

"Ed"

by
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1 EXT. PLANET TRUFGAR - AFTERNOON

1

A sandstorm-whipped world. The green sky is almost entirely blotted out, leaving the sun fighting to shine even a minute bit.

Three people in protective gear walk through the storms.

RALDO, 25, and a fellow guard approach the crashed shuttlecraft, now partly buried in a sand drift. Raldo is a big, tall, strong man - a walking bicep.

He grabs the craft's bent hatch with one hand and pries it up and open. He and his deputy enter first, making sure it is safe for TRIANA, 20 - a beautiful, slim, young brunette with sparkling, green eyes - to follow them.

Amid the broken and twisted equipment, they find an Earthman - CARPENTER, 40 - alive, but unconscious on the deck.

Triana's face lights up.

TRIANA

The gods have blessed us yet again!

Raldo and his fellow guard smile.

TRIANA

(to Raldo)

Bring him to the palace as quickly as possible. He needs medical attention.

Raldo begins to comply, but freezes when he notices the bleeding cut on the man's cheek.

RALDO

(astonished)

He bleeds. . . red.

Triana beams even brighter.

TRIANA

I see.

(beat)

Isn't it wonderful?

FADE TO:

The one-man shuttle detaches from its mothership, the *Diplomat*, for the alien world of Trufgar below. Carpenter is seated on his gravity couch at the controls. The voice of his boss, WATSON, is heard over the speaker.

WATSON

(always filtered)

Diplomat to Carpenter. Come in please.

Carpenter flips a switch on the control panel before him.

CARPENTER

I hear you, Harry.

(beat)

I expect planetfall in eleven minutes. Computer reports the sandstorms are at an ebb.

WATSON

Well, *that's* good news.

(apologetically)

I'm sorry you pulled the short straw, pal.

CARPENTER

Not to worry. If Joe Doyle's. . .

(chokes up a little)

. . . wife is sick, she's sick. He *should* be with her. I don't mind the extra duty.

WATSON

I wanted you to have today off because. . . well. . . you know.

Carpenter grins.

CARPENTER

Thanks, but I can't shirk my diplomatic duties every time the anniversary of Linda's. . . death comes up.

(beat)

I'd probably just sit in my quarters feeling sorry for myself. She wouldn't want that.

WATSON

I'll make sure you get some time off soon.

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

Don't worry about it.

He presses a few more buttons.

CARPENTER

I'll call you as soon as I'm on
the surface.

FADE TO:

INT. CRASHED SHUTTLECRAFT - LATER (FLASHBACK)

Carpenter groggily awakes, still strapped into his gravity couch amid the shuttle's now-twisted interior. He sighs heavily.

CARPENTER

Not my *best* landing.

He peers through the viewport beside his head - nothing but wind-whipped sand.

He unbuckles and attempts to rise, but it isn't happening. His body is one, big ache. He painfully coughs a few times and then grabs at his chest.

CARPENTER

That *can't* be good.

His right cheek feels odd. He touches it, and his fingers come back bloody.

He activates the communications system. Heavy static crackles back at him. He tries anyway.

CARPENTER

Diplomat, this is Carpenter. Come
in please.

More static. He tries again.

CARPENTER

This is Carpenter calling the
Diplomat. Come in.

(beat)

Harry?

After some more static, he turns the comm system off. He speaks to the computer, which responds in a monotone, female voice.

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

Computer, report status.

COMPUTER

Contamination from sandstorms is
affecting operating systems.
Immediate departure is
recommended.

Smirking, Carpenter looks about at the mess that was once
a fully functional shuttlecraft.

CARPENTER

(sotto voce)

Easier said than done.

(beat; no longer
sotto voce)

Is the shuttle space-worthy?

COMPUTER

Affirmative.

He tries to rise again, but cannot. He groans from the
pain.

CARPENTER

Status of auto-pilot.

COMPUTER

Auto-pilot is inoperative due to
atmospheric conditions.

CARPENTER

Can you calculate the duration of
this sandstorm?

COMPUTER

Negative.

CARPENTER

Why did you report earlier they
were not a concern?

COMPUTER

Insufficient data.

CARPENTER

(sotto voce)

You mean you made a mistake.

COMPUTER

Please repeat last question.

Carpenter shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

Never mind.

Three shrill beeps sound. He rubs his temples against the noise.

