

(Earth - Central Texas Hospital - ICU Ward - Scientific R&D Vice-Admiral Saleke - 1730)
(Earth - Central Texas Hospital - Third floor, Room 37A - Vice-Admiral Saleke & & Strat Ops Admiral Sophie Verin - 1800)
(Earth - Central Texas Hospital - Third floor, Room 37A - Scientific R&D Vice-Admiral Saleke & Illuminar FO Commander Sienna Verin - 1813)
(USS Illuminar - Landing Bay - 2LT Charles Temerity - 1830)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 3 - Captain's Quarters - CO, Captain Sekal - 2255)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CO, Captain Sekal - 2300)
(USS Illuminar — Quarters — EO ENS/jg Dano Vermyx — 2300)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - a1/O CMDR Dieter Gregory - 2303)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CO, Captain Sekal- 2305)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - a1/O CMDR Dieter Gregory - 2307)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CO, Captain Sekal - 2309)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 3 - Captain's Quarters- CO, Captain Sekal - 2315)

(USS Illuminar — Engineering Mechanical "Shop" — EO ENS/jg Dano Vermyx — 2317)
(USS Edmun Hilary - Bridge - SFI - Lt. Michael Weston - 2350)

(USS Edmund Hilary – Cockpit – ACONN Alex Dyson – 2351)

DAY 2 - 2446.05.11

(USS Illuminar -- personal quarters -- Deck 2 -- 3XO/CMO Commander Quinna Solice -- 0200)
(USS Edmun Hilary - Bridge - SFI - Lt. Michael Weston and Leeza Pel -0400)

(USS Edmund Hilary – Cabin – ACONN Alex Dyson – 0403)

(USS Edmund Hillary – Cockpit – ACONN Alex Dyson – 0415)
(USS Edmund Hilary - Bridge - SFI - Lt. Michael Weston - 0416)

(USS Edmund Hilary – Cockpit – ACONN Alex Dyson – 0417)

(USS Edmund Hilary - Bridge - SFI - Lt. Michael Weston -0419)
(USS Edmund Hilary – Cockpit – ACONN Alex Dyson – 0420)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 10 - Shuttlebay - Pilot Ensign Vic 'Raid' Montero - 0700)
(Starbase 12 – Personal Guest Quarters – Medic - Ensign (jg) Jason Bell – 0700)
(New Romulus - The Dive - Klingon Embassy Lawyer Vag'Has - 0825)
(New Romulus - Eryx - Administration Building-Prefect's Office - Prefect Korak – 0900)
(USS Illuminar - Deck 7 - Marine Camp Peleliu (cargo bay 1) - Major Audie Murphy - 0900)

(New Romulus - Klingon Embassy - Prime Office - Ambassador Gosen – 0903)
(New Romulus, Eryx – Police Station – Police Officer Sam Wavor – 0905)
(New Romulus - Eryx - Administration Building-Prefect's Office - Prefect Korak – 0906)
(New Romulus - Eryx - Administration Building-Prefect's Office - Prefect Korak – 0906)
(New Romulus - Eryx - Administration Building-Prefect's Office - Prefect Korak – 0906)
(New Romulus, Eryx - Police Station, Main Office - Civilian Yenna Valerius - 0907)

(New Romulus - Eryx - Administration Building-Prefect's Office - Prefect Korak and Ambassaor Gosen – 0915)

(New Romulus – Klingon Embassy, Office – Legal Officer Vag'Has – 0917)

(New Romulus, Klingon Embassy - Basement/Brig - Civilian Mac Dyson and Lawyer Vag'Has - 0930)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 11 - CEO Office - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 0930)

(New Romulus - Eryx - Administration Building- Prefect's Office - Prefect Korak – 0930)

(New Romulus, Eryx – Police Station, Main Office – Police Officer Sam Wavor – 0930)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 7 - Marine Camp Peleliu (cargo bay 1) – 2LT Charles Temerity - 0903)

(New Romulus - Klingon Embassy - Grand Reception Hall - Klingon Ambassaor Gosen – 0935)

(USS Illuminar – Kelly Long's Quarters – SO Kelly Long – 0945)

(New Romulus - Klingon Embassy, Grand Reception Hall - Ambassador Gosen – 0945)

(New Romulus - Eryx - Administration Building- Prefect's Office - Prefect Korak and Gertran Strayner – 0945)

(New Romulus - Klingon Embassy, Grand Reception Hall - Legal Officer Vag'Has - 0947)

(USS Illuminar – Sickbay – SO Kelly Long – 0955)

(USS Illuminar -- CMO Office -- Deck 5 -- CMO/3XO Commander Quinna Solice -- 0957)

(USS Illuminar -- CMO Office, Deck – SO Kelly Long – 0958)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CO, Captain Sekal - 1000)

(New Romulus, Klingon Embassy - Lobby - Civilian Mackenzie Dyson - 1000)

(USS Illuminar -- CMO Office -- Deck 5 -- CM/3XO Commander Quinna Solice -- 1001)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office, Deck 5 – SO Kelly Long – 1002)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 1005)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CO, Captain Sekal - 1008)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 1010)

(New Romulus, Capital City – Roof – Gunnery Sergeant Emile Schofield – 1011)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CO, Captain Sekal - 1013)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 1015)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Bridge - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 1015)

(New Romulus, Eryx Clinic – Emergency Room – Gunnery Sergeant Emile Schofield – 1020)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office -- Deck 5 – CMO/3XO Commander Quinna Solice - 1020)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 8 Cargo Bay 1 (Camp Peleliu) - Marine Major Audie Murphy - 1020)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office, Deck 5 – SO Kelly Long – 1022)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office -- Deck 5 – CMO/3XO Commander Quinna Solice – 1025)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 7 - Upper Cargo Bay 1 - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 1025)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office, Deck 5 – SO Kelly Long - 1026)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 8 Cargo Bay 1 (Camp Peleliu) - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 1029)

(New Romulus, Klingon Embassy – Office – Legal Officer Vag'Has – 1030)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office - Deck 5 – CMO/3XO Commander Quinna Solice - 1030)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office - Deck 5 – CMO/3XO Commander Quinna Solice - 1030)

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office, Deck 5 – SO Kelly Long - 1031)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 8, hallway - Gunnery Sergeant Kowalski - 1035)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 8, hallway - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 1037)

(USS Illuminar - Deck 1 - Officer's Watch - - 3XO/CMO Commander Quinna Solice and CO, Captain Sekal - 1310)

Quinna thought the captain had a valid question. The reply, "Again, I apologize for my lack of clarity. I thought, perhaps, it would be clear. In my estimation, do I believe that counseling treatments be sufficient? I would not have made such a recommendation if I did not believe so." Quinna nodded. Seemed reasonable.

Temas continued, "Is she fit for duty, I would say yes. Her current emotional issues do interfere with her ability to perform duties that are commensurate with the responsibilities given to a cadet." Quinna gave a hard look at Temas, What the f'ers was he talking about? Fit for duty but her emotional issues interfere with her duties. Quinna wondered why the two different stances on the same issue.

"As far as assuring there will be no recurrence of her behavior, I cannot, at this time, guarantee that. It is my... professional opinion that she was put in a position to make a decision that she was not able to judge for herself. But in my opinion, that is correctable and she can earn that position back. Of course, I am not a doctor of medicine, so I cannot attest to her medical condition. I would have to leave that decision to our medical staff." Quinna wondered which of the crew examined her after she beamed aboard the ship.

Quinna sent a message to Captain Sekal that they should talk. She had some concerns with the arguments.

