

migrations and other recurring phenomena

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migrations and other recurring phenomena

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Summary

Michael and Laira are stuck in a turbolift on the way to Saru's celebration of the sea frogs. Like migrating amphibians, maybe some things are written in the stars.

Notes

Written for the Year of the OTP event July prompt "stars"

I started writing this for Star Trek Femslash week, but life happened, and it turned into a good fic for Year of the OTP. I've been so busy with new job and all that entails that I haven't been writing, so coming back to something I love (like these two) is so important.

Thanks to whimsicalli for the middle of the night brain rot I need to fuel my creativity. All the love.

"My apologies, Captain, Madame President, I am unable to repair the turbolift at this time. Engineering teams are addressing the problem, please be patient."

Michael stares upward at the still ceiling of the lift, then down at her hands. Of course, the only reason they're in the lift at all instead of beaming is because engineering is updating the transporter, so those won't be back until tomorrow morning. They could ask headquarters to beam them over and then beam them to the lounge, but that sounds ridiculous. They can wait.

"Clever of you, getting your ship to give you the extra time to win the argument, Captain." Rillak's little smile is teasing and gentle.

"Oh I was already winning, we needed the extra time so you could lose gracefully, ma'am."

"How kind of you." Rillak clasps her hands in front of her chest, toying with her bracelet. She fidgets, but she seems content to wait.

"I try." Michael crosses her arms over her chest. "I'm sorry."

Rillak waves a hand. "First break I've had in a while, I'll take it." She keeps her smile, but there's something exhausted in her eyes.

"Long day?"

Rillak's little laugh cracks. "I didn't think days on starships could ever feel long, I grew up on Bajor, the days are longer. Starfleet days should fly by."

"A Bajoran day is twenty-six hours," Michael says, rolling her neck a little. "Those extra two hours felt pretty good when I was there."

"I've heard it can be relaxing." She touches her forehead again, then rubs the corners of her eyes. Rillak pinches the bridge of her nose like it hurts. Does her head hurt? When did her day start? How many ships did she beam to today? "At first, every day on Federation time felt rushed, too short by far, but now—"

"Now even twenty-four hours finds a way to drag by?" Michael reaches towards her but stops, her hand hovering above Rillak's arm. They don't casually touch - yet - perhaps, is that where they're headed? Friends close enough that Michael can comfort her? Check in with a touch like she would with Tilly?

"Sometimes."

"Like today," Michael finishes so Rillak doesn't need to. "I'm sorry, you came all this way and all I've done is argue with you about Federation politics."

"Oh arguing with you isn't tiring, it's intriguing." Her smile has a real light to it for a moment. Rillak presses her fingers into her forehead once more, then drops her hands to her sides and sighs. "It's the rest of the day."

"I can't imagine."

"You could say that by running for office, I volunteered for it, so it's my own fault."

"Things you enjoy are still allowed to make you tired. I spent most of my adult life training to be a captain, and some days I think it's the worst choice I could have made." Glancing up at the emergency hatch, Michael studies the rail about midway up. They could climb out. It's not far to one of the junctions, then it's not far to the corridor. Maybe three decks down? She's too short to reach the hatch, but Rillak could—

Where did she go? Rillak was right next to her, the turbolift's not big how could she be—Michael's thoughts stop.

Rillak is no longer standing next to her, but sitting on the floor, head in her hands. Did Michael miss something? Is she that tired? Is there something else? Is she claustrophobic? She sat down so quickly and quietly, and worry rushes warm through Michael's stomach.

"Hey." Sitting down next to her seems the kindest, so Michael folds her legs and sits in the center of the turbolift, making their faces level. "You okay?"

Rillak doesn't raise her gaze, and her eyes are shut. One hand is on each of her temples and her knees are up in front of her chest. "Hmmm?"

"Are you all right?" Michael repeats. If she had Vulcan visual acuity, or Saru's sense of thermal patterns she could determine more. Rillak seems pale. Is she merely overworked? Exhausted? "Laura, did you eat?"

"Today." Rillak blinks, forcing her eyes open. Her almost smile is cryptic. "I've eaten today."

It's nearly twenty-one hundred. Morning was an eternity ago. Is she talking about breakfast? "This afternoon or this morning?"

Rillak ignores that question entirely. "You called me Laura."

"I was worried you were about to pass out."

