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By Phoenix Rafael
prafael@myprivacy.ca

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Chapter Eight

*Lonely
The path you have chosen
A restless road
No turning back
One day you
Will find your light again
Don't you know
Don't let go
Be strong*

*Follow your heart
Let your love lead through the darkness
Back to a place you once knew
I believe, I believe, I believe
In you*

- I Believe in You, by Il Divo

It was a Wednesday, and things were back to normal. A few weeks had passed, and I had settled in well to my new English class. I still didn't like Ms. Laframboise my Imperial History and Government teacher, but we can't always change every teacher we get.

"Everyone did very well on last week's test. Alexander, I'm surprised with you. A+. Whatever you did, keep it up." Ms. Laframboise left my test on my desk. "The way you wrote, it almost seemed like perhaps you had some personal experience."

"Uh... well you see, I'm just trying harder in your class. I respect you a lot, and my Dad thought I could do better." I really had no idea what to tell her, so some BS should cover it for the time being.

"Well keep it up, Alexander and you will get a very good grade in my class." She moved on to passing out the rest of the tests. The test itself had been on Imperial Military History. There was a major essay on the ranks. Those are:

General
Lieutenant General (pronounced Leftenant General)
Major-General
Brigadier-General
Colonel
Commander
Major
Captain
Lieutenant (pronounced Leftenant)
Ensign
Cadet

Finally the bell rang, and I made my way to lunch. Susan and I got a salad in the lunch line, and sat at our table. Soon enough Peter and Mike had joined us, and we were talking about some upcoming social event.

"It's the party of the year, Alexander. We have to go!" Peter was trying to get me to go to a party of some sort. I didn't really care to go.

"You can go if you want to, but I don't want to go. Besides, you know what my Dad would say about it."

My Dad had come back to visit this week. He brought a few things with him for me to check out. Literature and stuff from previous Crown Princes. Most of it was quite boring, but *the book* was pretty interesting. It was a book that went from Crown Prince to Crown Prince and various notes made on important issues. My Father had even written on meeting Dad.

"Well maybe there's another way, Alexander" Susan spoke up after finishing a fork of salad.

Then we saw Shepard. He was looking quite delicious in his Royal Guard uniform. Wait, why was the Royal Guard here? Ryan was in the entourage, and so were the men that Peter had mistaken for *Men in Black*.

I crossed my arms, and looked at Ryan with a scowling face. Now he had just ruined everything. I did not want or need the stress associated with the entire school knowing that I had to be protected. Who the fuck did he think he was?

Then they managed to surprise me. All of them bowed in respect. "Your highness, my

apologies for the change to your security, but there's been a very big problem."

I tapped my foot, waiting for an explanation. I was none too happy at the moment, I was thinking of that party actually. You know, the angry and rebellious side of me wanted to go. If nothing else but as a big *SCREW YOU*.

"The RSS Imperial One was reported as missing late last night. We didn't want to say anything until it was confirmed, but no one can find your Father's ship. If that were the only bad news, we wouldn't be here. I'm sorry your highness, but your Dad was taken to St. Michael's Hospital in downtown Toronto for emergency surgery. Someone shot him multiple times when he headed out this afternoon." Ryan tried to explain.

I closed my eyes, and took a deep breath. I tried to keep from screaming out in the cafeteria. I didn't need or want to make a scene, one had already been created and it didn't need to get bigger. "Okay then, I will simply go into Toronto and see my Dad." I took another deep breath.

"There's more. Under the constitution, if anything should happen to both the Queen and the Pharaoh, and they are unable to perform their duties, a Regent shall take their place. Under their own orders, your highness, you are that Regent." Ryan finally got to the point.

I cocked my head, "What?"

"You will remain Regent until either such a time as both your parents resume their duties, die, or are determined to be unable to resume their duties. If either of those latter things happen, you will be inaugurated as the 9,215th Pharaoh. The Chief Justice is on standby for the next week or so." Ryan said this calmly, I know he wasn't trying to upset me.

"Oh, um...." I fidgeted a little. I didn't want to be a Regent. I just wanted to be a 17 year old High School student. Heck, I was still a virgin. Apparently loosing it wasn't a requirement to become the Pharaoh. "So what do I do?"

"We've already taken your sister to a secure location discreetly. Normally we'd advise you to travel to Rigel Prime, but your Dad is still alive, and on Earth. So Captain Shepard and his team here are going to take you to the hospital. You can get an update from on your Dad. When you're ready to leave, we'll take you to see your sister." Ryan explained.

I had to admit, it was an okay plan. At least Sophia was safe. "What about Peter, Susan and Mike? Now because of you, everyone knows they're associated with me."

Ryan shrugged a little. "To be honest, we hadn't thought that far ahead yet. And before you chew us out for not thinking ahead, we've been working double time for the last several hours, your highness."

I cocked my head a little. "Why would I chew you out for not thinking ahead?"

"It's something your parents would do, your highness. They don't tolerate that sort of thing at all. What do you wish us to do about them, your highness?" Ryan asked, clearly apologetic.

