

~ A New Beginning ~

by romansilence

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Sexual Disclaimer: If the idea of two adult women in love with each other bothers you, my stories might just not be for you.

Language Disclaimer: English is not my first language. So, please let me know if something is wrong or stylistically out of line - and please don't blame my betas; they have a hard enough job as it is. So, special thanks go to Pam and Mary for their great work.

Additional Disclaimer: This is a story in progress. So, I apologise in advance for all the loose ends it might create.

Summary: Seven years after the civil war on Earth Captain Susan Ivanova gets a new assignment and maybe a new chance at life.

Chapter One: The Day of the Dead

Six months after Captain Matthew Gideon and the crew of the *Excalibur* finally found a cure for the Drakh virus devastating Earth, Captain Susan Ivanova of the deep space explorer *Jefferson* found herself with nothing to do. Her commanding officer had forced her to take some of her accumulated leave, the first since her return to Earth after the civil war more than seven years ago, the first since Marcus' death, since the Ranger with the British accent had sacrificed his life to save hers.

She had been ordered to take at least two months of leave to relax and "recharge her energy cells", as General Holland had termed it, before taking command of a new ship. The details he gave her were rather sketchy. He only told her that the new ship would be state of the art, the fastest and most advanced ship the scientists of Earth and the Interstellar Alliance were able to build. He had also said that she would get all the details once she reported to Babylon 5 at the end of her mandatory two-months of leave.

Susan was not used to have nothing to do; she was not used to feeling useless and her first instinct had been to fight General Holland's orders, but she also was a soldier at heart and would never willingly disobey such an order. Being on a deep space explorer meant that it was practically impossible to stay up to date with the events on Earth and in the rest of the galaxy. Though her interest in politics was rather limited, the situation with President Clarke and the resulting civil war had taught her that it always was a good idea to be informed. So, during the first half of her leave she caught up on the news, starting with details about how the *Excalibur*

had found the cure ISN would never know about, to the recent activities of the "Remember Byron"-movement and the diplomatic tensions among the members of the Interstellar Alliance under her former commanding officer John Sheridan.

After that she grew restless and finally accepted Michael Garibaldi's invitation to visit with him and his rapidly-growing family on Mars. Even with all these years of not having seen each other, Michael still knew her too well and had no problem to look behind her carefully neutral façade.

All in all it was his fault that she now was sitting where she was, in one of the luxuriously appointed guest rooms on the Brakiri home world. One evening, when she had had far too much to drink he had told her about the "Day of the Dead" he had experienced a few years back while still on Babylon 5 in the year after the war. He had told her that had been life-altering for him and that she had a chance to experience the same. Susan started to protest that she had no need to change her life but Michael stopped her with a pointed look at her shot glass and a deep look into her eyes. *He definitely knew her too well.*

It seemed that though the comet the Brakiri held sacred usually returned only about every two hundred years an explosion at the rim had altered its course considerably, so it would be passing Brakir again in a few weeks. To the Brakiri it was an omen of great portent.

Susan had been intrigued by his suggestion and had booked transport on an Alien vessel leaving for Brakir. It would have been faster and even more comfortable to use a military transport but most officers and enlisted personnel even after all these years still treated her like some sort of hero, or worse an icon of freedom, because of the transmissions she had made as the Voice of the Resistance. She never had been comfortable with the unwanted fame and recognition.

Before even starting on this journey half-way across the galaxy the rational part of herself, the stoic Earthforce officer, had argued that giving credence to this particular alien superstition was wrong and a serious waste of time and resources. The Human, the Russian part of her, however, knew that she had to take this chance; that she at least had to try. The idea of meeting someone from her past, one of her loved ones, possibly, was too intriguing to resist - at least if it really worked.

Fatalism was an integral part of her Russian heritage but the other part was some sort of stubborn hope - and it was equally as strong though not as easily acknowledged. The combination was what had driven Russian history for hundreds of years. Now it compelled her to act; an instinct more than anything. And if she had learned anything in her time on Babylon 5 it was to listen to her instincts, however reluctant she might be to admit it.

Susan had been afforded quarters on arrival, sumptuous quarters suited for a state visitor. Her meagre baggage was quickly put away. Two young servants brought in an evening meal for two, and when she asked about it they told her that it was for the guest she would probably have during the night. They said that sometimes the dead had a very healthy appetite and left her room giggling at her slightly raised eyebrow.

The sun went down and soon after the scant illumination in Susan's quarters flickered, changed

to a red hue for a moment, and reasserted itself. From what she had heard about the day of the dead, she had expected someone from her past appearing more or less in front of her. But nothing happened.

Susan took a shower and relaxed on her bed; at least she tried to relax. With every heartbeat she expected to see her mother, her brother, her father, Talia, Marcus, even Kosh or a number of other aliens. But though more comfortable, more luxurious than most other sleeping quarters ever assigned to her, these were just as empty.

Susan felt her anger rising and she wished more than anything else for just one shot of Vodka but contrary to her habit she didn't have any. Though she had been afforded all the privileges of a high ranking diplomat the Brakiri security officer had insisted that no alcohol was brought onto their planet because the last time they had had some problems with inebriated aliens.

Oh, how she wished for a drink or two. Susan started to exercise to stay in control of her emotions; and at the end of her routine she was out of breath but not less anxious. She tried to meditate but couldn't reach the peace of mind she needed. It reminded her too much of Marcus who with his enthusiasm had overcome her initial reluctance and taught her this technique during long hours on board of a White Star ship.

The whole night she waited for something to happen, and her mind kept wandering back to the past, to all the people she had lost over the years. Rationally she knew that there was nothing she could have done to keep her mother alive or her brother. She knew that her father would not have lived longer had she stayed at his side. She knew that there was nothing she could have done to save Talia but couldn't help berating herself for not having kept Marcus safe.

Susan had been aware for some time that the irritating Ranger was attracted to her but in hindsight the signs that it had been much more were quite obvious. She should have picked up on it earlier. She then would have been able to let him down gently; he would have had a chance to fall out of love with her, and he would not have given his life to save hers. He would not have died and she would be resting in peace now.

She tried to imagine the Vodka burning down her throat and chasing away her memories and her guilt but thinking about it only made her crave the real thing even more. And in sudden insight she understood that for years she had used the alcohol as a shield against her emotions and against the world.

The first rays of a new dawn were beginning to streak through her window. Disappointment was making headway in her; and for the first time this night, she closed her eyes in exhaustion. Then there was a voice clawing its way into her consciousness - a voice she had expected, no, she had hoped to hear.

It was the voice of her mother; the voice she remembered from the time before PSI-Corps had found out about her abilities; the voice from the time before the drugs had begun to destroy her personality and had driven her to kill herself. It was the voice haunting her dreams, the voice keeping most of her nightmares at bay.

"Trust your dreams, my daughter," it said. "Trust your feelings. There's more to you than they know and much more than you know. Trust your heart. Listen to your heart - because the heart is the reflection of the soul. Trust your heart; that's all the protection you'll ever need."

"My heart and I don't talk anymore." It was the same answer she once had given the mysterious Lorien on the eve of the final battle in the Shadows' war.

"Oh, Susushka, you never did anything but act on your heart's fears and desires." The voice laughed, the gentle laugh that had always managed to bring her out of a bad mood - and then it faded away.