Wincing, Laura shuts her eyes, and takes a slow breath. She takes another, eyes still closed. Her shoulders move in a shrug. "Still might."

"Dizzy?"

"I'll be fine."

Holding up her hands, Michael reaches for her wrist to check her pulse. "May I?"

Nodding so slightly that her chin barely bobs, Laura sighs again before she forces her eyes back open. "You used my name."

Michael has to smile. "Sorry, ma'am."

"Sorry?"

"I needed to get your attention."

Laura doesn't argue with that, but when she inhales her breath has a catch to it. Her pulse seems steady, but quick, Is it quick enough that something's wrong? Is this normal for her?

Michael touches her cheek, and her skin feels soft, dry and cool, not too cool. Laura's hands aren't sweaty either, which seems a good sign. She doesn't seem to be ill. "What happened?"

"I'm tired. Hiding it from you in a stalled turbolift was pointless." Laura leans back, her head against the wall of the turbolift. For a moment, she meets Michael's gaze and shrugs again. "You've never called me Laura before."

Michael's face stings for a moment. She didn't mean to overstep, but that's not why Laura's smiling. "I needed to see if you were aware of where you were."

"Should have asked me who the president is."

Laughing, Michael drops her hands to her lap. "I should have thought of that. You don't seem to have a fever, you're not sweating, which means your blood pressure is probably all right. I don't think you're having a panic attack. Could be dehydration or exhaustion." She pauses, wondering if she can get Laura to smile. "Maybe you know I'm right about Andoria, and it's getting to you."

Resting her head on her knee, Laura smiles, eyes brightening. "The devastation of losing an argument to you can be all-encompassing."

"Takes your feet right out from under you."

"You really did." Laura shuts her eyes again, but she hasn't stopped smiling.

Does she have migraines? Is the light bothering her? Would she even say something if there was something Michael could do?

"Is that why you came to Discovery today? For a better argument?"

Laira shakes her head once. "T'Rina and Captain Saru invited me, arguing Federation politics with you on the way was a bonus."

"Saru's been planning a traditional celebration for weeks, and you don't need my permission to board the ship for a party."

"I filed the correct request this time."

"Oh you did? This time?" Michael chuckles.

Laira blinks twice and runs her fingers over her eye ridges again. She must have a headache she's not talking about. Even holopads are exhausting to read by the end of the day. Michael's had her share of nasty stress headaches, Laira's must be a few degrees of magnitude worse.

"Can I help?"

"Thank you, I'm fine."

"You're not especially convincing at the moment."

"I'm not sure that I've ever convinced you of anything." Laira tilts her head, smiling a little more. Her eyes sparkle bright blue when she smiles like that and it's far more intriguing than Michael's allowed herself to admit before. Laira's beautiful, of course, that doesn't—

There must be something. There are occasions where they've agreed, where their needs have been aligned, where they worked towards the same goal, and Michael's spent a large part of their time together convincing Laira of many things.

"I'm planning on voting for you next time it comes around."

Laira chuckles, warm and amused. This time she touches Michael: her warm fingers brushing against her hand. "I appreciate that."

Maybe they do touch. Their fingers remain in contact while silence grows between them, comfortable, stretching outward like a lazy sehlat in the sun. Michael should ask Zora for an update, or work on getting them out through the ceiling hatch, but it's quiet around them. Maybe they both need a moment where they're not needed by anyone. Might as well have it together.

Pulling her hands back so Laira has her space, Michael rests her hands on her legs, letting go of the worry that they'll be late. It's Saru's party, whenever they get there will be the right time. "I didn't know you enjoyed celebrating migratory amphibians."

"I enjoyed the last celebration I attended on Discovery."

"We'd just saved two planets."

Laira has a knack for the most diplomatic of tones when she wants to be funny. "I'm sure honoring the great migration of the Kaminar sea frogs will compare."

They stare at each other too long, meeting each other's eyes in that way where neither of them says anything but the entire universe seems to be waiting for them to speak.

"We should take your hair down." Michael offers the thought as it materializes. "I bet it would help."

"You think it would?"

"Philippa - Captain Georgiou, my mentor - used to say that wearing her hair down let her know that the headache was definitely from her job, not anything she'd done to herself."

Laira smiles, warm and tired and indulgent all at once. "Go ahead, then."

