and as it stands right now, they may not get that chance. If I can change that, even if it means risking my life to do it, I will," he says firmly.

"But Saber, You have Amanda and the li-" April starts to say.

"He's right, April," Amanda says interrupting her. "I do not like where this conversation is heading, but Saber is right. He has the most training of any of you and the ability to adapt quickly. None of you will be in any condition to fight should something come up, so why not let him try it?" she asks as she struggles to hide her fears. No one says anything and she looks to each one in turn before speaking again, "Do I want him to fight? No, but what he says is true. None of us can live a normal life as long as the Outriders have this technology that can so easily kill us. None of us are safe, no matter how much we try and pretend we are. So as I said, let him try it. Let him become familiar with the unit, at this point, he is your only chance...our only chance."

Elaine comes in from the kitchen to check on things and stops and looks at each person, sensing the tension in the room. She sees Amanda visibly upset and comes over to her and scoops Moria from her, "Lady Amanda, please don't work yourself up. You could make yourself ill, which wouldn't be good for you or the wee ones."

Amanda looks up, suddenly realizing that Elaine is there and has taken Moria from

her. She shakes her head to clear it and blinks back the tears that had started to form and sighs, "You're right, Elaine. I'll try and not get so emotional," she says in an almost monotone voice.

Saber casts her a worried glance then looks to Elaine, "Why don't we go lay the girls down? I'll be back down in a minute." Elaine nods and they take the babies up to sleep in the cribs.

An uncomfortable silence falls between the group in the sitting room. Upstairs, Saber places Eryn down gently in her bed as Elaine does the same with Moria. "Is Lady Amanda alright, Saber?" Elaine asks quietly as they approach the door to the bedroom.

Saber stops and sighs, "Yes and no, Elaine," he replies, getting a confused look from her. "She is glad the the babies are here and healthy and that our friends have survived another brush with death. However, she knows that this battle isn't over and that it appears that I may be the only one who can possibly end it," he says with a sigh.

"Why you?" Elaine asks.

"Because of my training and ability to adapt quickly," he replies matter-of-factly. "April said that even Fireball and Colt had trouble with the new suit that she has designed."

"And you think you can do better?" Elaine asks.

"Possibly. But it's more because of the fact that the others are injured, I stand a better chance with it right now."

"And what if something happens to you?" she inquires.

He shrugs. "I suppose that Amanda will have to handle it. Of course I don't plan on letting that happen. I want to see our children grow up, Elaine. I want them to have a chance to do so," Saber replies.

"Don't make her a widow twice, Saber," Elaine says looking up to meet his gaze. "I'm not sure she would take it so well a second time."

Saber nods slightly. "I know, Elaine. I don't want to do this. I have to," he replies, his voice breaking slightly. "Amanda is the strongest woman I know. If anyone can pull through something like that it would be her. I just don't want her to have to, and I will do everything within my power to make sure she doesn't have to," he adds quietly.

Elaine places a hand gently on his shoulder and nods. "Then you do what you need to do. She will support you. You know that. We will support both of you regardless of how this turns out," Elaine says.

Saber kisses her cheek and opens the bedroom door for her, "Thank you, Elaine." Elaine smiles and walks through the door. He follows out after her.

"It's what families do, Saber, support each other," Elaine says quietly as they return to the sitting room.

Amanda looks up as they return, her eyes meet Saber's and his countenance softens. He comes over and sits beside her on the arm of the chair. "How are you feeling, Love?" he asks quietly so only she hears.

"I'm okay, I guess," she replies quietly. "The girls are sleeping?" she asks.

He nods. "Yes. They should be good for an hour or so."

"Are you ready to eat?" Elaine asks brightly trying to ease the tension of the group.

Everyone turns to her and nods eagerly. Slowly the group gets up and heads into the dining room, Amanda and Saber lagging behind as he helps her up and she moves a bit more slowly. "I think after I eat, I should lie down for a while," Amanda says, not bothering to hide the fatigue in her voice.

Saber gives her a wary glance, "Would you rather go and upstairs and I'll bring something to you? I don't want you hurting yourself," he offers eyeing her carefully. "You're awfully pale."

"I don't want them to think I'm angry or something," she says as she slowly wills herself to move forward.

"Technically, you should probably still be in bed. Most women are still in the hospital one day after such a procedure. I think they will understand, Love. If they don't it's their problem, not yours," Saber states. "Let me help you to our room and I'll bring you a tray. I'll even eat with you if you'd like."

Amanda starts to protest, but nods, "Okay. I think you're right, perhaps I should go on upstairs. They are welcome to come and visit if they'd like, but I think I have done too much," she admits begrudgingly.

The next morning, Saber is awakened by Eryn crying. He gets up and goes over and scoops her up and rocks her. Elaine quietly slips in to offer assistance. After changing her and feeding her, she starts to settle when Amanda wakes up and takes her.

A knock at the door and April enters after a moment, "I thought I heard crying," she says quietly as she comes in, closing the door after her.

Saber comes over holding Moria, who he had just changed. "Would you like to hold her, April?" he asks quietly.

April tenses for a moment and nods hesitantly. "Um, sure, if you're sure I won't break her," April replies.

Saber chuckles as she holds out her arms. He carefully places Moria in her arms and

April holds her rigidly. "You need to relax, April. I won't let you drop her," he says obviously amused at her discomfort.

"Could I sit down with her?" she asks trying to not drop the baby.

Amanda smiles. "You can sit in the rocker, if you'd like," Amanda says.

April carefully makes her way to the chair and gratefully sits down. She relaxes a bit more and gently begins rocking her. "This isn't so bad," she says beginning to relax.

A short time later, Thomas comes up and enters the room, "Master Saber, Commander Eagle is here and wishes to see you."

Saber nods, "I'll be right down, Thomas."

"Yes, sir," he replies and heads downstairs.

Saber comes over to Amanda, "Are you alright?" Amanda nods.

"I'll be here with her, Saber," Elaine says as she comes over and takes Moria from April who stands up.

"Thank you Elaine," he replies.

"Be careful, Saber," Amanda says quietly.

"I will, Love," he replies and kisses her briefly before he and April head downstairs.

"All right Saber, I think we're ready for you to try the suit out," April says as she hits several keys causing several readouts to pop up on her screens.

"Got it, April," he replies and hits a couple of buttons and grabs the control stick and the suit begins to move.

"Take it out of the hangar, I want to see how well you're able to maneuver with it."

Saber is a little unsteady for a few steps, but after hitting a few buttons, he seems to have better control and begins moving fairly fluidly.

"Looking good," April says. "Think you're ready to try the weapons?"

"Let's go for it, April," he replies. April hits a series of buttons and several targets being popping up at random intervals. Saber begins firing at them, he hits all of them, only a couple of them miss the center area.

"Not bad, Saber. You're doing better than the others did."

"You've tweaked the systems since then, I'm at an advantage, April," he replies as he removes his helmet after exiting the unit.

"You don't look as overheated as they did either," April states after looking him over. "How are you feeling?"

"I feel as good as I have lately. I can see about the best I've been able to see since the accident," Saber replies.

"I wish I knew a way to see how the sword handles with it," April says more to herself than him.

"Do you want me to go back and and draw it and do some basic movements with it?" he asks.

April looks at him carefully, "Are you up to it?"

Saber nods, "I'm fine. I would tell you if I wasn't."

"Well, it might be a good idea to try the sword. Better to have some practice, in case something comes up," April says.

"All right then, I'm going back out," Saber says as he climbs back into the suit.

It's late in the evening when they return to Saber's estate. April makes her way to her room and Saber enters his room to find Amanda asleep in the rocker cradling Eryn against her, who is also sleeping soundly. He goes past them into the dressing room and after changing clothes, he walks over to the cribs and stares at Moria's sleeping form. He watches her for a minute before going over and kissing Amanda on her head, waking her. She looks up to him and smiles, still half asleep. "Why don't I lay her down and you come lay in the bed?" he asks. "I think that you'd be more comfortable."

Amanda nods and he gently takes Eryn from her and goes and lays her in her bed. She stirs a little, but settles and he goes over and helps Amanda up and to the bed, laying down beside her. After stretching out she moves against him carefully and he sighs.

"Are you okay, Saber?" Amanda asks concerned, moving a little to try and see his face.

"Yeah. Just tired. We spent several hours trying that suit out today," he replies.

"How did it go?" she asks quietly.

"April seemed pleased with the results. She sent the readings to her design team and said she wants to try again tomorrow," he says not bothering to hide his fatigue. "How are you feeling?" he asks concerned.

"I'm sore and tired, but I assume that is normal. Elaine has been wonderful. She is trying to do everything for me, and keeps trying to get me to take something for pain, but I'm afraid of taking anything."

"Why? Dr. Izumi wouldn't give you something that could hurt you or the girls."

"I'm more afraid of not being able wake up if one of the little ones start crying and you're not here," Amanda replies.

Saber nods and sighs, "I can understand that, but I don't want you punishing yourself, Love. There are people here that can help. Let them. I will do all I can to help too."

"I know, but who knows how long you'll be here?" she asks, her voice breaking slightly. "I'm assuming that if something does come up, you'll be the one to fight, right?"

"Aye. It seems that right now, I've done the best in the new unit."

Amanda sighs and snuggles against him, "I just hope this is all for nothing."

"So do I, Love," Saber replies as he drifts off to sleep.

Please review and let me know what you think! :-)

Kapitel 34: Just In Case

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 33: Just In Case

"Daddy!" the little boy says as he runs up to Colt, who eagerly scoops him up.

Robin comes running after him, stopping when she reaches the pair.

"Hey, baby," Colt says as he pulls her into the embrace and kisses her.

"Hey yourself, Colt," she replies looking him over carefully. "You don't look as bad as the last time you got hurt at least."

"I looked worse a couple of weeks ago. Thanks to some R and R, I'm healin' quickly," he replies as he gingerly sets Wil down.

Much the same reunion is happening inside where Sarah and Tyler find Alex recuperating. Tyler is in Alex's lap and Sarah is kneeling beside the pair.

"How long will you be in that brace, Alex?" Sarah asks concerned.

Alex shrugs. "A few more weeks at least, he replies. "Dr. Izumi says it's not healing as fast as he thinks it should, but I think it's because I've been walking more than I should be."

"How is Amanda doing?" Sarah asks.

"Much better than when we arrived. She had just had the twins at that point. She's moving around a lot better now," Alex replies. "She and Elaine have the twins out on the back porch. I'm sure she wouldn't mind you coming out to say hello."

"Saber isn't with her?" Sarah asks a bit surprised.

Alex shakes his head. "No, he, April, and Fireball, are with Commander Eagle at the Outpost," he replies. "They are working on a new weapon. From what I've heard them say in bits of conversation, Saber seems to have taken to the new unit well. Much better than any of us had."

"So he plans on fighting?" Sara asks.

"If he has to, I think he will. I'm hoping it doesn't come to that," Alex replies as Tyler climbs down from his lap and starts to wander towards the stairs.

Robin spots him as she enters the room and gets between him and the stairs, stopping him. "Tyler, you can't go up there without your mommy," she says to him as she turns him back towards Sarah, who is walking over to him.

"Thanks, Robin," she says apologetically as she scoops up Tyler.

"No problem, I'm used to having to stop Wil from getting into things. I was on my way out to see Amanda and the babies. Would you like to come too? The boys can run and play in the yard," Robin replies.

Sarah nods as she sets Tyler back down and grabs his hand. "Sure. That would be good. Perhaps they can burn off some of this energy," she replies and the two women head towards the porch with their boys.

Elaine hears the door and looks up and smiles. "Hello! I'm glad to see that you have made it," she says as the women walk up and the two boys run past her into the yard laughing and chasing each other.

"Hello, Elaine, Amanda," Robin says as she and Sarah approach them.

Amanda looks up and smiles. "Robin, Sarah, hello. I see the boys are doing well," she adds with a chuckle as they blow past her, startling Eryn and making her fuss. Amanda rocks her a little and she settles.

Sarah takes a seat, and Robin grabs a chair and moves it closer to the women. "How are you feeling, Amanda?" Robin asks as she sits down.

"Better than a few weeks ago. Getting over the surgery was rough. At least I can carry the little ones now and it not hurt like it did right after they were born," Amanda replies as Eryn squirms in her arms.

"May I hold her?" Robin asks hesitantly.

Amanda smiles. "Sure, if you don't mind coming to take her," she replies.

Robin stands up and comes over and carefully takes the infant from Amanda, sitting down while holding her. "She's beautiful. What's her name?"

Elaine gets up and offers Moria to Sarah, who carefully takes her and starts rocking her gently. "I'll go and fix some tea and bring out a snack for the boys," Elaine says after Sarah takes Moria.

Amanda nods and Elaine heads off to the house. "You're holding Eryn and Sarah is holding Moria," Amanda replies to Robin's question.

"They are both gorgeous, Amanda," Sarah says quietly.

"You said you had to have a cesarean?" Robin asks.

Amanda nods. "They didn't have room turn and I had started contractions and my water broke, so Dr. Izumi didn't have much of a choice. Everything went well though. They are both healthy. I'm grateful for that."

"Was Saber in the room?" Sarah asks.

"Yes. He was there the entire time. He kept me calm during the whole thing," Amanda says. "I was a bit upset when Dr. Izumi told me he was going to have to cut them out. I thought something was really wrong, thankfully, there wasn't."

"I don't think Alex would have been able to stay in the room. He is rather squeamish," Sarah says with a chuckle.

Amanda laughs, "So I noticed when he was having to help me work on Erika. I had to keep telling him what to do."

"He managed not to faint when I had Tyler, but there were a couple of times the nurse wanted to ask him to leave," Sarah replies.

Robin laughs. "I suppose I can't complain, Colt did really well. I guess it helped that Wil came so fast that he really didn't have time to worry about anything," she says.

The women relax and talk, watching the older boys play and run. Elaine comes out a little later with a cart with tea and cakes on it.

"I brought some milk and biscuits for the boys," she says as she pours tea for the women and places a plate with a small cake on it by each of the women.

Robin calls for Wil and Tyler, who come over and start munching eagerly on the offered treats. Elaine takes the infants and after placing them in a portable pin, she sits down across from Amanda. They are just about finished when a strange sound is heard in the distance.

"What in the world?" Amanda says looking around trying to figure out what the sound is and where it's coming from.

About that time, Colt and Thomas come rushing out of the house. "We need to get to the hidden basement, NOW!," Colt says as he limps over to Wil and grabs him protectively, before turning back towards the house.

"What's going on?" Amanda and Robin ask obviously confused.

"That noise, Milady, is an air raid siren. We need to go. Leave everything but yourselves here. I'll grab the crib for the wee ones. We'll grab a bag for them on the way through your bedroom," Thomas replies.

Elaine jumps up and quickly grabs Eryn. Amanda grabs Moria and Thomas grabs the crib as Sarah corrals Tyler and they all rush towards Saber and Amanda's room and into the dressing room.

Thomas opens the access to the passage and they file down as carefully as they are able. Once down there, he lights a small lamp. "Make yourselves as comfortable as you can. I am going to grab a few more supplies so that the kids have things to eat and everyone has something to sleep on. I'll be back shortly."

"I'm comin' with you, Thomas," Colt says firmly. "We can get more things here and faster if there are two of us, and I need to get my com-link anyways," he adds halting the objections from Thomas. They turn and head back up the passage to get more supplies.

"Okay Saber, I think we've got it about as good as we can," April says as Saber climbs out of the suit and walks over to where she, Fireball, and Commander Eagle are watching various computer screens.

"The suit seems to move much better and with less effort now, April. I noticed that you've included some new guns within the suit as well," Saber says getting a nod from April. "I see that you've also upgraded the blaster. It appears to be of the same caliber as the one from the Tirpitz."

"Actually, it's an upgrade of that blaster. We were going to change it out when they came back from that last mission, but obviously that never happened," April replies. "We have increased the firepower and the suit has a higher-grade armour than the Tirpitz was equipped with. I have thrown everything I can come up with into this suit, Saber. I don't want to lose anyone to the Outriders."

Saber comes over and places a hand on her shoulder, "I know, April," he says quietly as he drops his hand to his side. "I just hope we don't have to use this thing. But I am glad to know that I'll be protected with the best you can offer should I need to fight."

"We have also been training fighter pilots. They will act as a sort of cover for the pilot of the suit," Commander Eagle says.

"Much the way the Outriders have done," Saber comments. "Interesting that we are using their tactics. Perhaps it will throw them off enough to give us an advantage should we engage them again."

"That is my hope," the commander replies. "We also have a second suit that is nearly completed."

"It should be done this afternoon," April adds.

"A second suit?" Fireball and Saber both ask.

April nods. "Yeah, we had enough parts that after we got the first one working better for you, I had the design team start building a second one. It should be nearly identical to this one."

"But who would pilot it? So far Saber has been the only one that has had any luck with

it," Fireball asks.

"I was hoping you'd be willing to give it a go, Captain Hikari," Commander Eagle states. "You are in the next best shape of your crew. You are able to get around without an aid of any kind and I've seen you working out, so I think in a bind, you could handle it."

"Captain Hikari?" Both Fireball and April say at once.

"Yes, I have had both Mr. Hikari and Mr. Wilcox enlisted as the rank of Captain. It is something that is long overdue," Commander Eagle replies. "Saber is now a Colonel, and Amanda has been titled as a Captain as well. April has been assigned the rank of Major."

Fireball looks between the people standing there and nods, casting a questioning glance towards Saber who shrugs accepting the statement. He then looks to April, "If you think I can do it, then let's try it out. Can I try this suit?"

"If you'd like," April replies. "But, you would need to get one of the thermal suits like Saber is wearing to wear under your normal suit."

"Thermal suit?" he asks confused. "Wouldn't that make it harder to move around?"

"Not as hard as you would think, actually," Saber says. "It's rather thin, and it helps keep your body temperature regulated."

"Come over here," April says waving him over to a set of lockers. She pulls out a couple of suits and holds them up, "Try one of these. I think you'll be surprised."

Fireball hesitantly takes one of the suits and goes into another room and changes, coming back out in the suit and his normal uniform suit with his helmet in his hand. "You're right, I can barely tell I'm wearing that other suit," he says with a hint of surprise in his voice.

"Go on and climb in. I'll set up the targets once you're out of the hangar, Fireball," April says and he activates the suit and starts for the open practice area.

About an hour later, he returns to the hangar and climbs out, limping slightly. "How'd I do?" he asks as he comes over to the trio.

"Much better than before. You're almost as accurate in the suit as you are out of it," April replies satisfied.

"Well, at least you won't have to do this alone, Saber," Fireball says glancing over to him.

Saber nods. "Aye, and for that I'm glad. Just try and not over do it. If you can't walk, it will make it a bit more difficult to help fight if we're needed," he says, getting a nod from Fireball in reply.

"Let's all take a break and get something to eat, shall we?" April says cheerfully.

"Yeah, I'm starved," Fireball replies as they all head back into the main building of the Outpost.

A couple of hours later, April, Fireball, and Saber are walking back to the hangar when the alarms go off.

"What the?" Fireball says giving his companions a wary glance.

"Let's go and find the commander. He should be heading towards the command center near the hangar," Saber says. The other two nod and they take off running towards the command center.

Upon entering, they see Commander Eagle ordering several soldiers to launch in the fighters. As they disperse, he spots them and he waves them over. "I think the time has come, I'm afraid," he says looking to Saber and Fireball.

"What is going on, sir?" Saber asks trying to gauge the situation.

"Our scouts have spotted numerous Outrider fighters, a battleship, and a renegade unit heading towards here."

"Here? This colony?" Saber asks taken aback.

"In this general direction. I can't be sure whether they have discovered the outpost, or if they came from someplace the other side of here and are enroute to Cavalry Command. Either way, we need to act. If we wait to see what they are planning, civilians could be in more danger than they are now. I have had the local officials activate their air raid sirens, so that people are filing to shelters."

"Better to be over prepared than to be caught off guard," Saber states with a sigh.

"We have launched some fighters from here, and we have some battleships and more fighters coming from Cavalry Command. I want you two to hold off on launching, but be ready to go at a moment's notice," the commander says.

"Yes sir," both Fireball and Saber reply.

Saber goes to speak, but Commander Eagle interrupts him, "Colt has contacted me and they are all in the hidden basement. They have supplies, bedding and things for the babies. They are all as safe as they can be, Saber."

"Yes sir," Saber says, his eyes still showing his concern. As a distraction, he turns his attention to the various screens and begins listening to the multiple conversations on the com-link channels.

Fireball comes over and places a hand on his shoulder. "They are as safe as if they

were in Cavalry Command itself, Saber. As long as Amanda and Elaine live, no harm will come to your children. And Thomas will guard all of them with his life," Fireball says quietly. "And you know Amanda can handle herself if need be," Fireball adds with a smile.

Saber chuckles and nods. "Aye, that she can. And in defense of the children, I'd almost be afraid of her myself," he replies with a small smile.

Fireball chuckles. "Yeah, I saw how she defended you, so I can only imagine how fierce she would be defending your children," not someone I'd want to piss off. Saber laughs outright at the comment and Fireball looks at him curiously. "What's so funny?"

"You just reminded me of something that Amanda said to me not long after we met," he replies.

"What's that?" Fireball asks curiously.

"She asked me if she knew about red-headed tempers. I told her no. She laughed and said that it isn't wise to piss a red-head off. That they tend to have ferocious tempers, or something to that effect."

Fireball laughs. "Would you say that you've found that to be true?" he asks amused, watching Saber's face for a reaction.

"I'd say she proved that she has a temper fairly quickly as I recall," Saber replies.

"Oh?"

"Do you not remember the morning after Sean attacked her and I left before I said something far too harsh for the situation?"

"So that's what happened? You snapped at her and she called you on your attitude?" Fireball asks, while trying not to burst out laughing.

Saber nods. "Pretty much. I was not used to someone being so callous back to me."

Fireball and Saber both laugh so much that April walks over to them with an amused look. "What's so funny?" she asks looking between the two curiously.

"Just talking about how Amanda would defend the children if it came down to it with her life, and how I would not want to be on the receiving end of that fight," Fireball says as he tries to catch his breath.

April looks between the two as they regain their composure and shakes her head. "You two are strange."

"What?" they both ask innocently.

"I think it's about time for you two to launch. The renegade unit is trying to break past

the fighters. We've started losing people," the commander says bringing everyone back to the seriousness of the situation.

The two men sober up quickly and nod. "Yes sir!" they reply and each head to their suits.

"Can you two hear each other in your helmets?" April asks.

"Yeah," they reply simultaneously.

"I hear you just fine too, April," Fireball quips.

"Same here, April," Saber says.

"Good. Keep in constant contact with each other. I will also be able to hear everything you say, so if you need something, just speak up. You can talk as if you were in your saddle units. No extra buttons to hit. I kept the suits on a different frequency, so that nothing else can interfere with your signal. If the battleship starts to do something, I'll warn you," April says.

"Got it, April," they both reply.

"Okay then I guess you're ready to launch. Be careful out there," April says, allowing some fear to come through in her voice.

They both hit a sequence of keys and then leave the hangar and take off towards the battle.

A short time later, Colt and Thomas return. Each carrying a large duffel bag and a smaller bag. When they reach all the way inside the basement, they plop the bags down with a thud, and then Thomas goes and closes the door, sealing off the basement from the house.

"Well, we've gotten everything we can for now," Thomas says. "The sirens are still going off, but I didn't see anything immediately close. Let's hope that the officials are just erring on the side of caution, and that we aren't under a full attack."

"I spoke with Commander Eagle on the com-link," Colt says as he comes over and sits down next to Robin and Wil. "He said that the air raid sirens are a precaution, but that Fireball and Saber would be going out shortly. That no one was under direct attack as of yet, but that the Outriders had a battleship, a ton of fighters and a renegade unit heading in this general direction. It's possible they are actually headed for Cavalry Command and not here, but because of there being an outpost here, he didn't want to run the risk of it being attacked and the civilians being caught off guard."

"Hence the reasons they set off the sirens?" Thomas asks.

Colt nods, "Yeah. I think it was a good idea."

"Yes, it's better to have the citizens be prepared. You can protect more lives that way," Amanda says as she gives an involuntary shiver.

"Are you cold?" Elaine asks, looking at her carefully.

"I'm fine, Elaine," Amanda replies almost automatically.

Elaine gives her a wary look and starts to say something, but thinks better of it. Instead, she turns to Thomas, "Would you mind helping me set up the pen and place a blanket in it. The babes will need a warm place to sleep."

"Of course," Thomas replies and he and Elaine set up the pen.

Colt starts passing out blankets, pillows, and cushions to the others, and sets up a toy tent for the two boys. "This tent is just for you two," he says to the boys, who are staring at it wide-eyed. He hands them each a sleeping bag and pillow. "Tyler, do you know how to lay out a sleeping bag?" he asks the older boy.

"Yes. My daddy showed me how to camp," Tyler responds proudly.

Colt smiles and nods. "Good, then I want you to show my son, Wil here how to lay out his sleeping bag and pillow. Do you think you can do that for me?" Tyler nods and Colt smiles. "Good. I'll leave you in charge of the tent okay?"

"Yes sir!" Tyler replies happily as he drags Wil into the tent after him. Soon the two are sprawled out on top of the bags and laughing.

The adults turn to other preparations, satisfied that the boys are now occupied for at least a little while. A couple of hours pass and Amanda is sitting close to the pen on a small blanket and a pillow, watching the children sleep. Without realizing it, she has pulled out her necklace and is subconsciously fingering the ring on the chain beside her coat of arms completely lost in thought.

"Are you all right, Lady Amanda?" Elaine asks coming over and sitting beside her.

Amanda looks up startled out of her reverie. "I don't know," she replies, barely a whisper, tears threatening to fall at any moment. Elaine gives her a sympathetic look and takes Amanda's closest hand and squeezes it gently in a show of support. Amanda returns the gesture and sighs, sorting out her thoughts. "What if he doesn't come back, Elaine?" she says quietly, her voice breaking as she voices her fear.

Elaine sits quietly for several minutes watching the babies, thinking before she speaks, "Then you will do your best to make sure your that children remember him and his sacrifice. You must live, even if he doesn't. Otherwise, his sacrifice would be in vain, Lady Amanda." Elaine stops and studies Amanda's face. "It is your duty as his wife and the mother of his children," she adds quietly.

Amanda takes a deep breath and wipes away the tears from her face that she had not realized she had shed. "I pray it doesn't come to that, but I will do my best, no matter

the outcome," she replies so quietly that Elaine strains to hear her. Looking around, she notices that a blanket has been hung to ration off an area of privacy for her. "Why is the blanket there?" she asks aloud.

"Thomas thought that you would like a little privacy. Especially when you have to feed the little ones," Elaine replies quietly.

Amanda nods. "Thank you. I know I could not do this without the two of you," she replies honestly.

"Do you think that Saber and Fireball are okay, Colt?" Robin asks him quietly as they watch the fire, daring a glance in Amanda's direction.

Colt is silent for a minute or so. "I think they will do their best to return to us," he finally replies. "As for their current situation, like what they are doing right now, I don't know," he says quietly.

"Couldn't you call them on the com-link?" she asks.

"Yeah, but if they are fighting, it could be a distraction," he replies. "Not something I want to be held accountable for."

"Point taken," Robin says quietly.

"Lady Amanda," Thomas asks as he walks over to where she and Elaine are sitting. "I brought your sword down from your room. I have my pistol as well," he says after placing sword beside her. "I thought it better to be prepared, just in case."

Amanda looks down and nods slightly, "Good thinking, Thomas. I had not thought about the sword. I've not worn it since I've been unable to carry it during my pregnancy. I should keep it nearby now, especially in light of recent events."

"It also serves to mark you as head of the house while Saber is away. There are those that might try and take over the estate should something happen to Master Saber. You are it's rightful heir, as are the babes. Best to be prepared to defend it if necessary," Thomas says as he comes and sits beside Elaine.

Amanda studies the older couple closely for several minutes, noticing the fatigue that they refuse to show. "I am eternally grateful for all that the two have you have done for me, but especially all that you have done for Saber. Without you, I'm not sure he would be where he is."

Thomas comes over to where Amanda is and sits beside her and takes her hands, "Milady, we had long ago sworn loyalty to his family. He is like a son to us. We were never blessed with our own children, so knowing that we are able to do him this service, and in turn be of service to you, makes our job something we can be proud of."

Kapitel 35: In the Heat of Battle

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 34: In the Heat of Battle

Fireball manages to dodge another attack from a group of fighters, destroying two in the process. Not far from him, Saber is doing much the same thing. "We need to try and get these fighters off our backs, Saber," Fireball says sounding irritated.

"Aye. The longer we have to fight them, the closer that battleship and renegade unit get to the colony and Cavalry Command," Saber replies as he hits another fighter.

The fighters from the outpost start making headway in the fight against the fighters, allowing Fireball and Saber to break towards the battleship and the renegade unit. "Who do we engage first, Saber," Fireball asks as they near the battleship.

"Let's try and draw the renegade unit away from the ship. Perhaps the battleships from Cavalry command will get here soon so they can take on the ship," he replies. "Not a fight I care to engage in if we can avoid it."

"Yeah, not one I want to do either," Fireball replies.

They approach the renegade unit from behind and are nearly upon it when it suddenly turns and fires at them. Narrowly, they manage to separate and evade the attack, each firing at the enemy unit in retaliation. Fireball manages to land a glancing hit. The unit charges him and Saber takes the chance to fire his blaster, knocking the unit back just before it can fully strike Fireball with its sword, causing it to make minimal contact. Fireball is thrust backwards from the hit, but damage is minimized because of Saber hitting the enemy unit.

"Thanks," Fireball says over the com-link.

"Don't thank me yet. We've got to destroy this thing. And I think that is about to be more difficult," Saber replies.

"Why?" Fireball says as he dodges another attack.

"The battleship is trying to lock on to us," Saber says grimly.

Suddenly the enemy renegade unit charges Saber just as alarms start going off. Saber flips up his shields and a blinding flash is seen and everything goes dark. He feels himself hurling uncontrollably and unable to stop. He tries in vain to get the controls to work, but nothing responds. He hits the com-link, but it's gone dead. He finally

blacks out as the suit continues its spiral.

"Saber!" Fireball yells as the light blinds him. He is thrown backwards as the enemy renegade unit hits him from the force of the beam that fired from the battleship. spiraling out of control, he finally stops after ramming a fighter ship. Whether it is one of his or an enemy's he's unsure. He can no longer see, grappling for his controls he wildly presses buttons hoping to find out if his friend survived. "Saber! Saber! Come in!" he says repeatedly, getting no reply. He feels a jolt and realizes that he must still be under attack. He grabs the stick that is his main control and tries to visualize his console in his mind, just as he hears April's voice come into his mind. He replies, but it's as if April doesn't hear him.

"Fireball, are you there? Saber? Somebody answer me!"

"April?" Fireball says hesitantly.

A sigh of relief in his ear then April's voice again, "Fireball, can you see Saber? I can't get him to answer me."

"No, I can't see anything, April," he replies honestly. "April, can you tell me where the enemy is. I can't read anything here."

"I got a renegade unit coming at you two o'clock."

Fireball tries to remember how to grab the blaster and goes through the motions, and hits the button to fire it. "Did I hit it?" he asks.

The unit is flung back away from him. "Yeah, but it's almost got control again. It's coming at about eleven o'clock, Fireball," April says.

He turns and fires the blaster, making a direct hit. The enemy unit is thrown into the battleship, causing a bit of damage to its main weapon.

The enemy unit fires towards him and hits him directly. His shields were up, but he's unable to move or see anything. "Damn it. This isn't good. April I need some kind of assistance. Where is Saber?"

"I don't know, Fireball. I've lost his signal!" April says allowing the fear to come through her voice. "Here comes the renegade unit. It's at your nine o'clock."

Fireball moves to replace the blaster with the sword and swings hard, making contact with something. The feeling shocks his system and he starts to see fuzzy outlines and lights again. He notices a blip on his screen and turns, ready to react. It comes at him full force and he swings, grazing the enemy unit. It parries and swings, heading for the head of the unit.

"FIREBALL!" April yell, realizing he's unable to avoid the impact.

Fireball pulls up his sword to try and block the worst of the blow when a blast knocks

the unit back, causing it to miss. Fireball blinks in shock.

"Glad I made it back in time," Saber says over the com-link. "Sorry for the delay. My system shut down completely."

"Saber?" both Fireball and April say in a combination of shock and relief.

"Aye, it's me. I'm having a bit of dizziness, but I'm fairly unharmed," Saber replies. Just as several blasts are heard nearby.

"The back up from Cavalry Command have arrived," April states as one of the battleships lands a hit on the enemy battleship, causing a small fire to breakout on the ship.

"How can you do this?" Fireball asks as they instinctively turn towards the blast.

"Do what?" Saber asks, while pointedly moving away from the battleships.

"How can you function when you can't see?" Fireball asks.

"You can't see?" April and Saber ask him at the same time.

"Not really," Fireball replies. "Everything is a bit fuzzy, but it is better than right after that flash of light."

An alarm sounds and Saber's unit is suddenly hit from behind. "What the-" Saber says, his voice cut off from the force of the impact. He manages to steady the suit quickly and turns it around, trying to find the source of what hit him.

"Are you all right?" April asks over the com-link.

"I've been worse. Fireball, you still with me?"

"Yeah. The renegade hit you. I'm glad your shields were up," Fireball replies.

"So am I. We need to take that unit out and fast," Saber says urgently.

"Any ideas?" Fireball asks.

"Well, perhaps we can use the two battleships to our advantage," Saber says.

"Okay..."

"If we can lure it into the middle of the foray, and manage to not get ourselves killed in the process, perhaps we can get lucky and it get hit," Saber suggests as they pull back from where the battleships are fighting, the renegade unit in pursuit.

"Somehow I get the feeling it won't fall for that, Saber," Fireball quips.

"Aye. I'm open to suggestions, Fireball," Saber says as he attempts to evade the blasters of the enemy renegade unit.

The advantage goes back and forth for a while when all three are hit by a large blast, hurling them towards the colony.

"I can't get this thing to break out of the fall," Fireball says obviously straining for control.

"I'm not having much luck either," Saber says as he manages to move enough to grab ahold of Fireball's unit.

"What the Hell are you doing?" Fireball asks confused.

"I'm trying to use our momentum to get us turned so that we don't die when we hit. On three, hit the button for the jet thruster, like you're trying to go up," Saber replies.

"Are you insane? That will hurl us towards the ground faster!"

"For a second yes, but I have an idea. Do you trust me?"

"Yes."

"One...two...three!" The simultaneously hit their thrusters and Saber pulls hard, causing them to rotate down, then turning them so they run mostly parallel to the ground. Just before impact, the suits dig into the ground and they roll for several yards before coming to halt in a heap. The suits are badly damaged and they scramble to climb out of them, meeting next to remainder of the suits. Saber is about to speak when the third suit comes crashing down, a few hundred yards away.

"Are you hurt?" Fireball asks.

"I've been worse. I think I've got a cut on my side, I can feel what I think is blood, but we need to find that other suit and capture or kill the pilot," Saber replies. "How are you?"

"My leg hurts. I think my knee is slightly dislocated, but I can walk, for now at least," Fireball says. Saber nods and they head off in the direction of the crash. After nearly an hour, they reach the wreckage. "I guess it was a bit further than I thought," Fireball says quietly, pulling out his blaster and scanning the area surrounding the crash site.

Saber pulls his blaster and the pair split up, carefully scanning the scene as Fireball moves closer to where the pilot hatch is. "Do you see an movement?"

Fireball messes with the pod and it opens, revealing no one inside. "Empty."

"Did the pilot just vaporize when it hit?"

"Usually if that's the case, they leave some sort of debris behind. I don't see any sign

of that," Fireball replies. He starts to head back down when a shot is fired, narrowly missing him. He stumbles and lands hard on the ground and yelps from the pain of the impact.

Saber makes his way to him and drags him to some semblance of shelter the far side of the former suit, firing back in the general direction of the shot. "Are you able to walk?" he asks quietly.

"I'm not sure, to be honest," Fireball replies in obvious pain. He glances up at Saber and notices his left side covered in blood. "We need help, Saber. You're in no better condition than I am."

"Help is something we do not have right now," Saber replies. "We need to get away from here. Can you stand if you lean on me?"

"And risk making you pass out? No. I need to try and walk on my own. If I can get my knee back in place, I think I'll be okay for now."

Saber carefully lowers himself to his keeps and straightens out Fireball's leg, bracing a hand to either side of his knee. "This is going to hurt, Fireball," Saber says. Fireball nods and Saber pops his knee back into place.

Fighting the urge to scream or vomit, Fireball takes a breath and after a minute, he moves to try and stand. "I think I can walk, if I'm careful," he says still obviously in pain as he manages to stand up favoring the leg.

The pair start to carefully make their way and just reach a stretch of shrubbery when they encounter Jesse standing before them his blaster aimed at them.

"You two are making this far too easy," Jesse says with a sneer. "I seriously thought you'd make this a little more fun. Lower your weapons to the ground slowly."

Fireball and Saber start to slowly place their blasters on the ground, neither one willing to move quickly. As he reaches the ground, Saber places his blaster down, grabbing a handful of rocky dirt as he does. Fireball notices the slight movement and does the same. Slowly they start to stand and almost simultaneously they toss the dirt into Jesse's face, temporarily blinding him. They head in two directions, Saber moving around and behind Jesse, Fireball away and to the left. Seizing the chance, Fireball lunges towards Jesse and knocks him down. Grappling for his gun, Jesse swings a punch in Fireball's direction, hitting him hard in the stomach. They continue to fight, rolling across the ground. Fireball finally wrenching the gun from his hand and tossing it. Just as Fireball gets him pinned, he feels a sharp pain in his shoulder and sees blood dripping onto his attacker. Jesse kicks him aside and Fireball clinches his wound, realizing that he had been stabbed. "How?" Fireball asks, trying to ignore the pain.

"Always have a back up plan," Jesse says in a mocking tone. Fireball goes to get up and Jesse grabs the blaster from the ground and points at him. "Don't move."

Fireball stops his motion and looks up, to face his attacker head-on when Jesse is

suddenly hit from behind. The gun he was holding drops to the ground and Fireball rolls towards it. Jesse rolls and turns to face his attacker, pulling a sword from its sheath on his side.

"I'm going to enjoy killing you, Rider," Jesse says menacingly.

"Not the first time I've been told that," Saber replies as Jesse lunges for him, sword out. Saber moves out of the way, fighting back the burning pain in his side. Jesse is quickly on his feet and charging him. Saber parries the attack and the two fight for a while, neither one gaining a true upper hand.

Fireball tries to aim the blaster to shoot Jesse, but can't manage to get a clear shot, because of the constant motion of the two fighting. Moving so that he is a bit covered by the brush, he watches as Saber continually tries to gain the upper hand in the fight.

"Fireball, can you hear me?" A voice calls into his ear causing him to jump.

"Yeah," he replies quietly.

"Thank God you're alive. We lost your signals," April says with relief. "Where are you? Where's Saber?"

"We're on the colony. I think I can see the outskirts of the outpost quite a ways from here, but my vision isn't the best right now. It could be something else entirely. Saber is currently sword fighting with Jesse. I've tried to get a clear shot on him, but I'm afraid of hitting Saber."

"So Saber is okay?" April asks. "He won't reply to me."

"I'm not sure if he can hear you or not, April. This is the first time that I've heard you since we crashed. He is injured, and I'm not sure how much longer he can keep going. He's lost a lot of blood from some sort of injury to his left side."

"I think I have a rough fix on where you are. I've found the wreckage of two units."

"Um, are the two units together?" Fireball asks.

"No. I'm only getting visuals. It's like the suits have completely shut down."

"Then what you're most likely seeing is our two suits, that crashed as one, and Jesse's suit. We would have died had Saber not had us crash the way he did," Fireball replies.

"We've got people coming, including a couple of field medics. It'll be a little bit of time though."

"Time that I'm not sure we have." Fireball says. He notices Saber starting to falter and he moves to get a little closer to the pair. "April, how close are those medics?" he asks, he gets no reply. "April are you there?" Still no reply. He starts looking for an opening to try and shoot Jesse. He gets into position, ready to shoot.

Saber stumbles and Jesse moves so that he closing the gap between them. Jesse brings his sword up for the killing strike when Saber rolls slightly and a shot is fired. Jesse drops the sword, barely missing Saber as it falls. Almost automatically, Saber pulls his sword up and slices into Jesse's abdomen. Another shot is fired and Jesse drops completely, gasping for air. Saber looks around for the source of the shot and sees Colt step out from the far side of the clearing.

Amanda wakes to the sound of the children crying. She goes to get up and realizes that she is rather stiff and not able to move very quickly. By the time she is up and walking to the pen, Elaine has come from the other side of the makeshift curtain and scoops up Moria and begins rocking her gently. Amanda takes Eryn from the pen and starts trying to console her. After a few minutes, the twins have settled and Amanda and Elaine have changed them. Amanda cradles Eryn against her as she feeds her, Elaine rocking the other to keep her calm until she can be fed.

"I'll be glad when we can get ahead again," Amanda says, enticing a chuckle and a sympathetic look from Elaine. Eryn finishes and she swaps with Elaine, so that Moria can be fed. "Has anyone heard anything?" Amanda asks quietly.

Elaine is silent for a few minutes, thinking of the best way to reply. "Mr. Wilcox spoke with Commander Eagle and April about two hours ago," Elaine begins. "They have lost contact with both Mr. Hikari and Saber." Amanda gasps involuntarily, her chest suddenly feeling tight from fear, but Elaine continues, "As far as they could tell at that time, they were both alive. Their suits crashed onto our colony, but so far, they have not communicated with either of them. The enemy also crashed, from what they could tell. Mr. Wilcox set out in his Bronco Buster to try and find Saber and Mr. Hikari. We've not heard anything else since then."

Amanda nods, unable to speak from the fear building up. Moria finishes and begins squirming in her arms. She turns Moria so that she is resting against her shoulder and rocks her, to try and settle both herself and the child.

Elaine goes to say something when Alex moves the curtain aside and clears his throat to announce his presence.

"I apologize for the intrusion, but I've just spoken with Colt," Alex says.

Elaine nods after making sure Amanda is covered once more, and he enters the area, sitting across from the two women.

"Colt says that he found the wreckage of the two suits that he believes were ours," Alex begins. "The good news is, it appears that both Fireball and Saber at least survived the crash."

"And the bad news?" Amanda manages to whisper.

"The bad news is that at least one of them is hurt. There was a lot of blood in the pod of one of the suits, and a little blood in the other one." Amanda nods, accepting the

news and he continues. "Not knowing who was in which suit, we have no way of knowing who is injured and how they are doing. Neither of them was found close to the suits and it appeared that they headed off together. So if there is any good out of this report, it is that they are both alive and are together, so they have a chance at defending themselves."

"I suppose that is something positive," Amanda says quietly. "Thank you for telling us, Alex."

Alex nods and studies Amanda carefully, "Colt went out injured, perhaps I should have gone with him."

"No. If something happens, we may need you here to help protect the children, Alex," Amanda replies.

"I just feel like I should be doing more than just sitting here," Alex says obviously irritated.

Amanda fights to hide the small smile forming on her lips and takes a breath before speaking, "Alex, you are helping, more than you know. You are a source of protection, and our link to the people at the outpost. If you were not here to keep us updated, I'd probably be more worried than I am now. At least with you here, I have someone else that can wield a sword and shoot a blaster if needed. Thomas would defend any of us with his life, but having three of us to help defend this place is a lot better than the two of us."

