

## CHAPTER 17

Lee didn't indicate whether she agreed or disagreed with my decision. If anything, she just looked nervous.

I turned off the car and pocketed the key, then walked around to her door and opened it. She climbed out, and after a deep breath I slowly opened the sedan's back door.

Eddie was still there, lying awkwardly on his back. After his groan moments ago he had returned to unconsciousness.

“Should we wake him up before giving him your robot things?”

Lee shook her head.

“Let him sleep. Emnons work more quickly when the subject is sedated.”

“More quickly? How long will this take?”

“It depends on how much damage they find. Emnons typically finish their work in less than 30 seconds.”

Whoa.

“What happens when they finish?”

Kyralee opened the vial and swirled it several times.

“They shut themselves down. Eddie's blood will naturally filter them out and dispose of them when he next urinates.”

Lee suddenly looked up at me.

“Teal...are you certain you want to try this?”

“Certain? I'm definitely not certain. But what other choice do we have?”

Kyralee shook her head.

“I do not disagree with your decision. I just want to make certain that you are prepared for the consequences if something goes wrong.”

I sighed.

“Well... what’s the worst-case scenario? What happens if Eddie is allergic to those things?”

She looked down at Eddie.

“If he is part of that 10%, the reaction will occur almost immediately. Within minutes, his vital organs will start shutting down. Death typically occurs in less than hour.”

She looked back at me. Something behind her eyes implied a strong sense of warning.

“And Teal... it is said to be a very painful way to die. I thought you should know.”

“Seriously? You thought I should know THAT? Thanks a lot, Kyralee. Thanks a friggin lot.”

I shook my head and took another deep breath. Was I sure about this? Was it *really* the best thing to do? If Eddie were conscious, would he give the go-a-head?

A-ha! There was my answer! If Eddie was awake, he would definitely give his assent. He loved machines and computers and high-tech stuff. He would love the idea of tiny alien robots saving his life.

I looked Kyralee and nodded.

“I’m sure. Let’s do it.”

Without hesitation, she gently tipped Eddie’s head back, then pried open his left eye and poured in the entire vial.

I suddenly felt a little woozy.

“Uh, his eye? Was that really necessary?”

“Administering emnons into the eye provides the fastest and safest route to the brain. The emnons will begin their work there.”

I watched Eddie closely, but nothing seemed to happen. I turned to ask Lee for details, but she only raised a finger to her lips.

“Watch,” she whispered.

Suddenly Eddie groaned and arched his back violently, sending me cursing and jumping back in surprise.

Was he allergic? Was he dying?

The wooziness got stronger.

Eddie moaned again, then sat up straight as a rod and shook his arms violently.

“Ahh! What’s happening to me?”

Lee placed her hands on his shoulders and pushed him back down.

“You are okay. The itching will pass in a moment.”

“Eddie,” I exclaimed. “You’re alive! How do you feel?”

He looked up at me and raised an eyebrow.

“I got hit by a car, dude. How would you feel?”

At least his sense of humor still worked.

“Gah,” he gasped. “Everything itches! What did you do to me?”

“Lee here gave you a potion made of tiny robots. They’re supposed to help you heal.”

His eyes went wide.

“Seriously? Nanorobots? Cooool,” he exclaimed, turning to look at Lee. “So you’re Lee, huh? Isn’t that a guy’s name? And why are you here? Are you an alien?”

Lee giggled as I rolled my eyes in total disbelief. I had secretly hoped Eddie’s fall would knock some social skills into him.

Guess not.

“I am fairly certain Kyralee is a female name,” she replied, “and though I do not consider myself an alien, I am not from earth.”

Even though this was implied by our earlier conversation, hearing her come right out and say it raised goosebumps on my arms.

“Not from earth?” Eddie asked, looking equally dumbfounded. “Where *are* you from?”

“A planet called Orionis. I live there with my mother.”

“And,” I added, “you’re never gonna believe who her dad is.”

“What? Is your dad a Zargansk?!”

Lee giggled again.

“No, he is not a Zargansk. My father – Joseph – works at your school. I believe you met him yesterday morning.”

“NO WAY!” he yelled, his jaw dropping open in shock. “Your old man is the janitor? Ha ha! This just gets weirder and weirder!”

“So I’ve got a question,” I said, ignoring Eddie’s ongoing laughter. “How exactly did you get here to earth? Did you use a portalgate?”