He received the note and looked down at Quinna, nodded and turned back to the others. "There will be a short recess while I confer with Doctor Solice. You will be recalled when that is concluded."

(Reply: All)

He waited until they had cleared the room before taking his seat and turning to her.

"Yes Doctor?"

"If this is medical, then someone dropped the ball. Ensign Long was never seen by anyone in medical after the incident. We cannot make such decisions. But Also I am concerned about what Counselor Temas said. He claimed she was fit for duty, but then said that her emotional state interfered with that duty. It cannot be both. I hope I am being clear." Quinna thought she was circling in her words.

"Your concern is shared. Counselor Laredo gave conflicting statements about her psychological state. What is your recommendation?"

"Well, given what I just heard in there, I do not believe she is fit for duty. But I also question how she made it out of the academy if she had those issues, to begin with. But the question is, did she knowingly leave her post? Yes. I think her reason why was a reach."

"As noted, her breach of standing orders was without question. All security personnel on the planet were aware of them. Her decision to vacate her assigned position was made in breach of that standing order as was her decision not to notify her Commanding Officer for clearance first. Her error is unjustifiable."

"And your thoughts on everything else? Did we fail her as a staff?" Quinna asked though she did not see how they did.

"Negative." He replied. "All personnel are expected to act with decorum in the performance of their duties and Ensign Long has had no record of similar actions during her nine month period on the ship."

The words hit Laredo's brain like a frying pan to the face. "It is the finding of this hearing that Ensign Long is not fit for duty due to the testimony of Counselor Laredo therefore she is hereby removed from duty and remanded to treatment by Doctor Solice until she is deemed fit to return to active duty."

Everything else was background noise as he attempted to decipher the meaning behind those words. It was true that there are times that he still has trouble truly grasping spoken words. Telepathic communication was so much simpler. Nothing could be misconstrued. There were no hidden messages.

He knew that when he had taken the job to defend Kelly that it was an uphill battle. He, himself, offered most of what was handed down by Sekal. But to lose Kelly as a client? Especially due to his own testimony? That just didn't make sense. He wanted to protest, but his voice just wouldn't work. And he was certain that his protestations would fall on deaf ears.

He looked at Kelly, looking crestfallen. He had no words to offer her. Apologies and platitudes would sound hollow right now. He had not done his job. If anything he had made things worse for her. Now she has lost the one person that she actually trusted. He could only imagine the devastation she must be feeling. The urge to reach into her mind was nearly irresistible. But he did not. He needed to talk to Riven.

The next thing he heard was, "This hearing is adjourned." Then a bell rang and the room started to empty. Solice stood up and stretched, then headed towards them.

"Ensign," she said, looking at Kelly, "the hard part is over, let's meet for coffee in the morning. 1000 hours in my office. We can go from there."

Temas wasn't sure that the doctor was correct. He believed that the hardest part was just ahead of them. But it was no longer his place to say so, so he remained silent.

(Reply Long)

"I look forward to seeing you." Quinna smiled.

(Reply Long, IYW)

Quinna then turned and shook Temas's hand, "You did a great job."

Temas gave her a weak smile, but shook her hand. "I wish I could believe that."

T'Mur stood in front of her CO and mentor, barely able to contain herself. She wrung her hands behind her back as she forced the rest of her body to remain calm. Her breathing was steady, and she maintained her heart rate, but her mind was working fast and furiously.

"Captain," she began, "I just learned that Sien... Commander Verin has just regained consciousness. I have verification from Admiral Verin. I..." breath, "We need to return to Earth."

He picked up one of the glasses, took a long drink then gave an affirmative nod. "I will of course clear this with command. As soon as we have permission we will divert to Earth with all speed."

T'Mur paused. She wanted to urge him to leave now, but that was not the logical decision. The drive to be with her mate was strong, but logic needed to be maintained. Not for the first time T'Mur envied the captain his emotional control. She had often contemplated asking him for some advice, but these were matters that required a great deal of time, of which she had precious little.

"I understand," she replied, maintaining a calmness that she did not feel. She turned to leave then stopped and turned back. "Perhaps, I could take a leave and head back to Earth on a shuttle?"

T'Mur already knew, logically, that was a bad idea. By the time that they completed their purpose on Archanis the Illuminar would easily overtake her. But how could she just stand around and wait?

Sekal stepped around the desk and motioned her to sit down as he took his own seat. "Lieutenant Commander let me be concise. Illuminar is scheduled for a layover here of less than a day to take aboard new crew and I expect we will receive permission to return for my first officer. Before you could make the trip to Earth in a shuttle, Illuminar would have made the transit and been on the way to her next mission."

T'Mur nodded, and hung her head for a moment. When she looked up she managed a semblance of emotional control. "Of course. Forgive my impatience Captain. It's just..." she took a breath and centered herself. "Never mind. It is difficult sometimes, to maintain my own emotional control when it comes to Commander Verin."

He remembered vividly that moment on the bridge when he had lost control and been near to committing an unforgivable offense over a female. In some manner he understood. "I understand. Impatience can be more difficult to control than other emotional content. I am gratified to hear that she is recovering and will be more so when she is once again on the ship. In the interim I suggest you spend your energy preparing for her return."

He clasped his hands before him on the desk and leaned forward. "But be assured that if there is any deviation from my current plan I will do what is necessary to ensure your arrival on Earth in the shortest possible time frame including leave and a shuttle should it become necessary."

Ever a sea of calmness, T'Mur drew from the strength of her CO and nodded, "I appreciate that Captain. I suppose the surprise of the news and the sudden sensation returning to our bond was unexpected and caught me off guard. I will focus on my work and begin my... nesting when off duty. I do ask that I have a moment to contact the hospital, and perhaps speak with Sienna."

"Of course. Is there anything else?"

T'Mur stood up and found herself more composed than before. "No, Captain. Thank you for your understanding."

"Where..Where.." Sy looked around the room, shivering. Sophie wrapped a patterned blue shawl around her daughter's shoulders, a doting expression on the Admiral's face.

"Your wife is calling. The Illuminar will be here soon."

"T? T's here?" Sy's eyes focused on the screen and stared into the eyes of her Vulcan mate. "T... I'm ... I'm..." She was so disoriented. Sophie glanced back at the viewscreen.

"I'll step out to leave you two alone." The Admiral exited the room, and through the glass wall, Admiral Duke Williams was there, wrapping an arm around his wife.

T'Mur moved closer to the screen and touched it, feeling the electrical impulses from it, as if she were touching flesh. She managed a single soft word, "=^=Sienna.=^="

Sy continued to stare into T'Mur's eyes, a hungry expression on her face. "I broke." She said simply, the most coherent thing that she had so far managed to say. As seconds passed, Sienna was visibly becoming more oriented. And then she said something surprising, an entire phrase.

"Parted from me and never parted, never and always touching and touched. I await you." Sienna blushed lightly, a healthy blush. She wanted her mate, so badly. "I need you. Want Quinna. These Doctors don't understand me. Bring Quinna." She blinked her dark betazoid eyes rapidly as if she was trying to get moisture into them.

A single tear fell from T'Mur's eye, "=^=Parted from me and never parted, never and always touching and touched. I come for you.=^=" She stroked the screen gently, "=^=We are on our way, beloved. We will be there before long.=^=" Looking over her shoulder, "=^=Sekal is pushing the Illuminar. I am... pushing him.=^="

She sat down, without taking her eyes from the screen, "=^=Sienna, I have missed you.=^="

There was a movement behind her the feel of warm fur on the back of her neck. "=^=Someone else had missed you as well.=^=" She picked up the cat and presented Kenna to the screen.