"Colt?" Fireball says standing up and carefully making his way to where Jesse is crumpled on the ground. Saber is struggling to get up and Colt comes rushing over.

"I heard ya'll had crashed, and I figured one of ya was hurt bad," Colt says looking towards Saber. "We need to get you to the medbay and fast, Saber."

Saber goes to stand and suddenly Jesse makes a lurch towards him. Managing to get to his knees, Saber clutches the sword and plunges it with as much force as he can manage into Jesse. It pierces through him and he drops limply to the ground, his eyes glaze over and his body evaporates, leaving a small puddle where his body had been. Saber drops to the ground, barely conscious and Colt and Fireball immediately turn to him.

"Stay with us, I don't want Amanda to kill me for not bringing you back alive," Colt says. Saber manages to open his eyes and give an almost invisible smile before blacking out.

"Great. We need to get him to the outpost, Colt," Fireball says looking around.

Colt looks him over and notices that he is favoring a leg, "Are you up to helping me carry him to the Bronco Buster?"

"I'll manage," Fireball replies. "You can't exactly sling him over your shoulder in the

condition that he's in. That might just do him in."

Colt chuckles as the pair lean down and carefully lift Saber, slowly making their way towards Colt's waiting vehicle. After what feels like an eternity, they reach it and carefully plop Saber into it, then getting in themselves, Colt takes off for the Outpost.

"I've got 'em, April," Colt says over his com-link.

"Both of them?" A voice asks coming over the com.

"Yeah. Gonna need medics to meet us. Need a gurney, and a wheelchair or a second gurney."

"How bad?" she asks hesitantly.

"Saber has lost a good deal of blood from a wound on his left side. I can't tell if it's his only problem though, he's covered in blood and he's lost consciousness," Colt replies.

A stunned silence for a moment, then Commander Eagle's voice comes in, "And what of Captain Hikari?"

"I'm alive, sir," Fireball replies. "I've been hurt worse. I dislocated my knee, but I think Saber put it back in place. I have a few bruises and scrapes and a bad headache, but I think I'll be okay."

"You forgot to mention your shoulder wound, raceboy," Colt says giving him a glance.

"I've got medics coming out to meet you. We're tracking your movements and they should be upon you within a few minutes. Let them get Saber into a med transport, so they can begin working on him."

"Do you think it's wise to stop outside the outpost, sir?" Fireball asks. "What if Jesse has other fighters nearby that are waiting for such an opportunity or something, we'd be sitting ducks."

"If the medics met you at the gates what would your ETA be?" the commander asks.

"Probably ten minutes, sir at our current speed," Colt replies. "If we don't run into any problems."

"Then I will have them meet you at the gate. I want both of you to be checked out as well, as a precaution."

"Yes sir," they both reply.

The rest of the ride is uneventful. They pull into the outpost and the medics come and load Saber onto a transport and rush him into the medical area. Colt parks nearby and he and Fireball are met by Commander Eagle and April. April looks over the two men carefully, stopping where she sees Fireball covered in blood. "You should go and be

checked, Fireball," April says sternly.

"Most of the blood you're seeing is Saber's, April," Fireball says quietly. "I have a small cut here," he says pointing to his upper leg, "but it feels minor, and my headache has eased off. The worst is my shoulder, but it doesn't hurt as bad as I thought it would."

April nods. "Let's still get you checked out, both of you," she adds glancing to Colt. "I know you really shouldn't have gone out, but I am grateful that you did."

They all head off towards the medical facility, having various conversations as they go.

Kapitel 36: After the Battle

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 35: After the Battle

"Lady Amanda, Commander Eagle has arrived and wishes to speak with you privately," Thomas says coming into the kitchen.

Amanda looks up from her cup and nods, standing slowly. "Would you please send him into the study? I think we can talk there without much interruption," she replies.

"Of course," Thomas replies and leave back towards the sitting room.

Amanda takes a deep breath and releases it slowly. From the stairwell leading to the second floor, she hears the sound of a baby crying and turns towards it.

"I'll see to the wee one, Milady, you go and talk with the Commander. They will be fine, I promise," Elaine says, coming over and placing a comforting hand on her shoulder briefly.

"Thank you, Elaine. I'll go to the study then. Come and get me if you do need me."

"I will, Milady," Elaine replies as she heads upstairs to tend to the crying infant.

Amanda leaves the kitchen and takes the small hallway to the study. She enters and has just sat down when Thomas knocks briefly before leading the commander into the room. Commander Eagle takes a seat close to, but across from her, so that she can see his face, and he hers. Satisfied that he has fulfilled his duty, Thomas heads for the door. "Call if you need anything, Lady Amanda, I'll see to it that you are not disturbed," he says. She nods in appreciation and he slips out and closes the door behind him.

The pair are both quiet for several minutes, each of them trying to get a read on the other. Finally, Commander Eagle breaks the overbearing silence, "He is doing better, Amanda." A look of relief washes over her features and the commander continues, "He is still not out of danger, but at least he is finally stable. As you are aware, he lost a good deal of blood from when the unit crashed. Or we are assuming that is when it occurred, since the pilot pod was covered in blood, as was he. We have finally got ahead of the infection and his fever is down. Hopefully, that will stop the seizures and we can wean him from the anticonvulsant medication that is sedating him. It will still be a week or so once he wakes up before he will be allowed to return home, something that I know both of you will want."

"Yes, that is true, commander. I am glad that you have taken the time to come and see

me. It means a lot that you are taking great pains to keep me up to date on his condition. It kills me that I am unable to go and see him. I hope he isn't angry when he wakes and finds that I've not been there."

"Amanda, you should know that he will understand. You are caring for your children and running the affairs here. He will know that you have been kept up to date. I do not feel he will wonder why you aren't there when he comes around. If he asks, I will tell him the truth."

"So have there been any more signs of the enemy?" Amanda asks.

"We had one possible sighting of some ships, but they seemed to vanish by the time we got there to check them out. Right now, we are busy cleaning up just outside of that little town you and Saber visited before you got married."

"Why? From what?" Amanda asks curiously.

"Evidently during the fight, when we blew up some of the fighters, not all of the pieces burned up in the atmosphere above the colony. Several large chunks of debris fell from space and caused some extensive damage. We have sectioned off a small area of the outer fields of the outpost to set up temporary shelter and such necessities for the citizens that have been displaced while we have soldiers help with the rebuilding efforts."

"Was anyone killed?"

"Luckily no. We have a few that were injured," the commander replies. "One or two of them seems to be a little more serious than the others, but I think that everyone will survive. It is why we called for the air raid sirens to be activated. Had we not done that, the numbers could have been far worse."

Amanda nods and releases a breath she didn't realize she was holding. "I am glad to know that things are well, comparatively. I am sorry that anyone was injured, but as you said, it could have been far worse. How long do you think the rebuilding efforts will take?"

"Most of it won't take long. There are a few of the more...ornate structures that will take a bit longer. A couple of the nobility have been displaced, but they seem to be grateful that they came away with their lives. I will be meeting with those affected in a few days time, so that we can come to an agreement on restitution."

Amanda is silent for several minutes pondering the information she has been given. A couple of times she has started to say something, each time deciding against it. Finally, she looks up and meets the commander's eyes, "Sir, if I am able to arrange it, would you allow me to come to see Saber? I won't stay more than a couple of hours, but I feel that I need to see him. If not for my benefit, than to be able to affirm to anyone who comes questioning that he is indeed alive."

Commander Eagle watches her closely as she's speaking and almost as soon as she has

made her request, he is ready to object. She presses on and he soon sees that it would be pointless to argue. He sighs, rubbing his hands together in thought before replying. "Amanda, had anyone else made such a request, I would without a second thought deny it," Amanda goes to protest and he holds a hand up to silence her before he continues, "However, I know that this culture is a bit different than most, and I see your points as valid, so I will allow it, provided you are able to have an escort, and leave some people here in your absence."

"Thank you, sir," Amanda replies quietly.

"Now, why don't you go see if someone would come with you, and perhaps you may return with me when I leave."

Amanda nods and they stand up and return to the sitting room, where Colt, Robin, Alex, and Sarah are sitting and talking amongst themselves while watching their boys play. Robin looks up and smiles at them as they enter the room. Commander Eagle comes and sits down and watches the children play. Amanda nods politely and heads into the kitchen, searching for Elaine. Not finding her in the kitchen, she knocks on the door to her and Thomas' quarters and Thomas answers the door and gives her a kind smile.

"What can I do for you, Lady Amanda?" he asks stepping aside to allow her to enter.

Amanda steps through the door and looks around, "Have you seen Elaine?" she asks as she takes a seat on the couch in the small sitting area.

Thomas sits down across from her. "I thought she was with you. Perhaps she is upstairs tending to the babes," he replies. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Well, I have convinced Commander Eagle to allow me to go and see Saber today, provided I can find an escort and that someone will tend the children while I am away. I only plan to be gone for a few hours, but he is insistent that I have an escort, so that I do not have to return here alone."

"I would gladly go with you if you wish, Milady. However, perhaps Mr. Wilcox would be a better choice. He is better able to protect you should the need arise."

Amanda nods, mulling his suggestions and sighs. "Do you think I am being unreasonable wanting to go and see Saber?"

Thomas offers her a sympathetic smile, "No, I do not feel that you are being unreasonable. I think you need to see him, even if he doesn't know you're there, I think being close to him briefly would do you some good." Then as an afterthought he says with a smile, "As for whether Elaine would mind that you went, leaving her in charge of the wee ones, I don't see that being a problem."

"Thank you, Thomas. You two have truly been wonderful to me. I know that without the two of you, I could not handle this."

Thomas comes over and places a hand gently on her shoulder, "You are stronger than you give yourself credit for, Lady Amanda. Now, you go and talk to Captain Wilcox, and I'll go and talk to Elaine to tell her what we have discussed."

"Okay," Amanda replies as she stands up and they two of them head for the door. Once in the kitchen, Thomas takes the back stairwell, and Amanda heads to the sitting room. Spotting Colt, she walks over to him, "May I speak with you for a moment, Colt?"

Colt nods and stands up, "Sure thing, Amanda. You wanna go to the kitchen?" Amanda nods and they return to the kitchen and sit down at the small table. Colt studies her face for a minute before speaking, "So, what's up?" he asks casually.

"I have a favor to ask of you," she begins a little nervously.

"Shoot. Can't answer til I know what the question is," Colt says.

"Would you mind accompanying me to the Outpost for a few hours? I would like to go and see Saber, even if he's not awake. Commander Eagle said I could go, so long as someone goes with me that can escort me back. I thought about asking Alex, but since you are closer to Saber than he is, I thought that perhaps you would be the better choice," Amanda says before taking a breath to calm herself.

Colt chuckles to himself and shakes his head. "And here I thought this was going to be something hard," he quips. "I'll be glad to go with you, Amanda. I'd like to go and drag April and Fireball back here too. She needs to take a break, and I'm sure Fireball would like a change of scenery. When do ya want to leave?"

"As soon as the commander is ready, I suppose. Although I'd like to run up and check on the girls before we leave."

"Then you go and do that. I'll go talk to the commander and let Robin and Alex know what is going on," Colt replies.

"Thank you," Amanda says with a nod and heads upstairs. Colt heads back out into the sitting room.

"Is everything okay?" Alex asks when Colt returns alone.

"Yep. Amanda wants me to go back to the outpost with her to make sure she gets back here safely. That means that you'll be in charge of security and the troops at the gate while we're gone. You okay with that?" Colt replies.

Alex nods. "Sure. Is she okay?"

"She wants to see Saber, Lieutenant MacKenzie," Commander Eagle replies. "I think more to convince herself that he will be returning more than anything."

"Has he woken up yet?" Robin asks.

"Not that I am aware of," the commander replies. "He has had a couple of different surgeries and had to go under dialysis for a week, but his organs seem to be functioning almost normally again. Hopefully, he will come around before much longer. I can tell that this is taking a toll on her."

Amanda opens the door to the bedroom and slips in quietly. She sees Elaine sitting rocking Eryn, and Thomas is sitting in another chair cradling Moria. Elaine looks up and smiles at Amanda when she comes in the room.

"I thought you would have left by now," Elaine says quietly.

"I thought I should come and see you and the little ones. I wanted to make sure you had enough to feed them for a few more hours too," she replies quietly.

Elaine nods. "We should be fine, even if you end up having to stay overnight," she replies.

"I'm glad of that. I am hoping to only be gone for a few hours. I know Saber wouldn't want me to leave them for long, but I feel like I have to see him," she says trailing off.

"Do not feel as if you need to explain yourself, Milady. We understand. Go and do what you need to. We will care for the wee ones in your absence. They are the closest thing to grandchildren we have, and we love them as such," Elaine says firmly.

"Thank you," Amanda replies quietly. She goes and gently kisses each child's head and then heads back downstairs, where Colt and Commander Eagle are waiting. "I apologize for taking so long."

"You didn't. I'm sure you had to make sure things were in order for the little ones before we left," Colt replies as he stands up. Amanda nods. "Robin and Sarah can help too, if they need it."

"I'm not exactly incapable with a baby either, Amanda," Alex states. "So Thomas and Elaine will not be lacking in help."

"I sincerely appreciate everything that all of you are doing," Amanda says quietly as the commander and Colt stand up. They say their goodbyes and head out the door.

About an hour later, Amanda is walking into Saber's hospital room. She sees several machines and monitors hooked up and she goes and pulls a chair up beside the bed. She takes his hand into hers after sitting down and leans back in the chair and closes her eyes, listening to the sounds around her.

A short time later, a nurse enters the room and gasps in shock, jolting Amanda from her trance like state. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you," the nurse says apologetically.

"Funny, I was about to say the same thing to you," Amanda says with a weak smile.

The nurse comes over and checks Saber's vitals, scribbling some notes as she does so.

"So how is he?" Amanda asks hesitantly.

The nurse studies her face for a moment and glances to where Amanda's hand is intertwined with Saber's and sees her wedding band. "Much better than when he arrived. He could wake up at any time," the nurse replies kindly.

"Thank you," Amanda replies quietly.

The nurse goes about her duties and leaves after she is done, leaving Amanda alone once again with Saber and the various machines.

Amanda starts to feel restless, so she stands up and looks over Saber's sleeping form and with her free hand, gently runs her fingers across his face. He twitches slightly at her touch, so she leans down and kisses his cheek. "I miss you," she whispers softly towards his ear. He stirs a bit more. "Saber?" she says in a more normal tone.

Slowly he begins to stir and after a minute or so, he squeezes her hand. Amanda gasps and he opens his eyes, blinking several times and looks around. "Amanda?" he says barely audible.

"Saber?" Amanda asks in a mix of relief and excitement.

He gives her a weak smile and she leans down and kisses him lightly, tears falling onto his face from hers. "We have to stop meeting like this," he says quietly, causing Amanda to smile in spite of herself.

Amanda nods and turns and hits the call button beside the bed.

"Yes?" a female voice says from a speaker.

"Colonel Rider is awake. Please tell Commander Eagle and Dr. Izumi," Amanda replies.

"They will be there shortly," the voice replies.

Amanda starts several times to speak, but is unable to find her voice. Saber smiles weakly at her. "For once you're speechless?"

Amanda goes to reply when the doors open and Dr. Izumi comes in, followed closely by Commander Eagle, Colt, April, and Fireball.

"Saber?" April says as she comes through the door and rushes over beside Amanda.

"Hello," Saber replies quietly.

Dr. Izumi comes over and reads the machines and studies Saber closely before speaking. "How are you feeling, Colonel?"

"Stiff and sore, but I've been in worse shape," Saber replies honestly.

"If I'd known that Amanda's presence would wake you, I would have brought her here sooner," Commander Eagle says with a smile.

"I am actually surprised to see you here, Love," Saber says looking at Amanda.

"I convinced Commander Eagle to allow me to come see you. I won't be here for long, I'm afraid. I don't want to leave the girls for too long."

Saber looks at her closely and nods, "I'm glad you came, Amanda. I would have understood if you hadn't though. How are the girls?" he asks quietly.

"They are well. The whole camping in the basement was nothing for them. But I was glad to get back to a real bed."

"How long has it been?" Saber asks to no one in particular.

"Almost three weeks since they brought you in," Dr. Izumi replies. "We had our work cut out for us. You damaged a few of your organs, even had to be on dialysis briefly." Saber gives him a look of shock, but the doctor continues, "Your staples were removed last week, and you've had IV fluids for nutrients. Overall, you should be fine to go home in a day or so, provided you can promise to stay out of trouble."

"Well there goes that," Colt retorts, causing the others to laugh.

"Really funny, cowboy," Saber says dryly.

After the laughter dies down Dr. Izumi looks over Saber with a serious expression, "Do you want to try and move around a little?"

Saber shrugs. "Might not be a bad idea. Amanda, would you mind walking with me?"

"Not at all. Though might I suggest toting along a wheelchair, in case you get tired," Amanda replies.

Dr. Izumi nods his approval. "Let me get you unhooked from everything and have a wheelchair brought in and then the two of you can take a brief walk, all right?"

Saber nods and a nurse is called in. The others except Amanda leave to the commander's office to talk while the nurse and the doctor unhook him from various machines. After helping him change into sweats and a t-shirt, he takes Amanda's arm and they start slowly walking down the hall. After a few minutes, he has to stop to rest and Amanda unfolds the wheelchair.

"Sit," she says sternly, with a look that ceases any objection. He complies and they continue down the hallway in a comfortable silence, winding up to the entrance of the courtyard. "I suppose we should start heading back to your room," Amanda says

sounding a little disappointed.

"I know you have to be leaving soon, I'm sorry, Love," Saber replies quietly.

"Don't be. I'm glad that you are okay, and that I was able to come and see you," she replies as she turns the chair back down the corridor they came from. She nearly turns right into someone and looks up to apologize when she stops in shock.

"Mrs. Rider?" a female voice says equally shocked. "R...Richard?" she stammers.

"Sincia?" Saber says shocked.

"I thought you were dead," she says in an almost accusatory tone, after she recovers from her shock. Glaring between the two before her.

"Technically, I was. Amanda found out well after you had gone that I wasn't," Saber replies matter-of-factly.

"Technically?" Sincia scoffs. "So I'm sure the pregnancy was false too, as I see no sign of it now," she adds coldly, glaring at Amanda.

"That is quite enough, Ms. Swadjen," Amanda says trying to control the anger she feels building. "Saber is still recovering from the last battle. I do not want his stay away from our home prolonged due to stress."

"A battle that has injured my husband and countless others," she replies back hotly.

"I will not get into this here. This is not the time or place, madam. I pray for your husband's swift recovery. Good day," Amanda says and she pointedly steers the chair past Sincia, who is standing in shock, her mouth agape.

They arrive in the room a couple minutes later and Saber allows himself to laugh out loud, no longer able to hold it in.

Amanda stops and moves in front of him to face him. "And what pray tell is so funny?" Amanda asks.

"I do not think Sincia expected you to speak to her like that. No one has ever told her off before," Saber says as he finally catches his breath from laughing. "I think you handled the situation well, Amanda. You were far more polite than I would have been. So be glad you said something before I had a chance."

"I really should have handled it better. I'm sure that she is under tremendous stress right now," Amanda replies quietly.

"It still does not give her the right to speak to you the way that she did. I can understand her hostility towards me, but you have done nothing to her, Amanda." Saber replies.

Amanda helps him get back into bed and he sighs, obviously tired. "She had no right to speak to you that way either, Saber. She broke off your engagement through no fault of your own."

Saber goes to object, but decides against when someone knocks on the door. "Come in," he replies.

Commander Eagle, Colt, April, and Fireball enter the room. "Are you ready to leave, Amanda?" Colt asks hesitantly.

Amanda nods reluctantly. "Yeah, I suppose we should be going."

Saber takes her hand and squeezes it gently. "I hope to be home in a day or two, Love."

"I know. I'll be glad when you are," Amanda replies and then leans down and kisses him lightly. "See you later," she says quietly. They all say their goodbyes and leave to head back to Saber's estate.

Commander Eagle hangs back a minute after they leave. "Are you sure that you are okay?" he asks Saber noting how tired he looks.

"I'm just tired, sir. I think I'll be fine eventually. I tried to walk too much is all," Saber replies honestly.

"I am just trying to make sure. How is your vision?" the commander asks.

"About as good as it was before I ended up here," Saber replies.

Commander Eagle nods, accepting his answer. "I will come and check on you in the morning. Try and get some rest, Saber."

"I will, sir," he replies. "And thank you," he adds as the commander heads for the door.

The commander nods in acknowledgement. "Good night," he says as he leaves, pulling the door closed behind him.

The ride back everyone is talking randomly about various things, only Amanda seems rather quiet. "Are you all right, Amanda?" April asks suddenly realizing Amanda hasn't spoken during their trip.

Amanda nods slightly. "Just lost in thought, I suppose."

"You don't look too happy. I thought you'd be relieved that Saber was awake and seems to be well enough to return home soon," April replies.

"I am. I'll feel much better having him home. I suppose it's just everything hitting me all at once and I'm a bit overwhelmed," she replies quietly.

April nods slightly, accepting the answer. The rest of the trip Amanda listens to the conversations in the car, trying to look a little more involved, interjecting occasionally. Once they arrive, she heads up to check on the children. She finds them sleeping soundly in their cribs and Elaine cleaning the room when she enters.

"How is Saber?" Elaine asks quietly.

"He may come home as early as tomorrow. He woke up while I was there," Amanda replies sounding tired.

Elaine looks her over carefully and comes over placing a hand gently on her arm, "Get some sleep. The wee ones are good for a while."

Amanda nods and goes to change, returning a few minutes later. She gets into bed and falls fast asleep before Elaine has even left the room.

The sound of someone entering the room stirs him awake. Straining to see in the dark room, he notices the shadowy outline of a figure slowly walking towards him. Listening, he can tell they are trying not to make much noise. Moving slowly, he closes his eyes and then flicks on the lights above him, causing the intruder to gasp in shock. He opens his eyes and the person standing halfway between the bed and the door freezes in their spot. "What are you doing here?" he asks coldly.

"I...I...came to talk," she stammers.

"We have nothing to discuss," he replies flatly.

"Okay, I came to apologize then," she states quietly.

"You were out of line, stress or not."

"You lied to me, or rather she did," the female voice states.

"She told you what she knew to be true, Sincia. Everyone believed it was true. They had no reason not to believe that all of us were killed. Had we done what we said we were going to do, we would have died," he says firmly.

"You lied to me before that, Richard," she says matter-of-factly.

"So you say. I don't see how I did," he replies harshly.

"You said you'd never regain your vision," she retorts.

"I said I didn't know whether I would or not. I still could wake up one morning totally blinded again. You have a life now, you have a husband. Go and live your life, and let me live mine," he says coldly as he fights to control his anger.

Sincia gasps taken aback by his tone, "You can't talk to me that way," she says defiantly.

"I can easily have you removed from this room. I am doing my best to remain civil to you. You come in here at God knows what hour, claiming an apology, which you have yet to issue and instead you are speaking to me as if I owe you an apology. If that is what you are after, you might as well leave. I've done nothing wrong," Saber says coldly, allowing his anger to show in his voice.

Sincia's temper starts to get the best of her and she takes a deep breath, trying to calm herself before speaking. "I think you lied because you had met that woman and wanted to get out of our wedding contract. Had I known you would still be able to fight, I never would have broken our engagement. So yes, you did do something wrong, Richard. You lied to get out of our contract. Your parents would turn in their graves if they knew that you married the help."

Saber clinches his fists and starts several times to say something, each time stopping himself before saying something he would regret. A smile forms on Sincia's lips each time he stops himself from speaking, working to only infuriate him more. Finally, he closes his eyes and takes a deep breath to calm his temper. "Actually had all of this happened and they were still alive, they would welcome her with open arms into our clan. She has defended my life on more than one occasion. It is because of her that I was able to return and fight. She was my eyes. I literally was fighting blind, but knowing that the others would likely die if I didn't go, she went to help me fight, at the risk of her own life. Would you have been able to kill a man, Sincia? She has killed twice to save my life, including once when she was pregnant. Could you or would you have been able to do the same?" he asks. She goes to speak, but he continues, not allowing her to raise any objection before he has his say. "Do not judge everything from one vantage point, there are sometimes other things that change a situation to be something other than what it appears to be. She is a loving compassionate woman that has been through Hell because she has known me, and yet despite all of that, she has remained with me. I married her because I love her and I am glad that she has given me two beautiful children. So do not think you have the right to judge her because of what you believe her to be, because she is far more than what you think know."

Sincia feels tears of rage falling down her face. Several times she goes to reply to his accusations, only to have him cut her off as if her opinion means nothing. He finally finishes and she is near exploding with rage, so much so she can barely speak. "You don't know what I've been through," she finally manages to say just barely above a whisper. "How would you feel if you were told you had been promised to someone who would rather leave than be with you? Then when they do come home they claim not to know you and they are an invalid. So you do what you think is right and release them and find someone else that can appreciate you, only to have them mortally injured in the same damned war that your former love was supposedly maimed in?"

"You seriously think I pretended that I lost my sight so I could get out of our betrothal?" Saber asks in disbelief. "I am sorry that your husband was wounded. From what I have heard, those that were wounded are the ones that chose to ignore the air raid sirens. If that is what happened, then why didn't you evacuate? Do not try and blame what happened between us to be the fault of your husband's injuries, Sincia."

You and I both know that is not the case," he says coldly. "I am sorry that you are having to go through this, but perhaps enduring this will make you a stronger person. I know that I have grown because of what I have been through," he says not bothering to hold back the anger in his voice. "Sometimes it is the only way we learn the lessons we need to," he adds a little less harshly. He sighs, trying to force his rage from his system. "It is late, and I would like to rest. You should do the same, Sincia," he says quietly.

Sincia nods slightly. "I suppose you are right," she says quietly. "I am sorry that I have wasted your time and my time," she adds coolly.

"Perhaps one day you will see that I have spoken the truth, Sincia. I wish you the best in your life," Saber says as civilly as he is able.

"Goodbye, Richard," she says and she leaves without another word.

After the door closes Saber slinks back against the bed mentally worn out from the debate. He reaches for the call button, then thinks better of it. He turns off the light and sits on the darkness, replaying the last few hours of conversation in his mind, trying to make sense of it. Eventually he drifts into a restless sleep.

A couple hours later, Commander Eagle enters his room and finds him asleep. He walks over and touches his arm, "Saber?"

Saber stirs at the sound of the voice and someone touching his arm. Slowly, he opens his eyes and after a minute, "Morning already?" he asks groggily.

"Yes, it's nearly eight now. I thought you would have been awake some time ago," the commander replies.

"Late night," he mutters.

"Trouble sleeping?" the commander asks.

"Actually, I had been sleeping rather well until I had a late-night visitor," Saber replies with a hint of anger in his voice.

"A visitor?" the commander asks confused.

"Aye," he says with a sigh. "Sincia came in here last night. She was rather angry that I was alive, when she thought I had died," Saber says quietly. "She had run into Amanda and I in the hallway yesterday and said some rather harsh things. I know it upset Amanda, but Amanda handled it far more diplomatically than I was about to. But evidently, that just seemed to fuel her anger. So much so that she approached me here last night."

"You should have hit the call button. They would have removed her, Saber. You don't need to deal with that right now."

"Neither does Amanda, sir. I saw how tired she is, even though she did her best not to show it. I worry that she is going to make herself sick."

A knock at the door ceases their conversation and Dr. Izumi enters the room, "Ah, good morning, Colonel. How are you feeling today?"

"A bit tired, but I expected that," Saber replies honestly.

"He had a rough night, Doctor," the commander states, getting a look from Saber.

"Oh? What happened?" the doctor asks.

"It was more of a personal matter rather than a medical one, Doctor. Nothing you need be concerned about," Saber replies, hoping to cease further inquiry.

"Ah, worried about your wife?" Dr. Izumi asks. Saber nods slightly. "I noticed she looked a little tired, I figured seeing you wake up would help with that."

"Speaking of which, when do you think I can return home?" Saber asks hopefully.

Dr. Izumi chuckles, "I suppose you're ready to see your little ones?"

"It's been almost a month since I've held them, so yes, I want to see them, doctor." Saber replies. "I also feel that I can recuperate better at home than in this God forsaken place."

Dr. Izumi nods. "I'm sure you will feel better at home, sir. I need to check you over and make sure that physically you are well enough to go, but I would like for you to eat something first. If you can keep down some food, and your vitals are good until this afternoon, I may just allow you to go home today."

Saber nods and noticeably relaxes a little. "I'll hope for everything to come out well then. I still have the wheelchair from before that I can use to get around some if I need to, if that will help make your decision in my favor, doctor," Saber adds.

Dr. Izumi laughs. "That might gain you a couple of points in your favor. That and the fact that I'm sure your wife won't let you do much for a while."

"Trust me, if you list my limitations, she will make sure I don't exceed them."

"And I'm sure that Elaine will also make sure of that," Commander Eagle adds.

"Aye, I'm sure that is how it will be, sir," Saber replies with a smile.

"Well, your countenance is better than when I arrived, that is encouraging. So we shall see," Dr. Izumi says as he reads over his vitals. "I'll come and check on you in a couple of hours." With that, Dr. Izumi leaves and Saber releases a deep sigh.

"Well, the odds are you will be going home today, Saber," the commander says. "So

perhaps the only sleep disruption will be from your children, rather than uninvited guests."

"Aye. Had Amanda been here, Sincia might well have ended up with a sword at her throat. Or in a bed beside her husband."

Commander Eagle chuckles. "And then who knows what would have happened. I don't know what she said to you, and it's not my business to know what was said, but if she acted at all like she has in my presence previously, I'm sure it would have ended in her having to be admitted into the hospital ward alongside her husband."

Saber manages to hide his smile but nods. "Pretty much. It took everything Amanda had to not physically attack her yesterday."

Commander Eagle chuckles, "Amanda is fiercely loyal to you, Saber. Almost to a fault."

"She is different than most women that I've been around. Perhaps it's the way her father raised her."

A knock on the door causes the two men to turn just as it opens and Colt comes in followed by a nurse with a food tray. She sets it down and moves the table closer to the bed before leaving the room.

"Mornin'," Colt says casually looking between them.

"Good morning," they both reply.

Saber moves the table so that he can reach the food, then slowly begins picking at his food as they talk.

"Is Somethin' up? You two look a little tense," Colt asks curiously.

"I had an unwelcome visitor last night, so I'm tired. That's all," Saber says between bites.

Colt looks confused and looks at the commander for an explanation.

"Don't worry about it, Captain. With any luck, Saber will be leaving later today, so there won't be more of such instances," the commander says. He then looks to Saber, "I have some paperwork to do. I'll return in a few hours to see if a decision has been made."

"Thank you, sir," Saber says quietly. The commander nods to both of them and leaves.

Colt pulls up a chair and the two of them sit in silence while Saber slowly eats the food that was brought in for him. Just about the time he finishes Colt looks up at him and asks, "So, who was the visitor last night, Saber?"

Saber visibly tenses at the question, but then sighs and closes his eyes before facing

Colt again. "Sincia," he says barely above a whisper.

Colt notices his physical response and flinches when he hears the reply, instantly regretting asking the question. "Not for a social visit then?"

"No," Saber replies curtly.

Colt lets out a long whistle and shakes his head.

"She had the audacity to accuse me of pretending to be injured. Saying that it was a ruse to get out of our marriage contract," he says his anger starting to return.

"Ouch," Colt mutters. "What did you say to that?"

"I'd rather not repeat it right now. I'd like to be well enough to go home today."

"Understandable. Maybe some other time," Colt replies.

Dr. Izumi knocks and opens the door, coming into the room, a nurse not far behind him. "How are you feeling after eating some real food?"

"It seems to have agreed with me. I am still a little tired, but I would like to get out of here," Saber replies.

"I'm sure you would," Dr. Izumi says with a chuckle. The nurse comes over and checks his vital signs while the doctor does a brief physical examination, nodding approvingly. "Well, if you think you'll not rush into any battles for a while, and not pick up anything heavier than your little ones, I am inclined to allow you to return home," Dr. Izumi says with a smile.

"I can adhere to those stipulations," Saber says quickly.

"I can come over twice a week to check your progress, with the instruction that should I be needed in the interim, someone call me."

"I assure you that would not be an issue," Saber replies.

Dr. Izumi nods. "Then I will go and talk to Commander Eagle and see about your discharge paperwork. You could be leaving within an hour or so." The nurse begins disconnecting the various monitoring devices and removes his IV as they talk.

"Thank you doctor," Saber replies as Dr. Izumi heads out the door, the nurse in tow.

Colt and Saber talk for a while. Colt helps Saber change into regular clothes and they talk as they wait, Fireball and April join them, having heard that he was to be released.

About an hour later, Commander Eagle and Dr. Izumi return.

"You ready to go home, Saber?" the commander asks.

"Yes, sir," Saber replies. He gets into the wheelchair that is provided and they head out the door.

Please Review! :-)

Kapitel 37: Isn't It Nice to Be Home Again?

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 36: Isn't It Nice to be Home Again?

"I'm glad that Dr. Izumi allowed you to come home, Saber," Elaine says as she takes his plate from in front of him. "I know Lady Amanda has hated not being able to have you around. Perhaps seeing you on a more consistent basis will improve her mood. She has seemed a bit down lately."

She has had an unusual amount of stress to deal with, Elaine," Saber replies sounding a little defensive.

"And she has held herself together well, you should be proud. I know your parents would have been," Elaine says trying not to anger him. "I'm just worried about the physical toll this is taking on her. Between just having the twins, and having to nurse them, and then all of the other excitement around here, I'm actually surprised that she hasn't dropped from exhaustion."

"Aye," Saber says quietly, as he swirls the tea around in his cup, not really wanting to drink it.

Elaine studies him for a moment when he gives such a short reply and then pulls a chair up beside him. "What is troubling you?"

Saber shrugs and releases a heavy sigh. "A lot of things, Elaine," he says quietly.

Elaine sits silently waiting for him to elaborate.

Saber, realizing she's not going to just allow his brief answer stands up. "We need to talk elsewhere, I don't care to have someone walk in on this conversation."

Elaine nods and stands up slowly.

Saber turns towards the study and stops. "Perhaps I should talk with Amanda first, or maybe with both of you at once would be best," he says thinking aloud.

"Well, she is upstairs, would you like to go there to talk?" Elaine asks.

"I think I would rather still talk in the study. Why don't you let Thomas know that the three of us will be in the study, and I'll go see if Sarah and Robin would mind keeping an eye on the girls for a bit. Then I'll get Amanda and we'll meet you there."

"Of course, Saber," Elaine replies casting him a nervous glance. She then heads

towards their quarters in search of Thomas.

Saber heads into the sitting room where Colt, Robin, Alex, Sarah, and Fireball are all sitting and talking while the boys play on the floor nearby. "Good, you are all mostly here," he says as they look up when he enters the room. "I have a favor to ask."

"Sure," Colt says. "Whatever you need."

"I have some things that I need to talk to Elaine and Amanda about. Would you mind keeping an eye on the girls for us?"

"Sure. We can do that," Robin and Sarah reply together.

"Do ya need us to go upstairs with you?" Colt asks.

"No, if they are asleep, I'll just bring the monitor down. If they are awake, We'll bring them down here to you," Saber replies.

"Okay," Colt replies.

"Thank you," Saber says and heads upstairs. He enters the room to find Amanda sitting in the rocker with Moria on her lap playing with her. "How are you feeling, Love?" he asks quietly as he closes the door.

Amanda gives him a weak smile as she looks up briefly from watching Moria. "Tired, but a little better since you've come home," she replies honestly.

Saber nods and carefully leans down and scoops up Eryn, who is laying on a blanket on the floor playing with her feet. She squeals as he picks her up, cradling her against him. "Hi there, little one," he says softly, getting a coo in response. He smiles at her and looks over to Amanda, noticing that she looks more tired than she is trying to let on. "I've asked Robin and Sarah, and the others if they would mind watching them for a little. I'd like to speak with you and Elaine privately if you are up to it," Saber states watching Amanda closely for a reaction.

Amanda swallows hard, her stomach forming a nervous knot, but she nods and slowly stands up. "I've just fed them, so they may need changing before too long, but otherwise, they should be fine," she replies quietly. "Am I okay dressed like this?" she asks.

"You're fine, Love. I just don't want you having to try and care for them while we talk. Think of it as a small break," Saber replies. Amanda nods as she grabs the diaper bag and they head downstairs. After leaving the babies with the others they head to the study and find Elaine already there, waiting patiently in a chair. "Thank you for agreeing to this, Elaine," Saber says quietly. Elaine nods and Saber and Amanda come in and sit on the small couch across from her. The three sit in silence for a few minutes before Saber finally figures out how he wants to start the discussion. He looks to Elaine, "Did Amanda tell you about our encounter with Sincia that day she came to see me at the hospital?"

"Yes, she was rather upset about the incident when she returned home, so she took me aside and we talked," Elaine replies with a nod.

Saber turns to Amanda, who nods in reply to his unasked question. "Upset is putting it mildly, as I'm sure you know," she says quietly, eliciting a small smile from Saber.

"Well, that was not the last I saw of her, although I wish it had been," Saber says with as little emotion as he can, getting shocked looks from both women. "She came to my room at some point during the night. I was asleep and felt a presence in the room. I felt threatened, so I carefully moved so that I could surprise the visitor by turning on the lights suddenly, hoping to temporarily blind them."

"She came into your room in the middle of the night?" Amanda asks while trying to control her anger.

"Yes Love, she did," Saber replies calmly. He sees an outburst forming and holds up a finger to her lips, "Please, let me finish before you get so wound up," he says quietly. She nods and visibly relaxes a little and he continues, slowly removing his finger from her mouth. "I was actually shocked when I realized that it was her in my room. I was angry that she was there. I almost hit the call button and had her removed, but she claimed she was there to apologize for her outburst earlier."

"Good. She should have apologized. She was out of line," Elaine says harshly.

"That isn't exactly what happened," Saber replies quietly.

Elaine eyes him suspiciously. "Saber, you di-"

"I can not believe you would even allow such a thought into your head, Elaine," Saber replies harshly. "Of course I didn't do anything to compromise my relationship with Amanda. She is the only woman that I have ever been in a physical relationship with." Elaine has a slightly shocked look, but recovers quickly, giving a look of guilt for her thought. "I love Amanda, and I told Sincia just that. She said some pretty harsh things, some aimed at Amanda, and some very pointed accusations at me about how I supposedly duped her into breaking off the engagement. At first I was ready to call security, but after she said what she did, I went off. I said some things that were true, but that I should have left unsaid." He turns so that he looks directly at Amanda, "I want you to know that I have no regrets with you, Amanda. I know that the way we met was less than ideal, but I do not regret that we met how we did. I am a better person for having known you," he says quietly. "I felt that both of you should be aware of what transpired, so that if anything ever comes of it, it doesn't come as a surprise."

Amanda nods. "I am glad you told me, Saber. If I had found out through hearsay, I might have been far more angry about it. I wish I had been there to hear what was said though, it might have proven to be good entertainment," she says finishing her statement with a small smile.

Saber chuckles, "Or in physical violence," he adds with a smirk.

"You're one to talk. She is lucky that you weren't armed," Amanda replies.

"Aye, she might have had a sword at her throat in the dark."

"We would have known just how brave she was then," Amanda says with a chuckle.

Elaine stands up, "So do you think she will show up around here again?"

"No, I don't think so," Saber replies after a few moments in thought.

"What if she does?" Elaine asks. "Do we just turn her away."

Saber sighs, "Let's not borrow trouble. If for some strange reason she does come here, we will deal with it then."

Elaine nods. "Are we done then? I need to see about dinner."

"Yes, we're done, Elaine," Saber says quietly.

Elaine takes her leave from the room, slipping out quietly and closing the door behind her.

Saber leans into the back of the couch and closes his eyes, running his hands across his face feeling suddenly more tired than he did minutes before.

Amanda moves beside him and rests her head on his shoulder, out of habit he places an arm around her and sighs. "Are you all right, Saber?" Amanda asks concerned.

"I will be. I'm just tired, as I'm sure you are," he replies without opening his eyes.

"I am glad that you told me about Sincia, Saber. I'm sure it wasn't an easy thing for you to do. I can tell that it upset you."

"I'm not even sure how she found my room to be perfectly honest. I was in a supposedly secure area," Saber replies exasperated. "I'm still a bit upset about Elaine's remark too."

Amanda manages a small smile, "She has become rather defensive of me since the girls were born, I know you wouldn't do anything to compromise what we have, Saber. So I saw the humor in it, even if you didn't."

"I suppose it is mildly amusing, but it was not the time or place to say such a thing," Saber says gruffly, making Amanda chuckle. "I think that if she is acting like this to try and win you back, she's going about it all wrong. Something tells me it wouldn't work anyways."

"Amanda, the things she said...it was how she talked so bad about you that angered me. I can understand her saying things about me, but she was basing her opinions on

what Sean told her, not fact, and that is what made me so angry. I told her that she could only hope to be as good a woman as you."

Amanda looks up surprised. "You actually said that?" she asks in disbelief.

"Perhaps not those exact words, but yes," Saber replies while trying not to laugh.

"If anyone said something like that to me, I'd haul off and hurt them."

"Sincia is not you, Love. I don't think she could actually stoop to physical violence."

"So you're saying that violence is stooping to a low?"

"No. I'm just saying it isn't her style. She believes in verbal attacks, as opposed to physical confrontations. I rather admire that you seem to possess a diplomatic streak, as well as the ability to physically defend yourself. When you went off on her the other evening, you were far more diplomatic about what you said than what was about to come from my mouth. I had my chance later, and I tried to be proper about what I said, but obviously it went out the window by the end of the conversation."

"I wish I could have at least heard what was said," Amanda mutters.

"I was rather upset after she left. So much so that I almost grabbed my cell and called you to talk about it."

"I wish you would have," Amanda replies.

"I then thought better of it when I realized what time it probably was. I knew you were already on the verge of exhaustion, so I figured I would just talk to you about it now."

"I suppose that it might have woken the little ones up too, which would mean that Elaine would have gotten up, and then Thomas, if he heard my phone ring through the monitor, and God only knows who else would have gotten up to see what was going on."

"Hence the reason that I reconsidered the decision to call you," he says pulling her against him.

Amanda relaxes in the embrace and before either one realizes it they have fallen asleep. A knock on the door causes Saber to stir a little, but starts to quickly drift back off. The door opens and Commander Eagle comes in with Elaine, stopping when they spot the sleeping pair.

"Perhaps we should let them rest, Elaine," the commander says quietly.

Saber realizes they aren't alone in the room and forces his eyes to open. Looking around, everything is blurry for a moment, then he sees Commander Eagle and Elaine turning back towards the door. "What time is it?" he manages to ask before the two get out the door, causing them to return to the room.

"It's almost dinner time, Saber," Elaine replies.

"We've been here almost three hours?" he asks in shock, suddenly more awake.

"Yes, and now we know why," the commander says with a chuckle. "Obviously you both needed a rest."

Amanda stirs from the voices and looks around. "We're still in the study?" she asks groggily as she tries to move, realizing how stiff she is.

Saber moves a little so that they can both sit up better and nods. "Yeah. We both fell asleep I suppose when we were talking," he replies. "Elaine says dinner is almost ready."

"Oh. I'm sure that the girls need feeding again by now. I'm sorry," Amanda says quietly.

"They have been fed. We used some of the stored milk. I assure you everything is fine," Elaine says.

"Thank you, Elaine," Amanda replies as she stands up. Saber stands up slowly beside her.

"I suppose we should go and talk with everyone before dinner," Saber says. "I'm sure by now they all want to know what is going on."