Susan stayed on Brakir for another week. She went for long runs and even longer walks, spent time in the gym, and except for one dinner with Coulenbrac, the former Brakiri Ambassador on Babylon 5, she couldn't politely refuse, she didn't socialise. Her hosts thought that she just needed the time to cope with what she had learned during the day of the dead, and in a way they were right.

After waking up she had tried to put the memory of her dream or whatever it had been out of her mind but one thing kept coming up. "Trust your heart; that's all the protection you'll ever need."

She didn't know if she would ever trust her heart again, people got hurt whenever she did, but she didn't want to live the rest of her life hiding behind a shield, and ever since Marcus' death alcohol, her nightly shots of Vodka had become her shield. So, she used the time to purge her system from its addiction and arrived at Babylon 5 in better physical shape than she had been in a long time.

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Chapter Two: Coming Home?

Captain Susan Ivanova closed her eyes as soon as the flight attendant from the private transport she was on announced that their destination would be coming into view. Most of the other passengers, in contrast, tried to get a good look at the looming shape of Babylon 5, its blue and grey hull contrasting with the almost glowing yellow of Epsilon 3.

To them it was a vacation spot, a chance for adventure and financial gain, or simply a rest place on route towards other promising worlds.

To Susan it was not as straightforward. Babylon 5 once had been her home; now, it was only a reminder of everything she had lost. But she didn't need to be reminded. Marcus' sacrifice and Talia's probable death were never far from her mind; and since she refused herself the blessing of Vodka induced oblivion, she only had become aware of how much they still dominated her thoughts. She still was angry with herself for how much she had let her life be regulated by the

clear liquid. She no longer would rely on such crutches; that was not who she was and it certainly was not who she wanted to be.

Susan had been ordered to report to Colonel Elizabeth Lochley, the station commander, to receive her new orders at the end of her enforced two months of leave. The officer in her was curious about her new command and the new ship, in fact she was looking forward to the challenges it would hopefully bring, challenges that would allow her to escape her memories, to escape the two gaping wounds in her heart. *Work had always been her one saving grace, she thought ruefully, the one thing that kept her from wallowing in self-pity and helped her to stand the constant pain if she concentrated her thoughts on work, on her duties - it had worked after her mother's death and it had worked after Ganya's death. And it hopefully would work now. Yes, it was another shield to hide from herself and the world but it was a shield which she would not give up because, she admitted to herself, over the years it had become a part of what and who she was.*

Susan still had two days to the end of her leave, and though she was anxious to find out what the brass had in mind for her, she decided not to report to Colonel Lochley any earlier than required. Two days would just be enough time for a walk down memory lane and yet not enough to think too deeply about the past.

She kept her eyes closed when the flight attendant's next announcement made the other passengers scurry back to their seats to prepare for the docking procedure. Susan still knew every single step by heart, every manoeuvre of the pilot, every terse instruction from Command & Control. The slight movement of the ship told her that they were nearing docking bay two.

At this time of the day there would be at least two more passenger ships coming in at roughly the same time. That would give her the chance to get lost in the crowd. Now, all she needed was a young, inexperienced security officer to check her ID. Maybe it would even be fun to walk the station anonymously. Most of the people she had known in the past were gone and out of uniform they probably wouldn't even recognise her.

Luck, however, was not on her side this day. Security Chief Zack Allen was standing next to the young customs officer, scanning the crowd. For a moment she was tempted to sneak in via one of the various unofficial back alleys, but Susan also knew that she could not hide from the few friends left on the station indefinitely. So, she mentally squared her shoulders and took her place in the line.

Susan didn't have to wait for long. Zack saw her and drew her out of the line, hugging her like a long lost family member. Never having been a fan of public displays of affection, she was a bit startled, but recovered quickly.

"Hello Zack. You're looking good. Things must be rather quiet around here if you have the time to be on the look-out for me."

"That's one way of putting it, Susan. I'm glad you're here. We have been checking the passenger lists of all flights coming from Brakir ever since Garibaldi told me that you went there for their

Day of the Dead. The boss wants to see you, ASAP."

"I'm still on leave for two more days, Zack. Officially, I'm not even here yet."

"Sorry, Susan, orders are orders. The Colonel said as soon as possible, and she gets as soon as possible, and that's now."

"Alright Zack. And now also means that I don't get to change into my uniform first, right?" He smiled at her comment but it didn't quite reach his eyes. This was the last proof she needed to know that something was up and that she probably would not like it. "Then let's go, Zack. Far be it from me to let the almighty leader of Babylon 5 wait."

"Great, Susan. We can catch up later."

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Susan Ivanova and Elizabeth Lochley had never met before but each woman had heard of the other; this still was a man's army and high-ranking female officers were all but commonplace. Susan entered John Sheridan's former office, immediately taking in that it lacked even the slightest personal touch. She also saw the slightly rumpled uniform and the dark circles under the other woman's eyes and for the first time in too long her curiosity was piqued.

Elizabeth in turn studied the trim figure of the Russian who even in civilian attire couldn't deny her military background. How had John put it? "The epitome of an officer, a terrible enemy, and the best friend one could ever wish for." Her ex-husband was not one to exaggerate. Since his call she had been looking forward to work with the other woman but now they would have just have enough time for her to hand over the reins of Babylon 5. Elizabeth, however, saw also more than a competent officer. She saw a very familiar pain in the unusually blue eyes of her visitor and instinctively knew that like herself this woman had lost too many of her loved ones.

"Captain Ivanova, I'm glad you arrived early. Please, take a seat, let's talk first," Elizabeth said with an inviting smile that still could not entirely mask her bone-deep weariness.

"If you don't mind, Colonel, I'd rather stand. It was a long flight and I'm glad to be back on my feet. I'm also sure that you have better things to do than chat with a complete stranger."

Elizabeth's smile grew surprisingly more genuine at the almost rude answer of the other woman. *Yes, they had a lot in common*, she thought.

"You are right, Captain, it has been a long day. We might have a chance to talk over a drink in a more private setting some other time. Your initial orders were to report here to receive command of a new vessel, right?"

"Those were General Holland's orders. He said that you would give me any pertinent data I'll

need," Susan answered matter-of-factly.

"According to President Sheridan your new ship is the most advanced space ship ever built with the contribution of humans, superior to every other vessel under the command of the Interstellar Alliance."

"Sounds intriguing. But what has President Sheridan to do with all of this?" Susan asked.

"The ship you will command, if you accept the assignment, will be under the sole authority of President Sheridan. You'll still get your pay from Earthforce but only President Sheridan and Delenn in her function as Ranger One will give you your orders."

Suddenly Susan's weariness was gone. "So, I guess the crew will not be exclusively Earthforce?"

"No, but as far as I know the members of the Alliance were still arguing about the details. I was only told that Earthforce personnel will work with a compliment of Rangers and members from other Alliance worlds. There also will be a mixed group of scientists. The ship is behind schedule. The last communiqué I received spoke about a one or two weeks' delay. The schematics and technical details have already been uploaded into the computer of your guest quarters to help you familiarise yourself with the ship." Elizabeth answered.

"Will all of the crew be assigned to me or can I choose some of them myself?" Susan asked.

"I don't know. You'll have to ask either the President or Ranger One. One of them will bring the ship here and give you your first assignment. If you accept the command, of course."

"I would be stupid if I refused such a chance, Colonel Lochley." Susan answered.