CARPENTER

(annoyed)

Now what?

COMPUTER

Life support has been compromised.
Seventeen minutes to failure.

CARPENTER

Terrific!

He attempts to stand, but it doesn't work. He gets partway up when a jolt of pain hits, his legs buckle under him, and he falls unconscious to the deck.

FADE TO:

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE INFIRMARY - LATER

An injured Carpenter lies on a bed in an alien hospital. The bleeding from his cheek has stopped, but he is feverish. He wakes momentarily and sees Triana sitting beside him, holding his hand.

He smiles at the sight of the beautiful woman, and tries to sit up. She puts her other hand on his chest.

TRIANA

(gently)

Rest, pargon. You will soon be well.

Carpenter's mind swims in and out of reality.

CARPENTER

(hoarsely)

You're *beautiful*.

Triana blushes.

TRIANA

Thank you.

CARPENTER

(beat)

Linda. Lin. . .

(CONTINUED)

4

CONTINUED:

4

He drops off.

FADE TO:

5

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DAYS LATER

5

Triana is surprised to see Carpenter gingerly walking about the common room of the palace. He is wearing a bandage on his cut cheek and loose clothing from the Infirmary.

She lights up the room when she speaks. Carpenter is obviously smitten with her. She smiles.

TRIANA

You're looking well.

CARPENTER

It's all because of your nursing.

Triana poo-poops that idea.

TRIANA

I played a small part in your recovery.

Carpenter looks about the magnificent stone building sporting art and tapestry of many colors on its walls.

CARPENTER

How long have I been here?

TRIANA

Four days.

CARPENTER

(surprised)

Really? I barely remember.

(beat)

Has anyone come looking for me?

TRIANA

No, but the sandstorms have not let up since your arrival. It's very difficult to travel when they're this active.

She gestures at a small, circular table with two chairs.

TRIANA

Please sit. We don't want all this standing to affect your recovery.

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

Thank you.

He sits carefully. With a smile, she takes the other chair.

CARPENTER

What building is this?

TRIANA

The Imperial Palace - the home of our ruler.

CARPENTER

Good. He's just the man I want to see.

The words are barely out of Carpenter's mouth before he begins hacking. Quickly, it becomes a barking cough.

TRIANA

May I offer you something to drink?

CARPENTER

(between coughs)

Please.

Triana hurries to a nearby table and pours some sparkling purple liquid from a carafe into an ornate goblet. She returns and hands it to Carpenter, who happily takes it while trying to stem his cough long enough to drink it.

He looks into the goblet.

CARPENTER

Thank you.

(beat)

What is it?

TRIANA

It is called buntra. It's made from fermented berries.

He takes a swallow. It is very tasty, and his cough subsides.

CARPENTER

Thank you.

TRIANA

You're welcome, pargon.

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

What's that mean? Pargon?

TRIANA

It's a form of address we use when we don't know someone's name.

(beat)

Now drink.

He does.

CARPENTER

(embarrassed)

I'm sorry. I forgot my manners:
Ambassador Leonard Carpenter,
First Contact Division, Earth
Alliance.

She smiles.

TRIANA

I am Triana.

CARPENTER

A lovely name. . . for a lovely
woman.

She looks down at the floor to hide her embarrassed
blushing. Carpenter drinks some more buntra.

TRIANA

You're very kind.

(beat)

Why are you here?

CARPENTER

To tell your people about our
Alliance.

TRIANA

I don't know of such things.

CARPENTER

I tried contacting you before I
left the mothership.

TRIANA

We have no communications
facilities. Never saw the need.

CARPENTER

(sotto voce)

So much for a return call.

(CONTINUED)

TRIANA

Excuse me?

CARPENTER

Nothing, nothing.

(longish beat)

Would you please tell your ruler
that I'd like to see him?

TRIANA

I'm afraid that's impossible at
the moment.

A large, wooden door at the other end of the room is suddenly opened by an exuberant YOUNG MAN who closes it behind him. He runs to a pretty GIRL who is seated on a stone bench beside another MAN.

YOUNG MAN

He said yes, my love! He said yes!

She springs from the bench, her eyes alight, wraps her arms around him, and kisses him on the lips.

GIRL

I'm so happy!

(beat)

When may we wed?

YOUNG MAN

Whenever we choose. It shouldn't
take very long to make the
arrangements.

