

Stardate: 2445.12.28, 29, 30

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(Risa - Camellos Cafe- COO LTjg Paul Sleeford 10:45)
 (USS Exeter, Ready Room - CO, Captain Trip Williams 10:47)
 (Risa - Camellos Cafe- COO LTjg Paul Sleeford 10:50)
 (Risa – Suraya Bay Resort – Beach –Yeoman, Ensign SG Thea Helms- 2107)
 (Risa – Suraya Bay Resort – Beach –Civilian Addison Queen- 2110)
 (Exeter - Quarters - CoB - MCPO Janey 'chief' Brown - 2200)

Stardate: 2445.12.28

Sleeford sat outside a corner cafe watching the goings on, while Katie did whatever doctors do when an emergency comes in, several of the crew had been past, some nodding others just in a hurry to get somewhere. His 'call' to the captain was coming to an end.

“ If you need a sit down or face to face or longer than a minute, then I can meet with you tomorrow. But if it's quick, I'm all ears bud."

Smiling Paul replied, “ it’s a bit of both sir I’m afraid. I’ve just asked Doctor Kaitlin Jamison to marry me, we’d like to come and see you when convenient”

(Reply Trip)

"I'll speak to Katie and arrange a time to come and see you. I know she wants to move her stuff on board"

(Reply Trip)

(USS Exeter, Ready Room - CO, Captain Trip Williams 10:47)

=^= it’s a bit of both sir I’m afraid. I’ve just asked Doctor Kaitlin Jamison to marry me, we’d like to come and see you when convenient=^=

"Well," Trip said, "Don't rush to quickly, enjoy the vacation moments and the engagement high. No need to bring out the shotguns." Trip said, wondering if this might be the first of many declarations of love amongst his officers while on Risa. "Have you thought about when y'all will be making your appointment?"

=^=i'll speak to Katie and arrange a time to come and see you. I know she wants to move her stuff on board=^=

Trip smiled as he looked at his calendar, leavin at least one hour free every day while they were on Risa just in case they asked to meet with him. Of course he also wanted them to savor the moment. As Trip knew from experience there was definitely such a thing as Engagement high.

"No rush bud, just let me know when you've decided."

(reply Sleeford)

"Also I bet if you let some of the bars know, y'all might get some special treats, or at least some good champagne."

(reply Sleeford)

"And Paul, make sure both you and Katie remember one important fact, while there is an I in matrimony, wedding starts with WE."

(Reply Sleeford)

"Pass on my congratulations to Katie. I'm happy for both of you and I look forward to meeting with both of you."

(reply Sleeford)

(Risa - Camellos Cafe- COO LTjg Paul Sleeford 10:50)

"Well," Trip said, "Don't rush to quickly, enjoy the vacation moments and the engagement high. No need to bring out the shotguns. Have you thought about when y'all will be making your appointment?"

=^=i'll speak to Katie and arrange a time to come and see you. I know she wants to move her stuff on board=^=

"No rush bud, just let me know when you've decided."

Sitting there in the sun, Paul could imagine the confusion on the captains face, wondering if this was a 'holiday' fling situation.

"Understood sir, oh and to waylay any concerns, Katie and I have been dating on and off for several months, her secondment to Risa made me realise how much I missed her."

"Also I bet if you let some of the bars know, y'all might get some special treats, or at least some good champagne."

I was thinking of Nine and Dine, it's large enough to hold most of the crew and the surrounding corridor can be utilised as well."

"And Paul, make sure both you and Katie remember one important fact, while there is an I in matrimony, wedding starts with WE."

Smiling Paul nodded to himself, "Yes sir"

"Pass on my congratulations to Katie. I'm happy for both of you and I look forward to meeting with both of you."

"She's getting her gear sent to the Exeter and re-joining the ship. So we can come to see you anytime."

(Replies none)

(Risa – Suraya Bay Resort – Beach –Yeoman, Ensign SG Thea Helms- 2107)

“What ever this is?”

"What is it?"

“I have no idea but it would be impolite to not accept a gift.”

"Unless you are trying to drug me," She said with a laugh, "Then it would definitely be polite."

“How is has you day been. Done anything exciting for the start of your holiday?”

"Went power boarding all day. Just soaked up the sun."

(Reply Ewan)

"I mean, it's nice here, but it makes me homesick. I grew up in Hawaii, on the Island of Maui. So this just reminds me of home, but it's not home. You know what I mean?"

(reply Ewan)

"What about you?"

(reply Ewan)

(Risa – Suraya Bay Resort – Beach –Civilian Addison Queen- 2110)

Addison had finally got off shift, and got some things together, a shoulder bag that she'd thrown a change of clothes and a couple of bottles of spirits into on her way out of her tiny, shared room. Tiny yes, she admitted, but she actually didn't mind, ~nature abhors a vaccuum~ she thought, if she had more space, she'd only fill it up with more stuff than she either didn't actually want or didn't need.

Besides, her roommate was pleasant, and they exchanged clothes as and when needed. Such a time was now, her roomie had thrown a few things on Addison's bed, and offered her the use of whatever she fancied, so over her own white bikini, she pulled on a pair of shorts, and a sheer light pale blue blouse.

She'd beamed down to the planet, and made her way across the beach toward the bay front. She was aware that her station on board was sometimes considered below that of even the enlisted crew and Officers, but so far, all that she'd met had been lovely, and welcoming. Especially some of the really senior ones, that had surprised her more than a little. Miss

Ashlyn had told her not to put up with any nonsense when she'd first boarded, and though that had seemed a while ago now, she'd been good to her word and kept a look out for her, and had only just this morning tipped her the wink as to where the good parties were likely to be.

"Hey guys," she said, stepping around into the light of the fire. "Mind if I join you? I'm Addison, Addi, Adz, whatever..."

(Reply any)

(Exeter - Quarters - CoB - MCPO Janey'cheifBrown - 2200)

Janey had nipped down to the planet to see around, she loved Risa but it was different with noone to go with. After an afternoon swim she had returned to the Exeter to sort things giving herself time to take things in. She had been down to the cargo bay to retrieve two boxes now she had the space again she wanted her stuff. Models of the ships she had helped design and build ran across the small shelf in the office and her accolades on the wall. Two small pictures sat on her desk, one of her and Ash and the other with her old crew.

Having returned to her new quarters she had unpacked the extra stuff, her small closet held her uniforms and off duty clothing, in almost forty years of service she had a tradition, opening the storage box she started this tradition. Laying out the past uniforms she looked at each, they had changed over the years but the colour had remained the same, until today. Pulling out the tattered, burnt uniform she remembered the past, the pains and the ghosts.

"Oh Chris, you utter idiot. Why" she spoke aloud to herself, remembering the time she was held by her friend, comforted and supported as she found the only man she loved had died in the line of duty. She looked over to the sonogram of the twins they would have been the same age as Ailynn and Janey always wondered what they would have done.

Folding the uniform back up she took the newest one and placed it into the box. She took the duffle bag and pulled out her new Command division uniform, hanging it up she looked at the row of red. Smiling she closed the door.

Over the years Janey had many roles, many friends but recently had been out of place, Starfleet was a young person's game, proved by a ship of schools kids running around space. But now she had a chance to find her home again.

Taking the cup of hot chocolate, Janey made her way to bed, she would return the boxes to storage in the morning. Janey pulled the covers over as she started reading ships requisitions.

(Reply any)

[illegible]

Mission: Auld Lang Syne

Day:02

Stardate: 2445.12.29

[illegible]

(Risa - Beach front - Physio Lt(jg) Cerise Blake - 0245)

(Risa - Private Beach hut - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken and 9D manager Caity DuBois- 0800)

(Risa - Commercial District - 2O/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek, CSO - Lt. Erin Cortez, Lt. JG Greta Smith - 0933)

(Risa - Commercial District - 2O/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek, CSO - Lt. Erin Cortez, Lt. JG Greta Smith - 1020)

(Risa- The Hare Lounge -SOPS, Lt. JG Billy Alexander, aACMO Ensign SG Heinrich Kruze, and MedIntern Lana Wakeman - 1155)

(USS Exeter - Ops Office - COO - LTjg Paul Sleeford 13:05)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort - Shore line - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 13:06)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- CO, Captain Trip Williams 1307)

(USS Exeter – Turbolift – 20/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 1307)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort - Howling Monkey Cafe - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 1325)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort - Howling Monkey Cafe - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 13:26)

(USS Exeter - Personal Quarter's - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 14:00)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken 1430)

(USS Exeter - Science Lab - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 1432)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- CO, Captain Trip Willians - 1433)

(USS Exeter - Science Lab - CSO Lt Erin Cortez & Ensign Benedict Weatherby - 1434)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- CO, Captain Trip Willians and FO Cmdr Ailyn Bracken - 1435)

(USS Exeter - Deck 3 -Merek/ Shara Shara Quarters- CTO/3O Lieutenant Commander Ravok- 1530)

(Risa-Suraya Bay Resort, Waterside Bungalow- Outside- CTO/30 Lieutenant Commander Ravok-16:54)

(Risa-Suraya Bay Resort, Waterside Bungalow- R&SE Director Ashlyn Williams - 16:55)

(Risa-Suraya Bay Resort, Waterside Bungalow- CTO/30 Lieutenant commander Ravok-16:57)

As she walked, passing hour upon hour, she'd passed of all things a florist, and had struck up conversation with the aging woman in the tiny shack. She had a replicator, so few or none of her flowers were fresh, but in the grand scheme of things, Cerise forgave that, the climate was unforgiving toward the subtlety that was flower arranging.

She'd sat in the rude hut for a long while, talking to her, each sharing thoughts, feelings, and knowledge about flowers, sharing a moment, cross generations and over a cup of tea.

It was a moment that Cerise would smile about, even years later, and beyond then, as she approached the grave.

"Do you mind if you prepare me a bouquet?" Cerise had asked.

"Of course dear, not trouble, whatever you need. A lover? An apology? A death?"

Cerise shook her head, gently. "Base of marigold and Purple hyacinth, tilted left. Iris and apple blossom intertwined in the centre, Red salvia and sorrel intertwined to the left, Marjoram and lilac intertwined upside-down in the centre."

The old woman had raised more than an eyebrow. "And on the right?"

"Zinnia upwards, and black-eyed-susan upsidedown." Cerise had felt her eyes fill.

"Powerful message." was the only answer that she'd had.

Cerise had walked a long way since then, and reached a point where she could see that the tide would take the bouquet out to sea. Throwing it in she fell to her knees

“I’m sorry Miranda. So long as I have breath...I’m sorry!”

She watched for the longest time, the slow retreat of the tide taking her offering. She hoped this time that it would be accepted and she could rest her disquieted soul.

“I’m so sorry Mimi. I promise I didn’t know.”

(Reply none)

(Risa - Private Beach hut - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken and 9D manager Caity DuBois- 0800)

Opening her eyes, Caity stretched and smiled. The night had been.... Amazing. Realising suddenly that she was entangled in Ailynn, she smiled, kissed her forehead softly and slowly got out of bed in an effort not to disturb her.

Pulling on a dressing gown, she wandered into the kitchen and smiled to herself again. Opening the refrigerator door, she found it to be well stocked. Pulling out some bacon, eggs and milk, she fired up the grill and began cooking some rather aromatic bacon, humming to herself.

Ailynn felt herself drift awake, slowly shaking off sleep's blissful caress. As she became slowly aware of her surroundings, she smiled, a deep sense of happiness, and contentment resting on her heart. She stretched out in the bed, stretching her legs and back, and then pulled the duvet back up, tucking it under her arm, her head resting on the pillow. Caity wasn't with her, but by the sounds and smells that were reaching her, she was up to something, that possibly involved pancakes and bacon.

Realising how at ease she was, Caity began to sing as she made the batter for the breakfast pancakes. As she flipped the first pancake, she started to dance in the kitchen. Carefree for the first time in a while.

Smiling gently, Ailynn felt a creature of two opposing poles. Half of her was so utterly content, that she could live this moment for the rest of her life, the other was utterly ill at ease, the weight of decision, age-old pain and regret weighed down on her. She giggled gently to herself as she heard Caity singing away to herself down in the kitchen. Slipping out of bed, she pulled on a silk robe that was hanging up on a peg by the bed, and tiptoed to the kitchen, leaning on the doorframe holding back a giggle as she watched her girlfriend dancing and singing to herself as she prepared what smelt like a truly amazing breakfast.

Turning as she put the pancake on the plate, Caity saw Ailynn. Her face flushed with embarrassment as she paused, "... you heard?"

"Please...don't stop on my account." she smiled happily.

Smiling, Caity finished plating up the food and placed cutlery next to both plates, "Please, sit and eat."

Watching her for a moment, part of her wondered if she regretted what had happened between them. Fixing a smile on her face, she sat at the table and poured some orange juice.

"Baby, this looks amazing, you didn't need to." Ailynn smiled as she sat down, picking up the cutlery and moaning in appreciation at the first mouthful. "Mmm. This is amazing." she smiled, looking across the table to Caity. There was something, Ailynn had always been able to read people's faces. "Am...I in trouble? I've forgotten something haven't I."

"No..." Caity paused for a moment and sighed, "Okay, cards on the table. You don't regret... do you?"

Ailynn smiled gently, covering her mouth as she chewed. "Of course not, I..." she swallowed the mouthful of bacon that she'd got. "We've been seeing each other for months, and I adore and cherish every moment with you. It's the next step in our relationship. I'm no one's one night stand, you know that."

"I know. It's just.. I haven't felt this way about anyone before and, so help me if you tell anyone, I get nervous. I'm a little worried that now, you will realise that you could do better." She replied, looking at her for a moment and then taking a good sip of the orange juice.

"It's scary, but so help me I'd rather fight another Pah Wraith than hurt you. You are the only person that understands how vulnerable I am, you level all of my neuroses. My heart aches when you're near, and I feel empty when you're not. If there's someone who could do better, it's you."

"Oh come off it." Caity said, raising her eyebrow. "You're one of the top brains in starfleet. You're gorgeous. I'm... just me."

Ailynn smiled. "You...are...beautiful, funny, gentle, intelligent..." she smiled deeply, and swallowed another mouthful of breakfast. "And your pancakes aren't bad either." She teased.

"Wow. So you only love me for my pancakes and my steak sandwich?"

Laughing gently Ailynn's face fell serious. "I'm not going anywhere willingly. I still worry about you committing to me when I could be dead tomorrow, I worry that you'll want to settle down and blame me when I can't. I worry that my family will like you more than me." She smiled, finishing off her plate.

"I got on alright with Dale." Caity replied as she took a forkful of her pancake.

"Oh? When did you speak to her?" Ailynn asked, picking up the plates and putting them on the recycler.

"Yesterday. She called. Oh shoot. She didn't tell you did she?"

Ailynn chuckled, hiding out her hand and walked over to the large couch where she sat down next to Caity and lifted her legs onto her lap. "Why would she tell me? I'm just her granddaughter, not spoken for a week or more. Told you they'd like you more." She smiled and squeezed Caity's hand. "What did she want?"

"To make sure I was good enough." Caity smiled as she leant her head in Ailynn's shoulder. "In all honesty, she wanted to make sure I understood what your job was and what I was getting into."

Ailynn snuggled up, resting her head on top of Caity's. "She's right you know." Ailynn twisted her head and kissed Caity's brow. "Mum and I fought a lot. It's not as bad now, but we are such identical personalities, that she snipes at me, and..." she smiled. "I'm not an alpha female in most regards, but mum and I..."

"Too similar to get along?"

"Dale is really different, she sees things that few others do, maybe it's because she isn't a medic, I dunno. But if she tipped you the wink then..."

"Then, I'm golden?"

“Caity...can I be completely and utterly open with you? I mean...soul crushingly open?” Ailynn wrapped her arms around Caity, scared to let go in case she would take flight any second.

"You know you can."

“Caity, I am not the badass chick you may think I am. I carry a tattoo from the prophets themselves, but each day I look at myself, and I feel the pain of Ryelle’s sacrifice. A good part of me holds me to account for that, and will do for the rest of my life, I will always revere, and love that man. The purity of his faith, shames me, and he held me a greater benefit. Beyond that, I fell at a hurdle that I shouldn’t have, I slipped into the arms of addiction when I was surrounded by people who adored me, I’m about to turn down the opportunity of a lifetime, because I feel I’m not ready.”

Sensing this was something she needed to get off her chest, Caity took hold of her hands and listened.

Ailynn felt a tear run down her face, and she half snapped. “Dammit Caity I’m scared...I’m scared of...I’m scared of being me.” Tears ran fully. “I always have been.”

"I'm scared. Scared of this. Right here, right now. Because I have never felt about anyone this deeply before. I'm scared that I am not right for you. Scared that I love you too much. Scared that... if something happens to me, what that will do to you."

Ailynn nodded, and continued. “My own happiness has always felt secondary, from our first date back on the Exeter at that funfair. I only want you to...”

"Ailynn, we're all scared. It's what makes us human. How we deal with it, how we confront it, that's the damn scariest thing known to anyone."

Ailynn shifted on the couch, hooking her knee over Caity's legs. "Tee?" she said, kissing Caity on the cheek.

"You know that name.... It sounds like you are being incredibly English and offering to make me a cup of lapsang souchong. "

Ailynn smiled and sighed deeply before speaking. "I'm so in love with you." she then lifted up her head and whispered into Caity's ear, before standing up gently and crossing the room, casting an eye over her shoulder at the door.

"Oh...." Caity replied, as she stood, smirked and chased after her.

(reply none)

(Risa - Commercial District - 2O/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek, CSO - Lt. Erin Cortez, Lt. JG Greta Smith - 0933)

The warm morning ocean breeze grabbed a stray lock of her hair making it dance in the wind. Keira sat patiently, from all outward appearances that is. Inside she was a bundle of nerves. She fidgeted and placed the strands back behind her ear. She had never done this or anything like it, at least she had friends to walk her through.

Walking up to Keira, Erin smiled widely, "Hey there."

"Hi..." She said nervously.

"So, what's this all about, K?" Erin asked, looking at Greta who winked at Keira

“Well, I thought you would ask...” Keira started. “I’ve been setting this up for months now, but the timing never seemed right. I went to sickbay and started the injections. Then we had that mission in the Gamma Quadrant, and Ravok wasn’t in physical condition to do so, then Nesha died.. It didn’t seem right.”

Greta sighed, "Just spill it right now."

“If I was waiting for the perfect time to give my body to Ravok, I figured Risa would be just about the best place.” Keira blurted out but in hushed tones.

Greta’s eyebrows raised as she fell silent. Erin looked at Keira and said, "Oh... oh... okay... Keira, I'm not sure that I'm the best person to talk to this about. He's like my brother."

Greta chuckled a little, "I can understand that. So, you two haven't?"

“No,” Keira admitted shaking her head. “Odin knows he’s been patient with me.”

Erin smiled softly as she put her fingers in her ears and pretended not to hear.

Greta chuckled at the sight and said, "Patient is one word for it."

“The reason I asked you here is I’m wanting to buy something to wear...before...” Keira said

"Before you get down and dirty?" Greta asked plainly.

Erin shook her head and hit the woman softly on her arm, "Greta, seriously?"

"I just can't trust someone random with this. The sales clerk is a stranger and arguably biased. I can't ask anyone in my department, in no particular order Trip is a guy, as is Ire, not that I'd want them to see me near naked, though I trust Ailynn, she is my boss." she explained. "Plus, you two are my closest friends." ~Maybe I should have lead with that...~

"You should have lead with that." Erin replied winking.

Greta nodded her agreement. "So... what exactly do you mean by before? Do you mean a nice dress or do you mean something that will bring out the animal in him?"

Erin shook her head again. "This is my brother guys, less talk about him doing the do and more focus on getting Keira something sexy."

"Lingerie I believe it's called." Keira said, her face was flushed slightly green.

"Oh.... That." Erin replied with a grin. Greta looked at her and smiled.

"So, K. You got anywhere in mind?"

"There is a store over there. I've done reconnaissance." Keira said, regaining her composure. Treating it like a mission with objectives helped her cope with what she was doing.

"This is turning into a mission isn't it?" Greta laughed as the trio began to head to the shop that Keira had pointed out.

A short walk and the trio of ladies walked through the entrance of one of many clothing stores planet side.

“Welcome to Risa!” Called the store clerk. “Are there any purchases I can help you make.”

Keira looked toward where the voice was coming from and saw a one and one half meter Ferengi female in austentatious merchant attire and a smile almost as wide as her face. She remembered her last encounter with a Ferengi merchant on Mars, and with the famous Quark on DS9.

Erin looked around at the shop and blushed slightly. Her experience with this sort of thing was next to none.

Greta caught the blush and whispered, "You... you're a bit embarrassed aren't you and it isn't because of Ravok."

Erin nodded, "it's not really my area of expertise this."

Keira quietly promised herself that she would give this Ferengi woman a chance and hope that she was not like her male counterparts. The Romulan woman was in no mood for games within games just to not be taken advantage of.

“I was looking for evening apparel.” Keira stated.

"I have a lovely selection of evening gowns, cocktail dresses..." the Ferengi said, leading towards one corner of the store.

Greta shook her head and said, "Not that kind of evening apparel. Think more intimate. "

"Yes...intimate apparel would be a better descriptor." Keira said with a slight blush.

Erin sighed a little. This was beginning to make her feel a little out of her depth.

"Certainly, Miss." the Ferengi woman said, catching more of Keira's reactions than Keira herself would have liked. The short statured woman led in yet another direction to a back part of the store on the other side of privacy screens. There were several screens around showing various styles of apparel on faceless mannequins meant to represent various races from around the Federation and other non-aligned worlds.

Greta's eyes grew wide at the selection. "Man, this is quite a selection. There's things here from all over!"

"So, how does this work? Do I try on things?" Keira asked.

"No need. We have four holobooths that scan your exact size and you can select a style you like and it will project it on you to see how it fits. If you like it, you can purchase it, and we will replicate it for you," the Ferengi woman said. "You'll have to remove your outer clothes, but you don't have to get completely nude."

"That's something to be thankful for Keira." Erin replied.

“What’s stopping me from doing this back on the ship?” Keira asked. “I’m an Engineer, I know how to use a holodeck and replicators.”

Prepared for such a statement, only as well as thousands of such questions and retorts can prepare you the diminutive shop keeper had an answer. “Because my dear, you don’t have these proprietary patterns from around the galaxy. Additionally you didn’t state tailoring as part of your repertoire. Our tailoring programs will give you a fit unlike those from a clumsy one of Starfleet issue that’s made for making uniforms,” she said with a grin, knowing she was right. “I’ll leave you ladies to yourselves, just press this button to summon me when you’ve decided on what to purchase.”

Greta crossed her arms and looked at Keira with a look of determination. Erin winked at her and said, "go on then."

Keira shrugged, “Get in the booth?”

The pair looked at her and said together, "Get in the booth!"

