

Transformations

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Kapitel 24: A Long Time Coming

Transformations...

Chapter 24: A Long Time Coming

Amanda is sitting with a group of adults and children, shuffling her feet restlessly. A few of the children are playing with a ball not far from her feet, rolling it between them. She watches them for a while, jumping occasionally when she feels some dirt fall on her from the cavern above. The children start getting restless when a few of the adults bring around some food and drink. "This is all we can pass out for now," an older man says apologetically.

Amanda takes her portion and smiles, "I'm grateful for anything you have, sir. Has there been any news from above?"

The man looks around and seeing that the children have joined their parents for food, he steps a bit closer to Amanda and whispers, "We have heard a few reports, Miss Kelly. It doesn't sound good." She struggles to keep her features neutral and he continues, "The enemy has some sort of super weapon and it wiped out a lot of our ships."

"What about the Bismarck?" she asks barely able to speak.

The man looks at her sympathetically, "We know at least part of it has fallen back to the ground. It took a lot of damage. I don't know what or who was in the part that fell." He sees her stiffen at his words, on the brink of tears and he quickly adds, "The pilot was alive at least, so there is hope for that."

Amanda tries to relax and nods an acknowledgment of thanks to the man. He turns and continues passing out food to other people throughout the cavern. Amanda goes and sits down in a fairly remote corner, eating her food in silence. Several hours go by with no word from above. The cavern shaking fiercely on occasion, causing several people to become hysterical with fear. Eventually, they are calmed down and people try and make small conversations, as if nothing unusual is happening around them. She is almost asleep when she senses someone approaching her. She looks up to see three of her students looking frightened. She pats the ground beside her and they come and sit down.

"Miss Kelly, are we going to be all right?" the little girl asks, fear obvious in her voice. Amanda looks to each child in turn and nods slightly. "I think we will be, eventually. We are strong people and we can get through this," she replies trying to sound positive.

"What about Captain Rider? I heard my father say that at least part of the Bismarck ship was severely damaged," the older of the two boys asks.

Amanda swallows hard before replying, "Captain Rider is careful, so I'm sure he's fine," she says hoping she sounds more sure than she feels.

They all lapse into their own thoughts, the little girl curling up into her lap and falling asleep. Gradually over the next several hours the shaking and rumbling diminishes. After several hours of nothing, Amanda stirs at the sound of voices. She gently wakes the sleeping girl and they both go to find the child's mother. After reuniting her with her family, she heads for a group of adults that are talking in low whispers.

A man stops when he sees her approach and looks to be sure no children are with her before continuing, "I will take several of you up with me." He looks to Amanda, who is looking at him hopeful and nods, "Yes, Miss Kelly, I will allow you to be one of the first to go above ground."

She smiles her thanks and listens as the others make plans to check for above ground shelter and food supplies and similar things. After what seems like hours, she and a group of ten others are called together to go to the surface.

Athrun and Kira look to each other, then to Saber, who is watching both of them closely. Athrun takes a deep breath before speaking, "What do you remember about the battle, Saber?"

Saber thinks for several minutes, closing his eyes, trying to remember what transpired, "Well, it's still all a bit of a blur, but I remember Merla saying she was going to fire that cannon towards Calvary Command and that it was large enough to hit the other colonies nearby. One of those being my home. I have a vague recollection of seeing her power it up, after that, I recall feeling this pure anger, and a fear of losing everyone I care for and it was like something just...snapped. Next thing that I consciously remember is looking around and the cannon being gone, and the flash of an explosion. Then looking around and Merla is gone, and so much debris." He releases a breath he didn't realize he was holding and look up to see both Kira and Athrun watching him with a sympathetic look. "What happened?"

"Well, it's something rare called SEEDing. It can happen to someone who is a natural, but it is a little more common among coordinators. You basically reached a state of heightened reflexes and extremely quick information processing. It was probably triggered when Merla basically threatened to kill off you and everyone you care for. It's like you became so enraged, that your body exceeded its' normal capacities and fueled your desire to protect yourself and everyone else." Saber looks at him a bit shocked.

"What is unusual in your case, is that you seemed to be in control of your mind. You told Merla that you would end the battle and that she was the one who would die," Kira adds.

"That is not common when someone is in SEED mode. Typically, when a person has SEEDed, they don't speak, they are on 'autopilot' for lack of a better term. Their natural reactions are multiplied a hundred-fold and they can do things above even what some would think possible," Athrun adds, getting an even more bewildered look from Saber.

"So am I...dangerous? Could I unintentionally hurt someone I care for?" Saber asks, not sure if he wants to hear the answer.

