

Where Wolves Fear to Prey

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Where Wolves Fear to Prey

by [Planxty](#)

Summary

Thirty five years have passed since Khan Noonien-Singh and his band of Augments were exiled on Ceti Alpha V, and ten years since their last conflict with Starfleet and apparent defeat. Now Starfleet faces an ethical dilemma after a survey ship discovers that the planet and surviving augments have suffered a devastating crisis.

Notes

see end notes for meta details on canon divergence

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

2293

Maya Noonien-Singh had lost count of the number of times her life had been in danger, walked into situations she didn't expect to walk out of, and laughed in the face of death. Yet, she had never been more frightened than she was now, moments away from a meeting with a panel of Starfleet Academy admissions staff that would determine her future.

She was unusually polished and well-pressed for the occasion, bearing little resemblance to the wild half-augment who grew up in the wilderness of Ceti Alpha V. Her dark hair was tamed in a low, sleek bun, and she wore a simple burgundy dress and black pumps. She stood outside the door with La'an and offered her a nervous smile. Normally, due to her status within Starfleet Academy, La'an would be present on such a panel, but this time she had to recuse herself for fear that she could not offer impartial judgment for the young woman she had a guardianship over for nearly two years.

"Any final advice?" she asked.

"Be honest, and think before you speak. Tact is not a strength of yours." Even though she offered a piece of criticism, La'an spoke with kind encouragement. "If they were going by qualifications alone, this would be an easy choice. What you have to do is prove that any other doubts they have are unfounded."

Maya's smile grew. "You make it sound so simple!"

The door slid open, earlier than Maya expected. She gasped and turned her head suddenly, and La'an calmed her by placing a hand on her shoulder to calm her.

"It doesn't need to be complicated. Good luck Maya."

Maya stepped inside, and the door slid shut behind her. She clasped her hands behind her band and stood tall, trying to appear confident even though her heart was racing and she was beginning to wonder if it was too late to give up on everything. Across the room from her at a long table sat five officers who wore admiral insignia on their uniforms. Maya recognized one of them, Benoit LeFevre, from her escape from Ceti Alpha V. If she was frightened before, now she was terrified.

"Maya Noonien-Singh," began the admiral who sat in the center of the row, a woman with long straight hair that was mostly gray but still had a few dark brown streaks. "A pleasure to finally meet you. I am Admiral Chin-Riley. Allow me to introduce Admirals Gu, Park, and Linzer. I understand that you've already met Admiral LeFevre."

"I have," Maya was defensive and firm. "And I have a few concerns about his presence here."

"Such as?" Chin-Riley asked.

"If La'an could not be present due to concerns over impartiality, then LeFevre shouldn't be here either. He didn't trust me, and he was in favor of killing every augment on Ceti Alpha V, including young children."

"Maya..." Chin-Riley interrupted with a sigh. "Admiral LeFevre would not be here if there was any question of his impartiality. He might have doubts about you, but was also very impressed by your accomplishments."

Wonderful. Barely past the introductions, and, true to form, she had already made a mess of everything. Maya looked down for a moment and then glanced at LeFevre. "Then I owe you an apology, Admiral LeFevre." LeFevre simply nodded.

"With that settled, I'd like to get straight to the matter at hand." Chin-Riley glanced briefly at the notes on her PADD. "Under normal circumstances, you would be admitted without question. You have outstanding test scores and glowing letters of recommendation from Admiral Noonien-Singh, Doctor McCoy, and Captain Kirk."

"Captain Kirk?" Maya couldn't help but interrupt, her eyes wide with surprise for several reasons. He had been an admiral when they first met, but more surprising than his change in rank was that he had gone out of his way to do something kind for her when he had seemed just as hostile toward the Augments as LeFevre. Her heart ached to know it was too late to thank him or ask him why he had this change of heart.

"Yes, Captain Kirk. At any rate, as you know, your circumstances are not normal, and so..."

"My circumstances are not that different from your own, Admiral," Maya answered. Chin-Riley kept her composure, but LeFevre and Park leaned back and gave Maya an incredulous look. "Except that I've been open about my genetic status from the start, and I can hardly be called genetically engineered when I inherited every trait from my parents naturally, and only one of them was augmented."

"Your status as an augment will not be held against you," Chin-Riley answered. "For the reasons you mentioned and also because the new precedent is to consider such individuals on a case by case basis. What we are considered with, Maya, are your actions."

"Go on." That would be more difficult to defend. She reminded herself of La'an's advice to be honest, for she had already failed in being tactful.

"You used lies and deception to earn the trust of Captain Albrecht to attempt to take control of the USS Portland." LeFevre began before glancing back at his own notes. "And in this attempt you also tampered with Starfleet equipment, assaulted Starfleet officers, and helped

Khan's augments take control of the ship. Why?"

"Admiral Chin-Riley," Maya pleaded. "You said that LeFevre was impressed by what I did."

"I am." LeFevre continued. "I just want to know why."

Maya studied the panel before her and took a deep breath. There was no way to answer truthfully and cast herself in a favorable light. "Because I wanted to earn my father's approval."

"So you acted of your own volition?" Linzer pressed.

"Yes...but not entirely!" Maya took a deep breath to gather her thoughts. "There were many choices I made that were not entirely my own. My father was manipulative and emotionally abusive." It still didn't feel right to describe him in that way, even if it was true. He had been unkind but had never hurt her. "It was a regrettable choice to preserve my safety."

Chin-Riley made another note before she replied. "Regrettable is an understatement, but unless you were truly under duress I don't think..."

"And what about the sacrifices I made to set it right?" Maya tried to remain tactful, but couldn't help but feel defensive. She felt her fists curl into fists. "Did LeFevre say anything about how I let myself be made into a biological weapon, infected with an untested virus that could have killed me? How I risked my life and returned to the Portland after my actions made me a traitor to my people to spread the virus? How weakening the Augments in that way allowed the surviving crew to escape, or how I didn't fully recover for a year?"

"That was all in your file, but not relevant to the topic of this meeting." Park answered.

"So the topic is my flaws but not my virtues?" Maya clasped her hands behind her neck and let out a long breath to steady herself.

"Maya, please calm down." Chin-Riley spoke firmly yet calmly. "The purpose of this meeting is to assess the nature of your moral compass."

"I know that nothing can undo any wrongs I may have done, but I was also told that it's never too late to start making the right choices. At least give me the opportunity."

"And I can assure you, Maya, that everything will be taken into consideration." Chin-Riley glanced to the colleagues on her left and right. "If there are no further questions I'd like to conclude this meeting. There were a few nods of approval. "Thank you, Maya, for your time. You should have an answer soon."

"And thank you, Admirals, for your time."

Outside the door, La'an waited with an eager look on her face, but before she could ask Maya how it went, Maya rushed past her.

"Maya!" La'an called, but Maya did not slow down. La'an walked at a clipped pace to keep up, and still no response as she followed down the hall and out the door. Once outside, Maya stopped to kick off her shoes and pick them off the ground. "Maya, talk to me."

"There's nothing to say." With her free hand, Maya began to furiously pull the pins from her hair. "This was a stupid idea, and a waste of time, just like every idea I've ever had."

"Don't overreact, it can't have been that bad. You weren't rejected outright, were you?"

"Not officially, but I think their minds were already made up."

"But you have no way of knowing. No need to admit defeat so soon." La'an tried to offer a kind smile.

Maya leaned her head back to look up at the sky. "I suppose I've found hope in bleaker situations. Even in the worst case I haven't lost anything."

After two anxious days Maya settled back into her usual routine, or as much routine as she had in her aimless life. Her daily schedule at least found a predictable rhythm: she slept late, went on some sort of outing in the afternoon (more to please La'an than herself) and stayed up late "studying." Sometimes what she called study was truly an academic pursuit, but often that was how she referred to her voracious consumption of literature and music. One week later, Maya had nearly forgotten about her nightmare of a meeting at Starfleet academy, until one afternoon when Maya hadn't bothered to go on her usual outing. Instead she spent the afternoon sitting at the table, engulfed in study. Several PADDs were strewn on the table around her, each with a different topic: a Jane Austen novel, an organic chemistry textbook, a diagram of the lifecycle of Alaskan salmon.

When La'an came home Maya did not look up from her work until La'an stood just behind her and looked over her shoulder. "Is this what you've been working on today?"

Maya nodded. "This is everything. I slept longer than I meant to."

"You might want to start getting used to rising earlier. I shouldn't say anything because it hasn't been made official, but I spoke to Una today..."

Maya sprang up from her seat. "And?" She kept on hand gripped tightly on the back of her chair.

"However terribly you might think your interview went, you must have said something right. Only Admiral Linzer voted against you. Don't get too excited yet, that was only one factor, but Una also said that she sees no reason why your application would be denied."

Maya put a hand to her heart and sat back down. Her heart fluttered, and a broad grin appeared on her face. "That's the best news I could

hope for.”

“I only meant to ease some of your worries, not to get your hopes up. ‘No reason to be denied’ is not guaranteed admission.”

“I know, but this is still the best news I could hope for. Whatever may happen, I at least know I was good enough for something. I’ve never felt that before.

If outward appearances were to be trusted, Maya seemed to be a model student in her first semester. She knew all the answers, gave off an air of confidence, and seemed to effortlessly earn high marks. However, Maya was also a young woman with no experience being a student and little experience functioning in modern society. For one semester, Maya was able to get by on prior knowledge, luck, and brute force—she had a skill for predicting correct answers.

One semester of terrible habits put her in an unfavorable position for the next, and Maya fell from star student to academic probation. She kept her struggles private, at first sure that she could claw her way out on her own, but later she hid them out of shame. She couldn’t bear the thought of being a source of disappointment yet again, not after La’an had done so much before. She tried to get back on track on her own, until it became clear that she could not save herself. Her choices were to withdraw on her own terms or to face expulsion. Maya chose the former, but didn’t tell a soul. She sent her files to the registrar, and once she was moved out the whole ordeal would be behind her.

If she timed it right, she could slip out silently without her roommate knowing. Her window was small, just an hour and a half while Niamh was in class, but Maya had few belongings, she could pack everything in that time. She managed to cram everything into her suitcase and head out the door just in time, but still ran into Naimh in the hall.

Niamh raised an eyebrow and glanced down to Maya’s suitcase.

“Maya,..you didn’t tell me you were going anywhere.”

Maya evaded eye contact and took a deep breath to help her find the courage to look her (now former) roommate in the eye. “It was a last minute choice. I...I’m leaving. Permanently.”

Niamh’s jaw dropped, and as she regained her composure she tried to stand a little taller. “If this was about when I came home drunk last week, because I would have rather just talked...”

“Niamh, no. It’s nothing to do with you. I’m leaving the Academy.”

“Wait, what? Why?”

Maya pushed past Niamh. “My reasons are private. Goodbye, Niamh.”

Niamh followed her but stayed a few paces behind. “So, are you moving back with La’an?”

“Definitely not.” Maya quickened her pace and did not look back.

“Then where are you going?”

“Somewhere. Anywhere. Goodbye, Niamh!”