Lee’s face suddenly went white.

“I...”

Her expression turned foggy, and she suddenly swayed backward.

I lunged toward her, seizing her shoulders.

“Kyralee? Are you okay?”

She brought a hand to her head.

“Teal. I...”

She swayed again. Eddie leapt out of his seat to help, but I was already lowering her to the ground.

“Lee, it’s okay. Take a deep breath. What’s wrong?”

She shook her head.

“I... I don’t know.”

She looked straight at me.

“Help.”

And then she slumped quietly to the ground.

\* \* \*

From: oZ  
To: rOgi  
Subj: CODE X DIRECTIVE

Unexpected error in subject KYRL.<br>

Request immediate extraction. Loc confirmed @  
33.931192,-118.396252.<br>

As CODE X this supersedes all previous  
directives.<br>

<end>

\* \* \*

“Lee! Please! Wake up!!”

I felt frantically for a pulse; she had one, and it was even fairly strong.

So why wasn’t she awake?

I racked my brain for ideas when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Eddie leaning in toward Kyralee’s face.

I was struck by the sudden horrifying realization that he was going to give her mouth-to-mouth.

An unexplainable anger shot into my chest and I shoved him with so much force that both of us went flying. Eddie smashed against the ground, cursing as he fell.

“Teal! What the hell’s wrong with you?”

“She doesn’t need mouth-to-mouth, you freak! You just wanted to kiss her!”

“Are you insane? I was listening for breathing! I wasn’t trying to kiss her!”

I glanced embarrassedly down at Eddie, who looked genuinely shocked and confused.

“Uh, right. Sorry. I was just trying to keep her safe.”

“Safe? Whatever. You attacked me!”

“I did not. And why didn’t you say something about listening for breathing? What was I supposed to think, with you darting in like that?”

“Are you insane? Why on earth would I kiss a random unconscious alien, Teal?”

...He had a point.

“And even if I did want to kiss her – which I don’t – what gives you the right to stop me? She’s not *your* alien.”

“She’s not an alien, Eddie.”

“She’s not from earth. That makes her an alien.”

“Don’t be stupid. She’s a human, just like you and me.”

“But she isn’t from earth, Teal! By definition, that makes her—”

Somewhere behind us, almost inaudibly, a soft voice whispered, “...Teal.”

I barely it over Eddie’s angry ranting. I flew around and ran back to Kyralee.

“Lee! Are you okay?”

She nodded, and I exhaled a heavy sigh of relief.

“I, I think I am okay,” she muttered as she slowly sat up. “What happened?”

“I don’t know. One second we were talking, the next you were passing out.”

She shook her head.

“So... nothing happened to me?”

“Nothing at all. I asked how you got to earth, and *bam* – you were gone.

Are you sure you're okay?"

She paused, then gently nodded.

I extended a hand and helped her to her feet. She took a moment to catch her breath, then gently dusted herself off and smiled nervously at me.

"Thank you for taking care of me. I am sorry for—"

I cut her off with a wave of my hand.

"Don't apologize. It's not your fault. I'm just glad you're okay."

She smiled as Eddie looked on, scowling.

"So," I said, eager for a change of subject. "Should we head toward the school?"

Kyralee nodded.

"Yes, we should. Time is of the essence."

I avoided making eye contact with Eddie as I glanced across the field at the high school. It looked quiet and abandoned, but I was certain HIRCs were there, guarding it. The odds of us getting into the school unnoticed were slim.

But what other options did we have? If we wanted to reach the portalgate, we had no choice but to break into the high school and head back to the secret tunnels.

And – I reminded myself – every second we wasted out here was another second my dad got closer to dying.

"Hold on," interrupted Eddie, finally breaking his angry silence. "Shouldn't we make a plan before we go?"

I nodded before turning toward Lee.

"Have you been in the tunnels beneath the school?"

She thought for a moment.

"I...I am not sure. I seem to remember tunnels. What do they look like?"

"Long, silver, shiny."

She thought for another moment.

“This must sound so strange, but I cannot remember how I arrived on earth. It may have been through the same portalgate my father used, but maybe it was something else. I do not know if I have been in the tunnels beneath your school.”

Eddie and I traded wary glances.

“Um, okay,” I said, trying hard to remain tactful. “That’s cool. I guess this means Eddie and I will lead the way.”