Sienna brightened at the sight of her fluffy, beloved burmese cat. "You've been brushing her for me? She's all right? Has Ensign Celeste Winters been checking on her? T'Mur... T'Mur I'm so sorry I ruined our wedding." Sienna began to cry soft tears of happiness at the sight of her mate. "Please don't leave me." And there it was, the fear that underlied Sy's psyche. Her last relationship had ended so badly, had ripped Sy open and the emotional wounds still had not healed.

T'Mur reached to the screen again, wanting to hold Sienna and comfort her, well aware of her fears. "=^=I could no more cut out my own heart as I could leave you, beloved. And this is not your fault. It

just... happened.=^= She channeled a bit of Sienna's sarcasm, hoping it would comfort her. ^=The timing could have been better. Perhaps it was a sign that we needed to have a smaller wedding.=^=

Then, ruffling the fur on Kenna she set the cat aside, ^=And yes, all of Kenna's needs have been tended to. She and I, apparently, have come to an... understanding.=^=

A soft giggle came from Sy. "Was she a comfort while I was away? You know how much she means to me." Kenna was Sy's final project in the Academy, and the two had a bond unlike most. Kenna put up with Trip, but the only being she loved was Sy. As Sy and T'Mur spoke, Sy seemed to be focussing better, orienting herself to the now.

"How is my ship? How is Sekal? Saleke stopped in apparently while I was...resting. He arranged for a Vulcan healer to come and attempt to wake me up. Did Saleke tell you?" T'Mur was legally Sienna's next of kin now that their marriage was finalized, but Sophie had been the one able to live at the hospital with her beloved daughter. "Mom said that the kids took me being..sick..hard." Sienna had lived on the Illuminar rather than the Mars residential area, dedicating herself to the ship and the flight trials. In many ways it was equally her ship as well as Sekals. And she missed him. Her relationship with Sekal was much like that of siblings. The love she had for him shone in her face.

"^=The ship is fine, ^= T'Mur said. ^=You'll hear it sooner or later but there was a bit of trouble while in orbit of Qo'nos. The shuttlebay received a little damage but everything is fine now. And Sekal... he is himself. And yet he is not. It is hard to explain. He needs you as well. Just not the way I do.=^=

"In many ways he is my brother." She whispered, remembering their first real meeting when she had been kind of cranky with him, trying to ruffle his feathers. They were a team, truly. "What sort of trouble?" She noticed that T'Mur had not answered her question about Saleke. She would have to call him and thank him personally. "And Luma? Quinna?" Sy was not yet capable of getting up to touch the screen the way that T'Mur was, but she wanted to. That was obvious.

=^=Will survive her experience. There was an attempt to sabotage the ship by, what turned out to be, a Tholian plot. However, our crew was more than able to deal with that threat. But she "felt" the damage and the repairs. Mr. Laredo was able to shield her from most of the discomfort, from the explosion and from the repairs. There's no real anesthesia for a being such as Luma.=^= She paused and then, not wanting her to dwell on the bad news and went on. ^=Quinna, on the other hand, is doing well. She is acting very... pregnant. Mr. Weston has gone on some mission with Ensign Dyson to retrieve a child. Between Dr. Kylee and myself we are managing to keep her occupied.=^=

"Quinna is pregnant? Did I know this before I.. slept? My brain is having issues mapping, and the neuro-surgeon said that it was because of the coma, and that the connections and memories will return. Are you sure that you don't mind that I collapsed at our wedding? My Mother says you won't, that you only care about me. But... T, my love, I need you here."

From behind T'Mur, through the ship's comm system Luma communicated, offering, =^= Luma can jump the ship to Earth but Our Sekal would say no. Luma misses Our Sienna too. Our Sienna is part of the ship, integral just as Luma is. There is no real Illuminar without Our Sienna. Our T'Mur is being sad but hides it well. Our Temas is becoming the bondmate our Vex was, and Luma still misses Our Vex. =^= From the holo-emitters Luma appeared behind T'Mur and leaned in, -looking- at Sienna.

=^= The sickness from jumping is fading. Luma can tell. =^=

T'Mur looked at Sy and they both said at the same time, "No. No jumping the ship" Sy looked at her mate and giggled again, sounding more like herself.

"We'll manage in our own, less efficient but slow manner Luma, but thank you for the offer," T'Mur said. Then she turned back to Sienna and touched the screen again.

=^=The pregnancy was not well known. I have only been aware recently.=^= She paused, feeling a little empty inside. =^=I miss you my love. I wish I could be there with you. I should have stayed.=^=

"It is the...the..." Sienna frowned, trying to concentrate unable to find the word. "You needed to take care of the ship, of Sekal, in my place. You are my mate. But before that we are..." She sighed, "Fleet. Fleet first."

T'Mur nodded. =^=That is very logical. Why is it that I do not feel very logical right now? =^= She had not realized how much she had not allowed herself to miss Sienna as much as she had. There were moments when she was alone, so she would not allow herself to be alone. She worked more so she had little reason to go back to their quarters. Now, it all seemed to come flowing out all at once. =^=I feel... very emotional.=^=

"You don't have..me. Are you ah, near pon far again?"

T'Mur couldn't help but giggle, then she regained her composure. =^=No love. I am not entering pon farr. I just miss you.=^=

"I dreamt about that. I dreamt about so much. I felt like I was lost in a vortex of memories, of time."

Luma chimed in, =^= Was the jumping sickness. Being in multiple places at the same time has that effect. The doctors did not understand. Did..the great one come to you? =^= This was how Luma's people referred to the Q.

"I'm not sure, Luma. I remember a male voice speaking to me, telling me it was time to awaken. I thought it was Sekal, it was very comforting. Luma, may I speak to my mate alone for a little bit? I need her."

so many homeless. Sophie and Duke had land and resources and since Sophie could not have any more children conventionally, they had opened their hearts to several in need.

“Saleke! Duke went back to help our children. Our half vulcan boy is going to need help learning the kohlinar. Do you have a suggestion as to a teacher?” Sophie looked down at her exhausted daughter that was finally on her way towards recovery. “Sienna wants to talk to you, to thank you for all that you did to help her. I just heard that the Illuminar is on it’s way back to Earth and due in a few days time. Sienna is looking forward to seeing her mate, and your son.” Sophie looked more tired than her daughter, who was now being helped from the gurney into the larger double bed in the private room.

Sophie’s voice dropped, “She needs her mate. She says that she needs Sekal as well. Sienna said that she views Sekal as the brother that she never had. The Doctors still don’t know what to call what happened. The old woman on the Illuminar told us that it was called the jumping sickness.” Even here Sophie was discreet about Luma’s name, not wanting to draw attention to the being that lived aboard, considering that Luma was one of Starfleet’s most classified secrets. “I’d like to discuss that with you at some point, not so public.”

Saleke had weathered the verbal storm with aplomb, hardly even raising an eyebrow. Himself and Sophie Verin had not talked at length before but it was a simple logical extrapolation from where Sienna had inherited her breathless manner of speech. “I highly recommend the monastery on Mount Selaya for his training, as for the rest...,” he cast a look inside then turned back to her, “... we have a great deal to discuss it would seem, at a time of your choosing.” ~The brother she never had?~ That was a curious statement considering Trip Williams was her twin.