Chapter End Notes

The TOS timeline is a ball of yarn, and I am an orange kitten with one brain cell.

-2266: The events of Space Seed go according to canon, but Ceti Alpha V1 was never destroyed, so Ceti Alpha V never endured environmental devastation and the Augments thrived there

-Events of movies 2-5 did not happen (6 and 7 did)

-2291: Events of "That Which You Have Sown" and "Mirror of the Mind." Benoit LeFevre was briefly captain of the Enterprise.

oops the yarn is tangled

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Meta notes at the end

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

December 2301 - Bellingham, WA

Humans were not meant to live here, McCoy was sure of that, and yet when Maya Noonien-Singh chose to start a new life, out of all the places on Earth she could have picked, for some reason she wanted to live somewhere cold, rainy, and dark. She hadn't exactly gone into hiding, but she hadn't been easy to track down either. She worked in a computer repair shop, but he hadn't found her there. In fact, he had been told that she kept unusual and unpredictable hours and to try again after midnight...that wasn't happening. He was here to speak with someone who had been willing to listen to him in the past, not to track down a person who didn't want to be found. He was certainly too old for this shit.

To complicate matters, Maya was rarely at home, but McCoy did find out from someone at the shop that she spent most of her afternoons at a dance studio by the waterfront. McCoy was relieved to finally find the place and step out of the rain and into the brightly lit lobby. Her could hear a lively waltz playing from within. There was a trophy case on the wall near the door, and at eye level he saw a massive champion's cup with an inscription that read:

Pacific Northwest Championship

2299

Maya McGivers - Bea Durand

The music stopped, and McCoy kept his eyes on the door as the dancers trickled out, each of them wearing the odd combination of athletic apparel with dress shoes. Each dancer walked past and paid him little attention. Of course it would be his luck that he came on the one day she wasn't there, but the last dancer to step out into the lobby was the one he was looking for.

Maya froze in the doorway when she saw him and dropped the black bag she carried.

"Doctor McCoy?"

He offered her a warm smile. "It's been a while, Maya. If you don't mind, I'd like to find some place to talk. It shouldn't take more than a few minutes."

Maya inched back into the doorway. "That depends on what you want to talk about."

"An opportunity, a job no one else can do."

Maya visibly relaxed a bit, her shoulders softening. "I can't imagine what that could be, but I'll listen, at least. Let me change my shoes, we can get a beer next door."

The Finch fit the profile of what McCoy had seen of Bellingham so far: people trying very hard to seem like they weren't trying at all. The beer list was, for some reason, printed on paper and bound into what looked like an antique novella: pages and pages of choices, yet fully half of them were IPAs with poetic names.

McCoy furrowed his brows as he flipped back and forth through the pages and felt as though he was trying to make sense of a foreign language. He glanced up at the bartender—bless that man's patience. The bartender had a youthful face with a carefully styled mustache and tattoos on his forearms and throat. If he was clean-shaven he might not have looked older than seventeen.

"Need any suggestions?" The bartender asked as he poured a pint from the tap and placed it in front of Maya.

McCoy held his hands up in defeat. "I just want a damn beer." Well, that wouldn't narrow it down at all. "A lager." The look on the bartender's face suggested this didn't narrow down the choices much easier. "A pilsner?"

"How about a Czech pilsner?" the bartender suggested.

"I'm just going to trust your judgment on this one." After McCoy gave his answer, the bartender began to pour his pilsner, and McCoy turned his head to speak to Maya. "You know, none of the official records said that you changed your name."

Maya leaned back and gave McCoy a confused look. "I...haven't changed my name."

"So the Maya McGivers who won the Pacific Northwest Championship two years ago was another person entirely?" The bartender set the glass of pilsner in front of McCoy.

"Oh!" Maya sat up straighter. "That was nothing official. A stage name."

"Trying to hide an unfair advantage?"

“No” Maya snapped. “Trying to protect myself from those who would judge me unfairly on the basis of my name alone. And if I had an unfair advantage, I would have won more than a single.”

“Well far be it from me to make choices for you.” He took his first sip of pilsner. There was something off about it, but he couldn’t put his finger on what it was. Still, it wasn’t so bad that he didn’t want to finish it. “But I still think it’s dishonest.”

“Maybe so.” Maya sipped her own beer. “But I thought you wanted to tell me about a special opportunity, not criticize how I live my life.”

“Right. It’s to do with Starfleet...”

“I wasn’t good enough for Starfleet.”

“You were ill-prepared and put too much pressure on yourself. I don’t fault you for that, and neither does La’an, even if you did hurt her when you up and stopped talking to her.”

Maya blinked, something seemed to have hit a nerve. “Then what is it that Starfleet wants?”

“There was a survey ship in the Ceti Alpha system. It’s...bad.”

“It was bad to start.” Maya took a long sip from her drink, as if she was trying to finish quickly.

“Catastrophic bad, not Lord of the Flies bad. One of the planets in the system was destroyed. No one should have been able to survive...”

“Yet somehow they did.” Maya guessed with a caustic bite in her voice.

McCoy nodded. “Only twenty, according to the ship’s scans.”

Maya slammed one hand down on the bar and doubled over, looking down at her lap. She took a few deep breaths before she looked up to speak again. “Good riddance.”

“Come on, I know you haven’t lost your compassion over the past ten years. Or have you really forgotten how you begged Kirk and LeFevre not to destroy the Ceti Alpha V settlement because of the people, some of the children, who committed no crime other than being born on the wrong planet.”

Maya drank down another long draw from her beer and slammed the nearly empty glass on the bar. “I appreciate the news about my homeworld, but I fail to see how I can be of use.”

“Starfleet needs a consultant, a diplomat for their humanitarian mission.”

“Absolutely not. They won’t accept help, certainly not from me, and those children you’re so worried about are probably all dead by now.” Maya stood up and picked her bag up off the floor. “Goodbye, Doctor, I have to turn down your offer, but I will get back in touch with La’an.”

“I was wrong about you.”

“You hardly knew me.”

“I thought you had a heart, Maya. I thought you weren’t like the rest of them.” He had one more sip of his beer, maybe he wouldn’t be finishing it after all.

Maya closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “Doctor.” Another deep breath. “Do not compare me to conquerors and fascists when all I’m trying to do is preserve my peace!”

“I’m sorry.” McCoy looked away. “That wasn’t fair, but helping is still the right thing to do. At any rate, Starfleet is going ahead with or without your assistance.”

Maya looked up at the ceiling and let out a long sigh. “Then I guess I have no choice. I’ve seen how poorly Starfleet handled their past relations with Augments. If I’m not there to offer my insights, you’re all going to get yourselves killed.”

McCoy smiled. “Nice to see you’re just as optimistic as when we first met. You’ll be on the Enterprise, she’s in orbit over Mars now. La’an volunteered to pilot the shuttle.”

The color drained for Maya’s face. “You aren’t trying to make me change my mind, are you?”

“Come on, it’s been years since you’ve spoken to her. I think a little time to talk and catch up is the least you could do.”

“Hard to argue with that.” Maya nervously adjusted the weight of her bag. “Who’s the captain now?”

“I doubt if you’ve met. Her name is Saavik, she’s a Vulcan.”

“You’re right, I haven’t met her.”

“And you also might want to say hi to my daughter Joanna. She just started on the Enterprise as a nurse.”

Maya smiled. “I will.”

Yes, Saavik is Captain now. I mean I already added one non-canon Enterprise Captain so here why not. Saavik is blorbo and deserves to live her best life.

Competitive ballroom dance of the future!

Gender roles are basically gone. Dancers lead or follow based on their strengths and select partners based simply on who they dance best with...Maya leads and her strongest dance is Paso Doble

Chapter 3

La'an and Maya's initial reunion was quiet and unremarkable. They treated each other as strangers rather than two women who had once lived together and considered each other family. They exchanged terse pleasantries, barely saying a word and keeping their distance as if there was a wall between them. They began their journey in silence, not a word spoken until they were well outside of Earth's orbit.

"I...never knew you were a pilot." Maya struggled to find something neutral to talk about. She looked straight ahead at the stars.

"I wouldn't call myself a pilot, but Earth to Mars is a short, straightforward trip." La'an, too, avoided eye contact.

Another long, heavy silence before Maya spoke again. At first she opened her mouth and inhaled, but she paused before she formed a single word, unsure of how to put her thoughts into words. She might have abandoned everything if La'an hadn't turned her head to look right at her. "I suppose you're expecting me to beg for forgiveness."

"I'm trying not to expect anything." La'an looked away again, busying herself with the shuttle's controls. "I'm sure you had reasons for the choices you made, even if I can't begin to guess them."

"I doubt you would understand. You were probably allowed to make mistakes when you were young."

La'an stayed silent for a moment. She kept her eyes down at the controls but this time she didn't try to pretend to work. "I had hoped you trusted me enough to feel safe asking for help."

"La'an." Maya took a deep breath to brace herself. "I have never, and probably never will trust a person enough to admit that kind of weakness. What I will admit is that I was wrong in how I handled it. I was deeply ashamed and let it affect my judgment."

"I figured as much. Still, I don't think it would have done you any harm to keep up with some form of communication."

Maya kept looking straight ahead. They were close to Mars, the red planet growing larger with each passing moment. "You're right." She sat quietly until the Enterprise began to come into view, "it's strange to think that the last time I was on this ship I was a prisoner."

"This is a new Enterprise. You've never been on this ship."

Once the shuttle landed inside the shuttle bay and the door opened, Maya and La'an were greeted by Captain Saavik, her executive officer—a tall human man, and a handful of the other senior officers. Maya, however, paid little attention to anyone other than the Captain. The Vulcan woman had sharp features and bright eyes, and her tailored uniform and neatly styled hair made Maya feel uncomfortably out of place and unkempt. She couldn't say why, though, not when she had seen countless other people in the same uniforms.

The executive officer played the traditional tones on a boatswain's pipe, and Saavik offered La'an a slight yet respectful bow of her head.

"Welcome aboard, Admiral. I am Captain Saavik, and this is my first officer, Commander Caraccilo."

"A pleasure," La'an answered. "Unfortunately my time aboard will be brief, as I am only an escort. This is Maya, the consultant from Ceti Alpha V."

"Thank you, La'an," Maya began with a note of bitter pride. "But I can speak for myself." Both the Captain and the Executive Officer had their eyes on her, and in that moment Maya realized that she was in the uncomfortable position of wanting her voice heard but having nothing to say. Caraccilo's expectant look and whatever opinions he had of her mattered little, but the fear of looking foolish and ruining her first impression with Saavik...Captain Saavik...made her want to shrink away, crawl into the shuttle, and fly herself backwards to Earth. "In the interest of transparency, I have some hesitations about the mission."

"These concerns can be addressed in our first meeting, which is scheduled for 1900 hours."

So cold. So terse, even for a Vulcan. Dammit, she had ruined everything already, hadn't she?

"Then we'll talk again in about four hours," Maya answered.

"Admiral Noonien-Singh." Saavik's attention was back to La'an. "We will be leaving Mars in two hours. You are welcome to see any part of the ship and use that time as you see fit."

