­Chapter 38

Why did they keep it so dark? This could not be good for their eyes. This was just another thing Tsudo would have to keep in mind when she… if she succeeded in becoming Vatti’s apprentice.

It had been a full day since Vatti made the offer to Tsudo. The general would be leaving tomorrow morning and Tsudo still wasn’t absolutely convinced leaving with her was the right choice. And so here she was, pacing the halls yet agai…

“Oof.”

“My apologies.” Tsudo looked up to make sure the person’s face showed no sign of annoyance. To her surprise, it was a face she was familiar with.

“Oh, hello Tsudo.” Ortin said. “I’m guessing you’re still down about what happened yesterday.”

Tsudo gave a confused look.

“Who told you about that?”  
  
Ortin returned her look with a confused look of his own.

“Told me? We were all there. I suppose my words don’t matter to you, but you really shouldn’t feel bad about it. Making sync energy react to anything that isn’t biological just isn’t possible.”

“Oh, the vase thing.”

“Yes… isn’t that what you were concerned about?”

“Not in the slightest.”

“That’s… confusing, but a relief. I was worried that Ring had gotten to you. But that just begs the question, why are you upset?”

Tsudo let out a sigh.

“I’ve made it that noticeable, huh.”

Ortin grinned.

“Pacing back and forth throughout the halls all day? Thinking to yourself and not talking to anyone, even your friends who arrived with you? Yeah, you could say I’ve noticed. You could say everyone has noticed. We all just thought it was about the vase, though… and most of us revel in it.”

Ortin went back to what he was doing. Tsudo hadn’t noticed until now, but he held a Display. He started at the screen as though trying to figure out a puzzle.

“So, are you going to answer the question?” He asked.

Tsudo’s didn’t know what he was referring to.

“If not the vase, why are you so upset?”

Tsudo blew air from her mouth. This was not something she wanted to talk about. She could try avoiding the topic entirely, lead it to another direction. Tsudo liked that option. Still, Zordo’s teachings ran through her head.

“It’s not a problem I’m willing to talk about. I’m not very forthcoming with my problems in general. I deal with them.”

“That is… extremely blunt of you.”

“Yeah, well, General Zordo taught us no matter how much it hurts, honesty is usually the best way to go. A Discrete can tell if we’re lying so it’s better to find a truth that suits our needs. It’s also supposed to help us understand ourselves. If we’re always honest with ourselves, no one can make us doubt. The people around here should try it some time.”

Ortin looked up for a moment.

“I see sometimes you are hesitant with your honesty, yet others you are quite bold. But I can’t say I disagree with you.”

“I’m only hesitant when it suits my needs. Most of the time, I don’t care if people know the whole truth. In fact, I prefer it. So, you want to talk about what’s bothering you?”

Ortin was silent for a moment.

“If I’m to follow your example, I would have to say no. But… that doesn’t mean I won’t. You and your team did not deserve the ridicule you received when you got here, and what’s worse is that it will most likely continue no matter where you go.”

“It’s easier to tell a story when it’s in order. Perhaps you should start from the beginning.”

“Well, you know what happened when you and your friends were chosen. Only groups of kids between a specific age were allowed to join. Problem is, many of us were upset that we didn’t meet the criteria. But we still wanted to help in the best way we could, so we joined the Department of Defense. Basically, everyone in this Department, with the exception of the general, holds some sort of spite towards you guys who were trained by Zordo.”

“Including you? I didn’t notice any spite when you showed us around. You even tried to defend us.”

“I supposed I forgot to mention, I answer to Decson, not Vatti.”

It took a moment for Vatti to realize what Ortin was saying.

“You’re from the Department of Medicine.”

“Yep. Each base in the Department of Defense was assigned one of us. This is my assignment.”

“That explains your disagreement with everyone around, and why your opinion isn’t listened to. You’re also an outsider among these people.”

The conversation had lead to a place Tsudo hadn’t wanted it to. She decided to change the subject.

“You’ve had that Display up since I got here, what are you working on.”

Still trying to hide his emotions, Ortin turned back forward.

“Ever since I got here, I’ve wondered what this room is for. The technology in it is something I haven’t experienced. No one here knows what it does. I’m connected to its systems, but I’ve still no idea how to activate it.”