Michael raises her hands to take down Laira's hair. It might not help, but shifting the weight is usually kind to over worked muscles and tendons. It's the only thing she can do unless Laira will let her rub her neck. Michael's studied enough neuropsychology technique to be confident with her hands, and usually releasing some tension there helps. Amanda's headaches could be relieved with the right pressure, maybe Laira's are similar.

Laira nods at her to continue, and there's still something mysterious in how she smiles, but Michael can't determine what it is yet. Maybe she'll never know.

Michael reaches back and feels for the pins, easing Laira's hair out of the incredibly complex knot, one little twist at a time. "If you're in command of a starship you don't have to balance the very delicate situations, someone at headquarters does that for you."

"Ah, so much less stressful then."

"Most of the time."

"Sometimes the stress leaves headquarters and comes with you?"

"Even asks questions about my orders on the bridge."

Laira sighs contentedly and shuts her eyes, letting Michael's fingers run gently over her scalp. "How dare anyone do that to you."

"It's amazing I survived the indignity." Whistling softly, Michael shakes her head at the quantity of hair that hid in Laira's bun. She has so much of it. "Did you wear your hair up when you were a pilot?"

"Oh no, that was usually a braid, maybe several if I had time. We didn't have reliable gravity plating and my hair tangles horribly if it floats free." Laira sighs, and lays her head back into Michael's hands, surrendering. "Your braids seem very practical."

"They are, until they hit me in the face. That stings." Michael presses in a little, finding the taut muscles at the base of Laira's skull. "Is this how tense you usually are?"

"Oh no, today's been a good day."

Michael's disbelieving snort makes Laira chuckle. "This is from a good day? Does it hurt?"

"No, no, of course—" her words disappeared into a hiss of pain, then a moan of relief. "Dammit."

"Better?"

Laira takes a slow breath, almost whimpering as Michael works the tension out of the tendons just beneath her skull. "Why are you good at everything?"

"Captain's prerogative." Michael pulls her hands back.

Rolling her head on her shoulders, Laira shakes her hair free to fall on her chest in red-gold curls. It's bright against the blue of her suit, and her face is flushed pink. It's so rare to see her relaxed and content that she's almost a different person. Is this who she was before her election? Pilot Laira must have been incredibly charming, considering her sense of humor and how strikingly beautiful she is. Meeting her then would have been so different.

Twisting her hair a little to contain it over her shoulder, Laira beams at her. "Funny how your desire to fix everything in the galaxy includes my neck."

Michael rolls her eyes. She's not out to fix the whole galaxy, just the parts of it she can. "It's better?"

"I forget what it feels like not to be tense." Laira leans back again. Happier now, more relaxed in her shoulders. Does she ever say anything to anyone when her neck's sore? Can she? The whole Federation is her crew, and she has to lead them. She can't give them her burdens.

"Maybe it'll help your head."

"My head's fine."

"When you say it now, I can almost believe you."

"Thank you, Captain." That coy little smile is almost flirting. They don't do that, of course, they're not— Even though Michael's almost in her lap and the heat of Laira's skin is still in her hands.

"When did you eat?"

"Earlier today." Laira reaches over, patting Michael's hand, as if that's as specific as she's willing to get. "I'm fine, I'm sure there's food at the party."

They're going to a party, not sitting her until they— "Which we will someday get to." Michael glances upward. "Zora?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Is the turbolift ready to proceed?"

"Almost, Captain. I thank you for your patience. I still need to reinitialize the spatial matrix of the turbolift system. The lights will turn off momentarily while the EPS conduits realign. You will experience approximately forty-two seconds of darkness, after which the lift will function as expected."

There's no point in getting up before they know it'll work. Michael traces the metal of Laira's bracelet before realizing what she's doing and pulls her hand back. She doesn't have the right, they're not- even though Laira didn't pull away. Touching her feels good in a way Michael's not ready to process.

"Darkness in space is so much deeper."

"And quieter," Laira agrees, her eyes on Michael's fingers. The lights above them dim for a moment, then snap off, sealing them into that pitch black. Now the only sound is their breathing, because even the hum of the EPS grid is gone.

Laira's voice is small and soft. "When I first started running cargo, I'd turn on the holo in my quarters, so it would sound like Bajor, and the stars would look like home, and then I could sleep. I'm not sure when, but at some point I stopped needing it. I loved the star lines and all the new stars we found. I'd listen to the ship, and then that freighter had become home."

