

CHAPTER 30

Detective Parker



The hair on his skin was damp with sweat. Shelby Forthright patted it with a towel and shuffled it inside his pocket. He looked to his side, but Randall wasn't there.

Through the glass, Shelby saw ships lining themselves up in the distance. *They'll reach the resort in a matter of hours*, he thought. The observatory had a special glass made just for this space station. It was ideal for viewing objects far enough away for him to anticipate. *Never actually thought I'd need it.*

The door opened. Shelby greeted the guard clad in white gray for an almost sterile jumpsuit. The guard saluted the CEO of BnL and then turned to the entrance. He flicked his wrist at the door, summoning two more guards, just as sterile. They scuffled inside with a man Shelby recognized.

The tinkerer.

Al was dressed in worn clothing and appeared to have missed a shave. Both of his hands were held together by cuffs.

“Mr. Forthright! Thank goodness. I was just telling these degenerates—”

“That I’d let you go free?”

“Well...well, I just thought Randall was being a little, uh, emotional when he handed me over to these creeps.”

Shelby nodded, prompting the first guard to slap Al’s face and force him to the ground.”

Al shouted for half a second before controlling himself. Then he took several deep breaths. “Look, Shelby, I did everything you asked me to do!”

“And you’ll continue to do just that.” Shelby cleared his throat. “Your failures have led to the destruction of a super and the disappearance of another. Letting you get away with that would be unprofessional.”

The tinkerer bent his head down and started gasping. Shelby knew in an instant that the man was crying.

“Please!” Al yelled as he lifted his face, stricken with tears. “I can help you fight the starliners coming this way! Isn’t that them through the window?”

Shelby glanced at the window behind them. “Huh. No, I like to think of it as advanced glass.”

“Look, I overheard the guys saying that Randall isn’t around for some reason. You need someone to help you lead against this battle, and I’m your guy. I know these ships inside and out!”

Someone entered the already open door. It was another guard dressed in dark blue.

“Mr. Forthright,” he greeted the CEO.

“Yes, lieutenant? As you can see, I’m not busy or anything.”

“Apologies, Mr. Forthright. Logan Parr has returned from 2014.”

Hmm, Shelby thought for a moment. Interesting timing.

“Is her chip intact?”

“Yes, Mr. Forthright. She’s been asking about her directive. And she has critical information you should know about the Pixar Detective and his friends.”

And Randall? Shelby wanted to say.

“Good. Bring her in, lieutenant.” Shelby turned to the tinkerer. “Looks like I don’t need your help after all. But don’t feel too defeated. I would have tossed you aside eventually.” The CEO waved his hands and several guards grabbed Al as he protested.

“No, no, no! Where are you taking me! Stop, please! Shelby!”

The doors closed.

Shelby took out his towel and looked at it for a moment. *It's not even damp.*

...

Cara's fingers were numb. She stared at the control panel and let her hand loose from them for the first time in hours.

"Best you take a minute," Willem said, grasping her shoulder. "The fight's coming, and you need rest."

"Good idea," she said without breath. Cara arose and glanced around the room filled with people she had only known for a few months. Finally, her eyes met her cousin's. She curved her neck and they joined each other outside of the command deck overlooking the fleet of starliners.

"The 'dark' Logan is probably on that ship," Cara said, almost whispering. "Are you ready to face her again?"

"Please." Logan's hand crackled with sparks. She admired it. "I took her out easy enough the last time. Besides, I doubt this fight will involve hand-to-hand combat. Willem seems pretty certain we can shut the station down from the air."

"Logan, there's no 'air' in space."

"Exactly! BnL is screwed. Forthright has no idea how many starliners we've managed to find out there."

"True. But the resort has a lot of weaponry. Way more than anything we have..."

“Cara, don’t doubt your work here. We’ve created enough firepower. We have the people. We have the ships. Gosh, this timid attitude I’m seeing right now reeks of our childhood.”

“I know what you’re trying to do.”

Logan looked at her for a moment. She didn’t respond.