Sophie looked in on her daughter, the emotions clearly on her face. Sophie could be as coldly calculating and logical as any vulcan when needed. Her incredible logistical skills and unwavering dedication to Starfleet had made her the defacto head of Strat Ops, but had trapped her at the rank of Captain for far too long. Having never commanded a ship, her elevation to Admiral had come with the purging of the Roanoke dissenters in Starfleet. “I’d rather not send him to Vulcan. Is there anyone in Sector 001 that would be suitable? I know of the prejudice against half vulcans on your planet. The same prejudices exist on Earth, and my children faced it. Our son,” She smiled proudly, though the exhaustion made the woman look older, “Has expressed his wishes in learning the discipline. A suitable family could not be found to adopt him.”

“I have an attache’ that might be suitable.” He noted. “I will look into it after returning to Mars.”

“And Giovanna? I understand that you brought her here. Is she settling into this universe and department? I met her once, and she isn’t my daughter. So alike yet so different. Where Sienna is gentle and kind, Giovanna is cruel and cold. I don’t like her using my name but it is as much hers as it is my Siennas.” As Sophie watched, Sy was tucked in.

“Giovanna has been energetic, perhaps even driven...”, he noted, “however I watch her closely. There are a number of advances she has been instrumental in pushing. You may rest assured that I will not allow her liberties with the technology that she can misuse.” He noted that her attention was no longer on what he was saying and left it at that, her concern with her daughter was evident.

Her fatigue was also noted. “Perhaps you should return home to rest. With Commander Verin out of danger I can remain with her until another of the family arrives.”

Sophie turned towards Saleke and reached out to touch the cloth of his shoulder. “Thank you. She has a long way to go, my stubborn daughter.” Sophie looked back at Sy and then turned to leave before turning back to him, “I appreciate your mentorship of my daughter. Please, when you have a chance, come by the ranch house. I’ve learned how to make something that T’Mur likes, called a bean tamale.

Sy tucked the blankets more firmly around her, "Could you close the door Sir? I'd like to ask you something, and I know that this isn't a secure place to do so, but I'm not able to go elsewhere yet." The glass was see through, so closing the door would only make the conversation more private.

He did as she asked then returned to his seat. "What is your question?"

"Luma said that it was called jumping sickness that incapacitated me. She told me that the psychic imbalance was caused by Giovanna being in our universe. Luma told us that she feared that T'Mur's bond with me would have broken if I had been drawn into the dark mirror universe. Would that have happened? I don't really understand the metaphysics of what Luma did, or how she did it. Do you Sir? Can you explain how she did it? She tried to explain." Sienna looked down at her hands for a moment.

"Quantum entanglement could be ruled out considering that your mirror counterpart does not have the same energetic charge as yourself and psychic phenomenon do not lend themselves readily to scientific investigation." He crossed his right leg over the left. "As for Luma, she occupies a niche shared by many non-corporeal entities being that time has little meaning for her since her span of consciousness overlaps many time frames simultaneously." This was a subject he could expound on at length having once been a mind bondmate. "And she has the ability to place herself and by extension any in contact or close proximity with her into any timeline to which she has access. Her ability to navigate time could be dangerous to the timelines hence the reason she is prohibited from doing so except in the case of an extreme emergency."

"She didn't mean harm, Sir, I'm positive of that. She cares so much for the crew, and I think she would do anything to help us, and she did what she thought best. She calls us her small ones." Sienna smiled happily, her delight in Luma evident.

"As I surmised. Her action was not in question."

"I wanted to thank you personally for all you did to try and help me. I appreciate it. Sekal is important to me, he's like a sibling. He's a fantastic partner and we make a great team. I can't imagine running a starship without him by my side." So much emotion in her voice. "My twin ,Trip, we're very different and Trip doesn't really understand my interest in science. Sekal understands me. He does whatever it takes to help his crew. I am lucky to have him as a mentor and I appreciate the friendship that both of you have extended to me." A soft blush touched her ears. "Sekal's been trying to help me with self-defense training. I barely passed it at the Academy and I'm terrible at it. He's been patient with my inadequacy."

He settled back deeper into the chair. "It is the duty of every commanding officer to see to the safety of their ship first, without it their crew has no hope for survival. And without a crew their command means nothing. Are you aware that the USS Valkyrie I commanded during the civil war in preparation for the final push toward Earth was lost with all hands and I alone survived?"

Sy settled into the pillows, not caring that Saleke was seeing her with her hair a mess. Sekal; she would have asked to help her brush it. His father, not so much. "No Sir. As you know I had a very hard time when the first person under my command died. It wasn't my fault, it wasn't anyone's fault but it haunted me. I still have nightmares about her death."

He looked away for a moment, his face inscrutable. "I have lost others under my command, all have ... or will, but to lose three hundred plus under even the most extreme conditions while one is able to escape the calamity has ... repercussions. It took two years before I was given another command, a return to the Prometheus Class, the USS Furious." He looked back to her. "I always strove to teach that lesson to Sekal in the event he gained a commission and it is satisfying to hear that he has remembered it."

"He often references you, Sir. That his upbringing was slightly different for a Vulcan, more diverse. What happened to cause the destruction? Was it a battle? How did you escape? And why did Starfleet blame you and keep you away from command? Was that why you went to the VDF?"

He gave a slight movement of his head that was impossible to understand for a non Vulcan. "The Valkyrie and two other ships were tasked with taking down five forward positions within Federation space to open a path for the 52nd battle fleet's invasion. We were en route to the last when we were attacked by a larger force. Still, it was enough that they were able to punch through. How did I alone escape?" He paused for an instant. "I am unsure to this day. I called for a full evacuation and waited until the other life pods launched but was the only one found alive, months later on a nearly barren planetoid. When only a commanding officer survives an investigation has to be made to determine if he abandoned his ship and crew. It took time for the evidence to be found and myself exonerated."

He leaned forward a bit. "Why did I leave StarFleet? Luma'lenai among others. We were forcibly separated when I left the Mystique and I spent years attempting to contact her." He grew silent for a moment then shook his head. "But StarFleet was changing, becoming more political. Our orders became more illogical and our every action scrutinized and questioned. When my commission expired I left StarFleet and returned to my homeworld, to my mate. And when the Federation largely collapsed I was approached to serve with the VDF. Accepting the commission was a logical step."

"I'm very glad that you came back, Sir." Sienna's eyes grew heavier, but she was not ready to rest again, even though she ran through her energy so quickly. "Did Doenitz's people take out the life pods? Did they capture your people? Did the investigation ever find out what happened?" She was so interested in the history, and had grown up with fleet stories. Her parents had been part of the end of the Civil War, as had others. Celiste Winters had told her some of the stories that her Mother had told her while the two had tended Luma's precious roses. It was a different starfleet then, a harder, darker place.

"The ships involved in that battle were destroyed shortly thereafter by the 52nd, the disposition of my crew was never determined." He gave her a sideways glance. "The Illuminar is scheduled to arrive in four days, will you be strong enough to rejoin it?" This was the type of questioning he was known for. He crossed his arms and scrutinized her as she spoke.

Sienna looked him in the eye, not challenging but showing that she wasn't afraid. "The Doctors here don't understand what happened, or why I collapsed. I know that the healers who came to assess me said that my soul, my katra was not in my body. I remember the wedding, I remember a spinning sensation." Sienna was rapidly re-orienting herself to the present. "I felt like I was in a vortex of moments that spanned time. Flashes of events that reminded me of the holos from the Guardian of Forever that we studied in my command training. Fast, so that I could not focus on any one thing. It felt like forever, but it was several weeks according to my mother. The neuro-surgeon here did a scan of my brain and said that my brain is re-mapping the connections but that there is no damage. And according to the doctors I have several weeks of physical rehabilitation. There is no reason I have to do it here." She squared her shoulders, "The Illuminar is my home and is as much my ship as it is Sekals. The humm of her drive is a lullabye to me. There is nothing that I need to do here that can not be done aboard the Illuminar." That firm, polite tone was not too unusual for Sy, but speaking so had drained what energy she had left. Her eyes blinked rapidly.