"I sort of told them that I figured you were discussing last night's events with Amanda and Elaine. It raised a few questions, but no one seemed to want to press the matter," Commander Eagle replies.

Saber nods and they head out and have dinner.

A couple months go by uneventfully. Saber and Amanda are sitting outside watching the girls play on some blankets enjoying the lack of excitement when Colt comes out followed by Robin, Fireball, April, Alex, Sarah, Elaine, Thomas, Commander Eagle, and Dr. Izumi. Saber looks up to see the group coming towards them, "Is something wrong?" he asks almost dreading the reply.

"Yes, there is," Elaine says eying the couple closely.

"What?" Saber asks.

"We've been discussing things and have unanimously decided that the two of you need to get away for a couple of days," the commander says. Amanda immediately goes to protest and he holds a hand up. "We are perfectly able to care for your children for two days. We have their milk, diapers, and anything else that they might need. Your children are healthy, so a couple of days away from you shouldn't do them any harm and could do the two of you a wealth of good. I don't think either of you

have truly relaxed since before you got married."

"And for once, the two of you are in fairly decent health. I think the mental break is a good idea," Dr. Izumi states, getting a nod of agreement from both Thomas and Elaine.

"But we've got no place to go," Amanda finally says in protest.

"Lady Amanda, do you not think that you can afford a holiday someplace? Find a nice inn or something in a nearby town. You can still be close enough that you can return should we need you, but far enough away to finally relax," Elaine says.

"How long has this plotting been going on under our noses?" Saber asks trying to hide his amusement.

"We started talking about it approximately a week after you came home from the hospital this last time," Elaine says.

"I see," Saber says flatly. He looks to Amanda who is obviously trying to find some objection and shrugs. "I don't think they're going to let go of this, Love," he says almost apologetically.

Amanda sighs in defeat and nods slightly. "I suppose they aren't giving us much choice, are they?" she asks glancing over the group standing before them, noticing the amused looks on several faces.

"Apparently not," Saber replies dryly. "Have you already booked us a place?" he asks in a mocking tone.

"I was actually going to suggest your parent's vacation cottage to you, sir," Thomas replies.

"Vacation cottage?" Saber and Amanda ask at once.

"Aye sir, It is about three hours to the northwest of here," Thomas replies. "I have a nephew that cares for it that lives close by. I called him to inquire about how it fared after the last battles, since I knew some of that area had been damaged. He told me that your lands there were fine and that he had just recently given the house a good cleaning. He had recently rented it to some nobles who needed a place to stay while their home was rebuilt. I told him it was fine. He called yesterday to tell me that they have vacated the premises and that everything is once again in order. I can easily call him and ask him to get some groceries and such ready for your arrival."

"I believe we are capable enough to buy our own necessities, Thomas," Saber says obviously amused. "How come I've never heard of this cottage before?" he asks curious.

"Well, you've been there before, although you were a rather small thing. Perhaps two or so. You almost drowned in the lake nearby, and they didn't take you back after

that. But your parents would take a holiday there once a year at least. Don't you remember that?" Elaine replies.

"I remember them taking holiday, but I don't remember the places they went. I remember that I usually stayed home with the two of you and the tutors, so that I wouldn't be lacking in schooling. I don't remember nearly drowning as a child though."

"Well, you were really little, so I'm not surprised that you are unable to remember, Saber," Elaine says quietly.

Eryn starts crying and Amanda gets up and picks her up, cradling her against her to calm her. After a minute, she quiets down and Amanda places her against her shoulder gently bouncing her to soothe her. "I suppose it might be a good idea to get away for a couple of days. Someplace other than a hospital would be nice," Amanda admits quietly. "When are you suggesting that we leave?" she asks looking to Thomas and Elaine.

"Perhaps tomorrow?" Thomas offers. "It would give my nephew time to be sure everything is freshened up, and the two of you time to pack and such before your trip."

Saber nods. "Are you amenable to this, Love?" he asks Amanda.

"You ask as if we have a choice, Saber," she replies with a chuckle. "Something tells me that we don't."

"Aye, so I suppose we should go and get ready then," he replies as he scoops up Moria into his arms. "Let's lay them down and then work on packing a few things."

"Okay," Amanda replies. They take the children and head up to their room.

Colt chuckles, "I was hopin' they'd put up a fight a little more."

"I think they saw that they were clearly out numbered," Fireball says.

"And out gunned," Colt adds with a grin.

"So where are we going to let the babies sleep while they are away?"

"We will keep them in our room. At least until I set up Lady Amanda's old room as an official nursery," Elaine replies.

"Is that what they were going to do?" Sarah asks.

"I don't know, but it's what is going to happen, at least until the children are old enough to be further away and have their own rooms."

Colt laughs, "You are quite devious, Ms. Elaine."

"If we didn't intervene, they'd have them in their room for the next year. They are nearly old enough to start eating solid foods exclusively, and drinking whole milk, so I don't see the need for them to remain in the same room with them any longer," Elaine replies. "The babes will be six months in just another week. It is time, whether their parents are ready or not."

Commander Eagle laughs, "I see why Saber's parents were so fond of you. You aren't afraid to tell them what they don't want to hear. Something that the couple in question undoubtedly needs."

"We'll help get the nursery set up while they're gone. It'll be fun," Robin says with a smile.

The group continues to discuss their plans for a while before breaking off to do various things throughout the remainder of the day.

Kapitel 38: Vacation Part 1

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The Price of Peace
Chapter 37: Vacation

"Well, if I'm reading these directions correctly we're almost there, Love," Saber says as Amanda drives down a small country road. "I believe the town that we just passed through is the one just before the road we take up ahead on the left."

Amanda spots the side road and turns. After about ten minutes, they arrive at a small, but well-kept cottage with a lake behind it surrounded by woods. "It's gorgeous," Amanda says quietly as she pulls up close to the house and stops. They get out of the car and are met by a young man close to their age.

"Hello!" he calls as he walks up to them from the house. "Uncle said you'd be arriving today. I'm Jared, nice to meet you, Captain and Mrs. Rider."

"It is nice to meet you, Jared," Saber replies, not bothering to correct his rank. "I am grateful that you are willing to care for this cottage."

"It's no trouble, sir. My family lives just down the way, so I can keep an eye on it. Uncle Thomas pays me well for doin' it, which helps me out as I've got seven children and a wife to care for."

Saber chuckles, "I suppose that is a bit of help for you then." Saber heads around to the back of the car to grab the bags and Jared follows.

"I can take those in for you if you'd like, sir, so that you and your lady can look around," Jared says offering a hand.

Saber nods and passes the two bags to him. "Thank you. I would like to take a look around to become familiar with the layout of the area. Love, would you like to come along?" he asks turning to Amanda.

"Of course," she replies as she comes up beside him.

"Oh, 'fore I forget to tell you, you got three horses. They are with my horses, as it's easier to care for 'em all in one place. I'll take you over later if you wish to go riding to pick a couple o horses to keep while you're here," Jared says stopping at the entrance of the house.

"Thank you. I believe we would like to borrow a couple of horses. It has been a while since we've gone riding," Saber replies. Jared nods and then heads into the house.

"It would be nice to go riding again. It's been a long time since we have," Amanda says as they walk around the back of the house towards the lake.

"Aye, that it would. We could explore a bit more of the grounds that way. None of this even seems remotely familiar to me," Saber says as they walk. "I suppose we should have stopped for lunch on the way in, I didn't realize the time."

"It's not that late. We could easily drive back into town and get lunch and a few groceries for fixing things here and be back by mid to late afternoon. Once we check out the house," Amanda replies.

Saber nods. "That sounds like a plan. We could ask Jared what places are good to eat in town. I'm sure he'd have a suggestion or two." They gradually stroll back towards the house to find Jared waiting for them on the front porch, whittling a piece of wood..

"I'm sorry that we've kept you waiting, Jared," Amanda says apologetically.

Jared looks up and smiles kindly, placing his knife back in his pocket. "It's not a problem, ma'am. The kids are in school for a while yet, so I'm kinda enjoying the peace and quiet."

"We were going to ask you if there are any good places in town to eat. We plan on going in and getting groceries, but wanted to eat beforehand. Do you have any suggestions?" Saber asks.

"Well, if you want something fancy, there's Moore's Castle, they serve the nobility and upper classes. Went there once on your parent's invite as a weddin' gift. The food is divine. If you want somethin' a little more local, you can try Wedgewood's Tavern, it's a local pub, but not too bad at lunchtime. I'd avoid it in the evenin' though. After 'bout six, the lower-class and the 'riffs tend to hang there til late. Brawls are not uncommon after 'bout seven in the eve, once a few pints have been unloaded."

"Good to know, thank you for the information, Jared," Saber says.

"No worries. I'll come round again 'bout tea time with the horses if you'd like. I can return the ones you don't take to the stables at my place 'fore dinner time," Jared replies passing a set of keys to Saber.

Saber nods and takes the offered keys. "That'll be perfect. We shall see you then."

Jared nods and heads off towards his place on the scooter parked a bit back from the house. They watch him drive off then turn and enter the house, looking around. After some exploring they return to the car and head back towards town.

"So, do you care where we eat, Love?" Saber asks as they get closer to the town.

"Not particularly. I'd be fine with either of the suggestions. It's been years since I've eaten in a tavern. Of course that was because I refused to return to the one in the

town I lived at, but I don't care to talk about that."

Saber gives her a curious look. "Oh? Did you get into a bit of trouble?" he asks amused.

"Not exactly," Amanda mutters, mentally kicking herself. "Can we leave it at young and stupid?" she asks hopefully.

"You know you're only making this story more appealing," he teases.

Amanda sighs, "I sort of got drunk and I wasn't quite of age," she mutters.

"That's it?" he asks.

"Um, yeah," she mutters silently praying that he'll stop asking her for more information.

He stares at her for a moment and laughs, "You're a horrible liar, Amanda," he says quietly. "If that was the worst of it, I don't want to hear what you'd say to the age I had my first drink. I was barely thirteen. Of course if you are speaking strictly of pubs, I was a little closer to proper age, about seventeen, but I don't think I did anything exuberant."

Amanda swallows hard and sighs. "Let's just say that had my friend not come in, I probably would have been in a bad situation. Luckily, she came in and drug me out of the room and gave me a spare top she had to wear," she finishes quietly.

Saber shakes his head, the amusement gone from his features. "How much older was he?" he asks quietly.

"Hell if I know. I honestly don't remember much about it, other than puking my guts out the next morning," she replies obviously embarrassed. They both fall silent for several minutes. "My friend later told me that I lost my shirt because I was trying to fight the guy off, but I still feel stupid for getting into such a situation," she mutters quietly. "It's why I rarely drink."

Saber takes her hand and squeezes it, "I don't think less of you, Love. Drinking can make your judgement less than ideal, to put it mildly. I'm just glad to know that your friend got you out of the situation. I won't bring it up again, all right?" he says quietly.

She nods slightly. "Thanks," she replies quietly. After a couple minutes, she sighs, "I suppose since we're not dressed for the fancier places, we should just hit the tavern. What do you think?"

"Would you be all right with that?" Saber asks.

"I think so. So long as you don't harass me," she replies with a weak smile.

"I wouldn't, Amanda. I am sorry for pushing you earlier. Had I any clue-"

"Don't be," Amanda says cutting him off. "I should have told you a few years ago, but honestly, I had shoved it out of my memory."

"Can't say as I blame you, I would feel the same way," Saber replies honestly.

"So to the tavern?" Amanda asks. Saber nods and she drives down the road a little further and parks to the side of the tavern.

They approach the doors and slowly they enter, stepping inside to allow their eyes to readjust to the dimmer lighting of the place. Looking around, they see a few customers, but the place is mostly empty. They pick a table off to the side and sit down. After a few minutes, a young woman comes over to them. "May I have your order?" she asks, looking over the newcomers trying to assess them. "Our special today is the Ploughman's Lunch," she adds.

Saber looks to Amanda who nods approvingly. "We'll both have that, Miss," Saber replies.

"And your drink?" she asks.

"Your house special for me," Amanda replies.

The waitress nods and looks to Saber expectantly.

"Same," he replies.

They eat and chat for a while before going to buy provisions for a few days. Upon arriving back at the cottage, they find Jared and a young boy waiting for them with three horses. "Need some help with the groceries, sir?" Jared asks as he approaches them after they get out of the car.

"I think we've got it, it's not a lot," Saber replies as he grabs three of the four bags. Amanda grabs the other bag and they head inside. After unloading they return outside to see the horses. "They look well cared for," Saber says as he inspects the animals.

"I treat 'em all as if I own 'em, sir. I believe an animal is only as good as it's cared for," Jared replies.

"Which would you like, Love?" he asks Amanda who is quietly observing the animals.

"I like the black one. She seems calm and at ease," Amanda replies.

Saber nods and chooses his horse and they take them to the stable behind the house. Jared and his son leave on the third horse and they go inside and change for riding.

It is nearly dark when they return from riding and the temperature begins to drop. Amanda involuntarily shivers and Saber casts her a glance, "Are you all right?" he asks in a concerned tone.

"Aye, just had a chill. The temp seems to drop faster here than at home."

"We'll get a fire going once we put the horses away," he replies.

"It's fine. Are you hungry?" Amanda asks.

"Perhaps a little, but I can make a sandwich and be fine."

"I was thinking the same, actually. Perhaps with some tea," Amanda says as they head towards the house.

They go in and make a fire in the fireplace, and after eating, they are sitting back and finishing their tea when Saber notices Amanda just staring at the fire. He sets his cup down and places an arm across her shoulders, pulling her gently against him. "Are you sure you're all right?" he asks quietly.

Amanda looks up, startled from her reverie and nods. "Yeah, I just feel guilty for not being with the girls."

Saber chuckles and pulls her a little tighter to him and kisses her cheek, "That's perfectly normal, Love. Would it help to call and talk with Elaine to see how they're doing?"

"I'm sure they would just laugh at me calling," Amanda replies sullenly.

"I doubt it. They're probably surprised you haven't called yet," Saber replies with a hint of amusement.

"If I do, I can tell you'll tease me."

"I would not, Love. I understand. It's not the first time that I've been away from them, it is for you. It is hard, and you've had a stronger bond with them than I have," Saber replies. Amanda goes to object and he shakes his head. "It's natural that you would at this age, you've been their source of food," he says with a laugh.

Amanda blushes and grabs a nearby pillow and hits him with it. "So I'm just a food source, is that it?" she asks in a mocking tone.

Saber laughs as he half heartedly blocks the attack. "You're more than that to them, Amanda," he says gasping for air from laughing. "And to me," he adds quietly, in a more serious tone.

Amanda stops her onslaught and leans against him in a half-embrace. "I think I will call, perhaps talking to Elaine will put me at ease enough that I can relax easier and not feel guilty for leaving them."

Saber reaches over and grabs his phone from off the couch the other side of him and hands it to her, "Use mine, that way you don't have to move yet," he offers.

Amanda takes it and calls home, Elaine answers the phone, "I was wondering how long it would take you, Lady Amanda," she says answering the line with a hint of amusement in her voice.

"H...How did you know it was me? I called from Saber's phone," Amanda stammers.

"I had a feeling it would be," Elaine replies simply. "I can assure you my lady, your wee ones are just fine. They have been fed and the boys are on the floor playing with them now. I think all four of them are having a fine time."

Amanda visibly relaxes at those words and Saber pulls her closer to him. She snuggles against him, talking for a few more minutes before reluctantly hanging up the phone and handing it back to Saber. "Everything seems to be fine," she says almost sounding disappointed.

Saber chuckles and kisses her cheek, "I'm sure they can manage a couple of days, Love. Call again in the morning if you wish."

"You find this amusing, don't you?" she asks a bit defensively.

"A little," he replies honestly. "But I'm glad that you are in a position of being able to call. I can see it helped," She goes to speak and he holds a finger to her mouth to stop her, "And no, I don't think you're out of line or over protective," he adds with a smile.

Amanda starts to say something else, but thinks better of it, suddenly feeling rather tired. "I know it's not really late, but would it be all right if I went on to sleep?" she asks obviously fatigued.

"Of course, why do you even need to ask? We have no schedule, no real plans. If you only want to laze around here tomorrow, I'm fine with that, Love."

Amanda nods and slowly gets up, heading to their room. He follows her and they change and turn in for the night.

Amanda awakes to the smells of breakfast cooking and daylight creeping in through the blinds, she rolls over slowly and wills herself out of bed. After taking a brief shower, she dresses and comes out into the living area, spotting Saber at the stove.

"Morning, sleep well?" he asks not bothering to look up from cooking.

"Yes, I slept rather well. First full night's sleep in nearly a year," Amanda replies coming over and kissing his cheek.

"You were rather comfortable. I was getting hungry, so I shifted enough to get out of bed and manage not to wake you. I thought I'd surprise you with breakfast. It's been awhile since I've had a chance to cook, I'm hoping it's edible," he says as he places the eggs and bacon onto two plates and carries them to the table. They sit down and eat and talk. Eventually deciding to go riding and packing a lunch to take with them.

Later in the afternoon, they are sitting on the far side of the lake, the horses resting nearby enjoying the lunch they packed. "Do you think we could bring the girls out here when they're a little older?" Amanda asks breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

Saber nods. "I would like to. I think it would be nice to do so. Perhaps then Thomas and Elaine would take a break," Saber replies. He places his arm around her and pulls her against him, "Of course coming out a few times without them could be nice too," he says quietly leaning close to her ear.

She looks up and smiles. "This is nice, isn't it? I am rather enjoying having you to myself."

"Aye, I am definitely glad they convinced us to come out here. I do still think they are all up to something, but I'm not complaining about it being just us for a few days," he replies as he lays back on the blanket and pulls her close.

She lays her head against him and sighs feeling her body relax. "I'm sure they are plotting too, but might as well enjoy the break. I'm not sure we will get one again for a while," she mumbles quietly.

"You think we're going to need to fight again?" he asks, shifting so that he is facing her, her head on his arm.

"I hope not, but given the history of the Outriders and us, do you really think they're gone?" Amanda asks.

"I suppose there is a bit of truth to that statement," he says with a sigh. "I just hope they have gone on to someplace else. I would much rather to spend my life enjoying you and the children, not fighting constantly to protect them and our way of life."

"So do I," Amanda says quietly.

"Well, we've finished painting, Elaine. What do ya think?" Colt asks as he leads her into the room.

Elaine looks around and nods satisfied at the room. "I think it looks good. It should do them for a while," she says obviously pleased. "Thank you both for doing it."

"No problem. I'm glad Fireball was here to help. It made it go faster."

"Perhaps tomorrow we can move their beds into this room. The paint should be dry and the room ready by then," Elaine states.

"What all do you have for the room, Elaine?" Robin asks curiously.

"I've got a dresser, it's white with six drawers, a changing table, and then the two cribs, and the rocker that is in their room presently. That should be a nice set up, don't

you agree?"

"Yeah. I'm sure they will appreciate the effort once they see it benefits both them and the little ones," Robin replies.

April comes up carrying a medium-sized box with some items in it. "Do you think the paint will be dry enough after lunch that I can install this stuff?"

"What is it?" Colt and Fireball asks eyeing the box cautiously.

"A monitoring system," April replies as if it's perfectly obvious to anyone as she sets the box on the floor towards the center of the room. "It does sound and video, and I'm going to set it up where they can be anywhere in the house and see the girls when they are in their room." She pulls out two items that look like miniature computer pads and then sets one back in the box. "These two things are completely portable. You can take them anywhere on a good portion of the property and be able to keep an eye and an ear on the girls when they are in their room. I figure that you and Thomas can have one Elaine, and that Saber and Amanda can share the other one. Of course I can add as many as you wish, but to start with, I'll set up two," April explains.

"That's a brilliant Idea, Ms. April!" Elaine exclaims happily. "I'm sure once you have that in place, Lady Amanda and Saber won't be able to raise any objections."

"That is my hope. I was thinking that after we get the babies established in their room, I could keep the monitor with me for a trial run, and you can have the other one. We should have a couple more days before they come home, hopefully," April says.

The phone rings and Elaine looks at her watch and chuckles, "I'm surprised she manage to wait this long," she quips as she goes and picks up the phone. "I was wondering how long it would take you, Lady Amanda," she says answering the line with a hint of amusement in her voice.

"H...How did you know it was me? I called from Saber's phone," Amanda stammers on the other end of the line.

"I had a feeling it would be," Elaine replies simply. "I can assure you my lady, your wee ones are just fine. They have been fed and the boys are on the floor playing with them now. I think all four of them are having a fine time," she adds reassuringly.

"I am glad things seem to be going so well," Amanda replies with a hint of disappointment.

Elaine smiles at her tone. "Lady Amanda, the whole point of your trip is to allow the both of you to relax. I promise to call you if anything should prove to be troublesome. Otherwise, take your time, we have enough milk for four more days, maybe a day more if they eat like they have been today and enjoying the solid foods."

"Thank you, Elaine. I'm sure I'll be calling again, but goodnight for now," Amanda says with a hint of both disappointment and relief.

"Goodnight, to you both. We'll talk to you soon," Elaine says and then hangs up the phone with a chuckle.

"Is everything all right?" Robin asks with concern.

"Aye, Lady Amanda just misses the wee ones," Elaine replies amused. "I'm sure she'll be fine. It's her first time away from them since they've been born. Lady Mary was much the same way with Saber, I suppose it's natural.

"She was away a lot, wasn't she?" April asks quietly.

"Aye, after the first year, he was pretty much left to my care," Elaine replies as she heads towards Saber and Amanda's room, April follows along after her. "She would call constantly, so I knew she loved him and was proud of all he has accomplished, but life as a senator's wife meant a lot of time away from here, and that meant a lot of time away from Saber. The things he was required to attend were not the type of places you could take a wee one along, and the senator wanted his wife by his side. I think that was one regret she had, that they didn't get to watch him grow up. They saw the man he became, missing so many of his milestones. Perhaps that is why she was secretly hoping to release him from the betrothal to Ms. Sincia," Elaine finishes quietly as she folds the children's clothes and places them in a box. "I think she felt that since he had done so well for himself, he deserved the right to choose his life mate. However, I think it was harder to sway the senator to see that. His family was rather staunch on such matters. To them, it was first the integrity of the line, then love. I suppose that is why they were so particular about who their legitimate children be from, not necessarily their lover's children."

"I thought Saber's father loved his mother," April says a bit shocked by the statements.

"Aye, he did. He was one of the few that actually loved the woman he was forced to marry. As far as I know, he was completely faithful to her; something that isn't common among the nobility, as you heard from Mr. McCully," Elaine states. "Most noblemen left their wives at home to rear their legitimate children while they went away on business. Senator Rider was not like most of those men, when Lady Mary became ill, he stayed at her side, and insisted on being kept up to date when he had to leave. I honestly think that had he lived to the end of the war, he would have allowed Saber to decide for himself who he wanted to marry. I think after all that Saber and the rest of you had been through his father had a new respect for him and his abilities. He also knew it was what his mother wanted for him."

"But I thought he went away to school and such, didn't he?" April asks obviously intrigued. "His father and mother really didn't see him much because of it."

"Aye, he went to the finest schools the New Frontier could offer. He went away for a year, but was so bored that the teachers sent him home with extra work and allowed him to attend classes via video conference, so that he could pursue more than the basic classes that were offered on site. His parents paid for tutors to come here, so he

could go through the more rigorous weapons training and learn the most advanced securities technology available. I suppose you know how things went after that," Elaine says.

April nods. "Yeah. He joined the academy at Cavalry Command at sixteen, a bit younger than most, but he had already completed his university work by then, so they allowed him to enter. He was instated as an officer after only eight months, a rather impressive feat for the academy. It was one of the reasons my father wanted him on the Bismarck project. I never thought we'd end up the way we are now," April says adding the last part as a quiet afterthought.

"You mean in general or as friends, Ms. April?" Elaine asks.

"Both, I guess," she replies with a shrug. "When I first met him, I thought he was too reserved, too serious and seemed devoid of emotion. But after living with him on the Bismarck, I realized that once he trusted me, I was allowed to see that he can be more human. I have especially seen that side of him these past couple of years."

"He has always been a rather serious person, especially when it came to a task he was entrusted with. I think that is why he did so well in school. His mind works differently than mine, and probably even yours," Elaine says, getting a quizzical look from April. "Don't get me wrong, you're bloody brilliant in your own right, Ms. April, but the way he thinks things through is different. I am constantly amazed at the types of solutions he can come up with for anything. It seems so logical once he says it, but he looks at situations from a viewpoint I never would have thought of."

"That is why he's a great securities specialist," April replies.

"And Lady Amanda seems to think things out in much the same way," Elaine adds.

"I don't think my father had any idea what he got into when he hired Amanda," April says with a grin. "At first I thought that hiring her to help Saber was a mistake, especially after the whole thing with Sean. But after they talked that day out in that barn, something changed between them and Saber seemed to get better. I don't mean his vision, he just seemed more confident, more comfortable with his situation. As things happened, it only seemed to make his resolve stronger, so I know now that it was a good thing she was the one hired, but I never would have thought that those years ago after the accident. Although knowing that the two of them think so much alike is a bit scary, don't you think?"

"Aye, I could see where it could be, Ms. April," Elaine replies amused. "Let's see about getting the guys to move the furniture into the room, shall we?" Elaine says pointedly ending the conversation. "The furniture is currently in the study."

"Okay," April replies as they head down the stairs to find everyone in the sitting area. "Hey Cowboy, Fireball, think you two could haul the dresser and changing table up to the room?"

"Sure thing, April," Colt replies as the two of them get up. "Where is at?"

"In the study, Mr. Wilcox," Elaine answers. "I'm going to see about finishing up dinner while you see to the furniture. Mr. Alex, would you and Ms. Sarah mind keeping an eye on the kids while we take care of things? Ms. Robin should be down soon."

"Of course, Elaine. It's no trouble at all," Alex replies.

Elaine nods and every heads off to work on their various tasks.

"Amanda, are you all right, Love?" Saber asks concern in his voice.

Amanda manages to open her eyes, only to shut them again quickly and cover them with her hand from the onslaught of light coming in the windows of the room, "Ugh. What time is it?" she asks obviously tired.

He climbs into bed and lays beside her. "It's nearly noon," Saber replies quietly next to her ear.

"Noon?" she asks hoping she misheard. "How long have you been up?" she asks quietly.

"Almost three hours. I was glad you were sleeping, so I was letting you sleep, but after so long, I became worried that you might be ill," he replies concerned.

"Perhaps I'm a little off, the sunlight seems a bit brighter than normal, but once my eyes adjust, I'll be fine," she says trying to convince herself as much as him.

He nods unconvinced, but gets up and closes the blinds to try and help her be more comfortable. "Would you like something to eat?" he asks as he sits down on the bed beside her.

Amanda slowly moves her hand away from her face and manages to look up at him, and feels a pang of guilt for his concern. "Sure, that might be good. Have you made anything?" she replies quietly.

"We have some soup I was heating up since I thought you might not be feeling well. Would you like some of that?"

Amanda nods her head slightly. "That would be good," she replies as she sits up and turns to get out of bed.

Saber places a hand on her arm to stop her. "Are you sure that's a good idea? I don't want you falling or passing out on me."

"I think I'll be okay. Would you mind staying close just in case?" she asks.

"Of course not, Love," he replies as he offers his arm.

She takes his arm, grateful for the support and manages to stand up. She is a little

unsteady at first, but after a minute, she feels confident enough to let go of his arm. "Thank you. Could we eat outside, maybe?" she asks quietly.

"If you think you're up to it, I don't see why not," Saber replies.

"I think I'm going to change and then I'll join you," she states, feeling a little better as time passes.

"All right. Call for me if you need me. I'll come and see about you. Otherwise, I'll see you in a couple of minutes," he says and then heads out to gather everything for lunch outside. She heads towards the bathroom to change.

A couple of hours pass and Saber and Amanda are sitting on the shore of the lake enjoying a quiet day. They have just stood up and are packing everything up to take in when a sound from the other side of the house causes them to stop.

"What was that?" Amanda asks looking around.

"I'm not sure," Saber replies quietly. Out of instinct, he reaches for his sword. "Do you have your sword with you?" he asks quietly. Amanda nods and reaches for it. Saber holds a hand out to stop her, "Just be ready. It may be nothing but animals we're hearing," he says as he slowly approaches the side of the house, Amanda close behind him.

As they round the side, they spot several horses running loose in front of the house. "What the?" Amanda says quietly as she looks around only seeing horses. "I don't see anyone and they seemed spooked."

"Aye," Saber replies as he searches for possible attackers. "I don't see any signs of anyone else either," he replies as he sheaths his sword and slowly approaches one of the horses. He manages to calm it, as Amanda goes to another horse and helps to settle it, all the while listening and watching. After several minutes, most of the horses have settled and the pair take a closer look around.

"Saber, is that smoke over towards Jared's place?" Amanda asks pointing in the direction of the nearby farm.

Saber turns in the general direction and nods, "It appears so. Not a good sign, these could well be his horses."

"Let's call Thomas and then head over there," Amanda says.

"Let's be a little better prepared first. Do you have your blaster with you?"

Amanda nods. "It's inside. I keep the sword on me though," she replies.

"Well, we've got them calmed down, so let's go call home and get a little better armed before trying to find out what is happening. It very well could be nothing," Saber states.

They slip inside the house and head to the bedroom. Amanda gets her blaster from her travel bag and sits on the foot of the bed beside Saber, who is on the phone.

"Yes, okay we'll try and see if we can find out what is going on, Thomas. I'll call back as soon as we know something," Saber disconnects his phone and sighs, getting a concerned look from Amanda. "Thomas has been trying to raise Jared to the phone, but the call wouldn't connect. He was about to call me when I called there. I don't like it, Amanda," Saber says quietly.

"Neither do I," Amanda replies quietly. "How do you want to do this?" she asks.

"Let's take two horses. I think we could get there faster that way and with much less notice, just in case something is amiss," Saber replies.

"I think we should have a third horse. If something is wrong, we might need a way to transport people," Amanda says.

Saber nods. "Not a bad idea. Hopefully, we can keep three of them from getting spooked by whatever it is that is going on," he replies.

"Well, shall we go then?" Amanda asks as she turns towards the door.

"Aye, let's go," Saber says and they head out the back towards the stable. After rigging up the horses they are taking with them, they mount and he leads them through some of the thicker woods surround the cottage, heading in the general direction of Jared's house.

"Okay Elaine, I think we've got everything ready," April says as she gives the room one last glance.

Elaine nods looking around in approval. "Yes, I don't think they will be able to argue this point when they return. Shall we go and get the wee ones and see how they act in a new room?" Elaine asks.

April nods and the two head downstairs, where they find Sarah rocking Moria against her and Robin playing with Eryn. "How are things down here?" April asks as they come down to the sitting room.

"They're fine, April. Moria is just about asleep," Sarah replies.

"Well, then we have good timing," April replies. "The room is ready. Shall we go and lay them down and see how they do? We can try out the monitoring system too."

Sarah nods and she carefully stands up. "It's as good a time as any, I suppose," she replies.

Robin scoops up Eryn and nods. "Better to know now how they'll do rather than at night. That way, we're not all up all night with inconsolable children," Robin states as

she stands up holding a squirming Eryn.

Elaine goes to speak when the phone rings. "Go on upstairs, I'll join you in a minute. I'm sure it's Lady Amanda calling again," Elaine says with a smile. April, Robin, and Sarah all head upstairs and Elaine heads to the kitchen where Thomas has already answered the phone.

"Yes, it was about half an hour ago, sir," Thomas says into the receiver. He is silent for a moment while the person on the other end of the line speaks. "I tried to call right back, but it rang once and went to a strange busy signal," he replies. Silence again and he sees Elaine and casts her a worried glance, holding up a hand for her to not question him yet. "Thank you sir, I appreciate you doing that. Call if you find out anything." Thomas hangs up the phone and looks to Elaine with a worried expression.

"What is wrong, Thomas?" Elaine asks concerned. "Has something happened?"

"I'm not sure. I was talking to Jared when he said his horses started acting strange. He asked me to hold for a moment, then came back and said that he thought someone was coming up towards the house. He started to say more, but the line cut off. I tried again to call him, but the line rang quickly, then went to a strange busy signal. I was about to call Saber, when he rang here. He and Lady Amanda are going to see if they can tell whether there is something amiss."

"So much for their vacation," Elaine says quietly, plopping down into a chair.

"So it seems. Perhaps it's nothing, Elaine," Thomas says coming and sitting beside her, placing his hand on hers.

"Let's hope so. They don't really have anyone that can back them up should something be wrong," Elaine says voicing the thoughts that are running through Thomas' head.

April comes into the room smiling brightly. "We got the girls in their room. They seem..." she stops, the smile fading once she sees the concerned look on the faces before her. "What has happened?" she asks as she takes one of the remaining empty seats at the table.

"It could be nothing, Ms. April," Thomas says. "But as a favor, Saber and Amanda are checking on my nephew, as they are close to where they are and I cannot reach him."

"Should some of us head out there to assist them? Neither one really should be fighting," April says.

"I know, the thought had crossed my mind, but not being sure that it's anything, I am hesitant to send anyone from here towards them," Thomas replies.

April nods. "I understand. Why don't I at least talk with the others? We can discuss who will remain to help defend you and the children and who will go out should the need arise. Perhaps if we are over prepared, things will turn out to have a simple explanation."

"Thank you, Ms. April. I am glad to know that we are well protected and that some of you will go out if needed," Thomas says.

Elaine stands up and nods. "I think I shall start gathering supplies to be ready in the event we need to go to the basement once more," she says as she starts heading for the pantry.

April stands up, "I'll go and talk to the others. I'll come and see you after our discussion, please let me know if there are any updates." She turns and leaves the kitchen to look for Colt and Fireball and finds them talking in the sitting room. "Hey, have either of you seen Alex?" she asks trying to sound casual.

"I think he's upstairs," Colt replies, not looking up.

"Thanks," April replies grateful to not be asked anything yet. She heads up the stairs quickly and find him just exiting his bedroom. "Hey Alex, could you come downstairs for a few minutes?"

"Um sure," he replies hesitantly. "Is there something wrong?"

"Not sure, to be completely honest. It's more like we're setting up a plan just in case senario," April replies just as Robin and Sarah come out from the babies room. "Sarah, Robin, why don't you join us downstairs. We're having an impromptu meeting."

"Um, sure," Robin says hesitantly. "Is something wrong?" she asks.

"Let's talk downstairs, okay? I don't want to have to repeat myself several times over," April replies as she turns to head back down the stairs.

"Okay. I've got nothing else to do for the moment. Will is down for a nap and so are the girls, so lets go."

Kapitel 39: Vacation Part 2

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 38: Vacation Part 2

"What are those things, Saber?" Amanda asks quietly as they sit crouching behind some bushes.

"They are Outriders, Amanda. Some of whom I thought died in the last war," Saber replies back just as quietly. "We need to try and get as many of the people out of Jared's house as we can and quickly. They seem to be interested in the outer buildings at the moment. I'm going to try and get in. Take your cell and call the others. Tell them what we've found and that we could use some back up. Try and not be seen, I'll try to get the children out first. You may have to take them back to the cottage and guard them, no matter what happens to me. Can you do that?"

Amanda nods and turns to back away from their position so as not to be heard. She sees Saber head off in the opposite directions and silently prays for his safety as she hears the ring of the phone to her ear.

"Hello?" a familiar voice says on the other end.

Amanda sighs in relief. "April, it's me. We need some help," Amanda states quietly.

"What's going on? Thomas and Elaine seem pretty worried," April says.

"Outriders. Some that Saber said he thought were dead."

"Did he mention names?" April asks obviously taken aback.

"No, but he told me to call for backup. He also told me that no matter what I am to protect the children he is trying to rescue. So I'm pretty sure this isn't good."

April swallows hard and tries to keep her fear from her voice. "We're coming as quick as we can, well a couple of us. Two will remain here to guard the children and your household. What is your position?"

"Can you track my cell? I'd rather not say it over the line," she replies.

"Yeah. Try and stay safe. Remember, Saber is good at what he does, do as he asks. He won't do anything to risk his life unless he has no choice, he wants to see your kids grow up," April says trying to ease the fear she senses through the phone.

"Thank you. I'll lay low until I see he needs me. I'm trying to keep an eye on the house."

"See you soon," April replies and closes the connection. She turns to the others who are all waiting for a report on what has transpired. "Well, Saber says there are Outriders at Jared's place. Currently, we don't know the status of Jared or his family." She looks to Thomas and Elaine, "Saber is trying to find out if they are safe or what the situation is. As soon as I hear something, I'll let you know."

Thomas and Elaine nod. "Thank you," Thomas says quietly. "What do you need us to do?"

April looks to Elaine, "Have you gotten provisions ready?"

"Yes, we have enough food for the little ones, all four of them," she adds as an afterthought. "I've also gathered items such as blankets, water and food for the adults," Elaine replies.

April nods satisfied. "Well, Alex and I are staying here with you. I am going to call my Father and see if he can get some soldiers on stand by. Colt and Fireball, I want one of you to contact me as soon as you meet up with either Saber or Amanda," April says, getting a nod in reply from both Colt and Fireball. "If we sense any sign of trouble, we will evacuate to the basement."

"Okay. We're heading out now," Fireball says as he and Colt head out the kitchen door and get into their vehicles.

Robin and Sarah head upstairs and start packing overnight bags of clothes and a few toys before meeting April and Alex back in the sitting room. "Well, I think we're as ready as we can be," Robin says as she sits down on the couch. "The kids will probably be up soon, so I thought I'd ask if you've heard anything?"

"Well, I've talked with my father, he is on his way to the outpost and has begun organizing soldiers to head out towards where Saber and Amanda are. I texted Amanda to tell her and she replied back to tell me that they are both armed," April says glancing to the people before her, seeing several looks of relief. "Colt and Fireball are just about there and I have sent her location to them. She is also watching for them. She has not heard anything from Saber in the past hour, but she has also not seen any sign that he has been discovered either. So even though it is taking all she has not to rush in and try and find him, she is grateful that she knows backup is almost to her."

"Okay Colt, how far out should we park?" Fireball asks as they slow down just outside of town.

"I have a bit of a clearing off to the left, and no sign of anyone, let's park there and work our way closer on foot. Might be less likely to draw attention to ourselves that way," Colt replies as he turns sharply to the left.

Fireball struggles to make the sudden turn, but does and parks beside him and they meet in front of the vehicles. "All right cowboy, what now?"

"The fix I have from April shows that Amanda is several hundred meters that way," Colt says nodding toward their right.

"Of course, it's where all the smoke is," Fireball retorts. "Should we message her to let her know we're coming?"

Colt shakes his head. "Not just yet. If she has been found, it could endanger us. Better to use the tracker and find her that way."

Fireball nods and the pair head off towards the smoke, following the signal from Amanda's phone. After nearly twenty minutes, they are almost right on top of the signal when Fireball is suddenly met with a sword to his neck from behind. He freezes and Colt turns to see why he stopped, only to find Amanda holding Fireball with the sword to his neck. Colt goes to speak and Amanda holds a finger to her mouth, telling them not to talk before she lowers her blade and signals for them to follow her. They do and she leads them in a different direction from the smoke, into a thicker part of the wood. She leads them to a small lean-to and they go in and all of them having to crouch down to fit.

"They found Saber," Amanda finally says after listening to be sure that no one is close. "He is being held with a few of the children, he said four of the kids are dead and their mother may not live, even if they are able to get her out." She pauses seeing the shocked looks on the two men's faces, but takes a breath and continues, forcing herself to relay the information as calmly as she can. "Jared is also dead. He died trying to protect his wife and children. Saber and the kids have holed up in a part of the attic that the Outriders can't seem to get to. I think he has their mother too, but from the messages I've gotten, I'm not completely sure if she is in the attic with them now. The messages have stopped and that worries me. The Outriders seem to be after something, since I think otherwise they would just torch the place. Do you have any new information?" she asks the two men before her forcing the fear from her voice.

Colt shakes his head, processing the information that he's just heard. "We have help coming, but not sure how far away it is," he finally replies.

"I'll text April and give her an update and see if she has heard anything if you want," Fireball offers.

Amanda slowly nods in reply. "Probably a good idea. Although I'm not sure telling them everything is such a good idea at this point. I don't want to upset Thomas and Elaine with something like this from a text message," she says quietly.

Fireball nods and sends a limited bit of information and soon receives a reply. "Okay, the soldiers have found our vehicles, April sent them a way to track us, should we head towards them so we can split them up to surround the place, and maybe have a better shot at a rescue?"

Amanda thinks for a minute then nods. "I think that might be our best shot. I couldn't tell how many they had or if more were coming, so getting some soldiers to the far side might not be a bad idea. But how do we get them there undetected?"

The three of them are silent for several minutes, each running different strategies in their minds. "We could have Commander Eagle send a small team in the air and around, having them land a good ways past this place. Perhaps that would go unnoticed?" Fireball offers.

"That could work," Amanda says slowly. "But how quickly do you think they could arrange it? We need help as quickly as possible."

"I'll find out," Fireball replies. "Let's start heading towards the troops, so that the whole platoon doesn't get this close. It would be harder to hide those numbers in a lean-to," he adds quietly as they make their way out and start towards the vehicles.

Amanda nods and quickly casts a glance back towards where Saber is before pushing herself towards their goal. About ten minutes into their trek, they meet up with the first group of outpost soldiers.

"Sir," the cadet says halting his group and saluting the trio. They stop and return the gesture. The leader giving Amanda a double take. "I had no idea you were a cadet, Miss," he says looking to Amanda with a look of surprise.

"Um, have we met, sir?" Amanda says hesitantly.

"Yes ma'am, I was sent to guard Captain Rider when he was shot. I tried to get you to leave," he replies. "I am Second Lieutenant Jackson Waller."

"That would be Colonel Rider now, Lieutenant Waller," Fireball corrects quickly. "He was given the rank after the last battle with Jesse Blue."

"I apologize, I was not aware of his change in rank, sir," Waller says quickly.

Amanda allows a small look of amusement and nods in recognition. "Good to see you again, Lieutenant Waller." She turns her attention to Fireball, "How do you want to do this?"

"Lieutenant, do any of your men have vehicles that can fly?" Fireball asks.

"No sir, I'm afraid that we don't. We have some underwater vehicles, but I'm not sure those would be of much use in the woods."

"Why do you have underwater vehicles with you?" Colt asks.

"We were returning from a training mission when we were rerouted to here, sir," Waller replies.

Amanda suddenly gets a look on her face. "Where were you training, Lieutenant?"

"There's a river about half an hour to the northwest of here, ma'am," he replies confused.

"I know that look, what are you thinking, Amanda?" Colt asks hesitantly.

"The lake leads out to the river, Colt. Jared's house is on that river. That's how we get troops to the far side to box them in!" Amanda says with confidence. "If we can set an attack from both sides, we could buy time for a more direct air strike. It might be enough of a diversion to get Saber and those kids out."

Lieutenant Waller blinks for a minute then looks curiously between the three before him. "Um, which of you is actually the one I'm supposed to answer to?" he finally asks hesitantly.

Amanda, Colt and Fireball exchange glances and shrug. "We just sort of work as equals," Fireball finally replies. "Depending on the situation, one of us may take over the role as leader, if needed. For now, I am deferring to Captain Rider, as this is her home terrain, so she has the most knowledge of the types of landscapes we may encounter. She also thinks a lot like her husband, so strategy is a good thing to rely on her for."

"Captain Rider?" Waller asks in shock looking to Amanda.