Athrun shakes his head, "I don't think so, Saber. When you SEEDed, as soon as the threat was over, you came out of it. That is a good thing. It means that you have some natural talent to control it, not everyone does."

Saber relaxes a little. "So what now?"

Athrun smirks slightly, "Try not to let anyone piss you off."

Saber laughs, "I'll try and remember that." He holds his ribs and winces slightly.

"Are you okay?" Kira asks, noticing the movement.

Saber shakes his head, "It just hurt to laugh, I'm probably a bit bruised up. Nothing major. I feel fine other than a headache from where I was cut somehow."

A knock at the door and they look up to see Commander Eagle and Hothead at the door. Kira and Athrun stand up. "We'll see you in a little while. We need to contact Orb. Let us know if you have more questions," Athrun says.

Saber nods, "I will. Thank you." They turn and leave the room, allowing the commander and Hothead to enter.

"So, what did the doctor tell you?" Commander Eagle inquires.

"That other than the head wound and bruising, I seem fine," Saber replies.

"What about you going off to the village?" the commander asks.

Saber sighs, "He says I can't go alone. Just in case I have a concussion or something that hasn't shown up on the tests or something yet," he mumbles, obviously a bit mad at the situation.

Commander Eagle looks at him slightly amused, "So ask someone to go with you?"

Saber gives him a look, "Like who? Everyone is injured and mostly bedridden."

"I could go, Saber," Hothead replies. "Keith, Lance, Shorty, and Tammy are planning to return to Orb, but I could go with you. It would be better than sitting in a sick bay for hours on end."

Saber musters a smile, "You're not afraid of being with me after the battle?"

Hothead smirks, "I don't plan on pissing you off, so I figure I'm safe," he retorts.

Commander Eagle laughs, "We heard a bit of the conversation with Kira and Athrun. So we know that you aren't a menace, Saber. If I honestly thought you were a danger to yourself or anyone else, I'd have you locked up. I don't feel that is the case."

"Thank you, Sir. I am relieved to hear that," Saber replies. "Has there been any news from my home or the outer villages?" Saber asks.

Commander Eagle shakes his head, "Nothing from the villages, though I have sent soldiers out to tell them that it's safe to come out of the shelters and inspect their properties. I have spoken with Thomas, and he says that they got very minor damage. None of it to structures, just on the grounds around the estate. He did say that a few buildings on the colony were damaged or destroyed. So it seems they fared far better than here."

Saber nods, processing the information before looking up to Hothead, "Are you sure you won't mind coming with me?"

"Of course not. It should be far more entertaining to see you and Amanda hook up again than to sit with a bunch of sick and injured people," he replies grinning.

Saber smiles, "Funny." He looks over to Commander Eagle, "Sir, may we take one of the patrol vehicles? I figure if there is a lot of damage, a normal car might not fare well and I know I'm not up to riding Steed."

The commander looks amused but nods, "Probably a good idea. But may I suggest that you change clothes before you leave, Saber."

Saber looks down and notices blood on various places of his uniform and nods, "Thank you, Sir. I'll see that I change before we head out."

Commander Eagle studies him for a minute then gives a nod of approval, "Be careful, and come back as soon as you can, all right?"

"We will, Sir. I'd like to be able to return home for a while as soon as it's safe to do so,"

Saber states.

"Yeah, with Amanda in tow, I bet," Hothead says, getting a 'shut up' look from Saber. Commander Eagle hides a smile and turns to leave, "Check in with me once you return, both of you." he looks between the two men and then leaves.

Saber gets up from his bed slowly, "Let's go to my quarters so I can change. Then we can leave, unless you need to do anything before we depart."

"I'll go and tell Chief that I'm going with you. How about I meet you at the hangar area in say, fifteen minutes?" Hothead replies.

Saber nods, "I'll see you then." They both leave, heading in opposite directions.

Amanda is at the back of the group as they slowly approach the doors leading to the surface. "I don't remember there being so many steps when I came down here," she thinks to herself as they ascend a flight of stairs. The head of the group reaches the door and with help, they get the bolt off and the doors are swung open, letting in blinding sunlight. She covers her eyes for a minute, allowing them to adjust before going up the final bit of stairs, joining the others as several people gasp at the sight before them. Amanda exits the shelter and looks around. The landscape she sees is nothing like what she remembers. She involuntarily gasps, placing her hand to her mouth. "Did we come out the same door we went in at?" she asks barely above a whisper.