Cara touched her shoulder. “I know we don’t stand a chance. Willem has made that clear in his own way. But you don’t have to worry. We’re going down fighting, and I’m OK with that.”

...

A bad song was playing as Logan walked inside the observatory and stood upright before Shelby Forthright. His back was all she could really see.

“I hate this song.”

Shelby bobbed his head anyway. “It’s strange. I’m the CEO of BnL, but for some reason, they won’t let me handle the soundtrack. Not even in my own office!”

Logan raised an eyebrow. “We’re not in your office.”

“What? Oh, yes, that was a test or something.” Shelby grabbed a coffee mug and took a long sip. “So, where you been?”

“2014. You?”

“Just here. The lieutenant says you got here by way of the Blonde Magician.” Shelby emphasized those last two words. “At first, I

thought he was talking about you. I mean, you're blonde. Your superpowers are like magic. Who am I to put labels on things?"

"Wallaby Jones is his real name. And yeah, he sent me here. It was pretty easy to convince him and Stevin Parker to let me go free. I just had to seem upset about how the true Sadie got blown up."

"You could have eliminated them before you left."

"I need a directive for something that drastic. But I'm guessing by the bad music and fleet of ships getting closer that you're worried about something else."

"So glad you kept your wit when your directive vanished. Fine, we'll get that fixed. For now, your informal directive is to lead a fleet of ships against the starliners. Randall was meant to do this, but he's a bit preoccupied. And of course, I have a space station to run."

"Agreed." Logan turned to the left side of the observatory and gazed at the light shining in the distance. "Is that the same supernova?"

"Naturally. We've moved the station a bit closer to it, which is why it may seem a little bigger."

"Yes, never mind. I can feel it. It tastes the same." She rubbed her fingers together and shut her eyes. "I'll lead your fleet if you give me permission to use my firepower against those idiots."

"Granted. Thank goodness I left room for verbal directives. Your chip isn't bothering you is it?"

"It's good." Logan went to her knees and placed her hands on the cold, steel floor.

Shelby approached her, but he didn't look confused. He almost laughed.

"I can feel it, Shelby. It's warm and inviting."

"Hm, yes. Yes, it is."

"And thanks to you, I can use it against idiots."

"Yes."

"You know the biggest idiot of them all?"

"No."

"Shelby Forthright, CEO of Buy n Large."

He turned to see the flare shining brightly beyond the window.

"It's beautiful."

The blaze was a whip, piercing the side of the station. It started at the advanced glass of the observatory. Logan felt the fire inside the room before she saw it. In one moment, the entire room and everything inside it was a shining, beautiful light."

...

Wait...are finals today? Stevin leapt out of his bed like it was on fire. It took less than a minute to put clean clothes on, but almost a full minute to decide if he should wear his bowler hat. Stevin packed it inside the bag with the half-charged oracle and darted out the door. He tried to sneak around the kitchen without his mom seeing him, but he knew she was aware of his loud presence long before she gave him a stare. Stevin returned a salute and glided through the door.

“I’m not late!” Stevin praised himself at the bus stop.

Mary looked at him with a bent smile. Stevin knew it was more endearing than it came across. “I guess that means you really have changed,” she said.

“Sorry, not all of us can merge with a time sorceress and become a new person.”

“Yeah,” she sighed. “A new person without magic.” She scratched her face, which confused Stevin for rubbing her eyes.

“Hey, it’s been a few weeks. Don’t tell me you’re still having a hard time with—”

“Just an itch. Are you *still* waiting for Cara to text you?”

“What?” Stevin looked up from his phone. “No, weirdo. I’m just fascinated with this weather.”

“You could just call her.”

“My phone can make calls?”

“Fine, or you could text her.”

