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Chapter Four

*A heart that's full up like a landfill
A job that slowly kills you
Bruises that won't heal*

*You look so tired and unhappy
Bring down the government
They don't, they don't speak for us
I'll take a quiet life
A handshake of carbon monoxide*

*No alarms and no surprises
No alarms and no surprises
No alarms and no surprises
Silent, silent*

- No Surprises, *by Radiohead*

We arrived home soon after dropping off Peter and Susan. As Dad, Lizley and I walked into the house, I took a look in the living room. In there I saw my Father. Once my shoes were off, I ran in and gave my Father a big hug. Despite the fact that Sophia and I called one parent Dad, and the other Father it wasn't formal. Both were very loving.

My Father wrapped his arms around me, and I felt loved. He had the same red skin that Aunt Lizley had, and the same funny head stuff but he looked all male. If he wasn't my Father, I'd probably be attracted to him. "I missed you so much" I said in a muffled sound into his shoulder.

"I missed you too, Alexander. I'm sorry I couldn't be here sooner. Things were busy." I just remained in my Father's warm embrace. He looked over to my Aunt. "Hi Lizley, it's good to see you again."

She smiled to my Father. "You too, Keith. It's been too long."

My Dad walked into the living room. "Alexander's Aunt Cathy says hello. She said to tell you Alexander that if you don't call her soon, she's going to hunt you down and give you money."

Aunt Cathy was wild. We always had a good time when I saw her, and I liked her a lot. My cousins too. Okay, they weren't really my cousins, and she wasn't really my Aunt, but close enough. It was treated like that since before I was adopted.

I moved out of the hug with my Father, to sitting closely next to him on the couch. He put his arm around my shoulders. "I'll make sure to call her tomorrow or something."

My Dad sat down in a high winged-back chair. "So Alexander, tell me this. In your History and Government class, what have they taught you about the Imperial government?"

"If I asked it like that, Dad I'd loose points. Ms. Laframboise would want me to phrase it as 'In your History and Government class, what have they taught you about the Rigellian government?'. She's really a tight wad." I smirked a little.

My Dad started to look a little cross with me now. "We're not in class right now, so please just tell me what I'm asking. It's important. We'll discuss the parent-teacher interview later."

My Father just gently rubbed my arm casually, lovingly. I know they both love me quite a lot. "At the very top you have the Pharaoh and the Queen, then you have the Chancellor and the Cabinet, then you have the Leffe which is parliament. But the Pharaoh and Queen don't need them to pass a bill to make law, because they can do it by decree if they wish. The Basic Law is the constitution, and is similar to a partnership agreement. It does contain some rights that the courts can uphold, but it can never be upheld against the crown. The crown has the final say in all things, and when they rule, it is without precedent unless they say it is so."

My Dad nodded in thought. "I couldn't have explained it better myself." He almost looked like he was looking for the right words or something.

"Jason, do you want me to..." my Father started to say.

"No, I said I would do it. It was my idea, after all." I had no idea to what they were referring. I just hated the vague references and the secrets. It wasn't usually this bad when I was with both of them, but that didn't happen very often. Every few months I'd see both of them at the same time. Usually it was only one of them at the time.

My Dad took a deep breath. "Alexander, the reason you are rarely with both your Father and me is because of security. We can't take the risk that the both of us could be killed."

Killed?!? What?!? Why would they be killed. "WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?" I exploded. This had me not just upset, but very angry.

My Father almost cuddled me. "Calm down, Alexander. It's not as bad as Jason is making it out to be. Take a deep breath, and then he will continue."

I took one deep breath.

Then two.

I was finally calm a few moments later.

My Dad looked at me with love in his eyes. It wasn't the first time I had seen it, but I could tell he might get mushy. "You were 3 when you were adopted. Unlike what you may have been told by your grandmother, you came from another polity. You weren't born in the Empire."

I just nodded a little. I had always considered that possibility. It didn't really bother me, because I always knew I was loved. Sure it was a surprise, but it wasn't bad.

"When you started kindergarten, we brought you here to live with your grandparents, and when your sister Sophia turned 4, she came to live here as well. We love you both very much, but it was simply safer for you to be here. You see your Father and I live on Rigel Prime. While normally a safe place, there are a lot of... schemers, con artists, and people who would do you ill."

"You mean like what happened to Sophia?" I asked curiously. This was a strange explanation.

"Yes. The Royal Court is full of people who only want one thing. To rise in status. Many of them would do anything to get it, and they would not see it beneath them to kill a Prince or Princess."

Huh? I was baffled, and my face clearly showed my confusion.

My Dad took another deep breath. "Alexander, your Father and I are the heads of state. Your Father is the Pharaoh, and I'm the Queen. You are the Crown Prince, and your sister is a Princess."

I just blinked. Not possible. I stood calmly from the sofa, and left the room. I walked into the kitchen, and poured myself a glass of iced tea. It was the frozen Nestea kind. It was the one I liked best.