I turned to confirm this with Eddie, and instead found him gesturing frantically over his shoulder.

“Eddie, what?”

He pointed backward and raised his eyebrows.

“We need to talk!” he yell-whispered. “Just you and me!”

I glanced over to find Kyralee’s expression somewhere between confused and hurt. Was it possible for Eddie to make this *more* awkward?

“Uh, okay. Just a sec, Kyralee.”

I followed Eddie a ways into the field before he whirled around, an expression of obvious skepticism on his face.

“We need to get moving,” I preempted. “What on earth do you want?”

“What do you mean, *what do I want?*” he whispered. “Lee is nuts! She can’t remember how she got to earth? How suspicious is that? I don’t think she came through the portalgate at all. I bet she’s a spy or something for the men in black suits.”

“No way, Eddie. No way. She’s not a spy. She saved your life! How could you think she’s working for them?”

Eddie looked straight at me.

“Listen, Teal – I know she’s hot and all, but isn’t it obvious? How did she get Zargansk magic stones? How did she get those crazy healing robots? How did she know to look for us at Megamart?”

“How am I supposed to know? Maybe she came out of the tunnels beneath

the school and overheard the HIRCs talking about us. She could have easily followed them to the store.”

“Followed them how? By running after their cars?”

I didn’t have an answer for that.

“Eddie, this is stupid. Lee’s not a spy.”

I almost added *and you’re just jealous that she likes me more*, but that seemed a bit much, even for Eddie.

“Teal – dude – I’m telling you, something about her isn’t right. Doesn’t she just seem too...too...”

“Too good to be true?” I asked, half-joking.

“Exactly! It’s all too good to be true! Doesn’t it seem overly convenient that she saved us at the store, she saved my life now, she wants to come with us into—”

Eddie stopped. His sudden epiphany was so obvious, I almost expected a lightbulb to appear over his head.

“I’ve got it.”

“Got *what*?” I replied with barely masked sarcasm.

“I know what Lee’s after. She must be working for the Zargansk! I’d bet my life on it! She’s trying to get us into the school building alive, which is exactly what they want. They want her to lead us straight to them!”

It took me a moment to process all the pronouns he’d just used.

“Eddie, that’s—”

“No!” he interrupted. “Work with me here! The Zargansk want nothing more than to find Cronus, right? If what you’ve told me is true and the human ambassadors really did close their portalgates today, the Zargansk must know something’s up. Naturally, they would assume the escaped human ambassador had something to do with it.”

Although that made perfect sense, I couldn’t bring myself to give Eddie the

glee of knowing I agreed.

Not that it mattered, because he continued without so much as a breath.

“Now combine this with the janitor ordering us to find Cronus – which the aliens could have easily overheard, they probably have surveillance down there – and they could *totally* suspect that we have access to Cronus. Teal, don’t you see? It all fits!”

“Let me get this straight,” I said, trying hard to keep my temper level. “You think the Zargansk overheard our conversation with the janitor?”

“Or that Phenx – the alien you shot – reported us. It wouldn’t be hard for the aliens to figure out we’re involved, which is why the men in black suits are after us.”

“Stop calling them aliens.”

“But that’s what they are! They’re aliens!”

“I prefer Zargansk.”

“What? You don’t think they’re aliens?”

“No, I just...”

*Argh.*

“Whatever. Forget I said anything. So you think the Zargansk know about our mission to find Cronus, and because they want that information they sent Kyralee to find us and lead us into a trap?”

Eddie nodded.

“But that doesn’t explain why they came after me way before I knew about Cronus. Your theory doesn’t explain why they attacked my mom and I last weekend.”

“Don’t you see?” Eddie replied, his eyes gleaming. “Cronus is your old man, and we’re probably the only people still on Earth who know that. Obviously the Zargansk realize where your dad is – hence their attack on the hospital last Friday – but for some reason they can’t get to him.”

Eddie's smile remained, though his tone shifted from excited to worried.

“And since they can't get to Cronus, doesn't it make sense that they'd try and make *him* come to *them*? What's the one thing that would make your dad leave the hospital?”

...Saving his family.

If true, this would explain every HIRC attack so far – the hospital, the minivan, the house.

Holy crap. Eddie might actually be right.

“Eddie, this is, seriously,” I sputtered. “...C'mon, man! I mean, yeah that makes sense, but what does it have to do with Kyralee?”

A sudden, fleetingly hopeful thought entered my mind.