Keira sat down on one of several couches and padded benches and began first by taking off her shoes.

"She's not going to go through with this is she?" Erin remarked.

"Oh I don't know. She might." Greta replied.

“I’m doing it,” Keira promised. “Just not doing it wearing shoes.”

“Take off the shoes then and stop procrastinating, woman.” Greta said with a smile and a wink at Erin.

Erin shook her head and laughed, “She is gonna regret inviting us two.”

Keira quickly and efficiently removed her shirt and pants placing them neatly folded on top of the bench, and slid both her shoes and socks underneath. So neatly in fact, it would have passed a walk through inspection at the Academy.

“Are you folding your clothes in there, Keira?” Erin asked, stifling a giggle.

“Nervous habit?” Keira shrugged.

She stepped up barefooted into booth two wearing only briefs and a sports bra, her presence activated it.

[Scanning.]

As the device scanned it displayed the findings and measurements rapidly in real time.

"As an Engineer I appreciate it, but it's weird seeing, well this," Keira said gesturing to her body, "reduced to numbers."

“Well, men have done it to us for centuries. Why not do it to ourselves? I mean back in the day, women would be reduced to measurements.” Erin replied.

Greta looked at her, shrugged her shoulders and said, “I forget that you are a history buff.”

“Hardly, anthropologist thank you very much missy.”

"Where should I start?" Keira asked half-rhetorically. The menu displayed in front of her hinted at possibly thousands of choices.

“Simple is best. Don’t go full on show girl just yet.” Greta said, helpfully.

"Okay we'll try this." Keira said randomly pushing a button.

[Working]

The booth lit up for an instant and Keira's athletic build was dressed in a white lace bra and bottoms complete with white sheer hose and garters. A white feather boa was draped over her shoulders.

"Ew, world of no," she dropped the cord of bird plumage to the booth floor which promptly disappeared.

Giggling slightly, Erin looked at her, “If a feather boa doesn’t scream show girl, i don’t know what does.”

"Boa? Is that what that thing was called?" Keira asked. "I'd rather have an arboreal needle snake around my neck."

"To be fair, i don't know what would scare Ravok more. I'd go for the boa personally. The snake has too much of a bite to it. Although, i seem to remember a species native to earth called the Boa Constrictor." Erin looked at Greta and winked.

Sensing an opportunity, Greta went for it. "Oh yeah, i've heard of that one. I believe there was a subdivision called the feather boa constrictor too."

"There's a snake called that too?" The Romulan said, raising one eyebrow.

Looking at each other, Greta and Erin dissolved into laughter.

"I'm glad someone is amused." Keira said. She noticed a section of the menu labelled accessories was covered with a big red "X". "Oh, it's line item editable." She pushed several other buttons removing the leg hose and garters.

"So you're doing colour now are you?" Erin asked.

"I'm not big on white as a color..." Keira admitted.

"Let me guess, he hates white too?" Greta added

"Ravok has said he likes me in green, because I wore green on our first date," she answered. "He's also said when I wear black it makes my eyes "pop"."

"Go green with a hint of black lace maybe?" Erin suggested

"So, here is green..." she said pushing the button.

Erin looked at the green and shook her head.

"What i like the green? It's different." Greta said.

"Okay, I'll keep that in mind." Keira said after hearing their opinions. "Here is black."

"Now that is classy. Always liked black. Sets off your skin tone perfectly." Erin said.

"I'm really not fond of lace," Keira admitted. "It's also searchable by culture and home world. No entries for Romulan. They are a private culture." Keira then got abruptly silent and her face got bright green for a second. "Moving along."

"Now you can't say that and not let us in on the secrets. Spill it woman." Greta jokingly replied.

"Have you ever been to a Romulan home?" Keira asked.

Smiling, Erin nodded, "Yeah. Not many times but Ravok and i used to go up to his cabin quite a few times at the Academy." Looking at Greta, she shook her head, "Not like that. He's like a brother to me.

"Did you use the front door?" Keira asked.

A wry smile came over Erin's face as she nodded, knowing what she was referring to. "Oh yeah."

"Moving along!" Keira said more insistently.

Erin laughed heartily as memories of happy times spent teasing Ravok about his 'toy ship' collection came to mind.

"He was raised by his step mother who is Klingon. Maybe try Klingon?" Keira was more thinking out loud than asking for approval as she moved to the Klingon section.

(Reply none)

(Risa - Commercial District - 20/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek, CSO - Lt. Erin Cortez, Lt. JG Greta Smith - 1020)

"Thank you for choosing my establishment," the Ferengi woman said. "Thumb print here." Keira placed her thumb on the PADD charging the purchase to her credit account.

Greta sighed heavily. The realisation of the place they had been to was weighing on her. Her mind had fought not to look at the designs and think of what Ire would have thought of her dressed in some of the lacier outfits.

“Thanks, you two for sticking around for so long.” Keira thanked her friends. “Especially you, Erin. It couldn’t have been easy.”

“You owe me big time for this Keira.” Erin smiled. “If you can’t ask your friends to help, who could you ask? I can hardly see Captain Williams offering to help.”

"While I value Trip's opinion, he's not seeing me in this." Keira said.

Greta laughed heartily, “If you don’t mind ladies, I was on the late shift yesterday and i need some sleep. See you both soon, and Keira, we expect details on how it worked.” She said, winking as she headed off towards the beach.

Wide-eyed Keira shook her head, showing her doubt that was likely to happen.

“I most certainly do not want details. Uh uh. No thankyou.” Erin said. “Glad we could help. Just, don’t do anything you are not comfortable with. If he is the right one for you, you will know it. Don’t try and force it. Take your time.”

"You know me," Keira said, "plans with multiple contingencies..."

She hugged Erin. "Girl time was fun, but I've gotta get back up to the ship if I'm going to keep this a surprise."

"Go. I have things I need to do to." She smiled, "We should do this again soon. Just no men talk this time."

(Reply none)

(Risa- The Hare Lounge -SOPS, Lt. JG Billy Alexander, aACMO Ensign SG Heinrich Kruze, and MedIntern Lana Wakeman - 1155)

When Heinrich stepped into the Hare Lounge he had a strange sense that he had been there before. The narrow entrance gave way to a spacious oval room. The room was largely made of standing desks and free space. At the far end was a fully stocked bar, as large as Heinrich's living quarters. Behind the bar were two hallways, each leading to two different wings of the lounge. Each were reserved for exclusive events.

"Welcome to the Hare Lounge, gentlemen, and my lady." Said the maître d'hôtel, an impeccably dressed hare. "Do you have an invitation?"

"An invitation?" Heinrich asked, confused. "We were invited by one Mr. Turtle."

The host furrowed his brow. "I see." He paused for what seemed like an eternity.

"Mr. Turtle is waiting just down the hall to the right. You really can't miss it."

"Thank you," Heinrich said as he began to pass.

"Is he an actual Turtle?" Billy asked the Lepidian maire d'hotel. "Is he a Lepidian, or Terrapinian? Curious minds wish to know."

"His name is Turtle, what do you think?" The large hare responded.

"A Terrapinian, which is why this whole thing is so damn confusing."

The host shrugged. "You'll have to ask him why he prefers our establishment to the Turtle Lounge."

"Well Lana," Billy said with a smile, "You appear to be the most familiar with this kind of adventure," Billy laughed referring to her sleeping with someone who worked for SFI. "Should we go straight there, or should we get a drink first?"

Lana smiled "Get a drink, something light. Have a look around the room see who's there to eat and drink and who is the muscle."

"How will we know?"

"They won't be drinking, their attention will be on the room and who is in it not the other person at the table"

"So a cocktail then? Then as we enjoy it we get eyes on the prize."

"I'm always up for a drink." Heinrich said.

Billy then offered his right arm to Lana to grab and instructed Kruze to offer his left.

"Shall we Milady?"

Heinrich offered his left arm, "Yes, shall we?"

Lana smiled gently, allowing a blush to reach her cheeks as she took both offered arms. "It's a little early perhaps but, medicinal purposes allowing." She chuckled. "A cocktail it is."

"It's never too early for a fruity drink."

As they crossed the floor toward the bar, she spotted something odd at one of the tables. "3 o'clock" She muttered, "Don't look yet. What do you think?"

Heinrich spotted the figure out of the corner of his eye. It was a large turtle humanoid, a Terrapinian. He looked like he could eat Heinrich and go back for seconds. His back was crossed with scars and one eye was wrapped with a green cloth. "I think we found the muscle." Heinrich said in a low voice.

"Something seems odd about him." Billy opined. "He looks....off....lifeless almost."

"Don't be rude." Heinrich chided. "Anyway, I'm assume he's here to make sure there's no funny business. That we didn't come with our muscle."

Billy sighed, something about the Terrapinian didn't sit right, the way it sat, it moved, it didn't seem real. "Is this bar equipped with holoemitters?" he asked looking around the ceiling.

"You're just getting paranoid." Heinrich said. But just as he did he caught sight of a contraption near the hallway. "Or, maybe not. What's that?" He said pointing.

Lana looked up as they reached the bar and ordered their drinks. "That's a small containment field emitter. Makes sense I suppose."

"I suppose." Something didn't sit right with Billy.

She thanked the barman who brought them their drinks, and then turned to the others. "So what now? I'm guessing that we're supposed to assume that our Terrapinian friend over there is Mr Turtle, but that's a rather foolish assumption I feel."

"Mr. Turtle is down the hall. That's a sentry, of a sort. This is only growing more confusing."

"Let's get this over with." Billy noticed a small spherical object on the ground. It was round, a ball of some kind that someone must have been playing with and dropped. He picked it up. In high school he could throw a fastball in the 85 mph range. Not good enough to go pro, but

enough to do some damage if he needed to throw it at close range. Palming it he smiled and kept it in his off hand, just in case.

Heinrich sipped his drink as they walked down the hall. At the end of the hall was a door with a cheap sign out front that said "Mr. Turtle" in particularly poor handwriting. "Well they sure make it easy don't they?"

"Guess It's time to go..." Billy paused to create anticipation. "Down the rabbit hole."

(reply none)

(USS Exeter - Ops Office - COO - LTjg Paul Sleeford 13:05)

Sleeford sat behind the new desk in the ops office and stretched out his legs, having given most of the department time off to relax, drink and do whatever people did on Risa, he had taken the Alpha and Beta shifts, giving him time to contact his family and arrange transport and accommodation for his mother, sister and husband and two four year old banshees. He was looking forward to introducing Katie to his family. As he sat there voice of the captain interrupted his thoughts.

"Janice, Paul, this is the captain. Listen there is a tech expo tomorrow on In'ov'ateyon Island. I want the two of you to go, check it out, see if there is anything we might like or could benefit us. As my OPS chief and an ACEO you are qualified to do this. Commander Merek is leaving early tomorrow, so get with her today to talk about needs. Trip out, and you have whatever credit line you need."

Tapping his badge Sleeford replied, "Understood captain."

Sitting there Sleeford shrugged and tapped his badge again, "Sleeford to Commander Merek"

(Reply Merek)

"Sorry to bother you ma'am, I know your about to leave. The Captain has requested Lt Hammerhead and myself to attend the expo tomorrow on In'ov'Ateyon, What do we need, we have an 'open cheque book' "

(Reply Merek)

Closing the link, Sleeford grabbed a coffee and took a deep breath, sitting at his desk he swallowed and closed his eyes.

"Computer open a communications channel to New Caledonia. Sleeford Farm, Kelda province"

As the computer routed the call Sleeford composed himself and took a sip of coffee, for the first time in his career he was nervous, as the screen changed from the Exeter logo to the farm kitchen he smile as his mother cam onto view, her arms covered in flour."

"Paul, What's wrong?"

Laughing he shook his head, "What makes you think anythings wrong?"

"Well the last time you called, you'd lost your leg, so what have you lost this time, an arm, your head."

Seeing his mother was joking he smiled, "Well actually it's my heart."

Seeing the puzzled look Sleeford paused for several seconds before continuing

"I've got engaged to be married,"

His mothers jaw dropped and tears started to run down her cheek, "You what, who, when, why, "

Shaking his head, Sleeford Smiled, "The who, Her names Kaitlin Jamison, she's a doctor on the ship. The when yesterday and the why... well because i feel head over heels for her"

Watching as his mother wiped her arms and her face, Sleeford could see the myriad of questions flash across her face. "So where are you getting married, on the ship I suppose, don;t you even think about doing that before we get there young man, "

Seeing the glint him her eyes Sleeford smiled, "As if I would. I'll arrange transport to whatever venue it turns out to e and accomodation for you all"

"I cant wait to tell Jane, she'd given up all hope of you finding anyone to put up with you."

Laughing Sleeford shook his head. "Tell her thanks. I'll contact you with details of the ship your one and where you'll stay, as soon as I know. Bye mum, love you, give my love to everyone"

Closing the link he sat there for several seconds staring into space he saw the joy on his mothers face and knew that she'd love Katie like her own daughter.

(Reply Merek)

(USS Exeter – Turbolift – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 1307)

Keira was on her way to Engineering to finish up some last minute things before leaving for her evening with her love, and she was glad that she had decided to tell him that she had purchased things, and omit telling him what they were. Much better than trying to hide them all together. She was still in civilian clothes, but she was just dipping into the office to ensure contingency instructions were left behind.

=^= Sleeford to Commander Merek ^=

She slapped her combadge, receiving the call, “This is Merek, send it.”

=^= Sorry to bother you ma'am, I know your about to leave. The Captain has requested Lt Hammerhead and myself to attend the expo tomorrow on In'ov'Ateyon, What do we need, we have an 'open cheque book' ^=

“I was just heading to Engineering. I’ll compile a short wish list. Also since you’ve been given carte blanche, if you two see anything at the expo that you think might prove useful, feel free to pick it up. If the three of us can’t make it work, we can always just recycle it for the energy. Merek out.”

As the call ended the ‘lift arrived at Engineering.

(Reply none)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort - Shore line - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 13:06)

Crabs. Why was it they were just as unpredictable? No matter what planet you visited. Maybe it was conspiracy by the planets crustacean population. To get their own back. On the visitors for having their planets. Natural weather system changed from wet to sunny and warm.

Three times just as Stan slowly moved up on a beautiful crab sitting on a rock. Then the thing either turned towards him. Then spat a stream of sea water in his face , waved its claws distracting him. While another snuck up behind. Then nipped his ankle or just shot off sideways into the sea.

He was glad when his comm. badge chirped.

“=^=Cortez to More and Michaels.=^= “

“ More here ma’am how may I help you?” Stan said

“=^=I know we are officially on shore leave but could you meet me at your earliest convenience?=^= “

“ Absolutely ma’am. Where do you wish to meet us? “ Stan asked

“ =^=I’m at the Howling Monkey Cafe. I’ll explain more when you get here.=^= “

“ Och that sounds a bonnie place to meet. I am on my way.” Stan said excitedly

“Understood, Cortez out.”

A big smile crossed Stan's face. He had heard that the Howling Monkey Cafe. Did the best plant based beef burgers that were so good. You could swear they were the real thing. All this climbing had made him quite hungry. Plus he was curious as to what Erin had planned.

(Reply , Michael's)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- CO, Captain Trip Williams 1307)

“ Kimberly Novak, Commander,” she smiled. “And if you do that, I'll be a witness and say it was provoked, self defense; anything to get us out of this torture.”

“Be careful, I may just take you up on that.”

"You should just do doodles. I've already figured out the perfect line up for the Exeter's softball team." He said with a laugh.

“I can't even begin to tell you how annoyed I am Trip.” Ailyn sighed. “At least the food is decent, but there are a million things that we could be doing right now.” grumbling slightly, Ailynn regarded the plate in front of her and asked a waitress what it was. “Trillian cous cous,” came the reply.

“Figures. He’s trying to bore me to death and now the food is trying to kill me. I quit.” she said to Trip.

"What do you want me to say at your funeral?"

“Beats me.” She motioned to a table on the far side where few people were sitting, then after placing her plate down, grabbed a chilled fruit juice, and took a sip before sitting back down.

"So, have you figured out your decision?"

“Yeah I know, and I have made a decision, this isn’t the place or time to discuss it though. I have Bridge duty after this until 2200 I think. I’ll talk to you tomorrow about it.”

"Sure, doesn't have to be tomorrow. Sleep on it, take your time. Don't rush."

(reply Ailynn)

"You're in a catch 22. You don't want to leave, but you'd be a fool to pass it up. You never know the next time you'll get this chance."

(reply Ailynn)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort - Howling Monkey Cafe - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 1325)

Taking a sip of her drink, Erin noticed the two members of her department approaching and she smiled and waved them over.

“Take a seat, guys.”

(Reply More, Michaels)

As they sat, Erin placed her drink down and smiled at them both. “Okay, i suspect you are wondering why i asked you here?”

(Reply More, Michaels)

“Captain Williams has asked us to enter an amateur archeological dig tomorrow. Kind of a team building exercise.”

(Reply More, Michaels)

“We have to be in the Ma'Guf'an rainforest for 7 Am tomorrow. Ensign More, I know from you file that your parents were archeologists. What would you suggest we take for this?”

(Reply More)

Erin nodded, “Can i leave the equipment preparation up to you then. Ensign Michaels, As we don’t know a huge amount about the area, would you be willing to find or do a geological survey to see what type of rocks we can expect and relay this information to Ensign More?”

(Reply Michaels)

“Excellent, thank you guys. I know that this is shoreleave but there is a prize for the most unique and or interesting discovery so i want us to win at least one of those prizes. The pride of the Exeter is at stake.” She replied with a grin.

(Reply More, Michaels)

“Take the rest of the day to prepare and, most importantly, have some fun. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow. Get some rest and i will organise transport for us and will let you know later today when and where to meet me.”

(Reply More, Michaels)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort - Howling Monkey Cafe - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 13:26)

Stan arrived at the same time as Michael’s. He smiled as he saw Erin seated at a table and gave her an excited wave.

“Take a seat, guys.”

“ Hello ma’am.” Stan said sitting down.

(Reply , Michaels)

As they sat, Erin placed her drink down and smiled at them both. “Okay, i suspect you are wondering why i asked you here?”

“ Aye your call sounded quite intriguing.” Stan said joyfully

(Reply Michaels)

“Captain Williams has asked us to enter an amateur archeological dig tomorrow. Kind of a team building exercise.”

“ Archeological dig?” Stan said suddenly serious

(Reply Michaels)

“We have to be in the Ma'Guf'an rainforest for 7 Am tomorrow. Ensign More, I know from you file that your parents were archeologists. What would you suggest we take for this?”

“ Them. Nay just pulling ya wee leg ma'am. They still are to my knowledge during the summer holidays. As for me. Well it's been a wee while to be sure. But Archaeology is like riding a wee Bicycle ye never forget how to do it. Once ye have experienced it.” Said Stan

Erin nodded, “Can i leave the equipment preparation up to you then. Ensign Michaels, As we don’t know a huge amount about the area, would you be willing to find or do a geological survey to see what type of rocks we can expect and relay this information to Ensign More?”

(Reply Michaels)

“Excellent, thank you guys. I know that this is shoreleave but there is a prize for the most unique and or interesting discovery so i want us to win at least one of those prizes. The pride of the Exeter is at stake.” She replied with a grin.

(Reply , Michaels)

“ Then we shall do her proud ma’am or my name is not Stan Collin More of the clan McTaggard.” He said solemnly then burst out laughing.

“Take the rest of the day to prepare and, most importantly, have some fun. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow. Get some rest and i will organise transport for us and will let you know later today when and where to meet me.”

(Reply Michaels)

“ Aye ma’am.” Stan said

(Reply Erin , Michaels)

(USS Exeter - Personal Quarter’s - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 14:00)

After a very quick lunch. Stan returned to the Exeter to get supplies and some reading material on Risan history. As it happened he had a book in his nap sack about Risa and her culture. He was just about to leave his quarters. With the book in hand. When his communication terminal beeped. There was a call from Vulcan for him. Wondering who he could be. He opened the channel.

“=^=Hello son.=^=” Said his parents

Stan stood and backed away from the screen.

“ You.....” He said

“=^=Well Stan is that all ye have to say to yer kin? ^= ” They replied

“ After nearly six years what did ye expect. Bells , whistles and funny hats!” He replied

“=^= Yer nay understand. Yer gran ^=“ They began.

“ No tell me what was it. She assigned a Gorn death squad to stop you getting in contact. Put a force field around her house in Oxford Street. So ya could nay enter. Give yer both amnesia so you thought. That you only had two wee bairns instead of three. Told yer I had topped myself when Gale ripped my heart out and yer thought I was deed? Five and a half years. Five and a half years.” Stan said

“=^= It was nay easy fur us. But yer gran said it was for the best. We disagreed with her but she would nay let us see you. By the time she relented. You were gone. She would nay tell us where. It was only a chance meeting yesterday with yer cousin. That we found out where you were. Son you can’t imagine what it has been like for us. Being unable to see or talk to you. Knowing you were facing all that heart break on yer own. Without us around.=^=“ They said

Stan sat down again.

“ Well..... it would be nice to have ye around again. If that’s what yer want.” He replied

“=^= Oh very much son. So what’s yer news? ^=“ They asked.

Stan then went on to tell them everything. From his break up with Gale. To the present day.

“=^= Well. You were always interested in how things grew. So it’s good to know your finally in the correct department. An archaeological dig on Risa ye say. We could give yer a few pointers. ^=“ They said.

“ Nay. It’s a competition it would not be fair on the other teams to cheat.” Stan said

“=^= Well we be hear on Vulcan for a few months before returning to Edinburgh University. So please call us if yer need help.=^=“ They said

“ Would it be ok to call ye?” Stan said.

“=^= We would be glad to hear from you son.=^=“ then said

Stan smiled.

“ Thank ye I will.” He said.

(Reply , none)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken 1430)

“And so, regrettably we come to the end of our time together, I can only hope that I have in some way enlightened your minds, and broadened your horizons. It only leaves me to ask if any of you have any questions, which, given how deep we have gone into this; I doubt very much that you...”

Ailynn took a breath, and trying to resist it, her mood had soured, this idiot had wasted four hours of her life, four hours that she could have spent doing pretty much anything else to be honest. She looked around, everyone looked as utterly bored as she had been, but she found herself raising her hand. She had many many faults, she knew, however, a poor academic she wasn't. It was almost her greatest pet hate. She detested sloppy research, in her field, it got people killed. Her temper snapped, she'd had enough of this shameful debacle.

“Ah! yes...Miss?”

Ailynn reeled in shock ~@£%\$*#& really??~ she heard the double murmur run through the hall, the first of annoyance, the second of shock.

“Oh no he didn’t...” Commander Novak whispered to her from the chair to her left. Trip was on her right.

“It’s Commander, or Doctor. Both have been earned, either is preferable Mr...”

“It’s Professor...Commander.” He snipped back.