I took my drink over to the kitchen table, and had a seat. I starred out the sliding glass door into the backyard. The sun had gone down an hour ago, but the backyard lights were still on. I sipped my drink, lost in thought. How could I be the Crown Prince? How could they be.... be... the Queen? My Dad, the Queen? This was way too weird. And my Father the Pharaoh? Never.

I finished my iced tea, and anger flashed in my mind. I threw the glass against the wall. I'm not a violent person, but right now I was so upset at the lies that it overtook the calmness I had enjoyed during the drink. This is of course, assuming they're not lying this time.

My Dad rushed into the kitchen after hearing the glass smash against the wall. "Alexander! You may be upset, but it is unacceptable to damage a wall and a glass because of it."

My Dad walked over to me, and gave me a big bear hug. I just started to cry on his shoulder. "How could you? How could you lie to me? You deceived me for 14 years. And you expect me to be okay with it? How can I ever trust anything you ever say again?" I was sobbing as I said this to him.

Whispering, my Dad said "We did it to protect you and Sophia. It would hurt very much if anything had happened to either of you. You have no idea the anguish we feel with her in the hospital at the moment."

I just continued to cry into my Dad's shoulder. I was so angry and upset with them, I couldn't put it into words. But my Dad's hugs had always helped before, perhaps they will help in time.

"Alexander, can we go back into the living room, there's more we need to discuss."

I just nodded a little, and doing the best we could, we went back in. My Father had moved off the couch, I sat down with Dad and he just continued to hold me. "Right now I really wish Peter was here, but I guess this is probably something I can't tell him."

My Aunt looked at me, and she nodded. I knew what she wanted me to do. "Dad, Peter's my boyfriend." There, I said it. They know.

"Yes, and?" was the reply I got. No big fuss, no teasing. Just continued love. "We suspected a few years ago. You can tell him if you want, Alexander. His security check came back clean."

"His security check?" I looked to my Dad's face, and then to my Father's face. I was again confused, but still angry deep down.

My Father spoke this time. "With what happened to your sister, we had the Royal Guard run security checks of all of your friends, and hers. We had to rule them out. If not us, the police would have done it."

I just nodded. It made sense, and I did love Sophia, even if we did bicker from time to time. What siblings don't?

My Dad rubbed my shoulder. "Alexander, we need to talk about Mrs. Theophilus. I talked to her at the parent-teacher interview before I came to the hospital."

I just looked towards the floor. Here it was, the smack down for getting a B+ in English. I had gotten a B+ in both English and Imperial History. Yuck.

"We don't think she is fit to teach you anymore. In fact, because of the security, you'll probably have to start going to a new school." My Dad calmly explained.

"What?!" I jumped up from the seat. "A new school?! And leave Peter? I love him!"

"Alexander" my Father started to say. "You can finish the year at the school and graduate there if you want, but you will have to be careful. Security would be stepped up, but it would be discreet so long as you keep it secret about being the Crown Prince. If it's revealed, you'll have to be escorted by armed guards, just like we are on Rigel Prime."

"You can tell Peter and Susan if you'd like, but you're out of Mrs. Theophilus's class. She's a security risk. Did you know she's homophobic? I will have the head of your protection detail meet with school security tomorrow to start arrangements, and you, I and Sophia will have to meet with the Principal" my Father explained. "Your school needs more open minded teachers."

I looked at my Dad and my Father for a moment. "Wait a minute, if I'm the Crown Prince, do I get my own starship? Like on *Star Trek*?" I really didn't want to talk about my stupid English teacher anymore. I never liked her, and if being the Crown Prince meant I got out of her class because of some heavy weights, then I'm all for it.

My Dad cocked his head a little to the right and said, "Alexander, are you feeling okay? I thought you were angry with the lies, and the position."

I shook my head, "Not angry at the position, Dad. Just the lies. It's still there, but a nice shiny new starship would certainly help it go away." I have a small grin. I was still very angry, but right now I wanted to see where I really stood.

My Dad sighed a little. "As the Crown Prince, when you start to decide to take on your formal duties, you will be assigned a heavy war cruiser to ferry you. It will be the same one time after time. But since you're *only* the Crown Prince, you can't give the Colonel of the ship any orders."

I scratched my chin a little. "But if they do wrong, you'll give them the smack down?"

My parents just had their heads in their hands, probably not sure what to do with me at the moment. Funny thing being able to be ferried anywhere you wanted to go. I once heard of a planet where they spend 12 hours a day having sex, and their days are 30 hours long.

"We won't need to" my Father said. "The Royal Family is held in very high regard. If they screw up, their own superior officers will take care of it. Now it's 11:00 pm. You need to get some sleep young man. You have school tomorrow, apparently. Sophia will be back on Thursday if the doctor clears her."

So I could tell Peter. This has possibilities.