“And hey – if Lee's working for the Zargansk, why did she take out those agents at the MegaMart?”

“I don't know,” he replied. “Maybe to make us trust her? Maybe it was all rigged?”

I groaned. We were wasting precious time.

“Okay fine, say you're right – what do you think we should do about it?”

“We can keep her around. I just think we should be cautious.”

“What? That's it? After everything you've said, your grand summary is *let's keep her around*? Eddie, sometimes I just don't get you.”

He smiled and shrugged.

“Hey – at least now if she betrays us, don't blame me. Consider yourself warned.”

But I was already walking back toward Kyralee and muttering all kinds of angry comments about Eddie and his crazy ideas. Why had I brought him along originally? He was clearly intelligent, but sometimes that was more burden than help. I almost wished I'd left him in the back of the stolen sedan.

I forced a smile and tried to suppress my frustration as I caught up to

Kyralee.

“Is everything okay?” she asked.

“Yeah, everything’s fine. Eddie just thinks you’re a Zargansk spy.”

I forced a laugh.

“But you’re obviously not, right?”

Lee paused, and I wondered what that implied.

“Teal,” she said, shaking her head. “I must be honest with you.”

Uh oh. Nothing good ever comes from *I must be honest with you*.

“What is it, Lee?”

“I... I cannot remember anything from before I rescued you from the HIRC agents. The last thing I remember is...well, I don’t know. I have no memory of why I was at the same place as you, or why I knew I had to save you.”

I really didn’t know what to make of these ever-weirder developments. I had to admit that Eddie was right about one thing: Lee *was* suspicious, but somehow I still doubted she was anything but good. If it weren’t for her, both Eddie and I would have been captured – or dead – after what happened at Megamart. If she came here to hurt us, she certainly could have made her move by now.

Eddie trudged back and I turned to face him, hoping that if I didn’t respond to Lee, somehow the whole *amnesia* thing would stop freaking me out so much.

“How do you feel, Eddie? Did the emmons heal you?”

Eddie shook out his arms and legs then felt his head. The goosebump had shrunk considerably, leaving what just looked like a nasty bruise.

“Actually, I feel great! The robots must have worked!”

“Can you run? Is your ankle all better?”

He jogged in place, then did a little dance.

“Yeah! I’m good to go!”

I turned to Kyralee.

“Thanks for helping him.”

“It was your decision to use the emmons, Teal. Not mine. It appears you chose wisely.”

I smiled at the movie reference, but Lee’s serious face seemed to imply she had no idea what she’d just said.

Man. Why couldn’t I make friends with normal people?

Eddie proceeded to rip the tape off his ankle as he sang, “I got fixed by alien robots! I got fixed by alien robots!” to a tune I didn’t recognize.

I was tempted to laugh until a sudden burst of panic hit me – what if HIRCs were hiding somewhere nearby?

“Quiet!” I said. “Someone might hear you!”

Eddie stopped yelling, instead transforming his face into a mock scowl.

“Well excyuuuse me. Are we finally ready to head to the portalgate?”

“I think so. We don’t have many supplies, but I did manage to grab both our backpacks before leaving Megamart.”

I reached into the car and pulled them out, handing Eddie his and shouldering mine.

“I’m starving,” Eddie groaned. “Do we have time to grab something to eat?”

“Not really,” I replied. “Lee, are you hungry?”

“Yes, but I agree with you. Getting to the portalgate must be our first priority.”

She placed a gentle hand on my arm and looked directly into my eyes.

“I assume you have a plan for getting us inside?”

A plan? Ha ha! Lee obviously didn’t know me very well.

Of course I had no plan for getting into the school, let alone down to the portalgate. I still had a strong suspicion the entire building was guarded by black-suited men. Also, the school’s doors and windows were certain to be locked and alarmed, and – assuming we found a way past that – the janitor’s door

was still locked tight, and we didn't have a key.

As I thought about it more, the whole idea of getting into the school was completely ridiculous. But something about the way Lee looked at me with those big brown eyes made me not really care.

And, since things with Cierra hadn't exactly panned out, this was proving to be a much-needed infusion of femininity into my otherwise testosterone-filled life.

I forced a tenuous smile.

"Of course I have a plan. Let's go."

I shouldered my backpack and started trekking across the weed-covered field, my mind still racing.

I had to come up with a way into the school, and I had to do it quick.