Tsudo looked forward. Her eyes widened at what she saw and she was amazed she hadn’t noticed it prior.

“You were right to take interest in this room, it’s a very special one.”

Ortin watched as Tsudo walked up to the big window. She put her hand on the glass, as though touching a loved one.

“You know what this room is?” Ortin asked. “How is that, you’ve never set foot in this building before yesterday.”

Tsudo did not take her eyes off of the room in front of her. She spoke as though in a trance.

“When I first got here, I noticed that this building was very similar to the Department of Education. I couldn’t tell because the lights here are much dimmer than ours were, but I think the builds have the exact same design. And this… this is where my team and I spent most of our time.”

Finally, Tsudo looked at Ortin, her face had lost all concern.

“This is a room for Synchronize.”

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Tsudo pressed the last of the buttons Ortin’s Display. Once she did, the lights in the room lit up. The room became the brightest in the hall. The site hurt both Ortin and Tsudo’s eyes, forcing both of them to look away.

“Is there any possibility to dim the lights?”

“Apologies.” Tsudo pressed more buttons on the display. “The bright white inside the room became a dim blue.”

“It’s ready.” Tsudo smiled.

“And you said this room was used to play some sort of game?” Ortin asked. “I didn’t think the Discretes of old were the types to play games.”

“They weren’t” Tsudo corrected. “This room was designed by one of the Firsts, Naral. General Zordo has some of his original designs and notes for this place. Verde had placed him in charge of training the new Discretes. He hated the current training the Discretes of old had, so he decided to completely redesign everything from the bottom up.”

“And this is what he came up with? I would think a game wouldn’t even occur to someone with a Discrete gene.”

“The Firsts weren’t devoid of emotion like the Discretes are now. Remember, they were all self-taught. It wasn’t until after they united that they attempted to train future generations of Discretes to separate themselves from the rest of the world. From the files we’ve found, Naral was actually a bit of a jokester. One of our teams, the Clowns, are inspired by many of his antics.”

“Fascinating. Well, if this is a game that makes Discretes, it should be great for soldiers in this Department to get involved with. How do we play?”

Tsudo handed Ortin his Display.

“I’ve sent you instructions.”

As Ortin read the file, Tsudo felt a bit of worry come over herself.

“Do you, um… understand it?”

“Yes.” Ortin said. “Though it’s difficult to believe that such science exists in. Wait a minute, suits?”

“Yeah.” Tsudo said. “I’m guessing you guys don’t have any. They’re kind of required to play the game. I left mine back at the Department of Education for some other student to use. I don’t think Official D would approve of us going over there just to get suits.”

“Actually, we don’t have to.” Ortin said. “People from the Department of Scavenging came by the other day to make their usual delivery and inventory check. They left a package full of clothes. Nobody knew what it was for, not even the scavengers, but they told us it was from the Department of Technology. Did anyone from that Department see you guys playing Synchronize?”

“Savvi did!” Tsudo said excitedly. “If he saw us playing and put together that you guys were in the same building as us… where are those suits?”

“We keep all storage in the rooms on the first floor-”

Before the man could finish his sentence, Tsudo was off. She hurried down the hall towards the end of the hall where the stairs were. Suddenly, her path was blocked. Someone tall had been standing behind the door.

“Captain.” Napp said.

“Napp!” Tsudo said. She looked down to see he wasn’t alone. “Carol! Good. You two come with me.”

Tsudo rushed passed the two and headed down the stairs.

Napp and Carol were momentarily confused, but instinct kicked in as they proceeded to do as they always did and followed their captain’s instruction.

The Forefront quickly made their way to the first floor. Once down there, Tsudo headed towards the closest door in the hallway.

“Whoa.” Carol said. “That’s a lot of boxes.”

Inside were boxes upon boxes. The site of this stopped Tsudo in her tracks. She hadn’t realized that everything would be in boxes.

“Well, this might take more time than I thought.” Tsudo said.

“It might help if we knew why we were down here.” Napp said sarcastically.

Before Tsudo could answer, another voice intercepted her thoughts.

“Anything I can help you with?”

The group turned to see a female matching Tsudo in height. She was somewhat wide, with a dirty blonde ponytail.

“Who are you?” Carol asked.

“I’m Janet.” The female answered. “I look after all the equipment here.”