Michael can almost hear Laira's heart beating, and in the darkness her eyes insist Laira's face is there. Michael knows her ship, even in the darkness, she knows where she is. This is home. "I came through the wormhole a year before Discovery did, and the stars were right, and wrong, but I had to build a new home. I thought I'd forgotten how much I loved this ship, then I stepped onboard again, and I knew I belonged here. The sound the warp core, the EPS grid— this sounded like home."

"So you'll be really annoyed if I ask you to captain another ship?"

"Incredibly, ma'am."

"Just checking."

The lights flicker once, then snap back on. The lift hums to life a moment later. Light glows in her eyes and Michael's becoming achingly fond of the stars in her eyes in a way she can't articulate or even admit she's thinking. Laura rests one hand on the wall of the lift, then she accepts Michael's hand up as they stand together.

"Are you sure you'll all right?"

"As I've said multiple times, Captain, I am fine."

Laura is stunning, and happy, and perhaps Michael's the one who isn't fine. They're so very close to each other when the lift opens. Not kissing, though Laura's red lipstick is bright and they're face to face. Michael hasn't thought about kissing her, but if she stood on her toes— They can't.

Right?

"We can take a moment—" They can stare at each other without kissing. Of course they can.

"No need." Laura pats her shoulder. "I promise."

"You'll eat when we get there?"

"I've been listening to T'Rina and Saru plan the food for the last few days, it sounds incredible."

Chuckling, they walk to the lounge together, Laura a step behind Michael. The songs of the sea frogs fill the lounge with music, mixing with the gentle hum of conversation. The talking halts when they enter, and Saru beams at her from the crowd. Tilly waves at the people around her, with glowing excitement. They shouldn't have been waiting for her. This party isn't about Michael. It's for the frogs—

Then everyone in the lounge starts to sing to Michael in happy unison.

"Happy Birthday, Michael," Laura whispers through it all before taking a step away from her and joining in. Together, the entire room celebrates Michael with singing, cheers and applause. Her crew is all here, including Nhan, and T'Rina, even Admiral Vance and his family. Saru invited them under the cover of the Kaminar sea frogs and Michael had no idea.

None. A few of them had mentioned her birthday, but she didn't expect anything.

The crowd in front of her is bright with smiles, and the thought of Laura's smile remains with her, even as she slips away. Michael laughs with her crew and the visitors, and the lounge hums with energy while she drifts through their joy.

There was a time when she would have despised being the center of attention like this, but now she knows it's not about her, not really. Family celebrations sometimes need a catalyst, and her birthday works fine. It's an reason to see each other all in one place, to get Tilly over from the Academy and meet the man Bryce has started dating. It's her birthday, but this is about everyone.

After she's had some of the Kaminar-inspired hors d'ourves and a drink, Michael slips up next to Tilly at the bar. "So what was really going on with the turbolift?" she asks over her cocktail.

"I had some cadets to send off with Voyager and that ran a little longer than I'd hoped. President Rillak volunteered to distract you, and Zora stopped the lift when we needed more time."

"Rillak volunteered?"

"I must have looked sad about being late to your party." Tilly eats the garnish from her drink and shrugs. "She said she could probably distract you for at least half an hour, Zora did the rest."

"She locked us in a turbolift."

Tilly smirks, and Michael wraps her arm around her shoulders. "I'm surprised you didn't climb out."

"I was going to—"

"I bet."

"Laura wasn't feeling well."

"Oh?" Tilly raises her eyebrows. "What happened?"

"She works too hard."

"No wonder you get along."

Michael's cheeks burn for a moment. "We don't."

"You and Laura are on a first name basis apparently."

"We're not—" Michael didn't mean to use her name.

"You casually call the president of the entire Federation of planets by her first name?"

Michael doesn't. She hasn't. Okay, fine she did, and she did in the lift, and Laira even seemed to like it. The way she smiled after that—Michael's blushing again, and she has no reason to, but it won't go away. "She was dizzy, I was worried."

"So you used her name."

"I wanted to get her attention."

Tilly's eyes are wide and amused. "I bet you did."

"I did."

"So, is she okay?" Tilly asks, finishing the last of her drink.

Together they search the lounge for her with their eyes, but it's crowded. "I think so, she said she was fine."

