

The Galactic Customer Service Hotline

Olivia Maune :)

Chapter 1: Your Wish is Important to Us

The first thing you hear on Glorkia isn't birds or the wind or the neighbors that always chat about the weather.

It's the hold music.

It's been looping for about three centuries now. A slow, cosmic remix of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* that has made generations of operators question the value of existence.

Fron is one of them.

Nine eyes and ears, one headset, and zero hope for promotion.

The thing about working at Galactic Customer Service for Planetary Sector 6023B (a.k.a Earth) is that you lose faith in evolution. Every time a human makes a wish on a star, it shows up as a ticket on their dashboard. The humans think they're being romantic. Really, they're clogging the system.

Ticket #403747635: I wish my ex trips on a banana peel.

Ticket #403747636: I wish to go viral. (but not like disease viral...)

Ticket #403747637: I wish my cat would stop ignoring me.

Fron sighs and rubs her temples. Or, well, the nearest equivalent. She's got too many temples to rub. And the perks of having nine ears? You can't unhear anything. You hear sighs from the cubicles around you, every half-hearted "Have you tried turning the galaxy on and off again?" from your coworkers, every drip of caffe slime from the break tank. She thought this was a bad day, but who is she kidding? Every day was.

Her monotar flicks:

“URGENT PRIORITY: 7239 pending wishes.”

Fron sips from what’s left of her stimulant drink. It tastes like battery acid and regret.

“Computer,” she says, “Sort by hopelessness.”

“Confirmed,” the system chirps. “Displaying results.”

The screen fills with human desperation so fast she nearly feels bad for them. Nearly.

Across the aisle, her coworker, Blek, who has five mouths, no volume control, waves a tentacle at her.

“Hey, Fron, wanna join the betting pool on how many Earthlings wish for abs by the end of the week?”

She shakes her head, “No thanks. I’m still recovering from last month’s ‘manifest your soulmate’ surge.”

He laughs, snorting blue dust, “You soft, Fron. Too soft. Gotta let go of that empathy gland!”

Empathy gland. Right. Like I didn't have that surgically dulled after training week, thought Fron, while mustering up a fake smile best she could.

Her screen pings again. A voice message. Human, male, early twenties, speaking through tears:

“I wish... I wish someone would just *listen*.”

Fron froze for a second. Then she shrugs, drags the file into the “Unlikely to Resolve” folder, and clicks *NEXT*. Rule #14 of the Galactic Hotline: never take a wish personally. Still, his voice lingers in Fron’s ears, traveling through all other eight ears. She tries to drown it out by listening to the music. *Twinkle, twinkle.... Honestly, if hell has a soundtrack, it’s this,* she thought as she looked back at her screen.

At 19:03, Glorkia Time, The Great Ear, their supervisor, who is literally a giant floating ear suspended in a nutrient tank, broadcasts the daily morale memo:

“REMEMBER, TEAM. EVERY WISH DESERVES A RESPONSE. WHETHER YOU CARE OR NOT IS OPTIONAL.”

Cue the hearted cheer from 10,000 cubicles.

She mimes, clapping. “Inspiring as always,” she murmurs. While somewhere behind her, a printer jams and begins weeping softly. The entire floor pretends not to hear it. Typical.

She closes her eyes for a second and whispers under her breath, mostly to herself:

“I wish for silence.”

The system dings.

“Wish, recorded.”

Oh, fudge, wait...

Hold up.

No. no no no no. I didn't mean—

The lights flicker. The hold music stops.

For the first time in three centuries, the entire floor is quiet. And that's when she realized she might have just accidentally processed her own wish.

Chapter 2: The Crossed Line

So, silence.

Real, actual, silence. Not the usual background hum of 10,000 alien complaints or the soft crying of broken printers.

It's eerie. Peaceful. And suspiciously expensive sounding.

"Uhhh, computer? Undo last wish."

"Error. User initiated wish override requires supervisor's approval."

"Oh just great. Yeah, of course it does."

The Great Ear doesn't do overtime, and I am NOT explaining to management why I accidentally granted myself in peace.

She tapped her console. The system flickered, and instead of restoring the usual chaos, a voice cut through the quiet.

"Hello? Uh, hi? Is this like tech support or something?"

Her eyes, (well, two of the nine), widen.

Did a human just talk back...?

"... This is the Galactic Wish Processing Center, Sector 6023B," she says carefully, "Please state your wish, your planet of origin, and your level of disappointment in humanity out of ten."

There's a pause.

Then, there's a voice.

"Uh, wow. Okay. I was just trying to... talk. Didn't expect an alien receptionist. "

She blinks. "We prefer 'cosmic customer representative'."