"And my mate is there. I need to be with her. I don't have a great sense of her right now. Maybe it is the neural connections, but I need her." Sy's heavy eyelids closed again, but Sy had been noted that she was afraid to sleep without someone with her. She was afraid of being sucked back into the vortex she had been trapped in.

ending up in Starfleet in such places. Most of them needed expertise of one kind or another and his wide skillset had served him well.

Making ends meet hadn't been much of a problem but as the Federation contracted, opportunities had contracted as well. More and more people looking for less and less jobs, less places to work, less places to be where he wanted to be.

The offer to join Starfleet wasn't his first choice, he never was, he wouldn't say his Starfleet-Obsessed Mother had been sad that he didn't choose the service, but she was overjoyed when he had finally relented.

They had an agreement. The Admiral would keep away, not pull strings, and not help him. This was going to be his journey and not hers.

That lasted a month before she visited him at the Academy.

~Sigh~

His experience had fast tracked him through, and everyone knew that the Admiral had helped, just like everyone knew he was on the fast track to Command, and the same way everyone knew his was going to be in a red shirt when he graduated.

He never expected to have a fondness for medicine. Of all the experiences he had over the years, medicine was one that had eluded him but, the state of medicine technology wasn't unlike Engineering. He found he had a knack for the science of medicine, thrown in with his personality, saw him fall naturally into the profession.

The screen flickered into a message that read, "INCOMING TRANSMISSION".

Of course, it had the hallmark of Starfleet Command on the screen, mother was calling...

The viewscreen flicked into an image of Admiral Bell, on a ship, somewhere secretive no doubt.

"What?!", he said sharply in his half-dressed state, his medical uniform was fighting him this morning.

=^= I thought I would see if you were up. ^=

She said with a knowing smile. Sure, Jason would sleep till noon if he felt like it but, even he wasn't going to miss the shuttle to his new home.

=^= Besides, I wanted to say good luck on your trip and first assignment, I know you won't want me calling you when you get there, so I won't! ^=

The Admiral was pouting but Jason wasn't going to take the bait, "Good. At least you are going to follow that part of our bargain.", he said finally getting the uniform to stay straight. His smoothed it down.

=^= Much better ^=

"Mum, I'm going. I'll call you in a few weeks.", he said, making clear that he was not expecting any calls until he settled down, but he took a moment to look at the screen properly, "... where are you anyway?", he asked, not being familiar with her background. He knew every inch of the USS Wraith; he didn't recognise it.

The welcome by the Illuminar Crew was lukewarm, at best. At least they had a place for their equipment and a semblance of a private planning area. The Master Sergeant had the men working all night to get things into shape so that they could get onto the job of making it home. Temerity stayed up all night working alongside the junior enlisted and junior NCOs. Not as a supervisor either, He had taken the opportunity to get to know the Marines he was expected to trust his life with by getting to know them, trade stories with, and teach them about the workings of the older antiquated pieces of equipment they were still required to have but never used.

As a young sergeant, Charles found that by sharing the burdens of his subordinates with them, it was easier to earn their respect. As a result, he had no reservations about breaking a sweat and lugging boxes and carrying weapons to their designated storage locations. He even managed to start a debate between the benefits of hard manual labor and lifting weights at the gym. A few of the Marines he was working with made some comment about needing to be at the gym lifting to which Temerity popped off with, "I'd much rather work than workout." And the discussion was on from there. The debate regularly backtracked as folks returned from 30-minute breaks slash naps just to catch them up. While no one's stance on the issue was changed, they all enjoyed laughs at each other's expense. And Temerity surprised the Marines by laughing and cracking jokes at his own expense. Even when he started getting referred to as "Old Man", which is not to be confused with "The Ol' Man".

About halfway through the night, Charles had noticed that many of the NCOs were standoffish to him and yet gathered among themselves. Excusing himself, he took a short break to ask the group a question or two because he had also noticed many disapproving glances his way. "Gentlemen, Ladies; how are y'all doing tonight?"

The spokesman for the group replied, "Sir, you don't seem to mind how the juniors speak with you, is the same extended to us?"

Looking each of the NCOs in the eye, Charles indicated a location behind one of the containers, "May I suggest moving this conversation away from prying eyes and ears?" The group agreed and they relocated.

As the group was out of sight the senior NCO of the group spoke up with contempt in his voice, "We've all seen your record. On the carpet five times, busted down to corporal once..."

Charles interrupted with a laugh, "That was my Corporal Punishment. Sorry, please continue."

While one of the females snickered at his joke, no one else seemed to appreciate it, "We've all been on multiple combat deployments and you don't have a single one on your record, what makes you think you're qualified to lead us.?" The spokesman demanded.

Temerity nodded his head in understanding before replying, "Well that is easy Sergeant. The Commandant of the Marine Corps basically drafted me out of my military retirement because officers went from being commanders to simple administrators and NCOs went from being leaders to commanders. As the civilian captain of a long-range freighter, I know what it means to command and as

Sam was busy working on reports when his terminal blinked with an incoming hail. ~Round two, here we go.~ Yenna and Ginara were at the latter's desk, talking about the situation. He signaled for silence, then answered he cranked up the volume and answered the call.

=^=Are you alone, Wavor? ^=^=

"Yes, I am, Prefect." He lied.

=^=I have a task for you. I have secured the release of the girl. I want you to park your backside in that Embassy and wait there until the girl is brought to you. Do you think you can handle that? ^=^=

"Yes, sir."

=^=Now listen carefully... Sheriff, ^=^= The Prefect's voice went into dangerous mode. ^=^=When you have the girl you are to bring her to this office, without delay, and without fail. If you release her to Yenna Valerius this will be the last day that you are sheriff... or alive. Is that clear? ^=^=

"Yes, it is, Prefect."

=^=Repeat my directions. ^=^=

"Go to the Embassy, get the girl and bring her to your office. No delays and don't tell Yenna Valerius."

=^=Do you have any questions about those orders?"

"No, Prefect." ~Except, how can you know me so little ?~ He was an officer of the law and not afraid of dying on the job.

=^=Then go. Speak to no one, on the way there, or the way back. Most assuredly, speak to no one while in the embassy. But do let me know when you have the girl. ^=^=

(USS Illuminar - Deck 11 - CEO Office - CEO, Lieutenant Tegian Pex - 0930)

Tegian was sitting at his desk, looking at three PADDs with two ideas for handling Luma's pain while Engineering had to do repairs. He'd done write-ups for them based on theory. This should have been done days ago, but running this department turned out to take more out of him than he'd expected.

His idea to rotate through the shifts during the week so that he could observe their work sounded great until he'd tried to do it more than once. It had played havoc on his sleep cycle and his ability to focus on anything that required deep thought. So, instead, he had shifted his own work habits so that he worked at least a twelve hour day. But, with the Captain forewarning them that they were heading to Earth today, Tegian wanted to make sure he was in Engineering when they went into warp, so he was here two and half hours earlier than his now established working.

He'd had the Alpha shift run diagnostic on the warp engines to make sure everything was fine. The Captain hadn't exactly said when, but at least had given him a time frame. After landing on the planet, Tegian was concerned that there were stresses on the ship that they hadn't seen in a long time and he'd had the shifts running diagnostics on all the systems. There had been a lot of loose power couplings throughout the ship and the Gamma and Alpha shifts had been running around reconnecting things. Tegian, when he'd gone to bed around 0100, was satisfied that the remaining issues were minor and didn't affect crew quarters. He'd have to talk to the Captain about either landing the Illuminar more often or at least giving him more of a warning.

