

Glass Houses and Rubber Balls

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by [daraokwise](#)

Summary

It's good, sometimes, to go below, and check on the Chief, Una knows. Especially when Cait Barry has geniuses bouncing all over her department.

Una Chin-Riley didn't head below often, but the *Constitution's* chief helmsman and second officer made it a point to bring coffee down to Cait every week or so. Otherwise, the Chief Engineer started muttering, half seriously, about 'hoity-toity Bridge officers, leaving the real work to the grunts below.'

On her way past warp control, Lt. Stamets raised his head. "She hasn't eaten today," he said softly, and she rerouted back to the mess for a ham on rye as well.

She walked into Cait's office—the door open, as always—with a cheerful "break time, Chief."

Barry blinked owlshly, looking up from three different PADDs. "Una. Thank god. Maybe you can solve the damn crew rotation. It's worse than those logic problems from the Academy entrance exam: 'Scott can't stand Stamets. The blue one would like to serve with the quiet one. The tall one has already been in warp control. The one at phaser control would like to stay there, with someone else. Where is everyone assigned?'" She sighed. "It would be less painful to scrub the core out. By hand. With a toothbrush," she groaned.

"You need a rest, Cait," Una commiserated, and picked up the PADD, looking over the sprawling project. The Chief picked up her sandwich, and took a too-large bite, like she was in a hurry.

"I need a time machine, to go back to *Yorktown* and talk myself out of accepting this job," she grumped.

They'd come over from *Yorktown* together when the ship went into spacedock for a major refit. Captain April had scooped them up—Pike and Una, Barry and Boyce. And Cait had *absolutely* been ready to take over the engine room. But it was the largest department on the ship. And, even more than *Yorktown*, the fleet's flagship attracted some definite ... personalities. Two of them, in fact, were squabbling mathematically outside Cait's door, in accents that could only be described as 'Scots' and 'Bitch.' Sometimes both.

Cait's eyes went round, her jaw tightening.

"Computer, close the door," Una called, and it slid shut, blocking them out. "They really need to get a room," he continued, and Cait choked on a gulp of coffee.

Una leaned back. "We are orbiting a planet that might have *brainwaves*," she confided, and Cait blinked rapidly in surprise. "They are losing their minds up in science. The tectonic oscillations are delta waves."

"The planet is dreaming?" Cait asked, in a little wonder.

"The planet is dreaming," Una confirmed.

"Are we going to wake it up?"

Una chuckled. "I'm sure we will, whether we mean to or not. We'll need warp eight, Chief, when it chases us."

"You tease now ..." Cait warned, finally settling back with her coffee and closing her eyes. "Oh, that is good."

Una swiped at the PADD, making engineering assignments for the next two weeks.

“You can’t just assign them randomly,” Cait protested.

“You have 12 highly trained officers and 52 skilled crewmen. Yes, you can.”

Cait shook her head. “Every assignment I ever had from every Chief I ever served under seemed specially designed to push me, to build me, to make me better. My Chiefs weren’t just hanging on by their fingernails.”

Una pinned her with a look. “Yes, they were rewiring the core, mentoring troubled crewmen, teaching yoga, and making a soufflé. All at once,” Una said mildly. “Cait. I promise. They were hanging on by their fingernails. Every assignment seemed perfect for you because you were a *Starship Engineer*, serving on a *Starship*.”

“They are all brilliant,” Cait sighed. “I mean, some of them are an entire pain in my ass. But I *can’t* fail them.”

Una toyed with her mug. “There’s a story of juggling balls. Glass, tritanium, rubber. You can’t drop the glass ones. The tritanium ones can hit the floor. And the rubber ones will keep bouncing.”

“Off the ceiling. And each other,” Cait groaned.

“They are very energetic,” Una agreed, and held up the PADD. “Maybe throw them at some of these kinds of projects, Chief. Speaking of which. Handball? We can name the balls ‘Scott’ and ‘Stamets,’ and smack them around.”

“There’s an idea,” Cait said gratefully, standing. “Lead the way, my friend.”

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