"Thank you, Captain, but I think I'd like to just have something to eat and be on my way." She looked to Maya. "Do you want to join me?"

Maya shook her head. She had enough uncomfortable conversations with La'an. "No, I have my consultation to prepare for."

La'an tried to hide her disappointment, but her face still fell. "I understand."

"Commander Caraccilo will lead you to your quarters." Saavik continued. "We will speak again soon."

Maya had four hours to spare, and despite the excuses she gave to avoid spending more time with La'an, she did not need that much time to prepare. She had an idea of what sort of questions would be asked and knew what she wanted to say, and so after she dropped off her few belongings in her quarters she found herself with plenty of time but little to do to fill it.

Little to do but not nothing. Maya was due for a physical before she left Mars, and when she left her quarters she felt a wave of shame over just how long it had been. If she wasn't hurt or feeling unwell it all seemed like a long, elaborate waste of time. After living the first quarter

century of her life in a primitive planet, in some ways she still had to remind herself of the ease and accessibility of modern technology: that there was no need to take half a day to walk across town, or to limp around for weeks on a mild ankle sprain, or to hold on to every belonging as if it was irreplaceable.

As she walked through the corridors of this Enterprise, Maya tried to spot the difference between this ship and the previous ship to bear the same name, but in truth she had seen so little of it that she couldn't make much of a judgment. The flooring was different, at least, and the walls. Another difference kept coming up in her mind: the Captain. Any line of thought that went through Maya's mind would inevitably circle back to Saavik: wondering about what sort of person she was or if she might be able to remediate any damage done in their botched first encounter.

Sickbay, though, there she could see more differences. The place was familiar enough to be recognizable but just unfamiliar enough to make the familiarity unsettling...or maybe after ten years her memory was unreliable.

When she entered a nurse looked up from her work and offered a warm, welcoming smile. She was short and slim and had shoulder-length brown hair, but it was her round blue eyes that let Maya know who she was speaking to.

"You must be Maya Noonien-Singh," the nurse began.

"And you must be Joanna McCoy." Maya guessed as she sat in the edge of the nearest bio bed.

"Lucky guess." Joanna immediately went to work with her tricorder. "Or did my dad drop a few hints?"

"That was it, and you look like him."

Joanna sighed and shook her head. "I've lost count of how many times I've heard that. Just curious, what would you say if someone told you how much you looked like your father?"

"I would tell them they had absolutely no tact."

Joanna chuckled softly. "Noted. Now, I'm hoping there's some mistake here, but according to your records your last physical was before... well excuse my lack of tact again...before you dropped out of Starfleet Academy."

Before Maya answered, she looked into Joanna's eye, trying to project the thought in her head because somehow that seemed easier than saying a word. "No, that's...that's correct."

"Any reason?" Joanna showed no signs of judgement, just asking a simple question.

"Not any good ones." Maya sighed,

"I'll spare you the lecture, then. I'm sure you've heard it before." Joanna set down the tricorder and began taking notes on a PADD.

"Whatever you're doing, keep it up, you're like an elite athlete." Maya took that as an invitation to leave to leave and hopped off of the bio bed, but without looking up from her work Joanna held up one finger to stop her. "Hold on, I never said you were done. I have a few more questions." Maya's shoulders slumped and she sat back down. "I wanted to ask about the virus you were in grated with, the one that was engineered to target augments."

"You would have to read Doctor Kimani's reports. I had no involvement in its creation, I only spread it."

"I know, I'm not interested in its creation, I want to know if it's still affecting you."

"A little, but no one believes me about it. You saw it for yourself, when compared to the average human I'm incredibly fit, there's no indication that anything is wrong from me, I only have my insistence that I know my body and I haven't felt normal in ten years."

"For what it's worth I do believe you." Joanna took a few more quick notes. "Unless you have any questions, I don't need anything else from you, And I'm glad to have you with us. I think we might have been doomed without your help."

Maya hopped off the bio bed again, this time with no objections. "I wish I had your optimism. I think we're doomed regardless." She began to walk away. "And I'm also afraid I may have gone and ruined my first impression with the captain, so I'm struggling to keep a positive attitude."

"Don't be so sure of that," Joanna called.

Maya froze and turned to look back at Joanna, her eyes wide. "Why is that?" She gasped and put a hand over her mouth. "Did she...she didn't say anything about me already, did she?"

"What? No. I only meant that Vulcans are hard to read..." After a moment of realization a playful grin appeared on Joanna's face. "Oh...I think know what you're thinking."

Maya blinked, not making the connection herself at first, but when it hit her she gasped and stepped back. "Absolutely not!"

"On the off chance I'm right, don't go any make anything awkward, Maya. You might not be Starfleet, but Saavik's still your boss."

Chapter 4

Maya still had plenty of time to prepare for her meeting, and that's exactly how she planned to spend her remaining time. She could have gathered her thoughts, prepared notes with talking points, or reviewed the reports from the survey that had discovered the environment disturbances. Instead, it felt more pressing to focus on her appearance. Maya took a sonic shower, combed her hair, and took more time than she dared to admit trying to wrestle it into a neat bun. Selecting a change of clothes, however, proved to be more vexing. Unless she was on the dance floor (where nothing exceeds like excess) Maya dressed for practically alone. Everything she brought was plain, fit poorly, and in varying shades of gray. It wasn't until every piece of clothing was laid out on the bed that she realized how frumpy she was going to look sitting in a room full of officers in tailored uniforms, and she couldn't place why that thought bothered her so much.

She became increasingly more frustrated trying different combinations of clothing and not being satisfied with any of them. The process took far longer than it should have, and Maya suddenly found herself left with just enough time to get to the captain's ready room. No matter how unflattering to was was, she would have to settle for the clothes currently on her body: a gray shirt and black pants that hung loose on her frame.

Though she was just in time for the meeting, Maya was the last to arrive. Sitting around the conference table were Captain Saavik, Commander Caraccilo, and a man she had not yet met. Saavik stood and greeted Maya with a respectful nod. If she felt any distaste from their first interaction, at least her Vulcan features hid it well.

"Maya Noonien-Singh," Saavik began. "Allow me to introduce my chief science officer, Lieutenant-Commander Hollis."

"A pleasure." Maya offered Hollis a smile as she sat down in the chair across from him.

Before she began, Saavik looked to each person gathered around the table. "I would like to begin immediately, we have much to discuss. Maya, I take it you have read the reports."

"I have." Maya lied. It was the same mistake that ruined her relationship with La'an, and she couldn't help but do it again because she didn't want Saavik to think she was irresponsible or foolish.

"Then you understand the unique challenges we face. We plan to beam to the planet's surface with supplies and an away teams team including medical professionals in the event that such assistance would be required. The supplies and short term will be given without condition." While Saavik spoke, Caraccilo jotted notes down on his PADD. "The complication arise in determining the most logical, ethical approach to dealing with the survivors. I cannot, in good conscience, leave people on a planet that should not support human life, even if many of them have a history of war crimes. My intention is to grant safe passage to earth to anyone who wants it, with appropriate security measures and consequences to be determined on a case by case basis."

"That won't work." Maya answered. "None of it." All eyes were on her, and Saavik raised a perplexed eyebrow, a clear prompt to elaborate. "Without a way to communicate with the planet they have no way of knowing our intentions."

"And you think they would perceive our presence as a threat?" Caraccilo guessed.

Maya nodded. "I have no doubt about it. I think the only way to do this safely is to beam down the supplies and leave."

"I would rather not take such a minimalistic approach." Saavik responded. "What are your reasons for believing that an earnest attempt to offer help would be met with such hostility?"

"I thought that would obvious, Captain." There was a bite in Maya's voice she wished she could have controlled. "I doubt if this would be seen as earnest offer, rather than a ploy to get close enough to kill the remaining Augments. Every interaction they've had with Starfleet has ended in disaster for them. These people are violent, arrogant, and willing to take every advantage they have. They assume the same is true of all people."

Saavik nodded slowly. If she was bothered by the tone of Maya's voice she didn't let it show. "I will take this into consideration."

Caraccilo jotted down a few more notes before he looked up to ask a question of his own. "What sort of recommendations do you have for an away team, if we end up pursuing that option?"

"Phasers set to kill." Maya managed to control herself enough to keep her voice calm and steady.

"That seems a little extreme for a humanitarian mission," Caraccilo noted. "Our goal is to save lives, not end them."

"Do you think I like that suggestion?" Maya raised her voice again, but she stopped herself and took a deep breath. "Those people treated me poorly, and I hated them, but somehow I'm still grieving the ones who've died. All I meant is that an aggressive response is likely, and when that happens advanced weapons will be your only advantage. If it was so important to have me hear as a consultant, the least you could do is listen."

"Understood," Saavik answered with a nod. Caraccilo and Hollis seemed annoyed, but the Vulcan was still unreadable.

Caraccilo took a few more notes, and Saavik looked over his shoulder at his work. A strand of hair slipped out from behind her pointed ear, and Maya was enchanted by how elegantly she moved as she reached up to tuck it back into place.

Dammit, Joanna was right.

"Lieutenant-Commander Hollis," Saavik continued. "I understand you also have information and insights to add."

“Yes Captain. I’ve studied the reports from the survey that discovered the disturbances. The planet is no longer Class M, but Class K.” He looked to Maya. “Like Mars.”

Maya rolled her eyes. “I know the planetary classifications, I had two years at Starfleet Academy and I do remember most of what little I actually learned.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean any offense.” Hollis shook his head and held up his hands in a sign of surrender. “Anyway, the survey also reported extremely high winds and sand storms. I’m concerned this may make beaming in difficult. I’ll talk with the transporter chief, but won’t have a clear answer until we’re in orbit. We should have a shuttle ready as a backup.”

“Did you read any of Doctor T’Ralia’s reports on the Ceti Eels?” Maya asked.

“I have. I understood that she developed a serum that can kill the eel while sparing the host. We’ll be sure to have plenty synthesized just in case.”

Maya took a deep breath. The Ceti eels had taken two of the few people who had shown her kindness: her mother and Captain Albrecht. “Pray you don’t need it. It’s side effect is severe brain damage.”

“Doctor T’Ralia also developed an antidote, I understand. We’ll see if it can be improved.”

Saavik sat upright and glanced to each person in turn. “We have discussed everything on the agenda. If there are no further questions or comments, we can conclude this meeting.”

While Hollis and Caraccilo rose from their seats and left, Saavik and Maya stayed behind. Maya spoke first.

“Captain…” Maya paused and scratched the back of her neck, trying to think of how best to put her thoughts into words. As she considered this, Saavik looked right at her, and gazing into those bright eyes made her heart flutter. “I wanted to apologize. I’m afraid some of things I’ve said might have come off as overly blunt or even rude, and I’m sorry.” She forced a smile, more for her own benefit because she knew it wouldn’t matter to a Vulcan.

“On the contrary. I appreciate your candor.” Saavik stood tall, with her hands clasped behind her back. “Often humans fail to speak their mind or hold back opinions that need to be shared because they wish to avoid causing offense or having uncomfortable conversations. It is not logical. It is counterproductive at best and harmful at worst.”