“Not so.” Ailynn snapped. “Your Professorship was self appointed following your creation of your own institute, which as of this morning is not as yet accredited. Neither in fact, was the university from which you gained your Masters or PhD qualifications. You have at best a BSc. Nonetheless let us proceed with the questions.”

He gaped at her, as did Novak to her left.

“Professor...I’ve sat here for a few hours now, and a few things have taken my note. Referring your book published last year, and your prior reference ‘treatise in Samaya. The architectural notation that you described on slides 36 through 41 are in direct contrast than the ones that you refer to in your own magnum opus ‘samayan architecture’ furthermore, the style of carving in the columns you describe in slide 35 is Doric, not Tuscan as you claim. Tuscan style carvings were out of date by nearly 80 years by the time of the start of the 24th dynasty.

Let alone the 25th as you claim for this temple, despite it having an Iambic hallway which typified the 22nd dynasty.”

“I...”

“Furthermore, the translation of the Ceryllian Cartouche is, by the same self referencing work that you published last year, you describe the translation as ‘Ya’ad haq-ell te/reU’man’ which quite frankly is utter nonsense as Ya’ad can not take the third person transitive verb in this case because te/reU is exclusively female in its usage. Which you would have noticed had you not have got slide number one upside-bloody-down.”

“...I...”

“Samayan cartouches are carved on all axis, as you rightfully say in your book, however you didn’t read your own second sentence when you said, and I quote, “It is the governance and practise of incompetant buffoonery, not to check the shakell marker, which denotes position from which the reader should begin the translation.”

“Commander, I will be addressing these points, through your superiors who will no doubt be disappointed by...”

“My superior is sat to my right, and I have three Admirals who have spent my entire life being so disappointed by me that this one won’t even make the top 50; my question is this, if I may?”

“Please”

“Maybe it’s in a future lecture, but did you wonder why slides 16 through 21 the secondary Cerylian sub-cartouches contained ancient Bajoran heiroglyphs?” She smiled sweetly, and then sat down as she watched the blood drain from the lecturers face, and watched him slowly turn round to his notes in utter horror.

She looked at Trip with a look of complete innocence. “What? You know I can’t stand these kind of self-aggrandising imbeciles”

(reply Trip)

(USS Exeter - Science Lab - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 1432)

After having talked to her department on Risa, there was one other member to the team Erin wanted to recruit. Having beamed back to the ship, she walked into her main lab and glanced around. Erin, herself had a background in anthropology and xeno linguistics but she felt like the team needed someone who could concentrate purely on that side of things, leaving her free to lead them and assist in every area needed.

Not being one to shy away from hard work, Erin wanted to get her hands dirty, to dig alongside her team and work with them. That was what Captain Williams had said, to make it a team building exercise. She knew that a team was only as strong as its leader and she intended to show that she could do that.

After a second, she spotted the person she had come to see. Walking over to the console he was at, Erin smiled softly as she coughed to announce her presence.

(Reply Weatherby)

“I know that we are on shore leave but the Captain has asked me to put together a team to enter an archeological competition.”

(Reply Weatherby)

“You have a background in xenolinguistics right?”

(Reply Weatherby)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- CO, Captain Trip Willians - 1433)

“My superior is sat to my right, and I have three Admirals who have spent my entire life being so disappointed by me that this one won’t even make the top 50; my question is this, if I may?”

Trip looked to Ailynn, then the Professor, and the back to Ailynn.

~Why'd you have to drag me into this.~ He thought to himself

Trip just kept his head down and doodled while Ailynn continued berating the lecturer.

She looked at Trip with a look of complete innocence. “What? You know I can’t stand these kind of self-aggrandising imbeciles”

"Yeah, but did you have to drag me into it?" He said with a laugh. "You know this is why nobody liked you in high school." He winked at her.

(Reply Ailynn)

Trip stood up, "I apologize." He said as he looked around the room.

The professor nodded, "Thank you."

"I wasn't apologizing to you." He said, "Sorry for dragging you into this Lynn."

Trip then got his stuff. "The Lecture is over right?"

"It is." The lecturer replied.

"Good, it's happy hour at the bar. Let's go Ailynn."

(reply Ailynn)

As they left Trip took Ailynn aside as soon as they were out of ear shot.

"The next time you have issues with a lecturer and you have to burst like that, for goodness sake, can you wait to do it privately?"

(reply Ailynn)

"You are my first officer, you represent my crew, you represent my ship, and you represent me. Just, please, no matter how shitty it is, just some....restraint."

(Reply Ailynn)

"Look, I'm sorry for....I'm sorry that you had your time wasted. I;m sorry I sent you here. But sometimes, being in command means knowing when to speak out and and stand up for what you know, and knowing when not to. But this is my fault, I wasted your time. We'll get someone else to cover the bridge this evening, Go get your time back."

(reply Ailynn)

(USS Exeter - Science Lab - CSO Lt Erin Cortez & Ensign Benedict Weatherby - 1434)

After a second, she spotted the person she had come to see. Walking over to the console he was at, Erin smiled softly as she coughed to announce her presence.

Benedict turned to see Lieutenant Cortez approach him. "Lieutenant, how can I help you?"

"I know that we are on shore leave but the Captain has asked me to put together a team to enter an archeological competition."

"Gosh!" He said, "How fascinating. Erm...and I'm guessing I can help you in some small manner?" He asked simply, not one to assume anything.

"You have a background in xenolinguistics right?"

"It was a second major, not my exact forte, but I'm capable..."

"Mine too. I'm leading the team so I want to be available to help all three of you. Not just be focused on one thing."

He nodded happily. "Of course...what's the brief?"

"We have to dig in the Ma'Guf'an rainforest. We just have to have fun whilst doing it but there are prizes for the most interesting and the most unique discoveries."

"How interesting." He said genuinely. "Archaeology always interested me as a boy, but lost touch I suppose. Got back into it in a limited way in the Academy."

"Me too. To some extent."

"Did you ever go on any of those expeditions they ran?"

"Not at the academy. When I was back on earth. I changed department because someone at Starfleet science thought I showed promise."

He smiled, he didn't know Lieutenant Cortez all that well, he was ashamed to say, but he'd always been able to get past the nervous stumbling block that he tended to have when talking to people, especially the so-called 'fairer sex.' "And here you are now in charge; somebody got something right?"

"I always loved anthropology. Looking into lost civilisations. What about you, physics and linguistics seems an odd combination."

He nodded, and sighed, "people fascinate me, but I can't talk to them, at first the linguistics was a half-baked attempt at being able to converse with people on a general level, not work related.

Erin smiled, "I can understand that. For me, it was a chance to learn something new. To help with my counselling. I used to be a counselor before this. But it brought me one of my closest friends too."

"Ultimately I found myself fascinated by the science of it, etymology and all that. Not to be confused with entomology of course." He smiled to himself, the silly comment amusing him and relaxing his normally uptight manner.

"Don't want to get those two mixed up. Never been a fan of bugs myself."

He smiled. "I appreciate their position in an ecosystem, however it's all kind of...well, I'm a Physicist, not a xenobiologist."

"So, Where's home, Ensign?"

"Home?" he answered with the same question, smiling, as if remembering something from a long while ago. "Home, was a small village, nothing more than a few houses and a little hostelry that served beer they brewed on the premises." He smiled. "I recall never liking it, the world was too small, everyone knew me, knew how..." He blushed, "How rather introverted I was, didn't tend to speak to many people. I left as soon as I could, figured that new people wouldn't know me, wouldn't laugh at me... You know?"

"Oh I understand. For me, it was kind of the same. Everyone knew me because of something that happened. Didn't have many friends. Until the academy. "

"More steps away, more steps removed from...home." he shrugged. "Friends here, no one judges a shy physicist." He half smiled.

"I should hope not. If they ever do, you tell me, okay?"

He smiled, appreciating the gesture.

"Tell you what, if we win a prize at this shindig, we'll have drinks. The entire department. Get to know each other better. We know each other work wise. I'd like to know you all as people. Not just those I have to tell off occasionally." She smiled and winked.

"I'd like that," he said gently. "I'm...content here, I like my role, it would be nice to..." He thought for a moment. "...not be this awkward."

"Might surprise you but I can be a little awkward. "

"Surely..." He looked at his superior officer, somewhat surprised at her admission.

"I'm not what you would call a career leader. When I have to address all the department or go to a big meeting with the other department heads or the captain.... Awkward. "

"It sounds...odd, you saying that..." He half smiled, "I suppose We forget that you in the middle have those above you making the same waves."

"Take some time today, go have fun. We have to be in the rainforest for 7am. I'm going to ask the transporter Chief if he'll transport us there. Quicker and more lie in time." She winked.

Weatherby smiled. "Sounds good." He said shyly. "Maybe a book and relax by the pool." He smiled again, and regarded Erin. "Thank you Ma'am. I appreciate being considered for this."

"Ensigns More and Michaels will be joining us. I play to win." She winked.

(Reply none)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Conference Center- CO, Captain Trip Willians and FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken - 1435)

"Yeah, but did you have to drag me into it?" He said with a laugh. "You know this is why nobody liked you in high school." He winked at her.

Ailynn blushed, horribly embarrassed. It had been a long time since her annoyance had blown up like that, and she had thought herself grown out of that. The remark about not being liked at school had been a lighthearted one, she knew. But it had been a reminder that she had acted like a stupid girl.

Trip stood up, "I apologize." He said as he looked around the room.

The professor nodded, "Thank you."

"I wasn't apologizing to you." He said, "Sorry for dragging you into this Lynn."

Trip then got his stuff. "The Lecture is over right?"

"It is." The lecturer replied.

"Good, it's happy hour at the bar. Let's go Ailynn."

Wordlessly, her heart sinking, her mood plummeting, she followed him out.

As they left Trip took Ailynn aside as soon as they were out of ear shot.

"The next time you have issues with a lecturer and you have to burst like that, for goodness sake, can you wait to do it privately?"

"I'm sorry." She whispered, utterly ashamed.

"You are my first officer, you represent my crew, you represent my ship, and you represent me. Just, please, no matter how shitty it is, just some....restraint."

She felt a tear well up, and she moved over to a quiet area, a balcony area where no one was stood, she grabbed an orange juice from a platter, and leant on the railing overlooking the bay.

"Look, I'm sorry for....I'm sorry that you had your time wasted. I;m sorry I sent you here. But sometimes, being in command means knowing when to speak out and and stand up for what you know, and knowing when not to. But this is my fault, I wasted your time. We'll get someone else to cover the bridge this evening, Go get your time back."

Ailynn shook her head. "I'll do my shift. It's got little to do with losing a couple of hours." She sighed. "Look, I'd better get on, I need to get changed and then head on up to the ship. I'll catch you later." She smiled and nodded, then turned and left the conference centre.

(Reply none)

(USS Exeter - Deck 3 -Merek/ Shara Shara Quarters- CTO/3O Lieutenant Commander Ravok- 1530)

While Rayna ran around the quarters with the dog Venus, Ravok was busy packing her overnight bag. Trip and Ash were both nice enough to keep an eye on her for the evening.

" Rayna in a few minutes you have to get ready for a bath." Ravok said loudly so she could hear him from the next room.

She came running into her bedroom where he was.

" No!" She said ,stomping her foot and laughing.

Ravok turned and looked at her.

" I'm not dropping you off to the captain without you getting a bath first. "

" Trip ? " She questioned as she ran beside Ravok and jumped on her bed.

" Yes , but we don't call him that. He is the captain. "

" Captain James! " she said bouncing around on the bed .

Ravok laughed. " Oh No, don't call him that. Who told you that name ?"

" Aunt Nesha. She had secrets.I have secrets too." Rayna responded and wrapped her arms around Ravoks neck as he sat in the bed.

" You're a toddler. You are too young to have secrets. " Ravok remarked as he placed his hand on her tiny arms.

She climbed on his back.

" I'm towel she art."

Ravok grabbed her off his back and turned around on the bed to look at her.

" It's pronounced Tal shiar, and you are not one of them. You are a child ,my child." He said in a serious tone.

Rayna sat still, looking afraid.

" I'm in trouble?"

Ravok shook his head. " No little one. You are not in trouble. There is just so much that you don't understand yet, but all things will be revealed in time. Your value is beyond comparison. Your..."

Ravok stopped as he heard Keira moving around the quarters.

Rayna looked at her father. " Daddy?"

" Time for your bath little one. " He said, scooping her up and kissing her on the cheek as he carried her to the bathroom.

(reply none)

(Risa–Suraya Bay Resort, Waterside Bungalow- Outside- CTO/3O Lieutenant Commander Ravok-16:54)

Beaming down to the surface Ravok held onto Rayna. She had a fear of transporters so he always made sure to hold her tight and tell her to close her eyes. He too had the same fear as a child.

" You can open your eyes little one." Ravok said when transport sequence had ended.

Rayna opened her green eyes and looked around at the surface of Risa and smiled.

" Daddy " she said pointing her hand towards the ocean. " Water, it's pretty"

Ravok turned his head and looked at the ocean waters. He sat her bag on the sand and put her down on the sand allowing her to stand up. He held her hand and led her to the water.

" My father tried showing me the ocean when I was about your age. We were on Dylus IV. I was afraid but he held my hand like I'm holding yours now."

Rayna pulled on his hand to lead him to the waters edge at a more quickened pace.

She bent down and touched the water as it rushed onto the wet sand.

" It's warm."

He bent down and touched the water with her. " It's perfect, just like you."

" Perfect ?" She asked, tilting her head to the side.

He chuckled " Yes, perfect means...well it means something different to everyone, but it means that everything about something or someone is...um perfect " He laughed not knowing how to explain it.

" Perfect is perfect ?" She asked

" Yeah. I guess it's a feeling that everything is just the way it should be. A feeling of being happy with everything. "

" I'm happy with you and Keira"

Ravok smiled and kissed her on the cheek.

" We're happy with you too." He said squeezing her tight.

" Come on , let's get you to the captain."

Ravok picked her up and walked over to her bag and picked that up as well and walked up to the door of the bungalow and knocked.

" Captain , Its Ravok"

(reply Trip or ash iyw)

(Risa–Suraya Bay Resort, Waterside Bungalow- R&SE Director Ashlyn Williams - 16:55)

Ashlyn looked up from her PADD, containing the small selection of books that she was reading at the moment, and toward the door. The knock had pulled her attention away at the most inopportune moment. It was the culminating moments of a masterpiece of literature that she'd been working through for a few nights now; when the knock echoed round the cabin. Smiling gently, she stood up and stepped over toward the door, opening it to welcome Ravok and Rayna.

“Hi.Come in...Commander Ravok, how are you? Welcome.” She beamed a warm smile.

(Reply Ravok)

“Of course.” She knelt down, bringing her eye level down toward Rayna’s “well how are you sweetie?” She smiled gently, knowing that although she'd met Rayna before, back on the Exeter, there'd be an awful lot new, that could be scary for a little one. “I’m wondering if you could help me? I think that there’s a little dog somewhere that might have lost her ball? I can’t find it anywhere...” she held her hands out in an exaggerated show of confusion.

(Reply Rayna)

(Risa–Suraya Bay Resort, Waterside Bungalow- CTO/3O Lieutenant commander Ravok- 16:57)

“Hi.Come in...Commander Ravok, how are you? Welcome.” Ash's smile beaming warm as she welcomed them in.

" I'm good, It means so much to Keira and I that you are willing to keep her for the night." Ravok said as he stepped inside and nudged Rayna further inside.

“Of course.” She knelt down, bringing her eye level down toward Rayna’s “well how are you sweetie?”

Rayna smiled at Ashlyn. She had met her before, but still couldn't resist the urge to look at her ears.

" I'm good" she looked up at Ravok.

" I'm perfect."

“I’m wondering if you could help me? I think that there’s a little dog somewhere that might have lost her ball? I can’t find it anywhere...”

Rayna's eyes lit up with happiness, she loved dogs.

" Maybe the captain has the ball."

Ravok quickly tapped Rayna on her shoulder.

" Cut it out " He laughed.

Ravok looked at Ash.

" Keira may not be her mother ,but she sure has her mouth." He laughed. He knew Rayna didn't mean her remark to be rude, but rather observant and aware of the possibility that Trip may indeed could be in possession of the ball. Rayna may have been young, but her Romulan scepticism and her objective analytical problem solving skills were already on display. A human child would think to look under the furniture or in a corner. A romulan child however, would assume someone was in possession of the lost item, concealing it from the seeker.

(reply Ash)

Rayna looked around the room.

" I can find the ball. Venus has a ball too and its yellow. "

(reply Ash)

Ravok knelt down. " I'm going to go now little one. Remember, listen and be good or else the captain will have to remove your pip."

He said, pointing to the black pip on her shirt. It was Ravok's first pip that he wore as an Ensign junior grade. Rayna wore it everyday with pride. Although Ravok made sure she wore it on the left side of her chest and not on the right side so it wouldn't be viewed as a disrespect to the valor of an officer. Rayna wanted to wear one ever since Keira allowed her to pin her rank on her when she was promoted to Lieutenant commander.

" I will listen and be good." Rayna said as she looked at Ash and held her hand out to her. " I will find doggies ball"

(reply Ash)

(USS Exeter –Deck 3- Merek/ Shara shared quarters-CTO/3O Lieutenant Commander Ravok-17:10)

Ravok entered the quarters in a hurry. Grabbing a few last minute items and making sure his stuff was ready for a prompt take off tomorrow morning for the bat'leth competition aboard the flagship of Klingon Empire's 5th fleet. Being raised with Kora's Klingon influences, Ravok had a great respect for their culture, but now he wanted nothing more than to go to the competition and absolutely crush his opponents. If the tournament charts he viewed were correct his first opponent was to be Hara daughter Gu'Or. Ravok knew that this matchup was intended to have him as an outsider feel insulted that he was matched against a female, but he knew more about the klingons than they knew he did. Ravok knew that Klingon females were not weak and many times through out their history even proved themselves to be more dangerous in combat than their male counterparts.

His own step mother Kora, was named champion standing in 6 competitions winning her first title at the age of 16 during the high councils competition on Qo'noS, considered by many to be the grandest of all bat'leth competitions in the empire. She then went on to win 5 more titles. She had in turn trained Ravok with a Bat'leth from the age of 5. He may not have been the best fighter but when a bat'leth was placed in his hands he was transformed into a lethal combatant. His Romulan reflexes and dexterity would certainly make him a surprise to his opponents.

Ravok set his bags by the door.

" Almost ready ?" He asked Keira who was in the other room.

(reply Keira)

" We have an entire night to do whatever we want." He had told Keira that he reserved a beach just for them but didn't tell her other details.

(reply Keira)

(USS Exeter –Deck 3- Merek/ Shara shared quarters – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 1712)

Keira knew that Ravok was simultaneously getting ready for their evening and the Bat'leth tournament. She had never seen him so excited for a Klingon competition before. As far as she knew he hadn't shown any kind of interest until this point. Maybe it was because until now, he hadn't been asked. Maybe it was because of being beaten with in a melicam of his life at the hands of a god-like being during their mission to the Gamma Quadrant. Was this his way of making up for it?

She was doing like wise and preparing for the tournament and her responsibilities of keeping him alive to fight. Sure, Ire would officially be his sword bearer, Keira would be his cha'Dich, literally his second. As this was an official Klingon matter, he would only be allowed to fight in the tournament. Even or especially if someone were to challenge him, provoke him, or occasionally for those less honorable attempted assassinations. She packed every blade she had that she knew would be long enough to pierce Klingon armor.

Ravok set his bags by the door.

" Almost ready ?" He asked Keira who was in the other room.

“Yeah, just one more thing,” she said grabbing her surprise out of her closet, and placing it in one of the bags.

“Finished,” she said, carrying her own bags out of the bedroom. “How much time do we have reserved?”

" We have an entire night to do whatever we want," he said. She had been told that he reserved a beach just for them but other details were not as forthcoming.

“Well, then lets not keep ourselves waiting.” She said with a smile.

(Reply Ravok if you want, or none)

(Risa - Ozano Beach, Private Cabana - 2O/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek & CTO/3O Lt. Cmdr. Ravok - 1720)

Keira was transported with Ravok down to the edge of the beach. Just at the edge of the grass line. Off to the left slightly was thatch roofed cabana with wooden supports and cloth walls. It almost looked like a tent, if not for the roof it would have been. In Front of that was a wooden deck with an umbrella topped table and two chairs. Other than that it was nothing but a beach between them and the ocean.

Ravok put his arm around her.

" I figured you could use some time to unwind, maybe even swim, I promise I'm much better since our trip to Trill." He said with a smirk.

“We have been busy.” Keira admitted. “Between Rayna, Venus and us being the third and fourth ranked officers on the ship, concurrently being department heads to boot. It’s a good idea.”

" You do so much for me , I just wanted to show you how much you mean to me. So why not get a private beach on Risa. I mean just look around beautiful sand , water, sky all of which pale in comparison to your beauty but I tried ." He laughed.

“You’re sweet, kind, honest, loyal and patient with me.” she said, “I thought all males of any species were just asses, until I met you.”

" Do you really think Kora would raise a disrespectful man? She'd kill me."

“It helps that you’re easy on the eyes as well.” she giggled.

Ravok grabbed her hand.

" Me ? Look at you from top to bottom your perfect 100 percent the best looking woman on Risa right now. " They reached the cabana and he reached for the entrance to pull it open.

“Did you really want to swim or are you just trying to get me into a bathing suit?” She teased.

Ravok laughed. " A bathing suit ? I'm a little more ambitious than that. "

"Oh?" she tested.

" If you want to swim in the waters of Risa in a bathing suit then be my guest commander " he smiled.

" But I intend on enjoying myself." Ravok said as he pulled open the entrance of the cabana. Inside the floor was lined with large embroidered pillows of silk and the ambient soft lighting of the cabana gave a golden hue to their surroundings.

Keira dropped the bags just outside the entrance. She poked her head inside the structure to get a good look. "You've outdone what I was expecting."

" Or we could not go swimming " He remarked, very impressed that his expectations were surpassed.

"Jumping right to it huh?" She said pushing his chest gently to move him inside the cabana. Making her choice to not go swimming.

Ravok shrugged his shoulder slightly.

" Me ? Jump?" He chuckled

She dropped the entrance letting it fall closed. She grabbed him before he could go any further and kissed him.

" Are you sure? " He asked while they kissed.

"I'm ready. I'm sure." she said, barely above a whisper. After another kiss she pushed him away and put a finger on his lips.

Ravok looked at her and simply smirked.

She grinned and shoved him into the pillows.

Falling down on the pillows he looked up at her. " Good thing these pillows are soft. " he smiled.

“Get comfortable, flyboy. I’ll be right back.” She said with a smile.

Ravok raised an eyebrow at her. " Where are you going? "

“I’m going to change into your surprise,” she answered, “You aren’t the only one who’s been planning.” Keira then stepped back outside.

" My surprise huh? " He asked just as she stepped back outside.

