

In The Dead Of Night

219

by Kyle Eggleston

Ketish was on a spacewalk outside of Crimson Gamma. He was walking near the main reactor core at the moment. It had taken him two hours and forty minutes to walk the entire length of the station. It was a rather long station, so the time was understandable. As he walked there was a static sound in his helmet, someone was trying to contact him. Ketish boosted the gain on his radio.

“Come in Ketish.” Jack O’Brien’s voice came over the short wave. “I repeat, come in Ketish. Please answer if you can hear me.”

“I can hear you Jack. What do you want?” Ketish asked.

Jack sighed. “Finally.” He said. “I’ve been trying to contact you for over an hour. What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” Jack asked.

Ketish shrugged. “Going for a walk.” He replied. “Isn’t that what you humans refer to it as? Going for a walk?”

Jack was frustrated. “Yes, that’s what it’s called. But we usually do it *inside*, where it’s safe!” He yelled. “Come back to the airlock at once. You’re under my protection until a rescue ship comes for you. You’re the leader of a world for heaven’s sake!”

Ketish muttered something under his breath. Jack didn’t quite catch what he said, but he guessed he had called him a killjoy. It was appropriate considering what Jack was trying to do, get Ketish to come back inside the station for his own safety. “Fine, I will return.” He said. “Heading back now.” Activating his thrusters on his pack, Ketish floated away from the station and towards the airlock he had exited from. The jet pack made his trip much faster than walking all the way back.

Jack nodded his approval. “Good, thank you Ketish.”

Ketish scoffed. “Oh I not doing it for you Jack. I only did it because I am running out of oxygen. You really need to look into boosting the oxygen capacity on these suits. You never know how long you might be out here say doing repairs for instance.”

“Never mind that.” Jack said. “I can see you’re in the airlock. That’s all which matters. I would appreciate it if you would come visit my office when you have a chance. Nothing too important, just need to catch up on some ... paperwork with you.”

Ketish sighed. “I’ll be there.” Removing his helmet, Ketish breathed in the recycled air the station put forth. He was not a fan of recycled air. Ketish preferred the air on Dubor not some crummy space station where he had no control over ... *anything*. “Paperwork.” Ketish scoffed. “Right, that’s what he wants to talk about.” He exited the airlock to change into more official clothing.

After changing, Ketish was ready to meet with the major. But decided to stop in on someone else *first*. Walking up to Grilka’s quarters, Ketish rang the door chime. He waited patiently for Grilka to answer. He was certain she had asked the computer who was at her door and was hesitating on answering because it was *him*. Ketish tapped his finger on the door, his claws tapped loudly.

The door opened. Grilka stared Ketish in the eyes. “What do you want?” She asked.

Ketish grinned. “I wanted to check in on you, as usual.” He said. “How have you been Grilka?”

Grilka scoffed and spat on the ground. “You are not welcome here!” She exclaimed. Grilka turned to leave. As the door began to close, Ketish hurried inside her quarters. He wasn’t done talking with her yet.

“Grilka, wait.” Ketish said as he approached her. “I’m concerned with your safety. That World Eater could have killed you with the rest of these humans and other aliens on this station.”

Grilka turned around to face Ketish. Her eyes lit like fire. “You would have been destroyed as well.” She said. “Why are you and your officers still here?” She folded her arms and waited for a response.

“A ship has yet to arrive from the Dubor home world.” Ketish said. “I had to come. I had to make sure O’Brien’s life is preserved. The prophecy *must* be fulfilled!” He slammed his fist against the main door. “You do not know what’s at stake here Grilka. Don’t pretend that you do!”

Grilka approached Ketish, she placed her hand on his face. “My dear Ketish.” She said. “I understand more than you may ever know.” She scratched her claws down the side of his face lightly scratching his face. It wouldn’t leave a mark, but it made her message clear. Maybe a little too clear. She had just tipped her hat that she knew something. Something Ketish didn’t expect her to know.

“What did you say?” Ketish asked. He rested his hand on Grilka’s cheek.

Grilka felt a lump form in her throat. She turned away. “Nothing.” She said. “I said nothing.” She walked over to a couch and sat down. What had she just done? She wondered.

Reaching into his pocket, Ketish grabbed a vial. He put some of the drug on his finger and placed it up to Grilka’s nose. She breathed it in. He too took some of the drug. As they collapsed to the floor they entered a trance.

“Frack!” Grilka said as she saw where she was. She was standing on a high black mountain top. Ketish was standing beside her. “What have you done!” This was not the usual effect the medicine gave her, this was something completely different.

Ketish smiled. “Just a little communication that only our kind knows how to.” He said. “It’s a new medicine I developed, helps us communicate through emotion, feeling, and thought. It’s rather ... effective.”

“Okay ... but, why a black mountain?” Grilka asked.

Ketish shrugged. “Why not?” He said. “Think of it as a symbol of our people. Maybe you’ll see it, maybe you won’t. The mountain doesn’t matter. We can be anywhere you wish to be in this trip.”