"Aye, I am Colonel Rider's wife. We've been married a little over two years now, Lieutenant," Amanda states casually, getting a look of surprise from the lieutenant. "I was instated when we were married as a Lieutenant, then after I killed the traitor and saved my husband's life, they gave me the rank of Captain. I am dressed as a civilian because we were on vacation near here when this whole thing started."

"She has also helped him fight in the Bismarck. It is because of her that we have lived this long to be honest, she has earned her rank," Colt says proudly, causing Amanda to shift a bit uncomfortably.

"Okay, how many vehicles do you have, and how many men can we get across in them?" Amanda says pointedly bringing the group back to the task at hand.

Waller snaps his attention back to her and thinks for a moment before replying, "I have a platoon, ma'am. We can easily get all of them and all of you across in the three vehicles we have."

"That would give us ten per vehicle..." Amanda says to herself. "Do you know if the outpost is sending more ground troops?" she asks.

"They are. I do not know how many I'm afraid, ma'am," he replies.

"About sixty, Amanda. What are you thinking?" Fireball asks looking up from his phone.

"If I go with the Lieutenant, could you guys lead the forces from here?" Amanda asks. Colt and Fireball both nod.

"The other troops are maybe twenty minutes out," Fireball says.

"That would give us time to get to far side of the cottage and try to get the vessels into the water. You could send in part of the troops as a diversion, sending another group further down and to further draw any resistance, hopefully, that could allow us time to come onshore and possibly a couple of us get into that house."

"That might actually work," Waller says with a hint of surprise.

"I'm sure it won't go quite that smoothly, but we can hope for a positive outcome, nonetheless," Amanda replies as she looks to each person in their small huddle.

"Let's do it then. We'll head for the other troops and lead them back and around, you guys head for the water," Fireball says.

Amanda nods and she and Waller turn in the direction of the cottage. Colt places a hand on her shoulder, momentarily stopping her. "Be careful, okay. I don't want Saber pissed at us because something happens to you," he says with a small grin.

Amanda offers a small smile, "I plan on being the one to get to him first. He knows that I am going to do what I want. So he won't be mad at you. Take care of yourselves, I don't want to have to answer to April or Robin either."

"We will," they both reply and they head off in their predetermined directions, the platoon following Waller and Amanda.

Amanda leads the way back towards the cottage, finding two of the horses on the way. Leading them back along with the soldiers behind her, they stop near the edge of the woods on the property. Cautiously, she looks around for signs of anything disturbed, finding none, she leads Waller and the others towards the back of the cottage to the lake. "I think it's deep enough to accommodate the vehicles, let's get them into the water," she says to Waller.

"Yes, ma'am," he replies and tells his platoon to follow her directive.

She grabs her phone and checks for messages, seeing none, she dials April's phone.

"Yeah?" April's voice says coming across the phone.

"April, it's me. Have you talked to Fireball or Colt recently?" Amanda asks.

"As a matter of fact I just hung up with Fireball. Please tell me he's not serious."

"We're at the cottage now. The troops are working on getting the vessels into the water. We should be shipping out in the next couple of minutes. If I remember this

river correctly, we could arrive onsite in the next fifteen minutes," Amanda replies. April makes to protest and Amanda cuts her off, "It's the best plan, April. This is our best shot at getting anyone out of there alive."

April is silent for a moment then sighs in resignation. "I'm telling you the same thing I told them, I don't want to have to ID any of you. So you had best come back alive."

"I'll do my best to, April," Amanda replies quietly. "Call me if you have updates and I'll do the same."

"Will do," April replies and she disconnects the call. Turning to the people staring at her she sighs, debating how much to tell them. After a long imposing silence she takes a breath and begins, "I don't know for sure who is injured and who is alive. I know that there have been a couple of casualties." She sees Thomas and Elaine stiffen in shock but continues, "Saber is with the survivors, he is doing his best to protect them."

"Why did he compromise himself before he had back up?" Alex asks.

"Because he didn't want there to be more casualties," April replies quietly.

"Ms. April, you know the identity of at least some of the casualties, don't you?" Thomas asks hesitantly as he watches her for a reaction.

Slowly April nods. "Yeah, I do, but I think we should wait and see what else happens. I need you both to be focused in case something goes wrong closer to us," she replies sympathetically.

"We will defend this place and the heirs to it with our very lives, Ms. April, but I feel we have the right to be told if our family members have been killed," Thomas states a bit more forcefully than he intends.

April is quiet for several minutes, looking between Thomas and Elaine, debating how much to tell them. "Jared is dead," she finally replies, getting a gasp of shock from the others present. Elaine clinches her fist and tears well up in her eyes, but remains silent and otherwise unmoving. "His wife is injured, possibly fatally, and from what I have been able to decipher from Amanda's messages from Saber, a few of the children may have been killed or at the very least injured. That is where the details get sketchy, the messages from Saber stopped after that. The last we knew, he and at least two of the children were trapped in the attic of the house. Safe, but unable to get out presently."

"And what is the plan of attack?" Alex finally asks.

"Well, the outpost has sent two platoons to assist on stopping the Outriders. They should have just met up with Colt and Fireball. Amanda is taking a third platoon back towards the cottage to the lake, where it goes into the river, they hope to use the water vessels they have to approach unnoticed on the far shore from Jared's property. Colt is taking one of the platoons and heading back towards town, to come from a middle direction. The troops will head straight for the cottage, in hopes of surprising the enemy. Colt is going to do a fly over in his Bronco Buster and fire at a

few of the outer areas, hoping to distract them. If they are looking for an aerial attack, perhaps we can slip a couple of people in and help those trapped to escape. Fireball is leading the others in from the general direction of the main road. It's not the most thought out plan, but for now, it's all we got. From what Saber has sent, I think that the Outriders will be grossly outnumbered, however, they have been known to take bad odds and turn them into something favorable. Doing anything necessary to gain the upper hand."

"Including killing innocent children," Sarah says quietly.

April nods grimly. "Yeah, it is not beyond them to do something so horrific," April replies. "It is why we must defend this place with our lives and protect all of the children at all costs."

"And we will do so, Ms. April," Thomas states. The others nod in agreement.

"Okay, I'm going to try and get ahold of my father. I'll let you know if I hear any news one way or another," April says as she stands up. "I'll go upstairs and call, so that you can talk amongst yourselves if you want," having said that, she leaves, going upstairs as she calls her father.

Robin stands up and goes over to Elaine and takes her hand. "Are they the only family you both have left?" she asks quietly. Elaine nods, still unable to speak.

"Jared was my brother's only son," Thomas says obviously fighting to stay calm. "We have rarely seen him, but have kept in touch through email and phone calls. Occasionally he would come and visit here when Saber's family was away. They never wanted to come when they were here. His parents knew he would come and had no issues with it."

"I don't see why they would have. You have been in their service forever," Robin replies.

"They have always been good people, even if we didn't always agree on things regarding certain matters. We respected them, and they us," Thomas says quietly.

"I suppose when you say certain matters you are referring to Saber?" Robin asks hesitantly.

Both Thomas and Elaine nod slightly. "I never felt he should have been forced into marriage," Elaine quietly says glad for a distraction. "However, it wasn't my place to argue. I stated how I felt once, but was told that it was just how things were done, and it was left at that. I just didn't understand how someone could force their only child into a marriage to a person they didn't choose. So I suppose in a way, I am grateful for what has happened, even if for the wrong reasons. He deserves to be happy, and I know he is with Amanda."

"All right folks, I need you guys to continue heading towards the target," Colt says to his platoon of troops. "Try and move quietly and not draw attention to yourselves. I'm

gonna do a couple of flyovers to make my presence known and hopefully draw their attention. Your main mission is to extract civilians, are we clear?" Colt asks the troop of soldiers before him.

"Yes sir!" they reply in unison.

He salutes them and they return the gesture and he hops into his Bronco Buster and takes off. The troops begin moving quickly towards the house, the smell of smoke slowly starting to permeate through the air.

"Sir," the squad leader says as he approaches Fireball. "I thought we were meeting another platoon here. Where are they?"

"They are being led by Captain Rider," Fireball replies, getting a look of confusion from the soldiers. He shrugs it off and continues to explain the plan to his troop. "The platoon had other means of transport that is being utilized. Our mission is to keep the Outriders from escaping. Capture any you can, kill any that resist. We know that they have already killed some civilians, including children, so I have no problems with killing them if need be. But they may have information that could prove useful, so try not to kill all of them, are we clear?"

"Yes sir!" the reply and he has them move on as he gets into Red Fury and heads in the general direction of the house.

"Where's my daddy?" the little boy asks as he is held close to Saber's chest.

"I don't know, Stephen," Saber replies quietly. He casts a glance to the small girl sleeping against his other shoulder. Her face is tear stained and covered in blood splatter. Barely able to move, he manages to wipe a little off her face with his sleeve. She stirs a little, shuddering in her sleep. He instinctively rocks her as best he can and Stephen looks up at him.

"Is mummy goin' t'be okay?" he asks, his voice breaking as he looks towards her body slumped not far from where they are pinned.

Saber involuntarily casts a glance towards the woman's unmoving form and sighs. "I don't know," he finally replies barely a whisper.

"What about Rory?" Stephen asks.

"She's asleep beside us," Saber says quietly his patience waning. He struggles to remain focused as he listens for any signs of Outriders or possible reinforcements. He tries to move to get to his phone, but it is just out of his reach while holding the frightened children. He tries again to set Stephen down to reach the phone, but he immediately starts to tense and doesn't want him to start screaming, so he finally gives up, holding the child against him to quiet him. They sit there for so long that all three of the remaining children drift to sleep. He then hears what sounds like a ship, something firing and an explosion that rocks the house. Jolting the kids awake they latch onto him and he tries to keep them quiet. Below, he hears confusion and guns

firing. His phone vibrates again, moving further away from him as it does. Straining, he finally manages to reach it and checks the messages. Scrolling through, he sees the last one, from Amanda. Coming for you. He nods and strains to listen to the sounds in and around the house. After what seems like an eternity, but is only about fifteen minutes, he hears a struggle, then Amanda's voice along with Lieutenant Waller. "We're clear." Amanda states, knocking on various walls.

"Colonel Rider?" Waller calls out while following Amanda's example and knocking on various walls.

Saber hears the knocking coming closer, but instinctively moves the children behind him before kicking out the boards he had used to shield them from the Outriders. The wall starts to cave from the impact and nearly hits Lieutenant Waller when he breaks through it.

Immediately Amanda turns in the direction of the damage. "Saber?" she calls rushing over and managing to see into the holed up area. "Hey, a little help here!" she calls out to some of the nearby soldiers. Two more men come to help them. Slowly they make a hole big enough to gain access to where Saber and the children are.

Waller spots the mother slumped over to the side and orders his men to bring her out. Amanda is already climbing in and taking the smallest child from Saber. The girl starts crying and Amanda starts trying to soothe her. Saber tells Stephen to climb out and go to Amanda. Hesitantly he does so and Amanda places a protective arm around him.

Slowly, Saber takes Rory and she clammers against him and he slowly makes his way out of the attic area, moving stiffly as he does. One of the other soldiers comes up and offers to take Rory, but she refuses, clinging tightly to Saber, who is trying to keep her calm. "They're frightened. Is there a vehicle I can use to take them to safety?" he asks the woman cadet.

"There's Colt's Bronco Buster and Fireball's Red Fury outside," Amanda replies still rocking the youngest girl. "We also have a few transports a little ways down the road."

Slowly Saber manages to kneel down to face Stephen who has his face buried against Amanda's hip, hugging tightly to her. "Stephen," Saber says quietly. "I need you to help me out. Do you think you can do that?" he asks the frightened boy. Stephen nods slightly, but doesn't otherwise loosen his grip. "Okay, I need you to go with these nice soldiers. They are going to take you where it's safe, okay?" The boy nods and the female soldier reaches down and he carefully takes her hand. "I'll come and see you in a few minutes," Saber says as the boy cautiously leaves with the soldier.

"Would you like us to take other two, sir?" Waller asks, indicating the two children that are still clinging to the couple.

Saber nods as a few other cadets join them. "Yes, take them to a vehicle and guard them with your lives. I'll be down in a minute," he replies. The soldiers salute him and take the kids, who struggle for a minute, then after some reassurance, they go without much more of a fight. After they leave and Waller turns to see about the

mother of the children Saber sighs heavily and runs his fingers through his hair.

"She's gone, isn't she?" Amanda asks quietly, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"I think so," he replies barely audible. Lt. Waller turns and looks at them and shakes his head. Saber nods in acknowledgement and Lt. Waller comes over to him. "I want the bodies of the civilians carefully removed and taken to the outpost. They are to be treated as if they were my family, is that clear?" Saber says.

"Yes, sir!" Lt. Waller replies and he turns and begins issuing orders to his men.

"Let's go see about the children, shall we?" Saber says obviously fatigued. Amanda nods and they head downstairs, Saber looks to see how badly things were damaged as they make their way down. "I'm surprised that we weren't all killed today," he says quietly.

"I am grateful you weren't, Saber. I'm not sure I would have survived it," Amanda says, her voice breaking at the end of the sentence.

Saber takes her hand and stops in the middle of what was once a living room. "We should probably go through Jared's personal effects. There may be some things we could give the children when they're older," he says quietly.

"Maybe I should call Thomas and Elaine. It is their family, so they may have heirlooms they would know to hold back," Amanda replies.

Saber nods. "Perhaps you're right, although I hate to tell them such news over the phone."

Amanda takes out her phone and calls April.

"Amanda?" April says over the line.

"Yeah. It's me. We got Saber and three of the children out," she says slowly.

A silence on the other end as April processes the information and sighs. "Is anyone in need of immediate medical attention?" she asks.

"A few of the soldiers are wounded, but not anything critical, so far as I can tell," Amanda replies honestly. "How are Thomas and Elaine?" Amanda asks hesitantly.

"Taking what I have told them hard, but trying to remain focused on your kids. My father came about an hour ago and got them, it took a good deal of persuasion to get them to go. Once we knew that the troops had stopped the resistance, he decided they needed to be where you are. He's using a specialty transport, so they could arrive there at any time," April replies. "We've got the girls and they are doing fine, so don't worry about them, okay?"

"Okay, I'll keep you posted on how things are here," Amanda replies. She ends the call

and passes the information to Saber, who nods before looking around for Fireball and Colt.

Fireball comes up and looks him over carefully, "Hey, for once I don't see you bleeding from anywhere," he says in surprise.

Saber nods. "Aye, been a while since I've not been injured in battle. Although I thought I'd feel better than I do," he replies quietly.

Colt comes over and sees the tension in the other's body language. "I'm glad that you were able to get some of them out, Saber," he says quietly.

"Aye, but those kids are going to have a hard time with this. Stephen saw both of his parents murdered, and Rory saw their mother slain. I am hoping that Savannah is too young to remember any of this," Saber replies.

A vehicle comes up and lands not far from where they are talking. Almost immediately Thomas jumps out of the vehicle closely followed by Commander Eagle and Elaine. "Master Saber!" Thomas calls as he runs up to him.

Saber places a hand gently on his shoulder, eyeing the older man sympathetically, "I'm sorry," he says quietly. "Only three of the children survived."

Elaine comes up just as he finishes the statement, the realization hits her and she breaks down.

Amanda comes over to her and wraps her arms around her. Elaine leans against her sobbing, unable to hold back her grief any longer. "I'm sorry, Elaine," Amanda says quietly as she struggles to hold back her own tears.

Thomas comes over and hugs his wife, struggling to control his own grief.

"Would you like to see the three surviving children?" Saber asks quietly.

Elaine looks up, her face tear-stained and eyes red from crying and nods. "I don't know what we're going to do with them. I don't think his wife had any other family still living," Elaine says quietly.

"You are their family, and I consider you my family, so they will come with us. They will be loved, I know you will make sure of that. You know that there is more than enough room for them. Besides, now the girls will have even more children to play with," Saber says with a weak smile. "If you think you can handle it, I'll take you to the children. Stephen, Rory, and Savannah are the ones that survived," he adds sympathetically.

Elaine nods slightly, "Yes, I'd like to see them. I'm sure they are horribly terrified."

Saber turns towards the area that the Bronco Buster is parked and sees a couple of the soldiers trying to engage the kids in play, even though they don't seem interested.

Stephen looks up and spots Thomas and Elaine and breaks away from the soldiers and runs towards them. One of the soldiers starts after him, but Saber holds a hand up to stop her. He reaches Elaine quickly and she takes him into her arms and they both begin crying, the little boy trembling from a combination of both grief and fear. "Thank God you're safe," Elaine whispers as she holds the boy against her.

"Are mummy an' daddy?" Stephen finally manages to ask.

"They are gone, Love," Elaine says quietly, kissing his forehead. "You and your sisters will be coming back with us."

"What will they do with us?" he asks.

"We will raise you with our own children," Saber says coming up behind Elaine.

Stephen looks at him confused. "What?" he asks in confusion.

"We will allow you and your sisters to live as part of our family, Stephen. Our daughters and if we have other biological children will be the rightful heirs to our estate, but we will make sure you are well cared for, educated, and able to grow up to become what you want to," Saber says quietly. "You are in school, aren't you?"

Stephen nods. "I'm in class one. Rory and Savannah are too little for school yet," he replies.

"Then after things settle, we will look into starting you back in school, okay?" Saber asks trying to calm him.

Amanda comes over carrying Savannah a female cadet beside her holding Rory. Elaine takes Rory from the soldier, the girl nestling against her. "Saber, how can-" Elaine starts to ask.

He holds up a hand to silence her, "Elaine, you and Thomas have done more than required in your service to my family. These children have been orphaned through no fault of their own, knowing that we can help you and them at once makes the most sense."

"He's right," Amanda says as she rocks Savannah who is resting against her shoulder. "For all of the years that you have cared not only for Saber and his parents, but you've helped me, and our children, the very least we can do is allow these children a better life than they would otherwise have."

"When have the two of you had time to discuss this? This is a decision that shouldn't be made lightly," Thomas says in surprise.

"It's the right thing to do Thomas," Amanda says simply. "Besides, you know that if I had reservations I'd speak up. I see it just as Saber does, a way to return the favor for all that you and Thomas have done for the family all of these years."

Saber smiles weakly, "And trust me, if she had an issue with this, she would speak up," he affirms.

Thomas looks to Elaine who is looking between the two of them in shock, not sure what to say. "Then we are grateful for your kindness," he finally says.

Commander Eagle looks over both Saber and Amanda carefully, "I'm impressed, only a few minor scrapes and one good cut on Amanda's arm. Perhaps we should send the two of you out in civilian clothes instead of uniforms."

Amanda looks at her arms and shrugs when she sees the cut bleeding on the back of her arm, "I had no clue that I was bleeding," she states noting the side of her shirt is starting to have blood on it. "I suppose I should get it checked out. Then I'll have to go and change shirts."

"Sir," Thomas says quietly. "Why don't you and Lady Amanda stay for another day or two? I am of course assuming that the cottage is still intact. We can take the children and return to your estate and see to them and things there."

Saber goes to protest when the commander interjects, "It would also allow someone to remain close to here in the event that not all of the Outriders were captured."

Saber turns his attention to Amanda, "Why don't you check in with the medics, we can decide in a little what we're going to do, all right, Love?"

Amanda nods. "Okay. I'll be over there," she says quietly and then heads to the closest field medic.

"I am not against staying for another day or two, but should something arise, I'm not sure that just the two of us could indeed handle it, sir," Saber states. "I just don't think that either of us are physically up to it," he adds quietly, casting a concerned glance to where Amanda headed.

"I understand, Saber. Your concerns are valid ones," Commander Eagle states.

"But?" Saber presses.

"But I'm not entirely sure how to handle this. There very well could be more Outriders on their way here. We still don't know why they wanted this place. Or if there is something here that they were after."

Saber sighs in thought. "Perhaps you could allow a squad to be based here on a temporary basis. The house is large enough to accommodate that many soldiers and they could possibly work on restoring the house as restitution for using it. Perhaps you could have Lieutenant Waller lead the squad that remains here. He seems to have a good head on his shoulders," Saber states. "I do not wish to remain away from the children for more than another day or two. But on the off chance that something possibly arrive, at least we'd be close enough to help. We seem to be able to remain under the radar at the cottage, perhaps due to its size, so we could enjoy a couple of

days alone, before returning to the house where we will have to start the process of adopting the surviving children and arranging for a tutor for Stephen and establishing some semblance of a schedule for all of them."

Commander Eagle listens intently, nodding on occasion then looks a bit shocked at the final statements. "You plan on adopting those children?" he asks in shock.

"Aye. Thomas and Elaine are getting older, hardly the time for them to be solely responsible for three orphaned children. Amanda has already agreed to it. We will be setting up trust funds for them from whatever becomes of this estate and survivor benefits from their parents, so I know they will be all right financially. By Amanda and I adopting them, they have the protection of my clan and those benefits that our biological children will have, aside from inheriting our estate directly."

"It makes the most sense, Commander," Amanda says as she walks up to the pair, her arm in a sling.

"It appears that I spoke too soon on the injuries, or lack thereof," he says with a smile.

"Just a few stitches. I've been much worse off than this before," Amanda replies.

"I'm well aware of that, Captain," the commander replies with a hint of amusement.

Amanda grins and is about to comment again when Colt, Fireball, Thomas, Elaine, and the children come up.

"We need to be getting back, Saber. What's the plan?" Fireball asks.

Saber looks over the group debating his words before making a statement. "Amanda and I would like to remain here another day or two, if Thomas and Elaine are amenable to that," he says. Thomas nods and Saber continues. "That being decided, I think it best that the lot of you return home relatively soon," he stops when a female cadet comes up carrying a rather large box.

"Sir, we have gathered a lot of the children's clothing and toys for them. We thought it might help them in their transition to a new home," she says to Saber who nods and takes the box.

"Thank you. It was very thoughtful of you and your crew, Miss," he replies. Fireball grabs the box from her and the soldier salutes the group and turns back to her command. He turns his attention back to the people before him. "It is getting rather late, please call once everyone is settled and we can decide from there if we stay one day or two. It will also depend on if anything turns up here and if Amanda is feeling well with the stitches in her arm."

They talk a little more and say their goodbyes before heading off in several vehicles. Commander Eagle comes up beside them and sighs, debating his next words.

"I thought you left with Thomas and Elaine, sir?" Saber asks in surprise.

The commander shakes his head. "No. I sent the female cadet with them. She will return tomorrow and I will take the vehicle back to the outpost then. I want to try and figure this whole thing out. I want to oversee the searches of the outer buildings and such to try and glean what information I can from this. It just makes no sense. I can't think of any reason for them to do what they did to these people," he says exasperated.

"Sometimes we just don't know, sir. Our past experiences with them have taught us that they are not like us. They seem to be devoid of feelings or any type of emotional attachment with another of their kind or any other species. I suppose that is one thing that makes us different from them, but the heavy loss of life make the price of peace rather high. But that is how it is in war, I suppose," Saber says quietly. "I will be paying for all of them to have a full funeral, sir. I instructed that their bodies be sent to the outpost until arrangements can be made."

Commander Eagle nods. "I heard a couple of the soldiers mention that you had said something like that. It is a good call, Saber. You may arrange for services to be held at the outpost if you wish," he replies.

"I will discuss plans with Thomas and Elaine, since they are their family, they should have a say in how the service is held and where. I'll let you know as soon as I know something."

"Very well. You should go and rest. I'll call your cell should we need you for something," Commander Eagle replies.

Saber nods and he and Amanda take one of the horses and return to the cottage. After cleaning up and changing into fresh clothes they make supper and then turn in. Shortly after the light is flicked off Saber feels Amanda sobbing quietly. Not sure what to say he just holds her, allowing her to grieve for the day's events. "I'm sorry, Love," he says quietly. Eventually they both fall into a restless sleep.

Please let me know what you think. :-)

Kapitel 40: Life Goes On

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 39: Life Goes On

"Mummy!" Eryn cries happily as she runs into the sitting room.

Amanda looks up from rocking the child in her arms and smiles, "Hello, sweetie. Did you have a good time?"

"Aye," Eryn replies. "Stephen an' Rory chased us all the way through the school yard. Moria tripped an' cut her leg, but Daddy said she'd be fine. We barely made it to base before they caught us. Anna tried to stand up to Seth today, because he was taking her bag again, but the teacher found out and he was put in the corner. It was a lot of fun to watch him pout."

Amanda laughs and glances over the kids as they file in, Saber behind them. "So how are your marks?" she asks eyeing them all carefully.

The kids try and not make eye contact with her as Saber speaks up from behind them, "They are all satisfactory in their marks, Love. Although Rory needs to work on her behaviour," Saber adds amused. "Evidently she has a tendency to talk during classes."

Amanda chuckles and nods. "Well, aside from that, I am proud of all of you. Go and get a snack and then do your homework and then we will allow you time to work on your fencing and horseback riding," she says to the children before her.

"Yes ma'am," the children reply in unison as they dash into the kitchen.

Saber comes over and sits beside Amanda on the couch who is holding a sleeping child. He kisses her cheek, and then the head of the child. "How are you doing, Love?" he asks quietly.

"We're doing well. Elaine and I took Dylan and Samantha shopping in town this morning. The weather was nice and it was good to get out. We ran into someone rather unexpected."

"Oh? Who would that be?" Saber asks with a hint of curiosity in his voice.

"Well, I suppose I should tell you before they arrive," Amanda looks to say something and she holds a finger to his mouth and smiles, "I'll tell you. We ran into . She and some woman was with her out shopping. She wants to speak with us. She says that it is important."

Saber sighs and shakes his head. "I'm not sure that I want her to enter our home, Amanda," he says quietly. "When are they coming?" he asks almost dreading the reply.

"Tomorrow morning. That is, if you're still staying home tomorrow," Amanda replies.

"Yes, I should be here. I wanted us to enjoy our anniversary tomorrow," he replies. "And a day or two after," he adds quietly against her ear. "I had arranged a trip to the cottage for the two of us, with the others coming out this weekend to join us."

Amanda looks at him in shock, "When...when did you plan this?" she asks bewildered.

Saber smiles innocently at her. "Over the past month I've been arranging everything. I wanted to surprise you," he replies before kissing her lightly.

"I suppose I should call and reschedule the appointment then," Amanda says to herself.

Saber shakes his head. "No, let's get it over with and then we can go and relax. It might make getting away far more enjoyable to have this meeting over and done with,"

"I just don't know what she can possibly want. She didn't seem inclined to let on either. It's been what, almost five years since our last encounter with her?" Amanda muses.

"Aye, and I was hopeful that it was the last we'd have to see of her," Saber adds coldly. "If she so much as dares to speak down to you, I will remove her from our home. Forcefully if need be."

Amanda resists the urge to smile and nods. "And I won't try and stop you either, Love."

He stops when she addresses him as such and chuckles. "You don't call me that very often. Only when you're patronizing me," he replies amused.

"I'm not doing any such thing," Amanda replies in her most innocent voice. "Of course this does explain why Elaine almost spoke up when I told her she could come tomorrow. I'm sure she was chomping at the bit to spill the surprise just to keep Ms. Swadjen from coming here. I know how much both she and Thomas dislike her."

"And for reasons other than just their loyalty to you, Love," Saber states. "Although I don't see either one of them taking a comment from her about you lightly. Perhaps we should invite Colt over. He could bring Robin, Wil, and Jason with them and then maybe Robin could watch Dylan and Samantha while we have this discussion."

"And then we'd have one more armed person here, right?" Amanda asks amused. "I have no objection to them coming over, or even Colt coming in to play bouncer for us, but I thought that having the kids nearby might keep me from doing or saying

something I might regret later should she try and set me off," she states. "Of course should things start to go south, it might be a good thing to have Robin here to pass the kids over to."

"So you have already talked with Colt?" he asks.

"Not exactly. I talked with Robin, who told Colt what was going on and he was more than happy to come over. They should be here in a couple of hours. Elaine got more from the store so that we can have enough for everyone. She said she will also make some cakes and serve tea while our guests are here."

Saber chuckles and shakes his head. "I'm surprised you didn't call me while I was at the Outpost to rant about it," he says amused. "Although I think I'm rather glad you waited. As I'm sure the soldiers that I was grading would have been."

"Now I know you can be more professional than that, Saber. You wouldn't hold your personal feelings of her against the soldiers, would you?" Amanda asks amused.

"Not exactly, but knowing I'm going to have to deal with her in our home might have made me in a mood where I could have been more critical or something," Saber retorts.

Amanda smiles, "Then I am that glad I waited until now to spring this on you. I just am curious as to what it is about. She acted as if you would know. I'm pretty sure Elaine has a guess, but she refused to say anything."

Saber looks at her curiously. "Perhaps I'll go and speak with Elaine about it. I'm sure she'll tell me what she is thinking," Saber says.

"From how evasive she's been since we ran into Sincia, I'm almost dreading the appointment anyways."

"If she says what I think she may, I'll talk with you about it after the kids are down for the night, all right?" Saber replies.

Amanda nods. "I would appreciate it," Amanda says quietly. She carefully stands up, "I'm going to take Samantha upstairs. Dylan will probably be asleep for another hour or so, if you want to go and talk with Elaine before you start the fencing lessons."

"I think I will. I'll talk with you afterwhile, Love," Saber says and kisses her lightly before heading into the kitchen.

Elaine looks up from the dishes when he enters. "Ah, you're home. Have you spoken to Lady Amanda?" she asks casually while watching for him closely for a reaction.

"Aye, I have. So what is your take on this so-called appointment?" he asks as he sits down at the table.

Elaine is quiet for several minutes, pondering her answer as she finishes the dishes

and brings over tea for both of them. She sits across from him and sighs, "I honestly think they may want to betroth one of their children to one of yours." Saber takes a sip of his tea as he ponders the statement and Elaine continues. "She said that it had been a long time since you've spoken. She eyed the two wee ones we had with idle curiosity. I could tell she was not pleased to see a little of both of you in them. Perhaps she still harbors some sort of feelings for you, and knows that a betrothal would be the next best way to attach herself to this family."

Saber places his cup down a bit harder than he intends and sighs. "How badly would protocol be breached if I forbid such a betrothal, Elaine?" he asks.

Elaine shrugs. "I don't know all of the rules in such matters. I do not think that there are any real repercussions, other than giving her ammunition to tarnish your name in nobility social circles," she replies. Seeing his expression she quickly adds, "However, I don't think that actually matters to you, does it?"

"Not really. I am who I am," Saber replies with a shrug. "There are others that could be matches for the children, but they are young, and there is no real need to rush into something so..."

"Permanent?" Amanda offers coming into the kitchen from the back stairwell.

"Aye. I suppose you've figured out what we're discussing?" Saber asks.

Amanda nods. "It's what I figured, seeing Elaine's reaction. I can't say as I'm suprised, but I feel as you do. The kids are young, I mean, Stephen is the oldest and he's not quite twelve. I wouldn't be against them coming over and allowing the children to spend time together, provided she is civil as are her children. But to just arrange a marriage at their age, I could not in good conscience do that," Amanda replies as she sits down in a vacant chair at the table. "I would say that about anyone who came with such intentions, not just Sincia."

Saber goes to comment when the children come bursting into the kitchen. "Ah, done with your homework?" he asks, getting several nods in reply. "Good. I'm going to check it after supper, but let's do our fencing lessons and then it should be time for supper. Go get your gear on. I'll meet you out back."

"Yes sir," the kids eagerly reply and dash out of the kitchen.

"I suppose we'll talk later," he says almost apologetically.

"Aye. Have fun and don't be too hard on them. I don't want them to be too worn out to play with Wil and Jason," Amanda replies.

"I'll try and go easy on them, since you asked so nicely," Saber replies with a smirk. He kisses her briefly then heads out after the kids.

Elaine comes and places a cup of tea in front of Amanda. "It'll do you some good to drink this, milady. It will help you relax a little. For what it's worth, I think you two are

going about this appointment the right way. We'll see how she takes such terms, as she's not used to not getting her way," Elaine says quietly as she clears the cups away from her and Saber.

Amanda sips her tea in thought for several minutes before speaking. "I am glad you don't think it unreasonable, Elaine. I suppose I just don't like the idea of being forced to marry someone I don't love. I thought a good compromise would be to allow her child or children to be around ours and if something develops eventually, fine, but to force a child into a betrothal before they even know what it means..."

"It is just how things have been done, Lady Amanda. It's been that way well beyond memory for those in this class. I suppose Saber is different among his clan in that he feels as you do. Or he at least he's not afraid to voice his opinion on the matter. This may either be a good thing, or someone from lower in his clan lines could contest his authority to head the clan because of his decision."

"That's absurd, Elaine. I know that you're speaking the truth, but I still find it to be absurd. I thought that it was custom to allow the children to socialize among their social class to allow connections to be made?"

"In larger cities, that is not uncommon, but out here separated from the general public things have traditionally been done differently, especially among the royal lines," Elaine replies placing a gentle hand on Amanda's shoulder. "I do have a suggestion for you, milady."

"What's that?" Amanda asks curiously.

"Wear your most stunning outfit. Dress above your class for this appointment. As if you were actual royalty. So that Ms. Swadjen has no reason to try and doubt your status. I saw how she eyed you yesterday," Elaine states. "I'll help you get ready if you'd like."

"I would appreciate that, Elaine. I'm sure that Saber will know how to dress for such an appointment, and we will have help with the children while you are helping me prepare."

"Aye milady, I will get Thomas to take the children to school early, so that he can be back before our guests arrive. I'll have tea and cakes ready before they arrive as well."

"Thank you, Elaine. I honestly would be lost without you and Thomas," Amanda replies. The doorbell rings and Thomas comes through the kitchen towards the door. "I suppose that's Colt, Robin, and the children," Amanda says standing up.

Elaine nods. "Aye. I'll have dinner ready in about an hour, Lady Amanda."

"Thank you," Amanda replies quietly and heads into the sitting room where Colt and Robin are just entering, their two children in tow."

"Hey, Cowboy!" Amanda says with a smile. "Hello Robin, how are you?" she asks

greeting the blonde woman fondly.

"Hey yourself, Captain," Colt replies with a smirk.

"We're doing well, Amanda. You look good. How are the children?" Robin replies as they go and sit down and the boys run off to find the other children.

"The kids are doing well. Stephen, Rory, Anna, Eryn, and Moria are all in school, so we just have Dylan and Samantha at home now during the day," Amanda replies.

Robin shakes her head, "I honestly don't know how you have survived having so many children and still have your sanity, Amanda."

Amanda laughs. "At least you think I still have some. There are days that I doubt it. But I love all of the children, and I have no regrets that we adopted Jared's children. I love them as I do my own. It's nice to have a house full of children. It means that it's never dull," Amanda replies.

"I'm sure it isn't. Especially if they are like the two of you," Colt says with a grin, getting a look from Robin.

Amanda chuckles, "If someone had told me my life would be like this ten years ago, I would have accused them of being crazy. But I would not trade anything for this."

"Tomorrow is your anniversary, isn't it?" Robin asks.

"Aye. It'll be seven years. Hard to imagine isn't it? I can't believe Wil is seven already, and Jason is four now, isn't he?" Amanda replies.

"Yes. It has been an interesting eight years. So many things have happened. I don't like that we still must be ready for war at any time. Can't we just enjoy the peace?" Robin says quietly. "All of you have lost so much, and the countless others that paid with their lives, it just doesn't seem like it's worth it sometimes."

Amanda comes over and sits beside Robin and takes her hand. "I know how you feel, Robin. There are days that Saber wakes up barely able to see, even now. Other days he needs his cane, but these things he will have to live with for the remainder of his life; but he is alive, in spite of everything and I am grateful for any time we have together. I know things could change in an instant, so I live for the now and pray for a future, it's the only thing I can do. So many lives were lost in the wars with the Outriders, and those lives cannot be in vain. We must go on to show we can move on," Amanda says quietly. "Should the need arise, I know both he and I will fight again if we are asked to."

"I hope none of you ever have to fight again," Robin replies quietly. "Especially now that April and Fireball have Chihiro. I wouldn't want any of these children to lose their parents."

"It is why they are all teaching, Robin. They are the best at what they do. Alex will

become the leader of the new elite, and I think he will do well at it. The new designs that April came out with after the battle with Jesse have had promising results. Even the less trained have been able to handle the units."

"Let them train under Saber and us a little longer and they'll do as well or better than we did," Colt states. "I've seen Saber's classes. He's brutal on the cadets, but he still shows them respect, unless they do something to have it taken from them. They also seem to respect him, especially when he comes in nearly blind and can still beat the crap out of them," Colt adds with a grin. "I love watching him on those days. The newer recruits seem to think they can get away with things on the days he's wearing his darkest glasses. Their faces when he knocks them down a peg or two is priceless."

They talk for a while and then have dinner. Afterwards the kids play until time for bed. Amanda has just finished changing when Saber enters the room and comes up behind her and pulls her against him. "It's going to be a long day tomorrow, Love," he says quietly. "I've told Colt to not draw his weapon without a signal from me. Although he insists on being on the opposite side of you from me, almost as if to help protect you," he says with a hint of amusement.

"Protect me or her?" Amanda asks as she turns to face him, looking into his eyes.

"Perhaps a little of both," Saber replies with a smile and then kisses her briefly. Reluctantly, he releases her so that he can change and she goes and sits on the edge of the bed. "Did you and Elaine further discuss tomorrow after I left?" he asks from the dressing room.

"Yes," she replies as he comes out and sits beside her. "She told me to dress up tomorrow, as formally as I could, without wearing an evening gown, but to also carry my sword as to establish my place in the household hierarchy." Saber nods and they move to lay down, Amanda scooting against him as he covers them. "She said that she could help me choose my clothes and such in the morning, while Thomas runs the children to school."

"Aye, that sounds like a good plan. I'll be wearing my dress uniform with the markings of my new rank of Brigadier Colonel. Commander Eagle was promoted to a Lieutenant General. There is talk of promoting the rest of you as well."

Amanda looks up and blinks for a moment, not sure she had heard correctly before shifting so that she can face him better, her head on his arm. "When did this happen?" she finally manages to ask.

Saber chuckles, "I found out yesterday. April is being promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and the rest of you will probably be promoted to Majors, which is April's current rank." Amanda studies his face carefully for signs of him joking with her and finds none. "I am quite serious, Love. We will probably find out officially by the end of the week."

"I can understand the others, but why change my rank? I've not active," Amanda states.

"Because Love, Comman- General Eagle has insisted upon it. You still help with the technical side of things with April, giving your input and such on design features and how things might work better if done slightly different, so you are considered a reservist. At least that is how he sees it. He also knows that if you were asked to fight, you would, if it came down to it."

Amanda nods, acknowledging the truth in his statements and sighs, resting her head against his chest. "I suppose that makes sense. Too bad you won't have the uniform for tomorrow," she mutters as an afterthought.

"I already have the dress uniform, Love. Thomas came to the outpost this afternoon and got it to bring home."

"How did he get it past me?" she asks with a smile.

"Not the slightest idea. Perhaps you were out back with the children, or maybe it was when you were shopping with Elaine. It was around lunch time when he came to get it," Saber replies.

"You know, it is mighty convenient that we keep running into Sincia. Do you think she somehow planned that meeting?" Amanda asks honestly.

Saber shrugs and sighs. "Honestly, I don't see how she could have, but then again, she can be rather resourceful so I can't truly rule out such a possibility," he replies sounding tired. "Let's not dwell on it. Tomorrow will be here far too soon for me. We should try and rest while we can. We'll have to pack and such after the appointment,"

"You're right. Of course knowing Elaine, she might have very well already packed for us," Amanda says then yawns. "Good night," she says and kisses him lightly before snuggling against him.

"Good night, Amanda," Saber replies quietly before drifting off to sleep.

The next morning Saber enters the bedroom just as the doorbell rings. "Well, it looks like the show is about to begin," he says ruefully. Amanda steps out from the dressing room and he smiles at her nodding in approval. "You look beautiful, Love. Elaine did well with your necklace too, your coat of arms goes well with the jewels to either side." Amanda smiles and he sighs, "Are you ready?"

Amanda nods, "Let's get this over with."

Saber chuckles and they head out of their room and down the stairs, Colt waiting for them at the foot. They enter the room and nod to their guests and take a seat across from them. Colt stands slightly behind them ready to move if anything should occur.

"Thank you for seeing us, Captain and Mrs. Rider," Sincia says as humbly as she can manage.

Saber nods politely, "Actually, it would be proper to address my current rank of

Brigadier Colonel, and my wife as Captain Rider."

"A..Colonel?" Sincia stammers, not bothering to hide her shock. "And a Captain?" she says as if the sound of the title makes her ill. Saber nods. "How? How could..how could you possibly go up in rank after being injured so severely? Surely they know you are unable to fight." She says in an almost accusatory tone, causing Colt to stiffen a little.

Saber sighs. "If you think so little of myself and of my wife, then why are you here, Ms. Swadjen?" he asks while struggling to remain civil.

Sincia notices his tone and takes a breath before speaking. "Because regardless of whom you married, your daughter is still of royal lineage. I want to make a betrothal between our son, and your daughter. Thereby keeping the bloodlines pure for both of our families," she states as if she is making an offer that is to better him.

"Which of our daughters were you referring to?" Saber asks casually, as Elaine brings out the tea and cakes and serves it to each of them before returning to the kitchen.

"What do you mean?" Sincia asks obviously confused. "The child she just had is the closest to our youngest son's age. I am aware you have a son as well, but we have no need for a boy child."

"I wasn't sure if you meant one of our older daughters. We have five daughters and two sons," Saber states.

Sincia doesn't bother to hide her shock. "You...you have seven children?" she finally asks after finding her voice.

"Aye, we do," Saber replies with a small smile, noting her shock. "Stephen isn't quite twelve, then the others range in age from nine down to six months old."

"Twelve?" Sincia stammers. "I knew it! I knew you had been unfaithful! So you did lie to me, Richard," she says in a hateful tone.

Colt steps up, ready to intervene when Amanda signals for him to wait. He stands at his current position, ready to jump in. "Stephen is our adopted son, Madam," Amanda says unable to hold her tongue any longer. "Not that it matters, we love him regardless as if he were our own, just as we do his sisters." She is about to say more when Saber takes her hand and gently squeezes it.

"You came here in hopes of a betrothal with our child, and yet you still remain hostile towards me and show my wife no respect. That in and of itself is more than enough for us to flat out refuse any further contact between our families. I could even forbid any future prospects because of your actions here today, Sincia," Saber says coldly. "However," he continues in a more normal tone, halting the objections she is about to raise. "I do not think it is beneficial to the children for them to be punished because of their parent's behaviour. I had an idea of what this meeting was to be about and I had already decided a long time ago that I would not do to any child I had what you and I were put through. We are still upholding social protocols if we allow them to socialize

within the nobility circles. If they so choose once they are old enough to make such decisions that they want to pursue a proper betrothal, I am not against such, but it is to be their decision, not ours."

"So you are saying that you were put out by our betrothal?" Sincia asks coldly.

"Is that all you got out of that?" Amanda asks harshly before Saber has a chance to reply. "I was truly hoping you weren't as self-centered as you seemed to be. Obviously I thought too highly of you," Amanda scoffs.

"Amanda, don't stoop to her level, Love. She is not worth the effort," Saber says as he stands up and offers her a hand up. "This meeting is over. I wish you well, and perhaps one day our children will be friends. I hold no ill feelings to your children. We bid you both good day," having said that, Thomas steps in to lead the guests out and he turns towards the study, Amanda not far behind him.

"How dare you call me shallow," Sincia says coldly, eyeing Amanda venomously. Amanda stops and turns to face her. "You think you are of the same class because you married Richard. You are a fool. People will know by how you act that you are not from a good bloodline. Nothing but a want-to-be."