Maya breathed a sigh of relief and placed a hand on her heart, but she tried quickly to regain her composure. She still couldn’t get a read on Saavik, but she feared such a reaction might seem a bit foolish. “Glad to know we share that same sentiment.”

“I would like to continue to speak to you, to learn more about the nuances of life of Ceti Alpha V, and to gain more insights into the people we will be facing.”

“Well, I’m not fond of talking about my past, but this is why I’m here. Did you want to talk now, or later?”

“Later, and in a more casual setting. Do you play chess?”

“A little.” Very little. She hadn’t played in years, only knew the basics, and never cared to learn beyond that. A game of chess against an arrogant full-Augment could quickly crush a person’s self esteem. It didn’t take long for Maya to reach the conclusion that chess was not her game.

“Then we will have our discussion tomorrow over a game of chess.”

“I look forward to it.” The forced smile grew to reached her eyes.

“As do I.” After Saavik, spoke, Maya was sure she could see the corners of her mouth lifting ever so slightly to form a faint smile, but she dismissed that observation. A Vulcan wouldn’t smile at her.

When she left the ready room, Maya had a spring in her step and a giddy lightness in her head that she hadn’t felt since she was a teenager. Her excitement, however, was tempered by nervousness. This was another interaction that she might run the risk of ruining horribly, and she also tried to remind herself to not read too deeply into it. This was another professional consultation, not a date.

She needed advice, someone to talk to, but there was only one person on this ship with whom she had any sort of rapport. She had a brisk pace and a light head as she returned to sickbay, filled with the hope that Joanna was still there.

When she stepped inside, her face lit up to see that Joanna still sat working at her desk. “Joanna! I need your help,” Maya called. Joanna looked up, concerned, but her face softened when she saw that Maya hadn’t come here because of a medical emergency.

Joanna leaned back in her seat, crossed her arms, and smirked. “You know, usually people who rush into sickbay in need of help aren’t grinning like that, so I’m guessing you aren’t hurt or anything. What can I do for you?”

Maya rushed over to the desk and began to drum her fingers on the surface, eagerly taking any opportunity to burn off some of her frenetic energy. “Do you know how to play three dimensional chess?”

“I mean, I’m no grandmaster, but I like to think I’m pretty good for a casually player.”

“Perfect. Saavik wants to have a chat tomorrow over a game of chess, but I’ve only ever played the 2D version and was terrible at it.”

“Well, there’s no need to try to impress her. Vulcan logic might work to your advantage. If you tell her you’re a complete beginner, she’s not

going to think any less of you for playing like a clueless beginner. Everyone starts somewhere.”

Maya smiled. “I’m still not used to not having to impress people. If you have the time, though, I’d like to play a practice round.”

“Give me an hour.”

Chapter 5

Maya couldn't sleep that night, but she wouldn't have wanted to anyway. Her practice game with Joanna was enlightening, not that she learned much from one game, but rather that it highlighted how little she knew. That one game set off a new obsession, and Maya spent the night working frantically to fill in the gaps in her knowledge. She spent the night studying strategies and playing computer simulations, but the more she researched the more overwhelmed she became, every new piece of knowledge raised more questions that she felt compelled to chase down the answers to. No wonder people could devote their whole lives to this game.

She studied and worked until five hours before the scheduled...well not date, but...appointment when she made herself find a stopping point and lie down. Even though she wasn't tired when she lied down, soon she dozed off. Maya woke up with just an hour to spare, and she spent the time fussing over her appearance, but (just like before) couldn't be fully satisfied.

Maya arrived at the lounge a few minutes earlier than the scheduled time, hoping to have some space to clear her head, but Saavik had arrived even earlier and already had the three dimensional chess set ready in a quiet corner. Saavik rose from her seat when she saw Maya approaching.

"I appreciate your punctuality," Saavik noted, plainly.

"It's something I used to struggle with, and now I err on the side of caution." That much was true, even if it wasn't the reason why she chose to arrive early.

"A logical solution."

Was that a compliment? Dammit, Vulcans were hard to read! Maya took her seat at the chess table on the side with the black pieces and Saavik sat back down in front of the white.

"I should admit that I'm very new to the game." Maya studied the board, quickly refreshing her memory of what she learned about opening strategies.

"Then this should prove to be valuable practice," Saavik answered as she studied her own pieces. She began by moving a pawn.

Maya contemplated her own starting move. For all of hours of research it felt very different to put abstract concepts into practice in a real game against a real person. She simply moved a pawn of her own. "So, which deeply personal questions did you wish to ask?" Maya asked as Saavik considered her next choice.

"My intention is not to pry into private matters unless absolutely necessary. What I hope to gain is further insight to help manage expectations." Saavik moved another pawn.

"Now that I've had a chance to think about it, I'm not entirely sure what to expect." Maya reached toward her knight, but hesitated, her fingers hovering over the piece for a moment before she pulled her hand away to reconsider her move, "I couldn't begin to guess who their new leader is now, and not only because I don't know who survived. He lost his heir when I killed my brother, and most of his inner circle died with him on the USS Portland. My father was practically worshiped, I'm sure he left behind a nasty power vacuum." After reconsidering, Maya remained with her original choice and moved her knight.

"Is there a chance you might be accepted as Khan's heir?" Saavik made no hesitation when she moved her own knight.

"Absolutely not. I was looked down on for being a half breed, and I'm a traitor as well." Maya made another move with her knight.

"Are you so sure you're a known traitor? The reports stated that no other Augments survived the destruction of the USS Portland. No one survived to tell what happened aboard that ship. Those living on the planet's surface may not know the details of what happened aboard that ship." Saavik moved her bishop.

"They know I killed my brother." Maya took more time to contemplate her next move. She had been confident early in the game with her opening strategies, but as the game continued to unfold, she began to have doubts about her technique. "I never shared my motives, but I imagine that much would be easy to guess." She furrowed her brows and gave the pieces another moment of consideration before she made her choice.

"And may I ask what your motives were?" Saavik made her own next move quickly, almost automatically.

"Oh, you could ask," Maya teased, but her evasive response served only to cause Saavik to give her an expectant look. "I'm sure you've seen from spending so much time working with humans that choices driven by emotion sometimes make no sense at all. I'm not entirely sure my reasoning makes sense in my own head, and it would be a waste of time to find logic in it." She paused, and Saavik's expression remained unchanged. Maya took a deep breath. "It was an impulsive choice. I had a weapon, he didn't, but my entire life led me to that moment. He was cruel to me and threatened my life more than once, and I took the opportunity when I had it."

"Lethal force to end abuse? There is a sense of logic in it, if the approach was extreme."

"I'd be lying if I said that hatred and jealousy didn't play a part." A secret she had never shared before, as it didn't align with her goal to prove that she wasn't another violent, morally bankrupt Augment. "I imagine I'm seen as a failed usurper."

Saavik glanced down at the chessboard then back up at Maya. Embarrassed to have forgotten her turn, Maya moved a pawn without thinking, and without hesitation, Saavik moved to capture it. Maya frowned. "And it seems that impulse control is still a weakness of mine." This time Maya put more careful thought and planning into her next move. She could set herself up to capture a pawn in the next turn, but it leave herself

vulnerable. After another moment of consideration, Maya made that choice regardless, but just as she feared, Saavik was able to move into a position that made Maya's outcome seem bleak.

"I would say lack of experience is also to blame." Saavik made a surprising move. She had been in a position to capture another of Maya's pawns, but instead she made a choice that seemed to give her no direct advantage.

"You're not trying to let me win, are you?" Maya teased.

"No, making a personal sacrifice to spare your ego would not be logical."

As Maya considered her next move, the reasoning behind Saavik's previous move became clear. Maya was pinned in with no no good choices available to her. With a heavy sigh, Maya moved her knight, which Saavik immediately moved to capture.

"Brace yourself for some of the worst human ego you can imagine." Again. Maya found herself with no satisfying choices. She took more time to study the board, just in case a less obvious chose might become clear. "And hardship hasn't humbled them, if anything it's made them all the more arrogant, taking great pride in the fact that they were capable of thriving in a difficult environment. I don't think anyone living in modern civilization can really grasp it. You can all imagine the bigger things, like lack of modern medicine or having to build everything by hand and travel on foot, but there was so much more than that. I was told that in the early days on a unknown planet with no frame of reference it could be a gamble determining which fruit would be good to eat and which would be your final meal. I'm still amazed that I can have hot water in an instant instead of after hours of work." Even after the extra time to consider, Maya had discovered no new options, and she settled for the least-terrible move.

"I might be closer to understanding than most." Saavik still looked down at the board as she spoke, and her voice was soft. Hard as it was to read Vulcans, Maya had the feeling the captain was sharing a vulnerable moment, so she leaned closer to listen. "I, too, had a difficult start to my life and lived on an unforgiving planet."

"On Vulcan?"

"No. Not on Vulcan." All sense of vulnerability was gone from Saavik's voice, a sign that she was not interested in entertaining further questions. She made another move. "Check."

Maya's heart jolted and she sat upright. She hadn't seen that coming, and she took a deep calming breath while she evaluated the situation. The only way to spare her king was to move it, but when she tried to think a few steps ahead it seemed as though the outcome of this game would not be in her favor. The pair continued in silence for a few more turns, with Maya feeling like they were creeping toward the inevitable until Saavik made the move that trapped her king and declared "Checkmate."

"Good game...but I wish I might have lasted a little longer."

"With practice, you will be able to." Saavik began to reset the pieces. "I have enjoyed this game, and the conversation. If you would find it agreeable, I would like to schedule these games regularly."

Maya's eyes opened wide and bright and her heart fluttered. This was the best possible outcome. "Yes of course! I mean, I've enjoyed the practice very much. And..." Maya took a deep breath. She felt bold, especially for someone who had just been horribly defeated in a game of chess. "If you're interested, I'd also like to share with you something important to me. I would love to teach you ballroom dancing."

"Your offer is appreciated, however I must decline." Saavik put back the remaining pieces and rose to her feet. "Such physical contact would be considered too intimate for a Vulcan. Especially a Vulcan with a bondmate."

Maya stayed seated for a moment longer, trying to hide the shock and hurt she felt. Damned if it wasn't her destiny to fall for unavailable women. "I'm sorry, I meant no offense." She stood up as well. "Is this an appropriate time to say 'live long and prosper?'"

"Traditionally, that is reserved for situations with an extended period between interactions, but the sentiment is still appreciated."

Maya smiled, "in that case, have a good night."

Chapter 6

Saavik and Demora removed their fencing masks after one of their regular practice sessions. Saavik appreciated that this sport had a strong element of technique and strategy. Even with her Vulcan strength, Saavik found Demora to be a formidable opponent, on account of her years of experience in the sport—Demora started in childhood, while Saavik had less than a year of practice. Still, Saavik had been a quick study with her skill far ahead of such an inexperienced fencer.

“Demora, I find myself in need of advice.” Today’s session had been less than satisfactory. While it would not be logical to expect peak performance everyday, this might be one facet of a deeper problem.