His musings aside, he kept looking at the PADDs. Luma had suggested disconnecting the computer feeds in the area being worked. There were pros and cons with that approach. It would be somewhat easy to accomplish, but it would shut off a lot of preventive measures while doing so and they'd be blind in that area of the ship, potentially leaving them vulnerable. Plus, there were areas where they couldn't do it in small increments. For the most recent accident, he would have had to shut down everything in the Main Shuttlebay and much of Deck 9. And, he wasn't sure if she would still feel some of the pain from Deck 11 still being active or if he would have had to turn off some of the feeds from Engineering, which would have made them blind while trying to do repairs.

He looked at his proposal, the telepathic dampening field. There was much he didn't understand of how this affected those with telepathic abilities. And having these fields set up around an area they were working might affect crew members that had these abilities. So, there were obvious cons about this approach. He knew that Bohb had a lot more experience with Luma than he did. It was probably time to visit the Lieutenant and talk to him about these two ideas and see if he'd had any of his own.

liners which were on the wane and threatened the fragile relations with the Republic over a waif, a slip of a targ of a girl or switch his position in anticipation of a complete change in the stance of the council. That actually wasn't difficult, that change was already occurring.

He sat in a substantial, high-backed chair drumming his fingers on one arm watching the legal counsel come near before motioning him to take a nearby seat.

"We are come to a crossroad Vag'Has and you have taken your stance in opposition to the orders I gave which came from Qo'nos did you not?"

(Reply: Vag'Has)

Gosen's eyes were slits and his lips were pulled back from his teeth as he listened. "Yes, I'm aware Tagock carried out those directives. At one time he might have been lauded for it." He then turned away to allow Vag'Has to stew on those words and consider their meaning.

(Reply: Vag'Has)

The door opened presently and the group of four that had carried out the raid strutted in, his orders had been clear and their leader Tagock was certain that owing to his successful mission he was now being included in deliberations that had formerly been beyond him. He was smiling gleefully matter of fact and walking before those that he had commanded.

Gosen held up his hand for them to stop in the center of the room.

"How may I assist you hOd in your deliberations?" Tagock asked smugly after coming to a halt.

Gosen was silent for a moment, his eyes malignant. "You have already rendered more assistance than I can stomach. You carried out your orders with complete contempt for the delicacy of the situation here. Rampaged around in broad view of the populace like wild targ. Brought the notice of the prefect upon this mission and placed me in an unwinnable situation between the Chancellor and the rising tide of change on the High Council.

"You called, Prefect," she said pleasantly.

"Gertran, I have a little problem I need resolved," Korak said.

"Indeed," Strayer replied, I assumed so. Problem-solving is what I do."

"I have an issue with one of my sheriffs," Korak continued. "And I have a feeling that he is not taking me seriously enough. I gave him a simple task. So obviously he will screw it up. He is to retrieve a girl being held by the Klingons and bring her to me. There is a young woman involved. One Yena..."

"Velarius?" Strayer finished. "Yes, I am aware of her. As I am all non-Romulan citizens."

"of course," Korak said. "She is laying claim to the child in question. I am not... satisfied that she will not involve herself in this matter. However, his orders were clear. Bring the girl to me or he will die."

"So you would like me to ensure that he keeps his end of this bargain, or you do?" the young woman asked.

Korak nodded, "Exactly. If he doesn't bring the girl directly to me you are to dispense of him and you bring this girl to me. I want to know why she is so important. What makes her worth all of this effort, from everyone? Even the Federation is sending an envoy to collect the girl."

"Truly intriguing," Strayner said. "You know my fee."

Korak nodded and tossed the data chip onto his desk. She picked it up and put it in her pocket.

"You don't want to check it?" Korak asked.

"If it is incorrect I will come back to rectify *this* agreement, Prefect," Strayner said softly, sending a shiver down Korak's spine.

"Which is why I wouldn't back out of our agreement, ever," Korak assured. "It is also why I am willing to pay you up front. Please, be discrete."

Gertran chuckled, "As I always am."

She turned and left the office. Korak shook his head. Many of the old ways had been abandoned, but there would always be a need for people like Strayner. You just can't trust anyone, even on New Romulus.

(reply none)

"Accelerate to full impulse and notify me when are clear for a jump to warp."

"Accelerating."

The hum of the impulse drive carried by the deckplates through vibration deepened as the ship surged away from Archanis IV.

The officerial contingent had been greatly reduced as a number had left the ship for leave with orders to rendezvous again within this system in two weeks time. Some had personal business such as Alexander Dyson who was in transit to New Romulus accompanied by Michael Weston and the civilian Trill child Leeza Pel.

Thi'Lanista was on a mission for Ariel Trei who was on Qo'nos as was Galk, now head of the Imperial House. And another would be leaving soon, Dr. Riven Mias was due to return to Betazed and resume his duties there.

And then there were the additions to the crew, eleven StarFleet marines who were settling into their new billet on deck 8.

Illuminar was on downtime in the short term but that would be coming to an end with a prolonged exploratory mission into deep space. Before that happened though she needed to rejoin with her first officer, Sienna Verin.

His communication with Command yesterday had confirmed that she was awake and recovering, had Lieutenant Commander T'Mur not expressed her impatience there would have been no difference in the result, as soon as she was clear Illuminar would be going to hyperwarp.

Commander Gregory had filled in well in her absence and Doctor Solice had also stepped up, her input during the hearing had been well reasoned and mirrored his own thoughts.

Yes, he would be gratified to have Commander Verin back.

He caught movement from the corner of his eye as Yeoman Whitney stepped up and offered him a padd. "Interim roster changes and staff reports sir." She kept her eyes averted, looking in the direction of the deck as he checked over the contents then signed his acceptance and handed it back to her. "Thank you Yeoman."

"Yes sir." Her face was flushed as she took it and hesitated, looking up at him for an instant then turned and moved off.

He turned his eyes back to the viewscreen as he leaned back in the command chair. Would issues arise in the future from the meeting of last night? There was no way to make a logical extrapolation as of yet but it occurred to him that events rippling from what had transpired only months ago would not be cut off so easily. Where they ended was impossible to foresee.

"Warp drive available Captain."

"Best speed Lieutenant."

"Going to warp factor five."

Illuminar leapt into warp, its bearing taking it out of the system. Back to the Sol system for the last time before an extended deployment. It's heading ... into an uncertain future.

(USS Illuminar – CMO Office, Deck 5 – SO Kelly Long – 1002)

“It is not easy having to make the hard decisions. Sometimes we make those decisions before we are ready.” Solice said. “The question is, where do we go from here?”

“I don’t know, ma’am.”

“I believe I read in the transcripts... And Correct me if I am wrong...That you feel that Starfleet did not prepare you adequately to handle this situation.”

“Yes, ma’am. My instructor was far from a completionist, ma’am.”

“Tell me more,” Solice said.

“My instructor was a Tellarite called Zavos. He called us grunts and was very aggressive towards his trainees. His training focused on physical fitness, marksmanship and hand-to-hand combat. Everything else, he considered ‘red tape nonsense’, His favorite word was something old. It was...” She paused as she searched for the word. “...Humbug. Yes, it was humbug. Some of the other instructors called him Ebenezer. I never got the reference, ma’am.”

