

Miranda walked around the people huddled in the middle of the concourse. On one shoulder, was resting a heavy-looking rifle. In her other hand, she had a large handgun. Some of the people were looking at her angrily, others with fear, while some avoided looking at her entirely.

“Alright, ladies and gents. It should be clear why you are here, but to avoid any confusion, let me spell it out for you. You are here as encouragement for your boss to turn himself over to me. It might come as a surprise to some of you, but he’s a wanted criminal; murder, extortion, you know, that sort of thing.

“If he leaves whatever hiding spot he’s found, and presents himself to me, you all get to go home. If he doesn’t, or if one of you tries something... Well, in that case, not everyone gets to go home.”

She stopped moving as her comm implant beeped. She cursed. She hated being disturbed while working. That was why she’d set the implant to only accept high-priority messages, so this better not be some advertisement.

“Go,” she said. “Miranda Sunstar?”

“Speaking.” Out of the corner of her eye, she saw someone trying to edge away from the group. The woman probably thought she was too distracted to notice. Without turning, she shot her in the back. That made the rest of the people cry out in horror and fear, but the only movement was them huddling closer together.

“This is the Sayatoga. Tristan has escaped.”

It took Miranda a moment to remember who that was. “I had nothing to do with that.” Was that why they had called her on high-priority? To accuse her of being involved? Sure, she’d been interested in him, but she wouldn’t stoop to—

“That is understood,” the officer from the Sayatoga said, interrupting her thoughts. “The records show that you brought him in ten years ago, objective. Therefore, we are informing you first that there is a new bounty on him.”

That was more like it. “Is this a private bounty?”

“It is, for the moment. The captain is willing to make it exclusive to you until he feels you are taking too long. At that point, he will contact other bounty hunters.”

“How much?”

“Twice the previous amount.”

Miranda stopped moving. Six million? They really wanted him back that badly?

“Will you accept the bounty?”

“Yes, of course,” she replied quickly.

“This has been noted. Good hunting.” The connection was terminated.

She looked at the people, huddled together, still trying to take in the bounty’s value.

“Cooper, come in.”

“Here, beautiful. I haven’t found the target yet. You have any luck?”

“No, but he isn’t important anymore. Go back to the ship and get it ready for takeoff.”

“What? Why? What happened? I haven’t known you to abandon a bounty.”

“We’ve been offered a bounty worth six million, and it’s time sensitive.”

Cooper was silent for a moment. “I’m heading out. By the time you get back, it’ll be ready, I’ll have dinner made, the deck washed, and the bed covered with rose petals.”

Miranda chuckled. “Okay, okay, I get it. You’re impressed with the amount. Just get the ship ready.” She paused. “And where the hell would you get roses, anyway?”

“You know me, I know people. Cooper out.”

She looked at the people cowering before her. So, what was she going to do about them? With a shrug, she looked up.

“Looks like the universe is looking out for you, Kline!” she yelled. “I’ve just received a job that’s worth a lot more than you, so you got yourself a reprieve. If no one’s gotten you by the time I’m done with it, I’ll be back so we can pick this up where we left off.” She looked at the people. “That means the lot of you get to go home. You might want to reconsider working here. Unless you like being held at gunpoint.”

She holstered her handgun, turned, and left, whistling a happy tune.