

Unity

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Episode Twenty-Nine: Little Mistakes

Dashing into the main hall of the hospital, Sashuna's boot-clad feet thud loudly. The hospital is packed with many civilians and security personnel, quite a few of which are wounded from the skirmishes outside. Though few and far between on a ship as massive as Unity, and with the populace rather spread-out, the battles that have occurred are bloody. She pauses as every terminal on the ground floor is occupied by the loved ones of the injured, desperately looking for updates and room numbers. Unwilling to wait, a panicking Sashuna begins to scour the hospital, searching the old-fashioned way.

Though she fled Madrid's apartment after he'd left, she read a recent report that detailed the events and listed him as wounded. Her heart sank, and the purple and gold Kanorakus woman was quick to run once again, but this time directly to his side. Now moving throughout the halls of the hospital, her golden eyes scan each and every door as she hopes to find Madrid. She doesn't even know if he's out of surgery, but her palpable fear constricts her logic. Her chest is tight and her breathing heavy, much as it was when she witnessed Korazhu dying before her very eyes.

Passing a room, she glances inside. It takes a few steps before her muscles react to her neurons, and her feet cease and desist. Turning back, Sashuna approaches the room and peers inside. Sitting on a medical bench and with a bleeding gash on his left side, Draiman leans over, onto his left forearm. Corova pets her lover tenderly,

standing beside him and nuzzling his head with her snout, her tail swaying slowly behind her. The pair don't speak, but they're also melded; they can converse with their thoughts. Stepping slowly into the room, Draiman's eyes turn toward Sashuna, his breathing labored from the pain.

"Hello, Sashuna." Corova says softly.

Though she's angled away from Sashuna, and not even looking at her, the meld between Corova and her husband allows her to see through his eyes.

"Hi..." Sashuna murmurs.

"It's been a little while." Draiman chokes out.

"It has... What happened? Are you alright?"

"I'm alright. It's only a graze. It just hurts." Draiman answers.

"We're waiting for a nurse to come and seal his wound." Corova adds, turning around to face her former subordinate.

"I see. How did it happen?" Sashuna steps closer.

"We were trying to calm down a group of enraged refugees. We'd already managed to convince over a thousand to return to their homes and watch for updates on their terminals instead, but some wouldn't listen. We walked the streets together, looking for groups to defuse. One group of about twenty were clashing with police, so we did what we could. One man wouldn't listen to reason and shot at Draiman, who tried to shield a police officer. The police killed the man and arrested most of them, so I brought him here." Corova explains.

She turns her head to Draiman and gives him a little kiss, her three, clawed fingers and thumb gently holding the back of his skull and massaging his scalp. Her visible love for the wounded human makes Sashuna's heart sting with envy.

“Well, I’m here to find my own companion!” Sashuna boasts.

“Oh?” Corova glances to her, a brow raised.

“Is he nice? ... It’s a he, right?” A pained Draiman chuckles.

“It’s Unity’s captain.” Sashuna grins.

“Well, good for you.” Draiman groans.

A concerned Corova looks to her husband, the charcoal black flesh of her hand resting on his side, just above his wound. She uses a claw to lift his shirt, examining the bleeding gash, his life-giving fluid roughly the color of her bristles, and the swirls that paint her dark hide. She turns to Sashuna, a fearful look upon her face.

“Did you see a nurse outside?”

“No.”

“Could you check for one?” Corova asks.

“You have legs.” Sashuna grumbles.

“I don’t wish to leave his side.” Corova retorts.

“That’s your problem, isn’t it?” Sashuna crosses her arms beneath her bust.

Draiman lifts his head, looking between both women. Corova is shocked, something that he could see written plainly on her face, even if she wasn’t already voicing this to him in his mind.

“Please, Sashuna. I’m asking you as a friend.”

“Are we friends?” Sashuna cocks her head.

“You know we are!”

"No, I don't! You left me!" Sashuna steps back, pointing angrily at the pair. "You both did! Once they let us out of prison and gave us homes, you disappeared for days! I don't even have the numbers of your V.I. bracelets anymore, and I can see them on your wrists! Did it even bother you that I was alone on this strange ship, with strange people?! No friends! No family! No support! No Korazhu to hold me and say it'll be okay! No one to keep me from feeling afraid!"

Corova stands in a stunned silence, her arm around her husband who watches with equal surprise.

