

H I H

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Chapter Nine

*Every time I think of you
I get a shot right through
Into a bolt of blue
It's no problem of mine
But it's a problem I find
Living the life that I can't leave behind*

*There's no sense in telling me
The wisdom of a fool won't set you free
But that's the way that it goes
And it's what nobody knows
And every day my confusion grows*

*Every time I see you falling
I get down on my knees and pray
I'm waiting for the final moment
You say the words that I can't say*

*I feel fine and I feel good
I feel like I never should
Whenever I get this way
I just don't know what to say
Why can't we be ourselves like we were yesterday*

- Bizarre Love Triangle, by New Order

I sat on the bench, watching the flame. I had woken up this morning, not knowing where I was. I had slept for 19 hours, and they had the decency to let me sleep. But I was restless and had to get out, so I had my security people bring me to the temple.

Brother Josh put his hand on my shoulder. "I do not envy you, Alexander. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes. Did you know that each Pharaoh rules for at least 100 years on average? Now Rigellians don't really have a problem, they have a long age span. But the occasional non-Rigellian Pharaohs and Queen's we've had have lead long lives. No one has ever really been able to explain it. The Scrolls along with the tales of The Legendary Warrior say that the Gods themselves will intervene in our affairs when they deem it necessary. So we gather they are the ones who grant the non-Rigellian's long life."

I looked over to the monk. "What's your point?"

"My point is that it is most likely that the Gods have intervened in this situation too." Josh decided to guess.

"And why would they do that? I'm a 17 year old who doesn't know the first thing about running an Empire." I sighed a little, and looked back at the flame.

Josh closed his eyes for a few moments, and then spoke. "To guide you. It may seem cruel, but you need to learn your new responsibilities really fast, and there's nothing better than on the job training."

I rubbed the bridge of my nose a little. "And my parents have to be out of commission for this training? Where am I supposed to go for advice?"

"Where do your parents go for advice? They have advisors, you can use them too. But they don't have anyone like them to turn to for advice, and it's something you have to learn to do without. You won't have all the answers, but neither do they."

A few minutes after Josh had spoken, a strange man walked over and took a seat on the other side of me. I looked over to him, "Can I help you?"

"Your highness, my apologies for interrupting your spiritual odyssey. I am Sedrick Killerguy, his Majesty the Pharaoh's Chief of Staff. We have received an appeal from a... Brandon Jeomery. His son is in a California hospital. The child has a rare genetic degenerative disease, and standard medical treatments aren't working. Mr. Jeomery and his doctor's have applied to use a controlled medicine called Life59. But the child has only a 30% chance of recovery when using the medication, so his request was denied by all levels of local, state, federal and finally Imperial health agencies."

I thought about what this man was telling me. "Wait, did you say Brandon Jeomery? Doesn't he play Captain Simon Vegaris on *Star Trek: Sisko's Revenge?*" What can I say, I'm a huge *Star Trek* fan, even if most of it is outdated by the Empire's level of technology.

The man looked at his papers, "Yes, your highness he is the same one."

“And he cannot afford Life59?” I wondered how much this medication really cost. If it had all these denials, it must be expensive.

The man looked to the floor, clearly embarrassed. “Well you see, your highness... the medication is made from the atypical sunflower grown on a small moon in the Revalari region. We only get five doses of the medication every two years. It cannot be replicated.”

“How many do we have in stock?” I wondered if anyone ever got approved for this medication.

“We have seven doses in stock, they cost about a million takHse each to the end consumer. To make the base cost is around three quarters of a million takHse. It's policy that we don't ask for money for controlled medications, as we don't want it to be seen as bribery.”

I sighed, and looked at the fire again. I rubbed my temples a bit, and thought about what Brother Josh had said. Brother Josh himself left just after Mr. Killerguy had arrived. “Prepare a shuttle, I want to evaluate the situation in person.”

“As you wish, your highness.”

Flanked by several members of the Royal Guard, I walked down a long, bright, sterile hallway. I had a friend when I was younger who spent a lot of time in the hospital due to chronic illness. Once you've seen one hospital, you've seen them all. And this one was just as sterile as the next.