She looked around. The beach was deserted. She was alone. Alone with her thoughts. The sun had just dipped below the ocean line, lighting the sky on fire with orange and red hues. She was nervous and excited all together. Her emotions flooded every cell.

~Pull yourself together, Disira. He's waiting. Waiting for you.~

She exhaled forcefully through pursed lips to center herself. She unattached buttons on her shirt, unfastened her pants and kicked off her sandals. She pulled out the matched set she bought in the Ferengi owned establishment setting that out on top of one of the other bags.

Ravok sat there looking around.

He bounced on the pillows slightly even rearranged a few that were within arms reach. He didn't want Keira feeling like she had to do this. She always described him as being patient with her , but patience had nothing to do with it. He cherished her, at times placing her on the metaphorical pedestal. Perhaps he had even become accustomed to the thrill of the chase. She was after all his dream girl from the academy. Ravok however was no stranger to females and the occasional male throwing themselves at him, sure he was no Trip Williams or Carson Peters, but it happened. Time and time again he declined wanting to spare himself of another heartbreak. Keira was a different story not because of her looks or her romulan heritage, but because while his world was falling apart she was a gentle smile from a stranger , a smile that set his heart back in its place.

Outside Keira's former clothes were in an unceremonious heap that she stuffed back into the bags. Her new attire felt a little airy, but that was the point, right? One last final cleansing breath and she peered inside.

"Lathuel?"

"Disira ?" He called back using her private name.

"Okay," she said, stepping through the threshold. She was wearing a sheer, black spaghetti strapped camisole that loosely clung to her shape. It went down past her waist and was paired with bikini cut bottoms made of the same material. She turned around to show him the outfit from every angle. When she got around facing him again at one full turn, "What do you think?"

Ravok took a deep breath.

" You look ..wow you look..." he smirked.

" You are beautiful " he said as he got up and walked over to her, grabbing her he kissed her, lifting her off the ground. She wrapped her legs around his waist, crossed her ankles and pulled her body tight into his. Walking with her back to the pillows he dropped down to his knees , still holding her tight. He removed his shirt and without skipping a beat continued kissing her.

(Reply none)

(Risa - Raduka beach - southern shoreline near- SPC Armory Chief PO2 Sytuk-1800)

With sun glowing orange in the evening sky , Sytuk drug his raft onto the sands of the secluded Raduka beach, along the southern shore and along the tree line.

He stopped dragging the raft and looked around, seeing no one around he proceeded to unload his storage case from the raft. Slamming it on the ground he opened the lid and started to rapidly gear up, lacing his up boots, equipping his vest and fastening the straps. He loaded a power cell into his personal phaser placing it into his holster. Sheathed a combat knife on his vest and assembled the pieces of his phaser rifle, locking the various parts in place and finally slapping a power cell into the weapon . Once done he slung the phaser rifle over his shoulder and looked off into the distance and awaited the call from Ensign Kruze.

(reply none)

(Risa - Ozano Beach, Private Cabana - 2O/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek & CTO/3O Lt. Cmdr. Ravok - 1920)

Ravok held Keira in his arms giving her the occasional kiss on the forehead as he rubbed her head gently.

" How are you?" He asked gently.

“Recovering...” she chuckled. “You had me seeing stars there earlier. ‘N you?”

" I'm good, my mind is in a million places right now to be honest. That was...amazing , perfect, unexpected...different."

“Different? Oh, because I made you use the front door?” she quipped.

" I mean I didn't know that it could feel so natural. I don't know if it's because of you, my love for you, your love for me, or even the fact that you aren't entirely human."

“Was it the timing? Anticipation? I strung you along for a bit, but I’d been planning this for months.” she offered.

"Planning it for months?" He chuckled.

"No, it's just that I don't have to hold myself back with you, with anything. Something as simple as a handshake can't be a careless act. I could fracture if not break bones if I gave my firm handshake. " He said, Repositioning himself on his side to look her in the face.

" With you I can be me. Call it selfish, call it vain but that's why I love you more than you'll ever know. "

“Is this where we’re supposed to childishly fight about who loves who more? Because I don’t have the energy.” She said. “Not that I don’t love you. I’m just glad I’m not the Engineer that has to quantify it, you know?”

Ravok laughed. " No, there is no need to fight over it. I know how you feel about me and hopefully you know how I feel about you. That should be enough for both of us."

"I agree." she said with a smile.

" We should just do it." Ravok said .

"I thought we did," Keira said, slightly confused. "What with the months of planning and the three times, way to go Flyboy."

" No, I don't mean that. " He laughed.

"I mean would it be crazy if we just had my mother marry us ?"

"No, not crazy." Keira said. "Impulsive would be the term." She thought for a moment. " A Klingon wedding? Is it just a lot of shouting and head-butting?"

He laughed. " Sometimes maybe. Your father would kill us though."

"Kill? If he'd have wanted you injured he'd have done to you what he did to that 17 year old Klingon boy who came courting when I was 14." She assured him. "Besides, he likes you."

" I guess a part of me wants to let you know how serious I am about all of this. Not that I'm trying to force responsibility on you, but I see that way Rayna looks at you and always talks about you. I see a lot of myself in her. You didn't give birth to her , Kora didn't give birth to me, yet she idolizes you. The same way I did with Kora. "

“Idolizes me? What makes you say that?” Keira asked.

" Last week I was reading her a story about a puppy who wanted to grow up and be a hunting dog. The story was essentially about who he wanted to be when he grew up. After we were done with the story I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. " Ravok paused, taking a deep breath.

" She said you. " He smiled as the words escaped his mouth.

“That’s,” Keira paused, “ flattering. I’m not going to put her through some of the stuff I went through a little older than she is now. I could tell her stories from my childhood. Do you think she’d like that?”

" I know she would. The bottom line is I don't want you to feel like a placeholder in her life. You're her Keira " He laughed.

" And someday when she's older she will consider you her mother, just as I have with Kora."

“I hadn’t thought of it that way,” she admitted honestly. “She’s certainly special to me, now. I can’t deny that.”

Ravok smiled. " Me too."

“Funny how the little ones melt your heart, isn’t it?” she said.

" Yeah...yes it is." He said as he thought for a moment before sitting up.

" Come on. Follow me " Ravok offered his hand to her.

“Where are we going?” She asked.

" I want to swim in the moonlit Risian ocean , with the most beautiful woman on the entire planet. Does that make me greedy?" He smirked.

“Maybe a little,” she chuckled, taking his hand.

(Reply none)

(Risa–Suraya Bay Resort, Waterside Bungalow- CO, Captain Trip Williams and Dir. R&SE
Ash Williams- 20:00)

“I think she’s asleep.” Trip said whispering as he exited the small guest room in the rented bungalow. He left the door slightly open so he could hear if there was anything wrong. “Layla is in there, I think Layla decided she’d rather snuggle up to Rayna then us.

Trip then sat on the couch next to Ash.

Ashlyn smiled. “I saw. Little madam. Still,” she sighed, “it shows that your daft dog can be around children. I was worried about that.”

“I think she just hates Thea.” Trip said with a laugh.

She turned around on the couch, and leaned her back against him. "Rayna is a sweetie, I think they've worn each other out." she laughed.

"Thankfully. Because Rayna wore me out,"

"And you're not even sleep deprived and covered in posset." she laughed.

"I mean four hours with a toddler and I'm exhausted. How am I gonna do that with a screaming baby and running a ship." Trip said laughing. He then placed his hand on Ash's belly. "Soon and very soon."

Ashlyn smiled, and hugged into her husband's arm, resting her hand on his and moved it to the place where she knew, looking at the time, their son would soon start kicking.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

Ash turned to him. "You remember what Ronnie said? That we'd both been killed on board, and she'd grown up never knowing us?"

"I remember."

She looked at him gently, content and happy, but worried. “Does it worry you? Given we have her brother on the way that it could still happen?”

"I could die tomorrow by choking on a fish bone."

She sighed, “Yes, I know, it just gives me the heebie-jeebies is all. It just feels, I’m not sure.”

"Look its a reality. But we knew that. There are any number of things out there that could kill us. But if I am ever given a mission deemed too dangerous. You and the civilians will be left behind."

She nodded. “I know, and it isn’t so much the danger, it’s just that...”

“Unless you mean the exact situation that happened in her timeline.”

Ashlyn shook her head. “No no, I mean predetermination.” She paused, “I mean sure, we survived where we maybe weren't supposed to, Ailynn was supposed to be dead by now, but isn't because Ronnie changed the timeline, has it changed and will the universe kick back or is this what happened in our time anyway?"

“Or was this never that Universe to begin with.”

Ashlyn turned to him. “How do you mean?”

“I mean, depends on how you view the multiverse theory. I mean there have been a lot of known incursions with a “mirror universe”. It’s supposed to be classified. But people talk. So who is to say how many others are out there. How do they branch. Is there a universe where we are all dogs? Who is to say Ailynn living was the branching point, what if it happened earlier.”

“No, I know, I’m overthinking so much, you can’t help wonder though.” She “Its so strange to think about those kind of things, like once decision changing everyone’s lives.”

“Sure, you could see Ailynn maybe taking the Hood as the universe trying to separate us, so it can kill us, but we can’t be so fatalistic. We have to live every day like its a gift, and not worry about what's next. We have to. Otherwise the fear will cripple us.”

“You’re right, and I shouldn’t worry, hormones all over the place.” She smiled happily.

“Besides, off the record, I think we’re safe.”

“Good. Because dangerous though it is I meant what I said to you on our wedding day, I don’t want this adventure to end, and I’ll always be by your side for as long as it’s possible to be.” She turned around and kissed him gently, then stood up and walked over to the spare room, and peeped round the crack in the door.

Managing to hold back the laugh, she sat back down again, her face illuminated by amusement.

“What’s so funny?” Trip asked.

“Both of them. Layla has all four legs in the air, twitching gently in her sleep, and Rayna is, well, it doesn’t look comfy, nobody of any race should be able to sleep in that position, but she seems happy enough.”

“Kid’s are %\$#@% weird.”

Ashlyn smiled. “You’re not wrong.”

“You know, and I would never say this to his face, of all the people on the crew, I never would have pictured Ravok as the first one to have a kid.”

“I know, I appreciate that I don’t know him as well as you, but yeah, I see what you mean.”

“Granted, he didn’t know about it until recently. But dunno, I guess he’s full of surprises. I’m still surprised that he left the fighter wing, and that he turned down the Lexington.”

Ashlyn nodded, “I can see why, as I said, I don’t really know him, but he must have his reasons, beyond mere loyalty.”

Trip paused. “I just wonder if his loyalty to me is going to be a roadblock to his success. But it’s more than that. Sometimes I wonder if I’m even worthy of that kind of loyalty.”

“You are. Though you may not see why.” she smiled at him. “Has Ailynn spoken to you yet?”

"Not yet, you?"

Ashlyn shook her head. I haven’t seen her for a couple of days hardly, what with her and Caity, she’s had bridge duty today, so our paths haven’t crossed at all hardly. Perhaps tomorrow.” She sighed happily, regarding her husband. “You okay?”

"Yeah. Just..." he paused. "Just tired. How am I gonna raise a kid if I'm tired all the time. " He said laughing

She laughed gently. "Hey, I'm nearly 4 years older and nowhere near as fit." she smiled.
"We'll manage. Between us, we'll manage."

"I hope so."

"Maybe he'll sleep really well, and only wake up if he's hungry, and change his own diaper."
She laughed.

"We'll need a nanny."

"Hey! We could ask Addi, she's totally helpful." Ashlyn said with a cheeky giggle.

"At not Addison. I need some distance from her." He said with an awkward laugh.

"Thea?" she said, joking.

"Not her job. Plus she'll kill me."

“I was teasing. Joking apart, leave it with me, we have a few more couples now, and Rayna and this one, we have more children. I could perhaps find room for a creche on deck nine. Wouldn’t need a massive amount of space.”

"I had a thought about space actually."

“Oh?” Ashlyn looked puzzled, “Didn’t think that there was anything that we could do about it,” she said.

"The room below us is unoccupied. We could take it over and remodel. Turn the upstairs into living area. Living room, office, play room. Whatever. Bottom level into a large room for us and a couple smaller rooms. You know room to grow."

“I’m not going to get quite that big” she replied somewhat whimsically. “Can you do that? I mean, it makes sense, all things considered, but won’t those quarters be needed at some point?”

“Not really, we have a certain number of extra quarters for guests and what not. Plus who knows how many folks are going to start shacking up with each other after a weekend on Risa.”

“I guess it makes sense then.” She laughed. “Can you imagine if we were still in our house back near the base? I miss the chinese place across the road from my little flat.”

“I miss the pond, and the backyard, and my pit barrel smoker.”

“The little swing and the den with the sofa and windscreen” Ashlyn sighed happily.

“I love that little house. I love that its ours.”

“Me too. We’ll go back one day.”

“So, we never did settle on a number.”

“Of the house? It’s number 5, it’s on the door and everything.” She giggled. She suspected she knew what he meant, and turned to him an eyebrow raised quizzically.

“You know what I mean, silly.”

“I know.” She smiled at him, “I’m teasing.”

“I mean we always knew we’d have kids, and well, thanks to forgetfulness and lack of planning,” He chuckled, “we have one on the way. But...before I have the engineering team remodel our quarters, just curious. How many rooms do we need. Especially considering I carry the twin gene.”

“Well lets get this little man into the world first before we start annexing the entire deck for extra bedrooms. I like the idea of two, but we’ll see what fate has in store for us.” She smiled. “You hungry?”

"Always. Why do you ask?

“Mmm. I’ve got munchies is all. She stood up and grabbed a bowl of snacks that had been left on the side.

At that point Trip heard the beginnings of a crying child. Sighing, he stood up. "Guess it's time to practice. I'll take this one.”

Ashlyn nodded, and smiled gently as she watched her husband step slowly across the floor, she wondered what the next few months would hold in store for all of them, she knew that there was quite a bit of time before their own baby made his appearance. Leaning back she sighed contentedly.

(Reply none)

(Risa - Suraya Beach, Private Condo - CSO Lt Erin Cortez & Lexington CO, Captain Jimmy Hart - 2017)

After spending the day organising things for the archaeological competition, Erin had finally returned to her condo. Having sent the invite to Jimmy that morning and, not knowing if he would want to turn up or even be able to, she had decided to go with something light to eat.

A selection of tapas style food lay out on the counter in the kitchen and a bottle of wine was open and breathing. As she poured herself a glass, she sighed. ~knowing my luck, he won't be able to come but if he does, this is something that i need to say to him. Not for him, for me. I need to be that open and honest person that I know I have in me. To let him in to my struggle and not make this about a journey.~

Sitting down at the table, Erin took a sip of the red wine she had poured and picked up her PADD. knowing that everything was in place for her team, she put it back down and closed her eyes for a brief moment.

Jimmy knocked on the door waiting to be let in.

Standing, Erin walked to the door and opened it, "Hey there."

"Hey, umm, I can't stay long. I just thought I'd say goodbye in person."

"Oh... you're shipping out?"

"Yeah. First thing tomorrow. Need to pack. My first choice for first officer said no. My second choice said yes. And we need to put together a crew. It will take 24 days to get back to Earth and so I need a head start."

"I understand. " She said, sighing a little.

"I wish I could stay longer, but honestly, duty calls."

"Hey I get it. I understand. Really. This life isn't easy. " Erin paused for a second and then said, "I know you can't stay long but I wanted to tell you... you were right."

"I'm always right. Care to elaborate," he said laughing.

"What you said to me last night. You were right. Those past Erins are a part of me and always will be. I should have realised that. But, in the same vein, I acknowledge that my way dealing with things and not letting people in was not good for me or anyone else. So, you were right."

"It's not about being right."

"I..."

"Look," he said pausing, "it doesn't matter what i say if its viewed as right or wrong. Its what you know in your Heart. I'm not your counselor."

"I sat on the beach last night after you left. I spent an hour there just thinking about things and going over everything. Just by myself. You know what I realised? That I don't need any cooky quick fixes or to shut myself off from people. I don't need to be afraid to say look, this is me. I'm not perfect and I need help. I need to realise that trying to be strong means asking for help rather than muddling through it myself. My heart is telling me this. I'm not perfect. Far from it. No-one is. But what I am is trying. I am learning. Growing and that's okay. What

I am is here and always will be. I'm realising that what I am is a good person. Yes, I made and make mistakes. So, here you have it. That's my little speech." Erin said, taking a breath.

"I get that Erin, I do. But how many times have you given that speech." He rubbed his eyes. "Look I'm not the person you need to convince of this, nor the person you need to prove it to."

"Never. Never said that before."

"But how many times have you said you'd change, but then fall right back into the same traps?"

Erin closed her eyes for a moment and then nodded, slowly opening them to look at him.

"You need to believe it, and show it, and do it. And guess what? It will take time. Nothing worth having or being comes easy." Jimmy walked over and sat down.

Erin sat opposite him and replied, "Oh believe me I know."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course. Anything."

"How the hell did you ever get through the academy as a counseling student?" Jimmy didn't say it with malice, or anger, or anything mean. Just out of sheer curiosity.

Smiling softly, Erin shook her head, "I worked hard but, looking back... I don't know. Science is where I fit. I'm happy here. I enjoy it. Counselling I think was my attempt to try and help people the way I was helped. I honestly wanted to help people. I worked hard but the approach I had was wrong. I know that now. Where I am now? I am happy. I can feel I in my bones for want of a better way of putting it. I'm always learning, I have a passion for it."

"Good, because you can barely counsel yourself." Jimmy said laughing. "Is it true you locked Trip in the gym for his psych eval."

Blushing, Erin nodded, "Not one of my finer moments, I agree. Safe to say, I don't think he will let me forget that one in a hurry."

"I think he's moved on from that." Jimmy said smiling. "Erin, do you know who you are, who you want to be? You're 23, still young. Wouldn't you rather be free?"

"What exactly are you saying?"

"We're in two very different phases of life."

"I get what you are saying. You have a son. I am still young as you said. But being young doesn't mean that I am not ready for certain things. Look, I've been through some dark times. You know that. But the one thing that I have learnt, that I have realised lately is that I'm not like other people my age. I don't want to be young, free and single. That's not me. What I want in life..." she paused for a moment, took a deep breath and looked at him, "You really want to know what I want in life?"

"Look, I'm asking if you know. I'm giving you an out, my job is going to become my life for good while, while we're getting things started that's my focus. I don't want you to feel shackled to me, or trapped. This is your chance, no hard feelings. No questions asked."

Looking at him for a moment, Erin smiled softly, "I love you for saying that. I understand what you are saying. You said to me that you loved the fact that my life on the Exeter was independent of you. That I was doing something that I loved and doing it well. I don't feel trapped or shackled. What I feel... what I feel is that this.. what this is between us is something that I want. So your life is hectic and there's a good chance we won't see each other for a while? I accepted that the minute we agreed to give this a chance. I'm not going anywhere. Question is now, are you?"

"Yes. But that's classified."

"You know what I meant. I am not going anywhere. I don't want an out. What I want is right here. In this room."

"Erin...." He stood up. "How do you know? How do you know you just aren't in love with the thought of me. There is a good chance you won't hear from me for a month while I'm putting together my crew. Don't just say yes because you are enamored with the thought of me. Relationships are hard, relationships are work. Are you willing to put in the work knowing you may not see me in person for a full year?"

Erin stood, "Simple answer yes. Yes I am. Are you? Same question applies. You wouldn't get to see me for a whole year. Are you willing to take that chance on me?"

"There lies the difference. I've got the career. I've got a kid. I don't need a significant other. I'd be busy enough to be fine. I don't want you wasting your life on me."

"I have a department I am building from the ground up on a new ship. I have a career." She paused for a second, "Why do you think me wanting to be with you is a waste?"

“Because, you deserve to be with someone who is there, who is present, who can be with you day in and day out, lift you up, be there for every moment. Not someone who is absentee.”

Erin shook her head and stepped towards him, "... I don't want an out. I don't want that. Do you?"

“Look, I don't know. I guess, I guess I'm trying to make it easier for you.”

"What do you mean?"

“I told you, my ex is joining me, both Tommy and her will be there. Things have been good between the three of us as some sort of family. And I...I can tell that...for Tommy it's good for the three of us to be together, and I just.... I can't in good faith tell you that there isn't a chance that this kind of adventure.....if.....I just don't want you trapped in whatever family drama is coming my way.”

"Jimmy, I get that. Would I be lying if I said that it didn't concern me? Yes. But, having said that, I also know two things. One, that no-one can know what is going to happen in the future. Whatever happens, happens. It is how you deal with it that makes you the person you are. I know I am not the perfect example of how to deal with things. I know my choices have been less than stellar. But the choice I am making now. The one that I want to make, if you let me, is the right one for me. I understand that things may be difficult...."

“Erin....” He said interrupting her. “I still love her.”

Erin stopped, not knowing what to say.

“She’s the mother of my kid. I don’t think I’ve ever stopped. I just...I like you, I might even love you. But sometimes I wonder if what’s best for Tommy is....” He sat down again.

"For you to be with her?"

“I just figured it would be easier to give you an out, then fates conspiring to make me hurt you.”

"Look, If you want to go. Go. If you need space to figure out what you want, then that's fine. I understand. I... can understand that you still love her. She's the mother of your child. I get that. I do. I'm ..." Erin turned from him, walked to the window nearby and looked out, "... I'm not going to stand in your way. Do I think I'm in love with you? Yes. But part of that is knowing when to let someone go. Do I want to do that? No, I want to be with you. But I won't be that person that ruins a chance for a child to have his parents together. That not who I am."

“Erin...” Jimmy reached out but then stopped. He then turned and walked out the door, a tear flowing down his cheek.

Erin sighed. Running after him, she shouted, "Jimmy, wait."

Jimmy stopped at the foot of the patio stairs but he did not turn around.

"There's something you should understand about me before you question my motives or ask if I'm ready for family drama."

Jimmy stood silent and said nothing. He did not move.

Sitting down on the steps to the condo, Erin sighed, "I... my father, the man who raised me, he isn't my biological father. "

Jimmy stayed silent.

"The man who ran out on my mum and I did that when I was two. I don't remember him. But my father, my real father is one of the greatest men I have ever known. He had a wife who died. He met my mom and took us both on knowing that there was every chance my biological father would come back into our lives. He did that because he is a good man. So, I understand family drama. I understand your boy comes first. If it means you spending time with him over me, you do that. Because nothing is more important than family. What I am saying is, despite the drama that may or may not happen, I'm willing to fight for this. To make it work. I want to do this. If you want to give us a chance. "

"And I'm telling you Erin, deep space, things happen. Distance, is hard, and I don't want to hurt you. It's that balance. How do you be there in your son's life, with his mother, your ex, who you never stopped loving. And you know the tension is there. I don't...I don't want to cheat on you Erin. That's why I wanted you to come with. I don't want to hurt you, but I don't know what's going to happen. Sure, fighting for each other is great. But what happens when it's been six months, one year, or two, since we've even been in the same room."