“Well, your footwork was a bit less precise than usual.” Demora sat on a bench and inhaled deeply. Unlikely her Vulcan friend, this practice session had been physically challenging for her. Her skin glistened with sweat, and her breathing had not yet recovered to its usual rate. “I can show you a few drills to help with that.”

“My concern is not with my fencing technique, however I am certain that the distractions have been detrimental to my performance.” Saavik sat beside Demora but looked straight ahead as she spoke. “What I wish to share is a deeply private matter.”

Saavik sat in silence as she processed her thoughts. There was a human who haunted her mind. Thoughts of her filled all the quiet, empty moments and even tried to creep in and distract her when she needed to exercise the utmost logical concentration. Saavik had tried to purge (or at least bury) those troubling emotions through meditation or by filling every waking moment with some high-focus task to deny her mind the chance to wander, but to no avail.

“The details of Vulcan culture are rarely discussed with outsiders, so I take it you are not familiar with the concept of Shon-ha’lock.”

Demora simply shrugged.

“Its closest translation is ‘The Engulfment.’ It refers to an unconventional means by which a mate can be found, when thoughts of a person can consume the admirer’s mind. Until I found myself in my present state, I had incorrectly assumed that such accounts were exaggerated, however I find myself distracted by thoughts of this person. It is both inescapable and illogical.”

Saavik had spent far more time thinking about this particular human than she had spent in her presence, and the more she tried to drive those thoughts from her mind, the more they plagued her. The untamed dark hair that framed her face, the way she furrowed her brows when concentrating, and even the way she was quick to talk without thinking...all points of endless fascination.

Demora gasped and her eyes brightened. “Saavik...do you have a crush on someone? Who is it? Don’t worry, I won’t tell a soul.”

“It makes no difference. Shon-ha’lock should not occur in a Vulcan who is already bonded.”

“Well...”. Demora shrugged and brushed a few loose strands of sweaty hair out of eyes. “Plenty of people have more than one partner. In some cultures it’s the norm.”

Saavik quickly turned her head to face Demora. “It is not the norm on Vulcan.”

“Honestly, I’m not sure I’m the best person to ask for advice.” Demora wiped the sweat from her brow. “I don’t know the nuances of your culture, and I’m afraid any advice I might offer would be too human and illogical to be useful to you.”

“Demora, there is no one else I would trust with such a personal matter.”

“No one? Not even Spock? I think another Vulcan would understand the situation better.”

“Spock is too busy to concern himself with my personal affairs.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure.” Demora stood up, placed her mask on the bench, and arched her back to stretch. “You talk about him like he’s your dad, I don’t think he’d mind taking a few minutes to talk things over. But if you still want my illogical, human advice...” She paused to look for any signs of encouragement on Saavik’s face. “Well, it’s complicated. I don’t know that I want to encourage you to go behind Tural’s back or do anything dishonest, but you said you only see him once every seven years and don’t even speak to him much more than that. I don’t see why he would care, or even notice.”

“So your advice is to pursue this relationship?”

“I mean, this other person might not even like you back, which would make this all a moot point, but if you were hoping to hear that you should bury your feelings or ignore them or something you came to the wrong person.” Demora sighed. “Sorry, that probably didn’t help at all.”

“I expected no less, but it is still a relief to give voice to my concerns. Perhaps it will clear some of these consuming thoughts from mind.” Saavik stood up and turned to face her friend. “Thank you, both for the conversation and for another satisfying practice session.”

“One more piece of advice before you go...I really do think you should talk to Spock, or at least think about it a little more before dismissing the idea entirely.”

“I will give this suggestion the consideration it is due, however my situation is a temporary one. After the successful conclusion of our mission, Maya Noonien-Singh will return to Earth, and it is unlikely we will see one another again.”

“You sure you’ll forget about her when she’s gone?”

“I can only hope.”

Maya would only be aboard the Enterprise briefly, but much of that time would be spent working closely with Saavik: further consultations, working on the planet’s surface, and their new commitment to playing chess. She would have to meditate. A challenge laid in front of her, but not an impossible one.

After their previous consultation and three more games of chess, Maya and Saavik should have started to feel more comfortable around one another, but instead they became more tense, more guarded, with an invisible wall growing between them. This consultation was between the two of them alone. They sat across from each other at the table in Saavik’s ready room. With just the two of them, and no sound other than the soft whirr of the ship’s machinery in the background, the room felt cavernous and lonely.

“I wish to review with you the short list of candidates for the away team,” Saavik began. Her eyes were cast down at her PADD, but her gaze stayed still rather than skimming the information on the screen.

Maya nodded. “I looked through it, but you’re going to be a much better judge than I am. The only one of these people who I’ve spent any time with is Joanna McCoy.”

“And what is your opinion of Nurse McCoy?”

“Honestly more of it is personal than professional, and even then I think some of my opinion is shaped by the rapport I have with her father.” Maya leaned back, relaxing a bit in her seat. “She has a compassionate heart, she listened earnestly when I shared medical concerns that others have dismissed, and her files showed that she’s got experience treating refugees in remote locations. Have you see how she handles being in danger? Is she willing to fight dirty?”

“I have seen her, when threatened, bite a man and draw blood.”

Maya smiled. “Good. She has my vote.”

There were ten names in the list in total, and for most of them Maya could only shrug, admit she didn’t know the person but that she had no objection and was pleased to trust the Captain’s judgment.

“Doctor Thomas Rudd?” Saavik asked as they made their way down the list.

“Another medical professional wouldn’t be a bad idea, but if it’s either or, I think McCoy is the better fit.”

Maya gave a vote against two ensigns who seemed too young and inexperienced, and the final name in the list was...

“Demora Sulu.”

“The pilot,” Maya recalled. “Because of the concerns with beaming down to the planet?” Saavik nodded. “I have a question...is it understood that I’m meant to be a part of the landing party?”

“It is. That is one reason why I value your input. In the event of an emergency, these people will be responsible for your safety. We can discuss any concerns you may have, but understand that you are under no obligation to put yourself under any undue risk.”

“No...I’ve thought about it, and I really should be there, but I have another question. Is it also understood that you will be a part of the landing party?”

“No, it is not.”

Maya placed both hands on the table and leaned forward. “You would send others into danger and stay safely behind yourself. Why?”

“As the captain if I were to be killed or incapacitated, the ship would be left without a commanding officer.”

“That’s not a terrible reason, but it doesn’t make you seem like any less of a coward.”

Saavik straightened her spine. “I will give this feedback the consideration it is due.”

“Let me look through the list again.” Maya reached for the PADD, but the tips of her fingers brushed against Saavik’s. For a moment they froze, fingertips touching and eyes locked until Maya pulled her hand back and shrank away. She rolled her shoulders forward and looked down at her lap. “I...I’m sorry.”

Saavik said nothing and simply pushed the PADD across the table. Maya quickly scrolled through the list, not reading a word and barely noticing any of the information on the screen. She still didn’t look up, even as she spoke. “If there isn’t another Vulcan on this ship, it would behoove you to go along anyway. Doctor T’Ralia found that the Vulcan brain is resistant to Ceti eels. Someone needs to stay lucid if it comes to that.”

“You bring up the Ceti eels often.”

“Because I don’t think I can overemphasize the threat they pose, unless by some rare stroke of luck they were all killed when the planet went bad.” Maya straightened herself back up and once again found enough bold confidence to look Saavik in the eye. She spoke quicker and louder but not quick raising her voice. “Mind control, Captain, I don’t think I need to explain the horrifying implications. The only outcomes are an agonizing death or if you’re lucky enough to get T’Ralia serum permanent brain damage. I’ve seen people controlled by them, killed by them, and injured from the only cure. Damned if I’m going to see it happen again...Captain.”

“I will give these concerns the consideration which they are due.” Saavik’s response was calm and measured, a stark contrast to Maya’s passionate appeals. “And I will re-read Doctor T’Ralia’s reports on the Ceti eels.”

“Everyone going down to the planet should have their own supply of the serum and the antidote.”

Saavik nodded and made a quick note on her PADD.

“Maybe send some down with the medical supplies, I can tell you Augments are not immune to the eels.”

“That suggestion would have of more value earlier. I am not certain that large quantities can be synthesized within our time frame.”

Maya slumped back again. “Never mind then. To be honest, most of them would probably rather die than live with brain damage, anyway.” She leaned forward again, trying to steal a glance at Saavik’s notes.

“I would rather make an attempt than rely on an assumption that could prove to be false.” Saavik skimmed her notes one last time. “Is there anything else you wished to discuss?”

Maya shook her head, “No, only that, again, I am sorry about...”. She glanced down to Saavik’s hands and took a deep breath,

“You have done nothing wrong, and there is no need to apologize.”

Maya breathed a sigh of relief. “Chess tonight? It’s been a while.”

“No. I’m afraid I no longer have the time.”

“Oh.” Maya shrank back in her seat again and tried to force a slight smile. “I understand.”

Chapter 7

They would be reaching Ceti Alpha V soon, and the final preparations were underway. Maya's role faded into the background, and so she kept to herself and stayed in her quarters while the crew worked to make their final preparations: tactical strategies, preparing supplies and so on. Maya still had a little more work of her own in the form of practicing moving and functioning in an EV suit.

She and Joanna McCoy stood in the training hall, all geared up save for their helmets.

"You know, I'm not entirely sure this is necessary." Maya began with a heavy sigh. "I had a few semesters at the Academy, this isn't my first time in an EV suit."

"Well, that was a few years ago, best to knock off the cobwebs." Joanna answered with a shrug. "Shouldn't take long, it's not like we're going to space. The planet still has normal gravity and an atmosphere—just a thin one, so it's more of a precaution against radiation and sandstorms than anything. This is more of a formality to make sure you're comfortable moving around, know how to use the equipment safely, and won't have a claustrophobic panic attack when you're sealed inside. We can go get a drink after...a strong one."

"I am concerned about the atmosphere," Maya admitted. "I struggled with shortness of breath and orthostatic hypotension for years while I was recovering from the virus. Do you think the low oxygen could bring the symptoms back?"

"It's possible." Joanna smirked and held up her helmet. "But that's what this is for."

Joanna and Maya both put on their helmets, and once they were sealed in place, Joanna asked, "Can you hear me?" Her voice echoed over the communicator inside Maya's helmet.

"I can."

"Good. Try just walking around to start."

They weren't going to be doing any precise maneuvers, so Maya and Joanna took the time to practice basic movements: walking, running crouching. The EV suits were light enough that none of it felt awkward or uncomfortable, except of course for anything involving the hands. Inside the gloves, Maya's fingers felt thick and she couldn't judge the strength of her grip.

"Any advice for the gloves?" She asked.

"Just keep practicing," Joanna answered. "And don't be nervous to grip a little stronger, nothing you'll be working with is that delicate."

The two women spent nearly an hour at their practice, most of it spent on fine motor control such as carrying objects and using tools.