“Perfect.” Tsudo said. “Ortin said you guys received a box with special clothes in them recently.”

“Yes.” Carol said. “I heard General Vatti was here, does she need them?”

“No, I do.”

“You do?”

“Is that a problem?” Carol asked threateningly.

Janet looked at the three one by one. And quick smiled flashed across her face.

“You’re the new recruits. The ones that Zordo trained. Forgive me, I’ll show you to what you’re looking for.”

Janet calmly left the room to head down the hall. The members of the Forefront glanced at each other before following her.

“All resources are stored in oldest to newest. The newest boxes are put into the farthest room. This ensures that all old equipment will be used first. Sorry for the confusion, almost no one asked for specialty items except Vatti. I was simply confused that someone else actually wanted some.”

Tsudo tried to push past the woman, but found herself being stopped by her hand.

“Please do not proceed in front of me. I must be there to document everything you take. When other scavengers come by, I need to be able to give a proper report.”

“Other scavengers.” Napp repeated. “Are there more scavengers here?”

“You’re looking at one.” Janet said. There was some disinterest in her voice.

“You’re like Ortin.” Tsudo concluded. “Eve sent you here.”

Janet let out a sigh.

“Yes. The Defenders were so bad at rationing their supplies themselves, the general sent one of us to each base to…”

“Make up for their incompetence?” Tsudo asked.

Janet looked back as though checking to make sure no one could hear her.

“Exactly. It’s hard to believe the things these people get away with. If I’m even one number off, Eve hears about it and makes my life a nightmare.”

“We’ve noticed the lack of discipline.” Carol said. “And we’re doing something about it.”

Janet opened a door.

“I’m glad to hear. I would hate for any other new arrivals to go through what you guys did.”

The scavenger took out her Display and began pressing buttons.

“The box is in here. It should be towards the front labeled ‘Synchronized Outfits.’”

“There it is!” Carol shouted. She pointed to a stack of boxes.

“Napp.” Tsudo did not have to say anything other than that. Napp carefully reached up and pulled the box down. As he did, Tsudo took notice of a few things.

“How often do you organize?” She asked Janet.

“Inventory is done once a day on specific sections, six days out of the week. On the last day, I clean everything.”

“I thought so.” Tsudo said. “This place is significantly less dusty than the rest of this building. And you do it by yourself?”

“Every so often Ortin comes to help. Other than that, yes. Not that they would, but I don’t trust the defenders to sort anything properly.”

“Something just dawned on me.” Napp said. He placed the box on the ground carefully. “She said ‘synchronize outfits.’”

Carol let out a loud gasp.

“Please tell me this means what I think it means.”

“Maybe.” Tsudo said, grinning. “But first we’ve got to get these up to the fifth floor.”

Tsudo signaled Napp with her head who obeyed. He picked the box up and began carrying it out of the room.

“Wait a moment?” Janet said. “You’re taking the whole box? Is that necessary?”

“Well, I don’t know the clothes sizes of everyone so I need them to point it out.”

“You should bring them down here instead. I need to mark every outfit that someone claims as well as…”

“That’s going to be a pain.” Tsudo said. “I think it’d be better if you just came with us.”

“Oh, I… I can’t do that. I have to keep an eye on the inventory in case someone tries to sneak extra food or clothes or...”

“So… this is your post?”

“Not… this spot exactly, just the base. Still I work better-”

“Then you won’t be abandoning your post if you stay in the base. Come with us.”

“I would have to lock the supplies for the day and the doctor might have a medical emergency and need supplies-“

“The doctor? As in Ortin? He’s going to be upstairs with me. If he needs something, you’ll be the first to know if you’re upstairs.”

“But it’s easier to do my job…”

“Here’s the thing, Janet. I don’t want to make your life more difficult, but having people come back down here would make my life more difficult. If you’re only excuse is that you don’t want to leave, I can’t really sympathize.”

Janet stopped talking. She felt some form of frustration. She was about to speak, when

“Besides, you might have asked friend to stop, but since the order didn’t come from me, he just ignored you. If he gets to the top and starts passing out outfits, you’ll lose inventory.”

Janet’s eyes widened.

“Quickly, let’s go Come on.”

Carol and Tsudo couldn’t help but grin as they headed back towards the stairs. The group made their way up to the top.

Chapter 39 end