I looked at my friends, and gave a small evil grin. "Well..." I looked at Ryan's uniform, realizing I didn't know what his rank was. I couldn't very well address him as Ryan or Mr. Huntington "Well General Huntington, perhaps two of your best agents could take Susan home, she has a party to get ready for on Friday. Same with Peter." I looked over at Mike. "But Mike... there's no one at home to look after him. Perhaps Captain Shepard could be assigned to him for the duration of this situation?"

"I'm sorry your highness, but Captain Shepard is going to be taking you to the hospital and protecting you." Ryan clarified. I guess I had guessed the correct rank, because he didn't correct me.

I nodded a little. "Then Mike will simply have to come with us." Hmm... maybe I could play matchmaker. Might as well make use of a bad situation. The situation with my parents hadn't yet sunk in yet.

A few years ago I was with my Aunt Cathy when her father died. My Aunt can be scatterbrained at times, but when arranging the funeral, she was really professional. When I asked her about it, she said "I grieve for my father Alexander, but you still have to take care of business. The world doesn't stop just because a crisis has occurred in your life."

I suppose that was the situation I was in now. It's kind of scary to think that the Empire would be looking to me for leadership. Me, a 17 year old High School student. Okay, I did get an A+ on that test. Think the Leffe will care about that when I do something unpopular?

I stood from the table, and hugged Peter first. He offered me his condolences, and said I could call him whenever I wanted to, even in the middle of the night if I needed to talk. Susan was the next to hug me, and said much of the same. I winked at Mike and then he hugged me, and we all headed out of the cafeteria.

"It's like this, your highness." My Dad's personal physician had managed to make the long trip to Earth, and had just finished examining him. "The bullets missed any major organs. He's lucky that way, but we're not sure of the effect of the bullet he got in his head. It was removed, but only time will tell if he will fully recover or not. If he makes it through the night, he will live."

I nodded a little, sitting on an uncomfortable vinyl chair in the hospital's family room. Mike, and I were here listening to the doctor's report. Or rather I was listening to the report, and Mike was chatting quietly with Captain Shepard.

"We will let you know if his condition changes." The doctor said.

I nodded and looked to Captain Shepard. "Captain, I'm sorry to interrupt, but what are the security arrangements for my Dad?"

The blue man looked over to me, and looked apologetic. "I'm sorry, your highness. I got

carried away talking to Mr. Huntington here. I should have been paying more attention to you. We have two guards stationed outside his door, and two inside the room. Only authorized personnel with photo ID may enter. ID is checked every time, even if the guards recognize the person. Also a thumb print is used against the employee's record to verify identity."

I nodded. "That is acceptable, Captain."

As the doctor left the room, a tall man of about 6'7" came in, having to duck a little to clear the doorway. He was big and hairy. I blinked once, and then twice.

"Your highness, I'm General Meridian Lifdel of Imperial Intelligence." The tall man had introduced himself now. "We sent out our ship the RSS Yellowknife, and the Imperial Guard's RSS Stratichus to find your Father's ship. Incidentally we have assigned the RSS Agamemnon for your use during your term as Regent. Colonel Julia Blood is his commander."

"His commander, General Meridian?" I was confused by the reference.

"In the Empire, your highness ships are treated as a male entity, not female like humans on Earth" he explained to me.

"But some of them have female names?" I asked, scratching my head.

"Yes, your highness." That's all the explanation I needed for now.

I rubbed my eyes a little. I was tired. It had been a long day, and I needed some sleep. "Captain Shepard, what are the sleeping arrangements for me?"

"Your highness? It's two o'clock in the afternoon." Captain Shepard didn't seem very bright at the moment. Perhaps he had been dazed by Mike's muscles and attractiveness.

I looked plainly at Shepard. "Captain, I am tired. I have gotten a lot of upsetting news today, and as you say, it's only two o'clock. Now that I am the Regent, I'm certain there will be fifteen more things today requiring my attention, and all of them will be annoying. I want some sleep, and I want some sleep NOW! Do I make myself perfectly clear, Captain?"

I think I had been watching too many movies or TV shows with military personnel in them. But for the moment it seemed to all fit.

"Sir, yes sir." Shepard snapped to attention.

I shook my head. "At ease, Captain. Just tell me where the fuck I can go to sleep before I call Mike's Dad."

"We have a shuttle on the roof, your highness. It's the same one we used to bring you here. We can take you to the safe house your sister is in." Shepard explained.

I nodded tiredly. "Good, then let's do so now." I stood up and looked at the General. "Find my

Father, General and find him yesterday. I expect semi-daily reports from you on the situation until he is returned to me."

The General gave a nod. "Of course, your highness. I'd have it no other way. I'll give them to you in person if you'd like."

I shook my head, "That's not necessary, and would probably just add to my agitation. Just send a junior officer with a written report or something."

Mike, Shepard, and I went to the shuttle, and got settled in. I actually fell asleep in my chair, I was just that tired.