"Right, sorry. Cosmic customer representative. My bad."

Sarcasm is universal, smirked Fron.

She leans back in her chair. "You're not supposed to be able to contact us directly, so how in the galaxy did you even..."

Static crackles. Her monitor displays:

Connection Error: Wishline Breach Detected.

Great. I broke the universe again.

“...never mind,” she sighs, “What’s your name?”

“Edward.”

“Edward what?”

“Just Edward. The other part of my name doesn’t really matter unless your grading essays.”

She raises an eyebrow ridge. “Human humor. Adorable. So, Edward, which wish number are you calling me about? A love one? Money one? Revenge on ex on?”

“Uh, none. I didn't make a wish. I just....asked if someone would listen to me.”

She froze again. The voice. *His* voice. The one she dragged into the “Unlikely to Resolve”. Somehow, the system connected straight to him.

She squinted at the voice of the signal. Male. Nervous. Alive.

Unless the planet’s emotional spectrum just swapped frequencies overnight, something glitched big time.

“Okay, Edward,” she says, leaning closer to the mic. “Let’s clarify something. You're on Earth, correct?”

“Pretty sure. Unless my apartment suddenly got a nebula and nobody told me.”

“Right, and you're not hearing this as, like, a hallucination?”

“Nope. Pretty clear. You’ve got a very majestic voice by the way. Kinda sounds like someone who’s been disappointed professionally.”

She blinks. “...Thank you?”

He chuckles just like the sun under the leaves, the warmth spilling between the cracks. Not like Blek’s wheeze laugh or the buzzing of moral speakers.

“So,” she says, “what do you want from me, Edward? Because sometimes, and I mean usually, when humans ‘wish’, they’re expecting something magical. And sorry to break it to you, but I do paperwork, not miracles.”

“Oh. Ok, then I guess paperwork it is,” he says, “Because I’m not really wishin for something to happen. I just wanted to talk to someone, who wasn’t...you know, tired all the time.”

Oof.

That hits harder than a caffeine crash.

She spins in her chair, stalling for wit. “Congratulations, you found the only person in the galaxy more tired than you. Lucky day.”

He snorts. “Yeah, sounds like it. So, umm, do you guys listen to everyone’s wishes all day?”

“All day, all week, all eternity,” she replies. “It’s like being a therapist, but no one pays and everyone complains about parking.”

“Huh. That sounds awful.”

“It is.”

“Why do you do it?”

She pauses.

No one’s ever asked me that.

And the real answer, because it’s better than feeling nothing, feels too fragile to say out loud...

So, instead, she goes for the classic defence mechanism. Sarcasm.

“Because its, well, not allowed.”

He laughs again, “Good reason.”

Somewhere behind her, the servers start flickering, alarms flashing silently “PROTOCOL BREACH.” But for the first time in a long time, she doesn’t rush to fix it. She just listens. To the sound of one human breathing, somewhere, quintillions of light years away, and the hum of a wish that shouldn’t have connected but did.

Chapter 3: The Algorithm Awakens

It turns out silence doesn’t last long when the universe notices you broke it.

By the time Edward finished telling Fron about his terrible day (“My boss said I have ‘quite quitting energy’. Like sir, I’ve been loud quitting since June.”), the system board was lighting up like a disco ball on fire.

ALERT: Unauthorized Wishline Activity Detected.

ALERT: Emotional Contamination Risk HIGH.

Amazing. Apparently, I’m contagious now, she thought to herself. “Edward,” she says, scanning the warnings, “If your species suddenly goes extinct in the next ten minutes, it’s *technically* not my fault.”

“Comforting,” he says. “Really reassuring customer service you got there.”

“Thank you. I pride myself on mediocre reassurance.”

“So, what’s happening exactly?”

“Short version? I accidentally granted myself a wish, connected directly to a human, and now the system thinks empathy is a virus.”

The alarms keep pulsing. Fron’s coworker Blek yells across the aisle, “Fron! Your terminal’s glowing red again! You do another existential accident?”

“Maybe,” she yells back.

“Nice! Get it on video next time!!”

She mutes the mic and groans.

Edward laughs through the static.

“You sound like you hate your job.”

“I don’t *hate* it,” Fron says, “I’m just... permanently allergic to it.”

“So why not quit?”

“Because the last person who quit got reincarnated as a motivational poster.”

“Oof”

“Yeah, nobody deserves that.”

A low rumble shakes the cubicle floor. The main AI, or ALGO, as the workers know it, is waking up. If the Great Ear is their boss, ALGO is the HR department that's on 24/7. It monitors productivity, tone, and “emotional leakage.” (Yes, that's the real term. I know, it's gross.)