"Did she mean it the way you do or like a sane person?"

Michael glares, but Tilly's right, too right. "I think she just needed to eat and sit down for awhile."

"Take her hair down."

"I thought it might help."

Tilly orders another drink and nonchalantly points towards a booth in the back of the lounge. Laira's there, with Vance's wife and daughter, the tables full of plates and as far as Michael can tell from across the room, they're happy. "Were you trying to help make her even more attractive?"

"No."

"Because her hair's gorgeous down like that."

"I know."

"Did you take it down?"

"I did."

"Run your fingers through it?"

"Shut up."

Tilly sips her drink, smiling like a fictional cat about to disappear, and orders one for Michael. Unlike Tilly's fruity cocktail, Michael's is whisky, neat. "You're going to need courage."

"Why doesn't courage taste better?"

"This is good whisky. This is what Admiral Vance and I had at the end that ended up not being an end."

"We were close."

"Felt like it." Tilly turns, staring at Laira across the lounge because she has nothing to lose. "Until it didn't."

"Earth rejoined the Federation, it ended up being a beginning."

"Maybe this is."

There are only so many ways to glare shut up, so Michael takes her whisky and downs the rest of it, letting it burn her nose and her throat. It is good, actually, smoother than most.

"I think it's good that you have a crush on her. Someone should call her by her first name and gently take all the pins out of her hair while stuck in a turbolift together."

"It's not-" Michael protests again, but Tilly continues to stare at her and, fuck she's right. Fuck. This is a crush. Past a crush. She's gone.

"She has to have friends, but you- she should be honored you're so smitten with her."

"She has a partner." Michael can't say why that makes a cold knot lodge in her stomach, but it does. She needs another drink.

Tilly looks back and forth, then leans in, as if she's telling a secret. "They broke up."

"They broke up? When?"

"About the same time you and Book did. I don't know the details or anything. She used to go visit him, when she had a few days off. I only noticed because security changes when she's at headquarters, when she's gone, it's quiet. Anyway, she used to go visit, then she stopped. I

thought she was busy—"

Michael's ridiculous crush meant one thing when Laira was unobtainable, but she's unattached. That doesn't mean anything, of course. Break ups are hard and complicated and she might not—

Vance and Saru collect his family, taking them to show them something, and Laira's alone with her plates, in the far corner of the lounge where it's quiet and—

Tilly shoves two drinks into Michael's hands. "Go, tell her she's pretty."

"She knows that."

"Sure, but it's nice to hear it from you." Tilly grins at her wickedly. "Besides, it's your birthday."

"How does that help?"

"Maybe she wants to give you a gift."

They are not having this conversation. Michael isn't nearly drunk enough to be having this conversation, anywhere, much less in the lounge, about the president.

Tilly nudges Michael towards the most dangerous direction in the lounge, and Michael takes a step, then another. Pausing near the fire, she sets down the drinks. Her collar's tight. Fidgeting with it won't help, but she needs a minute. "Zora?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Why did you stop the turbolift?"

"Your party was not ready for your arrival. We had to improvise."

"We?"

"President Rillak suggested I stop the lift until Captain Saru said all was ready."

Laira had sent several messages while they were talking on the bridge, one of them could have been instructions to Zora. "And you went along with that?"

"Providing you with a surprise was incredibly important for crew morale."

"And she's the president."

"It is an honor to be of service to you, the crew and the Federation."

Even the sentient being who lives in the ship likes Laira. Michael straightens up, finds her best smile, grabs their drinks and tries to remember being fearless. She used to be good at it.

=====

They're two drinks down, and when it's Laira's turn to chose, she orders the most vile bottom shelf deck polish.

"Any replicator can make these," Laira says, taking the slightly blue shots from the server. "Even if the materialization coil is on its last few light years. These will taste all right."

They have never tasted all right, not since their invention, or tragic inclusion in a general replicator database. Michael winces, her eyes watering as she takes a sip. "On your birthday, we're drinking nice things."

"These are nice."

"If your other choice is plasma coolant."

Laira lifts her dreadful beverage in a toast to Michael. "We can order that next."

"Keyla and Tilly might drink that with you, respectfully, I will not."

"I'll keep that in mind." Laira drinks her vile shot without wincing, and her eyes remain locked on Michael's. It's intimidating and hot, maybe more hot now that Michael's tongue's starting to go kind of numb.