"Days, Corova... You didn't even look, and my name is registered. You could've found me..."

"We had a mission, Sashuna. We were asked to try and stave off this mess..." Corova speaks softly.

"And you didn't think that maybe I could help?! That maybe I'd want to be there, with the only people I know?!" Sashuna growls. "No... You're too busy being happy with your husband to remember that I'm even alive... But someone else noticed! Someone else cared to protect me, even when it was of no consequence to him! That's the only friend I have... That's the only person I'll help... Goodbye."

Turning around, Sashuna storms out of the room, nearly slamming into a nurse who tries to enter at the same time. Swiftly apologizing, the nurse backs away, giving the Kanorakus a wide berth. After a short pause, the nurse peeks her head in, looking around the room with her big, blue eyes.

"All clear?" She asks before stepping inside.

The white furred bunny Voeldahn carries a little tray of medical tools, setting them on a counter. She brushes her wavy, shoulder length, pink hair with the backs of her fingers before slipping on special medical gloves that accommodate her claws.

“Take off your shirt and lie back.” The nurse instructs.

“Yes, ma’am!” Draiman exclaims through clenched teeth.

Corova helps her husband lift off his shirt, while the nurse collects several objects from the tray. Approaching the injured human, she rests her hand above the wound, gently spreading it apart to examine it. Draiman groans in pain. She uses a plastic syringe to squirt saline water into the wound, cleaning it. Smearing an off-yellow ooze onto her gloved fingers, she carefully caresses around his wound, as if painting a little picture. Draiman immediately feels a numbing as the topical anesthetic seeps into his skin. After dabbing some of the ooze into his wound, she picks up a tool.

Turning his head, Draiman looks over the nurse. Her blue eyes turn toward him and she smiles, her lips curling up around her short snout. Something about her is very familiar. His eyes turn toward her name tag, which reads ‘Annette’.

“Hey... Do you know a guy named August?” He suddenly asks.

“Yeah. He’s my boyfriend.”

“I’m his cousin. I thought you looked familiar.”

“H-he talks about me?” Annette asks, her face lighting up.

“Oh yeah.” He softly nods. “Nothing but good things, and I can see why.”

“Aww!”

“He certainly cares about you.” Corova adds.

“He’s a great guy. I really like him.” Annette remarks.

Annette holds Draiman’s wound closed with her fingers and thumb as she activates the laser-suture. The blue beam burns his

flesh, searing a thin line as it melts the upper layers of dermis together. Draiman winces, feeling the sting even through his anesthesia. He can only imagine how painful it would be without it; it's a good thing his father, James Woods, never had one. As he lay there, Draiman looks up at Corova. Though she smiles, they speak with their thoughts, and her mind weighs heavy on everything Sashuna had said.

"Are you alright?" He telepathically asks her.

"No. I'm worried for Sashuna."

"Worried that she was right about what she said?" He poses.

"We both know that we didn't forget about her." Corova retorts.

"I sometimes did..." He admits.

"Well, I didn't. No, what worries me is her new 'friend'."

"Aren't new friends good? She has someone to keep her company now, someone to distract her from loneliness."

"Search my mind, my handsome, forgetful, husband. Remember what I learned about the meld once I reached puberty?" Corova telepathically asks him.

"I can't focus right now."

"Shortly before the slave rebellion on Lomboko, I noticed a change in Sashuna. She admitted to melding with Korazhu, and now he's dead. Melding minds, sharing thoughts and memories, seeing through another's eyes, and then having the connection suddenly stop altogether is said to be extremely hard to deal with. The emptiness is said to be maddening. I fear that Sashuna is struggling to cope and that she isn't handling it well at all. This is why many younger females don't meld, and why I was so afraid even though you assured me this wasn't a serious wound. If I suddenly lost you, my love..."

"You didn't." Draiman sweetly replies in her mind.

"But Sashuna did... I only *feared* your loss and I nearly crumbled."

The lovers now worry about Sashuna's emotional and mental health, wondering how she'll fair on her own. It's clear from her anger that she probably won't trust them the way that she would've, had they been able to keep in touch. Corova's heart weighs heavy, guilty by the fact that this entire situation is their fault. They were spending so much time with each other that Draiman ignored his duties; he failed to properly maintain the slave's pods, or remember to order others to do so. Had he not made this mistake, the slaves might not have awoken, the rebellion might not have happened, the Lomboko might not have been there when Unity exited hyperspace, and Korazhu and Sashuna would probably be happy together, right now.