"When I read your service report I at first had my doubts, Captain. In the last four years you refused two promotions," Elisabeth said.

Susan listened for hints of disapproval in the woman's voice but she only heard natural curiosity. So she answered, "I was not ready to take on a pure desk job, Colonel Lochley, and these promotions would have done exactly that."

"That's what President Sheridan said when Earthforce tried to insist on someone else in the command seat," Elizabeth said with a grin, and Susan knew that she somehow had just passed a test.

"Now for something else. While you wait for your ship, I have a job for you, Captain Ivanova."

"Security Chief Allen mentioned that you have been waiting for me, Colonel."

"Yes, you came just in time to take over for me for a while. President Sheridan has asked me to mediate some delicate negotiations starting tomorrow. They will take place onboard a White Star in neutral territory. He didn't tell me exactly what they would be about or who the parties

involved are. The final briefing is scheduled for tomorrow morning.

"Anyway you will take over for me while I'm gone. I had hoped that we would have more time to ease the transition but it will have to do. Babylon 5 is still the same crazy place it always has been and the regulations have not changed so much as to pose a problem for you. So, I expect my station to be still in one piece when I come back."

For a full thirty seconds Susan stared at the other woman: stuck on Babylon 5 for two weeks, in command of Babylon 5... The implications, both professionally and personally, were just too much to contemplate now; so, Susan did what she did best, she snapped into soldier-mode.

"Yes, Colonel, I'll do my best. When do you expect me for the briefing?"

"At 0800. Captain Ivanova. One of the security officers will escort you to your temporary quarters. Dismissed."

Susan saluted crisply and left the room without another word. It was no surprise to find Zack waiting for her. "Susan, I had your luggage already transferred to our new VIP quarters. I hope you don't mind."

"VIP quarters? Please don't tell me you're talking about these pretentious things on the diplomatic deck?" she asked.

"Honestly, Susan, I'd never do that to you. I know you don't like frilly and overdone. Personally, I think the only people really comfortable in these rooms are Centauri, and there's not too many of them around at the moment. No, when Lochley insisted on staying in your old quarters, even after the President moved to Minbar, his old rooms were transformed to VIP quarters, designed for military dignitaries only. You are only the third person to use them in almost six years."

"Well, in this case I should find my way without help, Zack, and you can go back to your duties."

"I'm off duty since you entered Lochley's office, and I had hoped that we could catch up over a drink at the bar, that is if you're not too tired."

Instinct told Susan to refuse his offer and use fatigue as her way out but she saw the hopeful glint in his friendly eyes and accepted. "In this case, let's go."

-X-X-X-

Three hours later, Susan fell on the couch in John's former quarters. Zack had filled her in on the highlights of seven years of near-disasters, diplomatic functions, run-ins with the PSI-Corps, the ongoing bickering between the commander of Babylon 5 and Teresa Halloran, President Sheridan's chief of covert operations. He told her what he knew about some of the people with

which they had worked, and many other things. She in turn had regaled him with some of the more humorous encounters the *Jefferson* had had in deep space and a couple of the dicier situations they had escaped.

Susan had smelled the alcohol hanging in the room like a dense cloud and felt its pull, the need to down two quick shots and then hold onto the third for a bit longer before also draining it in one gulp. But she had stuck to orange juice, freshly pressed from the hydroponics bays. At his questioning look she had just shrugged her shoulders and told Zack what John had told her when he first had been transferred to the space station. "It's practically impossible to get something fresh on a deep space mission. I'll enjoy it to the fullest as long as I can."

Zack had nodded unconvinced and had had the decency not to point out that she had been on leave for the last two months and thus should have had ample opportunity to fulfil her cravings for fresh fruits. Instead he launched into a tale about a thief trying to hide contraband in a hollowed out artificial leg and his surprise when the communicator he had unwittingly grabbed began to beep at the check-in point for his transport.

To her own surprise Susan had enjoyed the evening with her old friend. Though they had been through a lot together, he was not close enough to her to be able to see behind her mask, not like Garibaldi had a couple of weeks ago, not like John or Delenn.

She quickly rose and began to unpack her few belongings to keep the memories at bay and twenty minutes later washed the last traces of this day off her tired body and fell in a deep, surprisingly dreamless sleep.

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Chapter Three: The First Wave

After having spent one hour in the briefing and two more being filled in on the more crucial things going on at the station at the moment, Captain Susan Ivanova returned from seeing Colonel Lochley off to the transport. It would bring Lochley first onboard a White Star which would then go to sector 14 where the negotiations should take place.

Susan had a ton of paperwork to read through before being really able to do her job here adequately, but her mind kept going back to the debriefing about the negotiations and the fact that sector 14 in her opinion was still too close to Babylon 5. Whatever happened out there could easily spill over to the station and as odds usually went, especially with the parties involved, it would. She had to admit though that bringing Earthdome, Psi-Corps and the rogue telepaths of "Remember Byron" on a negotiation table was a daring plan, and at least from her point of view completely out of character for at least one of the main players.

So, her first order of business had been to keep the sector under constant surveillance. There still was a no-flight-order in place for the whole region of space. Both the White Star and the other

two ships at the rendezvous would use a new kind of cloaking technology that should keep them off the screens. Anything showing up therefore was trouble she wanted to know about before it caught the station unprepared.

The highlight of her day, so far, was seeing Corwin, now a Lieutenant Commander, in command of the Control Centre and doing a very good job. She remembered the young man she had met more than ten years prior, fresh from the Academy, eager, wide-eyed and so unsure of himself that he had trembled every time he had had to report to a superior officer.

Twelve years, no, probably even more... and yet to her it seemed as if it had been only yesterday. Susan called herself back to order and concentrated on the stack of papers in front of her. She was not yet old enough to lose herself in memories.

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The day passed without any major crisis, to Susan's utter surprise. She intended to grab a bite to eat at the Zocalo before retiring to her quarters but when she saw the vendors' stalls with their finger food and knick-knacks and fresh fruits, memories she had thought long forgotten swept over her like a wave.

Short flashes showed her Marcus and her old self walking past some of the stalls without really seeing them, too swept up in one argument or the other. She saw herself when she still tried to avoid meeting Talia Winters, seeing her as just another PSI Corps agent, just another threat. She saw herself hiding behind one of the stalls, following the blonde telepath with her eyes, observing her.

The images were so strong; they were almost like a blow to her chest. Susan kept herself from falling by grabbing the wooden handle of one of the vendor's carts to her right. A muscled hand steadied her and brought her back to reality. She looked down at the scaly arm of a Drazi male, a fruit vendor Talia had befriended. He had been the only one to have her favourite fruits in stock. It looked like an apple but tasted like a cross between a maracuja, or passion fruit, and a pineapple. It was a Minbari fruit called cakjoya.

He looked at her with a gentle smile, well, as gentle as a Drazi is able to smile, and then offered her two cakjoya. Susan instinctively reached for her credit chip to pay him but he stopped her and said, "For remembrance, Captain Ivanova. It's good to have one of the old guard back here. Have a good day, Captain."

Susan was too stunned to offer anything in answer, and suddenly he was nowhere to be found.

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Susan returned to her quarters and thoughtfully put the cakjoya on the kitchen counter. She looked at them as if at an enemy. At first she had not liked them, too sweet for her taste, but after having been fed small bits by her lover's hand she had revised her initial judgement and come to love the taste.