The other man, looking depressed, chimes in.

MAN

He said no to me.

GIRL

(genuinely)

I'm sorry.

MAN

Why would he. . .

YOUNG MAN

It is not for us to question his
decisions.

MAN

Very true.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG MAN

Come, my friend. Celebrate with us!

The three of them leave together.

CARPENTER

What was that all about?

TRIANA

Decisions have been made. Ed has spoken!

CARPENTER

Ed?

TRIANA

Our ruler. He is named Ed.

CARPENTER

Ed. . . decides things for your people?

TRIANA

Oh, yes!

CARPENTER

What kind of things?

TRIANA

Whatever we need answers to:
Marriages, children, business ventures.

(beat)

We bring our concerns to Ed, and he decides yes or no.

CARPENTER

Shouldn't you make up *your own* minds?

Triana is surprised at the question.

TRIANA

Certainly not! No one but Ed can act with true impartiality - thinking only of the good of the people.

CARPENTER

What makes him qualified to do this?

(CONTINUED)

TRIANA

(confused)

I'm sorry?

CARPENTER

Is he some great scholar, a wise thinker, a descendant of a royal bloodline?

TRIANA

(very confused)

No. He is. . . *Ed*.

FADE TO:

A small, elegantly decorated room.

ED is short, old, paunchy, and walks with a limp. He leaves his comfortable chair by the door - nearly a throne - and walks toward Carpenter with an outstretched hand.

ED

I'm pleased to meet you.

Confused, Carpenter shakes the offered hand.

CARPENTER

You're Ed?

Ed nods.

ED

Edward McNulty, at your service.

CARPENTER

You're not a native.

ED

Goodness no! I was born and raised in Chicago more years ago than I care to remember.

CARPENTER

(longish beat)

How can you. . .

ED

You have a hundred questions, I'm sure, but first, some refreshment.

(CONTINUED)

He limps to a table in the middle of the ornate room that is overflowing with colorful edibles, none of which Carpenter recognizes.

ED

May I offer you something?

CARPENTER

No thanks. I had some of that berry juice while I was waiting for you.

Ed takes an empty plate from a small stack of dishes and starts placing food on it.

ED

Isn't that tasty stuff? It *really* quenches the thirst.

He puts down his plate, picks up a knife, and holds it over a yellow and green spiky thing.

ED

This is a fruit they call mytrak. It's very similar to pineapple.

Ed cuts a few slices, revealing the purple flesh. He puts the knife down and pops a piece into his mouth. He smiles at the flavor.

ED

I've been making decisions all morning. It gets me. . .

He pinches the bridge of his nose.

ED

. . . right here.

CARPENTER

That's what I want to speak with you about.

ED

You mean how a guy from Chicago ends up as the ruler of a world dozens of light years from Earth?

CARPENTER

Precisely.

Ed sighs.

(CONTINUED)

ED

Do you remember the Costas
expedition way back in '18?"

Carpenter thinks briefly.

CARPENTER

(tentatively)

A deep-space colonization ship,
right?

ED

That's right, with a crew of 57.

CARPENTER

If memory serves, it was declared
lost with all hands.

(longish beat)

You?

Ed nods.

ED

One hand survived: Assistant
Engineer Edward McNulty. Serial
number 0124586.

CARPENTER

What happened to the ship? The
rest of the crew?

ED

We ran into a meteor storm and had
to abandon her. My pod crashed
here. Some Trufgars found me in
the wreckage and nursed me back to
health.

CARPENTER

No one else ever. . .

ED

No.

CARPENTER

Jesus.

(beat)

You've been here for *decades*.

ED

I gave up keeping track long ago.

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

How did you become the aliens'
. . . "decider?"

Ed takes another bite of the odd fruit.

ED

During my recuperation, some of
the medical staff started asking
for my opinions on things.

CARPENTER

Like what?

ED

Silly, simple things, like whether
to have A or B for dinner, or what
dress to wear out on a date that
night.

CARPENTER

And you gave them your opinions?

ED

It would have been rude not to.
After all, they saved my life.

CARPENTER

But opinions aren't decisions.

ED

There came a time when opinions
weren't enough, and the Trufgars
became unwilling to make *any*
decisions on their own.

(beat)

They relied entirely on me.

CARPENTER

Why?

ED

Their sacred texts promise them a
visitor who will come from the sky
and solve all their problems.