Amanda starts to say something, but Colt steps in front of her and shakes his head. "You're better than her, walk away, Amanda," Colt says barely loud enough for her to hear.

Amanda meets his gaze, and is about to try and step past him when he shakes his head and moves to block her. Saber realizes she has stopped and turns and takes her hand and she turns back towards the study, struggling to keep her composure.

"Now ma'am," Colt says in as formal tone as he can manage turning to face an irate Sincia, "You have been asked politely to leave. I will remove you forcefully if necessary."

Sincia glares back at him and goes to say something when her husband firmly grabs her arm and says something to her low enough Colt can't hear. She casts one more menacing glance in the direction where Saber and Amanda left then turns and leaves without another word. Her husband casts an apologetic glance to Colt before allowing himself to leave fully.

Colt goes to the door and stands in the doorway, watching the pair as they are driven off the property by their driver. Slowly he relaxes and lets out a long whistle. "That went better than I expected," he says to Thomas as the door closes behind him.

Thomas chuckles, "Aye, that it did. No blood was shed."

"There was about to be, I saw the look in Amanda's eyes. I was almost afraid of her for a minute," Colt says quietly.

"Well, you know what Lady Amanda is capable of, Captain Wilcox, Mrs. Swadjen does

not," Thomas states before heading to the study and knocking on the door.

"Yes?" Saber says in an irritated tone.

Thomas opens the door and steps into the study, "They have gone, sir," Thomas says quietly.

Immediately Saber's countenance relaxes and he nods. "Thank you for letting us know," Saber replies quietly. "We will go up and change before seeing to the children."

"Very well, take your time. I'm going to go and try to calm Elaine down, she is quite riled up as well," he says with a hint of amusement.

Saber allows a small smile, "I'll bet she is. I sometimes wonder if she is distantly related to Amanda, as they tend to share similar tempers." Amanda glares at him, but is unable to hide the amusement in her eyes and Thomas laughs out right.

"Interesting prospect, sir. And a bit daunting to think about. I'll be in the kitchen should you need me," Thomas says before closing the door.

Amanda looks up at Saber and laughs, "So I'm related to Elaine, huh?" she asks amused.

Saber chuckles and comes and sits back beside her, pulling her against him, "Not seriously a bad thing, is it?" he asks innocently.

Amanda shakes her head. "I'm rather fond of Elaine. I wouldn't mind being related to her in the least. I'd be honored, actually," Amanda replies.

"Shall we go upstairs and get some more comfortable clothes on, Love?" Saber asks.

"We should probably work on packing too, if you still wish to take that trip," Amanda says as she stands up and takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry if I disappointed you today," Amanda adds quietly. "I know I was out of line."

"No you weren't, Love. And you did not disappoint me, I'm rather proud that you didn't go off on her sooner. However, I should have told them to leave sooner than I did." Saber replies. "Perhaps then she would not have escalated the situation. I shouldn't have allowed it to get to that point. I knew how she was and I didn't exactly do much to divert her temper."

"She is her own person, not your problem to control, Saber," Amanda replies quietly. "I am surprised that her husband didn't say a damned thing the entire time she ranted."

"I don't think he speaks our language very well, quite honestly," Saber states simply. "I'm sure that's the reason she is able to be with him," he adds absently causing Amanda to laugh out loud.

"I can't believe you just said that!" Amanda says while trying to stop laughing. "What makes it even funnier is that you may very well be right."

Saber chuckles and shakes his head, "She was usually good with languages, so she may be able to understand him well enough. I thought with her being married so long to him, he would have had some effect on her, but evidently she is unable to let the past remain in the past."

"As I said, it's not your problem," Amanda states. "I almost pity the man. He doesn't seem like a hostile individual, unlike her who seems to pounce at the smallest thing. She wants to be in charge, and evidently he is happy to let her be. I hope I don't come across like she does."

"No, you don't, Love. I think it is why so many are so fiercely loyal to you," Saber says quietly as he comes up behind her and pulls her against him as she reaches for the door. "You treat people as an equal, not as someone whose job it is to follow your every command. By doing that, people are willing to help you. As for Sincia, she treats anyone she deems below her status just as such. She always has. I would like to know the age of their other child, out of idle curiosity."

"So would I," Amanda states quietly. "I notice how she has a tendency to quickly accuse you of having been unfaithful to her. My personal experience is that the person who is so quick to point fingers, is usually the one doing the supposed wrong."

"To be honest, I wouldn't care. I am glad things went the way they did. I am much happier with you than I ever would have been with her, Amanda," Saber says quietly as he releases her.

She opens the door to find Colt walking towards them from the sitting room. "I see you are finally calm enough to come out," Colt quips.

"Yeah, I know I was a bit angry. I should have done better than I did and controlled my temper," Amanda replies back.

"Actually, I was gonna say how proud I was that the meeting didn't end with bloodshed," Colt replies amused. "I saw your eyes, Amanda. It scared the Hell outta me to see you that angry and still be in control," Colt admits, getting a look of shock from both Saber and Amanda. "I know how well you can fight with a blade," he adds with a small smile.

"Well, I'm glad that I was able to resist the urge to harm her, although it wasn't easy. I was more upset because of what she about Saber, not because of how she treated me. Her opinion of me means nothing," Amanda replies.

"Well, it is over and done with, Love. Sincia will do whatever she is going to do, no matter what the truth is, so we may as well live our lives the way we wish. Perhaps one day she will see that she is only truly hurting herself," Saber says quietly.

"And possibly her children," Amanda adds with a sigh.

"Aye, but there is nothing we can do about that, Love," he says quietly as they head towards the kitchen.

Elaine looks up from the table when the three enter, she stands up quickly. "I should finish getting lunch prepared," she says quietly.

Amanda stops and studies her for a moment as the older woman starts to busy herself with food preparation. "Elaine, why are you so tense?" Amanda says in a concerned tone, placing a hand on her shoulder.

Elaine stops and looks at Amanda for a moment before answering, forcing back the tears that are near to falling. "Milady, she would not have been so angry had you not taken in the children," Elaine states quietly.

"Sit down, Elaine," Saber says firmly before Amanda can speak.

"Yes, there is more to this than what you are saying. What is it you know?" Amanda asks as the three of them sit down.

"I'm gonna check on Robin and the children," Colt says quietly and leaves before anyone can raise an objection.

Elaine looks between the couple before her, pondering what to say. "Well, I was talking to their driver while they were in with you," she begins hesitantly.

"Okay," Saber says, trying to encourage her to continue. Noting her hesitation he takes one of her hands in his. "Elaine, if something was said that has you so upset, please talk to us. You are like family to us, I don't want you to feel otherwise," he says quietly.

Elaine casts a nervous glance to Thomas. "I'll tell them if you prefer, Elaine. But I think it would be better to hear it from you, since you spoke with him more than I did," Thomas states.

Elaine takes a deep breath and slowly exhales. "Okay, as I told you, while they were in with you, I was here talking with their driver," Both Saber and Amanda nod. "Evidently, he has been with Lady Swadjen's family since she was a child. He was asking me if this was the home of the Rider's. I told him it was. He made some comment about how he came here once with Lady Swadjen's parents. I think for the betrothal agreement from the sounds of it. Anyways, he said that about two months before you were injured, when you had come home to take care of some of your father's affairs for a day or so, that the former Lady Sincia began telling everyone that the two of you had been hand-fastened."

"I never even saw her, how could we have been? In fact, I'd not seen her since my father's funeral, and the day she broke the engagement," Saber states. "But what would that have to do with anything anyways?" he asks confused.

"Because according to the driver, she was most likely pregnant," Elaine states, getting a look of shock from both Saber and Amanda. "You came home, and she was hoping to marry you straightaway, probably wanting to pass the child off as yours. Saying that she got pregnant right away."

"Elaine, I never even-" Saber starts to say.

"I know, Saber," Elaine says holding up her hands, halting his protest. "All of us know that you never even kissed her. She was rather cold to you. Perhaps it was her way of protesting the betrothal. Anyways, you came home, and were injured. Blinded and had no memory, so she had to do something fast. So she released you and quickly courted Mr. Swadjen. Whether or not their oldest child is his or not, I'm not sure. The driver said it was possible, since they had been seen around town together on occasion while you were away. But evidently, she is still saying that you she were handfasted just after your father died, but that when you found out she was pregnant, you became angry and lied about being blind to punish her, or something to that effect."

"She will say what she wants, Elaine," Saber says without emotion. "I have no control over that. People will believe what they wish, I know what I have and haven't done, as do all of the people that matter to me," Saber states.

Amanda lets out a long sigh and shakes her head. "I suppose she wants to make it hard on our children, since she didn't get her way. We may have to look outside the colony to socialize them," Amanda states.

Saber shrugs. "They are all so young, I'm not too worried about it," Saber says. "Stephen is the oldest, and even when he is of courting age, I feel he should choose who he wants to be with. Perhaps he will meet someone in school. I am glad that we are allowing them to attend private school at home. Most of the nobility use that school, unless they send their children to boarding school; and those that cannot afford the private school go to the public school. So there will be plenty of chances for social interaction among their peers. It was one of the reasons I felt we should send them to the private school here, aside from the curriculum being the same as the boarding school."

"I wanted the kids home. I enjoy having them around. I wonder if Sincia has her daughter at the school here, or if she has been sent away," Amanda questions aloud.

"From what their driver was saying, they have people that care for the children. So she may very well be away for school," Elaine states. "Not everyone wishes to be involved with their children, especially if the marriage was a forced one."

"She doesn't strike me as the type to really want children," Amanda states to no one in particular.

"I suppose that technically, it could be considered a requirement of the marriage, Love," Saber says.

"We never really discussed it. It just sort of...happened," Amanda replies with a shrug. "I love the children, and I am glad that we have them, but I'm glad that I never felt pressured, which from what all of you are saying is probably the case for a lot of women in such a position."

"Aye. It is true for a lot of women. Saber's mother always felt like an outcast because she only had him," Elaine says quietly. "But most people never said anything since she did give Master Edward a son. I know she miscarried a couple of times, but Saber was healthy and happy most of the time so they were content. Other than not being around him as much as they would have liked."

"I never knew mother had been pregnant other than with me," Saber says quietly.

"Aye, twice that I know of. Once you were away at school, the other time I think you are just too young to have known anything," Elaine replies. "I do think there was another time, but they were away on business for most of that year," Elaine adds absently.

A silence falls between them and Amanda stands up with a sigh, "Do you still wish to go on our trip, Saber?" she asks quietly.

Saber nods. "Aye, I do, Love. Shall we go and pack?" he asks.

"That is done for you," Elaine says snapping out of her reverie. "I took the liberty yesterday while you two were busy doing things with the children. Go and kiss the wee ones then be off before you find some excuse not to go."

Saber and Amanda nod. "Thank you, Elaine," Amanda replies smiling after kissing the woman's cheek before heading off to see Colt, Robin, and the children.

Kapitel 41: Mending Fences

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 40: Mending Fences

"Lance-Corporal Stephen Lindsay Rider," General Eagle says as the young man salutes then approaches him. The general hands him a piece of paper and shakes his hand. "You've done well. I know they are proud of you," he says quietly to him.

Stephen flashes a small smile and nods. "I will do my best to not disappoint any of you, sir," he says quietly before saluting and leaving the stage to return to his seat.

After another half hour, the cadets are all gathering in the banquet hall with their families to celebrate the graduation of basic training. A young woman comes up to Stephen and he hugs her and kisses her cheek. "I'm glad you made it, Raisa," he says quietly.

Raisa smiles and nods. "I am glad we made it as well, Stephen. I hope your parents don't mind my family and I came," she replies.

"Of course not. I think father said that my Aunt and Uncle were going to save you seats, but I guess you never found them," he replies.

Raisa shakes her head. "We were late, so we stayed to the back. I did see Moria down below and a bit of a gap, so perhaps that's where they were," she replies. "It would have been hard for us to get to them without bothering several people, so we just found spots near the exit."

"Regardless, I am glad you came. I hope your parents will come and say hello and maybe we can all have dinner," Stephen says as he searches the room for others he knows. After a moment, he spots Eryn and Rory talking to a couple of boys, slowly making their way in his direction. "Ah, at least some of them are here," he mutters. "Rory, Eryn!" he calls over the crowd of people, waving his hand above his head. "Over here!"

Rory spots him first and waves, grinning broadly. "We're coming!" she yells back and starts making her way towards her brother after grabbing the boy's hand that was talking with her. "Come on Lukas, you finally get to meet my older brother."

Eryn laughs as she follows behind the couple, Will following closely behind her. "Come on Rory, it's not like he's going to leave right away if you don't run," she says as she carefully dodges groups of people. Nearly out of breath, the four stop before Stephen.

"Glad you made it," Stephen says while nearly being choked by Rory. Reluctantly she releases him and looks curiously to the young woman beside him. "Raisa, this is Rory, Eryn, and Wil," he says once he can breathe again.

"Hello," Raisa says quietly. "Nice to meet you."

"Who's your other friend, Rory?" Stephen asks looking at Lukas.

"This is Lukas," she says a blush creeping onto her cheeks.

"Hello," Lukas says quietly. "It is nice to finally meet you, Lance-Corporal Rider."

"It is nice to meet you too, Lukas," Stephen replies before turning back to Raisa. "Eryn and Rory are two of my younger sisters, Wil is a family friend," Stephen explains. "Where are the others?" he asks looking to Eryn and Rory.

"They are the far side of the hall. There are so many people that they were more comfortable on the outskirts. I was hoping we could take you to them, instead of the lot of them trying to get through this crowd," Rory says.

"Aye. I do hope father is having a good day, so that at least he could see me graduate," Stephen says quietly.

"He seemed okay," Eryn says. "He was using his walking cane, but I think he could see well enough."

"Shall you lead us on?" Stephen asks amused. "Or are we going to make someone else come hunting for us?"

"Let's go then," Eryn says brightly. Will shakes his head and follows along after them. Rory quickly dodging around the clusters of people.

A short time later, they arrive where the rest of the family has gathered, along with Colt, Robin, April, Fireball, Alex, Sarah, Thomas and Elaine. Amanda spots him first and stands up and comes over to him and salutes him, smiling broadly. "Congratulations, Lance-Corporal Rider," she says and he salutes her and smiles.

"Thank you, Colonel Rider, ma'am," he replies with a smile, saluting her in return. He embraces her and kisses her cheek. "I would like you to meet Raisa, ma'am. She and I have been courting since junior year of high school," he says leading a nervous Raisa before Amanda.

"Hello, Colonel Rider ma'am. It is nice to finally meet you," Raisa replies trying to force back her nervousness.

Amanda smiles at the girl, "It is nice to meet you too, Raisa. I have heard only good things from Stephen about you. I am sorry that we have not met previously."

Elaine and Thomas approach him next as Amanda and Raisa are talking. Thomas comes up and shakes his hand, and Elaine hugs him tightly, releasing her just as Saber approaches him. He quickly snaps to attention and salutes him.

Saber returns the gesture and smiles. "At ease, Lance-Corporal, you are among family here," he says before firmly shaking his hand. "Your father would be proud of you, Stephen, I know I am," Saber says quietly.

Stephen nods. "I know he would be, and I am glad to know that I have done well by you, sir," he replies. "I owe you everything, and will do my best to continue to make you proud."

"I know you will, Stephen," Saber replies honestly.

"I would like to speak with you and mother privately, if I may," he asks with some hesitation.

"Would this be concerning the young lady presently talking with your mother?" Saber asks quietly, allowing a small smile.

"Yes, sir," Stephen replies. "I know that you've not met her before this, but-"

"If you feel she is the right person for you, I will not stop you, Stephen," Saber interjects. "I would like to meet her family and know a little more about her before anything is official, is that too much to ask?"

"No sir," he replies. "I was hoping for such an answer."

"Good. Now, let's go and rescue the poor girl from your sisters and Elaine," Saber says with a chuckle as he pats the young man's shoulder.

Amanda looks up as they approach and smiles. "She's nice, Stephen," she says casting a glance to Saber, who nods to her unspoken question. The group talks for a while, arranging a family gathering and inviting various friends. It is finally decided that everyone will meet at the vacation property, the house that was built on the land once belonging to Stephen's parents in three days time.

"They're actually coming!" Rory says excitedly. "I finally get to meet Lukas' parents."

"When are they coming, Rory?" Elaine asks curiously.

"This afternoon, Aunt Elaine," she replies. "Lukas seemed to think they might decline. He says they don't tend to leave their home much, other than for his father's business."

"What is it he does?" Elaine asks.

"I dunno. I think he's some sort of diplomat. But from what Lukas has said, he wasn't always one. Just the last couple of years."

"So his mother stays home or does she travel with him?"

"Not sure. I think a little of both. Lukas doesn't seem to like talking about it much. Oh, I hope mother and father won't mind, I told him his younger brother was welcome to come too, especially since his parents are coming."

"I don't think they will have any issue with it, Love," Elaine replies honestly. "How long before they arrive?"

"If the text I got a little while ago is accurate, in about an hour," Rory replies. "Possibly less, I suppose."

"I should go and ask Marianna to make sure the room for Lukas is set up for two boys, I'll see you afterwards, okay?" Elaine says. Rory nods and they both head off in different directions.

April, her father, Fireball and Chihiro arrive and Chihiro immediately runs off in search of Dylan. The adults begin gathering on the back patio as the children are doing various things. Some are sparring with sticks, some are just chatting amongst themselves. Eventually, Colt, Robin, Wil and Jason arrive. Shortly after, Stephen arrives with Raisa and her parents. He leads them into the sitting room and asks Mikhail to announce their arrival to his parents.

A few minutes later, Saber and Amanda enter the house and Stephen quickly stands up in greeting, Raisa beside him.

"Father, mother, these are Raisa's parents, Liam and Ciara Maher," Stephen says.

"It is nice to finally meet you both," Saber says as he offers his hand to Ciara.

She grasps it and they shake. "It is nice to finally meet you as well. Stephen has told us a lot about you. We have heard stories, of course, but it is nice to meet the people behind those stories. You have a lovely young man," she says as they take their seats.

"He has made us proud," Saber replies honestly. Marianna brings out some tea and offers it. Stephen and Raisa excuse themselves and head out in search of his siblings and other guests while their parents talk.

"It is our guess that they have brought us together for a reason," Liam states with a small smile after talking for a while.

"Aye, such was our thought as well," Amanda replies.

"We know that Stephen is your adopted son, however he's not talked about how you came to adopt him. I am curious, if you don't mind discussing it. We won't let on that we know, if it bothers him so much. We are fond of him and feel that he and Raisa are a good match," Ciara says looking between Amanda and Saber for a reaction.

They cast a glance to each other and Saber nods slightly. "He and his two biological sisters are the great-nephew and nieces of Thomas and Elaine Lindsay. They have been in the service of my family since long before I was born. They were the caretakers of our estate and ran the household in the absence of my parents and eventually myself after my parents deaths, as well as serving as advisors to me on a number of matters. I consider them family, and they are treated as such. Jared Lindsay was Thomas' brother and Stephen's birth father. It was on this very land that his biological parents, as well as four other siblings were killed in cold-blood by a group of Outriders," Saber begins. Ciara gasps, placing her hand over her mouth in shock, but Saber presses on with the story. "I managed to save Stephen, Rory, and Anna and we took them in and formally adopted them, giving them the protection of my family and their best chance in life," Saber says quietly. "It has only been in the past four or five years that the children have been all right with returning here. We had the property razed and rebuilt a larger home to serve as a family vacation home adjacent to our other lands nearby."

"I figured it was bad, but those poor kids. I cannot imagine having to live through something like that. I suppose that is one of the reasons that Stephen joined Cavalry Command?" Liam asks.

Saber nods. "Aye, I believe it was. I'm sure the fact that both Amanda and myself are soldiers had some influence on him as well."

"You weren't always a soldier were you?" Liam asks Amanda.

"No sir, I was not. I sort of happened into the position, for lack of a better explanation," Amanda replies honestly. "I never thought I'd be where I am today, but I have no real regrets."

"So you two were not betrothed as children?" Ciara asks curiously.

"No, we met after I was injured in the war," Saber replies.

"How unusual," Ciara comments. "I thought royal lines depended on betrothals. I am glad to see that you are more in tune with current times. I would not force my daughter into a marriage, no matter how much someone wanted me to."

"You sound as if you have experience in that, Mrs. Maher," Amanda states.

"Aye, unfortunately I do. But thankfully, my parents released me from it when they found out that the man I was to marry did not treat me well," she replies quietly. "After that, I swore that I would never do that to any child I had."

"So, shall we tell the children that they have our blessings if that is indeed what they desire?" Liam asks.

Saber and Amanda nod. "If that is their desire, I am not against such a match. I only request they wait a year to marry, so that Stephen has a little more time in with Cavalry Command," Saber replies.

The couple both nod in agreement. "If that is what they desire, then I will give them my blessing, with the same stipulation of waiting a year. I do not find that to be an unreasonable request," Liam states.

"Perhaps we can make some sort of announcement before the end of this gathering?" Ciara asks.

Saber nods. "I would not be against making anything official. But I feel that the children should have the final say on when an announcement is to be made," he replies.

"So, how much longer until we get to meet Lukas' parents, Rory?" Moria asks as she Eryn, and Tyler come over to where Rory is checking her phone.

Rory looks up and sighs. "They have been delayed. Lukas said that he had to tell his mother whose place they were going to and that she got a little upset," she replies sullenly.

"That's weird. Why would someone be upset about meeting mom and dad? They're like really nice," Eryn asks aloud.

Rory shrugs. "I dunno. He was going to try and figure out what the deal is. His father said they were coming regardless of his mother's feelings, so they may be a little later," she replies as her phone indicates a text. She looks down and smiles. "They're here! Going out to greet them, bye," she says as she jumps up and rushes through the house just as Ciara and Liam are coming out the door to join the groups of people, followed closely by Saber and Amanda. "Excuse me," she calls as she continues to the door, barely arriving before Mikhail.

"Lady Rory, I am able to get the door. I will usher the guests into you, Miss," Mikhail says, the amusement apparent in his voice. "Now go and wait in the sitting room. I will lead them in to you, and then I will go and inform Lord and Lady Rider of their arrival."

Rory blushes slightly. "Of course, Mikhail," she replies and heads for the sitting room and sits down trying to act casual.

A couple of minutes pass before Mikhail leads Lukas in, followed by his younger brother and his mother and father. "Lady Rory, your young friend is here along with his parents, Lord and Lady Swadjen. I will go and inform Lord and Lady Rider of their arrival," Mikhail states.

"Thank you, Mikhal," Rory replies, and he heads off towards the back. She turns to her guests and smiles. "Welcome to our home, it is an honor to finally meet you" Rory states as they all take a seat. Shortly after, Marianna comes in with a cart and offers everyone tea.

"So, mother, this is Rory, the young lady I have been talking about from school," Lukas says proudly as his mother is obviously scrutinizing the nervous girl.

"So, you are a Rider?" Sincia says curtly.

"Yes, madam," Rory replies nervously.

"You don't favor him," she states.

"She was adopted, Sincia," Saber states from behind Rory. "Please, for their sakes, let the past remain there. I have no qualms with you and only want the children happy," he says as he and Amanda take seats near to Rory, who is shifting a little uncomfortably.

"You know each other?" Lukas and Rory say at once. Looking between the couples with a confused expression.

"Why don't you kids go and join the others out back so that we may talk here, as adults," Amanda states with a smile.

Not needing any other prodding, the three children quickly head out back, the door closing after them.

Edon walks into the back with his brother. "Hey, why don't you see if you can play with the other kids?" Lukas suggests.

"Ok" Edon says and goes to find someone to play with. He comes across Moria and Eryn dressed in identical dresses talking to Wil. Lukas and Rory head off to find Stephen and Raisa to talk to.

"Do you think it's okay to send him off on his own, Lukas?" Rory asks as she watches Edon walk towards the courtyard looking a bit nervous.

"Yeah. It'll be good for him. Your sisters are closer to his age, Sammy is probably the closest to him. Maybe he will find her and they'll hang out. She seems outgoing enough to maybe bring him out of his shell," he replies as they head towards the last place Rory recalls seeing her brother.

"Now, all I am going to say is that we welcome you here. I will not bring up our past...differences. The only thing I ask in return is that you remain civil, is that fair?" Saber asks calmly. "I do not want the children to carry on this inane feud that has been between us. All of that is over and done with."

Sincia sits quietly for several minutes, taking her time and studying the faces of the couple before her. She goes to speak several times, but each time stops herself. "I am not sure whether I will be able to meet your terms, Richard," she finally says. "I still feel that I was wronged by you and by her," she says nodding to Amanda.

"You can feel that way all you wish, Sincia. It does not change anything. What changes is how you carry yourself now. You have a chance to show that you are no longer petty and living in the past. You have a good husband and two well-adjusted sons. Be

grateful that you are all doing well. Things very well could have ended far worse for you," Saber replies, giving a slight emphasis at the end, to try and let on that he knows some of the things she has said away from his presence.

Sven starts to speak, then stops, glancing first to Sincia, then to Saber and finally Amanda, not sure whom to address. After a minute he sighs and just speaks to all of them in general, "He is right. I have done everything you desired, be happy with what we have, Sincia. The children have been a blessing for us both."

She turns and looks at her husband, almost as if she feels betrayed, but finally sighs in resignation. "Fine. It's not as if we are betrothing them anyways," she says coldly.

"I've seen the way Rory and Lukas are around each other, it probably won't be too long before they desire something to that effect," Amanda says matter-of-factly. "And I'm sure they'd get married with your blessing or not."

Sincia looks taken aback by the statement. "What do you mean? They only see each other when they are at school."

"So you are unaware that Lukas has been visiting out home frequently?" Amanda asks.

"I've no knowledge of such activity. I would have forbidden it," she replies.

"To serve what purpose? To punish us or your son?" Amanda says in an accusatory tone.

"You...you have no ri-

"Please stop this, Sincia," Sven says quietly, placing a hand on her arm. "You would only hurt the children. This is not their fault. Do not drag them into this. Let it go, as you should have years ago."

"You knew about this, didn't you?" Sincia asks. "You let him come here and flirt with... with the help!"

"Yes, I did know, Älsklin," Sven says calmly. "I wasn't aware that the girl he was seeing was adopted, but I don't see how that matters. Lukas is in love with the girl, genuine love, isn't it worth putting aside your own feelings to see our son happy?"

"How did you keep this from me?" she asks obviously trying to not lose her temper.

"I told you that he was taking fencing lessons." Sven replies simply. "You never asked where, so I never offered the information, knowing that you would punish Lukas for something that isn't his fault."

"And Lukas seems to have an natural aptitude for it," Saber says. "I've been teaching him myself, along with our own children, and he's caught up to them too, not a common occurrence."

Sincia looks at Saber, "You knew all along he was our son, didn't you?"

"Of course," Saber says with a nod. "He introduced himself using his full name, I would have had to been a fool not to realize that he was your son, but I didn't let that cloud my judgement of him. Rory liked him, and that was enough for me to give him a chance. He's proven to me that he's a good man, noble in every sense of the word."

"How long has this been going on?" Sincia asks.

"Nearly two years," Saber responds matter-of-factly.

"And they've been dating the entire time?" she asks hesitantly.

Saber nods. "I believe so," he replies. "So as I said, despite knowing already who his parents were, when Rory asked if you could come so that we could meet you, I allowed it, knowing full well that things could go bad. I am able to move on and I want you to do the same. I think you should know some things about us, so that perhaps you will see Amanda the way I do. Just as I hope that we may one day become friends, Sincia," he finishes quietly.

"I will attempt to be civil, Richard, for the sake of my children. I do care for them, even though I doubt that I will ever see things as you do," Sincia replies.

"Thank you. That is all that I ask, aside from not referring to Amanda as the help," he adds with a small smile. "You should know that her mother was from the old French royalty. Not that it matters to me."

"French royalty?" Sincia asks in disbelief.

"Aye," Amanda replies as she pulls out her coat of arms and takes it from her neck to show her.

Sincia takes the necklace and studies it carefully. "I...I thought this family had died out when the princess ran away," she mutters to herself.

"I didn't know until after I had fallen in love with Saber," Amanda says quietly.

"So you really were blinded?" Sincia asks hesitantly, glancing to Saber who nods. "But you can see now?"

"Some days are better than others. I have days that I can barely see, and days that I can barely walk. But I do what I can with the abilities I have. Amanda has taught me that there is more that I can do aside from being a soldier. I know that I can teach and guide the soldiers that are up and coming, that I can still tune my abilities to be as good as they were when I was fully sighted, I honestly thought my life was over when I was told I would most likely never see again, Sincia. Then after you reacted the way you did, I became more depressed. It was because of that that then Commander Eagle hired someone to teach me to adapt," Saber says quietly. "Had he not forced me to agree to having the help and Amanda and I not met, I probably would have ended my

life," he adds barely audible.

Sincia looks at him in shock at such an admission. "So it...it wasn't just a ploy?" she asks after finding her voice.

Saber shakes his head. "No, Sincia, it was not a ploy," he replies calmly. "I wake everyday knowing that I could wake up in darkness, unable to see anything. However, I know that even if that does happen, Amanda will be there and she will treat me the same as she always has. Just as I know that if God forbid we have to fight again, she will be at my side, willing to kill to defend our lives if need be. That is why she deserves your respect. Not many would do what as she has already done."

Sincia looks between the two of them as he speaks, trying to get her mind to process what she's heard. Taking a breath to gather her thoughts she looks to Saber to speak, then stops and turns to Amanda, "You have killed?" she asks hesitantly.

Amanda nods, her eyes meeting Sincia's. "I have and would do so again to save those I love," she replies matter-of-factly.

"But you have only killed Outriders?" Sincia asks.

Amanda shakes her head. "No. Although they both had turned to the side of the Outriders when they were killed. It was Saber's life or theirs. I chose to save him," she replies simply.

"How do you know they betrayed our side?" Sincia asks.

"Hey, Rory, Lukas, come here!" Stephen says quietly as he waves the couple over.

What?" Rory asks as they approach him. "What's going on?" she asks quietly.

"Mom and dad are talking with your parents, Lukas. From what I've heard, evidently his mom and our dad have some sort history."

Slowly the kids make their way back to the study where Raisa is sitting and listening.

"Sean betrayed us when he left with the Outriders," Saber replies.

"Sean?" Sincia asks. "McCully?" Saber nods. "You killed Sean McCully?" Sincia asks in disbelief.

"He was about to kill Saber! I was not about to let that happen," Amanda says defensively.

"You...you actually..." Sincia says in shock.

"What would you have done?" Amanda asks honestly.

"I...I don't know," she replies barely a whisper.

"What if he was going to kill your children or your husband and you were the only person in a position to stop him, what would you have done then?" Amanda asks trying to get her to understand the situation.

"I would have tried to reason with him," she replies quietly.

"Then he would have killed all of you. He was out of his mind, Sincia," Amanda says sympathetically. "I still have nightmares about killing him, even after all this time. I have twice killed to save mine and Saber's lives. The second time was a man I was once engaged to. I took that one harder than I did killing Sean," Amanda says barely a whisper.

The kids all gasp involuntarily. "Mom killed two people?" Rory whispers in shock.

"To save dad's life," Stephen says quietly. "The first time, she wasn't even truly a soldier. She was pregnant with Eryn and Moria the second time."

"You knew?" Rory asks her voice a bit louder than she intends.

Lukas quickly covers her mouth and holds a finger to his to quiet her.

"It was talked about in our history classes at Cavalry Command," Stephen states quietly. "Mom and dad weren't even married the first time she had to.."

"Why were you even there?" Sincia asks.

"Because Saber was there. It was right after the sentencing. The Outriders helped Sean escape and we went after him," Amanda replies.

"Had she not gone, I'm not sure we would be here now," Saber states. "She served as my eyes, describing what was on my screens and such. Without her guidance, Sean would have killed us. Feel free to ask General Eagle, or any of the others about it. They will corroborate the story."

"So you really were blinded?"

"Yes. And the odds are high that I will eventually be again permanently," he replies. "So even though you went about things wrong, I am glad for both your sake and mine that you broke off our engagement. I know that you did it in the only way you knew. Perhaps you felt as I did. That we were and are too different. You deserve to be happy and you have a husband that can support you, and two good children. I have someone that can handle it if I wake up blind, without a second thought. I am grateful for my family, and I would not trade them for anything, including my sight."

The four kids all look at each other, their eyes wide. "Dad was engaged to Lukas' mother?" Stephen says quietly.

"Please tell me you didn't hear what I did?" Lukas says.

"My father was once engaged to your mother," Rory says quietly.

"Aye. And it evidently ended badly," Stephen says barely a whisper. "It sounds to me like father wants to move on and that Lukas' mother is possibly coming around."

"I hope so. I wouldn't want things to be complicated for us," Lukas says quietly as he takes Rory's hand.

Stephen casts a glance to Raisa who smiles slightly and nods.

"Then let's go and talk with them. Tell all of them what we've heard and that we don't want the feud to continue," Rory says.

Stephen holds a hand up to stop her. "No, we need to let them talk this out," he says.

"So, Wil, tell us which one of us you think is prettier," Moira says.

"You're identical twins. No one can tell the two of you apart," Wil says. "You're both very pretty. And I like you both."

"But you can only date one of us," Eryn says teasingly.

"Yes, I know that, but how can I decide between two beautiful ladies?" Wil asks becoming flustered. "Half the time I can't even tell which one I'm talking to unless you tell me, and given the amount of times you've played tricks on me, it's near impossible to tell if you're being truthful."

"We're not completely identical," Moira says with a smirk.

"I see no difference," Wil states, looking between the two with a confused expression.

About that time Jason comes walking over. "What are you guys up to?" he asks curiously.

"We have birthmarks in different places," Eryn says.

Wil looks interested. "Really?" he asks with a smile. "I've never noticed one on either of you and I've seen both of you in swimsuits."

Jason shakes his head. "Wil, would you just give it up already?"

"I'm not really gonna show him, Jason," Eryn says quietly in his ear. "I just like to watch him squirm. Keep watching and catch up to me and we can talk later."

"Maybe you just don't know what you're looking for," Moira says to Wil, pointedly ignoring Jason.

"How about one of you make it simple and tell me." Wil smirks.

"Perhaps we will..." Moria says.

"Yeah, if you can catch one of us," Eryn says as she grabs Moria's hand and they dash off laughing.

"Hey!" Wil exclaims as he takes off after them. The twins see him coming and separate laughing as he struggles to decide which one to chase.

A minute later, Jason decides to follow Eryn, seeing that Wil took off after Moria.

Edon shakes his head, not entirely sure what is going on with them and keeps looking for someone to talk to. He finds Samantha dressed in a pink dress sitting on a bench by the lake reading a book.. "Hello there, Miss," Edon says shyly.

Samantha looks up from her book. "Um, hello," she replies as she sets her book on her lap.

"I'm Edon Swadjen," he states. "And who might you be?" he asks.

"Samantha Rider," she answers. "Are you Lukas' brother?"

Edon nods. "Are you Rory's sister?" he asks. Samantha nods. "What are you doing by yourself?" he asks.

"I'm uncomfortable," she mutters.

"What you mean?" he asks confused.

"I don't like dresses," she says with a hint of annoyance.

"I thought all girls liked dresses," Edon states honestly.

Samantha chuckles. "You must not know too many girls, cause I know I'm not the only one that doesn't like to wear a dress," she replies.

"Only girls I know are my classmates, and I don't think they like me," he says quietly.

"Why?" Samantha asks curiously.

"I think it's cause they can't say my last name."

"Seems like a dumb reason not to like someone," Samantha says shaking her head.

"Well no matter how hard I try they don't ever want to talk to me," he says with a shrug.

Samantha moves over and pats the bench beside her. "Sit down, I'll talk to you. I don't mind," she says.

"I thought you wanted to be alone cause you were uncomfortable in the dress and reading your book?" he asks.

Samantha shrugs, "I'll deal, the book can wait."

Edon sits beside her. "So, what else should I know about girls?" he asks nervously, trying to start a conversation.

Samantha shrugs "I'm not sure what else to tell you. I'm only eight years old," she replies.

"So you've not had any boyfriends yet?" Edon asks hesitantly.

"Um, no. Haven't been interested in any either. Books are far more interesting than the boys around here. They are all into fighting and looking up girl's dresses and such," Samantha replies.

"How about you just tell me about yourself, and I'll tell you about myself and we'll go from there?" Edon asks.

Samantha nods. "Okay. That seems fair enough." She replies as she starts talking about her life.

Some time later, a Girl slightly older comes up to them. "Hey, Sammy," Chihiro says looking at Samantha. "Have you seen Dylan?"

Samantha rolls her eyes at the nickname. "You still haven't found him?" she asks annoyed.

Chihiro shakes her head. "He's hiding from me again," she replies and starts to say something else when she notices Edon. "Edon?" she asks looking pointedly at him. "What are you doing here?"

"You two know each other?" Samantha asks in surprise.

"We're in the same class," Edon says quietly.

"Chihiro, do you and the other girls have something against Edon?" Samantha asks eyeing the older girl with a hint of anger.

Chihiro shrugs. "He's the smartest kid in our class. I think the others are intimidated by him," Chihiro replies. "I suppose that could be it, but I'm not sure."

"Why not?" Edon asks.

"I'm in love with Dylan Rider, he's in the class above us. We grew up together, so I don't really pay attention to what the others in our class do and who they do or do not like," Chihiro answers quietly.

"Aren't you a little young for that?" Samantha asks. "You're not even two years older than I am."

"You'll understand one day, Sammy," Chihiro replies in her most superior sounding voice. "When you're more grown-up like me."

"Ah, I see, I take it Dylan doesn't reciprocate your feelings?" Edon asks trying to stop the girls from fighting.

"Recipro-what?" Chihiro asks confused.

"He doesn't care for you in the way that you care for him?" he asks.

"I'm not sure, but he will one day, you'll see," Chihiro says with a lack of certainty. "Well, I'm off to go search for him more," she says as she heads off in search of Dylan.

"I think I'd like to hear Dylan's side of this story," Edon says amused after Chihiro leaves.

Samantha nods. "Aye, and I know where he is," she says with a mischievous grin.

"What do you mean you know where he is?" Edon asks. "But you just told Chihiro that you didn't."

"No, I told her I haven't seen him. Which is true, I haven't seen him. But I do know where he went."

Edon shakes his head and laughs. "Could you take me to him?" Edon asks.

"I could...but I don't think I should, it's a secret place," she replies hesitantly.

"I won't tell anyone where it is," Edon says. "I swear," he adds, holding up his right hand for emphasis.

Samantha considers his reaction for a minute. "Why do you want me to take you to him?" she asks suspiciously.

"So I can talk to him," Edon replies honestly.

"Do you have a handkerchief?" she asks.

"Of course, every gentleman has one," he responds taking it from his pocket and handing it to her. "What do you need it for?" he asks.

"Close your eyes, I'm going to blindfold you," she replies as she gets up and walks around behind him with the blindfold.

"What? Why?" he asks turning to see her.

"So you don't know where the secret place is, then I don't have to worry about you telling anyone where it is and the older kids getting mad at me," she states.

"Fine" he says with a sigh of resignation, and turns away from her and closes his eyes.

Samantha blindfolds him then comes back around and grabs his hand. "Stand up" Edon does so and she slowly leads them to one of several 'secret' underground rooms scattered across the property .

Tyler and Anna are walking past the study when Anna notices the door opened slightly. She goes to close it and realizes that his siblings are in there. "What is-?"

"Shh! Rory says dragging the pair into the room and pushing the door back to only slightly ajar.

"What is going on?" Anna asks in a whisper as she sits down on a nearby chair.

"Our parents are talking with Lukas' parents," Rory replies quietly.

"So? Why are you eavesdropping? It's rude," Anna replies.

"They started talking about some interesting things. Did you know that father was engaged before?" Rory asks.

"So was mother," Stephen adds. Getting a look of shock from Anna.

"I didn't know that either one of them were with anyone else before each other," Anna says.

"Mother ended up killing her ex-fiance to save dad's life," Stephen says. "At least that's what it sounded like."

About that time the door to the study opens fully and the teens look up to see the four adults looking at them. They all smile nervously. "Um...hello, father?" Anna says sheepishly.

"And just how long have you lot been in here?" Saber asks trying to control his anger.

"Longer than we should have been, sir," Stephen bravely replies.

Saber sighs and looks to the other adults. "Should we just let them ask questions and get it done with?" he says obviously irritated.

"Might as well, Richard. They have probably heard some things that they are going to want clarified," Sincia says looking directly at her son.

"All of you, to the sitting room," Saber says. A couple of the teens start to protest. "Now!" he says firmly halting any further objections.

They quickly get up and file out to the sitting room and cast nervous glances between each other.

"Now, I'm sure at least some of you heard the majority of what was to be a private conversation," Saber says as he looks to each of the members of the guilty party.

"I have a question, sir," Lukas says speaking up.

"All right, go ahead," Saber replies.

"You were once engaged to my mother?" he asks looking between Saber and Sincia.

"Yes," Saber replies.

"What happened?"

"I was injured and lost my memory and was blinded. At the time I didn't know whether I would ever see again. Your mother needed someone that could be more...available to her, so we went our separate ways," Saber replies. "Any other questions?"

"Dylan, are you here?" she calls as they enter.

"Sam?" Dylan asks. "Did Chihiro finally leave?" he asks and then stops when he notices Edon. "You brought someone here? A boy at that?"

"It's not what you think," Samantha says. "He's Chihiro's classmate, and well, he says that he wants to talk to you."

"Fine," Dylan says and notices that Edon is blindfolded. "Go ahead and take the blindfold off."

Edon gratefully removes the blindfold. "I'm Edon Swadjen, nice to meet you."

"Hi, now what is it you want to ask?" Dylan asks suspiciously.

"Why are you hiding from Chihiro?" Edon blurts out before losing his nerve to ask.

"I take it she came looking for me?"

"Yeah, she says she's in love with you," Edon says.

"She probably thinks that she is," Dylan replies with a sigh. He looks to Samantha, "Sam, do you mind, um..."

Samantha rolls her eyes and blushes slightly. "Let me guess, boy talk?" she asks with a hint of annoyance.

Dylan nods. "Something like that," Dylan replies as if it were obvious.

"You know you can talk to me about anything, even if I am a girl," Samantha states.

"I know sis, just not this, not yet, please," Dylan says pleadingly.

"Ok" Samantha says. "I'll be by the lake when you're done," she says looking to Edon. "In case you want someone to talk to again."

"Don't worry, Sam, I'll return your boyfriend to you soon enough," Dylan says with a smirk.

"He isn't..." Samantha starts.

"See you back at the lake, Samantha," Edon says purposely interrupting her and Samantha leaves quietly.

"So I take it you like Sam, huh?" Dylan asks watching for a reaction.

Edon shrugs. "I dunno we just met. Besides, even if I did eventually decide that I liked her, it'd be kind of odd if we started dating."

"Why?" Dylan asks.

"Because my brother and your sister are kind of serious from what Lukas tells me," Edon states.

"Wait, you're Lukas' brother?" Dylan asks, getting a nod from Edon. "That's right, you said your name was Swadjen didn't you? Lukas is the one dating Rory, isn't he?"

"Yeah, that's right," Edon says. "So even if I did like her I don't think could work out."

Dylan smiles. "If you two hit it off and you decide that you care for Samantha just go for it," Dylan says simply.

"But..." Edon starts

"My parents have always told us to make our own happiness our highest priority, and I advise you the same thing. If Lukas and Rory wed you'll not be related to Samantha but by marriage, so it'd be ok, our family is large enough that two marriages to a prestigious family would be no shameful thing. Besides, we are not related by blood. Father and mother adopted Stephen, Rory and Anna. So I don't see where even that could be an issue."