"Yes, ma'am. This is the same place we went into the shelter from," The older man from before replies. "Over that way should be the school and your cottage," he points to an area where there is a charred building, and about half of a structure still standing. Pieces of the schoolyard fence are still standing, but not much else, including trees.

She slowly walks towards where her home and job had been. She turns towards the horizon in the direction of Calvary Command and sees huge plumes of smoke. Her heart starts racing and she feels weak, so she sits down on a large piece of debris not far from where she's standing.

One of the fathers of her students approach from behind, "I'm sure someone will allow you a place to stay, Miss Kelly. Not all of our houses are destroyed."

She turns and looks at him, "I know I'll be all right, thank you. I'm just worried about..."

"The Captain that's been visiting you lately?" the man finishes with a sympathetic smile.

She nods, allowing tears to fall, "Yes. I've not heard from him and if it looks this bad here, I can't imagine what the base must look like."

The man nods, "Try and think of it as 'no news is good news'. That is how I am thinking. I have a son who is a cadet, and I've not heard from him either."

"I pray that he is all right. I'm sorry for sounding so selfish," she says quietly, getting a chuckle from the man.

"You have every right to be, Miss Kelly. Just as I do. I would hope if I were gone off fighting that someone would care so much for me as you do your young man," he says getting a smile in return.

"Thank you," she replies quietly as she stands up to go and inspect the what's left of the school.

"Come see me if you need a place to stay. I'll make sure we find you a place until things settle back down."

She nods and heads for the remnants of the schoolhouse. She goes to her desk, one of the few pieces of furniture that is still recognizable and begins sifting through it.

"It appears that you kept your promise and went to a shelter," a tired male voice says from behind her, with a hint of amusement.

Amanda turns her head around quickly and spots Saber leaning against what's left of the doorway to the schoolhouse. She gets up quickly and runs to him, crying in relief and he pulls her against him, relaxing in relief that she seems unharmed. She feels him wince in pain and she pulls back, finally looking at him and gasps, "You're hurt. Please, come and sit down." She drags him over to the single chair not scorched and he sits down, obliging her, a hint of amusement on his face. Hothead watches the spectacle, trying not to laugh. Amanda looks over him and starts to speak several times, but is unable to find the right words.

Finally, Saber takes her hands and makes her stop and look at him eye to eye, "Amanda, I'll be fine. Please, just relax, all right? I'm just glad to see that you are safe." he says quietly, watching her closely, trying to be sure she really isn't injured.

She sits on the edge of her desk, tears falling looking him over, "How badly are you hurt?" she finally manages to ask, looking at the stitches on his head.

Saber is quiet for a minute, trying to think of the best way to answer, "Well, you see the cut I have," she nods and he continues, "I think I have some bruised ribs, I don't think any are broken, if they are, it didn't show in the scans they did. My knee is swollen, so it's either sprained or dislocated slightly, but I can walk on it. I have a bit of a headache and bruising around my left eye, probably from whatever cut me. So I may have a mild concussion, hence the reason I had to have a chaperone." he adds indicating Hothead, who is still hanging close to the doorway watching the couple with amusement. "Overall, considering how bad it got, I could have come out much worse."

Amanda nods, taking a breath before speaking, "What about the others?"

"Well, April I think is the worst, her ship was knocked to the ground and she has several injuries, but the doctor said that she will be fine. Colt has a broken arm and a few other ailments, and Fireball has a pretty good concussion, all of which will heal over time. We lost a lot of good soldiers though," Saber finishes quietly.

Hothead walks over to them, "Saber is the one who finished off Merla, so at least we know it's over."

Saber gives Hothead a warning look for saying more than he wanted said.

Amanda looks between them, "What do you mean?"

"He killed her. If he didn't, all of us would have been nuked with that cannon she was firing," Hothead replies getting another warning glance from Saber.

Amanda notices the look from Saber and places a hand on his shoulder, "You did what you had to do, Saber. I won't ask any more questions. Maybe one day you can tell me, but I can see that it's not something you wish to discuss right now. I can understand that."

Saber takes her hand from his shoulder and pulls her closer to him into a half embrace, his eyes meeting hers, "Thank you for understanding, Amanda," he says barely above a whisper. He looks around the remains of the schoolhouse, "It looks like you don't have a job right now. What do you think you want to do?" he asks, almost sounding unsure of her answer.

Amanda looks almost startled at the question, "I honestly haven't had any time to let it sink in," she replies looking around at the ruins of the school and in the direction of where her cottage once stood. "I literally have just what I can carry."

"Why don't you come back with us?" Saber asks quietly.

Amanda turns and looks at his face, seeing that he's serious, "You wouldn't mind?"