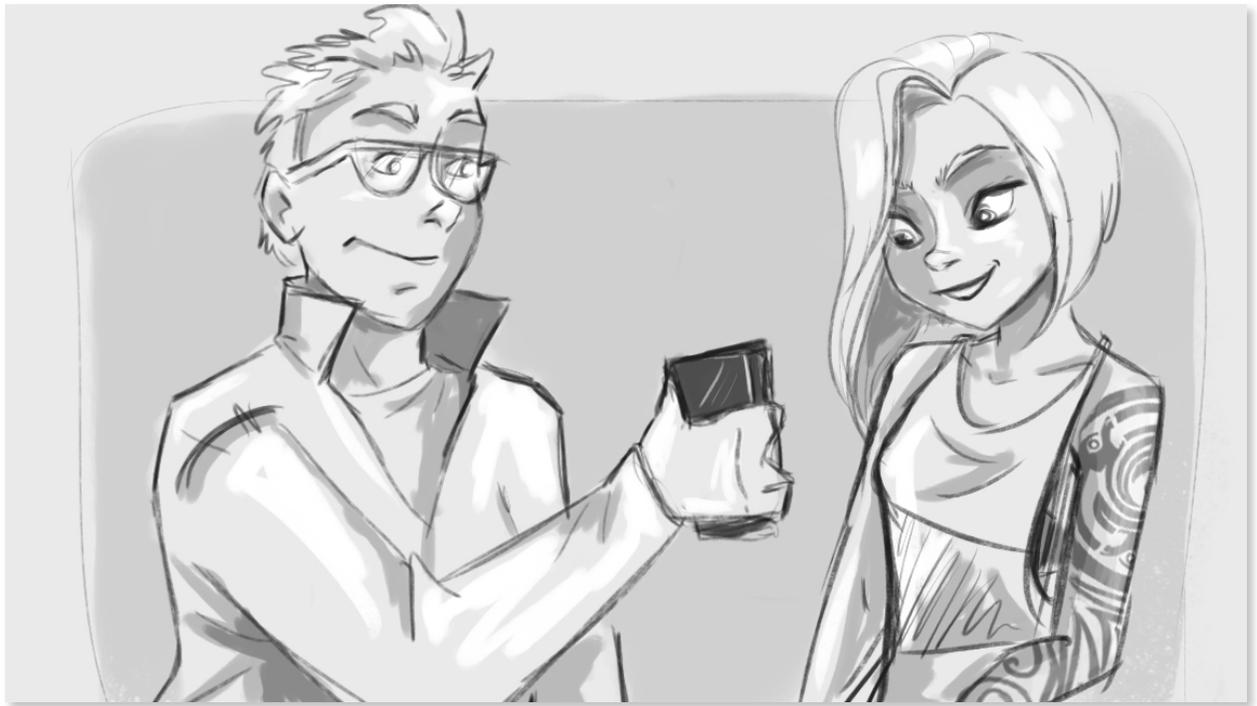
“Yeah, I guess I could. But I’m not sure she can get texts in other time periods. Right now she’s in 2101 building garbage-cleaning robots, which means her Wi-Fi is probably a little shaky.”

Mary yawned. “It must be tough crushing on girls with actual jobs.”

“What?! This isn’t a crush. It’s a business relationship.”

“You’re still staring at your phone.”

“Can’t a guy download the Brang app in peace?”



The bus screeched to a halt, but Stevin didn't notice it at first. It took a tug on his arm to lead him up the bus steps with his face still buried in his text messages.

He looked up to see Wallaby and Sadie sitting in the very back with bags saving their seats. Wallaby was showing her something on his phone. *Probably a video of dogs wearing costumes or something. He knows she hates those—*

But Sadie laughed this time.

Huh.

They sat down and Stevin buried his face in his phone again.

Wallaby shook his head. "Waiting for that Cara call, eh?"

"Oh, they're texting now," said Mary. "That's how you know it's serious."

Sadie stroked her chin. "I fail to understand how one is able to communicate emotional intent within the contents of a text message."

Mary giggled. “It helps if you’re hopelessly in love. Or if you’ve been through an apocalyptic scenario with that person.”

Sadie’s eyes glazed over. “Still, I don’t understand how courtship is possible when the person is 14 years older than you. And in other timelines on a regular basis.”

Stevin gave them a sharp look. “This isn’t courtship. Also, she’s only two years older. Basically.”

