

Unity

By Mantrid Brizon

Episode Seventeen: Coming To Terms

Racing up to Roku and Katala, the police officers drag the Voeldahn away from her Kanorakus captor, who lies flat on her back on the floor. Bleeding from her face and chest, Roku needs immediate medical attention. They usher Roku and her subordinates out of the main office and into the hall while they secure Katala's corpse, a single blaster wound in her forehead. Kellan feels sick to his stomach as he looks at the corpse, his first kill in the line of duty. Though he shot the terrorist and killed her, his aim wasn't quite true.

The hot shard took a detour through Roku's left cheek, gouging the fur and flesh before parking itself deep in Katala's brain. Falling back, Katala's hand slid down her throat and her sharp, silver claws slashed her captive. From the base of her neck and near her left collar bone are three deep cuts that run diagonally toward the top of her right breast, one for each finger. Even at a glance, it's obvious that these wounds will require treatment and will most likely scar over. The women of Roku's office panic and some cry. All of them are civilians who've never seen such things, except in movies and shows. Taking up his V.I. bracelet, Kellan places a call.

"How'd it go?" Miss Ayanda asks.

"Badly..." Kellan replies.

"... What?"

“The office was packed. Roku was taken hostage and I had to act. The target’s dead and Roku’s hurt.”

“WHAT?!” Miss Ayanda snarls. “Get back here, right away!”

“What about August?”

**“I’ll call him right now but I want everyone else in here ASAP!”
Miss Ayanda answers.**

“Understood.”

Leaving the Skahlzunian preserve and on his way to the security offices to begin his shift, August’s V.I. bracelet chirps. Smiling as he sees Miss Ayanda’s name, he accepts the video call.

“Hey! ... What’s wrong?” August asks the worried looking Kanorakus.

“August, you need to head to the hospital.” She begins.

“What?! Why?!” He asks as he starts to panic.

“There was an incident... We tried to capture the saboteur and Roku was injured in the process. I’m so sorry.” A sorrowful Miss Ayanda explains.

Enraged, sad and afraid, August terminates the call and darts toward the nearest tram station, riding toward Commerce Pod One. This pod contains Unity’s hospital, as well as the police station, jail and various civil services. While there are smaller scale versions of all of these services aboard the residential sphere, they are merely outposts; the clinic on tier eight isn’t nearly as capable as the hospital. Taking the tram, he wishes that the car would move at light speed. Reaching the Commerce Pods, as they call the first set of upside-down trapezoidal structures, he sprints toward the hospital.

Entering the void building, he approaches a kiosk and attempts to touch the hologram. A sensor reads his body heat and knows where

on the screen he's pointing, performing the requested action in response. Looking through patient charts, he finds Roku's. 'Patient 000001' is listed as 'in treatment' with a visitor wait time estimated at thirty minutes. Though a little perplexed by the number of digits, August is far more concerned with his sister's fate. What happened to her, and how is she fairing?

"You're lucky." The human doctor says, looking at Roku's scans. "With a wound like this I would've expected the shard to fragment."

"What would've happened if it did?" A scared Roku asks.

"We'd have to start cutting."

The doctor approaches her, holding a medical tool in his hand. A bunny Voeldahn nurse sprays a topical anesthetic on her broken flesh, soaking her white and black fur but numbing the pain. With a gloved hand gently taking hold of her chin, the doctor turns Roku's head and activates the medical device. An orange laser lands on her skin, fusing the top layers of dermis together and effectively suturing her wounds. The heat of the laser and the ultraviolet light emitting from a small bulb on the device kills all germs and bacteria, at least on surface level. With her shirt and bra removed, the doctor has Roku avert her eyes from the light as he closes the slash marks on her chest.

"Will that leave a scar?" Roku asks, her eyes focused on a nearby painting of a vibrant jungle.

"They're definitely deep, especially that blaster wound. Unfortunately, you'll see some scarring." He replies.

Roku closes her eyes and sighs. While not a particularly shallow woman, Roku had always enjoyed her feminine beauty and good looks. On her private terminal are a collection of photos of herself, some of them nude. Feeling the subtle burning as the doctor seals the gashes on her chest, she's certain that she feels herself becoming

less and less attractive. Her heart aches. Every woman wants to be beautiful, even the humble ones like Roku.

“I wouldn’t worry though. After a year or two, your fur should regrow and cover it for you... There! All better!” The doctor chirps.

As he returns the medical tool to a counter, the young nurse hands Roku a patient’s gown.