"So this is your idea of fun? Terrible booze and what, unsafe phaser games?"

"This is fortification." Laira takes Michael's half-drunk shot and finishes it for her.

"To do what?"

Laira tilts her head, glancing down at the table and her hands. "I'm not entirely sure. Negotiations can be complex."

"Do you know what the other side of the table wants?"

"Right now, I don't. The negotiator is difficult for me to get a read on."

There's truth in that, even vulnerability. Maybe it would be easier for Laira to determine what Michael wants if Michael knew. There's a gulf between wanting and what's feasible.

Isn't there? Nothing can happen between them.

"You knew I'd worry about you."

Laira nods, moving empty glasses towards each other. "You're consistent."

"I worry too much?"

"You care. You're not bothered by little things like position."

"We all need someone to care about us."

"And you care about everyone." Laira touches her hand, just for a moment, and Michael turns her fingers. They're not quite holding hands, but near enough.

"It's the least we can do for the universe."

"I don't think anyone can say that Michael Burnham has ever settled for the least she could do."

Michael's heart rushes in her ears, and the room behind her is much more empty than it was. Maybe it's entirely empty and it's just the two of them, in the dark again. Is that a challenge? An invitation?

Meeting Laira's bright blue eyes confirms it. They're flirting.

"You could have asked to kiss me if you wanted to." Putting words to the tension between them illuminates it like star slipping out from behind an eclipse. It was a guess, but a good one.

"That's much more vulnerable than telling you about my headache."

"Which you never admitted having."

"You didn't need me to say it."

What else are they not saying? That they're attracted to each other? That this is more than casual, easy flirting? There's a pink flush to Laira's face, and her eyes are bright. Her headache seems to be gone and she did need to eat. Michael so rarely sees her free like this, no one needs Laira to make decisions or keep the galaxy together, tonight she's here, and there's nothing she needs to worry about.

Michael doubts she's really that hard to read, but she can guess what it's like to be in Laira's position. "Feels like you can't have any weaknesses, not when everyone's looking to you."

"You know what that's like."

"I have one ship, you have planets."

Her blue eyes flit down like shy birds. "Only sixty-one."

"Your neck says that's not heavy at all."

Laira winces a little, but there's gratitude in her smile when she touches her neck. "It's better now."

"Today was a good day, wasn't it?"

Laira accepts two glasses of water from one of the servers and passes one to Michael. "Negotiations went well with a group of Orion colonies, important treaty language was approved by the Senate, I gave the keynote speech to a group of diplomatic fellows. It was a good day."

"All of that and then you found time to get trapped in a turbolift with me."

"That was the highlight."

Knocking back her water, Michael sets down her glass. The invitation is there, it's been there, perhaps longer than she's realizes. "The day's not over yet, maybe we can do better." Reaching over the table, she offers her hand.

Laira's hand is cool in hers, steady and strong. "All right, Captain, show me the stars."

The transporters are still being upgraded, so they walk, slipping through the stragglers of the party. Saru and T'Rina are engrossed with each other and the frogs, but Tilly catches Michael's eye and nearly bounces with glee on her behalf. Heat runs over her skin like a frisson of energy over the deflector. Leaving hand in hand with the president is a thing, but Laira has her hair down and her jacket's still in the lounge and together they're just people. Two ships sharing a course, nothing extraordinary.

The corridor to the turbolift's empty except for a couple kissing in a dark corner and a few DOTs doing maintenance. Laira raises her eye ridges at the couple, smirking. Once they're sealed in the lift, she toys with Michael's fingers.

"You're not just going to kiss me up against the bulkhead?"

"Maybe if I was still a lieutenant." Michael's stomach twists warm. That's something Laira's thought about? Just now or previous or— "We had a party more like that one right after I came aboard. Guess we'll have to try it again."

"HQ might be able to offer something similar." Laira leans, whispering. "Not that I know about or attend such parties, should they exist."

"Maybe with your hair down, wear something old, or a uniform, no one would notice."

"Hair down helps." Laira shakes her head so her hair moves. "If I wear it up at every presidential appearance, when it's down no one recognizes me."

Releasing her hand, Michael turns, takes a step, and Laira shiver. She does want the bulkhead treatment. Halting the lift with a touch of her hand, Michael takes another step, closing the distance. They were here, hours ago, they could have been right here, with Laira's back against the wall, but they sat, and talked.