"Almost... There! All done!" Annette chirps.

Draiman and Corova look at the wound, a three-inch gash now turned into a faint scar.

"Now remember, that's only the upper layers. You need to try not to reopen it until the underlying layers and the muscle tissue heal. No running, jumping, wrestling, and if you're into the kinky stuff... Tone it down." She giggles.

"Damn..." Draiman sighs.

"Thank you, Annette."

Corova turns to Annette, giving her a hug as soon as she pulls off a glove.

"You're welcome. So uhm... Have you heard from August?"

"We spoke not too long ago. He was fine then, and he's a hard-ass; he's fine now." Draiman assures her.

"Oh, good."

Collecting her tools, Annette leaves the room, noticing the vibrantly colored but upset looking Kanorakus who nearly ran into her earlier. Still standing in the corridor, Sashuna looks over a terminal, checking for information. Though Madrid's status hasn't been updated yet, merely listing him as in surgery, Sashuna has a room number that's already been designated for his recovery. With a map showing her where to go, she quickly leaves the terminal and dashes through the halls. She turns a corner, takes an elevator, and continues on her journey, swiftly approaching the room. Two guards see her racing toward them and raise their rifles.

"Halt!" They bark at her.

"Please!" She stops in her tracks. "I need to see Madrid."

"Who?"

"Captain Marcus Basile!" She reiterates.

"He's off-limits. You can't be here right now." One says.

"Turn around and wait somewhere else. If you're listed, they'll call you when he's ready." The other adds.

"Please... I need him."

The guards are unmoved, repeatedly telling her to turn around and go. Emerging from a room in the background, Sashuna recognizes Miss Ayanda, who speaks to a Voeldahn who looks like a female version of August. Could they be related?

"Thank you for coming down here. It says a lot about you, that you'll handle such a trivial matter personally." Miss Ayanda says as she rests a hand on Roku's shoulder.

"It's not trivial, Miss Ayanda, and I was happy to do it."

"I hope we're not draining all of the supplies with this nonsense." Miss Ayanda remarks.

“To be perfectly honest with you, I think the Dezonians and Solar Council saw this coming. When I took over the logistics office, I learned a lot of things. I was suspicious when I saw how much the fisheries and farms in the ring could produce, and then I checked out a storeroom for myself. The sheer amount of prepackaged, battlefield medicines was... Mind blowing. My charts didn’t even list it all.” Roku explains.

“You think they expected this to happen?” Miss Ayanda asks.

“It makes sense, all things considered...”

“True... Well, thanks again. It was good to see you, Roku.”

“You too.”

The two women share an embrace, their bodies shifting. It’s then that Miss Ayanda notices something. Her brow furls as she looks past Roku, seeing the familiar looking, vibrantly colored Kanorakus woman standing before the shorter Solakus guards. Roku turns and glances over her shoulder, curious to see who’s drawing her old friends’ attention.

“A friend of yours?” Roku asks.

“You could say that she and I have a mutual acquaintance.” Miss Ayanda replies.

“Cryptic as ever.” Roku giggles.

Approaching the guards, Roku passes by and continues on her business. Resting a hand on a shoulder of each guard, they turn toward Miss Ayanda, who is known to all officers as the chief of security; the highest ranking official in their profession. They’re quick to stand at attention, becoming statues that stare straight ahead.

“Ma’am!”

“And who do we have here?” Miss Ayanda asks.

"She wishes to see the captain, ma'am!"

"... Let her through."

"B-but our orders; no one but family and high-ranking personnel beyond this point." A guard explains.

"And I know for a fact that this pretty little thing is fucking the captain. As far as I'm concerned, they're close enough, now let her through." Miss Ayanda sternly orders.

"Yes, ma'am!"

The guards are quick to stand aside, giving Miss Ayanda a wide berth as she extends an arm to Sashuna, pulling her in. Leading her down the hall, Miss Ayanda keeps an arm draped over Sashuna's shoulders. Turning a corner, they walk through a door, but Sashuna is disheartened when she sees that it's merely a waiting room.

"How is he? Is he alright?" She asks Miss Ayanda.