“Your clothes aren’t damaged. We can wash them for you if you’d like.” She offers.

“That’d be fine... When can I go home?”

“Medically speaking, you’re good to go. However, we’d like to have our resident therapist speak with you, though it’s entirely up to you.” He answers.

“Sure... Whatever.” Roku murmurs.

Taking off her clothing and slipping on the gown, the nurse collects her garments. The doctor leads Roku to an unused room where she can clean the blood from her fur. Taking a quick shower, she looks down at the three lines of pink flesh above her breasts. Slightly raised as the tissue beneath must still heal on its own, there’s minor soreness. What hurts her more, however, is the mere sight of her wounds. Her clawed fingers caress her left cheek. Stepping out of the shower and drying herself, she looks into the bathroom mirror. As her eyes scan her unclothed form, she can’t help but look away. She doesn’t feel as pretty as she did this morning. A sudden knocking startles her and she jumps.

“Yes?”

“I have your clothes, Miss.” A woman’s voice calls from outside.

“Okay. Come in.” Roku replies.

The bunny Voeldahn nurse enters the bathroom, holding the steam cleaned clothing for Roku to take. Roku grabs her clothes and sets them on the counter beside the sink, collecting her panties and bra. The nurse watches her for a moment, focusing on Roku's melancholy face.

"Don't worry." The bunny suddenly speaks.

"What?" Roku glances back to her.

"You're still far prettier than me." The nurse grins. "I'll be outside when you're ready."

"Okay."

The young woman backs out of the bathroom and closes the door, leaving Roku to dress in privacy. Her lips curl into a little grin as she ponders the nurse's words. With soft curves in her face, big blue eyes, dyed pink hair, wavy and past her shoulders, snow-white fur, a slender frame, a modest but noticeable bust and a plump butt, the bunny Voeldahn is certainly an attractive woman. With her self-esteem marginally increased, she reminds herself that the scars won't last forever. Putting on her clothes, she leaves the bathroom where the young nurse leads her toward the therapist's office. Along the way, they find August searching for her.

"Roku! Roku!" He calls out for her.

"August?! Hai!" She chirps, elated to see her twin.

Racing up to her, he takes her into his arms and hugs her. Almost immediately he pulls away and looks her over, quickly noticing the pink flesh on her left cheek.

"I'm sorry! I hope I didn't hurt you! Are you okay?!"

"I'll be fine. I'm just going to visit the shrink and then I can go home." She replies with a warm smile.

"Oh, good! I'll wait for you!"

"Thanks, August."

Walking down the hall, Roku calmly explains what happened in her office, sparing him no details. August can't believe that the spy managed to attain a job working in her division. They must not have vetted the logistics team as thoroughly after Roku became the sole survivor when the first batch were blown up months earlier. Guilt ridden for her plight, which he can't help but feel partly responsible for, August is determined to be there for the only other person he feels that he has left, his twin sister.

"I just don't know what happened. Why did they come for Katala? What was that about?" Roku asks.

"She must have been the spy." August answers.

"What? A spy?!" Roku gasps.

"What happened?" The curious nurse inquires.

"A terrorist managed to become one of the crew and snuck into an Engine Pod. She tried to sabotage it but we caught it early and came up with a plan to catch her. The plan *was* to take her alive and interrogate her." August answers.

"So much for that." Roku murmurs.

"Wow. Are you some kind of secret agent?" The nurse asks, glancing at August.

"Something like that." He smirks, their eyes locking.

Reaching the therapist's office, Roku steps inside while August waits outside.

"I'll be here!" He chirps, taking a seat.

"Okay." Roku grins.

"So, tell me more about your work." The nurse asks, sitting beside August.

Pacing back and forth in the main hall of the security offices, Miss Ayanda grumbles to herself, fuming in anger. She cares for Roku, and the fact that she's been injured because of their failure infuriates her. Stefan finally enters, the last to arrive. He looks at everyone else, noting that everyone but August is present.

"What happened?" He asks.

"Would you like to tell us?!" Miss Ayanda growls.

"... What's going on? Where's August?"

"He's with his sister." Drayusa begins.

"There was an incident..." Sihl' Ahzen adds.

"That's putting it lightly! The entire office was packed! That's not what I wanted!" Miss Ayanda roars.

"Wha-?!" Stefan blinks.

"I sent you a memo, telling you to send the Kanorakus to Roku's office! You called them *all* there and the spy we were looking for took Roku hostage! Kellan had to shoot her and now she's dead and Roku's hurt! We can't question her, we don't know what else she did, if anything, we don't know if anyone else is with her, and Roku is in the hospital!"