He smiles, "I actually want you to come back with us, but I know that it is ultimately your decision. I don't want you to feel like you have to come." he adds quietly.

Amanda studies his face for several minutes, starting to speak several different times, each time stopping to try and find the right words, she sees that he is hopeful, but willing to be resigned to any decision that she makes. "Well, I don't have anything here, would I stay someplace at Calvary Command?" she asks, not sure what exactly to say.

Saber nods, "You can stay there if you wish. I heard Commander Eagle saying that he would be allowing people who have lost everything to live in base housing while things are rebuilt, in exchange for their help with the rebuilding efforts. I'm sure if you wanted, you could be a teacher on base for the children."

"What about you? What will you do now that..." she starts to ask and stops.

"I suppose I'll go home for a while and see what happens," he replies. "You are welcome there too, if you wish to come." He watches her face for some sort of reaction, he sees her smile slightly and continues, "I would like for you to come back with me. You have some things there already, so it wouldn't be a problem. I'm just not sure how long I'll be at Calvary Command before I can go back home."

Amanda nods, "I want to be with you. If it means staying at Calvary Command, I'll do that. If it means going back to your estate, I'll do that too. I just don't want to not be around you again. I love you too much to risk losing you." she says quietly, fighting back tears.

Saber smiles, "I love you too, Amanda," he says quietly, running a finger across her cheek, wiping away the few tears that have fallen. He kisses her briefly, when Hothead clears his throat.

"We probably should be going, Saber. It's getting dark and I don't think driving around in all of this is a good idea," Hothead says, adding with a smile, "Although I'm rather enjoying this little conversation you two are having."

Amanda blushes slightly and Saber gives him a look of amusement and carefully stands up, "Do you need help gathering anything else?"

Amanda shakes her head, "This is all I can salvage," she says holding up her small bag. "The rest is scorched, charred, or smells too bad to bother with."

He nods and they slowly make their way back to the vehicle, she tosses her bag into the back seat and climbs into the back. They then head back towards Calvary Command.

"So Chief, why did you let Hothead stay at Calvary Command?" Lance asks as they exit their lions and start walking through Orb's base.

Keith shrugs, "He said he wanted to go with Saber so that he could check on his girlfriend in the village. I figure we know that Merla and her forces are gone; so him taking one more day shouldn't be too hard on us. It's not like we're heading back to Altea today or anything."

Lance nods and they continue on towards the sick bay, where Fala is still resting. They enter the room and see Lacus and Kira talking quietly. Both look up and nod as they enter.

"How is she?" Keith asks, concern evident in his voice.

Lacus smiles, "She's doing well. We have backed her off of the pain meds, so she could be waking up any time now. She seems to be healing well. I think the infection she had is gone now."

"What about the other woman?" Keith asks, nodding towards the other bed.

"She has been awake some. We have learned that she was captured by Sakaki, the one who captured Queen Fala. The little bit of information she has given us indicates that she is probably Altean. She has endured a lot of abuse, but she seems to be healing now. I think given time, she will recover physically and emotionally," Lacus replies. "She still has not given us her name, saying she doesn't remember it. It could be a form of post-traumatic amnesia. Hopefully, her memory will return over time."

Keith goes and sits beside Fala, taking her hand in his. She squeezes it slightly, but shows no other sign of waking. He sits there, watching her sleep, not sure what else to do.

Kira gets up and starts to leave when Lance stops him. "Tell us about Saber, please. What happened to him?" Lance asks, blocking the doorway.

Kira sighs and looks between Lacus, Keith and Lance for a minute before taking a vacant chair and sitting back down between them. "He did what's known as SEEDing. His mental and physical abilities were extended beyond his normal limits, and well beyond most anyone else. It is what allowed him to do what he did. He is not a danger, if that's what you want to know."

Keith nods, processing the information. Lance looks over Kira's expression, then moves from the doorway, so that he can leave if he wants, "Thank you for explaining it. I know there is more to it than what you've said, but you have given us a good enough explanation."

Lance notices that the unknown woman is stirring, so he walks over to see her, he studies her features, thinking he's seen her before, just not sure where. Keith looks over from Fala's bedside and Lacus comes over beside Lance, checking the woman's vitals.

She slowly opens her eyes and looks around groggy and dazed. Her eyes meet Lacus' who gives her a reassuring smile, and then her eyes meet Lance's. She looks into his eyes and her eyes widen in shock, "I...I know you. We've met before, haven't we?" she asks, her voice barely audible.

Lance's face falters when he hears her speak, "N...Noriko? You're alive?" he asks shocked.