"I think that's about enough." Joanna took off her helmet and gave her head a little shake. "Nice work. I'll meet you for that drink in a bit. I need to clean up first, this thing always makes me feel so sweaty."

Joanna was already waiting the lounge with a glass of red wine when Maya arrived. She had managed to claim a table by the window, an impressive feat at this time when the lounge was packed full, when one duty rotation has just ended. Joanna waved to Maya. "Come on and have a seat, I'll get you a drink."

"An IPA," Maya replied as they crossed paths.

"Wait, humans actually drink those?"

"Yes, some of us do." Maya teased. "Now stop questioning my taste so I can go and guard our table."

A few minutes later, Joanna returned with a tall glass of beer. "I still can't believe you actually like that bitter stuff."

"Everything that grew on Ceti Alpha V was bitter." Maya took her first sip, a thin line of foam from her beer clinging to her upper lip. "I find anything else to be cloying."

"About that..." Joanna glanced around her and leaned in. She lowered her voice when she continued. "Are you going to be alright?"

"If earlier I feared I ruined the Captain's opinion of me, now I'm certain. I'll be fine, I'm used to having awful luck with women."

Joanna straightened up. "Sorry to hear it, but that wasn't what I was talking about. I meant..." She glanced out the window at the stars racing by. "...going home."

"I didn't have a home until I moved to Bellingham."

"Well, that's fair." Joanna had a sip of wine, a tiny sip that barely looked as though there was any less liquid in her glass. "But you know what I mean, the place where you had a rough history, seeing people who were unkind to you."

"Well." Maya picked up her glass and took another long sip. "I try not to think about it, but I find a great deal of comfort in knowing that most of those people are dead."

"If that was true, you'd still be on Earth."

Maya slammed down her glass harder than she meant to, which made the beer slosh inside the glass and foam vigorously before settling

down. “You’re right. You’re right, but I can’t make sense of any of it, and I don’t know how I feel or how I should feel.”

“Don’t worry about how you think you feel, no one’s every right about that.”

“Well, then it’s everything, everything terrible. Fear, grief, anger, and a sense of vindictive satisfaction that I’m completely ashamed of. But what’s worrying me more is that I think I accidentally assaulted the Captain.”

Joanna leaned in and placed both hands flat on the table. “Wait...what?”

“I’m not even sure. I brushed her hand by mistake.”

“I wouldn’t worry. She’s spent so much time around humans, I’m sure she knows you didn’t mean anything by it.”

“I’m not as sure about that. There was the way she looked at me, and she’s been avoiding me ever since. Out of no where she’s saying she doesn’t have time to play chess anymore.”

“Maya.” Joanna’s tone was gentle yet firm. “No one is going to be more direct than a Vulcan. If she had a problem, she would tell you, and if she saying she doesn’t have time, she’s not lying to avoid you.”

“I wish that was more comfort, but I’ll try to keep that in mind.” She looked out the window and sighed. “Everything would have been simpler if I had stayed in Bellingham where I could blissfully ignore anything further afield than the Cascades.”

“Well, in my opinion as a medical professional, I recommend you take a deep breath, finish your beer, then go have a nice lie down.”

Maya smiled. “I can do that.”

Chapter 8

Maya was still asleep when they reached Ceti Alpha V, but the first thing she did when she woke up was rush to the window to see the view of her home planet from space.

This was not her home planet.

Ten years ago was the first and only time she viewed this planet from space. Back then, Ceti Alpha V didn't look so different from Earth; the continents were different shapes, yes, but it had still been mostly blue with green and brown landmasses and wispy clouds. Now though... Ceti Alpha V was an angry rusty-orange ball, and the sight of it gave Maya a deep sense of wrongness, as if some horrible mistake had been made and they weren't even at the right planet. No...that was stupid. This was her home, only everything was gone: the riverside where she and Katya would sneak away to walk alone and hold hands, the trees she climbed when she was a child, the bright pink orchids that made your hands swell and itch if you touched them. Nothing remained except some sad husk of a world.

0730. Thirty minutes to get dressed, eat, and try to force herself to forget the creeping anxiety that tried to grow inside of her.

She arrived early to shuttle bay 3, where she was greeted by Saavik and Demora Sulu. The Captain and the pilot were already geared up in their EV suits (sans helmet)s and as Maya wrestled her way into her own suit, Joanna McCoy arrived, just on time at 0800 on the dot.

"Great news everyone!" She announced, holding her arms open wide and wearing a smile on her face. "I'm here."

Demora struggled to suppress a chuckle, Maya rolled her eyes, and the only shift in Saavik's controlled Vulcan visage was a slight raise of one eyebrow. "Nurse McCoy," she began. "The shuttle is loaded with supplies, and we will be able to depart as soon as you are ready."

Joanna began to slip into her EV suit. "What's the old saying? If you're early you're on time, if you're on time you're early, and if you're late you may as well not show up."

"I find tardiness more forgivable than absenteeism." Saavik replied.

"What a relief." Joanna rolled her eyes as she wiggled her arms into the sleeves of her suit. "I'm ready as soon as someone closes up my back"

The four women sat in the shuttle with their EV helmets in their laps, and when the shuttle bay doors were open, Demora began to enter commands into the console. "It'll be nice and easy to start, but once we get into the atmosphere, it's high wind and sandstorms all the way down. Hope no one gets space sick."

The shuttle lifted off the ground flew out the open door. As they crept closer to the planet, all the creeping feelings Maya felt from the morning tried to rise back up to the surface. Maya closed her eyes and took a deep calming breath.

"You holding up alright?" Joanna asked.

Maya sighed. "Still not sure if I give a damn if the people down there live or die."

"Well, it's a little late for second thoughts." She shrugged.

"I'm going to try to not let my personal hang ups get in the way." Maya gave a slight glance toward Saavik, but the captain kept her eyes forward. "I'm here to trust the Captain's judgment, and give a little extra support when needed."

Just as Demora had predicted, the first leg of their flight was smooth and easy, but after they broke through the atmosphere, the tiny shuttle was tossed about by violent eddies of wind. In the higher altitudes it was only wind, but closer to the surface they were also buffeted by swirling sands. Demora and Saavik remained calm and unfazed, while Joanna looked as though she was about to be space sick and Maya sat tense and stiff as if keeping perfectly still would prevent any further unexpected turbulence. After such a rough flight, the landing was pleasantly uneventful, just a soft bump on the planet's surface and all of the uncomfortable motion stopped.

In the moment of still silence before anyone moved to action, Maya spoke first. "I have one more piece of advice, as a consultant."

Saavik turned to face Maya, and even though her expression was still neutral and unreadable, it made her heart flutter. No one had any right to be so perfect.

"Go on."

She took a deep breath. "Diplomacy with the Augments might require me to bluff, or outright lie, anything to not appear weak. Don't contradict me."

"Understood." Saavik responded. "If there are no further questions or comments, we should proceed."

The landing team donned their helmets and carefully went through the final safety checks to ensure that their EV suits were sealed and the equipment was all in good working order. When the shuttle's door opened, a blast of sandy wind raced by. Though it was only a few meters from the shuttle, in the hazy air the structures where the augments made their new home looked like a vague blob in the distance. The group walked in pairs, each pair working together to carry a container of supplies.

"Are you sure there were any survivors?" Joanna's voice rang out through the communicator. Even though she spoke clearly, her words were muffled by the sound of howling wind. "How can people live in this?"

"The ship's sensor confirmed human life signs," Saavik replied.

As they moved forward, Maya's heart began to race, her stomach turned, and her head spun. Setting foot in her home planet and seeing it in this state triggered an overwhelming sense of...everything. Fear, anger, loss. When they were closer to the settlement, they could see a tall human form standing just outside: an Augment dressed in layers of robes and protective clothing to shield them from the sandstorm. The sight of this person sent a jolt through Maya's body as though she had stumbled into sudden danger. She needed to use all of her willpower not to drop the container and sprint back to the shuttle.

The figure gestured toward the door on the side of the structure, and the team paused before continuing forward. After the door slid open, the team stepped inside and the door shut immediately behind them. Inside, the air was still and warm, but the wind could still be heard howling outside. The Augment began to remove protective layers to reveal his face, and even though he seemed to have aged twenty years instead of ten, Maya recognized him instantly. This was Claudius—simply Claudius—one of the original survivors from the Botany Bay. He was one of Khan's closest friends, and Maya was surprised to see that he hadn't been with her father and went down with him on the Portland. The team set down the supply containers and began to remove their helmets.

"Unexpected guests, but not unwelcome." His cold gaze landed on Maya, and a twisted smile curled onto his face. "Except for you. I thought you had died aboard the Portland."

Maya inched back but still stood tall and held her head high. "Likewise. I suppose my father didn't think you were important enough to have you by his side in his moment of glory."

Claudius' jaw dropped, but he regained his composure. "Such a simplistic understanding. Someone both highly competent and deeply trusted had to remain behind as a contingency, which proved to be a necessary measure."

"Sir..." Saavik began.

"Claudius," he corrected.

"Claudius. Your statements have led me to the logical conclusion that you are the leader. I am Captain Saavik of the USS Enterprise. Starfleet has recently learned of the damage your planet had endured. As your exile was the result of choices made by Starfleet officers, we have come to make amends. Supplies we will give without condition, and anyone who wishes to leave this planet will be able to do so and start a new life on Earth."

"A new life as a prisoner," he scoffed. "And your assistance would have been of more use five years ago."

"Regrettably, the discovery was recent. Federation ships have avoided this system after the crash of the Toyotomi. Those among you who have a sordid history on earth will face consequences for their past transgressions. However, I am aware that your numbers also include those who were born on this planet who have no such history and may be able to integrate into society."

"And why is James T. Kirk not here to make amends himself?"

"Kirk died years ago," Maya blurted out.

The wicked smile on Claudius' face. "Pity I wasn't there to see it for myself." With two long strides he came closer to Maya, and she instinctively backed up. He towered over her. Among unaltered humans, Maya was just over average height, but as a half-Augment whose human mother had a small frame, Maya looked small and delicate next to a full Augment. "And I have even more questions for you. What was your role in all this?"

Maya took a deep breath. "Starfleet took me as a prisoner." She had a carefully planned alibi, many of the finer points she discussed with Saavik over the few chess games they shared before the captain decided she didn't have time for such things. The facts were mostly true, only told with a spin that cast them in a certain light. However, even with the perfect tale to tell, twisting the truth was a gamble. Her father could practically smell lies, and it was possible Claudius had the same ability to see through the best poker face too. "They used me, they turned me into a weapon, a vector for a virus made to target and weaken us. That's what turned the tide on the Portland, and as compensation I was allowed to return to Earth."

"As a prisoner?"

"Initially...yes."

"You're already doing a poor job of convincing me that Earth is worth returning to."

Fear gripped Maya and made her throat feel dry and tight, but she still pushed through to speak her mind. "None of this was my idea, and frankly it makes no difference to me if all of you die on this rock or not."

Claudius was mostly unfazed, aside from a momentary look of confusion. In the years since they had last spoken, Khan and Marla's meek child had learned to stand up for herself. "Come. Let me show you something that might stir your compassion."