Erin stayed silent, the feeling that he was pushing her away was strong and it hurt. But she knew his reasons and respected that.

"And so I'm giving you an out, Erin, so I don't hurt you, and you don't hurt me. You're young, you...you still have time to figure shit out, grow up. You say this is what you want, but Erin, you still don't know who you are, you admitted that yourself. I don't want my drama to get in the way of the beautiful person you will become."

"I understand..."

"It's not that I don't want to be with you. It's not that I just want you out. But dammit, timing isn't right." He clenched his fists. He hadn't expected the conversation to go this long. She was hoping she'd just let him go. Not because he wanted that, because it would hurt less.

Sighing, Erin closed her eyes. "You know what I have said. You know how I feel but I'm not going to sit here and.... You want to not hurt me, then go. Just go. I thought this could be something good. Something worth fighting for. But just.... "

Jimmy nodded. "Goodbye Erin." He then began walking down the beach until he was out of sight. Once he was sure no one could see him, the venodrian known as Bert shifted from Jimmy's form back to his natural form, and then to that of a Caity DuBois before making his way to a transporter pad to make his way back to the Exeter, before making his way to Caity's quarters and resuming his form as the snake named Bert.

Elsewhere down the beach at a Cafe, Jimmy Hart sat looking at potential First Officer Candidates, sipping a beer, having lost complete and total track of time. When he finally realized it later, he called Erin, but she didn't answer.

~Must have gone to bed.~ He thought to himself. Unaware of what had just happened.

(Reply none)

(Risa – Suraya Bay Resort – Beach –Nurse – CPO – Ewan McDonald - 2109)

"Went power boarding all day. Just soaked up the sun."

“That sounds like fun.”

"I mean, it's nice here, but it makes me homesick. I grew up in Hawaii, on the Island of Maui. So this just reminds me of home, but it's not home. You know what I mean?"

“I can see how it does.”

"What about you?"

“Me, well I did a lot of walking and found some caves with some amazing acoustics.”

He patted his trumpet which was sitting beside him.

“Which was fun to play with.”

(reply Helms)

“I grew up in Scotland which was cold, is not as warm as here or Hawaii but I do enjoy sitting on a beach looking out at the sea listening to the waves even if I had on fifty layers of clothing.”

He smiled.

(reply Helms)

“Hey guys,” she said, stepping around into the light of the fire. “Mind if I join you? I’m Addison, Addi, Adz, whatever...”

Ewan looked up and saw Queen standing nearby.

“Of course, please do. There is a drink in the box if you want one.”

(Reply Queen)

(Reply Helms, Queen any)

(Risa - Suraya Bay Resort, Beach front- CO, Captain Trip Willians and FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken - 2205)

Ailynn strode across the beach, after a quick change into t-shirt and shorts, and after facing herself in the mirror, she'd beamed back down from her quarters, to face her oldest friend, still ashamed and horrified by her behaviour earlier, it had brought a lot of things home to her.

She hit the chime, and stepped back, resting on the rail.

Ashlyn opened the door, and taking a look at Ailynn, nodded, not needing to ask what she needed. "Trip." she called across the room softly. "Ailynn."

Trip quietly walked over towards the door. He was doing his best not to wake up Rayna.

"Hey Trip. Sorry to turn up unannounced. Can we talk?" her voice was caught in her throat, and she choked on it briefly.

"Sure but outside. I don't want to wake up Rayna."

“Of course.” she stepped out, and down the steps. “Rayna?”

"We're babysitting."

She smiled. “Cute.”

"So What's on your mind?"

“Load of things to be honest.” She sighed. “Today has brought a lot of things to my mind.”

"Well you know you can tell me anything."

“I know,” she nodded, her voice was unusually quiet. “But nonetheless, it only reinforces something that I was already feeling. I’d like you to contact the Admiralty tomorrow, and thank them for the offer, but I will unfortunately be unable to accept their offer. I don’t feel at the point I am in my career, that I’m able to perform the duties of Captain of the USS Hood to the expected ability.” a tear welled up in her eye.

Trip wiped the tear from her eye. "Why not?"

“It’s not me, I’m too emotional, it isn’t who I am. I’m not ready Trip.”

"I mean, if I'm ready so are you."

“Trip, this isn’t the treehouse, I’m not you, I don’t have a half of your command presence, a tenth of it.” She shook her head, and drew a breath, letting it out slowly. “It isn’t a game Trip, peoples lives are at stake, and I have shown time and time again, that when it comes to it I have it lacking.”

"What is this really about?"

Clenching her teeth, she wished he’d listen. “Your you because of your unshakable confidence in what you’re doing. I don’t have that not with what I’m doing. Today’s outburst only underlined that. I’m at the edge of my nerves doing something that I’m discovering I’m not shaped for. I feel like a duck amongst chickens.”

"Bullshit. Its precisely because of that outburst you should keep considering it. Because you're passionate. You care about knowledge and truth. In time you can harness the passion more concretely. But you have that passion."

“Passion yes. Ability...no. Trip, I adore you but you aren’t listening. I’ve been struggling with this a while, and the further I go, the more I realise that this isn’t the path. Ive fought tooth and nail to come out of the shadow of my family, only to discover that I actually don’t know who or what I am. It sure as hell isn’t a Captain.”

"I'm not the one listening? Lynn your performance is exemplary. You commanded a large medical complex as an Ensign. So don't tell me you don't have the ability when I've seen it. Desire may be lacking. Self knowledge. But don't you dare say you can't or don't have the ability."

“Yes, I Commanded a medical facility. Medical.” she turned to the moonlit sea, then back “I trained for seven years to do that. Seven. That’s altogether different. Medicine is in my blood...”

"But.."

“Trip. I’m sorry. Command isn’t.”

"I see. I assume then you also want a transfer?"

"Trip..."

"Since command isn't in your blood, I assume that means you want to go back to medicine."

She shook her head. "I've lost all faith in me, you can't look me in the eye and tell me that I didn't publicly embarrass you? Hell, your response told me more than I needed. Yes. No-one liked me at school, and I still carry that loneliness, I still carry all that doubt. I've lost the belief in myself utterly as an officer. That display today tells me all I needed. I'm sorry Trip, unless something major happens to restore my faith in anything I do, then..."

"Let's take a walk."

She nodded, walking next to him.

As they began the stroll Trip turned to her. "Part of my job is your professional development. Could I have been Nicer. Yes. But frankly, If One chewing out can toss your confidence down the drain, well maybe you should hang it up. Starfleet isn't for you."

"It isn't about being chewed out Trip, it's about how my belief in my ability to effectively lead a team in a role that I'm increasingly aware that I may not be suited for."

"Honestly there is a bigger issue. You care too much about public perception you're letting it cloud your knowledge of self."

“And that is literally my point. My perception is that I’m failing, my perception is that I can’t control my emotion, hell, today is nothing, calling out a Professor, or teacher, that’s not the first time, possibly not the last. But can you, in all honesty tell me that you utterly trust me not to get that annoyed on the Bridge at some point?”

"Does it matter what I believe? You've obviously made up your mind."

“Trip, it could have killed five...hundred...people.”

"You've never let Me down, not Once. Not once. Because you perform under pressure. So yeah. I trust you implicitly."

“Makes one of us,” she sighed.

"But I think this is deeper. I feel your emotion. I know you. This isn't about your ability to command or the outburst. Maybe I'm wrong."

She shrugged. “It’s a part of it, a major part, but it isn’t the whole.” she admitted.

"How'd things go with Caity last night?"

“In itself very well.” she blushed. “We talked about everything, you know...”

"But... or is it an and?"

“I shouldn’t tell you, but I suspect you or Ash already know from her file...”

"Yes . Both you and the sister were addicts. So you told her yes?"

“Everything, and it was fine, is fine. Just brought a lot of pain back to the surface. Doubts I thought I’d forgotten, shame of failure that I’d looong since thought I’d got past. Made me start dwelling on what the hell I’m actually doing you know?”

"So there ya go. That's it. Thats your root thats your problem. You're punishing yourself for past Ailynn’s sins. For things you have already punished yourself and been redeemed for."

“Partly yeah, and I’m afraid that will always cripple me, I can’t help that...”

"You medical Professionals are the worst you know that."

“Medice, cura te ipsum...Yeah I know.”

"You can help that. That's why we have counselors on board."

“You kidding? They all think I’m insane anyway, Died twice, tattoo from gods, killed two people...I could go on.”

"I'm being \$#@%\$# serious here."

“I know, and you’re right of course.” She said.

"This is something You talk to a professional."

“She nodded. I know.”

"You don't Think you're up to the rigors of captaincy. That's fine. I get. But you're telling the Admiralty not me."

“Duly noted.”

"Second, you don't Think This is in your blood, ok. Well I can't have an FO with no confidence in their abilities. So here's your choice. Weekly counseling appointments to tackle your anxiety, get a handle on this. You stay on board, you stay my first officer. We get you the help you need. Because I trust you with every fiber of my being."

She nodded simply, there really were very few words she could use.

"The other option is you're being transferred and you won't be leaving Risa with us."

"I understand...Trip...?"

Trip didn't look at her, he was staring out into the distance. He wanted to hug her but she needed tough love. "Yes?"

She was so close to letting it all out, all her insecurity that she'd been bottling up in the last few weeks, she felt like a leaf on a rapids, but she had no way of really expressing that. Maybe if they'd still both been on Mars, then it would have been easy. She swallowed it all up, and squeezed it all back down again.

"I'll let Admiralty know in the morning, and yourself my decision on the 1st. If that suits?"

"Yes." He paused "Ailynn, Stop bottling your emotions. I'm an empath. I can feel it. Its deafening. You need to let it out or you will explode."

She looked at him, and for a second he wasn't the Captain, for a second they weren't stood on the beach at Risa. For a second they were just kids again, and she felt her defences crumble, tears welling up.

"DAMMIT, that's cheating." she drew breath to calm herself. "On top of all that, and that is enough believe me..." She stared at a boat just coming back into the bay. "Trip I'm in love; and I don't know how to deal with that on top of all my neuroses, I'm not like you, I'm certainly nowhere near as strong as Ash is...I'm bloody scared."

"And there it is."

"I don't know how to be all the things that people hold me up to be..."

"This isn't About your Confidence in the job. Its about not knowing balance. This is different than with Sy, you haven't known her your whole life. So now you feel lost, feel like how do I balance. Its new, you're flawed. How do you balance? How do you be miss Starfleet bad ass and be vulnerable with Caity? You don't know, and when Ailynn doesn't know, you get frustrated and doubt."

She nodded. "It seems easier to walk away and just be happy at one thing, rather than trying to balance all the plates, and I know that's stupid, and wrong, and I'd last even less time outside the Fleet than I will in it. I'm not wired for anything else."

Trip nodded. "Nothing worth having in life is easy."

"No I know, and you're right of course." taking a deep breath she sighed slowly. "I'll speak to the Admiralty tomorrow; and arrange counselling sessions to begin when we leave here."

"Lynn, let me tell you a secret "

She turned her head to him, a quizzical expression on her face. "Yeah?"

"I'm scared shitless about becoming a father. Excited, but scared shitless."

She half smiled and nodded.

"But everyday I wake up, take 15 minutes to myself and breathe. Because I Know Who I am. Fear, anxiety, it's normal "

"I know, and you're right. I have the biggest fear of failure, it's always been all encompassing, it's what drove me where I ended up in the first place. Now though I have this worry that I'm not doing anything to the point that I should be, it's taking on too much I know, it's utterly destructive. Times are though that I can't help it." she turned to him. "

‘sides, you’ll do great as a dad. You had a good family growing up that’s a good start on the battle.”

"I guess that's the point. It's healthy to be afraid. But you have to have confidence in who you are."

“Walk back?” she asked, motioning toward Trips cabin nearby, and her own further down the beach.

"Yeah. I think so."

She turned, falling into step beside him as they strode slowly back.

"We good?"

Nudging him with her shoulder she smiled. “Yeah we good.” pausing, she carried on. “You know I couldn’t bloody go anywhere anyway you asshat; it’d mean someone else being trusted to assist Ash in delivering your child.” smiling gently she carried on. “Thank you.”

"Always."

[illegible]

Day:03

[illegible]

(Risa - Personal cabin - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken - 0300)
(USS - Deck 3- Merek/ Shara shared quarters- 2O/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek & CTO/3O Lt. Cmdr. Ravok & CFO Lieutenant Sg. Ire Williams- 0630)
(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 0659)
(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 07:00)
(IKS Vur'tak- CTO/3O Lieutenant commander Ravok- 0703)
(IKS Vur'tak – Transporter Room – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0705)
(IKS Vur'tak- CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams - 0705)
(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - ACSci Ensign Senior Grade Adala Michaels - 0705)
(IKS Vur'tak – Transporter Room – SPC- Captain Kora of the house of Kal'Beroth – 0707)
(IKS Vur'tak – Transporter Room – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0710)
(IKS Vur'tak- Bridge - 'Exeter' CTO/3O Lieutenant commander Ravok- 0711)
(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 0801)
(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - SO Ens.(SG) Stan More - 08:02)
(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - ACSci Ensign Senior Grade Adala Michaels – 0803)
(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - ACSci Ensign Senior Grade Adala Michaels – 0804)
(USS Exeter - Sickbay, Physical therapy room - CO, Captain Trip Williams and Physio, Lt. JG Cerise Blake - 0900)
(IKS Vur'tak- Bridge - CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams - 0910)
(IKS Vur'tak- Training Room 10 - CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams – 1023)
(IKS Vur'tak – Mess Hall – Cha'Dich – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 1043)
(IKS Vur'tak – Mess Hall – Cha'Dich – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 1050)
(Risa- Captain's Private bungalow - CO, Captain Trip Willams and FO, Commander Ailynn Bracken - 11:00)
(Risa- Suraya Bay Buffet -SOPS, Lt. JG Billy Alexander, aACMO Ensign SG Heinrich Kruze, and MedIntern Lana Wakeman - 1114)
(KDF QorneL - Bridge - Doctor - E'Mpak - 1130)
(Risa- Suraya Bay Buffet -SOPS, Lt. JG Billy Alexander, aACMO Ensign SG Heinrich Kruze, and MedIntern Lana Wakeman - 1140)
(IKS Vur'tak- Bridge - 'Exeter' CTO/3O Lieutenant commander Ravok- 1141)

She felt her heart sink deeply in her chest, her body shivering against the cold dampness of the corridor. She reached the cell where she knew she'd see two figures, one of them giving up her own life to save hers. She caught her breath as she looked again. Breathing out she could feel the condensation from her own breath against her face.

~Two figures? No. There were three. The Emissary.~

She watched as he spoke to the version of her that was just awaking from death's grip, and beginning to sit up.

"Running may help for a little while, but sooner or later the pain catches up with you. And the only way to get rid of it is to stand your ground and face it."

Words spoken to her as she'd been saved, but it seemed that they were even now more appropriate than they had been even then.

Eventually, Cisco disappeared, leaving her watching herself mourn the loss of Ryelle.

"No...Ryelle..." she watched as she picked up Ryelle's prayer beads and ear jewelry. In passing she knew exactly where both of those were now. Both items she treasured and would do forevermore. She felt the tear well up as she watched the scene again, the sadness in her heart feeling as raw now as it had those months ago. She felt her pulse quicken as the anger raised in her body. He'd been so needlessly killed.

Ailynn woke up slowly, and sighed gently, the pleasure in her heart swimming all over her as she felt Caity's arm rest gently around her waist as she lay sleeping. The night's sleep fell away as she eased herself out of its warm embrace and out into the cooler, lonely grip of wakefulness. Slowly, she closed her eyes again, her pulse slowing back to a rested rate.

Caity's voice mumbled sleepily behind her as she wrapped her arm around her again, Ailynn was losing her battle against wakefulness once more.

“Feet...Cold” was the last thing Ailynn heard before drifting off.

(Reply none)

(USS - Deck 3- Merek/ Shara shared quarters- 2O/CEO - Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek & CTO/3O Lt. Cmdr. Ravok & CFO Lieutenant Sg. Ire Williams- 0630)

After a long night on Ozano beach Keira and Ravok made their way back to Exeter early and contacted Ire to go over last minute preparations.

" Now what I'm going to tell you both is very important, some of this you might already know. " Ravok said to them as he was fastening the gauntlets of his Klingon armor.

Ire nodded.

"Fire away." Keira said, but she was only half listening, her thoughts were still on the night prior.

" Ire you will be my sword bearer. After every match I hand you my bat'leth and you are not to give it back to me until my next match. During the time between matches I am forbidden to take up arms for any reason. If any attempts are made to bring violence against me or my house you are to stand in my place against any and all adversaries, but don't worry you will not be alone." Ravok said.

Ire smiled.

“You can count on me Ravok.”

" I knew I could." He said and winked his eye at him.

" You look good in that armor by the way." Ravok added and slapped Ire on the shoulder.

Ire looked down at himself and nodded. "It's my first time wearing Klingon armour and I must say I could get used to it."

He turned his gaze towards Keira.

"You my love are to be my Cha'dich, my voice to those assembled and declare my intent to compete. Although it is not necessary for you to fill this role or for me to even have a Cha'dich, I am having one because it's my right and plus it will piss a few of them off and contrary to popular belief a pissed off klingon is more dangerous to himself than he is to an enemy. They become dumb and sloppy and I couldn't think of a better way to achieve that goal than to have a romulan woman serve as my Cha'dich." Ravok explained with a smirk.

Ire grinned.

"I'm sure some of my House Mo'Kai dialect will enrage them further," she said, smirking. "You just need to let me know how you want to be introduced."

"In the most over the top and exaggerated way possible. Really get on their nerves." Ravok laughed

"What could possibly go wrong when you do that." Ire said as he looked between Ravok and Merek. "It's not like Klingon and Romulans have a fuzzy and cuddly relationship."

Ravok looked at Ire. "That's why they allowed me to come as a representative of a house. They want to wipe the floor with me, teach me a lesson and get a chance to beat on a Romulan. They want to humiliate me...us, but I won't allow that to happen."

Ire looked at Merek and Ravok. "No we don't. It will be fun to see how we can humiliate the klingons. Their anger is one of their weaknesses."

"Piss them off, got it." She said with a nod.

Ravok smiled. " My mother will be here shortly " he walked over to the couch where Rayna was sitting there patiently.

He knelt down beside her, her little hand reached out and touched his armor.

" Why do you fight ?"

Ravok was taken away for a moment by her question. " Some do it for fun, some do it for glory. I'm fighting for grandma for her house for Keira and for you. "

Rayna nodded her head.

" You will be safe with grandma ,there will be others there to keep you safe as well " Ravok concluded and hugged her.

He picked her up and turned to Ire and Keira. " Let's head to the transporter room." He said, holding his daughter in one arm.

Ire nodded. "Lead the way."

"Yes, let's go." Keira said, standing. She had originally thought that Klingon armor would be too bulky, and while it's true it did restrict movement, it was not as bad as she originally thought. The thing she did like is that there were many places to hide a blade.

(replies none)

(IKS Vur'tak- CTO/3O Lieutenant commander Ravok- 0703)

Beaming aboard the klingon vessel holding his daughter in his left arm with his bag in his right hand and his bat'leth on his back he looked around. As soon as they stepped off the transport pad the doors slid open and Kora walked in.

A smile danced across her face.

" My little princess " She declared ashe grabbed Rayna from Ravoks arms.

" Grandma! " Rayna yelled cheerfully as she wrapped her arms around Kora's neck. Kora turned and looked at Ire.

" Lieutenant Williams, you just keep getting better looking don't you ? "

(Reply Ire)

Kora laughed. " Don't be modest...it makes you even more attractive." She grinned.

(reply Ire)

Ravok blushed and shook his head.

" And Commander Merek" She smiled and approached her, placing her free arm around Keira and squeezed her.

" I hope my son is treating you well ?"

(Reply Keira)

" How well? " Kora laughed loudly and smacked Keira on the shoulder.

(reply Keira)

Standing there in embarrassment, Ravok felt his frustration beginning to grow.

" Mother!" He said loudly.

" Why don't you show show us around your ship"

Kora made a serious face as her son sucked the fun out of the room.

" Just like your father. Fine" she looked at Ire " You can make your way to the bridge if you want , feel free to look at our flight systems. "

(reply Ire)

" Keira, I am dying to show you our new warp core. The efficiency rating is up by 22 percent. "

(reply Keira)

Kora looked at Ravok. " Lathuel. make yourself at home but before you do carry everyone's things to the cargo area. "

Ravok clinched his fist.

" No! Their arms work just fine or better yet have one of your people do it. We are here because apparently no one here is up to the task of competing in the tournament."

Kora stepped toward him. " Lathuel !"

Ravok pointed towards the transporter operator. " You, carry our stuff and while you're at it, have my bat'leth sharpened. "

The klingon man stepped from behind the console. " I will do no such thing...Romulan" he declared with a snarl.

Kora looked at the exchange shocked at her son's behavior.

Ravok nodded his head. " Defiance I see. Very well " He looked at Kora.

" Send us back to the Exeter. If you can not respect the champion of this house then I have no need to be here."

Kora raised her hand and looked at the transporter operator. " Do ...do as he says."

Ravok handed his Bat'leth over to the klingon man. " I will have my Cha'dich inspect it when we arrive. For your sake I hope it's perfect." He said, and walked out of the transporter room.

Leaving the others standing there.

Kora turned to Ire and Keira.

" Make yourselves at home. "

(replies Keira and Ire)

(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 0659)

Standing in the rainforest, Erin wiped her brow. Despite the weather control system that was employed on Risa, the rainforest was still hot. Hefting her bag on her shoulder, she turned to look at her team.

“Okay, gentlemen and ladies. This is our spot. We have a 20 ft area to look through. From my research yesterday, this rainforest was one of the earliest spots for civilisation on Risa. Not much excavation has been done here so we are one of the first teams in here.”

(Reply More, Michaels and Weatherby)

“Let's get set up. Ensign More, you got the equipment we need?”

(Reply More)

“Excellent. Ensign Michaels, Any geological issues we are going to run into?”

(Reply Michaels)

“Ensign Weatherby, you up for some digging?”

(Reply Weatherby)

“Okay, plan of action, let’s start gridding out our area. We do this right, systematically and record everything. Every little thing we come across. Now, we need to be careful because i have heard that there is a system of tunnels that run through this area. Make sure that you are careful where you dig. The last thing we need is anyone falling down a hole that we can’t get you out of.”

(Reply More, Michaels and Weatherby)

Picking up a shovel, Erin dropped her bag and smiled, “I’m in it with you guys. Down and dirty. Let’s get to it.”