She looks at him confused, "That might be my name, but I can't remember," she replies embarrassed.

Lance shakes his head, trying to clear it, "Don't try and force your memory. It'll come back eventually. We're all friends here, so you don't have to be afraid."

She nods slightly and yawns, "My head hurts and I feel sleepy. Can we talk more later?"

He nods in reply, "Of course. Get some rest. My name is Lance, if you need anything and Ms. Lacus isn't here."

"Thank you," she replies quietly as she drifts back to sleep.

Lance walks over to Keith and sits down beside him, "I don't know what to think after last time."

"I think it might actually be her, Lance. We can run her fingerprints against the Altean citizen database, if she will allow us to. But, it would have to wait until we go home. I don't think we can get to it here," Keith replies.

"Shorty or Tammy might could, but I think they may be a bit preoccupied at the moment," Lance says with a smirk.

Keith chuckles and shakes his head, "I'm not even saying a word. I don't want to think about what you are insinuating."

Lance laughs. "Oh, come on. You and I both know-" A male voice clears his throat and Lance stops and looks to the doorway to see Hothead grinning.

"Aw, don't stop talking on my account," he says getting a look from Keith. "How is she?" he asks, nodding towards Fala.

"She'll be all right. She squeezed my hand when I took hers earlier. So perhaps she'll wake up soon." Keith replies. Hothead nods. "How are things at Calvary Command?"

"Well, they all took quite a beating. But Commander Eagle said that since they are all awake, he would allow them to fly to Saber's estate to recuperate tomorrow. They have good doctors there, so that would free up beds for others that are worse off than they are. I'm not sure who will fly the ship to his home, since I think all of them have at least a mild concussion. I might volunteer to do it, as I could load my lion into the transport, and fly it back here after we arrive," Hothead replies.

"Did Saber find Amanda?" Lance asks.

Hothead smiles, "Yes, he did. She is going back with him." He laughs, "I doubt she will let him out of her sights for a while, not that I see him complaining about it. I loved the look on her face when she turned around and he was there. But the relief he had knowing that she was all right was obvious too."

A few days pass and Fala is awake and talking. Shorty manages to get access to their databases and with the woman's permission, he scans her fingertips and runs them. After what seems like hours, a match displays and he calls Lance and Keith into the room.

"Well?" Lance asks impatience nagging at him.

"See for yourself," Shorty replies, pulling up the screen.

Lance and Keith gasp in shock. "It is her," Lance says barely above a whisper. "But Sakaki said she'd killed her."

"She obviously lied, Lance. She wanted you to lose control and probably die too trying to avenge the death," Keith says, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Why don't you go and talk to her. Tell her what we know. Don't force anything on her, just state the facts. Who knows, perhaps she'll remember you eventually and you will get a second chance."

Lance nods and leaves for the sick bay.

Keith looks over at Shorty, "So, are things going okay for you?" he asks as casually as possible.

Shorty blushes slightly and nods, "We told her mother."

"And?" Keith presses.

"She understood. She wasn't thrilled, but she understood. She still wants us to have a wedding ceremony once we are back on Altea."

Keith smiles, "I'm glad it's worked out for you. I'm glad Tammy is here. She will make a good member of our team."

"Thank you, Chief," Shorty replies.

Keith leaves and heads back to check on Fala.

The ships land on Saber's home colony and everyone slowly exits the ships. Robin holding their son, Thomas, Elaine, and Josh are all waiting at the hangar when they come down the ramp. Robin and Josh rush over to Colt, eyeing him carefully. He kisses Robin briefly and then kisses his son's head and nods to Josh, who gives him a relieved smile. April and Fireball slowly make their way to the waiting van, Thomas coming

over to offer assistance.

Elaine comes over to Saber and Amanda, her smile wide, but looking over Saber carefully, noticing his injuries. "Saber, will you be all right?" she asks worried.

He offers a weak smile, "Yes, Elaine. I will be. We all will be. It will just take time."

Hothead comes over and places his hand on Saber's shoulder, "I need to be going. We're leaving for Altea in a few hours."

Saber nods and smiles, "Please have a safe trip and thanks for everything. Give our regards to everyone." Hothead nods. "Perhaps after everyone is well, we can all get together again to have a real vacation," Saber says with a smile.

"I hope so. See you soon, Saber. Take care of her," he says grinning and nodding to Amanda.

Amanda smiles, "I don't think you need to worry about that. I'm not going anywhere."

They all three laugh and Hothead turns and goes to his lion, taking off for Orb.

Saber and Amanda make their way to the van and they all head for his estate.