"I honestly do not know. He's still in surgery, and even I cannot simply barge in to find out. In hospitals, a doctor holds more authority than I do."

"I see..."

Seeing the frown on Sashuna's face, and the slumping of her shoulders as she bows her head, Miss Ayanda becomes curious. She cocks her head, her crimson eyes scanning the woman for a moment.

"Are you two very close?" She asks.

"I.. I don't know." Sashuna admits.

"What?" Miss Ayanda chuckles in surprise. "It's not hard to know if you care for a man, especially when you're already mating with him. I'm going to assume that wasn't the first time you were together."

"It was the second." Sashuna remarks.

“Still, twice takes either a skilled lover, a deeper connection or both. How do you not know?”

The pair sit in chairs designed for a myriad of races, with central spines that allow for the accommodation of even the thick, tapering tails of the Kanorakus.

“It’s complicated... I’m very conflicted; I like him as a person, but I’m having trouble separating my feelings for him with...” Sashuna hesitates.

“With what? Or is it ‘with who’? ... I apologize for prying; I’m just trying to understand.”

“I was melded before, but my lover died... Madrid is certainly not him, and I know that, but sometimes when I’m with him, I become confused; I mix my old feelings with new ones and I don’t know which is which.”

“That’s... Unsettling.” Miss Ayanda murmurs.

“Before he left, after you called, he gave me the choice to stay or leave. I left because I couldn’t be certain that staying would’ve been the truth.”

“Then what are you doing here?” A perplexed Miss Ayanda asks.

“I came to see him because I *do* care, and to be a supportive friend because he supports me.”

“I get that, but *why*?” She reiterates.

“Guilt.”

“That’s a horrible reason to do anything. If he has any feelings for you, you’re going to make it worse by leading him on. If you don’t even understand how you feel, how can you expect to be properly supportive?” Miss Ayanda poses.

“I don’t know... What should I do?” Sashuna turns to her, her golden orbs welling with tears.

“My advice? ... Sort yourself out before you make it any worse, and you might want to seek therapy.”

Sashuna is flabbergasted. She was hoping for something more concrete, possibly a course of action she could take that would show results right then and there. The bluntness with which Miss Ayanda spoke makes it all the harder to swallow. It's so obviously a problem to her that it makes Sashuna doubt her own actions, and every reason behind them. Now fearful that her mere presence might give Madrid mixed signals, she second guesses her visit. Rising from the chair, she heads for the door. Stopping at the archway, she turns back to Miss Ayanda, who watches her intently.

“When you're allowed to see him, tell him that...”

“... Tell him what?” Miss Ayanda asks.

“Never mind...” Sashuna murmurs before leaving the room.

Sighing with disappointment, she shakes her head.

“Poor girl... Poor Madrid! Sometimes, it would be easier to just live people's lives for them and spare them the heartache of mistakes.” Miss Ayanda thinks aloud.

Sitting back in a chair and waiting patiently for news, the clock ticks away. Her V.I. bracelet chirps. Lifting her wrist and looking at the device, she opens and reads a text message sent by August, who's overseeing the repairs in the bridge. It's a status update, and the news causes her lips to curl with delight. Leaning over a console, Invar tightens the last of the screws, having just replaced a module that was damaged by blaster fire. With a relieved sigh, he slips his tools into the pouch on his belt and removes the special work gloves that shield his clawed hands.

“Finally!” Invar gleefully exclaims.

“Was it that hard of a job?” A coworker curiously asks.

“Hell no. I just want to get out of here. I have better things to do on my day off.” Invar replies.

“Got plans to see a girl or something?”

“Which one?” Invar smirks.

“There’s more than one?!”

“There’s so many more women here; of course there’s more than one.”

“You’re something else, Invar... Do they know about each other?”

“Sure they do!”

“And they’re okay with that?!” The coworker asks in surprise.

“It’s either share me with a few other girls or be lonely and never get laid. Yeah, they’re okay with it.”

“Wow...”

“How’s it coming in here?” August asks, entering the bridge.

“Hey bro! They let you out already?!” Invar’s wide eyes scan his half-brother.

“Yeah. They’re testing me for... Anything... I wasn’t hurt though, so no reason to stick around. They’ll call me with updates.”

“I just thought that after what happened, you might... Have some time off, or something. Mental recovery and all.” Invar remarks.

“Now’s not the time for days off.” August retorts.