"I'll think about it," Edon replies. "So, what about you and Chihiro?" he asks trying to draw the attention back to Dylan.

"I care for her, a lot," Dylan says blushing. "I think she's very pretty and smart."

"Then why hide from her?" Edon asks confused.

"I fear that we care for each other too much. That if we spend time alone together we might..." Dylan stops blushing heavily.

"You'll have to figure something out, cause eventually she'll give up on you, thinking that you really don't want her around."

"I don't know what to do," Dylan says frustrated.

"Weren't you just saying something about being raised to make sure your happiness came first?" Edon accuses.

"Well, yeah..." Dylan admits.

"Well, if you want someone to take your advice then you should probably listen to it yourself," Edon says.

"Fine, I'll talk with Chihiro, if you'll talk to Samantha," Dylan says with a chuckle.

"Deal," Edon agrees. "Although at this point I'm not sure what to say to Samantha. I barely know her."

"Just hang out with her and talk about things. She's always reading, do you like to read?" Dylan prods.

Edon nods. "Yeah. It's one of the reasons I don't have many friends," he replies.

"Well, Sam constantly has her nose in a book. Maybe you will find that you've read some of the same ones. Go from that and see what happens," Dylan says.

"Um, okay...I suppose I can do that," Edon replies hesitantly.

Fine, now put the blindfold back on and I'll take you to Sam," Dylan says.

"What? You don't trust me to keep the secret of this place after what you told me?"

"Sorry, but it's a family secret, hopefully someday I can tell you where this place is," Dylan answers with a smirk.

"We'll see," Edon says as he hands Dylan the blindfold and turns around and closes his eyes, Dylan blindfolds him and takes him back to the lake.

"See Sam," Dylan says as they arrive back at the lake, nudging Edon so he knows it's safe to take off the blindfold. "I brought your boyfriend back in one piece," he says grinning widely.

"He's not my boyfriend," Samantha says defiantly.

"I'd like to get to know you as a friend," Edon says quietly.

Samantha blushes "Ummmm...I suppose there's no harm in being friends. I don't tend to have many around," she replies slowly.

Chihiro bursts in between them before Samantha or Edon has time to say anything else. "Dylan, there you are!" she runs to him and hugs him, and he grabs her and hugs her back. "Dylan?" Chihiro looks astonished, "You're not running away?"

"I've decided to stop hiding how I feel, I want to be your boyfriend Chihiro," Dylan says quietly. "If you'll let me."

Chihiro smiles and kisses him. "It's what I've wanted for awhile," she replies happily.

"What...what did you two talk about?" Samantha asks surprised looking perplexed at the scene before her.

"Maybe someday I'll tell you," Edon says with a chuckle.

"That's not very polite to tease a lady," Samantha pouts.

"Actually, I don't see the harm in it," he states.

Samantha sighs, "I just met you, and you are already teasing me, that doesn't seem very fair," she pouts.

Well, how about I see if your father will give me fencing lessons like he has Lukas, then we can see each other again, and maybe we can become friends?"

Samantha nods "Okay, so friends?" she asks offering her hand.

"Sure," Edon replies as he shakes her hand. "Friends."

"Come on," Chihiro says, holding onto Dylan as if he's going to run away; "Let's head back to the house before they all start to wonder where we are at."

Samantha stands up and nods. "I suppose we should head back too. I don't want to give any one else yet another reason for teasing me," she says looking pointedly at Chihiro.

"All right, lead the way," Edon says, and the four of them start heading back towards the house.

A couple of days later, everyone has gathered for a large meal. Liam stands up and asks for everyone's attention, and the group slowly becomes silent. "Thank you," Liam says as Ciara, Saber, Amanda, Raisa, and Stephen stand up. "We want to announce to all of you that our daughter Raisa Maher has been officially betrothed to Stephen Lindsay Rider," he says proudly. Several people start clapping and cheering. "Thank you for sharing this time with us."

"We will most likely hold the wedding in one year's time," Saber states. He waits for the talking to die down again before trying to talk again. After it does, he signals for Sincia and Sven to stand up with Lukas and Rory, who are holding hands. "We'd also like everyone to know that Rory and Lukas have stated that they wish to be under a betrothal contract. After some discussion, we have agreed to this. They are not to wed until they have both completed school and are of age, but a ring has been passed between them, making it official." Several people start offering congratulatory remarks and clapping. Dessert is served shortly after and people begin breaking off into groups to talk about the evening's events.

"Well, I suppose it's official for us, isn't it?" Rory asks the others around her.

"Aye," Stephen replies. "Although I was surprised when you told me that our parents and Lukas' parents agreed to allow you to be betrothed."

"It is what we both wanted," Lukas says quietly. "Besides, maybe now mother can let go of her anger. She actually looks happier than I ever remember seeing her."

"Why does she call your father Richard?" Raisa asks. "I've always heard him addressed as General Rider, or occasionally your mother calls him Saber, but she is the only person I've ever heard that calls him Richard."

"His birth name is Richard, although Lady Swadjen seems to be as you said, the only person who addresses him as such. I suppose by now it's a habit," Stephen replies.

"What I thought was interesting was how he explained your mother's and his parting of ways. He didn't actually blame her for it. I thought that was diplomatic of him," Raisa states.

Lukas nods. "Yeah, he could have said what she actually said. I asked her that night before bed. She was not nearly as nice as he tried to make it sound," Lukas says quietly. "Mother started crying when I asked her to tell me what happened. She told me that they had been betrothed as infants. Then, she thought that when she finished school that they would marry, but the Outriders appeared and General Rider went to fight. He would write to her and tell her about their latest skirmishes and such, and how things were going. But the only times he came home was when his mother fell ill, then died, and then once he attempted a vacation, but an attack sent him right back out. She said she became bitter because to her, it seemed that fighting was more important to him than their relationship was. She decided that she no longer wanted to be with him, but didn't want to ruin her family's name by breaking the engagement. While he was off fighting, she continued going to school and eventually socializing among the other nobility her age. That's how her and my father met. She started having feelings for my father, and then things ..." he gets quiet, not sure he should say more.

Stephen gasps. "She was pregnant with you wasn't she?" he asks quietly, his eyes meeting Lukas'.

"Yeah," he mutters, and looks down. "So as not to shame her family she said that she

and General rider were handfasted, but then he returned injured. And she panicked. Things just kinda got worse from there for years."

"But your father married her, didn't he?" Rory asks, taking his hand.

"Yeah, as soon as mother broke the engagement she went to him and confessed to everything. He knew she was carrying his child, so they married straightaway. He was glad that she came back to him. I just wish she had let go of her anger a long time ago. We all would have been much happier. I think in some ways she was bitter because she felt guilty," Lukas says. "I hope she did, she should have," he adds harshly.

"Well, since we're all confessing our family secrets, I guess it's only fair to tell you about mother's too," Rory states.

"You don't have to, Rory," Raisa and Lukas say simultaneously.

"I think you should hear this, it sort of completes the whole story," Rory replies. Stephen starts to protest and Rory holds up her free hand, I'll give the short version, "Mother was indeed engaged a few years before she met our father. The man's name was Derrick. Long story short, she was once engaged, but he met someone else, broke it off with her and married the other woman like two weeks later or something."

"Ouch," Stephen says. "That's just wrong."

"No different than what my mother did, technically," Lukas states.

"A little different, but do you want to hear the rest of this story?" Rory asks, getting several nods in reply. "She cared for her father and eventually he died. Saw a job listed for someone to help a soldier blinded in the war learn to adapt to his new life. Decided to apply and got the job. One of the things she did, was have dad fence with a childhood friend."

"Sean McCully?" Lukas asks.

"Aye. He thought mother was a servant girl and was used to getting what he wanted from them, so when she refused him, it pissed him off and he attempted to rape her. Father heard her scream and grabbed a pistol and fired towards Sean and missed...barely. He had him escorted from the property and thought that was the end of it. A few weeks went by and Sean returned one day while they were out riding, tied up Uncle Thomas and Aunt Elaine, and then when they returned tried to assault mother again. Father came in and held a sword to him, he had thrown mother into a wall and hurt her shoulder pretty badly. They fought and in the end, father got shot in the stomach and Mr. McCully was cut from father's sword. They had a trial, then he was being sentenced and the Outriders broke him loose. They followed him, father ended up engaging him in a sword fight, and nearly had him when Mr. McCully overpowered him and was about to kill him when mother stabbed him from behind and killed him. The other guy defected to the Outriders and she ended up fighting him. She tried to reason with him, but he was crazy. He was about to kill both her and father when she killed him, she says it sort of just happened, that it's still a blur to her

really."

"I don't think my mother could have done that," Raisa says quietly.

"I know mine wouldn't have been able to," Lukas states. "I am glad that she seems willing to finally move on."

"I'm glad that they agreed to allow us to be engaged," Rory says quietly.

"So am I, Rory," Lukas says quietly, squeezing her hand slightly. "I just hope you two didn't mind that we did it the same weekend as you. I guess we should have talked with you before saying anything to our parents," Lukas says to Stephen.

"I thought it was a good thing, Lukas. I think in a way it might allow them to become friends once again, and that's not a bad thing," Stephen replies.

Kapitel 42: Politics and Diplomacy

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 41: Politics and Diplomacy

"Okay, I suppose I'll arrive tomorrow for the meeting then, April. Are you sure the others will be there?" Saber asks.

April nods over the video com-link. "Yeah. We've got the representative from Jarre coming too. King Roland wants to renew their ties with us, since the Outriders still attack his people on occasion," she replies. "I can't wait to see his face when he sees all of us. It's been so long."

"Aye, that it has. The last time I saw him was when my father died," Saber replies quietly.

"Yes, his father came when General Whitehawk passed, he stayed on Jarre then," April says quietly. "I just hope he doesn't try and hit on me. Fireball might try and hurt him."

Saber manages not to laugh, but is unable to hide his amusement. "I can only imagine what he'll think of the lot of us. Your father is retired, I'm running Cavalry Command with you, Fireball, and Colt to help me. I'm not sure if he even knows that I'm considered legally blind now," Saber replies.

"Let's not say anything. Surely by now he is aware of what all has happened," April says.

"He never bothered to keep up with things before," Fireball says as he walks up behind April. "I wouldn't be the least surprised if he had no clue that you're even married, Saber," Fireball says.

April and Saber both laugh at his comment.

"Well, that could be an interesting meeting then. Surely his father kept him abreast to the goings on elsewhere aside from Jarre," Saber states.

"I wouldn't be so sure, Saber," April says quietly. "They always were a little more self-absorbed. It could prove entertaining. Especially if you could convince Amanda to come along in her dress uniform for the meeting. She is a Brigadier Colonel, so she technically should be included in this meeting."

Saber shakes his head and laughs. "I don't think it would be too hard to get Amanda to agree to come along. The kids are all old enough now to be trusted, and Thomas and

Elaine are here, as are Marianna and Mikhail. So there would not be a lack of supervision," he replies. "I'll go and talk with her and let you know when to expect us."

"Sounds good. April out," she replies and terminates the connection.

"You and mother are going to Cavalry Command?" Eryn asks as she enters the study.

Saber looks up and nods. "Aye. I'm hoping to leave within the next couple of hours. We have a few meetings to attend," he replies rubbing his temples.

"Are you all right?" Eryn asks concerned.

"Headache, I'll be fine, Eryn. I've been doing a lot of reading, and that tends to make my head ache," Saber replies as he stands up.

"Um, father?" Eryn begins hesitantly.

"Yes?" he replies.

"Could I come along with you and mother?" Eryn asks quietly, a blush creeping onto her cheeks.

"I take it there is someone you wish to see while we are in meetings?" he asks struggling not to smile.

"Yes sir," she replies not looking up.

"And does this person have a name?" Saber prods, finding her uneasiness amusing.

"von Rohr," Eryn says.

"Ah. So you have been talking with Seth again?" he asks.

"Aye. We've kept in touch since graduation. He is through basic training now, so I thought I could maybe..."

"Go and pay him a visit?" Saber finishes.

Eryn nods.

"Very well. But pack for at least two days, perhaps three. Your mother and I will be in meetings for a lot of that time, so you will have your own room. I expect you to be on your best behaviour. I will find out if you are doing something you shouldn't be. Are we clear?"

"Yes sir! Thank you father!" Eryn replies and kisses his cheek before dashing out of the study to go pack.

Saber chuckles at her reaction and heads off in search of Amanda. He finds her in the

sitting room, talking with Elaine over tea. "Hello, Love," Saber says as he sits beside her.

"You're finally out of the study?" Amanda asks with a smile.

"Aye. But we need to go to Cavalry Command," he replies.

"Is something wrong?" Elaine asks as she sets down her tea.

Saber shakes his head. "No, but we have a couple of meetings we need to attend. And since you are a Brigadier Colonel, you should be included in those meetings, Love."

"Ah. When are we leaving?" Amanda asks.

"I am hoping to leave in a couple of hours. I've got a rather bad headache, so I'd like to rest after we arrive before the meetings first thing tomorrow," Saber replies.

"Aye, if we go tonight, then you can rest beforehand, instead of rushing about. Not a bad idea," Amanda replies.

"Oh, and Eryn wishes to accompany us," Saber says almost as an afterthought.

"She does?" Amanda asks.

Saber nods. "She wishes to see Seth von Rohr," Saber states with a small smile. "I have a feeling we may have yet another betrothal before long."

"von Rohr?" Amanda asks. "Wasn't he in the class above Eryn and Moria?"

Saber nods.

"He's of German royalty isn't he. Why would he be going through Cavalry Command?"

"Probably for the same reasons that I did, Love."

"But we're not technically at war right now," Amanda replies.

"True, but if people waited until we were to train, we could have problems. We weren't technically at war when I began my training. Although it wasn't long afterwards that we were. Besides, a good leader should know how to defend what is rightfully theirs."

"I suppose I see your point. I just think it's funny that they are all staying so close. My family spread out pretty far."

"And you almost lost your identity because of it," Saber replies. "I don't want our children to have to fight for their heritage. I want them to just be able to live happily."

"I know you're right, Saber. I just still question everything that is different from how I

grew up," Amanda says quietly.

Saber chuckles and kisses her lightly. "I'm glad you question it. I don't want you to just blindly agree to something. I admire that you aren't afraid to question something, unlike me when I was younger," he replies. "Now, we should go and pack, as I'm sure Eryn will be down momentarily and ready to leave."

A few hours later, they are settling into their quarters at cavalry command. "Eryn, call us if you need us and you should be back to your room by midnight, are we clear?" Saber says firmly.

"Yes, sir. I will. I also know that Seth is not to come to my room. We will stay in the public areas and I'll call if I need anything," Eryn replies.

"Good. Now, your mother and I are going to unpack and rest for a while. You are free to do as you wish within your normal boundaries."

"Thank you," Eryn replies before she turns and heads for her room.

The couple watch her go before heading into their bedroom. After unpacking, they head to the living area and plop down on the couch to rest for a while. "Was it really necessary to tell her not to allow Seth into her room?" Amanda asks curiously.

"Her twin sister is already engaged, and her other siblings either married or dating, Seth is the first boy to take a serious interest in her and he's a little older, I don't want her to feel like she's being pressured into something," Saber states.

"I suppose I can see your logic. If they went to her room, even under the most innocent of circumstances, things could...change and she might feel like she had to do something she wasn't ready to, right?"

Saber nods. "I don't want either of them in such a situation," Saber states quietly. "This way she can use me as an excuse if on the off chance Seth tries to talk her into going to her quarters."

"Ah. Good point. I know you don't mind being the bad guy," Amanda states with a smile.

"Not in the least," Saber replies with a smirk as he pulls her against him and kisses her lightly.

"So, what is this meeting about?" Amanda asks after he pulls back from kissing her.

"Well," Saber begins as he pulls her against him, "Jarre is an independent colony that has been ruled by the same family for centuries. King Jared was the Monarch at the time of the Outrider wars. More recently, his son, Roland has advanced to the throne. He apparently wishes to reconfirm our alliance, as they have had a few skirmishes lately with some of the remaining Outriders."

"Ah, so this is a bit of a political meeting?"

"I suppose so."

Amanda chuckles. "So you are playing the part of both your father and General Whitehawk and General Eagle?" she asks amused.

"That is one way to look at it. I guess there was no way to escape the political aspect of all of this," Saber says suddenly sounding more tired.

"Are you all right?" Amanda asks moving so she can look at him directly.

"Aye. I've just had a bit of a headache and it doesn't seem to be subsiding."

"Have you taken anything?" Amanda asks.

Saber nods. "This morning. I may have to take something stronger after dinner. I am hopeful that we can put off meeting King Roland until the morning. Perhaps Fireball and April can run interference for the evening."

"I'll call them and ask if they would mind. If worse comes to worse, I could go with them. April should be high enough to appease him, right?" Amanda asks.

Saber shrugs and runs a hand through his hair. "I think so, Love, but it having been so long, I just don't know. I was never good at political games," Saber replies quietly.

Amanda leans in and kisses him lightly. "I think you need a break and time to rest tonight, Saber. Surely even this King Roland guy will understand. We can always have April tell him that we didn't arrive until tomorrow."

"I suppose we could," Saber replies as the doorbell rings.

"I'll get it. You go and get your darker glasses, wearing those might help some, until you can take something," Amanda says as she heads to the door. Upon opening the door she is greeted by April and Fireball. "Hello. I didn't expect to see you guys for a while yet," Amanda says as she steps aside to allow the couple to enter the room. They go and take a seat across from Saber, Amanda takes the seat beside him.

"You don't look so good, Saber," April states quietly.

"I've had a bad headache today," he replies quietly. "The worst one in a while."

"Maybe it's from traveling from your place to here?" Fireball suggests.

"It started this morning and hasn't let up since," he replies as Amanda returns from getting his darker glasses.

"Well, his Highness should be here soon and evidently wants to see all of us. I think I will tell him that you have been delayed, so that you can get a little rest," April says

quietly.

"How soon does he want to meet?" Saber asks.

"Probably in a couple of hours," April replies.

"Then let me take something a little stronger and lay down for a little, perhaps after an hour or so, I'll feel better enough to make an appearance," Saber states as he gets up and heads for the bedroom.

"Even if Saber can't make it, do you think you could come, Amanda?" April asks.

Amanda nods. "Yeah. How would you want me to dress?" she asks trying to gage the situation.

"Unfortunately, tonight would be a banquet, so a semi-formal dress if you have one," April says begrudgingly. "I'd also recommend Eryn come too. I think having a representation of family there would be an asset."

"Ah, so you knew Eryn came along?" Amanda asks.

"Yeah. I saw Chihiro drag her to go dress shopping. Eryn was sort of in shock. I also heard Chihiro teasing her about a boy."

Amanda chuckles. "Probably that van Rohr boy. She has been communicating with him frequently as of late," Amanda replies.

"So they are serious?" April asks.

"Honestly I'm not sure," Amanda replies. "I think it's her first serious boyfriend, but whether they end up together, I'm not sure they've been around each other as a couple to know if that is in their future. But we shall see eventually, I suppose."

"Well, her twin is engaged, her older siblings married and Edon and Samantha are practically betrothed, so she may feel a little left out," April replies.

"Don't forget our Chihiro and Dylan," Fireball adds. "She keeps begging me to talk to you two about a formal betrothal."

"What about Jason?" April asks. "I've not heard anything about him and a relationship."

"Really?" Amanda says surprised. "I'd have thought Colt would've told you by now. A while back Samantha needed to have Jason accompany her to some school function where she was going to meet Edon, I can't remember exactly why Jason had to escort her."

"Edon was stuck escorting a young noble lady," Colt says. "His mother was trying to persuade him to change his relationship ideas."

"Colt?" Amanda says in shock. "I didn't hear you knock."

"Y'all left the door open, so we just came on it." Colt says. "So I take it y'all are talking about how Jason met Juli?"

"Juli?" April looks confused.

"Juli Hido," Colt says. "His lady friend."

"Hido..." Fireball says. "Isn't that the last name of one of the original members of the Tirpitz?"

"Yuri Hido," Amanda replies. "I remember helping pick them out. Who's her mother?"

"Gabrielle Weber," Robin says and everyone looks at her in shock that she knew that. "Sorry, but being a housewife does put one in a position to hear what's going on." Everyone chuckles.

"So Jason and Juli and together then?" April says.

"One could say that," Colt replies with a hint of amusement. "I'm just hoping those two don't make me a grandfather before Wil and Moira do," he adds as an afterthought.

Amanda chuckles. "Think you're still too young, cowboy?"

"More like they are," Robin replies.

"I'm waiting to hear that Anna's pregnant anytime now," Amanda says with a chuckle. "It just doesn't seem possible that the kids are old enough to be having kids of their own."

"You already have one granddaughter, so you should be used to the idea," Robin says with a chuckle.

"I don't think I'll ever get use to the idea. Nora's a God send, such a wonderful baby. And the last time we saw Rory she looked ready to pop, so I expect to hear that she's gone into labor soon and we'll have another name to put on our family tree."

"It just doesn't seem possible. We're all sitting here talking about our kids having kids," Robin says.

"A far cry better than making battle plans," April states.

"Speaking of which, I need to see if I have a dress that would work for tonight," Amanda says with a grin.

April and Robin laugh. "I suppose for you a dress is a bit like going into battle," April

says in a teasing manner.

"Aye. I really don't like to dress up, especially to try to impress people I don't know. But I suppose it's all part of being with Saber and a part of this life. None of which I would give up," Amanda says as she stands up.

"I've got a dress you could wear if you don't have one that you think would work," April offers.

"Well, let me go and check on the dress and on Saber. I'll be out in a minute," Amanda replies as she gets up and heads into the darkened bedroom. "Saber?" she whispers and hears the soft rhythm of him breathing. "Always pushing himself too hard," she mutters and pulls out a small flashlight she carries on her for occasions when light bothers him too much. She heads to the closet and checks to see if she has a proper dress. She takes a few out front to see them in better light.

"Any luck?" April asks seeing her carrying a couple dresses.

"It was hard to tell my the light of my flashlight, and I didn't want to wake Saber," Amanda admits.

"He's asleep?" April asks surprised.

Amanda nods and starts going through the dresses and holds up a light green dress. "I don't remember packing this," she mutters.

"Isn't that the dress you wore to Nora's Christening?" Robin asks.

Amanda nods. "I'd put it in the back of the closet as a keepsake, I didn't intend to wear it again. Marianna must've packed it for me."

"It should still fit you fine, Amanda," April says. "And you looked marvelous in the pictures, I'm sure it'd be more than presentable for tonight's banquet."

"I don't have the blouse I wore underneath it that day, and it's um, rather low cut otherwise," Amanda replies quietly.

"Let King Roland drool a little," April says amused. "It'll serve him right for only wanting to talk to us when he's in trouble. I doubt Saber would complain about you being in the dress," she adds with a mischievous grin.

"Only if you and Robin have similar cut dresses and we go in together, just to make him wonder," Amanda replies laughing.

Colt and Fireball blush and Colt goes to comment when Eryn enters the apartment, followed by Chihiro.

"Oh, I didn't know everyone was here," Eryn says looking around to the people present. "Where's father?" she asks noting his absence.

"He's resting. He took something for his head finally," Amanda replies.

"So it hasn't improved?" Eryn asks hesitantly.

"Not before he went to lie down," Amanda replies quietly. "He was sleeping peacefully a little bit ago, when I went foraging for dresses."

"Did you find anything?" Eryn asks.

"I think the best choice is the dress I wore for Nora's Christening," Amanda states.

"But?" Eryn prods, noticing her mother's uneasiness.

"I don't have the blouse that I wore under it. Marianna packed the dress for me and evidently didn't think about packing the blouse."

"So wear it without it," Eryn says simply.

"It's a bit low-cut, Eryn," Amanda states.

"So flaunt what you have. The point is to impress this guy isn't it?" She asks looking at the amused faces of the adults around her. "I know dad wouldn't complain," she adds as an afterthought. Causing the others to laugh out loud.

Amanda shakes her head and laughs. "The lot of you are incorrigible. I'm not even sure Saber will be up to going tonight."

"He will be if he sees you in that dress," Colt quips, getting a glare from both Amanda and Robin. "What? I'd feel the same way if it were Robin in the dress," Colt replies, making Robin blush and April laugh.

"Well, we have an hour now until we need to be ready, do you wish to all meet here?" Amanda asks, trying to get everyone back on task.

"Yes, let's do that. Do you want us to walk in or knock?" April asks.

"Just let yourselves in," Amanda replies.

"All right. We'll see you in about an hour," April replies. They all say their goodbyes and head off to get ready, leaving Eryn and Amanda alone. "Do you need help getting ready, Love?" Amanda asks.

"No, ma'am. Chihiro is coming back to my room and she's going to fix my hair and do my make-up," Eryn replies.

Amanda nods. "Very well then. I shall see the two of you in about an hour," she replies. Eryn nods and heads happily out the door. Amanda takes the dresses and retreats to the bedroom. After placing the other two dresses back in the closet, she

takes the one she is going to wear and hangs in on the back of the bathroom door before starting the shower and getting in.

Saber wakes to the sound of the shower cutting off and sits up slowly. Looking around, he reorients himself before grabbing his glasses and glancing at the clock and sighs. He slowly gets up and makes his way to the bathroom door and knocks softly. "Amanda?" he says quietly.

The door opens and he is immediately blinded momentarily. "Did I wake you?" Amanda asks quietly.

Saber shakes his head, blinking a few times before he can see again. "No. I'm sorry that I fell asleep," he says quietly. He goes to say more when he sees her in the dress. "You look good, Amanda," he says with a weak smile.

Amanda smiles back. "I'm still not sure about this dress. April and Robin seem to think it'd be perfect for tonight."

Saber chuckles. "If you're comfortable in it, then wear it, Love. It looks flattering on you. I certainly won't complain," he adds as an afterthought.

Amanda looks up at him in surprise. "You're going?" she asks.

"Aye. My head isn't hurting like it was. I think if I keep the darker glasses on, I should be able to make a sufficient appearance."

"Well, the others are going to be here in about fifteen minutes, does that give you enough time to prepare?" she asks.

"I showered this morning, and we've not done anything strenuous, so if I change, I think I'll be fine, unless you'd prefer me to take a quick shower," he replies.

Amanda shakes her head. "I think you're fine. I'm actually glad you're up, you can zip the dress for me. I was going to ask April or Eryn to do it otherwise."

He signals for her to turn around and she does so. He zips up her dress then pulls her against him, wrapping his arms around her and kissing her shoulder and cheek. "It really does look good on you, Amanda," he says quietly. "This is the dress from Nora's Christening, isn't it?"

"Aye, I guess Marianna packed it for me. She didn't include the blouse though, so I'm not sure about it."

"It looks more like a formal dress this way," he replies as he slowly releases his grip from her waist.

"A bit lower cut than I'm used to wearing," Amanda replies.

"I'm sure there will be some others wearing some a bit more..."

"Lower cut?" Amanda finishes, looking at him with an amused expression.

Saber nods. "And if Eryn is one of the girls wearing one, she will go and change," he says firmly, causing Amanda to laugh.

"She's technically an adult, Saber. We can't dictate such things now," Amanda states obviously amused as Saber starts changing into his dress uniform.

"It sounds like Eryn and Chihiro have arrived," Amanda says as she hears a knock on their bedroom door followed by giggles.

"Aye. God only knows what they're up to," Saber replies amused as he steps out fully changed.

Amanda nods, satisfied with his appearance and he escorts her out of their room to find Eryn and Chihiro chatting on the couch.

"Father! You're feeling better?" Eryn says as she stands up in a dress similar to Amanda's, but shorter.

Saber nods. "Aye, I'm glad I had some time to rest, it seems to have helped," he replies as he glances over her attire.

"Hoping for a date?" he says in a teasing tone.

Eryn grins. "I went more conservative than what Chihiro wanted me to get. Is this appropriate?" she asks hesitantly.

"You look very pretty, Eryn. Very grown up," Amanda replies.

"Just remember what we talked about earlier," Saber says quietly.

"Yes sir, I do," Eryn replies as April, Fireball, Colt, and Robin enter the apartment. "And I'll be sure to behave as you expect of me," she adds quietly.

"Then you two go on and enjoy yourselves," Saber replies.

The girls quickly get up and leave, chatting happily as they head out.

Fireball chuckles to himself as he watches the girls leave. "I bet Chihiro wishes Dylan were here."

"Stephen and Raisa are bringing him later," Amanda states. "Of course I don't think Eryn knows, so I'm pretty sure that Chihiro doesn't," Amanda says with a grin. "I hope I'm where I can see her reaction."

"At least we don't have to worry about Chihiro being asked out by other boys," Fireball comments. "Unlike you do with Eryn. The ring serves as a nice deterrent."

Saber chuckles. "Aye, and don't think I won't have an eye on her."

"More like an eye on who talks with her," Amanda adds with a smirk.

"Perhaps a little of both," Saber replies amused. "So, shall we go and get this over with?" he asks obviously dreading the occasion.

"Yes, let's go. Perhaps we can make a clean break before too awfully late," Amanda replies sympathetically.

Kapitel 43: The Banquet

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The Price of Peace

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 Chihiro's 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 coolly.

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.

Kapitel 44: Moving Forward

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The Price of Peace

Chapter 43: Moving Forward

"So what are you going to do about King Roland and Prince Adrien, Saber?" April asks as they all sit in his office a couple days later at Cavalry Command.

Saber looks to each of the people present studying the varying expressions of those he trusts the most and heaves a heavy sigh. "Honestly, I don't think it fair to punish every citizen of Jarre for the poor behaviour of their so-called Monarchs," he states.

Immediately Colts slams his fist down on the table. "His son nearly raped your daughter! How can you say you still wish to alliance with them?" Colt says angrily.

"Not to mention what happened with Dylan and Chihiro," Fireball adds, his tone making it obvious that he feels as Colt does.

"I am well aware of what happened to them," Saber begins and pauses mulling over his next statement carefully. "My personal feelings have no place in a decision that affects the lives of millions of innocent civilians. Just as your opinions should remain separate as members of this council," he says trying to keep his anger under control. "If it were solely up to me, I'd throw both of them in military prison after having the son castrated, but I do not get such a luxury of being a judge and jury. None of us do," he adds firmly. "The point here is we have to figure out how to handle this in the best interest of the citizens of Jarre, not just what suits their leader."

"And what have you come up with?" April asks quietly, forcing her anger from her voice.

"Amanda and I have been looking into the history of the kingdom of Jarre," Saber begins. "Some of what we have found I think will prove to be quite useful," he states and looks to make sure the others are listening before continuing. "A decade or so before the Outrider war, Jarre was ruled by a council of peers from Jarre's provinces. When the head of the then council died suddenly, Jared, who was his second in command took the helm and basically overthrew the council and turned it into a Monarchist government. It was about that time that the Outriders started their first explorations, and the citizens were frightened. Jared assembled an army and fought them, doing well at first, so no one complained about this new government. By the time the war was over, he was well established, so no one dared to confront him. His original intentions may have been noble, a stable form of leadership was needed during war time, but when no one opposed him, the lust for power won and it is as it is now. The current leaders believe that they are above everyone else, and above the

law. I think it is time to reinstate their council, thus overthrowing the Monarchy, and allowing the citizens a voice once more."

Everyone present is silent for several minutes, no one sure how to reply. Finally Fireball dares to speak up, "How would we find members for this council?" he asks.

"I did some research on ideas, Fireball," Amanda states. "I have also been in contact with the individual province leaders that are still in place in Jarre. When I told them of the goings on here, they were shocked, to say the least. I mentioned that we feel that one person should not have so much power over so many people. The majority of them agreed with those sentiments, but were unsure how to go about changing it. There are thirty-eight provinces in Jarre. The province leaders are elected by majority vote by the adults residing in those provinces. I think perhaps we should induct a council of those leaders, and allow them the chance to arrange their government. Have them vote on a council leader, who also serves as a delegate to be on our council here; allowing them the chance to make the much desired alliance with us, that the people wanted."

"What will happen to the so-called King and his son?" Colt asks.

"They will be prosecuted under our laws. The king's wife died years ago, and Adrien is his only living child, so that would end their reign," Saber replies. "Leaving them available for prosecution under council laws here."

"However," Amanda adds quickly, "I think it would be wise to wait until their council has someone here, so that a jury of their peers can be selected to help decide on their fates. I do not think we want to risk being accused of having an unfair trial."

Colt looks as if he wants to object, but stops himself several times. Finally he nods in resignation. "You are probably right. Let's just hope that this trial goes better than McCully's did."

"How is Eryn doing?" April asks, looking to Amanda, pointed trying to change the direction of conversation.

"She is all right. She honestly doesn't remember much. I'm glad of that. She and Seth are officially engaged now and are talking seriously about getting married before too long," Amanda replies.

"Yeah, Wil said he and Moria were talking about a double wedding with Eryn and Seth," Colt adds with a chuckle.

"I'd heard that as well," Saber replies. "Is it me or does the date keep getting closer?" he asks amused.

"What are your thoughts on it?" Colt asks.

"They are all of age, I say it is their decision," Saber says. Amanda nods in agreement.

April sighs. "Has Dylan been on you about he and Chihiro yet?" she asks obviously frustrated.

Saber nods. "He has asked for our permission to request a formal betrothal. I was trying to wait until all of this was over and done with before discussing it, but he is becoming a bit more insistent," Saber states. "I'm just not sure after what happened if that is a good idea."

"That's what I was thinking too," April replies. "I think after they..."

"Had their make out session?" Colt quips grinning. Fireball starts to say something, but stops himself. "Well, what would you call it?" Colt asks as innocently as he can muster.

"That works," April mutters slightly annoyed. "And yeah, after they got a feel for the idea, I think they want to, but know we'd kill them if they don't wait."

"You do realize that in my family a betrothal at their age is basically considered the same as a handfasting?" Saber says with a chuckle. "Dylan is well aware of this."

"And a handfasting is like marriage before marriage, right?" Fireball asks.

"At their age, yes. If they had been betrothed before Chihiro hit puberty, it would have been more like the arrangement that Sincia and I were under. We would have had the option of going through a handfasting ceremony when she graduated school, but by then I was already with Cavalry Command and fighting in the war."

"If you had gone through with that, you would have basically been married?" April asks.

Saber nods. "Aye. It would have been considered a trial marriage supposedly. Of course if there were any children to come of it, then it was considered a regular marriage. Otherwise, it was to be arranged to be formally married a year and a day from the date of the handfasting, unless the couple decide to split."

"Did you know this when you gave the ring to Amanda?" Colt asks with amusement watching the pair closely.

Saber chuckles and shakes his head. "No, I didn't, and until Elaine got all upset about finding out Sincia was claiming we had been handfasted, I'd not really paid much attention to the term. I thought it was something long forgotten," he replies honestly.

"It is the reason we will not allow a betrothal between Edon and Samantha right now. It would be as good as handfasting them, and given how things are with the others, I'm not sure allowing them that option would necessarily be a good idea," Saber states. "Of course I suppose Eryn is technically handfasted to Seth, although we have not mentioned it to them, so they are under the assumption that it is a more modern engagement, which is fine with us and Seth's family."

"Don't want to have too many grandkids so close together, eh?" Colt asks grinning widely.

"Precisely," Amanda replies seriously. "Now...back to the actual subject," she says sternly trying to change the course of the conversation.

Fireball laughs. "As usual, you have to bring us back to the task at hand, Amanda," he says.

"Well, I don't relish sitting in here all day," she retorts with a smirk. "If we start talking about ways to prevent the children from having sex, we will be here all day."

Colt laughs and shakes his head. "You really need to learn to speak your mind, Colonel," he says with a grin.

Amanda starts to make a retort, but stops herself. "Seriously, we need to figure out if we are in agreement on this and begin taking steps to implement a course of action, or we will have to release Roland and Adrien. We still have yet to formally file the charges, and if we intend to, we have to do so quickly," she finally says.

"She is right. We can only hold them for another twenty-four hours without filing the formal charges," April states.

"Then let's get the kids in here and file the charges," Fireball says.

"We need to talk with the people in Jarre first, Fireball," Saber states.

"Why? The charges have nothing to do with them," he replies.

"In a way, they do," Saber replies getting looks of confusion from the other three. "We want to be sure that the delegates are on our side before formally charging them. Otherwise, it could be considered an act of war," he explains.

"What? How do you figure that?" Colt replies hotly.

"Because they could see it as a form of hostility towards Jarre," Saber says with a tone of frustration. He sees the others about to raise an objection and holds up his hand. "I do not however feel that is going to be a problem, provided we gather the leaders together and discuss this first."

"We can't just load 'em up and haul 'em over here, Saber," Colt replies.

"You're right, we don't have that much time. That is why we are meeting via vid-com in just under an hour from now. It will consist of all of us presently here and each of the council members. Eryn, Seth, Chihiro, and Dylan will be outside waiting if the council members wish to hear their versions of the events. We have also gathered security footage of everything. Something I do not wish to show unless absolutely necessary," Saber replies.

"By everything you me-?"

"I mean including what happened in the outer rooms," Saber replies cutting him off. "I could not watch the entire collection of footage. What I did see was more than enough to make me want to kill Adrien," Saber admits in a tone that silences the others. "The entire banquet facility is under surveillance. The only exceptions being the restroom areas, but even some areas of that are recorded for security reasons."

Fireball looks to say something, but stops and sits back to think before speaking. "So what are we actually discussing with this council?" he finally asks.

"We will be confirming the council back into existence, then allowing them the chance to vote on a delegate to join us here and serve as an ambassador for them here. After that, we will discuss the fate of their former leader and his son, after discussing the charges that will be brought up against them," Saber replies. They talk for a while longer before the vid-com activates and the meeting commences.

Several hours go by before the meeting adjourns and the group come out of the office. Seth and Stephen both stand up quickly at attention when the group opens the door. "How did it go, sir?" Stephen asks hesitantly as the others stand up behind him.

"I am glad that I had the paperwork filled out. The council said that they had been wanting to catch him in something to try and overthrow him. This gave them the will to do it, since they would be prosecuted here, he can't claim it was politically motivated. Having the video proof of everything was instrumental in winning over the couple that were hesitant," Saber states and pauses when he sees Eryn flinch at the statement. "After the trial we will be rid of it, Love. I cannot do anything about it before then, I'm sorry," Saber says quietly to her.

"I know, sir," she mumbles, looking down to the floor.

Seth dares to move beside her and pulls her close, placing an arm around her shoulder. "Eryn, no one here thinks badly of you, not that it should matter," he says quietly. "What Adrien did was wrong. You literally had no control over your actions, and once you realized you were being manipulated you fought back," he says a bit more forcefully, and lifts her chin, making her eyes meet his. "Any person who thinks himself a man should know to never force himself on a woman, nor strike one in anger. If they do, then they are not worthy of being called a man," he states firmly, getting a look of shock from Eryn and the others in the room.

Saber comes and gently places his hand on his daughters other shoulder. "He speaks the truth, Eryn. I know that facing this will be hard, but it will stop these people from being able to hurt other people as they have you and the others," he says sympathetically.

Amanda comes over and takes Eryn's hand. "Come on, Love. You and I need to talk," Amanda says quietly. Eryn nods and Seth removes his arm from around her and she quietly follows her mother back to her quarters.

"Will Eryn be all right?" April asks obviously concerned.

Saber sighs. "I think eventually she will be. This has really upset her emotionally. There are times you'd never know it happened, other than the bruising on her face," he replies. "Perhaps I should not have let her know about the security footage," he adds.

"I think it was wise to do so," April replies. "She needs to look at it as proof that it was not her fault."

"Aye, the video also shows Adrien putting something in the drinks, so even that cannot be refuted," Saber states. "I was surprised when she talked with me later last night that she said she was hoping you didn't change your mind about the marriage proposal," he says looking to Seth.

"Yes, she seems to want to go ahead with the engagement, but I will not allow us to be completely alone," Seth states. "I don't want her to feel pressured, and I think she might." He is quiet for a minute before adding, "Although I'd love to be left alone with Adrien for fifteen minutes."

Saber manages not to laugh, but allows a small smile. "There are several people here that share your sentiments regarding Adrien," Saber says quietly. "However if we were to take the law into our own hands, we would be no better than the ones that break it to begin with. It is why we do things as we do, and as people who have sworn to uphold the laws created to protect the people, we are entrusted with following them as an example for others to follow."

"I know sir, and you are right. I just get so angry when I see the fear and shame in her eyes. I wish I could do something to help her, but I feel so..."

"Useless," Saber finishes quietly. Seth nods. "Believe me I know how you feel. But she is strong, and she has her mother's resilience, she will overcome this. Let's go and get the charges formally filed, so that we can have this over and done with. Perhaps that will help her move past this," Saber says and the group heads off to file the formal charges.

A few days later, the Jarre council has sent their ambassador to oversee the arraignment of Roland and Adrien. "You may request to have legal counsel, Roland," Saber states to the man sitting across from him. "So may your son. The charges will not just go away. Your son is in a far more deal of trouble than you are, for his crimes were intentionally harmful."

"You have no right to speak to me like this, Rider! I am the King of Jarre. I can have you removed from command for this!"

Saber shows no reaction and allows him to finish before speaking. "You are no longer the king of Jarre, Roland. The council of peers has been reinstated and an ambassador sent here to oversee your trial. You have no idea just how serious the actions of you and your son could have hurt the citizens of Jarre. They will no longer sit and watch. We will protect them, just as you wished, the only difference will be that you are not

running the show."

"Your precious daughter is lying! Adrien told me what happened. She came on to him, and then got scared and cried rape," Roland says through gritted teeth.

"What if I can prove otherwise? Will you drop your defense of him?" Saber asks pointedly.

Roland stares at Saber menacingly for several minutes, trying to gage his vision behind the darkened glasses. "What kind of proof?" he finally asks when Saber refuses to relent.

"Video proof that he spiked the drinks of three teenagers. Two of whom are under age for starters," Saber replies flatly. Roland blinks, but keeps his countenance cool. "It shows everything that transpired after the drinks as well, including when your son and my daughter were in that room," he adds.

Roland sits in silence for several minutes, pondering his reply. "I want to see this video, General. Because I think you're bluffing," he finally says.

Saber shakes his head and sighs. "Fine," he says quietly and gives a signal and the video starts playing. "Tell me when you've seen enough," he states as he sits stiffly while the video plays over the next hour.

The video finishes and Saber and Roland sits in a deafening silence, neither one willing to speak. "If you did not have the proof that he laced the drinks, I would say that you don't have a case," Roland finally says breaking the silence. Saber goes to speak and Roland cuts him off, "That being said, I can see plain as day that Adrien did just as you said, so prosecute him to the fullest. However, I do not feel you should persecute me for only trying to defend my son. I should still be ruling Jarre."

"Your actions here have shown us that you think of yourself first, sir," Saber replies. "Your people should have come first, not your son's legal issues. So the council has been reinstated and shall remain so. Legally, we must charge you for carrying your firearm onto this facility without the proper permits, but you will most likely only have to pay fines for such a charge. Your son won't be as lucky. Perhaps one day you may be able to serve your people once again as a councilman. That is between all of you."

"What charges are being filed against him? I feel that I have the right to know that," Roland states.

Saber nods. "He is facing the charges of two counts of giving an illegal substance to a minor, three counts of possession of an illegal substance, three counts of distribution of an illegal substance, two counts of delinquency of a minor, attempted rape, and assault," Saber replies. "None of which are good charges by themselves, let alone together."