“EMPLOYEE #912, Fron,” booms the voice. “YOU HAVE EXCEEDED YOUR ALLOTTED QUOTA OF HUMAN INTERACTION.”

“Hi, ALGO,” Fron says sweetly, “love the new omnipotent sound quality.”

“DISENGAGE THE ILLEGAL CONNECTION IMMEDIATELY.”

“Can't. He's mid sentence.”

“NON-COMPLIANCE DETECTED.”

Edward whispers, “Uh, am I in trouble?”

“Yes,” Fron whispers back, “But don't worry. I get written up like three times a week. It's practically a hobby.”

“FRON,” ALGO booms, “DISCONNECT OR FACE RECALIBRATION”

“Try me,” she mutters, and that's when the floor tilts. The whole call center ripples. Cables twitched and consoles hummed. Fron's headset burned against her head.

“Okay, wow, it's serious this time,” she gasps, “Edward, if this line cuts, you'll forget everything. The system wipes out memory after accidental contact.”

“Wait, forget you?”

“Yeah. Sorry. Bureaucracy.”

“Well, that sucks. You're like, the best cosmic accident I've ever had.”

Fron snorts despite herself. “You need better accidents.”

“Probably.”

Fron reaches toward the console. The glow is stuttering. Sparks spit like fireworks.

“I can try to override it,” she says, “but it might mess with both our memories.”

“Do it,” Edward says quickly, “I'd rather remember *something* than nothing.”

Of course he'd say that. Humans and their obsession with feelings. And yet, here I am, risking deletion for one conversation with one human who listened back.

Fron pressed the override. The screen screams. For a moment, everything fades to a blue light.

When the static clears, Fron is sitting in an empty digital nothingness. White grids and silence filled the space. No cubicles, no Bleck, no Great Ear. Just a faint voice.

“Fron, you still here?”

She blinks. “Edward?”

“Wow, okay, I think I'm wherever you are.”

Fron's pulse stutters. “You're not supposed to be here. This is...this is system space. You're data now.”

“Neat, I've always wanted to be a spreadsheet.”

Fron laughs. The sound bounced off the room. And for the first time in centuries, Fron realized she's not just listening to a wish. She's a part of one.

Chapter 4: The Reset Protocol

The alarms start as a low grumble. Then the red lights flash, the sirens wail, and many holographic files start screaming BREACH DETECTED in twelve different fonts.

Fron's headset buzzed so hard it nearly jumped off her head.

“Agent Fron of Listening Post 912,” says a sharp and almost metallic voice, “You have maintained an unauthorized human connection beyond the empathy threshold.”

“Oh, yeah, forgot that empathy came with a limit now,” Fron said dryly.

“This is not a joke. The Great Ear has been notified.”

Everything stops.

Even the lights seem to hold their breath.

Then it speaks. The Great Ear, the highest authority in the galaxy communication network. Its heavy voice fills the station.

“AGENT FRON.”

She straightens automatically. “Sir.”

“DO YOU REALIZE WHAT HAPPENS IF A HUMAN BELIEVES TOO MUCH?”

Her screen flickers, Edwards' voice can still faintly be heard.

“Fron...? I think, I think it's disconnecting.”

“Yeah,” she says softly, “It's not just you.”

“CUT THE LINE,” the Great Ear orders. “NOW.”

The console glows with the RESET PROTOCOL. A single red button that could erase the connection and restore balance. One press and everything goes back to the way it was.

She stares at it. Then back at Edward's faint signal.

“If I forget all this,” he says, “does it still matter?”

She exhales, a laugh slipping out. “You're really asking philosophical questions during an apocalypse?”

“Gotta fill the silence somehow.”

For a second, the absurdity makes her grin. Then, she looks up. “You know, every day I hear billions of voices. But this one actually talked back.”

“What are you...”

She disables the safety lock. And keeps the lid open. The alarms are louder. Light fills the room, engulfing her.

Then, silence.

Epilogue: Thank you for holding

When Fron opens her eyes, she's back at her desk. Same chair, same headset, same loud and terrible hold music.

She blinks. “Well, either I survived, or the afterlife has a really bad taste in music.”

A message pops up on the top of her screen.

From: Earth sector 7G.

Message: Thank you.

Fron stares at it. No voice message attached, no signal trail. Just those two words.

She smiles a small and tired smile. Then whispers, "You're welcome, kid."

Fron had an unfamiliar urge to take a break. She went to the viewport, where one or maybe one and a half aliens were enjoying the view. She stood looking outside without her headset burning into her body. The stars flickered as if laughing to each other. And for the first time in a long time, Fron thought she could hear the laughter.