

## The Pampshifter: Chapter 8

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Balling up his fist tightly, Ellis had made his executive decision. "I'm sorry, Meg. I can't," he said, having a moment of weakness that only Meg was able to pick up on, "Until we get this...thing off of Donnie, I want the med bay on lockdown. No one comes in or out without my knowledge."

"Um, excuse me, captain," said Luna, politely raising her hand as if she were in school waiting to be called on by the teacher, "I know I'm not official crew but I do have multiple medical degrees. If there's any way I can assist, I'd be happy to help with the extraction. I just need to collect a small sample to figure out how its nerve function works." She punctuated her sentence with a polite smile, doing her best not to seem too eager. Could anyone blame her, though? This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to analyze a potential brand-new species.

Walking around the medical bed Donnie was laying on, Ellis folded his arms as he addressed Luna face to face. "The man on that table is one of my best friends. I'm trusting you, Vickers. The rest of you clear out. We've got work to do."

"Captain, may I speak candidly?" said Meg, earning an affirming nod from Ellis, "Luna is not one of us and I'm not sure I feel comfortable letting her put Donnie under a microscope. No offense."

Gritting her teeth and shrinking back, Luna held up her hands innocently. "None taken. 'Twas merely a suggestion. I haven't forgotten my place. Stay silent, alert, and out of the way.' Right, captain?"

Nodding his head to Luna, Ellis smiled at his ship's lone guest. It was a saying he often told to passengers aboard his vessel, one designed to keep them from harming themselves or any of his crew. To hear Luna repeat it now made him feel even more confident in trusting her. "That's right. And right now, I need you all to be alert. Vickers will assist me with quarantine and analysis. My decision is final," he said, swiftly ending the discussion.

"Yes, captain," said Meg and Mason in unison. They both saluted Ellis before immediately clearing out of the room.

Watching the militaristic gesture with a bemused smile, Luna felt her curiosity peaking. "Woof, so serious. I thought you guys were the outlaws but I swear, you guys are more to the letter than any military outfit I've accompanied," she said, pointing out the odd behavior of Ellis's smuggling operation.

"That's because we all were trained in the Federation together. Roland, myself, Meg, and...Donnie...we've been a unit for a long time. And Mason's taken to the ship like he's been working here his whole life. It's our way of showing respect to each other," he said, momentarily relishing in the heartfelt moment he was sharing with Luna, "Now then, enough chatter. We've got work to do."

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“I don’t like this. I DON’T like this,” said Meg as she paced back and forth in the cockpit, “Like, she doesn’t so much as lift a finger the whole voyage, and now she’s in there acting like the captain’s best friend. It doesn’t make sense.”

“Uh huh, couldn’t agree more,” muttered Mason, barely listening to Meg as he continued to put the finishing touches on his freshly-made mittens, “What do you think, Meg? Stars or crescent moons on the back?” He held up both mittens for Meg to see.

Curling her lips inward as she halted her pacing, Meg wasn’t in the mood to participate in Mason’s latest crafting venture. That being said, she also couldn’t help herself from talking knitting with Mason. It was her who got him onto it, after all. “Why not one for each hand?” she suggested, before resuming her walk cycle.

“Ooh! Great idea,” responded Mason excitedly before diving back into his knitting. He wouldn’t get very far into his detail work, though, as moments later, Ellis entered the cockpit. Both he and Meg stood at attention for their captain.

Waving his hand in a downward motion, Ellis put his crew at ease. “I’ll cut to the chase. We’ve extracted a sample. Luna’s in the med bay now doing her analysis. Hopefully, we’ll know what we’re dealing with in a few short hours,” he said, lightening the tension ever so slightly. Still, he didn’t want to give his crew too much false hope in the event things went South, “That doesn’t mean we’re out of the woods yet. So stay frosty. Meg, I want you stationed in the cockpit at all times. As of right now, we maintain course to Earth. Mason, head down to the loading dock and help Roland finish patching the sh-”

“Captain!” shouted Luna as she raced into the cockpit at full speed, “You’re gonna want to see this.”

TO BE CONTINUED...