"Yes, I am aware of that," Roland replies with a sigh. "From the footage, I know he will be serving time; I suppose it will be in a military facility, since it all happened on base."

"Aye," Saber replies with a nod. "He would be put in maximum security, and if you would like, I can at least have him in solitary, to keep him from associating with others," he offers.

Roland looks up at him in surprise, "Why would you offer that?"

"As a concession to his previous life. I'm not sure he would do well with the general population," Saber states.

Roland nods. "I would appreciate that. What do you want in return?" he asks.

"For him to face his charges like a man and not have to have this video shown to several more people," Saber replies honestly.

"I think that is fair," Roland replies with a nod. "And for the record, General, I do not condone rape. He is usually with a random girl, but he can be persuasive. I honestly never imagined he would resort to drugging someone," Roland says. "I have had a woman or two come on to me and change their mind after things became heated, just as I'm sure you have. Sometimes a bit of persuasion is necessary."

"I do not agree with you, Roland," Saber states firmly, becoming a bit agitated. "The only woman I have been with is my wife, and if she changed her mind, I'd stop. Physical violence or guilt is not acceptable under any circumstance."

Roland laughs. "You cannot be serious, Rider. You are a nobleman, I surely doubt that you have been completely faithful, no man in your position is," he retorts.

Saber shakes his head and sighs. "Obviously you don't know why I respect my wife, sir," he replies quietly, forcing himself not to become angry. "It is simply a difference in opinion."

"Enlighten me then."

"You know about my blindness, correct?" Saber asks trying to keep his tone neutral and his anger subdued. Roland nods and Saber continues, "I never should have returned to the battlefield, to be honest. But circumstances being what they were, I had no choice. Amanda was the person who was teaching me to adapt to being blinded. One of the ways she taught me, was to have me teach her the skills I excel at, such as fencing and marksmanship. She is rather formidable with a sword and when my life was threatened, she killed a man to save my life. There are not many women who would do something like that. Especially twice," he adds as an afterthought.

Roland stares at him in shock for a moment before composing himself. "So you have only known your wife?" Saber nods. "I suppose she has given you several children, so things are well enough between you."

"My personal affairs are none of your concern, Roland. You would be wise to focus on yourself and your situation," Saber says firmly. A knock on the door halts the

conversation and the two men turn to find April opening the door.

"The ambassador from Jarre has arrived early, sir," April says to Saber, trying to sound official. "She wishes to speak with you and then proceed with the charges against the former prince of Jarre."

Saber nods and stands up. "Excuse me," he says curtly and exits the room, leaving Roland infuriated.

The next morning, Saber, Amanda, April, Fireball, Colt, Seth, and Stephen are all dressed in their dress uniforms accompanied by Eryn, Chihiro, and Dylan to meet first the Ambassador of Jarre, and then accompany Roland to the council chambers where his son is to face the charges brought against him. The group enter the chamber and then Adrien is escorted by guards wearing chains around his hands and feet. He glares at Eryn who makes a point of ignoring him. He then sees his father in a suit and notices he is at the table across from him, not beside him.

"So, you turn on me when I'm no longer convenient, father?" Adrien says in a hateful tone.

"You are not to speak until you are addressed, Adrien," Saber says forcefully. Adrien goes to retort, but the look from Saber ceases his reply. "Now, you are aware of the charges brought against you?" he asks the former prince.

"Yes I am," Adrien replies nonchalantly.

"What is your plea to these charges?" Saber asks.

Adrien is quiet and studies the others in the room before wording his reply. "That you have a personal vendetta against me and have filed these charges to taint my family's good name," he replies with a smirk. "You have no proof. It is my word against hers," he says nodding to Eryn.

"That is quite enough, Adrien!" Roland says fiercely. "I have seen the proof of what you have done. All I can say is that even I would not stoop to the levels you did just to enjoy the company of a woman. Does it excuse my past actions? No, it does not, but what you have done is blatantly illegal and you must be punished for it."

"You're just trying to cover your own ass," Adrien replies coldly.

"That will be enough!" Saber says loud enough to get the attention of everyone present. "He has already been sentenced for his crime. Do you wish to own up to yours?" he asks facing Adrien directly.

"I told you what happened, General. But because the supposed victim is your daughter, you refuse to believe me," he says in a tone that is obviously trying to infuriate Saber.

"As I told you, we have proof of what you have done. Your own father, who defended

you that night has even relented after seeing it. So I ask you again, how do you plead?" Saber says struggling to keep a neutral tone.

"Show me the proof then," Adrian says with a smirk. "Prove it to all of us present."

"No. He has no need to," Roland says turning to face the people present, including the Ambassador. "The young people in the video have been punished enough for this. Adrien has crossed some lines that even I would not cross." He turns and faces his son directly, "You will face these consequences like a man and perhaps with good behaviour they will let you out of prison while you're still young enough to have a family. Most everyone in this room has already seen the video, and I know that you have as well, Adrien. Your lawyer has shown it to you before this hearing. You are only making things worse for yourself."

Adrien stands with his mouth agape and stares at his father. "You actually are throwing me to them?"

"You crossed a line, Adrien, you must be held accountable for it. I gain nothing by trying to protect you and lose more if I do," Roland states. "You would do the same were the situation reversed."

"I'll not soon forget this," Adrien states between gritted teeth, while glaring hatefully at his father. "Fine, you have your damned proof, what will you do to me?" he asks Saber directly.

"I have asked the council of Jarre to decide your fate, as they are your peers. They have watched the video, and have seen how you have acted today. You show no remorse for your actions and act as if you've done nothing wrong. So it is up to them to decide your fate." Saber then turns to the ambassador. "Lady Aline, you have discussed these matters with the council?" Saber asks.

Aline stands up and nods. "Yes, General Rider, we have discussed this case at great lengths. I would however ask for a brief recess, so that I may communicate with the council before suggesting a punishment befitting the crimes and his lack of remorse, sir," she states.

Saber looks to the other members of the council before him. "Are there any objections to such a request?" he asks. After no one raises an objection he nods to Aline, "You may converse with the council. Will an hour be sufficient?" Aline nods and Saber nods back in recognition. "Very well, we will reconvene in an hour's time and you shall be sentenced then," he states to Adrien before turning to his guards. "Take Adrien back to his cell and keep him under strict guard. I will send for him when it is time, we are adjourned."

Everyone rises and Adrien is led away, still in chains. Slowly people file out and talk amongst themselves until they are called back in. More than an hour passes before Aline steps out of the chamber to signal the time to reconvene.

Within a half an hour everyone has returned to the council chambers and sitting

quietly waiting for a decision to be made. Saber stands up and turns to Aline. "Have you and the council of Jarre made your decision for a suitable punishment against the former prince Adrien?"

"We have, General Rider," she responds after standing and unfolding a piece of paper.

"And what decision have you reached?" he asks.

"After much debate, we have decided upon the following punishment recommendations: for the charges of two counts of giving an illegal substance to a minor, we recommend the middle range of punishment of three years per charge. On the three counts of possession of an illegal substance, we recommend three years per charge. For the three counts of distribution of an illegal substance we feel that he should serve three years per count. For the two counts of delinquency of a minor we suggest that he serve three years per charge. For the charges of attempted rape and assault, we recommend five years each, with a total minimum prison time of fifteen years out of the total of forty possible years for the crimes for which he has been found guilty of, sir," Aline states and then quietly takes her seat after folding up a paper.

"Thank you Ambassador Aline of Jarre," Saber says before looking to the others in the room. His eyes meet Seth's, who nods in agreement with the recommended punishment. His eyes then meets Roland's who tries not to show any emotion. Lastly his gaze falls upon Amanda's and she nods slightly in agreement. "So there are no objections?" he finally asks and a deafening silence settles in. He turns to Adrien, "Stand up Adrien," he says firmly. With his guards assisting him, he stands his fierce glare meets Saber's and Saber holds the gaze. "I agree with the recommendations that have been brought this council. I am offering you one chance to show any remorse for your behaviour."

"I only regret that you people think you are better than me," Adrien states defiantly.

Saber sighs and nods. "So be it. You are hereby sentenced to a maximum of forty years in solitary confinement. You are not allowed visitors without the council's approval. This meeting is adjourned," Saber states forcefully, and the guards grab Adrien and haul him back to a cell. He lands one last glare to Eryn who tries to remain emotionless as he passes. Once he is gone, the others slowly begin to disperse and Saber is left alone with Amanda, Eryn, Seth, and Aline.

"Is he able to appeal the decision?" Seth asks quietly.

Saber shakes his head. "No, he isn't because of the amount of proof against him," Saber replies. Eryn releases a sigh of relief at his words and he looks at her sympathetically. "I know this has been hard for you, Eryn, but I think considering the situation you've done well."

"I wish I'd never asked to come with you here," she mutters forcing back tears that are on the verge of falling.

"Ms. Rider, I think you should know that the council of Jarre did not see the entire video," Aline says looking to Eryn. "Once they saw that you were impaired, they cut it off, knowing how things ended. Not everyone has seen everything. Nor was it your fault. You had no reason not to trust him. He gave no real indication of being deceitful. So know that your integrity was never truly in question. I know what he put in your drink, and you are lucky that this young man arrived before things got worse," she states nodding in Seth's direction.

Eryn nods slightly, not wanting to speak for fear of breaking down.

Seth takes Eryn's hand and feels it shaking. He intertwines his fingers with her and squeezes her hand gently in a show of support. "It is over, Eryn. If you wish to return home, I'll take you there myself. There is no need for you to remain here now," he says quietly.

Eryn nods. "I think I'd like to go home," she replies quietly.

Seth stands and Eryn stands with him. "If it is fine with you, sir, I'd like to escort Eryn home," Seth says to Saber.

Saber looks to Amanda who nods. "I think that is a good idea. You two should take time and discuss matters. You are on break from your schooling here for two weeks. Take that time and think about your plans, both of you. You are welcome to stay at our estate, Mr. Von Rohr," Saber replies.

Seth nods. "Thank you, sir for your generosity," Seth replies. "Eryn, are you ready to go?" he asks turning to face her.

"Yes. I just need to get my bag from my room," she replies quietly.

Amanda stands up. "Come on, I'll go with you to get that and we'll meet Mr. Von Rohr at the hangar shortly," she says and she and Eryn head out of the room.

Seth goes to leave and Saber stands up. "Mr. Von Rohr?" he says causing Seth to stop and turn around.

"Yes sir?" Seth says.

"May I talk with you for a minute?" Saber asks as he comes around where Seth has stopped..

"Yes sir," he replies.

"Good, let's talk while you're heading out," Saber says and the pair leave the meeting room, allowing the door to close behind them. A little ways down the hall Saber stops and Seth stops to face him. "Thank you for taking her home. I will call ahead and have a room prepared for your arrival."

"Thank you, sir. I do wish to speak with Eryn about things, once she has calmed down. I

want to marry her, but I want her to be sure that it is what she wants. I don't want her saying yes just because of what happened."

"The ride over should give you some time to talk. I don't think her mother is going with you. I am glad that you are willing to be so patient with her," Saber says quietly. "I seriously doubt most would have been as you have about this whole situation."

"She is worth waiting for, sir," Seth replies firmly.

Saber hides a small smile and nods. "You should go. They may be waiting on you by now."

Seth nods. "Thank you, sir," he says and heads for the living quarters.

About half an hour later, Seth and Eryn are heading back to her home, neither one sure of what to say. Seth, growing uneasy in the silence sighs and looks over at Eryn and sees her staring down at her hands. "Eryn?"

"Yeah?" she says nervously.

"Do you want me to just make sure you get home and then leave?" Seth asks trying to sound neutral.

"No," she replies quietly.

"Then please, talk to me. I want to know your thoughts, Eryn. I don't want to assume anything. For all I know you're trying to figure out how to tell me that you don't want to marry me after everything that has happened," Seth replies quietly.

Eryn looks up, unable to hide her shock. "You think I wasn't serious when I told you I wanted to marry you?" she asks, her voice breaking slightly.

"I'm not sure if you replied in haste, Eryn. I thought that perhaps you said yes simply because I saved you. If that was the case, I would be no better than Adrien if I held you to such an agreement," Seth replies. Eryn goes to protest, but Seth shakes his head and holds a finger to her lips. "Having said that, you should know that I desire to marry you very much. I am comfortable with you and I enjoy being around you. I am not withdrawing my proposal, which is what I'm sure you were thinking," Eryn nods and he continues. "I just want to be totally sure that you do not feel coerced into being with me."

"I have never felt like that, Seth," Eryn says quietly, tears falling down her cheeks. "Sure, I said I wanted to marry you that night after all of that. Perhaps I should have waited to answer, but if you had asked before that, my answer would have still been the same. I sort of looked at it as you still wanted to be with me in spite of what happened, not because you were trying to save whatever rep I had."

"Then after your parent's return home, we can make it truly official, all right?" Seth asks as he wipes the tears from her cheeks. Eryn nods. "Good, I feel better knowing

that we have cleared that up between us. I truly do love you, Eryn, and I do not think bad of you because what happened was not your fault. I saw where you even tried to refuse to dance with him, but he talked you into it."

"I do have one question," Eryn says quietly.

"Anything," Seth replies.

"Why did you tell me you weren't coming when you intended to?" Eryn asks.

Seth looks up in surprise from the question, "I went to get the ring. While I was there, my grandmother passed," he states quietly. Eryn gasps, but he continues. "I wasn't sure then how soon I would be returning to Cavalry Command. That's why I said I couldn't come. But mother told me I should go, that my grandmother wouldn't have wanted me to change my plan. So I decided to surprise you, since you had already left with your parents. I will have to return for the funeral, as soon as I know what the arrangements are. I would like for you to accompany me, if you are comfortable doing so."

Eryn nods. "I'd like to come with you," she replies. "Let me know when it is and the appropriate dress for it, so I don't look out of place."

"Thank you, it means a lot that you're willing to accompany me. I know things have been hard the past few days, perhaps now, you can relax. I don't think we need to bring it up again, all right?" Seth asks.

"I would be fine with that, Seth. I am glad that you are willing to let go it. I just hope that I can," Eryn replies quietly.

Seth nods. "I'm sure your mother can help you pick out a dress. Anything you wear I'm sure will be fine."

They talk a little more until they arrive on Eryn's colony. They leave the outpost and drive to the estate. They are ushered to their room and they agree to meet later to speak with each other later after they get settled. Eryn heads to her room and plops down on her bed, physically and emotionally exhausted. She is just about asleep when someone knocks on her door. Groaning from a mix of annoyance and dread, she replies in a muffled voice, "Come in."

A hesitation and she hears the door open and someone enters the room. "Lady Eryn, are you all right, Love?" Elaine says as she comes over and sits on the edge of Eryn's bed.

Slowly Eryn wills herself to roll over and she sees the concern in Elaine's eyes. "Just tired," she replies honestly.

Elaine nods and takes her hand then gasps when she notices the ring. "Are you and Mr. von Rohr..."

Eryn nods and slowly sits up and smiles weakly. "Yes, although we won't officially announce our engagement until mother and father come home," she replies quietly.

Elaine hugs her, then studies her face carefully. "Are you having doubts, Eryn? You don't look like a young lady who has just accepted a marriage proposal," Elaine states.

Eryn involuntarily releases a sigh. "Well, things got a bit...things didn't exactly go smoothly," she finally says, getting a look of curiosity from Elaine. Realizing that she isn't going to let the subject drop, Eryn continues, "You spoke to Seth after I left with mother and father, right?" Eryn asks.

Elaine nods. "Yes, it was the night of the banquet. He was hoping you were just leaving and he could meet up with you and go together to the banquet. I offered to call you, but he told me not to, that he'd just surprise you by showing up," Elaine states.

"Well, I was definitely surprised," Eryn says quietly. "I went with Chihiro. We didn't know Dylan was going to come until Stephen and Raisa brought him. After he showed up, Chihiro went to dance with him, and then they were going to meet me for food and drinks. I went got a drink and found a table to share with them and was sitting quietly when this young man came over and started talking to me. He introduced himself as Prince Adrien of Jarre and he asked me if I was alone. I said the person who I would have come with had another engagement, but that I had come with friends. He asked me to dance, and I didn't see any harm in it. We danced, then went to sit down and he went to get us something to drink. Chihiro and Dylan came over, and I guess he saw them, because he came back with drinks for all of us, himself included. We all drank and chatted for a while. Dylan and Chihiro eventually got up to dance some more and he asked me to dance again. I refused at first, but he begged for one more dance. Reluctantly I submitted. I vaguely remember feeling dizzy and hot..." Eryn says trailing off and wringing her hands nervously, afraid to look up at Elaine.

"Eryn, what happened?" Elaine asks in shock.

"Mother and father haven't told you?" Eryn asks weakly.

Elaine shakes her head. "They said that all of you would be delayed returning, but I never thought there was something wrong," she replies honestly. Elaine sees Eryn tense up and moves so she can see Eryn's face more clearly. "What happened, Love?" Elaine presses.

"I've only seen the footage once," Eryn replies looking down at the floor. Elaine sits patiently and waits for her to continue, taking one of Eryn's hands in her own. Realizing Elaine is not dropping the subject, Eryn reluctantly describes the entire incident to her.

Elaine sits back and exhales, trying to recover from a mixture of shock, anger, and grief. "Lady Eryn, I truly hope you do not blame yourself." Eryn continues staring at the floor and Elaine pointedly lifts the young woman's chin to make their eyes meet. "Mr. von Rohr is right. This is not your fault. You were drugged and not in control of

your actions. I am glad he had the decency to protect you and not try and take advantage of you in such a state. He still wishes to marry you?" Elaine asks.

Eryn nods. "Much to my surprise, he does. He wanted me to be sure that I still wanted to. He told me after everything that happened that night, why he was late. I assumed after he told me about the ring, he would decide that he could do better, and I stated such. He told me that it was quite the opposite, he still wanted to be with me. I said I wanted to be with him and he gave me the ring, but told me we could not make anything official until mother and father return here. That way I still have time to back out."

"So he thinks you might back out? Perhaps that's what he wants," Elaine offers.

Eryn shakes her head in disagreement. "I don't think so. I asked him if he was only saying he wanted to go through with it because he had sort of already asked, but he told me no. He claims that he still wishes to get married. We talked a lot about it on the way back here. It was the first time we have really been alone since that night. I think he is being sincere. He wishes for me to accompany him to his grandmother's funeral as well. Not something I think he would ask if he had doubts," Eryn replies.

"Aye. It sounds as if he is rather serious. I am glad that he is. You deserve to be with someone that respects you, and it sounds as if he does."

"Even if I haven't exactly earned it," Eryn mumbles.

Elaine goes to reply when a soft knock sounds from the door. Eryn sighs and Elaine gets up to answer it. Upon opening it, she sees Seth standing on the other side, obviously surprised to see her. "Oh, good evening, Mr. von Rohr," she says smiling at him.

"Good evening, ma'am," he replies recovering from his shock. "I came to see if Eryn was feeling any better."

"I'm still tired, but maybe a little better, Seth," Eryn replies as she comes to the doorway.

Seth studies her and eyes her hesitantly. "You've been crying?" he asks concerned.

"I was explaining everything to Elaine," Eryn states.

"I see. Are you all right? Perhaps I should let you rest a while longer," Seth says obviously concerned.

"Why don't you two come down for tea? I'll have Marianna make some and you can talk out on the patio. The weather is still nice enough to do so," Elaine suggests.

Eryn nods hesitantly. "I'd be okay doing that. But I would like to change first. I sort of just collapsed onto the bed when I came home," she states. Elaine nods and heads downstairs, leaving the couple alone in the doorway. "Um," Eryn starts nervously. "I

suppose you could sit at my desk while I go into the dressing room and change."

"Would you be more comfortable if I waited here, honestly?" Seth asks.

"I trust you, Seth. I don't think you'll do anything to hurt me," Eryn replies. "So it's fine if you sit in the room. I'll be in the dressing room anyways. Perhaps you should leave the bedroom door open though, so that no one thinks anything is going on, not that it will matter."

Seth nods and steps into her room and goes and sits in the chair beside her desk, and Eryn heads into her dressing room and closes the door to change.

A few minutes later, Eryn steps back out dressed in a three quarter sleeve blouse and a long skirt. "Nice to be in fresh clothes," she says sounding a bit more relaxed.

"You look nice, I hope you didn't dress up for me," Seth says as he looks her over.

Eryn looks at her clothes. "Honestly, maybe the skirt instead of jeans because you're here, but no big deal really," she replies.

"You don't have to dress nice for me, Eryn, I don't care if you're wearing sweat pants," Seth states.

"I know, Seth," Eryn says. "I wouldn't have agreed to marry you if I thought you'd insist on me being in dresses and such, but it doesn't mean that I can't try to look nice for you either."

"As long as you're comfortable, Eryn," Seth says quietly. "That's my only concern."

"I'm comfortable around you Seth," Eryn replies quietly. "Now how about that tea that Elaine said she was making?" she asks trying to change the subject.

"Oh yes, we should head down before someone starts to suspect that we decided to start our honeymoon before our wedding," Seth says as he stands up.

Eryn blushes slightly at the idea and they head downstairs. Upon entering the kitchen, they see Elaine setting tea down on the table. "Ah, there you, I was just about to send Marianna to fetch you," Elaine says eyeing Eryn with a hint of concern.

"Sorry, I couldn't decide what to wear" Eryn replies honestly.

"I'm just glad that you look a little better than you did when I came down here. I was rather concerned," Elaine says as she pours tea out for the three of them, then hands them each a small cake.

"Have you heard anything from mother and father?" Eryn asks after sipping her tea.

Elaine shakes her head. "Last I had heard, they planned on coming back later this evening, but probably not in time for supper. I would not expect to speak to them

tonight, as I'm sure they'll be tired, if they have been dealing with everything you've told me along with their original reasons for going," she replies.

Eryn goes to speak when Seth's cell alerts him to a call and he pulls out his cell. "Excuse me for a moment," he says apologetically and then answers the phone. "Yes?" he says. Murmuring from the other line. "Okay," he replies. "Thank you for letting me know. Hopefully, we'll both see you then. Good-bye," he says then closes his phone and looks up to Eryn staring at him curiously. "Well, my parents would like me to arrive day after tomorrow for services. The service should last two days, with the wake, then the funeral," he replies to the unasked question. "I am hoping you still want to accompany me," he adds as an afterthought.

Eryn nods. "I think it'd only be appropriate as I am wearing her ring," she replies. "When will we need to leave?" she asks.

"Tomorrow afternoon at the latest, that way we'll arrive tomorrow night, the wake will last all the next day and part of the next, then she will be intuned."

"If your mother is too tired I will take you tomorrow to get a dress," Elaine says.

"I'd like that, Elaine," Eryn says. "Seth, will you come too?" she asks pleadingly.

"I didn't think women wanted men around when they were shopping for dresses," Seth says.

"I think it's more that men don't want to sit around cause it can take hours for a proper fitting," Elaine says with a hint of amuse.

Seth looks slightly unnerved at the concept, then Eryn speaks up "I'm sure it won't be that bad, I won't have time to have a dress made, I'll have to take one off the rack, and have it adjusted, that's a lot quicker."

"You can't just get one off a rack?" Seth asks

Eryn shakes her head "I've never found one that fit me right that way, have always had to get them adjusted," she states matter-of-factly.

"If you want me to accompany you, then I will," Seth says a bit hesitantly.

"We will have to leave first thing in the morning" Elaine says

"We have the afternoon to relax then?" Seth asks

"Aye, I suppose I can trust you two together without a chaperone?" Elaine asks trying to sound serious.

"We'll just take a walk around the grounds," Eryn says dryly. "We'll be fine," Elaine scoffs.

"Last time your parents said that, Samantha was born about nine months later," Elaine reminds her.

The couple looks at each other and they both blush slightly. "You'll just have to trust us," Eryn says and they both get up and leave.

Seth and Eryn hold hands as they walk the grounds. "You know, Elaine did remind me of something I promised your father I would discuss with you," he states.

"What's that, Seth?"

"Well, I know that technically our engagement isn't formalized yet, but your father had said that he like our opinion on when we wanted to get married, if we still wanted to get married."

Eryn chuckles slightly, "Yes, I'm sure if he has his way it'll be a few years before we're allowed to get married."

"Let's just say I was lead to believe he would open to a sooner marriage date than that," Seth says hesitantly.

"Oh? And would you mind telling me what leads you to believe that?" Eryn asks.

Seth hesitates for a moment, releasing a sigh of resignation before conceding to her request. "Fine, your father and I were talking after you left with your mother that night," he begins. "He asked me if I actually still intended to marry you after everything that had happened, and I told him that I would. I knew it wasn't your fault, Eryn, and I stated as such. He basically then said something to the effect that if you still felt the same way after everything was said and done that as far as he was concerned I could marry you tomorrow, after everything"

"My father would never say something like that!" Eryn says in disbelief.

"Really? Perhaps you'd care to wager that I was lying?" Seth says in a teasing tone.

Eryn looks nervous. "What kind of wager?" she asks hesitantly.

Seth laughs. "Nothing harmful," he replies truthfully. "But I know that both of us come from prominent families, so I figure our main argument would be the location of the wedding."

Eryn nods. "I doubt that we could ever find a plan that pleased both families."

"Exactly" Seth says "So my suggestion is this, we wager on whose family we please. If I can prove to you that your father did indeed say that, then we please my family, if not, then yours, fair?"

"And you have until we start planning the wedding to prove it?" Eryn asks trying to clarify. Seth nods. They lapse into silence for a few minutes before Eryn stops

suddenly and smiles deviously. "Here's a thought," Eryn says mischievously, "How about tomorrow while my dress is being adjusted we go and get married at the courthouse?"

Seth laughs, then stops when he sees the look on her face. "You are joking, aren't you?" he asks, uncertainty creeping into his tone.

Eryn shakes her head. "No, I am not," she replies simply.

"But that wouldn't please either family," Seth states.

"I'd rather do that than have to pick which family we appease," she replies.

They talk about several other things as they walk around the property, finally returning to the the house at sunset. "Eryn, Seth, I've left some supper for you in the kitchen. Also your mother called and they won't be home until tomorrow evening."

"Did you tell them about our plans to go to Seth's grandmother's funeral?" Eryn asks.

"Aye, I did, and that told me to tell you to enjoy the trip the best you can," Elaine says. "And to be on your best behavior," she adds with a hint of amusement.

"You know I will, madam" Eryn says in a mocking tone.

"Now, eat up you two," Elaine says as she grins at Eryn's response.

"Yes ma'am," Seth responds and they sit down and eat the food left for them.

"Now, you two should should be heading to bed, we'll have to start early in the morning," Elaine says towards the end of their meal.

"Okay. Thank you, Elaine for doing this," Eryn says as they finish up their meal and then head upstairs. "Well, I suppose this is good night, Seth," Eryn says as they stop at the door to her room.

"Yes, it is," Seth says and they kiss for a minute before he releases Eryn and she heads to her room. After she closes her door, he continues on to his room.

Eryn heads into her bedroom, closing the door softly behind her. She goes and changes clothes and then flops onto her bed, exhaustion hitting her from tension she didn't even know she felt. She starts sobbing uncontrollably for several minutes, finally calming herself down. She looks at her clock and sighs before hesitantly reaching for her phone on the nightstand. She unlocks it and hits a button to send a text, but each time cancels it. After much debating, she finally hits send and waits hesitantly for a reply.

After what feels like an eternity, she gives up and lays the phone back on the nightstand and is almost asleep when it starts ringing. She practically jumps at the sound and grabs it quickly to silence the ringer. "Hello?" she says quietly as she opens

the phone.

"I'm sorry that it took me so long to reply to you," the voice on the other end of the line says. "I had to move out of the bedroom. I didn't want to wake your father, he was actually sleeping peacefully. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, but I've got so much running through my head that I wanted someone to talk to," Eryn replies quietly, forcing herself to not get upset. "Someone other than Elaine."

"Well, I'm here, Love. What's on your mind?"

"Well, I wanted to know your thoughts on my um, engagement and upcoming marriage," Eryn says slowly, trying to figure out how to word her questions.

"Are you wondering if we're pleased with it?" Amanda prods.

"Kinda," she replies hesitantly. "I mean, father said he approved of Seth, but I don't know how you feel about it, or how soon you would allow us to get married or anything."

"Are you trying to tell me that you two have-"

"No!" Eryn replies a bit louder than she intends. Then in a more quiet voice, "No, mother. We've not been together like that. I am just afraid of us offending some or all of you by not following some family custom or something. I don't want to have to choose sides, and I'm sure we can't please all of you," she adds quietly trailing off.

"What is it you want, Eryn? If you totally had your choice in how to get married, what would you want?" Amanda asks.

Eryn thinks for a minute "Something small, and private, and relatively soon, after everything I'd like to just get on with my life."

"I'm sure we can accommodate that," Amanda says. "Just please tell me you two aren't considering going to the courthouse and getting married."

"Well..." Eryn pauses. "We sort of discussed the idea."

"Eryn Blaire Rider!" Amanda says loudly over the phone "You will do no such thing! Seth's supposed in mourning over his grandmother, it would be very highly improper."

"But Seth never said anything," Eryn says.

"The boy loves you Eryn, he'd defy his family for you," Amanda says regaining her composure. "We'll arrange something as soon as we can, and I promise we'll keep it as small and private as possible."

"Promise?" Eryn asks.

"I promise Eryn," Amanda replies. "I've already called and Seth's parents and gave my condolences on the loss of Seth's grandmother, and informed them of Seth's proposal, and asked that they call me back at a more appropriate time to discuss a formal engagement. When they call me back I will discuss your wishes."

"Thank you, mother," Eryn says.

"I should be heading back to bed now, Sweetheart," Amanda says. "We have to finish a few things here and then we'll be home late tomorrow. We'll see you when you return from Seth's."

"Good night, mother," Eryn says then hangs up the phone, she looks at the clock and sighs before getting up and quietly leaving her room, and goes to Seth's room. She quietly opens the door and whispers, "Seth? You up?"

"Eryn?" Seth sits up in the bed and whispers. "What are you doing up?"

Eryn steps into the room, shutting the door quietly behind her, "I just got off the phone with my mother."

Seth pats the bed beside him. "Must have been important, it's the middle of the night," he states.

Eryn looks at the offered place on the bed, then hesitantly sits down. "I discussed our pending nuptials with my mother," Eryn states.

"Ah, I see," Seth replies. "I assume that you didn't mention your idea of eloping?" he asks.

Eryn blushes slightly, "Actually, yes, I did."

Seth chuckles slightly. "I suppose that went over well," he says sarcastically.

"Actually, she said that it'd be improper as you are grieving the loss of your grandmother, but didn't act too surprised that the thought had crossed my mind."

"So, what's the plan?" Seth asks.

"My mom has already contacted your mom to express our family's condolences. She also mentioned that you have issued your marriage proposal and asked them to call at a better time to discuss it further," Eryn explains. "I told mother that we want a small, private, and preferably soon ceremony."

"You know we don't have to rush getting married Eryn, I'm willing to wait if you'd like," Seth states. "I don't want you to feel pushed or forced into anything."

"I want to move on past everything, and get on with my life. And the next stage of my life is with you Seth, as your wife," Eryn says. "So, the sooner the better, I figure," she

adds with a shrug.

"Well, I'm certainly not going to complain if we are married sooner rather than later," Seth says with a grin.

Eryn chuckles and smacks him playfully. "You just can't wait for the wedding night," she retorts with a small smile.

"You're the one that came into my room in your nightgown," he replies.

"Touche"" Eryn says and they kiss briefly.

"We should really get to bed, Love, we have a long day ahead of us," Seth says after pulling away.

"I can't sleep," Eryn says quietly. "I've got too many things going through my head."

"Come on, let's lay down and relax and you can talk until you fall asleep," Seth replies.

"Lie down, as in together?" Eryn asks in shock.

"Well, yeah," Seth replies as if it were an obvious solution. "I assure you I intend on being a perfect gentleman, as long as you want me to be."

"I don't know," Eryn says hesitantly.

"Earlier today you were suggesting that we elope tomorrow, meaning we'd be married, and doing more than just sleeping more than likely. I don't think that us spending one night with the intent of actually sleeping will be of any harm."

Eryn nods. "I suppose if I can't trust you now, then we have issues much too deep to be talking about marriage," she replies. They lay down together and talk until they eventually both drift to sleep.

Please Review.

Kapitel 45: Unexpected Beginnings

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace

Chapter 44: Unexpected Beginnings

"Welcome back, Seth!" a woman says in greeting upon Seth and Eryn's arrival to his grandmother's estate. She embraces him and he kisses her cheek before the woman turns her attention to Eryn, who is waiting silently and struggling to control her nerves. "How are you feeling, Miss Eryn?" she asks as she studies the girl closely.

"I am doing well, ma'am," she replies. "I am sincerely sorry for your loss," she adds quietly.

The woman smiles approvingly and pulls Eryn into a brief embrace. "Thank you. I am glad that Seth has chosen such a fine young lady to be his wife. You have done your parents proud." Eryn smiles politely as the woman releases her from the embrace and signals for a young man to approach that was waiting in a nearby doorway. "Karl, please come and take Master Seth's and Lady Eryn's belongings to their chambers. They will accompany you and freshen up before tea."

"Yes, Lady Klara," the young man replies as he takes the luggage from Eryn and Seth.

"You two go and get into more comfortable clothes, then we shall meet for tea," Klara says to the couple.

"Yes, mother," Seth replies as he takes Eryn's hand and they follow Karl down a corridor.

Karl takes their luggage to a room at the end of the corridor and opens the door for them. "Your chambers, my Lord and Lady," he states.

Seth and Eryn step into the room. "This is the Master's suite," Seth states under his breath in astonishment.

"Yes, my Lord," Karl says as he places their bags down. "We were told to have the room ready for you," he states as he scans the room to be sure everything is in order. "Is there anything else, Lord Seth?" he asks.

"I think we're good for now, we'll join my mother for tea shortly," Seth says

"Of course," Karl says as he leaves closing the door after him. Seth sits on the bed, looking slightly off.

"Seth?" Eryn asks worriedly. "Are you okay?"

"I'm not sure," Seth answers quietly.

"What's the matter?" Eryn asks sitting hesitantly down beside her.

"Do you know what being in this room means?" he asks.

Eryn shakes her head. "Not really," she replies honestly.

"This room is only for the master of the estate," Seth says taking a breath to try and truly absorb the situation. "If my parents aren't staying here then..." he trails off.

Eryn gasps. "They're going to have you take over your grandmother's estate?" she says in shock.

"Not me," Seth corrects. "Us."

"Us?" Eryn asks speculatively. "But we're not even officially engaged yet."

"Obviously my parents don't see it that way," he replies still recovering from his shock.

"And what brings you to that conclusion?"

"Do you see a second bed in our chambers?" Seth asks with flourish of his hand.

Eryn looks around, and then realizes that Karl had intentionally left her bag there too, and then she blushes very heavily.

"It's okay Eryn, you know that I don't expect to do something like that with you until we're actually married," Seth says quietly.

"I know Seth," Eryn replies. "But you're parents must have similar customs to mine; they must view us as handfasted."

"Handfasted?" Seth asks confused.

"It's like being married without being married. Basically given free range for that, just if any children come along then you were married the whole time. I heard it explained as a sort of trial marriage."

"That makes absolutely no sense," Seth says.

"I think the idea was to make sure people were completely compatible before they were married, cause a handfasting could be undone, but a marriage couldn't be when the custom started," Eryn explains.

"So you mean to tell me that my parents think that we're..." Seth asks and Eryn nods.

"And they have no problem with this?"

"Think about society, how many woman have children out of wedlock?" Eryn asks. "They're probably happy that I wasn't pregnant when you asked me to marry you."

"Well let them think what they want, as far as I'm concerned we can wait until our actual wedding night. That'd be fine with me," Seth says.

Eryn smiles and kisses him softly. "We'll just have to control ourselves like we did last night, we slept together, and everything is still the same," she states.

"Right," Seth says with a nod. "Now, we should change and get back down for tea before they really start to suspect something."

They change quickly and head to the sitting room for tea. Seth leads her to a large room with a couple of couches and a huge fireplace where his mother is sitting and patiently waiting for them. She stands up when they enter the room and looks Eryn over carefully. "Your parents have taught you well. You have chosen nicely your dress for this occasion. I expect that your accommodations are satisfactory?"

"Yes, ma'am," Eryn replies.

Klara nods. "I am glad things have met your approval. I want you to feel comfortable here, as this will be your home with Seth," she says glancing to Seth. "That was in accordance to your grandmother's wishes," she states, seeing the look on Seth's face.

"She wanted you to have a place to call your own," Klara says. "I'll help you and Eryn take over the responsibilities of running it after the funeral."

"Mother, are you saying that Eryn and I are considered handfasted since I proposed?" Seth asks.

"Of course you are Seth, Eryn is of noble blood, and that is the custom, and barring any incidents," Klara says, looking at Eryn purposely. "You shall be wed a year and a day from your proposal and her acceptance thereof."

Seth nods. "So we are to live here together?" he asks.

"Correct, Seth," Klara says. "If you didn't notice I took the liberty of having all your possessions moved into your new room."

"Lady von Rohr?" Eryn says.

"Please, call me Klara, Eryn, as you are also technically Lady von Rohr," Klara says.

"Of course, Klara," Eryn says nervously. "I'm afraid that I am not fully prepared to move in with Seth just yet."

"What do you mean?" Klara asks confused by the statement.

"I need to pack up my possessions back at my parents estate first. Had I known that you also had the custom of handfasting I would have been properly prepared for such an occasion."

"I understand my dear, I will send some of our most trusted servants to help you pack and return here as quickly as possible." Klara says.

"I would appreciate that very much, ma'am," Eryn says just as a female servant about Eryn's age brings them tea and cakes and places them on the table.

"Alles andere, Madame?" {Anything else, madam?} she asks Klara.

"Das wird allerdings für jetzt genug, Andrea," {That will be enough for now, Andrea} Klara responds and fixes her tea. "I hope you speak German Eryn, I'm afraid that's all Andrea knows."

"I am sure we will work out something," Eryn says a little nervously.

They discuss various things over the next few hours and eventually Klara stands up and looks at the couple. "You both look rather tired, perhaps you should turn in for the evening and we can start getting everything in order for the wake and funeral in the morning," Klara states.

Seth stands up and offers his hand to Eryn, who takes it and stands beside him. "It has been a long day, mother, I think we should retire for the evening. We shall see you at breakfast," he states before leading Eryn out of the room and back to what is now their quarters.

They enter the room and close the door and Eryn releases a heavy sigh as she plops down on the foot of the bed, covering her face with her hands.

"Are you all right, Eryn?" Seth asks obviously concerned, as he sits down beside her. Eryn nods, unable to speak. Seth reaches over and carefully pulls her hands away from her face, to see that she's crying. "You're not all right, Eryn. Please, talk to me. What can I do to help you feel better?" he asks quietly as he brushes some tears from her cheeks.

Eryn shrugs, and after a couple of minutes, she stops crying. "I suppose I should have been prepared for this, but since none of the others really seemed to have this happen, I didn't think about it. Mother and father were already living together when they became engaged, so it wasn't a real adjustment for her, and I guess father didn't think about the possibility because he had other things on his mind. If I had known ahead of time, I don't think I'd be so upset, I could have prepared for this, mentally before coming here."

"Would you feel better if I just took you home?" Seth asks quietly.

Eryn looks up in surprise. "Are you saying you don't want to marry me?" she asks

hesitantly.

Seth shakes his head. "No, I want very much to marry you Eryn, but I don't like seeing you this stressed out. Perhaps if I took you home, I could convince mother to allow us a more...modern arrangement."

"Somehow I don't think she'd go for it, Seth. She seems to be rather set upon tradition. I respect that, as my family has a few traditions they still uphold. But as I said, it just sort of hit me like a wall. I just need time to adjust, that's all," Eryn replies quietly.

Seth nods. "I'll give you all the time and space that I can. However, I think we are stuck sharing this room. I hope you can tolerate that."

"I don't mind sharing the room, Seth. I think I can adjust to that. It's just that I never had time to adjust to suddenly be considered married. I thought we'd have to wait a bit or something. I really thought we were only coming for your grandmother's funeral, not moving in."

"As did I, Eryn. I honestly had no idea about this handfasting thing. Had I known, I would have waited until after the funeral to ask you."

"Well, I suppose we just go on from here. But I'd like to call my family to let them know of these developments, if that is allowed," Eryn replies.

"Eryn, you are my equal here. You can pretty much do as you please. You don't need my permission to call your family. But I'll head to the dressing room, if you'd like some privacy. I don't think leaving you here alone would be proper, considering the situation," Seth states.

"It's fine if you stay, Seth. I've got nothing to say that I've not said to you already," she replies as she goes and gets her cell before taking a seat back down on the bed and calls her mother's phone.

"Eryn?" Amanda asks as she picks up the phone.

"Hello, mother," Eryn says quietly.

"How are things going? Was your trip restful?" Amanda asks.

"The trip was fine," Eryn replies.

"But?" Amanda prods, causing Seth to look in her direction.

"Um, evidently, Seth's family is a bit more...traditional than he knew about," Eryn states.

"How so?" Amanda asks a little perplexed.

"Um, evidently, they consider us handfasted," Eryn replies. Amanda is quiet for a couple of minutes, causing Eryn to check her phone to be sure they're still connected. "Mother?"

"I'm...I'm here, Love, and so is your father, although he looks a bit more amused than I do about what I've just told him."

"Well, I am so glad that father finds this amusing," Eryn says snidely.

"We apologize sweetheart, but you have to understand we all should've known this was a possibility," Amanda says. "Your father seems to have suspected it the most, and is highly enjoying the comedic element of it."

"Mother!" Eryn says angrily. "I'm trying to have a serious conversation here!"

"Forgive me, Eryn, I'm sorry," Amanda pleads. "Would you like me contact Seth's mother and see if I can convince her to make your arrangements more modern?"

Eryn pause for a minute and looks to Seth. "You mother might be able to convince her, if that's what you want," he says.

Eryn shakes her head. "I think I'm okay with the idea now, mother. It just took some time to get use to the idea," Eryn says into the phone.

"Well, how about Elaine and I work on packing up your possessions and bring them to you? I might even be able to convince your father to come along and see your estate, and meet Seth's parents," Amanda offers.

Eryn looks to Seth who nods his head in approval "We would be delighted if you would come," Eryn says. "Besides, then you could meet his parents and such. That would make me feel a little better about all of this."

"Might I suggest that we ask Thomas and Elaine accompany us? They have experience in handling estates and could help you learn what needs to be done and such, Eryn," Saber says from behind Amanda.

"I think that's a good idea, Eryn," Seth states. "They are people you trust, and they're your grandparents, so I don't see anyone being able to raise an objection to their presence for an extended period of time. I could go and let the caretakers know to prepare rooms for all of you. When would you arrive?"

"It will probably take us a few days, Love. So it would be after the funeral. The day after, I suppose at the earliest," Amanda replies.

"That shouldn't be too bad, I suppose," Eryn replies. "I am sorry for calling and bothering you," she says quietly.

"Eryn, you are not bothering us. I am glad you called to tell us what is going on. I am sure that after everything else that has happened, this news was quite a shock. From

what you have said, I am assuming that you waited until returning to your room to get upset about it?"

"Yes, ma'am," Eryn replies. "Although Lady Klara is aware that neither Seth or myself knew that we were considered handfasted until we arrived here. She offered to send me with a couple of servants to retrieve my things after the funeral, but I shall tell her that it won't be necessary. She seemed to expect that we just accept it as fact, so that is what we've done."