Susan remembered the first few weeks on board of the *Jefferson*. Her head cook had somehow put his hands on quite a cartload of cakjoya without really knowing what they were. They were high in vitamins and fibres and would do her crew good. She had told the cook how to prepare them and had then done her best to avoid the messhall until all of his cakjoya provisions were gone. The smell and taste reminded her too much of her lost lover.

She stripped and stepped under the steaming hot water of the shower. In the past it had always helped her to regain control of her raging emotions, had washed them away as if they never had existed. This time it didn't work, and she wasn't surprised.

Putting on her robe she walked back into the living room and once again stared at the innocent fruit. She turned towards the couch and activated the view screen in an effort to take her mind off her past. Soon she turned her head back towards the kitchen counter, her eyes irresistibly drawn towards the cakjoya and suddenly she remembered the first time they had made love.

It had taken Susan months to admit her attraction to Talia Winters, the station's resident commercial telepath, and even more time to stop rebuffing her overtures of friendliness, of friendship. Talia's persistence had worn down her stubbornness, but it still had taken weeks to go any further than just talking since the first time the telepath had taken off her gloves and the PSI Corps insignia. It had been harder and harder for Susan to keep her hands off Talia. She regularly had dominated Susan's dreams. In her dreams they kissed and made love but when it finally happened for real, she had not been prepared for the overwhelming sensations.

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[Flashback]

Talia warned her that she would not be able to keep her blocks up and that she would know all of Susan's thoughts and feelings should they ever make love, but Susan knew that. She knew that Talia then would know what she had hidden her whole life. She would know that she was a latent telepath, a very weak telepath, but even weak telepaths were forced to join PSI corps or end up in jail. Susan knew what she was risking and she knew that for the first time ever she would willingly disregard the first orders she ever had been given. "Tell no one. Let no one in." It was the first thing her mother had ever taught her, long before she had been able to understand why.

With her former lovers it had been easy. She had kept it on a purely physical level. On the few occasions when there had been an emotional connection with her sex partners, she had not been able to keep herself from reading their emotions. They never had been aware of it and she hated it when it happened, but she also knew that there was nothing she could do to stop it. A few

times she had been only a hair's breadth away from telling them but her mother's warning had been stronger.

"Tell no one. Let no one in."

But Talia was different. She never had felt for anyone what she felt for her, and she wanted to let her in. If she were wrong about Talia she would be risking everything she was, everything she had achieved in her life. One look into Talia's eyes, however, and she knew that she could trust her.

From the first moment her fingertips touched Talia's skin Susan knew that it no longer mattered. She instinctively pulled Talia closer until the whole lengths of their bodies were touching. Susan drowned in Talia's blue eyes, willingly and consciously letting go of the defences her mother had taught her to hold in place every moment of her life.

This time she did not wait for them to falter on their own. The voices she heard every time she drank too much and every morning just after waking up were back for a moment; and then there was only Talia left.

They still had not gone further than mere touching and yet it was more intense than anything she had ever felt before. Susan felt Talia's surprise at feeling her mind reach out for her. She felt how the other woman opened herself up to her and let herself fall into the embrace of Talia's thoughts and emotions.

For the first time in her life Susan let someone in; for the first time since her mother's death she felt the presence of another mind in her mind, and for the first time she didn't feel lonely. For the first time she felt at home and safe while making love. But it was more than just that. She simultaneously felt like plunging in a cold lake after a scorching hot day and like the first time flying a Starfury in battle, frightening and wonderful and addictive.

Susan felt Talia in her mind and after the first few minutes of getting used to it, it went beyond anything she ever would have dared imagine. She'd likely never be able to put the experience into words.

Later, much later, when their respective defences were almost completely back in place and Talia was comfortably snuggled in Susan's arms, she said, "Thank you, Susan!"

"It's me who should thank you, Talia."

"I love the way my name sounds when you say it. But you're wrong: thank you, Susan. You're possibly the bravest soul I ever met, Susan Ivanova. Thank you for trusting me with your secret. I'll not betray it."

"I know you won't, Talia. I never trusted anyone with this before, no one but my mother."

"Your secret is safe with me, my beloved."

Susan closed her arms more firmly around Talia's slightly shorter body. She closed her eyes and once again lowered her protective walls, concentrating her thoughts on Talia.

I never thought that making love could feel this way, she sent.

Me neither, was the soft answer. It was so much more than I ever felt before.

That broke Susan's concentration and her walls automatically snapped back in place. She looked at her new lover with question marks in her eyes.

"It's true, Susan," this time Talia spoke out loud. "In my first year here I tried to explain to Commander Sinclair what it's like when telepaths make love. I told him that once your defences are down it's all mirrors reflecting each others feelings, deeper and deeper. I told him that somewhere along the line the two souls would mix, and that the feeling was so profound it made you hurt.

"That's how it always has felt for me before today, before now. Now, I know that it was not the whole truth. The only hurt, the only pain I felt was when our souls separated. I thought that making love with Jason was the pinnacle of perfection. I was wrong."

"Jason Ironheart was a very strong telepath, even when you met the first time, and his gift made you much stronger, my Talia. That's what his friend said to me before he had to leave the station after the incident with Bester."

"No, Susan, I don't think that it has anything to do with personal strength or the question if I'm still a P5. Two years ago I also told Commander Sinclair that making love was the only moment in a telepath's life when we no longer hear the voices of all the others and that's still true - but every time before when the two souls mixed there was only silence. This time it was as if for the first time I could feel my own soul and yours and together they didn't cause silence but the most perfect, the most harmonious melody one could ever imagine."

"That's what it felt like for me, but I'm not even a P1. From what I read I should not have been able to feel you this intensely. It doesn't make any sense."

"Does it have to, my beloved?"

Susan saw the sincerity in Talia's big blue eyes and decided that she didn't really need a rational explanation, but she also heard her thoughts at the edge of her own.

You're stronger than you think, my Susan.

[End of Flashback]

That last thought snapped Susan out of her journey along memory lane. As if waking from a dream, she found that she had taken one of the cakjoya, peeled and eaten most of it while in the grip of her memories. She felt the urge to wash the taste down with a big mouthful of vodka but she didn't. Instead she raised her hands to her face and revelled in the unique scent of the Minbari fruit.

Once again, perhaps for the millionth time since the implanted personality had taken Talia from her, she asked herself why they never had come for her.

Had Talia really been able to hide the knowledge of her limited telepathic abilities from Bester and his researchers? If not they would have come for her long ago. At the least Bester would have tried to blackmail her with his knowledge.

Susan usually shied away from this particular strand of thought. She had it locked up in the deepest recesses of her mind, together with a few other things like the question if Talia was really dead.

Bester had said that she had been vivisected after the implanted personality had told them everything it knew - but had that been the truth or had he only said it to get a rise out of one of us? Perhaps Talia's body was still alive and out there, forced to serve the Corps and the heartless bitch that had taken over her body. Talia would rather be dead, Susan knew that for a fact and it shocked her out of her musing.

She mechanically put the peeled off skin in the waste bin and returned to the couch. Her mind went back to the stray thought she had picked up from Talia that first time they had made love. After that first time neither of them had felt a need for further discussion of the experience; they simply had enjoyed it.

You're stronger than you think, my Susan, Susan remembered hearing Talia think.