He led the party down a short hallway and into a wider room. With space at a premium, every inch of the vertical walls were used for storage. It looked like clutter and bric-a-brac at first glance, but a closer inspection revealed that it was all utilitarian: tools, weapons, jars with various contents and other supplies. A young Augment tended a hydroponic garden by the far wall, but the plants were brown and wilting. He paused in his work and turned his head to face Claudius with an expectant look in his eye.

"Get the others. Everyone." Claudius ordered, and the young man dashed away behind another corner. Moments later, more Augments began to trickle into the room. Maya silently counted them...one...two...three...only nineteen altogether. Unless McCoy had been mistaken when he spoke to her in Bellingham, one more might have died recently. Only one other of the survivors was from the original Botany Bay crew, the others were adults born on the planet, a handful of teenagers who had been young children when Maya left, and one young boy who appeared to be about ten years of age.

“Maya, look.” Claudius gestured toward the small crowd gathered before them. “One third of our population never returned from the Portland. And the others...I don’t think I need to elaborate. In any case, the prodigal son—or daughter—has returned to so selflessly help us in our hour of need, but five years earlier might have spared us more hardship.” His voice dripped with sarcasm. He turned his attention to Saavik. “Captain, repeat your offer so everyone can hear it.”

“We have brought supplies,” Saavik began. “These, and anything else you may need are given freely. Anyone needed medical attention may seek it with Nurse McCoy, and anyone who wishes to leave the planet.”

“Don’t omit details, Captain,” Claudius pressed. “Under which conditions?”

Saavik raised an eyebrow. “There are no conditions, however the degree to which each individual can expect to integrate into Federation society will be contingent upon each person’s personal history and psychological profile.”

“Now, I think we deserve more than that,” Claudius taunted. “What I see before me is four hostages who will be instrumental in securing a more favorable outcome. Or, perhaps, I should say three hostages.” He gave Maya a pointed look. “The usurper needs to answer for her crimes.”

A fit of panicked rage gripped Maya, the likes of which she had only experienced before when she was pushed past the edge and killed her brother. She drew her phaser and fired a warning shot into a shelf on the wall. The blast hit a glass jar full of sand and gravel, shattering the glass and sending the contents into a dusty explosion. To the floor fell a mature Ceti eel. The creature scuttled around on the ground for just a moment, before Maya turned her phaser on it and killed it instantly.

She raised her weapon and aimed it at the crowd of Augments. Every muscle in her body was tight and tense, and her eyes were full of fire. “I killed my own brother just to watch him die, and I’ve had ten years to think about the ways in which I’ve been wronged. I am Khan’s only living heir, and if you have any respect for my father, honor this one request. Your quarrel is with me. Let the others go.”

Despite the threats and the phaser fire, Claudius remained calm and unbothered, the same stern look still on his face. “Maya, what are you?”

Her face fell, and she lowered her weapon. All of her bold bravado was gone as she vividly remembered being a small, frightened child constantly reminded of her own inferiority. This was a question her father, and later her half brother, asked when they thought she was getting out of line. There was only one acceptable answer.

“Half-breed.” Maya answered, her voice soft and weak.

“And not the heir, either,” added another Augment, Francesca. She had been pregnant the last time Maya saw her, and beside her stood the one young child. The implication was clear: the boy looked exactly like Maya’s brother when he was young.

Maya began to breath heavily, and her fingers trembled. In only a few minutes her plan dissolved away, and her head was too filled with painful memories to let her think straight enough to regroup.

Saavik remained a calm, steady presence, not so much as a raised eyebrow this time. “I would like to propose a counter-offer. As the captain, I am the most valuable hostage. Allow Lieutenant Sulu and Nurse McCoy to return to the ship, where they can give a detailed account of what happened here and convey the gravity of our situation.”

“Captain, please!” Demora begged. “Don’t do this, if anything happened...”

“Thank you, Lieutenant, for proving my point.”

Claudius stepped closer, only inches from Saavik, and narrowed his eyes as he studied her closely, but the Vulcan did not flinch. “And what do you stand to gain from sacrificing yourself in this manner.”

“I am unsurprised to see that altruism is a foreign concept to you. Maya is a civilian, and as a Starfleet officer I am sworn to protect civilian. I would be in violation of that oath to willfully leave her behind. Furthermore, it is unlikely that you would allow this exchange to end without taking a hostage, and I cannot in good conscience allow a member of my crew to stay behind. My safety is forfeited in any outcome.”

“A logical conclusion,” Claudius noted.

“And an obvious observation.”

“Very well. Send the others back to your ship with the following demands: a ship of our own and full Federation citizenship. No restrictions, no consequences, no questions asked.”

“Understood. Sulu, McCoy. Return to the shuttle.”

“Captain, you can’t be serious,” Joanna begged, her eyes wide with desperation. “No one’s leaving unless we’re all leaving together. Nobody gets left behind.”

“That was an order, McCoy.” Saavik’s voice remained even and steady, but she spoke louder and with a heightened sense of stern force and urgency.

Demora and Joanna hesitated, and a pair of tall Augments inched forward. That was the only other encouragement they needed to get on the move.

“Well,” Claudius began again, this wicked smile back on his face. “Now that our terms are settled, allow me to welcome you both to Ceti Alpha V.”

Chapter 9

The Augments had taken Saavik and Maya's EV suits, communicators, and weapons and led them to a small room in the back corner of the compound. They were held with little additional surveillance or security, but such measures would have been unnecessary at any rate. The only way out was through the crowd of Augments, and on the outside they stood no chance of survival. Maya leaned against the wall and slid down to sit on the floor, and Saavik remained standing, hands clasped behind her back and a thoughtful look on her face.

"Trying to think up a brilliant escape plan?" Maya asked, trying to bury the fear she felt.

"Not presently, no. The inherent risk makes an escape attempt at this time illogical."

In the close-fitting body suit that Saavik wore, Maya noticed the soft curve of Saavik's hip but looked away the moment she realized she had been staring. This was no time to be nasty.

"Sit back and wait to be rescued, then."

"Yes, barring a change in circumstance, that would be the safest and most logical course of action."

The pair remained in contemplative silence for a moment until the sound of footsteps echoed in the hall. Francesca was back, wearing a sly half smile on her face. "Captain," she began. "It seems your life is of less value than you led us to believe. Your first officer has heard our demands but is steadfastly refusing to satisfy them. For now. And you, Maya, get to your feet and have a little dignity, you're to answer for your crimes."

Maya didn't move, she only narrowed her eyes on Francesca. "And I suppose Claudius has appointed himself judge, jury, and executioner?"

Francesca's brow furrowed. "You have no right to speak about him like that." She bent over and roughly gripped Maya's left upper arm. Even ten years after her old shoulder injury was fully healed, Maya shrieked in fear, instinctually panicked that she risked further harm. She let Francesca pull her up, but she was unsteady on her feet and felt the room spin as she was forced upright. "Come on."

"I cannot allow this." Saavik, who had not moved during this exchange, spoke in a tone that was both assertive and calm.

"Oh?" Francesca let go of Maya and crossed her arms. "And what makes you think you're in any position to stop me? Do you think your Vulcan strength can match mine?"

"Unlikely, though not impossible. However, my intention was not to use force. I simply wish to accompany Maya."

"Outworlders are not welcome to interfere in our affairs."

"My intention is not to interfere. One reason why I chose to stay behind was to protect Maya. I would fail in that endeavor if she left my supervision."

"Saavik..." Maya begged. "You don't have to do this."

Both Francesca and Saavik ignored Maya's pleas and stared each other down. Francesca narrowed her eyes. "Very well. You may attend, but not interfere. You will be seen but not heard, I want to be able to ignore you entirely."

"Understood."

Francesca led the pair back to the main hall. Again, all of the surviving Augments were gathered there, all of them wearing looks of disdain on their faces.

"The Vulcan insisted on tagging along," Francesca announced. "But she did agree to not get involved."

Claudius considered this development for a moment. "I trust you will keep this promise."

"I insisted on attending in order to ensure Maya's safety. I will keep to myself unless circumstances arise which would require me to intervene."

"Very well. Let's not waste any time. I believe Enzo wanted to be the first to question you."

From the back of the crowd, the young boy stepped forward. Seeing him again this time was no less chilling than before, reminding Maya of painful memories that she would have preferred to forget. Enzo took a deep breath and glanced toward his mother, who gave him a small nod of approval and encouragement. He took another breath before he spoke.

"Why did you kill my father?"

Maya opened her mouth to speak, but stopped as she could feel all those pairs of accusing eyes on her. Francesca seemed to be enjoying this far too much, and the smug smile on her face made Maya's blood boil, and when she answered she addressed the mother instead. "Well, to start, I'm surprised that anyone believed that Arjun was the father when it was a well known fact that you sleep with anything that moves."

Francesca's mouth hung open. She was caught off guard by the unexpected attack on her character, but once the insult registered she exploded. She lunged forward, but stopped short when Claudius raised his hand from across the hall.

"Don't give her the satisfaction of knowing her petty insults worked. Maya, answer your nephew's question."

Maya took a step closer to Enzo and bent her knees to be closer to his height. She looked her nephew in the eye and spoke softly and gently. Whatever hatred she had for her family, she didn't want any of it to extend to this child. "Before I answer, is it alright if I ask you a question first?"

Enzo nodded.

"What was the reason they told you? I think it's only fair if I know the narrative that's been told about me while I've been away."

"They said you were frightened and jealous and shot him in the back to take his place."

Maya looked down and sighed. "Technically all true, but there's more to it than that." She took a deep breath and looked up, now feeling bold enough to address the whole crowd but still terrified that telling the truth would result in horrific consequences, just as she had felt when her brother was alive and making her life hell. "Your father was not a good man. I'm sure every one of you has the same rosy view of my brother as you had of my father." Here she paused, trying both to read the room and get a grip on herself. Adrenaline coursed through her veins as she felt the freeing satisfaction of voicing thoughts that she had kept private for so many years. "They both tormented me, but at least the worst my father did was insult me. I can't say the same for Arjun, who weaponized Father's favoritism and often hurt me. Everyone here saw it happen, those who were old enough to have been there, at least." Now her head was spinning as she tried to make sense of how her confession may have changed the circumstances, but her mind was too overwhelmed by a surge of frenetic energy to think straight.

"If you were hoping to convince me that you are not, in fact, a jealous coward, you're doing a poor job of it." Claudius replied.

"Then I can live with being a jealous coward, and I accept whatever consequences I am due." Maya glanced to Saavik, hoping to see some kind of hint or look of encouragement, but the Vulcan was as unmoved as ever. In its own way, that was a source of comfort. Maya needed the support of someone steady and stable when she felt as though the ground was crumbling beneath her feet.

A wicked smile curled onto Claudius' face. "And I'm happy to oblige. Luckily for you I've learned a bit of compassion from your father, even though I once thought it was a weakness of his to fall for an unaltered woman and let her half-breed bastard live."

"Arjun was the bastard," Maya corrected.

