

# Ridin' Out the Storm

## A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 16

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### Weather Report: 3500-14

#### Part 1

Rex and I were preparing lunch, and arguing over whether we should put little olives on toothpicks on all the sandwiches (I thought they were kind of cute, but Rex wasn't so keen) when we heard one of the worst sounds a person can hear: your own name over the PA.

"Privates Callahan and Storm, report to Captain Jefferson immediately."

We looked at each other in horror, each reviewing everything we'd done lately which might get us in trouble. The problem with such mental reviews is that it's always a long list.

"Probably nothin'," Rex said as we hurried along the corridor, trying to ensure our uniforms looked presentable.

He was both right and wrong. It was nothing...yet it was certainly something. For standing in front of Captain Jefferson's desk was Shelandra and Vance. Shelandra wore the black armband of an MP, but Vance was not wearing handcuffs.

Rex and I were openly surprised, but we stood before the captain's desk and saluted.

I had told Rex about Vance, and what I had experienced aboard the *Heir Apparent* during the battle. I had *not* told Rex about Shelandra's extracurricular activities.

"Morning, gents," Captain Jefferson said. "Private Storm, I'm told you're acquainted with our guest."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, keeping my voice carefully neutral.

"The admiralty have determined we have no more information to obtain from this prisoner, and has agreed he isn't a threat. Since you were the one who made the arrest -" she raised an eyebrow in doubt and amazement "- they're remanding this prisoner to your care, along with MP Pellardini in a supervisory role." She looked at Rex. "This means you, too, Private Callahan. The prisoner will assist you in the kitchen; he will follow your orders; you will be responsible for any trouble he causes."

"Yes, ma'am," we both said.

"MP Pellardini will brief you on the details," the captain said. "Dismissed."

All four of us saluted and left.

"What-" Rex said the moment we were in the corridor, but Shelandra signalled to him to keep quiet. We walked to the kitchen, Vance looking around with interest and drawing a few stares on the way.

As soon as we were in the kitchen with the door closed, Rex started again. "What is going on...*MP Pellardini?*"

Shelandra gave him a mock glare. "Yes, I'm an MP now."

“How did you manage that?”

Shelandra hesitated and glanced at me. I shook my head, indicating I hadn't told him.

“Rex,” Shelandra said softly. “I have a confession to make.”

“You want me to show Vance around?” I asked, subtly offering her a chance to be alone with Rex.

She shook her head. “He's not to leave the kitchen until shift end. And...I don't see any harm in him knowing, if he's your friend.” She took a deep breath and faced Rex. “I'm the one who reassigned you and Jake to the *Starfall*, using Admiral Brighton's credentials. I did it to save your lives.”

Rex absorbed this. It took about half a minute. We all stood in silence. I knew Vance was hearing this for the first time, too.

Rex finally looked at me. “Is that why you went to the *Heir Apparent*?”

“I figured it out,” I said. “But I didn't want to say anything without proof, even to you. After that, it wasn't my confession to tell.”

Rex nodded.

“Please forgive me, Rex,” Shelandra said.

“Our replacements...” Rex said, piecing it together.

“I know,” she said quietly. “Jake and I have already had that talk. It hurt enough the first time. And...I'll have to live with that forever.”

A sardonic expression flickered across Rex's face, ever so slightly. “Come here,” he said, and wrapped Shelandra in his arms. Vance and I just stood there as they hugged.

After a few moments, with no self-consciousness whatsoever, Vance said to me, “You should hug your friend.”

I scowled, but Shelandra smiled and waved me over. “Aww,” she said, as I joined the group hug.

“Vance, you might as well get in on it,” Rex said. Vance gave us all a giant bear hug. We all laughed, it was so absurd.

A familiar voice asked, “What...in...the...hell...are...you...people...doing?”

We all disengaged and turned to find Jerry in the doorway, which he had closed behind him. He was leaning on a crutch because his leg was still not healed.

“Secret cook stuff,” I said. “You wouldn't understand.”

“Uh huh,” he said, looking at Vance. “I heard there was an enemy prisoner on board. I wanted to see for myself.” Jerry stared at Vance as if he were an interesting zoo specimen.

“This is Jerry,” I said to Vance and Shelandra. “Jerry, this is Vance, and our good friend Shelandra. Vance isn't just a prisoner, he's actually a friend.”

Jerry pulled a *hmm, that's interesting* face as he absorbed this information. He still gazed at Vance.

“Jerry's a super hacker,” I said to Shelandra. “He's the one who figured out what you were doing in the database.”

At these words, Jerry's attention finally left Vance and swiveled onto Shelandra...and suddenly his keen interest was on something else entirely.

“Well, hello, MP Shelandra,” he said smoothly, and with a lot more charm than I had certainly ever seen. “Pleased to meet you.”

Shelandra smiled, and Rex and I glanced at each other, suddenly feeling a little protective of her.

“So you were the one mucking around with the records,” Jerry said with a smile. “Not bad work. Of course, I’d be happy to teach you a few tricks of the trade to help you cover your tracks a lot better next time. I can tell you’d be a quick learner, and I’d love to help. Maybe tonight after you’re off duty?”

“Sweet mercy, he’s fast,” Vance said.

“Yeah, I’ll think about it,” Shelandra said. “But an MP is never truly off duty, you know.”

“Ah, but there are exceptions to every rule,” Jerry said.

“*Anyway*,” I declared, halting this train wreck before it killed someone, and turned to Shelandra. “I’d like to know why you’re an MP instead of a Special Gunner, what you’re doing here, and what Vance is doing here.”

“I arranged everything,” she said simply. “I told you I would. Duty change, ship reassignment, prisoner reassignment...the works! And now we’re all together.”

The thoughts assembled in my head, each one increasing my horror. “Shelandra...you didn’t!”

“I did. Admiral Brighton’s orders, all the way.”

“And what happens when Admiral Brighton discovers these incredible orders he’s supposedly given?” Rex asked.

“Chances are low,” Shelandra said.

“Jerry,” I said.

“I’ll take care of it,” he said with a smile directed only at Shelandra. “And it will go

so much more smoothly and quickly if the lovely MP will assist me. Show me which records she’s manipulated.”

I rolled my eyes so hard I almost left the galaxy.

“Yes, that would be fine,” Shelandra said, also with a smile and just as smoothly.

Jerry smiled back, the charm turned up to 11.

I said, “You know, as long as you people are here, you might as well help us with The Great Olive Debate. Little olives on toothpicks on each sandwich. The fate of the empire rests on your decision. Gimme your vote.”

“Olive us are here together?” Rex asked.

“Ha ha,” I answered.

“Olives are good,” Vance said. “But ugly.”

“Don’t give a damn,” Jerry said.

“Life’s short,” Shelandra said. “Do the olive thing.”

The door opened and Veronica and Janice from the Heart of Fire walked in.

“Hey guys!” Veronica said. “Fancy meeting you here!”

Rex and I were beyond stunned. And beyond thrilled!

Shelandra must have seen the look of wonder and joy on our faces and suddenly felt a little protective herself, because she leaned close to me and said sweetly, “Hey...who’re your friends?”