She really wished she were but the last seven years had been proof of the contrary. She had not been strong enough to really start over; and now she was back where it all had started and she didn't know if she really wanted to start again.

Perhaps it was time to stop running. Perhaps it was time to call it a day and go to bed.

-X-X-X-

Chapter Four: The Hour of the Wolf

The sound of the Babcom jostled her out of a deep sleep. She had fallen asleep quickly with the taste of the cakjoya fruit still on her lips and once again she had slept without being disturbed by

dreams. Long habit had her in her robe and in front of the view screen before the worried face of Lieutenant Commander Corwin appeared, flanked by Zack Allen. The Chief of Security also looked far from relaxed.

"Report!" she ordered.

"Sorry to disturb you in the middle of the night, Captain Ivanova, but there has been an incident."

"What kind of incident?"

"It seems that we lost a section of the station, about seventy feet in diameter of sector brown in down-below disappeared from our sensors half an hour ago. Za... Security Chief Allen sent a patrol down and they found some sort of energy barrier. We're unable to penetrate it, not with scans, not physically, not with weapons," Corwin reported.

"According to protocol you are the only one able to call a station wide alarm." Zack added from behind Corwin's left shoulder.

"Any idea of what kind of energy the barrier consists?"

"Our scans were inconclusive, Captain. At first we thought that the Brakiri had something to do with it, but I cross referenced this signature with the one we have on file from their Day of the Dead. It doesn't match. All we can say at the moment is that there has been no considerable increase of the energy output of the station. Whoever has put up the barrier has not done so by tapping into our energy system."

"Hmm. Zack, I want you to pull your people back from the barrier and establish a security perimeter around the affected area as best as you can. Corwin, scan the surrounding space. Notify me should you find even the slightest anomaly. Man all battle stations and put security on quiet alert. I want to avoid a panic. We're lucky that it's in the middle of the night. Zack, meet me in down below, I want to have a look at that myself. Ivanova out."

Susan quickly dressed in a fresh uniform, pulled her hair in a ponytail and purposely strode out of her quarters. She was reasonably sure that the Brakiri had nothing to do with the current situation.

When she had had dinner with the former Ambassador Coulenbrac on their home world he had loudly complained about Colonel Lochley's unreasonable refusal to sell a part of Babylon 5 to his successor to give his people off-world the opportunity to celebrate this unexpected Day of the Dead. She had done it almost seven years ago and according to Michael had been stuck in it together with Emperor-to-be Londo Molari and him. Susan suspected that she had seen someone that night she had not been ready to meet.

No, the Brakiri had nothing to do with this.

Zack was waiting for her at the end of the transporter ride, tugging at the collar of his uniform

jacket. "Stop fighting it, Zack. Once you do, it will stop being uncomfortable."

"Easier said than done, Captain. You know, I didn't like the Minbari designed uniforms we got from Delenn but they did fit a hell of a lot better than these things do - and now you're telling me that it's all a question of attitude?"

"In a way it is, Zack. It might also help if you have your tailor line the inside of your collar with silk or something similar," Susan concluded with a smirk.

"You'd think someone could have told me that years ago. Here we are; it's right around the corner."

Four heavily armed and armoured security guards were kneeling with their backs to them; their weapons trained towards a blue wall of energy. It was simmering like water cascading down a sunlit mountain side.

Despite Zack's shouted warning she stepped closer until she was only a nose-length away. The temptation to touch it was strong, very strong, but Susan knew that it would unduly worry the chief of security. She had at least to give him a warning.

Susan took a deep breath and turned around. "Move your people back to the main junction of the sector, Zack. This is something I have to do alone."

"Sus..., Captain Ivanova, please reconsider. You don't know what's behind this thing and it's my job to keep everyone on the station safe, including you."

Zack had always been a friend, so, she added, "You can stay here and keep an eye on me, 'til I'm in."

He only nodded and ordered his people to leave. "You know what this is, right?"

"I'm not entirely sure, but I have a pretty good idea. I think that this barrier consists of psychic energy. I've seen something like this before. In my first year here, under Commander Sinclair, a rogue telepath named Jason Ironheart had created it protect himself from Bester and the PSI Corps," Susan answered.

"I have heard of Ironheart and his powers. He could have destroyed the whole station then. If this also is a rogue telepath and he's as strong as Ironheart was, we should call the Corps. They are better equipped to deal with something like this," Zack cautioned.

Susan's blue eyes flashed angrily. "Running to Bester and his cronies and begging for help is the last thing I would willingly do, but my hatred for PSI Corps aside. Colonel Lochley is out there in sector 14 and tries to negotiate a peace agreement or at least a cease fire between PSI Corps, Earthdome and the rogue telepaths. The last thing she needs is an incident involving telepaths, regardless of the faction. We have to try and keep this under wraps."

"I think I understand." Zack seemed surprised at the news of Colonel Lochley's whereabouts.
"But how?"

"We'll have to talk with whoever is behind that barrier, Zack. Touching the barrier should advise them of my presence and they also should pick up that I mean them no harm. My hatred for the Corps should also help. Ironheart used the barrier to protect himself. It's possible that this one is also for defence only. If they let me in, I will go alone. I don't want to scare them any further," Susan explained.

"You have a point here, but letting you go without backup is against anything Garibaldi ever taught me."

"I know, Zack, but please, trust me. If I'm not back in an hour I want you and Corwin to evacuate the whole section and put it under heavy guard. Put the station on red alert and notify headquarters. Have them call the PSI Cops."

"Yes Captain!"

Susan then extended her arms and touched the energy screen with the flat of both hands, half expecting to be propelled backwards. Instead she was overwhelmed by a sense of pain and fear, definitively not her own. The barrier disappeared and before stepping inside she turned half around and ordered Zack to have Doctor Hardy, the station's CMO, stand by. "We'll probably need a trauma team here."

Susan was not aware of the energy curtain reappearing almost immediately after she had entered the area, but she felt the presence of someone else in her mind, someone trying to scan her. For the fraction of a heartbeat she was tempted to try to block the scan. At the last moment she stopped, Talia's words once again popped up in her mind. *You're stronger than you think, my Susan.*

It was then that she recognised the presence in her mind. She had felt it once before, when Lyta Alexander had tried to send the password revealing the PSI Corps traitor. So, she decided to take another chance and called out, "Lyta, where are you? Are you hurt?" She listened to the echo of her voice. "Lyta, please, answer me!"

"Third corridor to your right," was the only answer.

Susan rounded the corner and found Lyta kneeling on the deck with G'Kar's upper body resting on her thighs. There was blood everywhere and a few feet away the bodies of two men were lying on the floor face first. It didn't take a medical professional to see that they were dead.

"How is he, Lyta?" Susan said after going down on her right knee next to them.

"I got him stabilised by inducing a telepathic coma. He needs medical attention but I could not risk contacting sickbay. Officially we... he's not on the Station, and if I show myself on the upper levels security will be forced to arrest me."

"Were you hurt when they attacked?"

"No, just a scratch. I'm alright."

"Why the energy barrier, Lyta? It made a lot of waves in C&C."

"They were PSI Cops trying to get to me. I didn't know if there are any more of them out there. It was an instinctual reaction. I'll take it down," Lyta said.