"I-I... I'm sorry, I..."

"Sorry?! Roku could've been killed! What were you thinking calling all of them to the office early?!" Miss Ayanda screams in a rage.

"I did what you said!" Stefan defends himself.

"No, you didn't! The plan was to corner the Kanorakus women in a meeting, arrest them all and pull out only Katala! That's not what went down, and it's all your fault! I gave you one task! How could you be so incompetent?!" Miss Ayanda berates him.

"Stop!" Drayusa steps forward and between them. "He made a mistake, but it still worked out!"

"WHAT?!" Miss Ayanda laughs. "He fucked up!"

"He made a mistake, but Roku is *alive*, the spy is *dead*, and *Unity is safe*." Drayusa stresses in a calm voice.

"We still didn't get to interrogate her. What if there are more? What if she had other devices planted elsewhere? Even six hundred of us can scour this entire ship!"

"We dealt with the spy. We'll deal with that as well, if we have too. Stefan made a mistake. We all make mistakes." Drayusa pleads.

"But I-"

Drayusa holds up a hand, silencing him. Glancing back at him, over her shoulder, her purple eyes are warm and inviting, her lips curled into a little smile. She nods subtly, one time. Trusting her, Stefan shuts his mouth and stands in silence.

"This was a *big* mistake. It could've cost lives." Miss Ayanda growls.

"Yes, but it didn't. It worked out as well as it could. Please, go easy on him." Drayusa persists.

"Fine... Get out of my sight. I need to report to the Council." Miss Ayanda waves her hand.

Returning to their offices as Miss Ayanda leaves with a few Marines in tow, Stefan takes a seat at his desk. Drayusa enters with him, standing beside him.

"Thanks, babe. I appreciate that." Stefan says softly.

"It's alright, my love."

"I could swear I followed her orders though." He insists.

Accessing his computer, Drayusa rests her hands on his shoulders, standing behind his seat and resting her chin atop his head. Bringing up the memo in which Miss Ayanda ordered Stefan to send the automated calls, his eyes carefully scan the message again.

"The spy has been identified as Katala, a Kanorakus female working under Miss Roku Woods. Use an automated message and contact the women of her office. Call the three Kanorakus in for a meeting in Roku's office. Once inside they'll be sealed within the offices and police will arrest all three under false pretenses. Katala will be removed for interrogation while the other two will be released."

His heart sinks. Somehow when he read this message the first time, he misunderstood. Admittedly, he was skimming. Sending the message to *all* of the women foiled Miss Ayanda's plan and put everyone in danger. Slumping back in his chair, the human turns his eyes up to Drayusa, whose snout he can see looming over him. She reads the same message and knows his guilt, yet she doesn't attack him for his error.

"I'm so sorry. It *is* my fault." Stefan admits.

"It's alright, my love." She assures him.

"No, it isn't."

Walking around his chair and squatting down beside him, she takes him into her arms, her head beside his. Nuzzling him affectionately, she kisses his cheek. He holds her back, resting his nose against the nape of her neck, his fingers running through her incredibly soft bristles.

"We all make mistakes. Learn from it and be thankful that this one did not cost lives." She coos.

"You're right."

"I know." She quips.

"I love you." He chuckles, squeezing her a little tighter and kissing her neck.

"I love you, too."

"... What do you think Miss Ayanda is going to tell the Council?"

"I don't know, but so long as I have you, I don't care." Drayusa replies.

"You don't think they'll jettison me out of the airlock, do you?" He teases.

"Only if they want me to tear this ship apart myself." Drayusa smirks.

"I want to meld with you!" He suddenly blurts out.

"Oh, I-I... When?" She asks apprehensively.

"As soon as possible."

"Alright... Tonight, when we go home... We'll meld then." She assures him.

Holding each other tightly, she stares at the blank wall of his office, her heart beating out of her chest, but not with joy.

"Speak, Miss Ayanda." The Kanorakus Councilwoman says.

"The spy is dead."

The members of the Council gasp, frustrated by the failure. They immediately press her for the details, which she quickly provides. They sit enthralled, except for the Dezonians who rest on their

insectoid abdomens, listening to Miss Ayanda as she gives them a relatively swift play-by-play. Hearing of the death of Katala, the Dezonians seems more perturbed than the others.

“We did not want the spy to be killed.” The red Dezonian speaks.

“As I said earlier, one of my Lieutenants misunderstood my orders. The situation was not ideal, and it couldn’t be helped.”