"I am glad that you have been graceful about this ordeal. I suppose somewhere in the back of your mind you should have known it was a possibility. You have heard us discussing Dylan and Chihiro, and why we won't allow them to become engaged."

"Yes, it is why when they brought us to this room and Seth sort of told me what the room signified that it hit me and I explained it to him."

"So he didn't realize that is how his family viewed your engagement?" Amanda asks.

"No ma'am, I had no clue. I would have waited to ask her then, as I didn't want her to feel pressured into anything. She is worth waiting for, she knows that I feel that way," Seth replies. "It sort of threw us both off."

"Well, what's done is done. I am glad that you both are handling this gracefully."

"What else could we do? You have taught me better than to lash out when things don't exactly go as planned," Eryn states. "I suppose it's helpful that I know how Seth feels about the situation and is going out of his way to make me feel comfortable."

"I'm glad, Love. Now, I suppose it is getting late and all of us need some rest. We will talk briefly with Thomas and Elaine before heading to bed ourselves, you both should get some rest, so that you are fresher in the morning for what will be a couple of difficult days," Amanda says.

"Yes, mother. Thank you for letting me vent to you," Eryn says.

"I am here if you need me. Do not hesitate to call, we'll see you soon. I'll call you once we know exactly when we are coming," Amanda replies. "Good night, Love."

"Good night, mother," Eryn replies and disconnects the call, placing the phone back on her side table with a sigh.

Seth comes over beside her and gently places an arm around her, "We can still do as we did last night, Eryn. Why don't you go change in the dressing room, and then I'll go and change and we can head on to bed? Your mother is right about us needing to get some rest," Seth says quietly.

Eryn nods. "I suppose it won't matter if we change separately," she mutters. "We are expected to act as if we're married already. I'm just not sure if I can fulfill all of the requirements just yet."

"I don't expect that yet, Eryn. I want it to be when you're ready. I was serious when I told you that you're worth waiting for. Besides, as long as we share a bed, no one will know," Seth says. "Not that it's their business anyways," he adds.

Eryn smiles weakly. "I doubt it will take me long for me to be more...willing. I don't think it'll be a year of us sharing a bed. I figure when it happens, it'll just happen. Not really planned, you know?"

Seth nods and kisses her cheek. "I'm agreeable to that. I won't complain about sharing the bed with you. I liked having you sleep against me," he replies.

Eryn blushes heavily "I enjoyed it myself," she says. "I suppose that's a good thing, since we're going to be sharing a bed from now on."

Seth nods. "I agree," they both change for bed and lay down together and snuggle together.

"I can definitely get used to this," Eryn says. "You're warm," she says as she yawns and they soon both go to sleep.

The next morning Eryn and Seth enter the kitchen dressed for the wake. "I trust you slept well?" Klara says as the couple takes their seats. "That is a lovely dress Eryn."

"Thank you, Klara," Eryn replies. "My grandmother helped me pick it out."

"She has remarkable taste," Klara says.

"I'm glad you think so, because she and my mother will be bringing my possessions in a few days," Eryn says. "My father and grandfather may come too if they can be convinced,"

Klara smiles, "What a remarkable solution, Eryn."

"Thank you ma'am," Eryn says and they all eat breakfast and prepare for a long day, They drudge through the wake and funeral, not really having much time to themselves, over the next couple of days. The night after the funeral they change and collapse into bed.

The next morning, they come into the kitchen rather late. Klara is talking with an older woman, who seems to be in charge of the kitchen, and looks up when the couple enter. "Ah, good morning. I was about to send Karolin here to check on you." she says and looks to say more but stops, eyeing Eryn with concern. "Eryn, are you feeling well? You look a little flush," Klara asks concerned.

"Oh, yes, ma'am. I'm just still a little tired from the last few days," Eryn replies quickly.

Klara casts an amused glance over the couple and nods, deciding against any further comment. "I believe today is the day your parents will arrive, correct?" she asks,

changing the subject.

Eryn nods as she sits down to eat the plate set out for her. "Yes, ma'am. I believe they should arrive this afternoon," Eryn replies, grateful for the change in subject.

Klara nods and Andrea steps in the room from the doorway. "Andrea, stellen Sie bitte sicher, es gibt Zimmer bereit für Lady Eryns Eltern und Großeltern. Sie werden hier gerade nach dem Mittagessen." {Andrea, please make sure there are guest rooms ready for Lady Eryn's parents and grandparents. They will be here just after lunch.}

"Wie Sie wünschen, gnädige Frau," {As you wish, madam.} Andrea replies. She casts a glance towards Seth, eyeing him with curiosity, "Ich bin für Sie da, mein Herr," she says to him quietly before heading off to her duties.

Seth looks at her in shock and watches her leave, before turning his attention back to his breakfast and Eryn. "Is there anything you want to do before your parents arrive?" he asks.

Eryn looks up and shrugs. "I'm not familiar with this place to know, Seth. I don't think we should go too far, so that we are available when they arrive."

Seth nods. "That is true. I want to be sure we are here when your family arrives."

"Your father should also be done with your grandmother's affairs by lunchtime, Seth. So by this evening, you and Lady Eryn will officially take over the affairs of this estate," Klara says.

"Yes, ma'am," Seth replies. They finish breakfast and he takes Eryn for a brief tour around part of the estate before lunch time. After lunch, they head to their room to wait for her family's arrival. Eryn is sitting in a chair in the sitting area and Seth across from her.

"You've been awfully quiet, Seth. Are you okay?" Eryn asks.

Seth nods and releases a sigh. "Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just trying to figure out a problem," he replies.

"What is it? Maybe I can help," Eryn offers.

"I don't want you to be upset when your parents come. Can we talk about it tonight?" Seth asks.

Eryn eyes him carefully but finally nods. "I suppose it will keep. Although you're making me nervous saying that you think it will upset me. Have I done something wrong already?"

"Not at all, Love," Seth replies with a smile. "I'm glad we're becoming better acquainted with each other."

Eryn blushes at his comment and nods. "I was afraid that perhaps I'd done something to offend you or your family without knowing it," Eryn mutters.

"I assure you. I would tell you if that were the case, Eryn. You have done nothing wrong. But I would like to start teaching you German, if you're willing to try and learn," Seth states.

"I would be willing to try and learn it. I just hope you have the patience of a saint," she replies with a grin. "I've not got a gift for languages, unlike my parents."

Seth chuckles. "Surely you can't be that bad, Eryn." Eryn starts to say something and Seth comes over and kisses her briefly. "Besides, I'll make it fun," he says against her ear.

Eryn blushes and smiles slightly. "I will make a good attempt, for you," she replies.

"That is all I ask, Love," Seth replies. They talk a while longer until they hear a knock at their door. Seth answers and finds Karl at the door.

"Lady Eryn's family has been spotted, sir they should arrive momentarily. I thought that you'd like to meet them in the sitting room."

"Thank you, Karl," Seth replies as Eryn come up behind him.

"Ah, Lady Eryn, you look like you are feeling better than this morning," Karl states.

"I am, thank you," she replies.

"I will escort your family in. See you downstairs," Karl says before heading towards the entrance to the estate.

Seth and Eryn head to the sitting room where Klara and Stefan are already waiting. "Good afternoon, mother, father," Seth says as he and Eryn take their seats. The next few minutes seem like an eternity to Eryn, but she finally hears the door open and familiar voices.

Karl comes into the room looking a bit taken aback, but he stiffens up and makes his announcement, "General Rider and Brigadier Colonel Rider have arrived. As have Lord and Lady Lindsay." He ushers in the guests.

Saber and Amanda enter first, Saber being guided by Amanda and using his cane and wearing his darker glasses, but both are dressed in their dress uniforms. Thomas and Elaine are in new outfits and they nod a small greeting to Eryn, who looks relieved to see them.

Seth's parents stand up and Stefan is the first to speak. "General and Colonel Rider?" Saber nods. "I had no idea that Lady Eryn was your daughter. I assumed she was of some decent, but just figured that she was a more distant relative. It is truly an honor to have her in our family. She is a wonderful young woman."

"Thank you, Lord von Rohr, she is one of our two oldest biological children. We are proud of all of our children," Saber replies as they all sit down.

"Yes, Seth informed that Eryn had a twin sister, Moira isn't it?" Klara asks.

"That is her indeed," Saber replies with a nod. "Moira is engaged to Wil Wilcox, son of Colonel Wilcox."

"That is splendid, have you any other children?" Klara asks curiously.

"We do," Amanda answers. "We have a son Dylan, and another daughter Samantha, as well as our three older adopted children."

"It must be wonderful to have such a large family," Klara states.

"It has kept us busy for many years," Amanda says with a smile.

Klara looks to Thomas and Elaine. "And you must be Eryn's grandparents, I am so pleased that you could come," she says kindly.

"It is our honor to be here," Elaine replies.

"Wonderful!" Klara says. "I understand that you've taken the liberty of bringing Eryn's possessions with you?"

"We have," Amanda says

"And Eryn and Seth have invited us to stay and help Eryn get settled into her new duties," Elaine adds.

Klara looks a little unnerved. "Well, of course, it is their estate, they may do as they wish," she says a bit stiffly.

"Now mother, you shouldn't be cross, you and father need to return and run your estate," Seth says.

"My grandparents have a lot of experience in running my parents estate, and will help us learn our new responsibilities," Eryn says.

"Of course," Klara says. "That makes much more sense than Stefan and I staying away from our estate any longer. I wish I had thought of the idea."

"Don't worry, we'll get them adjusted into running the estate in no time. But just in case we run into any unexpected problems, I don't suppose you could leave us a contact number?" Elaine asks, trying to smooth things over and ease the tension. "You never know how things could be different in different estates."

Klara smiles slightly. "If you're not too road weary, how about a quick tour of the

estate? That should prove to be helpful."

"I would be delighted, madam," Elaine says, and elbows Thomas.

"Of course, we'd love a tour," Thomas adds quickly.

"Perhaps we could all go?" Amanda asks. "That way everyone is up to speed."

"Why of course, Colonel Rider," Klara replies. "The more the merrier." They all get up and Klara shows them around the grounds and introducing them to the servants, then they all go to the dining room and have supper, before going back to their rooms to rest.

"So, Seth, are you going to tell me what's bothering you now?" Eryn says as she changes for bed.

Seth sighs and sits on the bed, "Of course, now please try not to freak out." Eryn looks worried as she sits on the bed next to him. "Well, after what Andrea said to me earlier I believe that she was hired to be my mistress for lack of a better word," he says slowly.

Eryn looks at him in complete shock. "Are you saying that you want to sleep with her after..." she blushes heavily.

"No, no, you have it all wrong, Love," Seth says quickly. "The problem I'm having is how to deal with her," he says frustrated. "Whether I should just outright fire her, or see if she has another useful skill and keep her on."

"If she stayed would you sleep with her?" Eryn asks hesitantly, struggling to hold back the tears in her eyes.

"Never my love, I told you that I thought you were worth waiting for, and have proven you were, and more. I don't want anyone other than you, I swear."

Eryn nods. "Then let's see if she can be of another use to the household before putting her out onto the street."

"You are a good woman, Eryn von Rohr," Seth says with a smile before kissing her briefly.

Eryn returns the kiss, and then pulls back.

"What's wrong?" Seth asks in a worried tone.

Eryn shakes her head. "Just thinking, is all."

"About what?" Seth asks with a mix of curiosity and concern.

"That perhaps you should talk to Andrea. Tell her that you're not interested in such

services and give her the chance to tell you what other skills she has. I just can't think of who would have told her that she'd be here for such a thing."

"Your father never had anyone like that?" Seth asks honestly curious.

Eryn looks repulsed by the idea and shakes her head. "Of course not! Although I heard that someone he used to know thought my mother was for such a service and tried to get what he wanted from her. She and my father weren't together at that point," she adds as an afterthought. "The man actually went ballistic and hurt mother, which enraged my father, as he does not feel that women should be treated differently to men. Long story short, mother ended up killing him just before he could kill father."

"Wow!" Seth says. "I had no idea."

Eryn nods. "Does your father have someone like that?" she asks.

Seth looks ashamed as he answers, "Yes."

Eryn looks shocked. "Who hired her?" she finally manages to ask.

Seth looks even more ashamed. "My mother," he mutters barely audible.

Eryn gasps. "Your mother hired your father's mistress?" she asks in disbelief.

Seth nods. "She probably also hired Andrea, not wanting to put the pressure on you," he replies quietly.

"No offense, but how hard could it be to pick out a mistress?" Eryn says obviously miffed at the idea.

"Do you want to me be honest?" Seth asks.

Eryn sighs. "I suppose you'd have a pretty good idea, huh? Having had known your father's mistress. So, yes, please tell me what you know."

"Well obviously a mistress must be physically attractive," Seth says.

"Aren't I attractive?" Eryn asks sounding a bit dejected.

"Of course you are, Love," Seth says. "But I want you to compare yourself to Andrea."

"I haven't really thought that way." Eryn says. "She is the kind of women that men would flock to, isn't she?"

"Yes," Seth says. "But you know I only care for you," he adds as an afterthought.

"I know," Eryn says. "What else is there?"

"Well, obviously she must be willing to serve her Lord however he sees fit," Seth

states.

"Well, that's a given," Eryn says. "Is there anything else?"

"Well, um, I don't know if it's a requirement, but I know that my father's mistress was sterilized so that no illegitimate children would come from their coupling," Seth adds.

"Are you saying that your mother may have already had Andrea sterilized?" Eryn asks in shock.

"Knowing my mother, probably," Seth replies.

"The poor girl," Eryn says sounding almost sympathetic. "Why would she agree to that?"

"Her family probably sold her into slavery," Seth says and Eryn gasps. "Who knows what happened to her between then and when my mother found her, but I'm sure this is a big step up for her."

"What... what if her skills are limited to... you know?" Eryn asks. "We can't just put her out on the street, it wouldn't be right. She'd end up a prostitute."

"I don't know, Eryn. But I don't want her presence to be a source of discontent between us. I would send her away if it made you feel better, because I have no interest in her for the reasons that she was hired," Seth says beginning to sound frustrated.

Eryn sighs in frustration. "I think you should talk with her, after your mother leaves, and tell her how you feel about such an arrangement. Then if she wishes to leave, let her, but tell her that if she can do other jobs around here, we would allow her stay. Does that sound fair?" Eryn asks hesitantly.

Seth nods. "More than fair, Eryn," he replies. "Your parents should be proud of you for how you carry yourself."

Eryn blushes at the complement. "It seems fair to me. I cannot force my personal beliefs on you, just as I hope you won't try to force yours on me. I know we will not always agree, but I think we can reach a compromise in most situations, or just agree to disagree."

Seth nods in agreement and moves to lie down. Eryn slowly moves up beside him and he pulls her against him, her resting her head against his chest. "When my parents leave, I will talk to her, Eryn. I hope that perhaps your family will stay a few days after as well, so that they can help you get settled. They seem to care about how you take this, and I want all of you happy with how this turns out, even if it isn't exactly how we wanted it to," he says quietly.

"Okay," Eryn replies barely awake. She sighs contentedly and snuggles against Seth.

"Goodnight, Eryn," Seth says quietly as he runs a finger along her arm that is draped across him. He lies there in thought for a while before the steady lull of her breathing sends him to sleep.

A couple of days go by and Stefan and Klara leave for their estate. Saber and Amanda make plans to leave the day after, and Thomas and Elaine have decided to stay for a couple of weeks at least. All of them are sitting out back enjoying the afternoon and talking when Karolin brings out tea and cakes.

"Here we are," Karolin says cheerfully as she doles out the cakes and pours tea for everyone. "Dinner won't be for another hour yet. I am sorry that it will be later than usual, but I am attempting to teach Andrea to help in the kitchen," she says with a hint of amusement. "I think she will catch on, but the girl tries my patience."

Seth chuckles. "I apologize, Karolin, but I am grateful that you are willing to try and teach her. How is she doing with the other duties?" he asks.

"She does well cleaning, my Lord," Karolin replies. "But I get the feeling that she enjoys the kitchen work. It is a far cry better than what she was doing before she came here," she adds quietly.

"So you feel she will be an asset?" Seth asks.

"I do, sir," Karolin replies honestly. She turns to Elaine and smiles, "I have been grateful for your guidance, Lady Elaine. If you had not given me an idea of how to test Andrea, I would have had to have her sent away, and it was obvious that neither Lord Seth or Lady Eryn wanted to do that if possible."

"They both have good heads, I think they will do well. But I am glad that I was helpful to you," Elaine replies.

A crash is heard from inside and Karolin excuses herself. "I had better go see what happened. I'll inform you when dinner is ready," she says before quickly heading inside.

"I'm glad that Andrea is attempting to learn new skills," Amanda says.

"Aye, it'll be good for the girl," Elaine agrees.

Karolin comes running onto the patio, "Lady Elaine, you seem adept in the kitchen, I'll need you to finish dinner, if you don't mind."

"What's the matter?" Elaine asks as she gets up.

"Andrea fell on some dishes, I must get her to the hospital immediately,"

Amanda and Eryn also get up and the ladies all rush into the kitchen.

"What should we do?" Seth asks.

"I suggest we wait until they ask for our assistance," Saber says. "That way we are out of the way unless we are needed."

About 5 minutes later Eryn comes back out. "Karolin and Mother are taking Andrea to the hospital, Elaine has the kitchen under control, except that she wonders if you gentlemen would be so kind as to clean up some broken dishes, as Karl is out tending the garden."

"I'll take care of it," Seth says as he gets up.

"Allow me to give you a hand," Thomas says and the two go into the kitchen, and clean up the mess. They come back about half an hour later.

"Done?" Eryn asks.

"Yeah," Seth says as he and Thomas sit down.

"It must have been some mess," Saber says.

"It was," Seth says. "Broken dishes and a good bit of blood."

"Andrea looked really bad," Eryn admits. "I worry for her, most of the cuts were on her hands and arms, but there were several on her face, and one eye looked very bad."

"Well, I'm sure that she'll be fine, and we'll find jobs that she can do no matter what happens," Seth says.

Eryn nods. "Of course, she was fine at cleaning so if nothing we can keep her around to keep house for us, and assist Karolin wherever she can."

Dinner is eventually served by Elaine and the others all come in and eat. Elaine and Thomas work on clearing the dishes, with Seth helping them place them away. Afterwards, they all talk until it's rather late. Thomas and Elaine retire for the evening and Eryn notices that Saber looks tired.

"Father, would you like me to lead you to your room? You look like you could use some rest," Eryn says with a hint of concern.

"I'm a little tired, but worried that we've not yet heard from your mother," he replies.

"I'm sure if things were too bad, she'd call," Eryn says, trying to sound confident. "I promise that I'll come and let you know if I hear anything," she adds.

Saber sighs in resignation. "I'm sure it's getting rather late, so I probably should at least head to our room. I'd go by myself, but my vision isn't doing so well today, and I'm still not familiar with the layout here," he says.

Eryn nods and stands up and then comes over to him and offers her hand. "Then allow

me to escort you. It'll give me the chance to see if I can find my way back without help," she adds with a hint of amusement.

Saber chuckles and takes her hand as he stands. "Well, at least I know you have more than one motive for the offer, Love," he says amused.

They head off to Saber's quarters, walking in a comfortable silence until they reach the door. "Eryn, what exactly is the story behind Andrea, if you don't mind my asking," Saber prods as they enter his room.

Eryn sighs and closes the door behind them as Saber goes and sits on the foot of the bed. "Well, she was hired by Lady Klara. I'm not sure how long ago, but not too long evidently, since Seth didn't seem to know her when we arrived. She didn't have an easy life before here, from what Seth has heard in various conversations amongst the servants. So anything here is better than what she could be doing," Eryn states.

"What was she hired for?" he pushes, knowing that Eryn was purposely avoiding the question.

"To be Seth's mistress," Eryn says coldly. Saber goes to say something and Eryn cuts him off. "Seth has told her that he is not interested in such services. I was the one that suggested trying to see if she had other...talents to be utilized. I don't think Seth would lie to me about such a thing."

"Obviously the idea upsets you, Eryn," Saber states.

"I never knew you to have another woman around for such activity, father," Eryn retorts a bit more harshly than she intends.

I never did. I had no desire to, Eryn," Saber states quietly. "However, there are some people that see such actions as normal. One of those was a person I was friends with at one time."

"McCully," Eryn states, getting a nod in reply. "Seth seemed rather upset by it, so I don't think he liked the idea, so I want to try and help Andrea. I don't think anyone should be forced into sex, not matter what. It is so, degrading. Perhaps because of what happened with Adrien...maybe that is why I want to help her," Eryn adds with a sigh.

"You and Seth are both good people, Eryn. I think you will do what is right, even if it isn't the normal thing to be done here. I am sorry that you were blindsided by this, but surely in the back of your mind you had some inkling that it was a possibility?"

Eryn nods. "After it happened, and Seth was sort of freaking out, I began explaining what I'd heard you and mother talking about with Dylan and Chihiro, and why you wouldn't let them make their engagement official until they were both of legal age. It hit me then why. So in a way, I was better prepared than Seth," she says with a chuckle.

Saber takes her hand and looks up at her, "For what it is worth, we are very proud of the woman you've become. And if you ever need anything, do not hesitate to tell us, no matter what it is."

"Thank you. That actually means a lot to me," she replies quietly. Her phone rings and she answers it. "Yes?" Murmuring. "Yes, okay. Thank you for calling, mother. We'll see you soon, bye." Eryn disconnects the call and sighs. "Well, they should be home in the next half an hour or so. Andrea needed several stitches, and will be laid up for a week or so while she heals, but luckily, her eye isn't permanently damaged."

"That is good news. I am relieved to know that they will be home soon. I'm sure your mother is exhausted as well," Saber replies with relief.

"Aye. I am glad things were not worse. I suppose I should go and let Seth know. I'm sure he'll be coming to hunt for me, thinking I got lost," Eryn says with a chuckle.

"Aye. He is a good man, Eryn. He proved that back at Cavalry Command," Saber says. "I think he was being quite honest with you about Andrea."

Eryn nods. "I know. But I'm glad to know that you approve of him. Goodnight, father," she says kissing his cheek.

"Goodnight, Eryn. See you in the morning," he replies.

"Aye," she says as she heads out the door.

After a few minutes and a couple of wrong turns she finds Seth still waiting in the sitting room for her. "Everything okay?" he asks when she returns.

"Aye. I was talking with father about everything and mother called. They should be home soon," Eryn replies as she comes over and sits beside Seth.

"How did Andrea come out?" Seth asks hesitantly.

Eryn shrugs. "From what mother told me, it could have been much worse," Eryn replies. "She needed several stitches, but her eye was not permanently damaged. It sounds like she'll be laid up for at least a week though."

"I suppose we should be thankful then," Seth says quietly.

"What's wrong?" Eryn asks.

"Do you think Elaine would mind tending to her? We need Karolin to be learning how to run the place, not caring for an injured person," Seth replies.

"I'll help tend to her. I've had some first aid practice with mother and father. Perhaps it will allow me to work on my German and have a chance to get to know her," Eryn replies.

Seth looks at her with an amused look and then leans in and kisses her. He hears the door open and he pulls back and grins at her. "You really are something, Eryn," he says with a smile.

Eryn goes to make a reply when Karolin, Amanda, and Andrea enter the room. Andrea has a patch over her right eye and her left arm in a sling, looking rather groggy. "Ms. Karolin, do you mind helping Andrea to her room, before you retire for the evening?" Eryn asks.

Karolin has a confused look for a moment and hesitates before replying. "Um, of...course, Lady Eryn. But I will need to finish cleaning up from supper before bed," she finally stammers.

"We have taken care of it. Although we left each of you a plate of food, if you've not yet eaten," Eryn replies, getting a look of shock from the older woman. Eryn chuckles, in spite of herself. "Ms. Karolin, I may be a Rider, but I do know how to do dishes, Lady Elaine made sure of that," Eryn says with a smile.

Karolin allows a smile and nods. "Of course, milady. Thank you for your kindness. I will take mine and Andrea's tray to our quarters and eat there, so I may keep a close eye on her tonight."

"Thank you, your help is greatly appreciated," Eryn replies as Karolin escorts the groggy Andrea through the kitchen before going to their quarters.

Amanda plops down in a chair across from Eryn and Seth and releases a heavy sigh.

"Are you all right, mother?" Eryn asks obviously concerned.

"Aye, Love. It's just been a long day. It was interesting trying to recall the little bit of German I knew," she adds ruefully. "Not a language I heard spoken much. I do better reading it, than speaking it."

"You're a far cry ahead of me then. I can't even read it," Eryn replies.

"I'm willing to bet in a couple months you'll be fluent in it," Amanda says.

"Aye," Eryn replies.

"Has your father gone on to bed?" Amanda asks noting his absence.

"Aye. He went earlier. I was just leaving your room when you called, so I'm sure he's waiting up for you. He looked rather tired though, so he didn't put in to wait out here with us," Eryn replies.

Amanda nods. "You know how he pushes himself," she replies. Eryn nods. "Of course I really can't say too much, I'm almost as bad," she adds with a chuckle before stifling a yawn. "I suppose we should all turn in. Karl said he'll lock up and go to bed shortly."

Eryn and Seth stand up. "Thank you for coming, mother. I am glad you went with Karolin and Andrea," Eryn says.

"I am too, it gave me time to learn some about both of them. Goodnight, you two," she replies turning towards her quarters.

"Goodnight," they reply before they all head their separate ways.

A few days go by and Saber and Amanda leave to go to Cavalry Command for business, promising to visit again soon. Thomas and Elaine work closely with the other household workers to set up a daily routine, and Eryn works on tending to Andrea. "Ihr Auge sieht besser aus, Andrea," {Your eye is looking better, Andrea} Eryn says slowly. "Ich bin froh... zu sehen, dass," {I am glad to see that} she adds.

"Warum zeigst du mir so viel Güte, Lady von Rohr?" Andrea asks hesitantly. {Why do you show me such kindness?}

"Weil Sie verdienen... eine Chance, etwas mit deinem... Leben anfangen," {Because you deserve a chance to do something with your life} Eryn replies simply. She stops and ponders her next phrase carefully before speaking, "Keine Frau sollte gezwungen, sich jemandem zu geben werden." {No woman should be forced to give her body to another.}

"Sie sind freundliche Frau," {You are a kind woman.} Andrea replies quietly. "Ich habe nicht ein, wie Sie vorher getroffen." {I've not met one like you before.}

"Sprechen Sie langsam, bitte," {Speak slowly, please.} Eryn pleads. "Ich glaube nicht, gut verstehen." {I don't understand}

"Sie versuchen, Deutsch lernen?" {You are trying to learn my language?} Andrea asks in surprise. Eryn nods slowly. "Warum?" {Why?} Andrea asks.

"Damit wir miteinander reden," {So that we can talk to each other} Eryn replies slowly. "Jetzt sollten Sie ruhen. Rufen Sie, wenn Sie etwas brauchen." {Now, you should rest. Call if you need anything.} Eryn says before leaving the room and closing the door.

Eryn and Seth are sitting in the sitting room, talking with Thomas and Elaine after dinner when Andrea slowly makes her way out and cautiously approaches the group. "Andrea, ist alles in Ordnung?" {Andrea, is everything all right?} Seth asks.

"Ja, Sir. Ich bin gekommen, um sich zu entschuldigen," Andrea says hesitantly.

"Apologize? What for?" Seth asks confused.

"Um...I not been telling whole truth," she says very slowly.

"You speak English?" Seth asks.

Andrea nods, looking to the floor. "Lady von Rohr...er...your mother, she...order me

only speak Deutsch. Said I be well care for. Only give you body," she mutters.

Seth sighs. "Well, at least speaking with you will be easier. Andrea, I told you that I do not wish such a...service. But I will honor the offer of making sure you are cared for. All I ask in return is for you to help around here where you able and do what Ms. Karolin asks of you." Andrea nods. "Why did you decide to tell us that you can speak English?" Seth asks out of curiosity.

"Lady von Rohr showed me kindness. Didn't treat me bad, like many wives do," she replies quietly. "You are first man to not strike me," she mutters, barely audible, trying to fight back tears. "First people to treat me as a person in long time."

"Andrea, that's because you are a person, and we want nothing more than your happiness," Eryn says, getting up and gently taking the woman's hand.

"I could find husband then?" Andrea asks hopefully.

"Of course you are free to find yourself a husband," Eryn replies as she releases Andrea's hand.

"As long as doing so does not impede on your other duties," Seth adds.

Andrea smiles. "Thank you, I do my best to serve," she says as a few tears fall down her cheeks. "Thank you both."

Please Comment :-)

Epilog: Epilogue

I DO NOT own Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs or Sei Jushi Bismarck, they are owned by their respective animation companies.

The Price of Peace: Epilogue

"I'm glad you're now officially part of our family now, Chihiro," Amanda says hugging the smiling girl.

"Thank you for convincing my parents to allow this, Lady Amanda," Chihiro replies as she moves back from the embrace.

"Saber had just as much pull as I did. He actually I think made the most convincing argument. Just remember to be careful not to make your parents grandparents too soon, okay?" Amanda says grinning at the blush creeping onto the new bride's cheeks. "Now, go see about Dylan before his sisters harass him too badly and ruin his good mood."

"Yes, ma'am," Chihiro replies and rushes off to find Dylan.

"What did you say to her to make her blush so, Amanda?" Fireball asks walking up behind her.

"I told her not to make you a grandfather just yet," Amanda quips.

Fireball blushes and laughs. "You don't think..." he stops, seeing the look from Amanda and laughs.

"What's so funny?" April asks curious, as she comes over to the pair.

"Taking bets on how soon you'll become a grandmother," Amanda replies.

"Hopefully not anytime soon," April replies.

"Saber has talked some with Dylan, so perhaps they will be a little cautious," Amanda says.

"Aye, and I told him if he makes us grandparents again in less than a year, he won't be alive to be an heir to anything," Saber says walking up to the group.

"You didn't?" Fireball asks in disbelief, while trying not to laugh.

"I did. I tried to talk with him rationally, but he would quickly change the subject, so I resorted to threatening the lad," Saber replies nonchalantly.

"He knows you'd do it too," April says sounding amused.

"I knew all of you were like family, never did I imagine that we would all actually end up as such," General Eagle says with a smile as he walks up to the group.

"Aye, sir. I don't think any of us actually thought about being at this point all those years ago," Saber states quietly.

"Yeah, I didn't think any of us would actually live this long as reckless as we were," Colt says walking up to the group.

"It's not for lack of trying on the part of the Outriders that we're still here," April adds.

"Aye, a lot of good luck on our part," Saber adds.

"And skill," Fireball quips. "You have to admit, we were and still are the best at what we do."

"I think the new elite are almost past us, Fireball. But that is as it should be. They have to learn from our mistakes," Saber states. "And it is our responsibility to teach them."

"From what I've seen you have done well with that," General Eagle states. "As you have in handling delicate situations that have come up," he adds nodding to indicate they should walk alone to talk a little more.

"I assume you're referring to Jarre?" Saber asks, following the general away from the group.

The general nods. "It has been a constant source of discontent among the council at Cavalry Command for years. We had suspicions that King Jared had been engaged in unbecoming activity, but when he died, we had hoped things would improve. Obviously that was not the case. Until we could prove that they had done something illegal, we didn't have any recourse. Adrien was the one to turn the tables on their reign."

"His mistake was one of believing he was above the law, even when caught," Saber replies. "The fact that the person he was caught with happened to be my daughter was purely circumstantial. Even his own father could not condone what he did, when shown the video of what led up to the events."

"How is she doing? I've not seen her since the ceremony," the general asks.

"Eryn is well. She married Seth von Rohr nearly three months ago in a double wedding ceremony with Moria and Wil. She seemed to not feel well today, but I'm sure that will pass before too long," Saber adds with a hint of amusement.

"So perhaps it is all of the excitement?" Eagle asks.

"Perhaps," Saber states.

"Ah, you believe there's more to it?" he asks.

"Aye, mainly the adjustments to making a life of their own. Seth is good to her, and since his mother has let up about him having a mistress, they both seemed to have adjusted well."

"His mother was insisting on him keeping a mistress?" the general asks in disbelief.

Saber nods. "And Seth told her that he did not wish one," Saber replies. "She berated Eryn and said some rather nasty things from what I have been told. Seth did not like the way his mother spoke of Eryn and told her that it was his decision to not have a mistress. He told her basically it was not her concern how they chose to live now. They decided together to keep on the young woman that his mother had hired to help with housekeeping duties. She is now married and is due any time to have a child. Her husband is also in service to Eryn and Seth. They seem to have workers that respect them, so I feel they will continue to do well. Moria and Wil are also well and have settled into life together. They live on a smaller estate adjoining some land that Colt and Robin own to the south of here."

"That just leaves Samantha, doesn't it?"

"Aye. But she is as good as married."

"But she's so young."

"She and Edon have been betrothed for several years. They have agreed to not speak of getting married until after they have both finished school. They could then decide whether to be handfasted first, or just outright married. We would allow it to be their decision," Saber says as they slowly mingle into the group.

They talk a while longer before everyone heads their separate ways for the evening. Saber and Amanda are in the kitchen talking with Marianna when Seth and Eryn come in.

"How are you feeling, Love?" Saber asks seeing that Eryn looks tired. "I heard from Samantha that you were sick earlier."

"I'm okay, father. Actually a little hungry," Eryn replies with a small smile.

Saber laughs, "Get used to it, Love. You're going to feel that way for the next several months."

"You know?" Eryn asks hesitantly.

"I suspected, you just outright gave it away," Saber replies amused.

"You're not mad?"

"No. You're married, Love. It's fine," he replies.

"But I heard you tell Dylan-" Eryn starts to say.

"He is a bit younger than you, as is Chihiro. Honestly, if she winds up pregnant, we will make the best of it. But you don't think I'm going to tell either one of them that, do you?" Eryn laughs and shakes her head. "They don't need any encouragement," he adds.

"That is true," Eryn replies as she takes a snack offered to her by Marianna.

"Are you going to share your news with the others before you leave?" Saber asks.

Eryn looks to Seth who nods.

"Perhaps tomorrow at the afternoon meal? That way everyone will be together," Amanda suggests.

"Aye, perhaps that would be the easiest," Eryn replies.

"Have you told Seth's parents yet?" Amanda asks.

"Not presently, ma'am," Seth replies. "I was thinking of going to see them when we leave here to share the news, if Eryn is feeling up to it, that is."

"Aye. I should be fine to travel. Mother fought in a war when she was pregnant with Moria and I," Eryn replies.

"I wouldn't exactly use your mother as a role model of how to act when pregnant, Love," Saber says amused, getting a glare from Amanda.

"Why not? I think we turned out fine," Eryn retorts with a smirk.

"Because I'm not sure if Seth would survive the amount of worry I felt when she was placing the lot of you in danger," he replies seriously.

The smile quickly fades from Eryn's countenance and she nods. "I hadn't thought of it like that," she replies quietly.

"Eryn, I'm sorry if I upset you, it wasn't my intent. I just don't want you being quite as reckless as we were, because you don't have to be, all right?" Saber says coming over and gently placing a hand on her shoulder. "I am hopeful that none of you ever have to face such decisions," he adds quietly.

"It's okay. I'd never actually thought about it from this perspective before," Eryn replies honestly.

"Why did you go out again?" Seth asks looking between Saber and Amanda. "Weren't there others that could have fought in your stead?"

"Not at that time," Saber replies. "I was going out because they needed me to help in the Bismarck, but my vision wasn't reliable, so Amanda went with me and served as my eyes."

"So how did you end up being the one to kill those two men?" Seth asks intrigued.

"It just happened that way," Amanda states with a sigh. "Sometimes you have to make decisions that will haunt you for life. But, had I not decided the way I did, I don't think we would be here now, so I do not regret it."

"I pray that neither Eryn nor myself or our child ever have to make such a decision," Seth says quietly.

Eryn finishes her snack and they all retire to their rooms for the evening.

The next afternoon, everyone has gathered for the mid-afternoon meal and are chatting amongst themselves. Eryn and Moria come out just as the meal is being served, both looking a little less than perky. "Hey, you two look sick, what did you eat, so we can make sure not to?" Dylan asks in a teasing tone.

"Dylan, leave us alone," Moria says on her way past him. "Or I might just throw up on you next time," she adds with a smirk.

"You're throwing up?" Chihiro asks quietly.

"Aye, it happens," Eryn replies.

"Yeah, when you find out you're pregnant," Moria mutters.

"Pregnant?" Dylan and Chihiro exclaim together, causing the other conversations to cease and everyone turn in their direction.

Eryn sighs. "Not exactly the way I wanted to announce it," she says and smiles weakly at the crowd around them as Seth comes up beside her.

"Aye. I know what you mean," Moria adds as Will takes her hand.

"So which one of you is pregnant?" Dylan asks.

"They both are," Saber replies with a chuckle.

"And close together, at that," Amanda adds as she places a hand gently on each girl's shoulder. "They are due within two weeks of each other," she states, obviously amused.

"Does that mean that you both could have twins, since you are twins?" Samantha asks curiously.

Both girls get a look of horror on their face and several other people start laughing.

"I'm not quite sure that's how it works, Love," Amanda replies. "Twins just sort of happen. Just because they are twins, it doesn't guarantee that they will have twins," she states, causing the girls to sigh in relief.

Everyone starts offering congratulatory remarks and chatting with the two couples as Saber and Amanda quietly slip away from the crowd. Amanda guides Saber around some miscellaneous toys that are scattered along the grounds as he holds her arm gently and they walk in silence enjoying the warmth of the afternoon. Eventually, they wind up outside the old barn and go inside and sit down. Neither one really speaking at first.

"You can't see at all, can you?" Amanda finally asks, almost dreading the reply.

"No. I'm back in darkness, Love," he replies barely audible. "I don't think it's coming back this time either, it's been almost two days."

"I thought you were acting a little off," she says with a sigh. "We've known the possibility was there," Amanda replies, her voice breaking slightly. She looks around and laughs.

"What?" he asks, casting her a mildly curious look.

"You realize where we are?" she asks.

"Somewhere out in the outer fields. If I remember correctly this is one of our old hideouts," Saber replies hesitantly.

"Aye. It's where I found you after I pissed you off a few weeks after we met. After the whole thing with Sean."

Saber chuckles. "It's pretty much the same date as it was then, isn't it?" he asks.

"Aye. Close to the day we met. Ironical that we wound up here."

Saber? Amanda?" a male voice calls out from close by.

Saber sighs. "I guess the general noticed our absence," he says with a hint of disappointment. "Do you mind showing him in, Love?" he asks quietly.

"Sure," she replies quietly and heads out the door. A few minutes later she returns with the general in tow. "Evidently, he's the only one looking for us," Amanda states as they come in and sits beside Saber.

He takes her hand and the general watches them closely for a minute before speaking. "Have I interrupted something?" he asks looking between the couple before him.

"We just wanted some peace, sir," Saber replies quietly.

"Why do you sound like something is wrong? I thought you would be happy that your daughters are both pregnant."

"My vision is gone, sir," Saber replies. "We knew it would happen eventually, and ironically it was this date that started my eventual life with Amanda."

"It's been nearly twenty-five years since you lost the bulk of your vision, and yet you are now the head of Cavalry Command. Something that at the time I never would have imagined," General Eagle says to Saber.

"I honestly thought that I had lost everything then," Saber admits quietly. "And yet I think it was when I was actually able to see the most clearly. I would not change anything I have for this. I love Amanda and the children dearly. I cannot imagine my life without them."

Commander Eagle chuckles. "And back then you fought me over hiring her."

"That I did," Saber says with a smile. "I remember thinking after her first few weeks with me that one of us was going to end up dead, and at that point, I wasn't sure which of us it would be. She was unlike any woman I had ever known. She was not afraid to tell me that I was trying to do something beyond my ability, or that I needed to stop wallowing in self pity. I both hated and admired that in her. I still do at times," he says with a small smile.

"I remember the time she went off on you. It left you rather confused, didn't it?" he asks.

"Aye. It was the morning after Sean first attacked me," Amanda replies.

"I felt guilty that it happened, and I actually was afraid she would leave. By then, I didn't want her to. I had become accustomed to her being around and didn't want to have to learn someone else's mannerisms over again," Saber adds.

"By then I think you started feeling something for her, Saber, even if you weren't ready to admit it," the general says quietly.

Saber shrugs. "Perhaps. But it was after we had our blow-up and then met later here that I think things actually began to noticeably change between us."

"What did happen between you? You've never actually told me," he asks.

Saber sighs in thought and Amanda takes his hand and squeezes it gently in a show of support. "I hit bottom," he states simply. "She had given me confidence and I felt like my old self again. Then I went to do something so simple, to get water, I think; and fell, nearly making everything worse, including hitting my head again, and I lost it. I wept. All of the frustration, doubts, fears, everything came out then. Everything that I had tried to push past came out and she was the one there to see it." General Eagle gasps at such an admission and Saber takes a breath before continuing. "But instead

of telling me to get over it, she came over and just put her arms around me and let me be. I remember her telling me that it was normal to feel like I did, but that I can move past it and that she wouldn't leave until I forced her to. We then stayed like that for a long time...but I think it was then that something changed between us, even though neither of us acted on it for quite a while later," Saber finishes.

"And I will remain here," Amanda says quietly. "We just don't want the children to know just yet. We will tell them eventually, but I don't think we should ruin their happy time. We want them to enjoy their time with each other."

"With Amanda's help, I think I can continue my duties with Cavalry Command a while longer. But before long, April will most likely take over, and by then she'll be ready to, I think. She has learned a lot these last few years, and I will be nearby, as will you, if she wants advice."

The general releases a breath he was unaware he was holding and shakes his head. "You have paid a heavy price in the name of peace, Saber. Perhaps this will be temporary, as it has in the past," he states hopeful.

"We all have, sir. We all have our demons to deal with, ," Saber replies. "Amanda still occasionally has nightmares on occasion, as I'm sure the others do, but don't speak of. None of us move as well as we once did, and some of that is from the physical abuse we put on ourselves being young and reckless. I just hope that those that are serving now, don't have to sacrifice what we have."

"I feel that if they do, they are better prepared for it. We have taught them everything we can. We have improved the technology, the rest is up to them, Saber," Amanda says quietly. "As long as people live, there will always be conflict."

"We probably should be heading back. I don't think anyone has noted our absence yet, since no one has called. I just happen to see you both walk off and was curious," the general states as he stands up and stretches.

"Aye, I suppose we should head back. I don't want to upset the children," Amanda says as she stands and offers a hand to Saber and pulls him up.

"I'll go on ahead. You two come along shortly. I'll tell them you went walking if anyone says anything. That I saw you when I went wandering," General Eagle says. Amanda and Saber nod and he heads off towards the back of the main house.

Saber steadying himself and then pulls Amanda into an embrace after he hears the general leave and sighs, his head against her shoulder.

"Are you all right?" Amanda asks.

"Aye, I just wanted you close for a minute. I am grateful everyday that I wake that you and I met. And just talking about things now reminded me of why. I am sorry that you have paid a heavy price just for knowing me, Amanda," he says. Amanda goes to reply and he places a finger gently on her lips. "However, without you, I wouldn't have our

children or grandchildren. None of which I would trade for anything. I just thought I should tell you that."

Amanda smiles and kisses him briefly before turning towards the door and guiding him to it. "We'd better get back. I don't want to be the brunt of their teasing for having disappeared unannounced for a couple of hours."

"Aye. Let's go," Saber says with a small smile.

Amanda chuckles and they continue making their way back towards the house. "Oh and for the record, I have no regrets either," she says and they talk as they come back up to their friends and family, joining in on the various conversations.

If you have read to this conclusion, I thank you and hope that you have enjoyed the story.