"You sat down to keep me from climbing up the lift and spoiling my own party."

"Kissing you wouldn't have worked as well as that did." Laira's voice catches a little in anticipation. Her eyes keep finding. Michael's mouth, and she wants to be kissed so badly that the air tingles between them and she inhales when Michael touches her chin.

"We needed to make it to the party."

"Yes." Laira licks her lips.

Michael leans in, stands on her toes because Laira's so damn tall, and Laira meets her more than half-way. Laira's mouth is eager and warm, and the wall of the lift keeps them up, and stable, because the gravity's not holding them the way it should. Must be the upgrades. Michael's hand catches the wall and Laira's hands are on her arm and her waist and they keep kissing, feeling each other out.

"Kissing wouldn't have allowed that."

Sighing and sinking back against the wall, Laira shakes her head, rests her hands on Michael's shoulders and nods. "If you'd kissed me before, we wouldn't have made it out of the lift at all."

A turbolift is a uncomfortable, even risque place to have sex, and Michael vastly prefers the comfort of a bed, but there's a wildness in the way Laira's hands squeeze her shoulders. Must have been hard to find privacy on those old cargo ships.

"I'm glad you had a headache." Michael runs her fingers over the ridge on Laira's cheek, then her temple.

"I needed you to stay in the lift, if I wasn't going to leave it, there's no way you would."

"That pathological need to save everyone came back to bite me." Moving Laira's hair aside, Michael kisses her neck, then touches her teeth to Laira's skin, just for a moment. That earns a little whimper and they need to talk to Michael's quarters before fucking each other senseless in the lift starts to feel like a good idea.

Releasing the hold on their transit, Michael kisses her again, rougher this time and her knee slips between Laira's legs. They do kiss in the corridor but it's right outside of the doors and only Michael's quarters are this close to the turbolift anyway. It feels headless and senseless and Laira's the one who pushes Michael into the door of her own quarters and won't free her mouth for the voice access. Laira untethered from her responsibilities must be a whirlwind. Clothes fall to the deck in Michael's quarters, Laira's blouse on Michael's trousers and Michael still has her socks on by the time Laira's thighs are on the bed. Michael keeps kissing her, hands deep in her glorious hair before they pause, searching for breath.

The stars around headquarters glow in Laira's eyes, bright as the promise of her lips. The brilliant spiral of HQ glows just beyond them. Discovery is home, but the spire's growing on her with every jump back.

Laira's hands touch her breasts, helping her peel off her bra, and they flip, Laira guiding her back with a twist of her hips.

"It's still your birthday."

"Only for a few more minutes—" Fuck, she doesn't even know and Laira's mouth on her thigh is too insistent for Michael to have any thoughts about linear time. Licking her way up, Laira rests one hand on Michael's belly, pulling her close to the edge of the bed. She nibbles her thigh, her teeth almost sharp and almost there and— Laira has incredible control over her tongue.

And she's a tease.

Michael's aching clit is deliciously warm, then abandoned to the cold before Laira's fingers are inside of her, deep and curling, then gone, and she's panting, one leg over Laira's shoulder, hands wrestling with the sheets.

Her surrender is not accepted, and Laira's demanding tongue rolls her to the brink of orgasm, when Michael feels it threatening the back of her mind like a rising wave, but then Laira's mouth is gone and her thumb is there and it's good, but it's not enough, and fuck, kissing her now tastes of herself and Michael must resist her own desire to orgasm long enough to fight back.

Laira likes to tease; Michael loves a game. It'll come, she'll— fuck, not now, not yet. Kissing Laira's neck, right where her shoulder begins makes her fingers clumsy, even buried within Michael, and they stroke and kiss and nibble, pressing each other, pushing each other closer to the brink of release, but waiting, panting, whispering obscenities between each other's lips like poetry.

Between the two of them the curses they mutter into each other's damp skin are legion.

Laira's hissing slips into a moan and is that it? That little swirling motion with Michael's thumb? Is that the right pressure sliding wet over her clit? Her eyes are black, even with the stars beyond and there aren't words in her moaning, she's so close Michael can feel the orgasm threatening within her as she tightens. Getting her first would be so—

Michael's own release explodes behind her eyes, white hot. Her thoughts go with it and she collapses into Laira for a moment, laughing.