They found themselves standing in the middle of the Main Gallery on Crimson Gamma.

“I wish to be here.” Grilka said.

Ketish rubbed his chin. “Interesting. You *would* want to be among *them*.” He said. “Enough distractions. What. Do. You. Know.” He stared her down. Reaching out, he placed three fingers on Grilka’s forehead. He pressed his fingers *into* her head and saw all that was there.

Grilka flinched, she tried to resist the mind probe but was unable to. Screaming into the void, she couldn’t do anything about it.

“Relax.” Ketish said. He placed his other hand behind her head supporting it. “We’ll be done soon enou ...” He paused. “Oh, so you know the truth about Jack.” He finally said. “That is unfortunate.” Ketish released Grilka.

Grilka took a big step back. “What the shilock!” She exclaimed. “How dare you invade my mind like that!”

Ketish shook his head. “You shouldn’t have kept that from me. That you know O’Brien is a clone. It shouldn’t matter of course, the real Jack O’Brien is safe on Dubor where *you* will never find him.” He said to Grilka. “It really doesn’t matter though, you fell in love with a clone not the real Jack O’Brien. So what do you care?”

Grilka frowned. Ketish had a point. A solid point at that. The real Jack O’Brien and the clone of him were two different people now. So different that she preferred the clone.

“But if you know.” Ketish continued. “Then Jack knows.” He paused as the pieces fell into place. “I am not sure I like the thought of this. I will have to consider the matter in more depth.” He clapped his hands.

Grilka and Ketish woke from their drug trip. They were laying on the floor of Grilka’s quarters after having collapsed into their drug induced trance. Standing up, Ketish looked at Grilka. Without a word he left her quarters.

Grilka stood up and walked over to her computer. “Grilka to O’Brien. Ketish knows. I repeat, Ketish knows.”

* * *

Jack O’Brien sat in his office. He had just heard Grilka’s warning message. He was frozen at his desk. Ketish knew that he knew. What was he supposed to do with this information? He had a meeting scheduled with Ketish, surely this new information was going to be brought to light.

“Major O’Brien.” Ketish said as he entered Jack’s office.

“That was fast.” Jack said.

Ketish looked puzzled. “What?”

Jack laughed. “Nothing.” He smiled. “I wanted to talk about some actions of your people on my station.” Jack said.

Ketish sat down on a chair across the desk from Jack. “Go on.” He said. *This will be amusing*, he thought. “I will talk with you about my people if you will talk to me about something.”

Jack nodded. He knew where this was going. “Agreed.” He pulled up a security report. “Security reports several infractions over the past week. Disrupting the peace mostly by your crew.” He read the report more. “Your crew is getting drunk and then causing fights. We cannot have that happening on Crimson Gamma. I have to maintain order here.”

Ketish nodded. “Humans do not party as hard as we do apparently. We are just celebrating the destruction of the World Eater. You can’t blame us for celebrating.”

Jack nodded. “I get it Ketish, I get it.” He said. “But, partying that hard? It’s a no go from me. You need to find a way for your people to celebrate without causing disorder on my station. Disorder leads to destruction of property. Do you see where I’m going with all of this?”

Ketish leaned his head to one side. “Why do you care? Our people do not care about such things. You are one of our people, Jack.”

“About that.” Jack said. “I know you know that I know. Which Jack are you referring to exactly?” He rested his hands on the desk. “Why did you clone me?” He had an actual interest in the whys and possibly the hows of his cloning.

Holographic Ketish appeared behind Jack and whispered in his ear. “Don’t believe a word he says. He will lie to you in order to get his way.”

Jack sighed. Now was not a good time to be talking with two Ketish’s. He looked over his shoulder and glared at the hologram. He wished he could grab the hologram’s hand and just smash it in a desk drawer or something. Obviously that wasn’t possible, but oh how he wished it was.

Ketish groaned. “I have my reasons Jack. If you must know, I am seeing exactly how much of a Dubor you are.” He explained. “I cannot do that on a living subject.”

“Living subject?” Jack asked. “Are you saying I’m going to die?”

Ketish laughed. “No, not *you*.” He said. “The other you? That’s a possibility. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to talk to my men about your complaints against them.” Ketish stood to leave.

Jack watched Ketish leave his office. He was safe, for now. Jack breathed a sigh of relief. Until he realized the holographic Ketish was still standing behind him. *Son of a bitch!* He screamed in his head.

“Woah, woah, not so loud!” Holographic Ketish said. “I’m right here and I can hear your thoughts! Silence them down a bit man.”

Jack chuckled at Ketish’s use of Earth slang. He really was picking it up quite well. “Okay fine. So you said I shouldn’t believe a word he says. Him meaning you of course. Is he going to cause harm to my real self?”

“I am not programmed with that knowledge.” Holo Ketish said. “But if I were to hazard a guess? I would assume he already has caused damage to your body. It is already set in motion. There is no going back.”