(Reply Solice)

Kelly looked a sip of her chocolate. “Anyway, there were rumors that he was a marine drill sergeant before his service at the Academy. But none of us had the clearance to check. And the instructors had the clearance, but weren’t telling. Once I graduated, I was simply so glad to be away from there that I didn’t even want to think about that man.”

(Reply Solice)

Pex, the Chief Engineer of the Illuminar. The Captain mentioned you needed a few things. My department hadn't received a request, so I thought I'd come down and find out in person what you needed so that we could make sure you and your team weren't inconvenienced any longer than necessary."

The Major looked up to see the Lieutenant standing there. Turning to his Master Sergeant, "Seems the fleet is more lax than I remember," he said. Turning back to the engineer, "We are well used to the fleet inconveniencing us, as if there was some competition between fleet and the Marines," he said as he took a PADD and handed it to the engineer, "Well Lieutenant Tegian Pex," he said, "I think you will find the current list of items we are in need of. If you can supply these, my team would be appreciative."

Tegian took the PADD. "Thank you, Major. I will review this when I get back to my office and provide you with a schedule of when we're able to provide these items. And, if anything else comes up, please feel free to reach out. Engineering is responsible for all systems on the ship and we don't discriminate. If any of my department does so, they will find themselves scrubbing the hull of the ship the next time we're in orbit."

He paused, "So tell me Lieutenant, what does someone do for fun on a starship like this? My men could use some downtime after building out little home away from home."

Tegian tried to imagine what someone might consider fun. "There's the Explorer's Lounge, also known as the Prancing Pony on Deck 4. There are two holodecks on Deck 5 and the firing range is on Deck 14.

Temerity was grateful that he had given some serious thought to this question, after all it was the same question, he would have asked were he in her position. So, with little to no guidance from Major Murphy, Temerity cooked up a plan he hoped would be acceptable to both the Marine commander and the Security commander. “Well Ma’am, the way I understand it, the Major would maintain direct control of two-thirds of the detachment as a rapid response force to train and remain ready until called upon by you, the ship’s XO, or CO. Or to utilize as mission parameters dictate.”

(Reply: T’Mur iyw)

He watched her as he spoke and figured he would be a fool if he did not think she was mentally taking notes if not actually jotting them down. But he continued just the same, “Myself and the remaining third, with your acceptance and approval, would assist and augment your security forces with day-to-day functions.”

(Reply: T’Mur iyw)

“I have no intention of taking over security, that is why I intend to make sure that the senior most NCO I intend to bring would be a Staff Sergeant and have one Marine teamed up or paired with one of your people in such a way as someone with less experience paired with someone with more experience that way, they will be able to learn from each other to become a more balanced team and hopefully better partners. I would report to you but keep the major in the loop.”

(Reply: T’Mur)

“I have no intention of taking over security, that is why I intend to make sure that as much as possible, rank wise, Marines will be no more than equal to your personnel. Personally, I would like to see enough cross-training that, in time, the single biggest difference between security and marine forces is the color on the uniform.”

(Reply: T’Mur)

(NRPG: Room for more if desired.)

Charles nodded, “Roger that, Ma’am, I’ll pass your message on to Major Murphy.” then reached down and opened the top of the briefcase. Reaching in he pulled out an old leather dual shoulder holster with double sheaths on the back. In each sheath was a razor-sharp Bowie style knife and in each holster was a custom disruptor pistol that resembled an 1857 Colt Navy from the American Civil War from Earth’s history, also referred to as a Cavalry pistol. Charles spread the rig out and held it out to T’Mur by the leather straps making a point not to touch any of the weapons, “This is the subject of the second topic. These are my personal weapons. Please feel free to examine and inspect them but be careful. The knives are sharp, and the power packs are charged.”

(Reply: T’Mur)

“That last name is in question,” the girl replied. “But that’s the name I’m going by for the moment.”

“You certainly have caused a raucous, haven’t you?” Korak continues his questioning.

“Have I?” MacKenzie returned. “I can’t understand why.”

Korak smiled, “I imagine. But the Klingons certainly held an interest in you. And so does the Federation since they’re sending an envoy for you.”

MacKenzie looked even more confused, “The Federation? Why would they…”

Then it dawned on her exactly why the Federation would come, and who they would send.

“No!” she said emphatically. “No, no, no.”

“No what?” Korak asked.

“No, that better not be who I think it is,” she said defiantly.

“And who’s that?”

“My… father,” she could barely get the word out. “Or my suspected father. It was never confirmed. But my mother said a great deal of negative things about him. So I’ll probably like him.”

Korak snorted in amusement. “I see. Let’s talk about why they’re all after you shall we?”

“I already said I don’t know why,” MacKenzie whined.

“Indeed you did,” Korak agreed. Let me ask you this. Do you recognize any of these names?”

He turned his computer screen around to show a list of a dozen names. MacKenzie glanced over them and stiffened. She did recognize many of them. “Many of them worked in the office that I “interned” with.” ~Yeah, if you call slave labor an internship.~

Then she noticed a red dot next to each of the name. Finally she saw the last two names. Hers was last and her mother’s was just above it. It had a red dot as well.

“What does the red dot mean?” she asked.

Galk was perched on a chair with an empty bowl and a nearby flagon, when he saw his father nearing he bellowed for a second setting.

Jos stopped short and eyed him closely, Galk had been large and strong when he had first seen him but had put on a lot of muscle and looked formidable which made him quite proud. He continued to the other side of the table and seated himself.

"You are looking stronger this morning."

"Phaah!" Jos growled. "My head hurts and my joints ache but that will work itself out in time. You look restless. Why are you not on your ship?"

"Hmmm." Galk leaned forward. "I had to make sure you were ready before I left. When I am not here you will run the House."

Jos threw back his head and roared in laughter. "You are joking! The Imperial House is yours."

"I am not joking." Galk's face was intent. "There must be someone here to provide leadership when I am not, especially this early in the process of change from Eshag to me. You are my father and your word will carry my weight behind it. Any who will not heed your word will be the fool that the wind despises."

Jos sobered up at that and replied sourly. "And you expect me to tell them that they will be punished when you return? What kind of life is that for a Klingon?"

"Hah! No! I have already invoked the joH cha'Dich for you. You will run the House and I will be your weapon while I am here."

Jos was stunned and silent for a moment, after he had considered the news he spoke. "While you are here? What do you mean by that?" A bowl and tankard were set before him but he was going to let his stomach settle a bit first.

"Once the House is under control I intend to return to the Federation."

Jos half rose from the bench and a closed fist slammed down on the table causing the pottery to dance alarmingly and bloodwine sloshed from his tankard. "You are what? You have just won your birthright through combat! Why will you turn from it?"

Galk had been prepared for this and motioned for his father to sit down. "I turn from nothing. When I came to Rura Pente I was a soldier who knew nothing but to follow orders from my superiors, whether they were truly honorable or not I did not question though I was honorable in my dealings. From you I learned that I had to be better, to question and challenge what I had been told, to think beyond and see to the core of things. The Imperial House is the arbiter of honor for the High Council and it steers the Empire. To run the House I had to learn what it truly meant to lead in honor."

"Yet you went to the Federation!" Jos exclaimed.

"I did. The Empire had lost its way and it was necessary to learn how to bring it back. The Federation is not warlike as our people are but they know honor, how to lead without sacrificing who you are, how to minimize losses which only makes you stronger and how to gain respect while putting your strength to its best use. I have learned. But there will come a time when I will have to run this House alone and when that time comes I will have the knowledge and honor to do it the way it should be done."

"Indeed," the Prefect said as he turned back his desk and lowered himself into his seat. "And there appears to be some question of that ver matter, Mr. Dyson. You have proof of your paternity, of course."

