

# 026

In this chapter, the protagonist wakes up to find that Nasha has left a message, indicating she has to leave for the day. This news brings a smile to their face as they experience an unfamiliar feeling of lightness and freedom from fear. However, this sense of calm is interrupted by a command from Marshall, requiring them to report to his office immediately.

Upon entering Marshall's office, the protagonist is surprised by Marshall's unexpected demeanor, which is more relaxed than anticipated. The conversation begins with Marshall offering an apology for misjudging the situation regarding the device the protagonist had relinquished to some creatures. Despite having anticipated a reprimand, the protagonist finds themselves in an unusual position of accepting Marshall's apology. The discussion soon shifts to the pressing issue of fuel for their colony, as half of their antimatter supply has been lost.

Marshall explains that the device brought back contains critical fuel that needs to be reinserted into the colony's core. The task is daunting and dangerous, requiring manual intervention due to the way it was extracted. Upon hearing this, the protagonist's concerns grow, recalling the dangers associated with the antimatter core. However, when Marshall expresses admiration for their previous saving of the colony, all genuine feelings quickly dissolve into frustration and anger.

In a bold move, the protagonist refuses to comply with Marshall's order to handle the fuel situation. They resign as the colony's Expendable and threaten to disrupt the newfound peace with the creatures if Marshall attempts to harm them. Marshall's temper flares after this assertion, but instead of fear, the protagonist feels liberated from the weight of their previous roles and expectations. Mocking Marshall's authority, they assert their power over the situation.

After this confrontation, the scene shifts to a casual dining moment with Berto, where awkward silence prevails. Berto acknowledges the protagonist's resignation, and despite their earlier tension, the protagonist reestablishes ground by playfully punching Berto. This act fosters a new dynamic in their relationship, and with the chapter closing on a now-defiant stance, the protagonist recognizes this as the beginning of a fresh chapter in their life.