(Reply More, Michaels and Weatherby)

(Risa - Ma’Guf’an rainforest - SO Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 07:00)

Stan looked around him. The area was a little soggy for his taste. True being from Scotland he liked a bit of mist in the highlands. This though was just a little bit past the Scotsman’s taste. But as the planets weather systems were under computer control. This must be part of the Risan experience.

“Okay, gentlemen and ladies. This is our spot. We have a 20 ft area to look through. From my research yesterday, this rainforest was one of the earliest spots for civilisation on Risa. Not much excavation has been done here so we are one of the first teams in here.”

“ Aye ma’am” Stan replied

(Reply , Michaels and Weatherby)

“Let’s get set up. Ensign More, you got the equipment we need?”

“ Yes indeed. I even brought a mobile coffee machine and some food. After all archaeology is thirsty and hungry work.” He said excitedly

“Excellent. Ensign Michaels, Any geological issues we are going to run into?”

(Reply Michaels)

“Ensign Weatherby, you up for some digging?”

(Reply Weatherby)

“Okay, plan of action, let’s start gridding out our area. We do this right, systematically and record everything. Every little thing we come across. Now, we need to be careful because i have heard that there is a system of tunnels that run through this area. Make sure that you are careful where you dig. The last thing we need is anyone falling down a hole that we can’t get you out of.”

“ Perhaps we could use a tricorder to warn us of any holes?” Stan asked

(Reply Michaels and Weatherby)

Picking up a shovel, Erin dropped her bag and smiled, "I'm in it with you guys. Down and dirty. Let's get to it."

"Aye. This takes me back to when I was a wee bairn." Stan said

(Reply Erin, Michaels and Weatherby)

(IKS Vur'tak – Transporter Room – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0705)

Kora walked through the doors of the transporter room and greeted the apple of her eye. " My little princess " She declared as he grabbed Rayna from Ravok's arms.

" Grandma! " Rayna yelled cheerfully as she wrapped her arms around Kora's neck. Kora turned and looked at Ire.

" Lieutenant Williams, you just keep getting better looking don't you ? "

(Reply Ire)

Kora laughed. " Don't be modest...it makes you even more attractive." She grinned.

Keira saw Ravok shake his head out of the corner of her eye.

" And Commander Merek" She smiled and approached her, placing her free arm around Keira and squeezed her.

" I hope my son is treating you well ?"

“Of course he is.” The Romulan woman replied with a smile.

" How well? " Kora laughed loudly and smacked Keira on the shoulder.

“wejSaD.” {Klingon: Three times.} Keira said with a straight face.

" Mother!" He said loudly. " Why don't you show show us around your ship?"

" Just like your father. Fine," she motioned toward Ire "You can make your way to the bridge if you want , feel free to look at our flight systems."

(Reply Ire)

" Keira, I am dying to show you our new warp core. The efficiency rating is up by 22 percent."

“Looking forward to it. Knowing it was your ship was the only reason I didn’t grab a shuttle from the Exeter. Your ship wouldn’t fall out of the sky.” Keira said with a grin.

Kora looked at Ravok. " Lathuel. make yourself at home but before you do carry everyone's things to the cargo area. "

Ravok clinched his fist.

" No! Their arms work just fine or better yet have one of your people do it. We are here because apparently no one here is up to the task of competing in the tournament."

Kora stepped toward him. " Lathuel !"

Keira watched the tense exchange between Ravok and the woman who raised him. She stared in disbelief.

~That's not like him. Is he just playing the "Klingon" part?~

The transporter operator, with such disdain, referred to him by his race, not that he was the adopted son and next in line to lead the house.

As suddenly as it started, it ended.

Kora raised her hand and looked at the transporter operator. " Do ...do as he says."

Ravok handed his Bat'leth over to the klingon man. " I will have my Cha'dich inspect it when we arrive. For your sake I hope it's perfect." He said, and walked out of the transporter room.

Leaving the others standing there.

Kora turned to Ire and Keira. " Make yourselves at home. "

(Reply Ire)

Keira turned to the transporter operator. “‘ach qabDaj vISovbe’,” {K: I can handle my own luggage.} she said with a Mo’Kai dialect. She had her Bat’leth, the one that Kora had presented her, still in it’s case, and very little else. “If you’ll excuse us?” She waited until both Ire and the transporter operator left.

She knew all too well some things were handled best in private.

“What the Grethor was that all about?” Keira asked Kora.

(Repy Kora, Ire)

(IKS Vur'tak- CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams - 0705)

" Lieutenant Williams, you just keep getting better looking don't you ? "

Ire looked over at Kora unsure how to answer.

“Um thank you.”

" Don't be modest...it makes you even more attractive."

He looked at her for a moment before replying.

“Okay.”

He was saved by Kora moving over to talk to Merek. He moved to one side looking around the transporter room thinking about how different the Klingons design cues compared to the federation. He heard Ravok talking about a tour of the ship as he returned to the conversation.

" Just like your father. Fine"

He saw Kora look over at him.

" You can make your way to the bridge if you want , feel free to look at our flight systems. "

He smiled.

“That would be great thank you.”

" Keira, I am dying to show you our new warp core. The efficiency rating is up by 22 percent.

(reply Keira)

Kora looked at Ravok. " Lathuel. make yourself at home but before you do carry everyone's things to the cargo area. "

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The klingon man stepped from behind the console. " I will do no such thing...Romulan" he declared with a snarl.

Ire watched Ravok speak to the transporter operator

" Defiance I see. Very well"

Ravok looked at Kora.

" Send us back to the Exeter. If you can not respect the champion of this house then I have no need to be here."

He saw Kora raised her hand and looked at the transporter operator.

" Do ...do as he says."

He watched as Ravok handed his Bat'leth over to the klingon man.

"I will have my Cha'dich inspect it when we arrive. For your sake I hope it's perfect."

He looked as Ravok walked out of the transporter room as Kora turned to him and Keira.

" Make yourselves at home. "

Ire nodded. "Thank you." He picked up his bag and walk out of the transporter room.

(Reply any)

(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - ACSci Ensign Senior Grade Adala Michaels - 0705)

Adala looked around her at their area and frowned slightly. "Be careful where you walk, you never know what surprises will be hidden in the underbrush."

She started walking around the perimeter, using the handle of the walking stick she had with her to probe the ground. There was something 'off' but she wasn't sure what it was.

"Ensign Michaels, Any geological issues we are going to run into?"

She turned back to Erin as the question was posed. The question she'd been mulling over but hadn't voiced.

"Be careful where you walk."

She didn't elaborate until after Erin's next comment.

"We need to be careful because I have heard that there is a system of tunnels that run through this area."

Adala replied "I was just thinking the same thing Erin. I don't want to have to rescue any of us from underground." she spoke as she picked up a shovel.

(Reply Jackie, More and Weatherby)

(IKS Vur'tak – Transporter Room – SPC- Captain Kora of the house of Kal'Beroth – 0707)

“What the Grethor was that all about?” Keira asked Kora.

Kora bounced Rayna on her hip and sighed. " Keira my dear, I learned a long time ago that all men compete for dominance in some way for another, regardless of their race, but they all fail to realize that it's us who hold the power. The sooner they understand this the better off we will all be."

(reply Keira)

" Let's walk so I can show my two favorite ladies the warp core." Kora said.

Rayna smiled. " Keira has a warp core"

" I know she does princess and knowing her it's probably the best in the fleet, just not this fleet . "Kora joked.

(reply Keira)

" So how is being the second officer of your own ship?" Kora asked as they made their way to main engineering.

(replies Keira)

(IKS Vur'tak – Transporter Room – SPC- Captain Kora of the house of Kal'Beroth – 0707)

“What the Grethor was that all about?” Keira asked Kora.

Kora bounced Rayna on her hip and sighed. " Keira my dear, I learned a long time ago that all men compete for dominance in some way for another, regardless of their race, but they all fail to realize that it's us who hold the power. The sooner they understand this the better off we will all be."

(reply Keira)

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" I know she does princess and knowing her it's probably the best in the fleet, just not this fleet . "Kora joked.

(reply Keira)

" So how is being the second officer of your own ship?" Kora asked as they made their way to main engineering.

(replies Keira)

(IKS Vur'tak – Transporter Room – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0710)

Kora bounced Rayna on her hip and sighed. " Keira my dear, I learned a long time ago that all men compete for dominance in some way for another, regardless of their race, but they all fail to realize that it's us who hold the power. The sooner they understand this the better off we will all be."

"I'll keep an eye on him," she said.

" Let's walk so I can show my two favorite ladies the warp core." Kora said.

Rayna smiled. " Keira has a warp core"

" I know she does princess and knowing her it's probably the best in the fleet, just not this fleet . "Kora joked.

"I was wondering when we'd get to that." Keira said.

" So how is being the second officer of your own ship?" Kora asked as they made their way to main engineering.

"Oh, you know... Captains and First Officers doing what they do, sometimes they leave me in charge!" Keira said with a chuckle as they headed toward Engineering.

(reply none or Kora if you want to continue)

(IKS Vur'tak- Bridge - 'Exeter' CTO/3O Lieutenant commander Ravok- 0711)

Ravok walked onto the bridge ,looking around he spotted the tactical station and made his way over to it. His path was immediately blocked by a rather large klingon male. " What are you doing?" The klingon officer snapped.

Ravok leaned to his right and saw the tactical display readout.

" I'm the chief tactical officer of the Exeter. I'm just checking out your tactical station."

" You have no business looking at that." The klingon officer growled.

Ravok laughed. " I believe I do. For multiple reasons. One, you are in federation space ,two this is my mother's ship that she acquired by not only her influence and status but my financial backing as well and three...You performed a level 2 tactical analysis of the Exeter while its shields were down. Which is a violation of about six or seven laws honored by both the empire and the Federation. The Federation I serve with all my heart. So be a good law abiding citizen of the klingon empire and visitor within federation borders and delete the information acquired from your scans."

The klingon stepped up chest to chest with Ravok . " And if I don't ? "

" Well protocol dictates that I would make an inquiry of the captain who is my mother , incase your mind wandered off to memories of you banging rocks together as a child and during that time of self reflection you forgot that fact."

The klingon man snarled and Ravok held his hand up. " I'm not done. There's more" Ravok declared.

" Once an inquiry is made and I discover who ordered that scan, which I stated earlier was illegal , I could have charges levied against that person or I could just break your hand right now."

Laughter erupted on the bridge around him.

Ravok looked around at the klingon faces laughing at him.

" That's funny Romulan. Now get off the bridge." The klingon officer said laughing.

Ravok joined him in laughter, laughing maniacally and quickly swept the leg out from under the klingon officer , while simultaneously grabbing his right arm and twisting it behind his back slamming his face into the console. The sound of his face smacking the tactile station echoed around the bridge.

" ERASE THE RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS NOW!!" Ravok screamed.

The officer grunted in pain as he could feel Ravoks gripping tightening on his hand as his leg was pressing into his spine.

" FINE !" the klingon officer yelled as he erased the results of the scan with his free hand.

Ravok released him right away and looked around the bridge at the others and then back at the Klingon man who was still knelt down in shame.

" That ship is my home, don't you ever forget that and don't make the mistake of doing a tactical analysis of another starfleet vessel in the manner you did. " Ravok said sternly.

A klingon woman approached him with a smile.

" Does that aggression continue in...private quarters?" She asked, rubbing her hand on the chest plate of his armor.

Ravok looked at her. " On the beaches of Risa it does, ask my Cha'dich. " He quipped with a smirk and walked off the bridge.

(reply none or Ire if he is making his way on the bridge)

(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - CSO Lt Erin Cortez - 0801)

After an hour of slow digging, Erin was becoming tired and a little frustrated. As she stood and stretched her back, she looked around at the area they had already cleared. Her team had already found a few bits of broken pottery and some evidence of animal bones but nothing to write home about.

Putting down her shovel, Erin walked over to Ensign More first. Tapping him on his shoulder, she smiled and said,

“How’s it going?”

(Reply More)

Erin nodded, “We have plenty of time. I don’t think the contest finishes for a good few hours yet.”

(Reply More)

"How are you, Ensign More? How are you finding being in this department? Anything I can do to help you?"

(Reply More)

“Well keep at it. We’ll find something soon.”

(Reply More)

Looking over at Ensign Michaels, Erin winked and wandered over to her. “How are you doing here, Ensign?”

(Reply Michaels)

Kneeling next to her, Erin whispered, “So, yesterday, when i was gathering supplies for this. I was in the main shopping area and i could have sworn i saw you talking to a gorgeous young man.”

(Reply Michaels)

“I get it, I’m the boss and what not. I am glad to have you back with us though. I heard a few things about what you were up to back on earth.”

(Reply Michaels)

“Starfleet science is quite a close knit community. Nothing escapes us.” She replied with a smile. “I’m joking. I kept an eye out for any news on earth. My parents are still there so anything from earth i read. I saw your name a couple of times. All good things so you must have made quite the impression.”

(Reply Michaels)

“We should get together for a drink soon.”

(Reply Michaels)

Erin stood, nodded and, as she turned away, she felt the ground underneath her feet move slightly. Her eyes widened slightly as she stepped back, almost falling over Ensign Michaels in the process. As she turned to apologise, the small area where she had been stood began to crumble. Taking a breath and holding onto Ensign Michaels shoulder to steady herself, she shouted, “Okay, everyone back.”

(Reply All Science)

Watching her team step back from the site, Erin took out her Tricorder and began a scan.

“Ensign Michaels, A geological viewpoint please.” Erin stated, holding out the tricorder towards her.

(Reply More, Michaels and Weatherby)

(Risa - Ma’Guf’an rainforest - SO Ens.(SG) Stan More - 08:02)

Stan had forgotten how boring an archaeological dig could be. Sometimes if you were lucky. You could find items almost on the surface. Usually old coins or bits of pottery. But just like today. Whatever treasures and secrets of long ago. Were hidden deep in the soil. So it was a matter of carefully digging. Then examining every piece of soil you removed.

“How’s it going?”

“ Slow ma’am,” Stan said

Erin nodded, “We have plenty of time. I don’t think the contest finishes for a good few hours yet.”

“ Aye. Although judging by the lack of joyful noise from the others. I dinna think they have been successful either ma’am.” Stan replied

"How are you, Ensign More? How are you finding being in this department? Anything I can do to help you?"

“ Och. I am having a great time lassie. This is just where I belong! Tis nay anything I need ma’am. I just wish Risa’s secrets from the past. Would reveal them selves.” He said

“Well keep at it. We’ll find something soon.”

“ Och aye that I will ma’am” he said.

Just then the ground began to shake. Erin called out for them all to get back. As soil began to fall away exposing. What looked like a huge hole. But something about it's shape made Stan wonder.

“ There is something odd about the shape of the hole. It looks man made what do ye guys think?” Stan asked

(Reply All Science)

Erin watched her team step back from the site, she took out her Tricorder and began a scan.

“Ensign Michaels, A geological viewpoint please.” Erin stated, holding out the tricorder towards her.

More earth began to run away from the hole. Stan could make out an archway. With what looked like ancient symbols along the sides.

“ Porridge for breakfast.....” Stan said in awe.

(Reply Erin , Michaels and Weatherby)

(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - ACSI Ensign Senior Grade Adala Michaels – 0803)

Adala lowered her shouldered pack and looked around the area that had been chosen for them. Her eyes were taking in everything. A shudder ran through her as her eyes took in the trees, the underbrush and the dirt beneath her feet. Something was off, but she couldn't place it. But for now she'd keep her thoughts to herself, she could be wrong

After working a while Erin stepped to her side and spoke.

“How are you doing here, Ensign?”

“I'm doing well Lieutenant. “ she said as she leaned back from her work and wiped an arm across her face clearing the sweat away.

“So, yesterday, when i was gathering supplies for this. I was in the main shopping area and I could have sworn I saw you talking to a gorgeous young man.”

“That's Ens. Blackwell, we've ... been spending a lot of time together, especially lately.” A smile crossed her features as she spoke, her mind running over all the things they'd done together since their arrival on Risa.

“I get it, I'm the boss and what not. I am glad to have you back with us though. I heard a few things about what you were up to back on earth.”

She looked up as Erin spoke again. “What'd you hear?” she was curious what rumors had surfaced.

“Starfleet science is quite a close knit community. Nothing escapes us.” She replied with a smile. “I'm joking. I kept an eye out for any news on earth. My parents are still there so anything from earth I read. I saw your name a couple of times. All good things so you must have made quite the impression.”

Adala shook her head. “Probably all scuttlebutt, you can't believe the rumors.” Anything real important she knew was already known. No reason to toot her own horn and continue any rumors.

“We should get together for a drink soon.”

Adala stretched her back and nodded. “I'd like that.”

With that she turned and prepared to get back to work.

{TBC in the next post}

(Reply none)

(Risa - Ma'Guf'an rainforest - ASci Ensign Senior Grade Adala Michaels – 0804)

As Adala turned to go back to work the ground shifted beneath them and a hole appeared beneath where Erin had been just seconds earlier.

“Ensign Michaels, A geological viewpoint please.”

Adala took the proffered tricorder and looked over the scans. She was about to reply when Stan spoke up.

“ There is something odd about the shape of the hole. It looks man made what do ye guys think?”

She moved behind Stan so she could see what he was seeing and glanced down at the tricorder and back to what was before her not speaking right away. To be honest she wasn't sure what she was seeing, either on the tricorder or before her.

"I don't know..." she said, speaking slowly as she continued to look from the tricorder to the archway. Her eyes roaming the area wondering if more of the ground would give way beneath them.

(Reply Erin, More and Weatherby)

(USS Exeter - Sickbay, Physical therapy room - CO, Captain Trip Williams and Physio, Lt. JG Cerise Blake - 0900)

As Trip limped into the PT room he smiled. "Sorry for taking you away from your time off, but I reaggravated an old injury."

"Hey Trip." Cerise smiled pleasantly, a look of gentle concern on her face. "What happened? What did you do?"

"Not many people know this, but my knee got busted pretty bad in the second battle of Wolf 359. Trying to outrun a torpedo, hit my knee on the side of the cockpit, tore my ACL and my MCL and cracked my patella. I rushed rehab, because I'm an idiot, and it acts up from time to time. But healed enough to where I can pass a physical."

She shook her head, and sighed, it was often the way with some patients, rush back, and then wonder why they're left with a bum knee, or shoulder or whatever. "So you rushed treatment, and now...How?"

"Oh yeah, how did I aggravate it. Well last night I was chasing a toddler, who was chasing a dog, who was chasing me, and then I tripped over said dog, over a couch, and through a table. Then I shrugged it off, and slept on it wrong."

"It's never anything normal here is it?" She patted the treatment table. "Up you come, least you had the sense to wear shorts, the amount of people I get come in wearing yoga pants or track pants and then wonder why I shake my head and ask them to strip."

“Well, ain't my first rodeo. Played baseball in high school remember? Catcher. All those games of squatting for hours on end. It's surprising I still have knees to begin with. The trainers and I were pretty close.”

“Lie back, knees slightly raised.” She compared the two knees, one was obviously slightly swollen. Touching each one, comparing the muscle, she nodded gently. “You've sprained the MCL again, I need to do a few checks of the ACL.”

“Well shit. Ash told me this was gonna happen.”

Cerise laughed warmly. “She always was a smart girl.”

“She said, ‘Trip honey, you're playing too rough, you're gonna hurt yourself. You may be 23, but you have a history of sports injuries. Don't be stupid.’ and well I was stupid.”

“And she said it to you, not to the dog or toddler, almost like she knew which one of the three musketeers was going to get hurt.” She winked and smiled, happy in her little environment, content in a way that she had no idea how to express should she be asked. “Keep this up and you are headed for knee surgery. Raise your knees, pull the affected leg as close to you as you can, but keep your foot on the bed.”

Trip did as he was asked. “Ahhh, @\$@. That hurt.” he said as he was able to get it all the way to his chest but with considerable pain.

“Easy there, slowly...foot on the bed, now, I want you to hook your good leg around, and push the bad leg against it...GENTLY...tell me exactly where it hurts.”

Trip did as he was asked and pointed to the inside of his knee. “Errgh, right about there.”

“Oh Trip...You've done it good and proper this time. I think you twisted your knee, LCL sprain too.”

“Great, just like me to screw up my knee playing with a little kid. Just another reminder that I have no earthly idea what the hell I'm doing.”

She regarded him, a few thoughts running through her mind. “Lie back. This may hurt, but you’ll thank me.” Moving over to a nearby cupboard, she reran Trips last sentence over in her mind. “Tell me to mind my own business, but do I detect a hint of worry?” She returned with a couple of small terminals. “These are designed to send out an electromagnetic pulse, that will assist the healing. It’s a sine Pulse Shortwave diathermy. Nothing to worry about.” She attached the emitters at certain points across Trips knee, then tapped a few settings to begin the cycle.

“Worry me, isn’t that my job?” he said with a laugh.

“Talk to me...” She smiled. “I’m going to massage the muscles around the injured area, quite often they go into spasm and pull it all out.” she rubbed her hands together and started to very gently manipulate the base of the quadriceps

“What I say is confidential. Consider it part of my medical treatment.”

“Of course. How’s that? No pain from the emitters?”

“None.” He said. “You ever feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders, and you have to be all things to all people. And no matter how you try to put your best foot forward, you have to be the guy with the answers, even though you have none. You have to be the rock, the glue, the ligament if you will that holds the damn thing together. And no matter how much you want to reach out and tell others and share your burden, you can’t, because you have to be the one to carry theirs.”

She nodded, moving around to the back and sides of the knee. “I’ve never been in that position, thankfully, but I understand how you feel.” she looked at him, “I’m going to manipulate your knee slightly now, I’ll need to tuck your leg under my arm.” She did so, using her shoulder and opposite arm to gently exercise the joint.

“You know, in high school, would have been every puberty ridden boy’s dream to have you get this close and personal to them.” Trip said with a laugh.

She laughed. “Ass.”

“Other than Ash, I just don’t really have anyone to talk to. Still trying to figure out the counselor situation too. I think we need to bring in a few new staff. I’d like to bring in a civilian contractor to be the counselor for the senior staff. Someone outside the chain of command. I just need someone to talk to.”

“I would say you have a First Officer for such things, but I know that Lynn’s had her own issues last couple of days.” She looked at him and shrugged. “Bumped into her in a bar, got talking.” She shrugged. “She’ll be okay. Just needs to get her head on. Always was highly strung.”

Trip nodded.

“You know what you say in these walls is confidential, I’m always about.” she shrugged. “I may not have the same insights to a problem, but I’m a good listener.”

“Yeah, surprisingly.” He said with a laugh.

“You mentioned having no idea what you’re doing, but you said that right after talking about a toddler.” She looked at him. “Not just about the ship is it?”

“How much did Ailynn tell you?”

“About you? Nothing actually...only herself, that she’d had a time of things, and her head hadn’t been in a great place. That was about all.”

Trip nodded.

“Look, If I’m off base I’ll back off, but are you okay?”