Dyson was stumped. As many times as Weston had told him that there was no proof and that he had only accepted the mother's word on the matter, it was still unproven.

"Ummmm... no," he admitted. "But K'Neara said..."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure that's all true, but surely you don't expect me to release a child to two strangers, especially two male strangers, based on hearsay?"

Michael put a hand in Dyson's shoulder, "No, of course not. But we were helping that you could help with genetic matching. And in the meantime, we would like to see the child."

"I would be happy to comply, to keep open lines of friendship with our Federation neighbors," Korak said. He hit the button on his comm station. "Send in the doctor,"

Another Romulan came in and moved to them. He carried a small bag of medical supplies. Without a word the medic pulled out a device, walked behind Dyson and with a swift motion touched the side of his neck.

"Ouch!" Dyson cried out.

"Apologies," Korak said. "Doctor Raynar is taking a DNA sample for the comparative assessment."

"You really we're ready for us," Michael quipped.

"I was," Korak said. "In anticipation I have been ready for most situations. Including this one."

The door opened again and MacKenzie walked in. Dyson stiffened a little but smiled. "Hi MacKenzie."

The girl's eyes narrowed as she glared at him. "Don't hi MacKenzie me. You're probably not even my father. Just some idiot as well as hundreds of others that used my mother for a ...Klingon experience."

"The genetics match," Raynar announced.

"Excellent," Michael said. "Then we can collect her stuff and be on our way."

"Not exactly," Korak said. "Please, everyone, have a seat."

There were three chairs conveniently placed at his desk. They all sat down.

"Miss Dyson," the Prefect began, "has a problem. She is on a list of names, of which all but her are dead. Many under, shall we say, dubious circumstances."

"I've got to find a place to keep her safe," Dyson said, indicating to Mackenzie.

Michael reached out and grabbed Dyson's arm. "That's what I'm saying. Let's take her back with us. She'll be safe in Federation space."

"No," Dyson pulled himself free, "she won't. We don't know who's after her or why. But they've killed all those others already. Do you really think she'll be safe?"

"Yes," Michael replied, "I do. You're not thinking this through."

Dyson looked at the girl again, "Well, apparently that is not new for me."

"Don't be stupid," Michael said. "You won't be able to keep her safe by yourself."

"Don't you get it!" Dyson cried out. The people in the street stopped then walked around them, trying to avoid the drama unfolding. "It's not just her. It's everyone around her. Yeva. Sweet God, Yeva too. And her daughter, which is mine as well. We're all going to have to disappear. All of us. We can't do that in Federation space. And I already have a plan. I had a contact with an old friend before we left. He'll give us a lift into more... uncharted territories. We'll find a place."

"Yeah, great plan. Somewhere, sometime, living on the run with a brood of kids with you. I'm telling you, you're safer with us."

"No, I don't think so," Alex was insistent.

"What about your career?" Michael asked. "You just going to walk away. Desert the fleet and the Illuminar?"

"I see no other option," Alex said with determination.

"Then you are short sighted," Michael said.

"Mr. Weston," Dyson started, then tried again, "Michael, I appreciate your concern, but I did not ask for your opinion. I am not coming back with you. Go back to the Hillary and take Leeza home. I have my own family to take care of."

Michael shook his head, "No."

Suddenly a weapon appeared in Dyson's hand. "I'm not giving you an option here. Go, or I'll shoot you and go my own way anyway, only you'll be unconscious and nobody will be able to protect Leeza."

(USS Illuminar - Deck 8 - Cargo bay 1 - Marine 2LT Charles Temerity - 1103)

Temerity was standing over by the makeshift quarters the Marines had put together and was working on a padd and checking out power connections. He had spoken with T'Lela and she had confirmed that she was willing to have Impetuous Industries be a 'corporate sponsor' for the Myrmidons, and by extension the Illuminar if necessary. She finished in her message to him by saying "As VP of shipping, you can authorize anything you need, and I'll see that it is covered. Any wants will be pulled from your personal accounts." Charles just smiled at that last. His reply was two simple words, "Thanks, Mom."

"Lieutenant, a word."

Temerity just looked at the Major and responded, "Yes Sir on my way." and briskly walked over to his commander. "Sir?"

"Well, it seems, Lieutenant, we are back where you started. Could have saved you a trip if I had known we would be coming back here. I've given the team 48 hours liberty. You should take time out as well. I don't know how long this extended deployment the Illuminar is going on will be."

Charles just smiled as he heard the news

"One other thing, I want you to take over the training program. You have a unique perspective and experience that I believe will be good for the team."

"Roger that sir and thank you. I'll get something together after liberty and I will brief you daily." Charles replied.

"No, don't share your plans with me. I want to be surprised as well and see how well they respond."

"Copy that, Sir."

"Anything else?"

"Actually, a couple of things sir." And Charles held the padd out to the major, "I've made arrangements with Impetuous Industries for some special designed barracks modules that can be stacked in any configuration we desire, and the system comes with a power distribution module that will plug into the ship using the same connections we are currently using. There will also be an office module that has two individual offices in it. I just need the troops to pull all their gear out of their cubbies and stack it on the far wall, so when they return, they can all move into their individual rooms. I've got things set up so everything else will be settled. These modules will not be coming out of the unit budget. I can get them delivered and installed inside the next 12 to 18 hours while everyone is gone. I will stay behind and oversee the work. What I want to do I can do after the contractors are done."

(Reply: Murphy)

"I do have a question Sir. It is a point of curiosity, and you don't have to answer, but I do need to get the question out of my system at the very least."

He didn't have long to wait.

"hOd! Birds of prey decloaking!"

Two of the small, heavily armed craft swept in on the Mal'Kesh, strafing it. Commander pA'shU had anticipated it well and the Vor'cha's shields were raised in time which minimized the damage. In reply he'gev and kha'sha dropped their cloak and engaged the enemy. This was a game of kling-za and Bardok would not expose all of his assets quickly, neither would Galk.

"Shields up hOd! Disruptor cannons charged and torpedoes ready."

"Stand ready."

Galk leaned forward.

"Five more decloaking."

"DoH!"

Disruptor cannon fire slammed into oGh'Shu's shields, as his ship replied in kind. Bardok was attempting to soften up the capitol ships prior to bringing in his attack cruisers. The Birds of Prey on his left flank appeared behind the swarm and began firing on the atrackers. Caught between them and weapons fire from the ogh'Shu two enemy erupted as their shields were overloaded and failed spectacularly. With the ships on his left flank exposed the way was now open.

"Kem'Pek is under fire."

His ship shuddering from more hits Galk saw one of his ships destroy another. Weapons fire crisscrossed and exploded in brilliant flashes.

"Three Vor'cha on our left flank!"

The entire enemy force was now committed. "Concentrate fire on the cruisers."

"Jay'aj hOd!"

Mal'Kesh and its wing had already turned their fire on the cruisers and the enemy Birds of Prey were being dismantled by the Kem'Pek and the Birds of Prey from the oG'Shu's left flank. Bardok's opening gambit to harass the cruisers with a superior number of assault ships had been his only option and though numbers favored him his gambit relied on surprise.

Not that Galk's force had not sustained losses, report of another Bird of Prey falling punctuated the reports.

"Mal'Kesh is damaged."

As the report came through one of the enemy ships was vaporized.

Og'Shu itself was taking fire from the remaining ships and lurched from another barrage.

The ship to the right turned about as the other accelerated inward.

Galk hit the control button which opened a communication to his small fleet. "Kem'Pek and all attack craft are to break off and engage the fleeing ship. Disable it only."