(beat)

They think I'm him.

CARPENTER

(astonished)

You *let* them believe that?

(CONTINUED)

ED

I told them I was no one special.

(beat)

They're like kids - they want
someone to tell them what to do.

CARPENTER

You can't run their lives like
this!

ED

They want me to.

CARPENTER

What do you get from the
arrangement?

ED

Anything I want.

Smiling, he gestures about his chambers.

ED

Only the best the people have to
offer.

CARPENTER

You're taking away their right of
self-determination!

ED

I'm not *taking* anything,
Carpenter. I told them the truth
several times, but they won't
listen to me!

He sighs heavily.

ED

There are worse jobs I could have.

CARPENTER

(longish beat)

Do you want to leave here?

ED

I'm. . . I'm not sure.

CARPENTER

My shuttle is out there. It's been
damaged, but I think it could fly
again.

(CONTINUED)

ED

Bet I could fix it.

CARPENTER

The mothership, the *Diplomat*, is in orbit. We could be in its hangar bay in half an hour.

ED

They'd never let me leave.

CARPENTER

What are they going to do - hold you down and *make* you decide things?

(beat)

There comes a time when every child has to grow up.

ED

(concerned)

I don't know what they'll do without me. I've been playing this part for so long.

CARPENTER

That young man who left here, he was happy you gave him permission to get married. But the other one was upset.

Ed nods.

ED

He wanted to open a buntra stand, and I told him no.

CARPENTER

Why?

ED

This planet is *lousy* with them. He'd only lose money.

Triana slowly opens the door.

TRIANA

Ed, it is time for your massage and bath.

ED

I'll be just a minute.

(CONTINUED)

Smiling, she closes the door. Carpenter watches her leave.

CARPENTER

(to Ed)

Will you consider my offer?

ED

You bet. I'll have my - you should
pardon the word - *decision* for you
soon.

FADE TO:

Triana enters and sees Carpenter. He is still walking
carefully, but better than before.

TRIANA

Did you sleep well?

CARPENTER

Yes.

TRIANA

I'm happy to hear that. It will
help with your recuperation.

CARPENTER

(beat)

May I speak with Ed?

TRIANA

I'm afraid not. He always naps
after his morning bath.

CARPENTER

Do *you* take care of that for him?

TRIANA

I do.

CARPENTER

(sotto voce, at
first)

Dirty old. . .

(beat)

Triana, I understand your sacred
texts tell of Ed's coming.

(CONTINUED)

TRIANA

They do. It is written that a man from the sky will become the one who decides things for us.

CARPENTER

And your people took that to mean Ed?

TRIANA

Why wouldn't we?

CARPENTER

(longish beat)

Could he leave here if he wanted to?

TRIANA

That question is irrelevant. He is content here. We give him every comfort.

CARPENTER

Did your people make their own decisions before Ed arrived?

Triana rolls her eyes in remembrance.

TRIANA

They did, and they did *not* enjoy it.

CARPENTER

Why?

TRIANA

(longish beat)

Do you remember your childhood?

CARPENTER

Of course.

TRIANA

You enjoyed life without care. Then you began maturing and needed to make your own decisions. Didn't life become less enjoyable?

CARPENTER

That's part of growing up.

TRIANA

Why must it be so?

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

It's just. . . life.

(beat)

Has Ed decided things for you?

TRIANA

Of course.

(longish beat)

If you'll excuse me, I must wake him. It is time for more decisions.

CARPENTER

(dejected)

OK.

Triana takes one of Carpenter's hands in hers.

TRIANA

You are sad.

Carpenter quickly shakes his head.

CARPENTER

I'll be fine.

TRIANA

Do you. . . desire something?

CARPENTER

Why do you ask?

TRIANA

You seem ill at ease.

(beat)

Do I make you uncomfortable?

Carpenter quickly chuckles under his breath.

CARPENTER

Quite the opposite.

Their eyes meet.

TRIANA

(incredulously)

You. . . love me?

CARPENTER

(beat)

I. . . I do.

(CONTINUED)

TRIANA

I love you too, Carpenter.

(beat)

For years, I've not felt right here. Now, with you beside me, this feels like home.

(beat)

Will you remain on Trufgar with me?

He raises her hands to his lips and kisses them gently.

CARPENTER

Happily.

TRIANA

Can we marry?