"In less than 24 hours I had two of my most trusted officers have such near total breakdowns in their confidence that one asked to resign and the other I threatened to transfer."

Cerise nodded, "Did you know...that back in the 20th century, people in high stress jobs, like teaching, or law, a significantly high percentage dropped dead in their first year of retirement?"

"Im a bit off from that."

"Bear with me this is going somewhere. This was before they began all kinds of preparatory courses and the like. My point is this, you and the others live in a world that is such high stress that your brain and body are used to a certain level of stress, just like the workers in the twentieth century. So you then uproot your officers from that stress, and tell them that they now can switch off."

Trip just nodded and listened.

"But that isn't how people are wired, especially humans, or human hybrids. Take Ailynn, she's a surgeon, an extremely high stress job, she needs a certain level of stress to function properly. Take that away and her brain starts brooding about things from 10 years ago, about neuroses that on a normal day she doesn't even register having."

"So you're saying that it's the vacation's fault?"

"I'm saying it's a factor. Why? What happened." She shrugged, "that you can tell me"

"She turned down her own captaincy, and lost all confidence in herself in the process. Usually when someone gets picked for such a prestige position, even if they turn it down, they know they that someone thinks they are competent."

"She told me that much, and about the conference." Cerise smiled. "Total Ailynn, she was always like that. She did say she just didn't feel ready, who else was there?"

"Ravok even turned down being First Officer of the Lexington and wanted to resign his #@\$%&\$# commission."

“Ravok has just found out he has a two year old, and is still in quite a new relationship himself. Do you see what I’m saying. Both of them normally cope well, but both have suddenly had extra worries, be it a child or a serious relationship, and have the time to think about stuff.”

“I guess....but its...”

“You mentioned not knowing what you were doing, but at the time we were talking about toddlers. Worries?”

“Honestly, my only worry is not finding an adequate outlet for my stress. Because I have a lot, and Ash is a dear, but I can only place so much on her without crushing her.”

“It’s cute that you worry, I think that you underestimate how broad her shoulders are, but that’s between the two of you.”

“All my life I’ve been groomed for a leadership role, just by being me. That is just my personality. Captain of the Baseball team, leader, dealing with that stress. Coaching little league, captain of the wrestling team. Student government. The fighter wing. I’ve learned how to be a leader, I’ve gravitated to it. I guess, I have that advantage. So when they offered me the Exeter I didn’t even hesitate. And I guess I lost sight of that, didn’t appreciate that not everyone had the education that I did in that regards.”

“Somethings are innate in some people, others are learned,” Cerise agreed.

“But what I never learned is how to cope with this heavy burden when my outlets are taken away. I mean, in high school you get stressed, you drink, or you go to makeout point, ya know. Can’t really do that. And I can’t put this on Lynn, it’s not....well....maybe thats my failing. I don’t share the load.”

“You need to spread the load. Lynn will turn it around, she’s just torn in a lot of directions, once her random thoughts all decide to all pull in the same direction she’ll pull through. She’s a fighter, she always was; and she may actually be glad of the direction. Ravok I don’t know, I haven’t had the privilege of fondling his knees.” she winked gently. “Speaking of which,” she removed the PSW emitters, and gently massaged the ligaments. “You’re going to need a

couple more sessions, also, head on up to sickbay, you need an anti-inflammatory, I'll make a request, but I'm not licensed to dispense."

"Great." He said sitting up. "Any limitations on what I can or can't do?"

"Stop chasing dogs and toddlers?" she giggled.

"Well thankful her father picked her up, and for the record I wasn't chasing the dog, she was chasing me." He said with a laugh.

"Sorry, just take it easy," she passed over a small packet. "I had the computer do this, it's a support bandage tailored to your knee, it'll...well..support and help, but shouldn't limit your function. No kickboxing or excessive kneeling on hard surfaces." she smiled regarding the Captain. "Free advice?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you remember at school, Mr Artemis, the head of Physical Activity? Never stressed, never rushed about, sure he stayed in his office and his minions ran around him. Arguably to a fault, but you take my point."

"Didn't really know Mr. Artemis. Coach Deevers told us not to listen to the PE coach. That we were real athlete and to listen to him." Trip laughed, "But I get your point. That's why we had a Head coach, a pitching coach, a hitting coach, and a fielding coach. One person can't do it all."

"Exactly that." She smiled "Now. You need anything else?"

"No." He said as he stood up.

"Good. Now scram." she winked. "I'm due a ten-o'clock and then I have a date."

"Since when did you start dating again?"

She blushed. “dammit ...” smiling though, “since yesterday...Lieutenant Brightwood took me sailing. Nice chap.”

“Chap? His mannerisms might be rubbing off on you. Well just make sure if you want to make it more regular you fill out a fraternization form.”

She sighed in mock annoyance, and stuck her tongue out at Trip. “honestly...we are way off fraternizing, to get there we’d need to be consorting, and we’re not even past associating yet.” she smiled. “But of course. I will when it’s appropriate.”

“Well, just make sure. Human resources is a pain in the ass, and nobody likes dealing with it, but if the Ire and Greta situation has taught me anything, just need to be aware of what sort of....explosive situations might be out there.”

“I know, and you’re right. It’s really early days. I’ll be careful”

Trip began walking around feeling out his knee, “So basketball is out of the question right?” He said joking.

“Fraid so skip.” she chuckled.

Giving her a hug he smiled, “Thanks Cerise, I mean it.”

(reply none)

(IKS Vur'tak- Bridge - CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams - 0910)

Ire walked onto the bridge of the Vur'tak and nodded to the officer of the watch. He had not spent time on a Negh'Var class star ship before and had made his way to the bridge after he had settled in.

“What do you want human?”

He looked back at the officer of the watch.

“Lady Kora told me to come and look at your flight systems.”

He spoke levelly without apology.

“Did she now?”

Ire took a step forward looking hard at the officer.

“Yes she did. You can let me look or you can go and ask her if you want.”

The officer snorted and indicated the helm station with a dismissive jut of his head. Ire nodded again as he stepped over to the helmswoman. As a Negh'Var class starship the IKS Vur'tak was enormous almost twice the size of the Exeter and heavily armoured. He nodded to himself as he scanned the information displayed on the helmswoman's console. The Exeter had a better manoeuvring which was not surprised as she was a smaller starship but if the Vur'tak got her main disruptor cannons to bear then they would be in trouble. He had heard whispers that the Klingon Defence Force were building a class of starship that would give the Republic a run for its money he gave a mental shudder at what a ship that size would be like. He shook himself. He was not here to speculate on what ifs.

(Reply, any)

(IKS Vur'tak- Training Room 10 - CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams – 1023)

Ire stood in the middle of one of the Vur'tak's many training rooms. The other Klingons had departed when he had arrived which he did not mind as he was happy to be alone. The dark red of the lights casting deep shadows in the corners of the room. he could hear the thump of the ships ventilation system and the swish, swish of the bat'leth as he swung it in circles as it moved from one hand to the other in a hypnotic rhythm.

The door to the training room opened as he heard heavy foot falls entering the room behind him.

“You human.”

Ire did not move and just kept swinging the bat'leth.

“Are you deaf?”

He did not move but heard the foots falls move closer as he just kept swinging the bat'leth.

“You have no right being the Tawi'Yan to the house of Kal'Beroth.”

Ire slowly rotated with the next swing of the bat'leth so that he was facing the person who was talking to him. It was a tall Klingon barely under 6 foot 5 inches in hight looking down at him.

“I was chosen by Ravok the Son of Captain Kora to be his Tawi'Yan for this tournament.”

He smiled.

“But you are human.”

“That’s very perceptive of you.”

He grinned as the Klingon snarled back.

“It’s a tournament for the honour of the house. It should be a Klingon of the house that is the Tawi’Yan and not a puny human.”

“I may only be a puny human but think about why I should be chosen over someone like you?”

His grin got wider.

“You say that I have not honour?”

He stepped forward as Ire used the momentum of the Bat’leth’s swing to turn it into a downward strike. The bat’leth stopped inches from the Klingon’s neck as Ire looked coldly into his eyes.

“I am the Tawi’Yan at this tournament and not you. Go away and think about why think about why I am more worthy than you to carry your house’s bat’leth.”

He could feel the aggression pouring off the Klingon and he knew that if he backed down or made any proactive move the Klingon would have the excuse to attack him. So, he just stood

his ground and grinned at him. The Klingon gave a growl before turning around and walked out as Ire went back to spinning the bat'leth smiling to himself.

“Ow this is going to be fun.”

(Reply, any)

(IKS Vur'tak – Mess Hall – Cha'Dich – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 1043)

While Rayna was napping Keira decided it was a good time to get some nourishment, there weren't replicators in every room like the Exeter, so she found her way to the dining facility. She could hear the laughter and carrying on from outside the doors. That laughter stopped after the Romulan woman entered the space. Keira looked over the room. A dozen or so Officers and Warriors all looking at her. As she made her way to the back and the serving line the entire room watched her every move.

Keira grabbed a goblet and a bowl. She approached the serving window, and looked over the offerings. Some things she recognized having dined with the Klingons on Carraya IV, from their approximations of Klingon food, others she recognized by reputation.

“Excuse me, can I get some service?” The cook seemed to ignore her. He had a patch over one eye. His remaining eye leered at Keira, seemingly sizing her up. Then he looked away.

~So, that's how you want to play it?~“Qu'vatlh!” {K: Food, now!} Keira yelled.

The culinary specialist seemed surprised. “tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh'a'?” {K: You speak Klingon?}

“jISovbe” {K: I know some.} Keira said.

“I know some Federation languages.” The cook spoke. “Your pronunciation of Klingon is old. How is it that a Romulan woman is speaking Klingon the way a dead house did?”

“ ghIjlu'meH DuHbe' “ {K: It’s complicated} Keira said with a grin. “Maybe I’ll tell you some time, when you tell me what happened to your eye.”

“That is a story for another time. I like you Romulan. What can I give you?” He asked with a chuckle.

“What do you have?” She started, “Wait, don’t tell me...”

“Heart of Targ?” Keira asked, she was pretty certain.

The chef nodded.

“Bregit lung?” She deduced based on it’s texture.

“Both, correct.” The Chef exclaimed with a toothy grin.

“The last one... gagh?” Keira guessed based on the fact it was still moving worms.

“Close, it’s racht,” he corrected her. “Gagh is a thinner creature. Pretty good, for a Romulan.”

“I won’t get it wrong a second time,” Keira promised, and handed him the bowl. “I’ll take some heart of targ and some racht.”

He nodded and accepted the bowl, he threw in one mass of cardiac tissue, picking it up with his bare hands, then he did the same scooping a mass of writhing worms with the same hand and threw the portion in the bowl right over the targ organ and handed it back. Grinning the toothy smile again. “You won’t be disappointed in the Racht, it just came in this morning.”

“I’m, sure. Thank you.” She took the metal goblet and dunked it in the large bowl at the end of the serving line filling the cup full of a dark red liquid. She looked around finding an empty bench and table with her back against the wall and sat down.

Keira gave a good long stare to the mass of food in her bowl. She took a drink from her cup which she found out was blood wine. ~Here goes, down the hatch.~

She picked up the half heart serving and not having any utensils, bit at it with the corner of her mouth, ripping off a chunk. It was chewy, but it did break apart. At least it wasn’t the consistency of gristle, then she might never had finished it. Luckily the room had gone back to the normal activities of laughter, conversations and eating. Keira was able to observe how the worms were eaten. Refusing to eat it at this juncture, like she did when she was younger could prove to be problematic at this point. From her vantage point, they didn’t seem to be chewing.

~Maybe that’s the secret?~

Mirroring what she could see the others doing while eating their racht she grabbed a few near their middle, and she just went for it. She had to slurp it like a wide noodle, but once she got the creature actually in her mouth the fight wasn’t yet over. ~It’s trying to escape!~ She had to swallow hard twice before she got the mass of writhing things down. She grabbed the blood wine to wash the taste out of her mouth.

The whole room burst out into applause. Keira looked confused. There were some words said in Klingon that Keira had never heard before.

A Klingon female came up next to Keira and spoke. "They are congratulating you for doing something a child can do. They are still impressed because you are a Romulan."

"I'm full of surprises." Keira said.

"Indeed. That blade." The Klingon said gesturing toward the gilded cord on Keira's shoulder. "You are the champion's Cha'DIch?"

"Correct." Keira answered.

"Good. He was on the bridge earlier and said I should speak to you." She said.

"Really? What for?" Keira asked taking another bite of targ heart.

"He said that you were the person to speak to about arranging for him to come back to my quarters. I want to see if that fire he displayed on the bridge matches in my bed." She said.

~She's trying to make a move on Ravok. I can't appear weak.~

Keira swallowed so that she could speak. "That's not going to happen." She said firmly.

“Why is that?” The Klingon’s voice started getting louder. “Am I not good enough?”

“Probably, but that’s not the reason why.” Keira verbally shot back.

“What IS the reason?” She yelled defiantly.

“HIQaH, jIH!” {K: He has a mate, me} Keira yelled back in return. They were both standing now and Keira picked up the goblet and threw the blood wine in the female Klingon’s face.

“Romulan petaQ! {K: Garbage, useless}” the Klingon yelled. The whole room fell silent.

“Qa'Hom!” {K: small animal, esp. something harmless trying to look impressive.}

A circle had now gathered around the pair of females. The small crowd began chanting:
“VAY! VAY! VAY!” {K: Fight!}

(Reply any)

(IKS Vur'tak – Mess Hall – Cha'DIch – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 1050)

The Klingon woman growled as she went to wipe the blood wine off of her face.

Keira lunged in the moment of distraction grabbing fists full of her opponent's hair and yanked her head down and drove her knee up into the Klingon's chin. The Romulan's knee connected with a resounding crunch.

“RRRRRAAGH!” Yelled the Klingon as she executed a Mok'bara palm strike to the Romulan's midsection, pushing her up and away. The crowd parted, moving with the fight. Keira landed a meter away in a crouch, opening her fist several tufts of black hair were released from her grip.

“SaQa'!” {K: I'll kill you!} She mumble-howled through her broken jaw as pink blood cascaded over her lips.

“Tera'ngan.” {K: You can try.} Merek replied solemnly.

The raging Klingon charged straight at her smaller opponent. Merek waited for the right instant and leaped over her attacker, before clearing her head Keira grabbed on to the Klingon's shoulder armor plate using that as a pivot point she guided her own momentum ending up directly behind her. The would be suitor scrambled on her feet to try and slow her momentum to turn around, but it was too late. Keira grabbed both shoulder plates near the woman's head, yanked back and jumped up, wrapped her legs around the Klingon's midsection, dug her boot heels into the crease between her hip and thigh securing her self. The Klingon woman flailed her arms in an attempt to dislodge Keira, but she couldn't reach. Again Keira grabbed a fist full of hair with one hand and pulled back hard.

The Klingon howled in pain as Keira's other arm shot under her chin and wrapped around her neck and locked in with the other arm. The Romulan woman then cinched down the hold and began cutting off the blood supply to the Klingon's brain.

The Klingon swung wildly about trying to get the Romulan off her back, but Keira was dug in and didn't move.

Desperate now, the Klingon woman backed up into the nearby wall throwing her weight into it, and smashing Keira against the bulkhead. It knocked the wind out of Keira, yet she persisted and kept the hold.

A second attempt by the Klingon to unseat Merek and her hold, ready this time Keira let the blow force her exhalation absorbing the hit. She persisted and kept the choke hold.

A third attempt by the Klingon only this time she was barely able to stand. Keira could feel the Klingon's powerful heart muscle trying to force blood up into the brain. Instead of being slammed against the bulkhead it became more of a lean and the Klingon woman slid down to the ground. She went limp. No resistance.

Only then did Keira release the hold and take a breath. She completely released the Klingon letting her slump to the ground. Keira stood up.

There was hushed muffled conversation among the gathered crowd. The Klingon chef just laughed heartily. The crowd then raised their metal cups, "Q'apla!"

"Should we call medical?" Keira asked.

"HA HA HA!" The one eyed Klingon said, "No, let her lay there wallowing in it. They'll respect you know."

"That's a comfort," she mused, "they came for dinner and got a free show."

"Indeed." He answered. "It was no Klingon Opera, but a good show none the less."

“I came for lunch and got a warm up,” Keira said. “This will happen at the tournament too, huh?”

“Does a Ferengi love latinum?” He responded sagely.

“Fair enough,” she said, “thanks for your help.”

The chef simply nodded and resumed his duties. Keira left the mess hall.

(Reply none)

(Risa- Captain's Private bungalow - CO, Captain Trip Willams and FO, Commander Ailynn Bracken - 11:00)

Trip sat in the hot tub of his private bungalow allowing the bubbles and the jet action to add some relief to his knee. Sure it was healed, but the hot tub was a relaxing way to enhance the rehab. It was either that or an ice bath, and he was not in the mood for an ice bath. Ash was out doing some shopping so it was just him and the dog when he heard the door creek open.

“I’m out back,” he yelled.” He wasn’t worried about being robbed. He could feel the visitor. It was Ailynn.

After slipping off her beach shoes and rubbed off the sand from her feet, Ailynn walked across the room and toward the back of the bungalow where Trip’s voice had come from.

She’d woken up early, and after sharing breakfast with Caity, who had told her in no uncertain terms that she was being silly to say the least, Ailynn had begun the slow climb out of her well of self-pity.

"You mind me bothering you? She asked. "I can come back later."

"Not at all. Feel free to jump in or pull up a chair. I sprained my knee. Just doing some rehab."

She nodded, and pulled off her shorts and t shirt, glad that she'd chosen to go with a Conservative bikini underneath. She then stepped into the hot water, lowering herself in.

"Listen if you got time, I kinda wanted to talk about last night."

"Yeah...me to. Of course I have time" She stretched her back, working out a couple of knots that had formed. "Knee again huh? I told you you'd rushed your rehab."

"I tripped over Layla then over a couch, then through a table."

"That won't have helped." She said pulling her hair back out of her face.

"I was chasing a toddler."

"Babysitting." She smiled. "I remember Ash saying you were going to."

"You wanted to talk too?"

Ailynn sighed, unsure where to start. "Been a bit of an arse haven't I." She said openly.

"Not really. You've just been you. With all the bad and all the good."

"I'd got to the point where my head was tearing me in opposite directions. Opening up emotionally to Caity affected me more than I gave allowance for. I then started second guessing every action."

"Quicksand."

"I'm not with." She replied, confused.

"Sports phenomenon. Things aren't going well so you try too hard and make a mistake. So you get frustrated and over compensate. So you try to hard, and you struggle and fight it. But nothing seems to work. Until you're in over your head. Like Quicksand."

"Yeah. That sounds familiar." She sighed. "I put in a request for counselling. There's things that I thought I'd got over."

"Good." Trip said closing his eyes.

"I still feel bad, it's not something I can get over instantly, unless I happen to wake up tomorrow morning as a completely different me." She half-smiled.

"Then don't get over it. Use it. Keep it as a reminder that you still have room to go."

"You're right." She smiled, "This time I've got someone to really open up to, someone who gets it. Not that I didn't last time but this is different."

"I've failed you myself."

Ailynn looked puzzled, "How so?"

"I should have been more...well shared more with you. More of the load. Supported you more professionally."

Ailynn leanback in the hot tub, the water easing her shoulder muscles. "I think its perhaps fair to say that we both are to blame? I didn't share concerns that I should have with you, and you don't always delegate enough."

“It’s not just that. I think sometimes I don’t share, because I don't feel comfortable. Like it’s my weight, my burden, my cross to bear. And frankly, I’m a stubborn asshole who thinks he can do it on his own. Which honestly, if I keep going that way, will take me to my grave.”

"I understand that. Back when I was working more as a surgeon, I'd worry more about the responsibility of the procedure. It was my job, as lead surgeon to bear all the responsibility of every aspect of the patient's care. Letting go of it is hard, I know."

“Like, shit, when Ravok almost resigned his commission, because he was freaking out about whether he was ready or not. Well, #@#@ I should have told you about it instantly, talked it out. Not spend the whole time wondering if he’s going to freak out again. Then last night, it’s like, who can I tell if you yourself are struggling.”

She nodded. Letting Trip air everything that he had to say.

“And then it hit me, just sort of talking about it to Cerise. One of my biggest failings is I don’t think I tell you enough how great a job you’re doing.”

"Been confiding in CeCe? That's a sentence I didn't ever expect to hear. But me too. Saw her late last night. Went out for a beer."

"She's grown. We all have I hope."

She nodded, "I appreciate the confidence." Smiling she carried on. "You shouldn't need to bolster the confidence of a 27 year old Commander...badass...chick." She laughed.

"I shouldn't. You're right." Trip said with a smile.

"But it's always good to hear confirmation." She finished, smiling.

"You contact the Admiralty?"

"I did yeah. They understood, I think on some level that they were expecting it, I mean it took 3 days for me to decide right?"

"Did they say who their second choice was?"

"They didn't say, only that the alternative was in the area and would be contacted today."

"I did you a disservice."

"In what manner?" Ailynn asked.

"I should never have told you I didn't want you to take it. I should have challenged you and encouraged you to take it. Shown more confidence."

"Trip." She sighed. "You can't have this one every way round. You telling me you didn't want me to take it is the highest compliment, and has no factor in me turning it down." She smiled. "There's a lot of factors, but it's just not me at the moment. I'm happy and content in what I do, and I have a lot to learn before I take a starship Captaincy, if I want one."

"It'd be a shame if ever you did."

"I'd be sorry to, but that won't hold me back either." She smiled.

"It's not just you. Ravok almost resigned yesterday because of uncertainty about his abilities. Then there's you. I almost wonder if I'm not doing the best I can for your personal and professional development."

She nodded. "I understand. Maybe you do, maybe not, but I, we, need to help ourselves too. Maybe I've rested on my laurels. If Ravok is feeling that, then that one is on me as much as you, arguably more so as I'm his superior."

"You can't blame yourself for that."

"No no, I'm not, but it's something I need to focus on. It's easy to forget that FO is a multi directional position. Top down, sure, but more importantly, bottom up."

"I also need to do a better job letting you in. Not keeping things from you to spare your feelings."

"Think that perhaps we both need to share more." She said.

"If I can't share the load with you, then what's the point. "

"Absolutely. We never used to be this closed off from each other. I get that we aren't kids anymore, but you're right. You're trying to shoulder it all, and you can't, no-one can."

"Yeah."

"We need to support and trust each other. I think that we've let that slip a bit." She half sighed, half smiled.

"Part of the job. You'll always be my friend, but certain things have to be separated. I guess I need to do a better job of learning to talk to you as your captain and your friend."

"I know, and I don't disagree, I wonder if we've over compensated, that's all I'm meaning. You're shouldering too much, and I've shut you out of my worries."

"Probably." He smiled, "I'd give you a hug but not sure if its appropriate." He laughed.