"I have a trauma team standing by outside. G'Kar will be cared for. Zack and I will develop a believable cover story and dispose of the bodies. Lyta, I want you to stay out of sight for the time being. We'll have to talk about all of this but it'll have to wait until later."

"Sounds reasonable, but why should I trust you, Captain Ivanova? I would not need more than a thought to kill you."

"I know, Lyta, but you trusted me when you let me through the barrier. So, why should I not trust you not to kill me? I don't want to see you in a cell and I don't want to see G'Kar hurt. Scan me if you want to make sure."

Once again Susan fought against her need to protect herself from the scan. Lyta's and her eyes locked, but she didn't feel the distinct sensation of someone probing her mind. A couple of minutes passed and finally Lyta seemed to have come to a decision.

"We'll do it your way, Captain."

"I'll need at least 'til midday to sort everything out. I suppose this somehow has to do with the negotiations Colonel Lochley went to mediate?"

"I fear it does, at least in a round-about way. I'll contact you early afternoon, Captain Ivanova."

"Susan, please."

"Alright, Susan. I'll drop the shield now. Please take good care of him."

-X-X-X-

The rest of the incident was rather anticlimactic as far as official records were concerned. Zack manipulated the manifest of the private transports and registered G'Kar's arrival for the day before. The two PSI Cops were recorded as unidentified lurkers from down below who had tried to rob the former Narn Ambassador. He was injured while defending himself. They were killed in the attack, and their bodies were incinerated, having no one to claim them.

To find an explanation for the energy barrier had been harder; it would not do to simply erase it

from their sensor logs. There were too many people in C&C and in the security teams to just pretend that nothing had happened. So, Zack and Susan created a story about G'Kar bringing an alien device to the station to have it examined. During the fight with his attackers it had been activated by accident and created the energy barrier. Zack and Susan had taken advantage of a sudden fluctuation in the barrier to get in and had then disabled the device with concentrated fire from a PPG, destroying it completely in the process.

Zack had really come through for her as soon as he had heard that Lyta was involved, possibly due to the crush he still harboured for the red-haired telepath. Now, the only thing she had left to do was to wait for Lyta to contact her.

Susan knew that from a professional point of view she should have questioned Lyta when she had had the chance. She should have had her arrested, despite her sympathies for the rogue telepaths; after all the "Remember Byron"-movement was a terrorist organisation and its unofficial leader wanted by more than just the Corps.

Susan decided to spend some time in C&C and give Corwin a break. The routine operations would take her mind off things, especially of her personal problems.

Even before she had reminded Zack of Ironheart she had known without a doubt with which kind of energy barrier they were dealing. She had known even before she had seen it. Susan had sensed it, and she should not have been able to do something like that. She also should not have been able to identify Lyta's mental signature in her mind. Both things were well beyond the capabilities of someone who was not even a P1. She shook her head, but Talia's words, so recently remembered, kept haunting her.

You're stronger than you think, my Susan.

Susan was drawn out of her unsettling thoughts by Lyta's voice coming over her comm. link. She gave her directions to one of the rented quarters in blue sector.

-X-X-X-

Lyta activated a jamming device as soon as the door had closed behind Susan.

"Is this really necessary?" she asked. "It won't do any good if another one of these PSI Cops is on the Station."

"I scanned Babylon 5 a couple of hours ago. PSI Corps won't be a problem for now, but Number One has eyes and ears everywhere. We usually try not to step on each others toes but a bit of caution has never hurt anyone."

"Number One? Are you talking about Teresa Halloran?" Susan asked.

"Yes, President Sheridan's spook, so to speak. The nickname from her time with the resistance

on Mars kind of stuck."

"I understand. Did you have the chance to speak with your representatives at the negotiations?"

"Yes, everything seems to be alright. They have arrived at the White Star, as have the others. The negotiations will start as scheduled tomorrow morning."

"Do you think that it will work out?"

"I hope so, Susan, but I'm still a realist. I don't trust the Corps and I don't trust Bester. It also has been hard work to convince the others in the resistance to even try. Byron would not approve of all the killing in his name."

"Is this why you came back, Lyta, to end the violence?" Susan asked curiously. "Every newspaper and report I read blames you for the violence."

"And I am responsible. All those years ago, when I left with G'Kar, I was so angry at everyone, Sheridan, Bester, the Corps, even the other rogue telepaths. I was full of hatred and I wanted everyone to suffer for the pain I felt. Two years later, I returned for the first time. G'Kar had taught me a lot in these two years, about myself and my decisions. It was then that I understood that we were doing Byron's memory a disservice with all this violence, with trying to kill each other.

"The Corps heard that I was on Mars and I barely escaped alive. I told the others then to stop the violence and fight PSI Corps by helping all rogue telepaths, but it took another two years before I really came back. G'Kar and I passed a remote Earthforce outpost. I read of the continued bombings in an old newspaper. I had to come back and at least try to convince the others, but I'm afraid that I wasn't entirely successful. G'Kar insisted on staying by my side. He sees himself as my bodyguard but in time he has become my conscience. He would not have been hurt if not for me."

"Doctor Hardy assured me that he will make a full recovery. She also was very impressed with the telepathically induced coma, though it was hard to convince her to keep it out of his file. She said it saved his life. He should regain consciousness soon. You have nothing to feel guilty for, Lyta."

"I disagree, but that's not something we'll have to discuss now." Lyta answered. "Is there any way to monitor the negotiations?"

"I already ordered sector 14 to be kept under surveillance and sent an encoded warning to Colonel Lochley, but that's about all I can do officially."

"If I could get closer without being seen, I could scan the whole area just how I scanned the Station. It would make me feel better."

"You think those undercover PSI Cops wanted to take you out because they thought that you and

G'Kar were on your way to the negotiations?" Susan asked.

"It's a distinct possibility. I was too busy to fight them off to scan them."

Susan studied the other woman's face and came to a decision. She opened a comm. link and ordered the surveillance of sector 14 cancelled and one of the new two-seater Thunderbolts prepped for flight.

"Is there anything wrong, Captain Ivanova?"

"No, Corwin, I just need to stretch my legs a bit, so to speak. We only had Starfuries on the *Jefferson*. It has been years since I had a chance to fly a Thunderbolt and B 5 is even equipped with the new ones. I want to try out this new distortion field that makes the ships so hard to pick up on the sensors since I first read about it. This might be the best chance I'll get to do so."

"I understand, Captain. Colonel Lochley also took the first chance she got to try the new babies out. I'll have one of our pilots waiting for you to serve as your back-seat."

"No need, Corwin. I'm just going for a joy ride, not into battle."

"But, Captain, the regs clearly sta..."

"I know the regs, Lieutenant Commander, but in this case I'm pulling rank," Susan said letting amusement lace her voice.

"Alright, I give. Have fun, Captain."

"I will, Ivanova out."

Susan turned her attention back to the red-haired telepath. "Let's go, Lyta. I'll get you to the edge of sector 14."

"Thank you, Susan."

-X-X-X-

Halfway into the flight to their target area Lyta asked, "Why are you doing this, Susan?"

"Would you believe me if I told you that I don't know for sure? Let's just say that I was in the mood to go for a joyride and leave it at that."

"If you insist, I'll leave it alone, but I'd really like to know," Lyta answered softly.