Jack frowned at the thought. Somewhere on the Dubor home world he was getting tortured still. Undergoing operation after operation. There was no way of telling exactly what Ketish was up to, but whatever it was it wasn’t good.

“But look on the bright side Jackie boy.” Holo Ketish continued. “*You* still have your health! There’s something to celebrate!” He smiled.

Jack waved his hand. “I’m done talking with you.” The hologram vanished.

Swiveling around in his chair, Jack faced the window. He looked down at the planet below. Jack wondered if a simpler life could be found on Shuka. Could he find a better life if he quit the service and just lived out the remainder of his days on some other planet. It didn't even have to be Earth. Earth was too noisy for him right now. Perhaps Shuka could be a nice alternative. *If* the inhabitants would allow him to live there of course. Snapping out of it, Jack chuckled *what a pipe dream*, he thought.

One thing that didn't come up in Jack and Ketish's conversation was the chip implanted in his head. Or the holographic image of Ketish that kept popping in from time to time to pester Jack. O'Brien wanted to keep it quiet as long as he could. Especially from command. If any of the higher ups found out about it, he could lose his command, his commission, hell his very way of life could be threatened. No, he would keep it to himself for a bit longer. Those who did know about it swore to him they wouldn't tell anyone. He was good with their word.

* * *

Ketish had gathered his officers in a giant room. He stood before them confident that they had done nothing wrong. But he promised the major he would do *something* about their supposed behavior.

At the announcement of Ketish wanting them to be quieter while in the Main Gallery and other public areas of the station, there was shouting among his people. They felt they were being unjustly tried for something they didn't do. Ketish understood where they were coming from, to him they were just celebrating as any Dubor would. But the humans just didn't grasp the concept it would seem.

"I understand." Ketish yelled over the crowd. "Please be quiet." They slowly quieted down so he could speak. "Their ways are not our ways." He continued to explain. "We cannot blame their shortsightedness. They are only human. Do not worry my brothers and sisters, when we get home we will have the grand celebration that we deserve. I promise you that. For now, just keep things down to a minimal roar."

The crowd didn't like the thought, but agreed to comply with Ketish's wishes. As the crowd dispersed, Ketish's first officer stayed behind so she could speak with him.

"The Shovu will be arriving in the morning to transport us back to Dubor." She said. "I will let the men know."

Ketish nodded. "I know the commander of the Shovu, she's a fine vessel. Worthy of our home coming." He said. "Thank you sub commander."

She bowed in response and left the room leaving Ketish alone with his thoughts.

Stupid humans. Ketish scoffed. *Stupid Dorf!* He was not pleased with how Jack was handling anything. Sure the fight had gone well for them, but he wasn't certain Jack fully understood the danger of it all. But that's just how the humans worked, they never understood anything this far out on the frontier of space. Oh well, what could he do about it? Nothing.

Ketish exited the room and headed back to his temporary quarters. It was time for more of the drug. He needed to just space out and relax for the time being. In the morning he and his men would be gone.

* * *

Norev was listening to the latest news broadcast from her home world. The announcer didn't seem like they were interested in the news themselves that day. Which was an odd thing, usually they were more energetic than what they were portraying. Norev shrugged it off, it could just be fatigue. The World Eater had taken a lot out of everyone. People had been scared and rightfully so. To face destruction was not something you looked forward to.

Crossing the room, she grabbed a cup of tea and sat down on her couch. Getting comfortable on the couch she proceeded to sip her tea. It was hot, a little too hot. Norev blew on it to help cool the tea down.

"In other news, the Dubor contingent currently based at Crimson Gamma will be leaving in the morning. Thank goodness they're finally gone from our stars." He paused. "With the World Eater destroyed, citizens are wondering when the *next* World Eater will be coming. Speculation states that if the World Eater doesn't return to their point of origin and report in, another one will be sent to investigate."

Norev sighed. She wished the whole World Eater topic would just go away, but it was still too soon for that to happen. She switched stations, a popular melodrama played on the channel she landed on. Now *this* was something she could get into. Leaning back, she relaxed.

Norev fell asleep and dreamed. She dreamed she was standing on Shuka in the past. Nokev was there smiling at her. He wasn't saying anything, just smiling at her. Norev paced around for a moment, what was she doing there? What was her purpose?

"Nokev?" She asked. "What are we doing here?"

Nokev turned to face Norev, she had been pacing after all, he smiled. "Your time is not complete. You have a mission to perform. Only you can do it." He said. "I will guide you into what you are to do and when you need to do it. But first, you have to kill Jack O'Brien."

AskEarly dot NET

Norev woke up with a start. She was breathing heavily gasping for air. Did she just have a vision? What was that? Why would Nokev tell her to kill Jack? None of it made any sense. Sitting up, she drank some more of her tea hoping it would calm her down. It really didn't do anything for her.

She was entering the darkest of nights.

The End