Stopping at the nurses station, my new Chief of Staff who had been assigned to my Father previously, stepped up. “I'll arrange for the patient's chart, and to speak with the various officials.”

I nodded. “Which room is the child in, and what is his name?”

Mr. Killerguy looked at the patient board, “Room 513, and his name is Charley.”

I turned and started towards where I thought that room would be. I walked down the hall, finding the room quickly. I motioned for the guards to remain outside, and I walked through the open door. I saw the five year old little boy laying in a typical hospital bed with an IV connected. A worried father sat in the chair next to him.

I walked up to the other side of the bed, and smiled. “Hi, I'm Alexander. Some people have asked me to come and see you Charley.”

The little boy smiled. “Really? That's so cool, thank you Alexander.”

“How are you feeling?” I asked of the boy. His father was watching us chat, but didn't

interfere. And I definitely recognized him from TV.

The boy scrunched his face a little. "Tired, I'm tired all the time. Daddy says it's because I have this strange disease. I want to play with my friends, but I have to stay in bed or I'll die."

Mr. Killerguy came into the room, handing me Charley's medical chart. I didn't know medical stuff very well, but I did give it a good look. While I was reading, a doctor and some other people came into the room.

I looked over to the doctor, "From the report I got from Imperial Health, the medication for Charley here only has a 30% chance of working. Is there anything we can do to increase those odds?"

The white haired doctor shook his head. "No, your highness. We've gone over this with several doctors from multiple centres, and this medication alone may help. Even a combination could nullify any potential benefits the medication may have."

I looked over to another man, whom seemed to be wearing a black outfit with white stripes. "And you think the cost of this isn't justified by the risk?"

The man nodded. "If it were 50% or better, we'd have no problem approving it. But the risk is just too great given the limited supply and the cost."

I scratched my head a little. "How many doses have been given out in the last year?"

The man fidgeted a little. "None, your highness."

I raised an eyebrow. "None? Why not?"

The man shifted from side to side a little as well as his continued fidgeting. "Well you see, your highness we only get a small number of requests per year, and most don't meet the 50% threshold."

I hmmed. "How long until the medication expires after it is produced?"

"Five years, your highness."

I looked at the request form, and then at the man. I looked down to Charley's smiling face, and signed the form. "Doctor, I am approving your requested treatment plan. I expect regular reports on the progress of Charley."

Brandon, Charley's father, finally looked up at us. He gave a faint smile. "Thank you, your highness. You don't have any idea of what this means to our family."

I smiled to Brandon now. "Oh I have some idea, Captain Vegaris."

Brandon stood up now. "Your highness has seen my show?"

I walked over and shook his hand. "Until recently, I was just a regular Canadian teenager, Mr. Jeomery. Then the Gods decided to smack me upside the head and told me to smarten up. So your TV show was, and still is on my TV every week."

"Please, call me Brandon, your highness. I cannot express my gratitude enough." He was simply gushing now.

I smiled again, "If you'll call me Alexander, then we have a deal. As for gratitude, I suppose as part of my new public duties, I'll make it a point to stop by the set of your show sometime."

Handing the chart to a nearby nurse, my entourage started to flank me as I left the hospital room. When I got to the door, I stopped and turned to face Charley and Brandon. "Charley, get better soon so you can come with me to the set."

He got a huge grin. "Yes sir!"

I winked to the boy and headed out of the room. Stopping at the nursing station, I looked at the man from Imperial Health. "Revise your standards. If we have medication that is expiring instead of being used, then it is both a waste of money, and of resources. It's a crime that we could help to save lives with a medication like this, and yet it is denied. If this happens again, well... my parents will become more involved."

I didn't give him the chance to respond. I turned on my heels, and headed straight down the hall to the elevators.

On the bright side, I met a hot actor, and I'm going to get to see the set of a *Star Trek* series. Perhaps this job wasn't so bad. I think I'll have to review more of these appeals my parents get. I could be exploring and meeting great new people. As for boldly going anywhere, well... my Dad once said I had the attitude of a bull in a china shop.

Perhaps it was time to change the world.