"I read a lot about the Remember-Byron movement the few times we were back in the Earth sector, and I had the chance to read more since the start of my leave. In my opinion what

happened on Babylon 5 should never have happened and I keep thinking that it could have been avoided, though I admit that I don't know how. Anyway, as an Earthforce officer I can't openly sympathise with your movement, but this, this is something I can do with good conscience."

"Thank you, Susan."

"Not for that, Lyta. We'll need another hour 'til we reach the border of sector 14. Try to get some rest while you can. I'll wake you a few minutes before we arrive."

Lyta took Susan's words for what they were, a polite way to tell her that she was done talking for now, and she respected the other woman's need for some quiet time.

Susan, on the other hand, focused on the displays in front of her and tried not to think. Everyone who had ever worked with her knew about her contempt for PSI Corps and everything to do with it. So, it would only be logical to assume that she harboured sympathies for the rogue telepaths and their cause, but she never had admitted it to anyone. The honesty and trust she had shown Lyta over the course of the last day astonished her to a certain degree; it was against her nature. She usually was suspicious and distrustful. It made no sense.

Susan's train of thoughts was interrupted by her long range sensors picking up some sort of disturbance. She rechecked the area, but it was gone. She programmed a wider search pattern, keeping the scans passive not to warn off anyone. The disturbance of whatever it was seemed to travel right in front of them and apparently with the same destination in mind. When she changed the resolution of the scanners it was easy to follow the phenomenon. Unfortunately the sensors of the small fighter could not tell her much more about it. So she asked Lyta for help.

"Susan, we're still too far away even for me to pick up anything."

"I'm picking up something strange on the sensors. Please, just try it."

Silence fell between them and Susan was divided between wanting the strange disturbance to be nothing but a fluke of the sensor array and wanting it to be some kind of threat to the negotiations for her to take out, a challenge of sorts. She had had her share of adventures on the *Jefferson* but for most of the time she had felt more like an administrator than like a soldier.

"You were right, Susan, there's someone straight ahead. Five or six life signs, I think. It's hard to say for sure; at least one of them is a very strong telepath. He's masking the thoughts of the others. Except for the people on the White Star there should be no one else out there. Can you get us a bit closer, Susan?"

"I'll try. They could find us, if they knew what to look for, but I fear that that's a risk we'll have to take."

"I'll try to keep them from sensing us."

Another minute of silence and Lyta added, "There are six of them. Only one is a telepath. He's

very strong but keeping the minds of the others cloaked is taxing his reserves and his own shields. Just get us a tiny bit closer and I might be able to tell you what they're up to."

They came closer to the disturbance with every heartbeat. Susan focused on the sensor readings and tried to keep her breathing as calm as possible. They were coming in weapons' range of the disturbance.

"They have orders to destroy the White Star and leave enough evidence behind to implicate Remember Byron. We've got to stop them."

"They would need some serious fire power to even make a scratch in a White Star." Susan said.

"It's a bomb. They're about to launch a bomb, a bomb powerful enough to even destroy Babylon 5."

"It's time to stop playing hide and seek. Lyta, can you let this telepath know that they have been made? Meanwhile, I'll send an encoded message to Colonel Lochley."

Susan kept the message short and sent it on a rotating frequency they had used during the Shadow war. She hoped someone on board would recognise it.

"Any reaction from our telepathic friend?"

"He's confused. He can't pinpoint our exact position but he's worried. He doesn't know what to make of it and what to do. Now he's thinking of launching the bomb earlier than planned and getting the hell out of here. Damn, he found me. He's blocking me. I'm sorry. I lost contact."

"Another disturbance just appeared, on trajectory towards the centre of the sector. I'll program our missiles to intercept it. They should at least be able to knock it off target. And now we'll deal with these guys Earthforce style. Please keep an eye on the bomb."

Susan held her eyes firmly on the strange disturbance. She had expected that they would try to slip past them towards Epsilon Three and the Babylon 5 jump gate. Instead they were heading deeper into space. That could only mean that their ship was capable of opening its own jump point or that they had another bigger ship waiting for them. In any case they had to be stopped, and she really liked to get a few answers out of them.

Suddenly, the ship was knocked off-course by some sort of shock wave coming from behind. Susan needed all of her skill to get it back under control but the wave had apparently shorted out their sensor arrays, and without them there was no way to keep track of the other ship. And yet all her instincts told Susan not to let them go.

There might be a way, but it bordered on insanity; it was more than just a far shot and not without risk but she had to try. "Lyta, the normals, the mundanes on board of the cloaked ship, can you still feel them?"

"Yes, I can hear their thoughts. They're angry and confused. I'm not good with coordinates but they're in front of us, out of weapons' range - at least that's what two of them think. It seems as if they also were hit by the shock wave or whatever it was."

"I need more, Lyta. I need to see what you see about them, I need to hear what you hear. You can't fly this thing for me but you can be my eyes and ears out there."

"Do you really know what you're asking of me, Susan?"

"I don't see any other way, Lyta. We can't just let them escape."

"Alright, we'll try it. I just hope that we both won't live to regret this. I'll have to initiate a scan to make it work. And if it does, we will see with my eyes and my mind but we will use your experience in combat and your reflexes. Try to relax. It will make this easier."

Of course, Susan's instinctive reaction was to try to block the scan, but she fought it down and suddenly she felt the minds of those five men, mercenaries possibly, in her head, and she knew exactly how to find them. It was hard to separate the voices but as soon as she had thought it, there was only one voice left, the thoughts of the pilot of the other vessel - and he was good, really good. She quickly forgot where the information was coming from.

Her Thunderbolt seemed to have a slight advantage in speed and they slowly gained on them. Suddenly, they veered around and Susan just barely avoided being hit by a pulse canon by pulling her craft in a tight loop. She returned fire and forced the other vessel to change course. They now were headed towards Epsilon Three.

Susan felt the exhilaration of the pursuit. She pushed her engines beyond their limits, rejoicing with every internal curse uttered by the other pilot. Thoughts and actions were in sync with him, like with every good fighter pilot. So, being in his head didn't give her that much of an advantage, but she could feel his growing nervousness and like a background noise the growing fear of his companions.

They were steadily getting closer, close enough to try to take their engines out and thus disable the other ship. She wanted them alive; she wanted to know for whom they worked. Just a bit more and she could use the electro magnetic pulse canon. It would fry the electronics on the other ship and they would easily be able to grab them and bring them to the Station. The other pilot evaded her first attempt but the second shot hit. Their cloak failed but they were still able to manoeuvre.

They returned fire, and moments later her fighter spun out of control. Her finger found the release button for the forward cannons before she was sure if she was upside or down. She only saw it out of the corner of her eyes: a bright ball of fire indicating that the other vessel had been destroyed. It was so bright and blinding that it abruptly broke the connection between her and Lyta.

Seeing the expanse of space around them with her own eyes only, Susan for a moment had a

distinct sense of loss. She suddenly felt alone, but now was not the time to contemplate the experience. She had to get her Thunderbolt back under control. Luckily the navigational systems were still online and allowed her to backtrack her way to the station.

The two hours flight, unfortunately, gave her ample time to contemplate the experience. Apart from enabling her to hear the thoughts of their opponents, what Lyta had allowed her to see was far beyond almost everything she had ever experienced before, but it also had been very exhausting and the almost sleepless night was beginning to catch up with her. She docked her flyer and wrote a short, politically-correct report about the attempted bombing and the destruction of the enemy ship. She then collapsed on the bed and fell instantly asleep. She slept 'til the next morning and woke minutes before her alarm clock would have thrown her out of bed anyway.