“This spy could’ve had vital information.” The human remarks.

“I understand this, but we’re confident we can handle any further situations, as we handled this one.” Miss Ayanda replies.

“Preferably with no loss of life.” The red Dezonian interjects.

“Do no waste lives, especially females capable of breeding.” The other adds.

Miss Ayanda is floored, her ruby eyes growing wide in surprise. Why would they care if the spy could breed? Thinking back on the messages that she could not access, Miss Ayanda decides to make a bold move.

“You are dismissed.” One Councilmember says.

“Pardon me, but I have something else that I feel we need to discuss.” Miss Ayanda begins.

“Go on.”

“As the chief of security, I should have access to all knowledge relating to this ship so that I can better carry out my duties. It’s come to my attention that I do *not* have full access.”

“You are referring to ‘level zero’, the highest level of clearance. That is not necessary for you to carry out your duties.” The red Dezonian speaks.

“It’s reserved only for the Council and Unity’s acting captain.” An Irakus Councilwoman adds.

“Forgive me, but the captain does not control the police and militia when we are in a crisis or even day-to-day. *I do*. If this were a military, I’d be a general.” Miss Ayanda begins.

“But this is not a military ship.”

“But I *am* bound to protect her, possibly with military action. If I am to do that accurately and efficiently, I need *all* knowledge of this ship and her purpose or I will not be capable of properly judging how to best protect her and the mission. Security should be left to *my* judgement, and that requires the highest level of access... I cannot run a race with bound ankles.”

The Council sit in silence, pondering the situation for a moment. They soon dismiss her, asking her to wait outside while they discuss her suggestion. Standing outside with her Marines, Miss Ayanda waits for about twenty minutes, only for the Council to call her back inside.

“We’ve considered your request, and while it was not a unanimous vote, we agree with you. Your security clearance will be updated immediately to level zero and your code will now function as such.” The Voeldahn Councilwoman speaks.

“Thank you.” Miss Ayanda bows her head.

“However, as it is the highest level of security, it goes without saying that no one is to know what you discover. We don’t wish to replace you so late in the project’s lifespan...” The Kanorakus Councilwoman coldly warns.

It’s clear that the Council are hiding something. However, Miss Ayanda thanks the Council for their generosity, playing to their egos for a moment before leaving their chambers and swiftly returning to the security offices. In a matter of seconds, she bolts into her private office, seals the door from her desk’s built-in controller and activates her terminal. As they’d said, her code now grants access to the previously sealed files she’d uncovered. With the volume low, she begins listening to the audio messages and reading the text, left stunned by the revelation.

“Alright, ready to g-”

Roku stops in her tracks as she exits the therapist’s office, seeing August still sitting beside the attractive nurse, the bunny Voeldahn giggling at something he’d said. Roku has been speaking with the therapist about her ordeal, as well as her previous incident for nearly two hours. She was certain that August would be asleep in a chair by now.

“What? It’s time already?!” He asks in surprise, glancing to her.

“Yeah.”

“Huh!” He looks at the chronograph on his V.I. bracelet. “Well, it looks like I have to go, Annette.”

“Aww. Well, it was fun talking to you!” Annette chirps.

Rising from her seat, Roku can see her little tail, shaped like a candle’s flame, dancing from side to side.

“Likewise. Maybe we can do it again, you know, when I’m not doing secret agent stuff.” August grins.

“I’d like that.” Annette coos.

Before leaving, August and Annette trade numbers, adding each other as contacts in their V.I. bracelets. Quickly darting off, Annette looks back no less than three times before turning a corner.

“Mmm... That’s something special.” August murmurs to himself, watching her leave.

“Ahem!” Roku clears her throat.

“Oh! You’re hot too!” August quips.

“Shut up and take me home.” Roku smirks, shaking her head.

They walk in an uncomfortable silence; August is unable to break it. Roku looks deep in thought, her eyes somber and posture slouching. Riding the tram back to the residential sphere, they take a large lift up to tier one. They stop at a small park that’s on their way to Roku’s apartment building, which is next to August’s. August has Roku sit on a bench beside him, draping an arm over her shoulder and holding his twin sister comfortingly.

“I know this is a really stupid question but what’s bothering you?”

“Does it ever stop?” She turns her sad eyes toward him.

“Does what ever stop?” He asks, his brow furled in confusion.

“The struggle for survival... Does it ever stop?”

“My experience would say no, but I’m always hopeful.” He says with a little smile.