Trading in her own vulnerability is one of Laira's favorite ways to pull her in. They pause, gasping and falling back. Sensation washes over her, pleasure more intense than she has words for. Nerves stinging, Michael centers herself. Holding Laira's eyes, she lies over her, letting her heart slow.

"You got me."

"You need to put me first."

Laira's breathily so close to orgasm that Michael could probably kiss her over the precipice, but that would be gentle, and Laira's demanding mouth hasn't been asking for that. She deserves to suffer a little. Palming her clit hard, Michael drags her teeth across her shoulder.

Gasping, Laira stares up at her, flushed, needy, and waiting.

Michael slips her fingers back inside, curling them up and in. "Laira."

That smile of hers is absolutely disarming in bed. "You already- have my complete- attention."

Stroking and nipping her way down, Michael licks too gently and sucks too softly and waits. Rocking her fingers in and out, slowly increasing speed, she takes her time. Laira bucks underneath her, close, teetering, begging, but so close isn't there. Michael holds her, taunting until Laira's half sitting, moaning, nearly horse in wanting.

Her orgasm breaks like an eclipse, sudden and intense. Trembling, she collapses boneless, broken beneath Michael's mouth. They lie there, naked and spent on top of the sheets, stars twinkling above them. The light over the bed is tinged blue from the other warp nacelles around them, and silver from headquarters itself, but the stars shine bright against the black.

"Now I'll know what window is yours," Laira teases, her hand lazily on Michael's stomach.

"Yours is on the second level, twenty-seven degrees from the central line."

Chuckling, Laira nuzzles her shoulder. "I wouldn't even know how to define that, so you must be right. I have a good view."

"Is it home?"

Rolling into Michael's side, Laira rests her head on Michael's shoulder. "It's the closest I have. I like how it moves, and how the starlines spin at warp. Having new stars makes it feel more like my freighter, but the viewport is much higher quality. The stars feel close enough to touch."

"That's what I love about advanced EVA, you're really out there."

Kissing her shoulder, Laira sits up, her hair falling over her naked breasts. "This is close enough for me." She stands slowly, stretching and retrieving more water.

Sitting up, Michael pulls back the sheets, making space within the sheets instead of hurried on top of them. Laira returns, handing Michael a glass of water.

Shutting her eyes for a moment, she grins, content. "My head wasn't spinning before, but now—"

"Hopefully that's a good thing."

"It's wonderful." Laira finishes her water, and sets the glass aside. Wrapping her arms around her knees, she sits on the bed beside Michael. "I knew I'd enjoy the party, everything else was incredible. Spending time with you usually is."

Michael smiles at her wickedly over her water glass. "My opinion of having you on board has definitely improved."

"So we should have had sex earlier?"

"I would have still disagreed with you."

Stretching out beneath the sheet as if she belongs here - perhaps she does - Laira pulls the pillow under her head. "True, but if I felt this good, I could have made it work."

"We actually made a good team."

Toying with Michael's braids, Laira curls into her again when Michael finishes her water. "That doesn't need to change."

"I don't think it will." Michael kisses her forehead, curious what her ridges will feel like to her lips.

"So this is a singular occurrence?" It's not, and Laira knows it, but the way she asks is both wistful and teasing.

"Oh no, I think this is part of something much more numerous." Michael's confidence blooms along with Laira's sleepy smile.

"Like a constellation?"

"Maybe a stellar cluster."

Laira's cool fingers run up Michael's neck, and she didn't think they'd need to touch each other again so soon, but the idea of it starts warming her toes. "I hear those are full of stars."

Michael pauses before kissing her. "I'm an optimist."

As their bodies slide together, Michael watches the stars, wondering how short a time it might be before Discovery's stars are home for both of them.

"Happy Birthday," Laira whispers, her voice filled with sleep.

"It's not my birthday any more." Michael's not sure of the time, but it must be well past midnight.

"Then I'm early."

Michael sighs, wrapping her arm around Laira's shoulders as they curl together. She waits, alone with her in the dark, lost in her thoughts. Laira's breathing is slow and even.

"Maybe you should stick around until next year," Michael whispers.

Laira's supposed to be asleep, and not hear that. Her breathing was much too even. "We can always get stuck in a turbolift again."

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