-X-X-X-

Her door chimed when she was about to leave for the mess hall. "Lyta, come in. I'd offer you some coffee but my cupboards are rather bare at the moment."

"That's alright. Coffee gives me a headache anyway. G'Kar was just released from the infirmary. We will leave in about an hour."

"Could you get in contact with your people at the negotiations?"

"The shock wave from the explosion has shaken the White Star quite a bit but it seems that the threat of this bomb has broken the ice between the parties. They've really started talking, thanks to Colonel Lochley. She quickly got them past the point of accusing the other side of having sent the bomb. I'm still not sure if they will reach a compromise, and even if they do, I'm not sure it will hold. Anyway, that's not the question I expected. I thought you might have some questions about what happened out there," Lyta said.

"Take a seat, Lyta. You're right. I have questions, but I'm not sure if I really want to know the answers. What we did out there was an incredible experience but the longer I think about it the more I come to the conclusion that it should not have worked. I know that you're incredibly strong, Lyta, stronger than any PSI Cop, but I still... I'm sorry, Lyta, I can't talk about this."

Lyta heard the worry in the other woman's voice and tried to reassure her. "Susan, what we did out there worked because you allowed it. You allowed me access to your mind. You saw with my mind's eye, but I was able to feel your emotions, not only the exhilaration of the pursuit but everything you ever felt, every joy, every sorrow, every pain."

At Susan's alarmed expression, she added, "You have my word that I will never betray anything I learned about you to anyone, Susan. I didn't tell you this to embarrass you but to make you understand something."

"Being discovered by PSI Corps is one of your greatest fears. So, I want you to know that there's

nothing to fear."

"What are you talking about, Lyta?"

"It's hard to explain, especially since I've never seen or felt anything like this. Should your telepathic abilities ever manifest themselves, you'll be very strong, PSI Cop level at least. I know you probably don't want to hear this, but it's part of what I have to say. Thanks to the Vorlons I can scan people without them knowing it, but you felt it after you went through the energy barrier. For the fraction of a second you tried to block me, but when you stopped you felt to me like any other mundane. There was no hint at any latent telepathic abilities."

"That's not possible. My mother would not have been this insistent or cautious if she had not felt something."

"No, you misunderstand me, Susan. I felt your potential when we were in space, when we were in each others minds, but were I to scan you now there would be nothing to find. Your shielding is too good. You're too well protected."

"But that's not possible. I never heard of anything like this. Are you sure, Lyta?"

"Yes, Susan, I'm sure. As long as you don't try to actively block a scan, no one will ever find out. I don't know how you do it, how it works, but it does. I can only speculate that it has something to do with your mother training you from a very young age, perhaps from the first moment she found out that you inherited her telepathic gene."

"It sounds too good to be true, Lyta. So, I hope you don't mind if I still stay on my guard. You also gave me a lot to think about I'm not sure I want to think about, but thanks anyway."

"I know it's a lot to take in, Susan, but I felt that you had to know. And now I need to go. G'Kar is waiting for me at the docking bay."

"I'll walk you there. That way you won't have to sneak around the back."

-X-X-X-

They walked in companionable silence and though a few of the security guards obviously recognised Lyta, none of them tried to arrest her, despite the standing orders from Earthdome.

G'Kar greeted Susan with a smile and a bear hug. He also expressed his sorrow that they had not had a chance to talk after all those years. At Lyta's request he left the women alone to say their good-byes.

"Stay in contact if you can, Lyta, and let me know when there's anything I can do to help you or Remember Byron."

"I will, Susan. Susan, there's one more thing. Years ago when Captain Sheridan was on Zha'hadoum you told me about the hour of the wolf, a dark time in the night when as you said 'all you can see is the troubles and the problems and the ways that your life should have gone but didn't'."

"Yes, I remember. I told you about my father's remedy. I told you how he took one glass of vodka to keep the wolf away and then three more small drinks of vodka just in case she had cubs while she was waiting outside. I also told you that it didn't work but I recently stopped trying to chase the wolf away with a drink."

"I know since the Day of the Dead on Brakir, but that's not what I wanted to talk about. Susan, you have been living in this hour of the wolf ever since Talia was lost to you. You could hide it then but since Marcus' death... Talia and Marcus would not want you to spend your live mourning them."

Susan's well developed defences snapped in place; no one had the right to talk to her like that. She was about to deny Lyta's allegations when she saw the sadness and grief in the other woman's eyes.

"No, Lyta, they wouldn't, but I can't help it, just as you can't help mourning Byron. Take care of yourself, my friend, and of him," Susan said with a nod towards the ship, inclined her head in greeting and left.

"Wait, Susan. There is something I need to give to you." Lyta disappeared inside of the small ship and returned a few heartbeats later. She handed Susan a data crystal. "Here, take this. The crystal contains a recording of Talia's brain patterns. Kosh made it a few years ago."

"Talia is dead, Lyta."

"According to Bester, yes, but he is not the only powerful player in the Corps. We have our own people in the Corps." Lyta gave Susan a second crystal. "This one contains a list of the current factions in the Corps and among the PSI Cops as well as a list of all the sleeper agents and their activities since the implanted personality has been activated. The last entry concerning a certain Alita Winters, the name the implanted personality goes by, is three years old, after that she simply vanished, but there is no record that she has been terminated."

"Talia is alive?!"

"I don't know if she is alive or not. Not even the Corps knows where she is, Susan. She could be dead by now, but if she is, it was not the Corps' doing."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Susan asked forcefully.

"Because Kosh asked me not to tell you before the time was right. I'm not really sure if he would see this as the right time, but his lessons always were rather cryptic and only time helped me to understand them. He also gave me a message for you. He said, 'What you search for will slip

through your fingers, and what you do not search will come to you. The power of one mind is stronger than the evil spirit of many others. Wait for the twin of your soul and it will be restored."

"That sounds..."

"I know, Susan. Just remember his words and when the time comes, you will know what to do. And in the meantime, there is one thing I found out about this crystal. If you play it with your shields down you can hear Talia's soul. I heard the friend I had in the PSI Corps Academy but I'm sure you'll be able to hear much more. The only downside is that it can only be played once every two months."

Lyta didn't give Susan a chance to say anything and disappeared back into the ship. Susan was left on the landing pad with the two crystals in her hand and Kosh's words running through her mind.

"Wait for the twin of your soul and it will be restored."

The twin of my soul? Was there really a chance to bring the old Talia back? Was this what she had waited for all these years? And what had the dead Vorlon meant with "What you search for will slip through your fingers"?

Susan's comm. link beeped and brought her back to reality. Duty was calling.

-X-X-X-

Epilogue: Two Years Later

Susan looked down on the blond head nestled against her shoulder. Even after all these months it seemed like a dream to her that the love of her life was finally back, and that no one would ever take her away from her again.

"You okay, Susushka? You're all tensed up." Talia said without looking up.

Susan dropped some of the walls that kept her from invading the thoughts of others and showed her beloved partner what she had been thinking about.

Then she added, "Just thanking the Universe for bringing us back together, love. Thank you for waiting for me."

"Thank you for bringing me back and destroy the other one. I would have waited for you 'til the end of time." Talía answered softly.

The END

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