They poured out of the bus with their bags dangling from their backs. Stevin stood in the center as they walked, as usual, with Mary and Sadie on each side. Today, Wallaby was on Sadie’s side instead of Mary’s.

They didn’t meet again until fourth period for Mr. Azam’s class. Stevin got to the class early to see an old friend.

“Sumner,” he whispered by the closet. The purple monster let the door crack. “Hey mate, you got my 11am coffee?”

“Right here.” He handed Sumner the coffee as Mary jumped on his shoulders, noticing Sumner at the last second.

“Mr. Sumner!” she shouted louder than Stevin appreciated.

“Ahem,” Mr. Azam cleared his throat. More students were walking in. He stopped Stevin as they walked to their desks. “Don’t worry, Mr. Parker. She’ll call.”

“No one ‘calls’ anymore, Mr. Azam.”

Mr. Azam smiled. “Right, of course.” When Sadie entered, he immediately shifted his attention.

“Sadie, I have a quick request.”

“Yes, peculiar professor?”

“Well, you know I appreciate you turning me back into a human, but I have a bit of a problem you should be able to help me with.”

“I don’t think—”

“It would be SO simple! See, my girlfriend’s parents are visiting. Now, Molly has assured me that they’re quite agreeable, but if I could just be a fly on their wall for two seconds—”

“Forgiveness, Mr. Azam. I’m scaling back the frequency in which I use my powers. I only want to use them for...special occasions.”

“Right,” he nodded. “Of course. Ha ha ha!”

The class was about to start, but Stevin was definitely ready to leave. Mary slid her chair near him as they sat at their desks. “When are you seeing her and Logan next?”

Stevin smirked. “You’ll know when I know. Things are about to get pretty busy for us.”

Wallaby wandered over to them. “Yeah, that sounds good. Now that we’re all here and together and whatnot...it’s all pretty boring. I could use a good old-fashioned adventure.”

The phone started shrieking. Stevin pressed the center button, and Cara’s face appeared onscreen. “Cara! You got something for us?”

“Stevin! Yes, we’ve tracked him down. But it’s pretty far back in time. Can you handle that, Wallaby?”

“Gladly.”

THE PIXAR DETECTIVE

Cara smiled. “Round up the troops then. I’ll text you the exact time period. I may be able to send you support since the Unforgivables still owe us a favor.

And...well, I’d like to say this will be a smooth mission for the Pixar Detectives, but you never know when it comes to dinosaurs.”

“Thanks, Cara. We’ll take care of it.”

Mary touched Stevin’s shoulder. “Promise me you’ll find him?”

“You know you have my word.”

She smiled and went back to her desk.

With a nod, Sadie snuck Sumner out of the closet and placed him halfway into her bag. Wallaby was already by the classroom door. “Are we ready, Stevin?”

He looked back at the phone. “Hey, Cara. Um, we should probably meet up sometime to talk about—”

“Yeah, definitely.”

“...Missions and stuff.”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Great. See you later.”

“Bye, Stevin. Good luck!”

He hung up the phone and walked up to the door. “Alright, Wallaby. Can you handle going back a few million years?”

“Already tried for my own enjoyment. You don’t want to know some of the weird stuff I’ve found so far.”

“Ah, perfect. Sadie, are you amped up for some dinosaur transformations?”

THE PIXAR DETECTIVE

“I believe an anaconda would be a suitable adversary for a tyrannosaurus rex.”

“Great. Sumner, I’m guessing you’re ready to stretch your wings?”

“Always, Detective Parker. Just point me in the right direction, and I’ll flee from it.”

Stevin smiled and put his hand on the doorknob. When Wallaby’s knocks stopped, Stevin looked back to see Mary sitting quietly at her desk. He knew she wished to have her powers still. But she didn’t look sad. She looked at him with a beaming smile. *I bet in her own weird way, she’s proud.*

He placed the bowler hat on his head and grinned. “Alright, Pixar Detectives. Let’s get chased by everything bigger than us.”



The End.

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