She laughed. "Yep. Way too much skin on show for a hug."

"Not sure what the rules are on half naked hot tUb hugs are Between captain And First Officer."

Ailynn laughed openly. "I imagine they're pretty stringent."

"At least we have the safety net that I'm not your type." Trip laughed.

Smiling amiably, she nodded. "Yep. Never going to happen"

"Plus, technically I'm your uncle."

"Also true. Its a good job that Auntie Ashlyn trusts me with her man." She giggled

Trip tried to stand up, winced then sat back down. "Think I need a bit longer to get some of the soreness out."

"Take it easy. Knees are not to be messed about with." Ailynn said.

"But feel free to go and do what you need to do."

Nodding, Ailynn stood up, and grabbing a towel, stood up, wrapping it around her. "I'm going to try to catch up with Gabe. Caity's on shift."

"If you can find him. Last I heard he and Ronnie were at the casino until 400 hours. Not That I'm keeping tabs on them. Just heard Through The grapevine."

"Okay. In that case, I'll head back, and read a bit. Await my lady's return"

"You could just stay here. Hangout. If you wanted."

She nodded. You know what? Think I will."

"Can I be honest? Sometimes at night, I see their faces. Everyone who was seriously hurt or killed under my command. Do you think that will ever go away?"

"Honestly? I'm not sure. I'd be surprised, I think that if you, we, did then a bit of us that we need to stay levelled will die." She sat on the edge, and dangled her legs into the water.

"Do you ever think about Ryelle?"

She sighed and her tone became quiet, reflective, and regretful. "All the time. I think of his gentle manner in my waking day, and there's times that I wake up knowing that I've dreamt about him. I'll never forget him. I suppose I love him in an odd way."

(Reply none)

(Risa- Suraya Bay Buffet -SOPS, Lt. JG Billy Alexander, aACMO Ensign SG Heinrich Kruze, and MedIntern Lana Wakeman - 1114)

The past few hours had been a blur. Waking up in a strange room, next to a strange urn, being chased off the planet, figuring out the next steps, recruiting the scariest person Heinrich had ever met in his life. He was ready to chow down. He saw Lana and Billy from a distance, and waved them down.

"Ahoy!" He shouted.

"There he is, Kruzetopher Columbus. I brought some back up." Of course what Billy left out was that Lana kinda invited herself. Still, as much as Kruze thought he was, he was not the face.

Heinrich hated being called Kruzetopher Columbus. "Ah! I see!" He made his way up to the both of them. "I don't know if we've had the pleasure, though I'm pretty sure I've seen you around. I'm Doctor Heinrich Kruze." He extended his hand.

Lana smiled. "Hey Doc." she smiled, glad of the minor breakfast detour that she'd forced Billy to take. "Brought you some brunch...may be cold. I hear you guys are having all kinds of adventures?" She passed over an extra breakfast sandwich that she'd picked up.

"Well, thank you." Heinrich accepted the sandwich when he expected a hand. "I suppose you can call it an adventure. I think of it more as a nuisance." He inspected the sandwich, found it more than appetizing and took a bite.

"I have to ask...How did you get yourself in this mess?"

Billy laughed. "Alcohol."

Lana smiled, "sounds like the start of most good stories."

"Well let's hope this one has a good ending." Heinrich said between bites of his sandwich. "I hate stories with lousy endings."

"Unless of course it ends with the words, to be continued." Billy paused. "So how much longer until we need to be at the Hare Lounge?"

"We meet Mr. Turtle at 12, but we wanted to make the transaction at 1830. I got a hold of Sytuk, and he's waiting on me to give him the word to join us."

"So...where are you hiding the thingy?" She asked. "You know that Mr Turtle...D'you know I am way too sober for this to make sense....Mr Turtle will have backup?"

Heinrich took a messenger bag off his shoulder. "I got it right here." He opened the bag and showed Lana the urn inside. "As far as what Mr. Turtle has going on, we don't know. William here thinks it's suspicious that a Mr. Turtle would invite us to the Hare Lounge."

Billy liked being called Wiliam. "Right, I mean let's be real here. Why would someone named Mr. Turtle want to go to the Hare Lounge. It makes about as much sense as finding an Urn from the 20th century."

"Maybe he likes the food." Heinrich said.

"What do you think Lana?" Billy asked.

"The tortoise and the hare?" she said. "Slow and steady win the race." she smiled

"Maybe he prefers the Hare Lounge because of the faster service." Heinrich quipped.

"Maybe...she said. You mentioned Sytuk?"

"Muscle, but right now we're at the spy phase of the game, and he sticks out like a sore thumb." Billy said with a smile. "But we, and please don't take this as harassment, we needed a pretty face, and Kruzeanova over there ain't no Fabio."

"Aww. meanie..." She smiled. "Okay...so I'm a decoy, I'm going to need to know what kind of place this is?"

"Is that important?"

“Makes a difference, too low-brow, and a dress will scream local security, too high-brow a bikini top and shorts will scream working girl and I get marked and booted. Need more?”

“Umm, well, lets go middle ground?” Billy said puzzled. “Like, Ummm, can’t go wrong with a little black dress? I guess we need to dress up to. Right Kruzetopia?”

Heinrich hated being called Kruztopia. “I suppose so. But where do we get suits?”

Lana sighed. “Go back to your private rooms, then beam to the Exeter, I’m guessing there’s something in your rooms that you get clothes from?” her tone was a touch sarcastic she realised. “Smart, but not showy, no jewelry if you wear it. Shoes the same, smart but make sure you can run in them.”

“One of the best things about Starfleet is not having to worry about fashion.” Heinrich sighed. “So I guess I got to get back on the Exeter?”

Lana nodded quietly, but put up a whimsical face. “I mean don’t beam up in the middle of the street, might be suspect right? Also...don’t come back dressed as a pantomime horse.”

“Well, before we go up, we should probably figure out the dress code right? Surely we can ask a computer or something.” Billy opined.

Sighing deeply, Lana looked at them. “Seriously? How did you morons manage to steal it if you have so little street smarts?” She stopped herself. “What is this crap you managed to steal anyway?” she shouted at them in a hoarse whisper.

“Hey! I didn’t steal anything!” Heinrich said defensively. “Someone must have given me The Undertaker’s urn!”

“It’s a prop, well an artifact, it was used in pro-wrestling in the 20th century by a man by the name of the Undertaker who was some sort of immortal druid wizard.”

“NECROMANCY?” she turned to Kruze and pointed. “Really?!”

“It was a tv show, pretend.” Billy chimed in.

Lana calmed down. “So where was this thing? Museum?”

“Now that is the million dollar question. You might want ask ‘Mr. Face’ over there, he’s the one who found it.” Billy pointed at Kruze.

“I know it belongs in a museum. I don’t know any more than that.” Heinrich said.

“Ugh.” Lana shook her head. “Look. timecheck. 1125...now...” She continued, “Meet back here, 1140. Maker help us..”

(reply none)

(KDF QorneL - Bridge - Doctor - E'Mpak - 1130)

E'Mpak entered the bridge and looked at the viewscreen as the QorneL moved towards the Ba'lack'I'p the 5th fleet flagship.

“Prepare to de-cloak on my command.”

E'Mpak looked over from the QorneL's view screen to her captain.

“De-cloak and inform the Ba'lack'I'p that the QorneL is here for the tournament.”

“Yes Captain.”

Came the replies from the tactical and communications officer. There was a thrill of palpable excitement that went around the Klingons on the bridge, and she felt the same way. It had been a few years since the QorneL had been able to participate the tournament due to being on long range patrols but the opportunity to participate this time had caused much celebrating on the mess hall when it was known. He looked over her Captain who would be participating for his house with the first officer as his Cha'dich. She did not expect him to get far. He was a good fighter but too hot headed and easily prone to making mistakes when he was angered.

For her it was an excuse to see old comrades in the fleet as well as celebrate in the tournament. She was looking forward to some good blood wine and some fresh gagh.

“Haqwl”

She pulled her mind from its wandering.

“Yes Captain.”

“How good is your Romulan and human healing knowledge.”

She paused for a moment.

“With the equipment we have on board I can treat them. Why do you ask Captain?”

“It appears that the Champion and the Cha'dich of the house of Kal'Beroth are a Romulan and a human...”

She frowned for a moment. The Captain knew that she had spent some time combat medic in the federation on exchange program until the disbanding of the 52nd fleet. She returned to the Klingon Empire where she trained to become a Surgeon before being assigned to the fleet.

“...and I want you there to render for aid when we defeat them in the tournament.”

She nodded knowing that she now would have to stay with Captain and First officer while they were at the tournament. She hoped that she would be able to get some opportunities to slip away and meet up with her other friends in the fleet.

(Reply any)

(Risa- Suraya Bay Buffet -SOPS, Lt. JG Billy Alexander, aACMO Ensign SG Heinrich Kruze, and MedIntern Lana Wakeman - 1140)

Heinrich arrived wearing a canary yellow jacket and plaid pants. “How do you like my new look?”

Billy arrived wearing khaki slacks, a black button down and a white blazer. “You look like a banana. A Kruzenana.”

Heinrich hated being called a Kruzenana. “I think I’m just ahead of the curve.”

Billy then turned and his jaw dropped as Lana arrived.

Lana stepped into the room, a gentle smile on her face. She half remembered her mother wittering at her, ‘Lana...’ she’d said. ‘Always have the LBD with you, wherever you end up. The Little Black Dress is your friend.’ At the time Lana had ridiculed the advice, regarding the advice from Coco Chanel, some 500 year long dead alleged fashionista as utter guff. However, as she’d gotten older, and she’d sat back, and watched people, watched how they behaved, watched how they dressed, she’d understood, ~people react very differently depending on how you portray yourself.~

~The rules may be 500 years old, but the game has not changed.~

She stepped across the room, the elegant, black dress, tapered into the waist, and a classic, elegant cut, clung to her, exuding a message of grace to anyone who looked. The ensemble was finished off with a matching pearl necklace and earring set, replicated of course, but she’d liked the end result when she’d seen it.

“Gentlemen...” she smiled coyly. “Let’s...play ball.”

“Alright then,” Billy said picking his jaw up off the floor. “Let’s get Harey.”

“You mean let’s get Mr. Turtle.” Heinrich said.

As they began walking towards the Hare Lounge Billy turned to Kruze and whispered, “Yo, Heiny, you should totally go dancing with L-Dawg over there later. I’d do it, but Murder fairy girlfriend.”

“That’s... really something you need to figure out. It’s one thing having a long distance girlfriend, it’s another when she’s a constant threat.” Heinrich said.

“Well she’s also in the Gamma Quadrant on a secret mission, but I’m not gonna cheat on her. I’m trying to get you the hook up bro.” Billy winked and laughed.

“I appreciate your support.”

“So do we have a plan?” Billy asked.

“Uhh... delay the handoff?”

“What’s already arranged?” Lana said. “Number of exits?”

“Ummm, wow, Lana’s been here an hour and already has more of an idea what to do then you Tom Kruze.”

“No, Tom’s my cousin,” Heinrich said. “And I think I’ve been clear I have no idea what’s going on from the beginning.”

“From my research there are four possible entrances. You have the front door, an emergency exit in the back, the doorway to the patio, and the kitchen exit. As far as arrangement, not sure, but I am packing a Type 1 phaser hidden by my blazer.”

Lana looked at them. “Good work. Look, I don’t know much about this, but I slept with this guy back when I was working at SFMHQ as a nurse, he said he’d done this, he was a talker, you know the type.” she waved her hand in the air randomly.

Billy nodded.

“I’m glad you’re carrying, but every shake up I’ve seen at a bar the door staff feel down the sides, never the back or buttocks.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying...” she replied testily, “that shove it in your pants and you may only shoot yourself in the ass.” she giggled.

“Well yeah, the good thing is it’s locked. I mean come on. Its the 25th century. Thankfully we don’t have to deal with the 21st century problem of butt dialing.”

“I find it odd that no one considered that flaw.” Lana said irreverently.

“Alright, so we good?”

“I’m good.” She said, turning to Heinrich. “Big H?” she hooked her arm around his.

Heinrich smiled. “Let’s rock.”

(reply none)

(IKS Vur'tak- Bridge - 'Exeter' CTO/3O Lieutenant commander Ravok- 1141)

Finally arriving at their destination Kora opened a channel for all on board to hear.

" Attention all, we have arrived. Security report to the transporter rooms. Those disembarking you are free to do so now."

Ravok listened from his mother's quarters.

He looked at Rayna and Keira.

" Time to go." He said with a grunt as he stood up.

(reply Keira)

Kora entered and walked over to Rayna.

" You'll stay with me princess. "

Ravok looked at his step mother.

" You're not going ?"

Kora shook her head.

" I am all for seeing a good competition, but she doesn't need to see it. " She said ,talking about Rayna.

" She will be safe here on the ship and you will be safe with Ire and Keira."

Ravok looked at his daughter.

" You're right. Children shouldn't see such things. " He looked at Keira.

" Are you ready?" He asked

(reply Keira)

" Then let's go." Ravok said as he knelt down on one knee and hugged Rayna.

" We'll be back soon, listen to your grandmother and stay by her side."

" Oh Lathuel if you think I'm letting the little princess out of my sight you obviously must have banged your head." She laughed.

" Thank you" Ravok said as he stood up. Kora grabbed him and hugged him.

" I'm proud of you and your father would be too."

Ravok closed his eyes as he hugged her.

" I'll do my best mother."

Kora pulled away from the hug.

" I know you will , remember to watch their hands and how they grasp their bat'leths. Newer grips on the blade are..."

" Clumsy and not broken in. "Ravok said ,finishing her sentence.

" I remember mother."

Kora placed her hand on the side his face and rubbed it.

" I'm just glad you have a strong woman going with you." She said, turning her gaze to Keira.

" Keep my boy safe." She smiled but the sadness in her eyes was apparent.

(reply Keira)

" Now both of you get out of here."

(reply Keira)

Ravok waited for Keira and walked out of the room with her.

Arriving in the transporter room Ire was awaiting them. Ravok handed his bat'leth over to Ire and nodded his head.

" Let's do this"

(reply Ire)

(replies Keira and Ire.)

(IKS Vur'tak- Captain's Quarters – Cha'dIch- Exeter 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek - 1143)

Keira was spending some final moments before the tournament with Ravok and Rayna as an announcement came overhead.=^= Attention all, we have arrived. Security report to the transporter rooms. Those disembarking you are free to do so now. ^=

" Time to go," Ravok said with a grunt as he stood up.

Keira nodded and stood from the chair she had been sitting in that was adorned with targ fur.

Kora entered and walked over to Rayna, " You'll stay with me princess. "

Ravok looked at his step mother. " You're not going ?"

Kora shook her head. " I am all for seeing a good competition, but she doesn't need to see it. " She said ,talking about Rayna.

" She will be safe here on the ship and you will be safe with Ire and Keira."

Ravok looked at his daughter. " You're right. Children shouldn't see such things. " He looked at Keira." Are you ready?" He asked.

"Of course." She said tapping the only visible weapon she had, the ceremonial Klingon dagger she had slung on her shoulder by a gilded cord, hanging from the sheath at her right hip.

" Then let's go." Ravok said as he knelt down on one knee and hugged Rayna." We'll be back soon, listen to your grandmother and stay by her side."

" Oh Lathuel if you think I'm letting the little princess out of my sight you obviously must have banged your head." She laughed.

" Thank you" Ravok said as he stood up. Kora grabbed him and hugged him.

" I'm proud of you and your father would be too."

Ravok closed his eyes as he hugged her." I'll do my best mother."

Kora pulled away from the hug." I know you will , remember to watch their hands and how they grasp their bat'leths. Newer grips on the blade are..."

" Clumsy and not broken in. "Ravok said ,finishing her sentence. " I remember mother."

Kora placed her hand on the side his face and rubbed it.

" I'm just glad you have a strong woman going with you." She said, turning her gaze to Keira." Keep my boy safe." She smiled but the sadness in her eyes was apparent.

"I will." Keira promised.

" Now both of you get out of here," Kora said.

Ravok and Keira walked out together.

(Reply None)

(IKS Vur'tak- Transporter Room – CFO - Lieutenant – Ire Williams - 1145)

Ire stood in the transporter room waiting for Keira and Ravok to arrive. He was back in his Klingon uniform and as he looked down at himself again, he realised that he did like the look. Starfleet uniforms did seem to be fer bland compared to the Klingon defence force that he was wearing.

He watched as the door to the turbolift opened and watched as Ravok and Keira entered. Ravok walked over to him and passed him the Bat'leth. He took the Bat'leth feeling its weight in his hands. He knew that it was not a replica like the one on the holodeck. It just felt more solid for some reason. He guessed that he might need to fight with it made it more physical rather than just a replica or a toy.

" Let's do this"

He looked up from the bat'leth and looked at Ravok.

“After you.”

He moved to join them on the transporter pad.

(Replies Keira and Ravok, any)

(5th fleet flagship - IKS Ba'lack'Ip- Main holodeck- Kal'Beroth Champion Ravok son of Kora & Cha'Dich Keira Merek & Tawi'Yan Ire Williams- 1157)

Beaming aboard the flagship of the fifth fleet. They were inside the massive holodeck, the sounds of drunken klingon warriors and wouldbe competitors filled the artificial surroundings. The competition had open challenge areas set up allowing anyone to compete. The main competition areas were set up in 3 large rings in the center of holodeck. Balconies offering aerial vantage points made up the perimeter of the holodeck.

Ravok looked around at the seemingly endless sea of klingons slamming steel goblets of bloodwine together while singing songs of battle.

The opening rounds were about to begin as the commencement announcements rang loud over the noise of the crowd

" Alright we're here. We should make our way over there. " Ravok pointed towards the center.

As the trio walked across the assembly floor, Keira kept her eyes open and her attention wide. She didn't know what little piece of information she could glean that would prove advantageous.

Ire scanned the crowd of rawkus Klingons knowing that fights were more than likely to start almost spontaneously. His grip tightened ever so slightly on the bat'leth in his arms as he followed the others. He had met Klingons before and even seen them drunk but there was also an explosive aggression within them that could be triggered almost too easily.

Making their way over Ravok looked at the different house crests that adorned the armors of the numerous combatants.

It wasn't long before he noticed the crest of the house of Pak,'r. The house of his first opponent ,Hara daughter Gu'Or.

In no time at all his eyes were met through the crowd by the eyes of a klingon woman who was staring at him with looks that could kill.

~ That has to be her~ He thought.

The announcement of the opening matches began.

Ravok listened for his name.

"Hara daughter Gu'Or of the house of Pak'r and...Starfleet officer and romulan Ravok Shara adoptive son of Kora of the house of Kal'Beroth enter Ring 2 " The announcer said.

The announcement made Ravok slightly frustrated.

" Isn't that some S#!÷" Ravok said to Ire and Keira. This was something he had kind of prepared himself for. He knew they would most likely go out of their way to discredit him.

Keira could tell the announcement upset Lathuel before he said anything. The tensing of his shoulders, and his face and posture gave him away. Keira turned her own attention to the entourage that was moving to the same destination they were. The female Klingon was obviously the fighter, she was without ceremonial dagger and her companion was carrying a rugged looking bat'leth complete with a spinal patine.

Ire ignored the female klingon and her companion who looked like the ones that Ravok was going up against and looked at the faces of the others that were around the ring trying to get the feeling of the Klingons that we're here to watch.

Making their way through the crowd they had all eyes on them. Some Klingons spat on the floor at the mere sight of the 3 non Klingons before them.

~ Keep spitting, we'll shut your mouth by the end of this competition.~ Keira thought, but maintained composure.

Ire mentally clocked the spitting klingons as they passed. He would need to keep an eye out for them in case they caused trouble later.

Ravok said nothing as he stepped over the knee high wall. He held his hand up to Ire and Keira. " Stand there." He said. The ring was for the two combatants only, all others had to stay outside the ring.

Ire nodded and stood beside Keira. Shifting the Bat'leth from where he had it running along his forearm into both hands so that Ravok could take it.

Ravok took the bat'leth and gripped his hands on it and gave a thankful nod to Ire.

Keira watched the other combatant's group. The Tawi'Yan of the other side was young, barely an adult young, seventeen Earth years at the oldest by the look of him. As he was preparing to hand over the weapon to the competitor his grip slipped just enough for the sword to bounce it's spine off the knee high wall before he recovered it. The reverberation projected enough for Keira to hear it, even over the activity of the assembled Klingons.

~ That didn't sound right.~ Keira thought.

Just before the announcement by the other side Keira leaned in to whisper to Lathuel. "Hey, your opponent messed up. The heat treatment of their Bakkonite blade is off. They used the wrong temperature. Judging from the patina on the blade it's been that way for a while."

Ravok looked at the bat'leth as Keira spoke to him

A klingon man stood on the side of the knee high wall behind Ravok's opponent. His announcement interrupted what Keira was trying to tell Ravok.

" Representing The house of Pak'r ,I present . Hara daughter Gu'Or, Lieutenant and Chief weapons officer of the IKS Fr'Koit !!!" Her Cha'dich declared for all to hear as her swordbearer handed Hara her bat'leth.

Ravok looked over his shoulder to Keira.

" Your turn." He said quickly. "Her blade is brittle, it can break." Keira finished.

Keira had never announced before, and only got passable marks on her public speaking lessons at the academy. She remembered the announcers from the old fighting spectacles that Mr. Jordan used to watch, she took her cues from that and began speaking before the crowd turned further against them.

"Hailing from somewhere in the Alpha Quadrant!" Keira projected from her diaphragm, "though Romulan, chosen member of House Kal'Beroth.

Chief Tactical Officer of one of the newest combat tested vessels in Starfleet. Recipient of some of the most prestigious accolades in Starfleet: 3 Combat Action Ribbons, Squadron Commander's Commendation, Ribbon of Sacrifice with Clusters, and the Gold Life Saving Medal. He faced an Angry Bajoran god and lived to tell about it..." Keira finished with a flourish and sweeping hand gesture in his direction. "Rrrraaaaaavok!"

As Keira spoke Ravok watched as Hara twirled her bat'leth. The room around him seemed to fade away, his eyes watching how the grips of her bat'leth slid through her hands. He looked at every detail .One of her three grips looked newer than the rest ,causing it to slightly catch the skin of her palms while the older grips slid freely through her hands.

Ire watched Hara warming up as he thought what Keira had said about the Bat'leth. He almost felt sorry for Hara fighting with a defective bat'leth, almost. He looked over at Ravok who was getting ready to fight. He knew that Ravok would be fine but fighting a Klingon would not be an easy task. Although he was interested to see how this fight would go comparing Romulan and Klingon physiology and fighting tactics.

The announcer of the match signaled over to a klingon man holding a large staff. With a swift swing the klingon man struck a circular steel disc. The sound of the gong reverberated through the holodeck. The match had begun...

(posted by Rob , Robbie and Todd)

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End Compile

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