“Tell me about it. Anyway, we’re all done here! Luckily the damage was minimal. The communication console had the most damage, but Unity’s loaded with spare parts. They really planned ahead. I just gave Roku a call and she sent what I needed!”

“Excellent.” August grins.

Lifting his wrist, he presses a button on his V.I. bracelet, first texting Miss Ayanda before using a basic short-range transmitter application as a two-way radio.

"The repairs are completed. Send in the crew." He instructs.

"Affirmative." A female's voice responds.

A small, racially diverse group make their way inside the bridge, under guard by Irakus commandos who answer to Sihl' Ahzen. Fully armored and bearing state of the art rifles and submachine blasters, they protect the crew from rebels. Not nearly the full staff, the skeleton crew of volunteers take their seats as Invar and his team of mechanics and electricians pack their equipment and leave. With the timer expired, Unity's computer has ceased making the necessary corrections; orbit is decaying. With captain Basile in surgery and the Council under lockdown for their safety, no one is left to give orders.

Miss Ayanda, though not in a position of power, suggested the skeleton crew as a means of preserving the lives of all aboard the ship. If no one acted, Unity would simply crash into the surface of the nameless moon that orbits the beautiful and unexplored gas giant. What good would it do to kill everyone aboard? Also, at Miss Ayanda's suggestion, the security forces have begun full disclosure. They guard the crew from rebels, but regular reports are drafted and published; anyone who stops to read their home and officer terminals knows that Unity will crash into the moon without them. Miss Ayanda and her Lieutenants hope that by being transparent, they can heal the wounds between the crew and refugees.

August remains with the crew for a time, sitting in captain Basile's chair as they make the necessary changes to Unity's programming. Without an understanding of when they'll receive their next orders, they set the autopilot to maintain orbit, programming a new timer for one hundred and twenty hours. With five days to sit and wait, the skeleton crew do a brief but thorough check of the systems,

ensuring that Unity is functioning properly. Their work now completed, the crew are ushered from the bridge, urged to return to their homes. The bridge is sealed tight by the security team, the doors guarded around the clock.

Walking down the corridors on his way to the security offices, a chirping draws August's attention. Lifting his wrist, he has an audio-only call from Drayusa.

"Hello."

"Hey, August. So, is it done?"

"It's done."

"I'll draft a report!" She chirps.

"Well, you sound happy. Any news?"

"About what? The captain's status? The rebel's status? Or were you looking for personal details? Because I don't share my private life with anyone but my husband."

"Anything you're willing to give me, I guess." August sighs.

"Captain Basile's patient profile was just updated to 'stable – good', so I'm assuming he's out of surgery and that he'll be pull through." She begins.

"A fair assessment." August remarks.

"Miss Ayanda hasn't been back since she left to visit him though. She's been gone for hours. I'd be more concerned, but her V.I. bracelet is still in the hospital, surrounded by guards, so she's probably fine. The rebels aren't fairing as well. Thirty dead – twenty-two of them from the bridge shootout, and eight in smaller skirmishes with Unity police – and just over one hundred arrested for disorderly conduct. We've stopped them, though. For the most part, the streets are becoming rather peaceful. Once we started issuing reports, we saw an immediate change; no one went for the bridge when it was published that our orbit was decaying." Drayusa explains.

“Miss Ayanda may be a lot of things – she’s hot-headed, narrow-minded, and grouchy – but she’s also quick on her feet, most of the time. That was a good idea.” August comments.

“It was... Also, I just saved a ton of credits on my hovercar insurance!”

“... Did you just crack a joke?!” August chuckles.

“Stefan urged me to say it. He keeps telling me that comedy makes bad days easier to stomach...” She sighs.

“I’m glad he’s finally right about something.” August laughs.

“So... What’re you going to do now?”

“With the captain pulling through, Unity in a stable orbit, and the rebels more or less under control, I guess I’ll check on my sister, and probably visit Annette. I imagine the hospital is pretty packed right now... What about you?”

“After we’re done here, I’m looking forward to spending some quality time with my husband!” Drayusa chirps.

“Sounds like a good plan.” August murmurs.

With their business now complete, they say their goodbyes and end the call. The limited but positive information that Drayusa gave him lifts his spirits. With a spring in his step, August makes his way back to the hospital, where his girlfriend Annette, a full-time nurse, should still be working.