CARPENTER

Of course.

TRIANA

I will ask Ed to decide.

Carpenter's face sinks.

CARPENTER

You need to ask him?

TRIANA

Of course!

(beat)

I wouldn't *dream* of making such a significant decision without his approval.

FADE TO:

ED

Carpenter, I've made up my mind. I want out.

CARPENTER

You do?

ED

I'll never have a better chance. This place is a jail - a *really nice* jail, but a jail.

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

Uhm. . .

ED

(confused)

What's wrong?

CARPENTER

(beat)

I'm not sure *I* want to leave.

ED

What?

CARPENTER

I'm in love.

ED

You're taking back your offer?

CARPENTER

I *can't* leave her.

(beat)

You take the shuttle. I'll help you fix it. Tell my boss, Harry, I've resigned my commission and decided to stay here.

ED

We can take your girl along.

CARPENTER

She won't leave Trufgar.

ED

So you won't come with us?

CARPENTER

(confused)

Us? Who are. . . "us?"

ED

Triana and me.

CARPENTER

Triana and *you*?

ED

Could your shuttle hold four people: Triana, your girl, and the two of us?

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTER

Triana *is* the girl I'm talking about.

Ed chuckles.

ED

She's the one you've fallen for, the reason you won't leave?

CARPENTER

Damn right!

Unseen by them, the door to Ed's chambers opens and Triana silently enters wearing a lovely, pink dress. She listens to them sparring.

ED

Well, she *is* leaving. . . with me. She can't stay here with you. I won't allow it!

CARPENTER

You'd deny me my happiness?

ED

To guarantee mine, of course I would.

Unable to control his anger, Carpenter lunges at Ed, and they begin to fight. Triana hurriedly approaches them.

TRIANA

No! Stop it!

(beat)

No!

They ignore her plea. She makes a move to separate them, but they are too quick for her. In short order, they crash onto the food table, which collapses under their combined weight. They fall to the floor beside each other.

Ed cries out in pain. Triana rushes to him. The mytrak knife is sticking out of his chest, his red blood pooling on the floor. Weeping, she pushes Carpenter out of her way, kneels beside Ed, and pulls him close.

Carpenter starts to rise.

CARPENTER

I'll get the doctors.

(CONTINUED)

Ed reaches up and weakly grabs Carpenter by the collar. As Ed speaks, red blood trickles from his mouth and onto Triana's hands.

ED
(weakly; gasping)
Don't bother. The decision. . .
has been made.

He wheezes, his eyes roll back into their sockets, and his body goes limp.

He is gone.

Triana very gently lays Ed's body on the floor. She sobs as she speaks.

TRIANA
Why?

CARPENTER
It was an accident.

TRIANA
I cared for you, I loved you, and
you killed my father.

Carpenter can't believe her words.

CARPENTER
(shocked)
Your *father*?

Raldo and another guard hurriedly enter the room. Triana attempts to control her weeping. She slowly stands, and Carpenter follows suit. Her pink dress is stained with Ed's blood.

TRIANA
(to Raldo)
Fetch the doctors. Have the body
prepared for services.

Raldo obediently nods and leaves.

CARPENTER
Triana -

TRIANA
You betrayed me! You betrayed
everyone.

CARPENTER
I did no such thing.

(CONTINUED)

TRIANA

You lied. You do not love me.

CARPENTER

I do!

TRIANA

I *can't* love you.

(beat)

My people need a new ruler to make our decisions. *You* are chosen.

CARPENTER

Me?

TRIANA

You also came from the sky. You also bleed red. You cannot hope to equal Ed's greatness, but you can take his place.

CARPENTER

I can't.

TRIANA

Then you must suffer the consequences of your actions: The punishment for taking the life of another - even, as you say, accidentally - is death.

CARPENTER

But -

TRIANA

(to the guard)

See to it that Mr. Carpenter's shuttlecraft is rendered unusable.

CARPENTER

Now hold on one -

TRIANA

If you encounter any of his shipmates, kill them.

The guard nods and exits.

CARPENTER

(disbelievingly)

Triana, *what* are you doing?

(CONTINUED)

TRIANA

Death or becoming my father's
successor.

(beat)

The choice is yours.

CARPENTER

I can't. . .

TRIANA

Would you like a glass of buntra
while you ponder your first
decision?

FADE TO BLACK.