"What sort of ideas did they put in your head on Earth? You used to know your place." His tone was taunting, like a cat toying with its prey. "Though I'm sure you will learn it again in time. All I want is for you to suffer in the way that we have, to live out the rest of your days on this hell planet struggling to survive."

"More merciful than I expected." Maya found the strength to remain calm even though the idea of living in close quarters with people who used to torment her—and after ten years of thinking she was rid of them—was worse than whatever horrors an old war criminal could imagine. Maybe Claudius knew that.

"And don't think I've forgotten about you, Captain. It seems you face a similar fate unless your commander comes to his senses and satisfies our demands."

"Then I, too, resign myself to becoming another permanent resident of Ceti Alpha V."

"Quite the choice you're making, Captain. I hope you don't come to regret it."

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Cw: mentions of death of young children (including babies) mention of infanticide

Commander Caraccilo had rarely sat in the captain's ready room without the captain present, and never when she was in danger with no clear path out. His eyes were heavy lidded and lined underneath with dark bags, and on the table in front of him he had both hands curled tightly around a mug of coffee—his third this hour. Even though he looked exhausted, his mind was racing, both worries and hopefully solutions swirling in his head. All that caffeine wasn't helping, but it was keeping him alert.

Gathered with him for this consultation were Joanna McCoy, Demora Sulu, chief science officer Remi Hollis, and transporter chief Ekatarini Petrokokkinos. Caraccilo had another long sip of his coffee before he began.

"Well. I'm not going to sit here and lay on the false optimism...frankly there isn't much of anything to be optimistic about. The Augments have the captain, their leader has made impossible demands and refused two counter offers, and the only solution I can think of is to say to hell with the humanitarian mission and send in a heavily armed rescue party. If anyone has any better ideas, please enlighten me."

"Even if that is the only option, I still wouldn't recommend it," Joanna was the first to respond. "Advanced weapons might not be enough to overpower them, the reports from Starfleet's last encounter with the Augments showed just how easily just a handful were able to take over an entire ship."

"Noted, but we don't have any time to listen to problems without solutions."

"Lieutenant Petrokokkinos." Hollis spoke up to address the transporter chief. "Are you absolutely sure there's no way to compensate for the storms to beam them out?"

"Don't you think I would have done it by now if it was that simple?" Petrokokkinos rolled her eyes. "Theoretically, though? Maybe, but it wouldn't be quick or easy. I need more data on the storm patterns."

"Which we've been collecting all along, and will continue to gather more." Hollis answered.

"And we'd have to wait for a lull in the storms."

"Doable, if not ideal." Caraccilo answered with a nod.

"And I can't be certain yet, but it's very likely they would need to be outside to get a strong enough signal."

Caraccilo hung his head and stared pensively into the dregs of coffee in his cup. "We can't communicate with them, and even if we could they don't stand a good chance at that kind of escape."

"I'll see what I can do, Commander, but I thought it was better to mention that upfront and avoid a nasty surprise later."

"Good point." Caraccilo took a deep breath and drank down the remainder of his coffee. "Well, you all know what you need to do. Get to it."

When the sun set on Ceti Alpha V, the temperature dropped. Not so much as to be dangerous to a human (and even less so to an Augment), but enough to cause discomfort that was difficult to ignore. Without so much as a blanket, falling asleep would be challenging. What bothered Maya more than the cold, however, was an ever-worsening feeling of dizziness and hunger for air. She couldn't guess if the feeling was caused by an anxious heart, the thin atmosphere, or a combination of the two. She sat leaned against the wall with her head slumped, trying to take slow, steady breaths.

Saavik seemed more bothered by the cold. At first she tried to hide it, standing still with her hands clasped behind her back and her usual contemplative, neutral look on her face, but in time her resolve began to crumble. She sat down beside Maya and tried to keep a little more dignity by sitting up straight with rigid posture, but when Maya glanced over she saw that the Vulcan was shivering.

Maya inched closer but was cautious to leave a space between them. "Wish there was something I could do to help," she sighed.

"There is." Without warning, Saavik took hold of Maya's hand. The sudden and unexpected contact made Maya gasp in both delight and shock—Saavik's hand was freezing. "Come closer."

"Saavik...Captain...What about your bondmate?" Even though she protested, Maya did not let go of Saavik's hand.

"These are extenuating circumstances. It would be illogical for Tural to perceive a transgression in measures taken to protect my safety...if he were to find out at all."

Maya took a deep breath and moved closer, making an effort to remain respectful of whatever unknown boundaries might be in place. She pressed her side against Saavik's and rested her head on her shoulder as Saavik took her other hand. After they sat together in silence for a few minutes, Maya closed her eyes. They faced the worst possible outcome, yet Maya began to feel calm and at peace.

"Would it bother you if I rambled about my complicated emotions?" Maya asked. Her eyes were still closed.

“No. I understand such measures may be necessary to preserve one’s peace of mind, in which case I will listen.”

“I’m not even sure where to begin. I’ve been acting cavalier because I have to, but I’m frightened, not only about what could happen to us but that acting like that came back to me so easily. Being violently assertive was practically required. I had a hard start to my life.” Maya fell silent as foreign images flashed through her mind, of abandoned, starving children left to fend for themselves on a wild planet. Somehow she knew whose memories these were. “But yours must have been so much worse.”

“Comparing our experiences in such a way is not a worthwhile endeavor.”

Maya sat up straight and opened her eyes. “How did I know that?”

“A telepathic link, perhaps a bond.”

“I’ve had a mind-meld before and found it painfully intrusive. This was nothing like that.”

“That was likely because the previous meld was not wholly welcome, while this link is.”

“And what about you? Is this what you want?”

“It is, though I have concerns for potential complications.”

“You meant Tural?”

Maya nodded.

“It would not be productive to worry yourself with such things. You need rest. I can see your health is beginning to be negatively affected.”

Maya rested her head on Saavik’s shoulder and closed her eyes again/ “I imagine I wouldn’t have to worry so much about a Vulcan being a jealous lover.”

Saavik opened her mouth as if to answer, but stopped herself. Some affairs were best kept private.

Not long after Maya dozed off, she was awakened to the sound of approaching footsteps: soft, light and quick. The surge of energy made her sit straight up, and her heart jumped. However, the sense of shock subsided as quickly as it came. Maya breathed a sigh of relief when she saw the young boy, Enzo, turning the corner carrying a small sack. Maya and Saavik stood up; Maya was careful to move slowly as her head was still in a fog.

“I take it you have more questions for the woman who killed your father.” Maya put her hands on her hips.

“Not quite.” Enzo extended his arms to offer the bag to Saavik and Maya. “I want to help.”

Maya took the bag and looked inside: one confiscated phaser and communicator. “You took quite the risk to get these. Why help us?”

Enzo looked down at his feet and sighed. “Because I want to go to Earth, more than anything.”

Maya handed the bag off to Saavik and placed her hands on Enzo’s shoulders. She looked into his eyes, and even though he looked so much like the man who had once caused her so much pain, she began to see Enzo as his own person. His own person who could forge his own life and had the capacity to do a lot of good, if only he took that chance, just like she had ten years ago. “I know exactly how you feel. You have my word that if we manage to get out of here you’re coming with us, and maybe you’ve given us an advantage.”

“Maya, it would be wise to temper your optimism,” Saavik added. “With the other phaser still accounted for and adversaries whose numbers and strength far surpasses our own. It would be more accurate to say that what we now have is simply less of a disadvantage.”

“Hope is free. At least now we can communicate with the ship. Enzo, before you go, may I ask you a few questions?”

Enzo nodded.

“There were three other children, teenagers. I’m sure I knew them, but they’ve grown too much for me to recognize or remember their names.”

“Umeko, Elena, and Aada.”

Maya nodded, now realizing the similarities in the three teenage girls and the very young children she had last seen years ago. “And now I feel foolish for not recognizing them. And...are you the youngest child?”

Enzo nodded. “The youngest survivor. The others...new babies...” Enzo forced a slight smile, but there was pain in his eyes.

“You don’t have to elaborate.” Maya didn’t want to dwell on that topic, and she certainly didn’t want a young boy to think about it either. If she didn’t know the details she could carry on with the belief that this environment was too harsh for a fragile new life, but given the Augments’ obsession with utility she had darker suspicions.

“I think you need to hurry up and get back to wherever you need to be.” Maya patted Enzo on the shoulder one more time. “If anyone finds out what you’ve done, say that I put you up to it.”

After a silent nod of understanding, Enzo turned to go. Maya reached into the bag to pull out the communicator and pushed it into Saavik’s hands. “Contact the ship, I’m going to find a place to hide these.”

“Are you giving orders now?” Saavik teased.

“As the expert on Ceti Alpha V, I think I’ve earned it just this once.”

Maya lowered herself to the ground and began to feel around where the wall joined the floor, and while she worked Saavik readied her communicator.

“Saavik to Enterprise.” She spoke quietly, held the communicator close, and cupped it with her hand to muffle any sound.

“Captain? Caraccilo here. What a relief to hear your voice.”

“Keep it brief, Commander, with every passing moment I risk discovery.”

“Right. We might be able to beam you out of there, but you’ll have to get outside when the sandstorms die down in three hours.”

“What you require will be extremely difficult, and there will be a third with us.”

“Understood. Caraccilo out.”

During this conversation, Maya had managed to peel back the corner of the covering on an interior wall. “Put everything in here. A lot can happen in three hours.”

Chapter 11

Maya soon drifted back to sleep, but this time she was less reserved how close she chose to be to Saavik. She pressed up against Saavik's side with her head resting on her chest and her arms wrapped around her waist. It felt as though she had barely slept at all before she felt Saavik move and stirred awake. Maya opened her eyes and lifted her heavy head.

"I heard the communicator."

Maya sat up and inched away to allow Saavik to peel back the wall covering to retrieve the communicator. The wind outside was not howling as strongly as before, but the air was still bitterly cold.

Saavik flipped open her communicator. Just as before she held it close and in a cupped hand. "Saavik to Enterprise."

"Caraccilo here. Can you try to get out now? We're expecting a twenty minute calm in the storm, and it looks like the next one won't be for three days."

"We will make an attempt, however with no time to prepare, our circumstances are far from ideal. Saavik out." She closed the communicator and shifted her weight to begin to get back on her feet. "Get the phaser. I anticipate we will need it."

Maya crawled toward the hiding place to take the phaser before she slowly stood up. Falling asleep hadn't made her feel any more restored and rested, it made her feel worse, with her heart racing and her head spinning. If everything went according to plan, she wouldn't have to be on this terrible planet much longer.

"What about Enzo?" Maya asked once she was back on her feet.

Saavik stood in the doorframe and looked in both directions: all clear. "I plan to honor the promise you made to your nephew, but be aware that the longer we take, the higher our chances of being discovered."

With her phaser ready, Maya stepped out in front and began to lead the way. She was on high alert and felt as though the slightest provocation would make her jump out of her skin, yet her body still felt sluggish and heavy. Somehow she still managed to move slowly and cautiously, careful to make as little noise as possible. It weighed heavily on her heart to think that she had no idea where Enzo was or how to wake him without alerting the others.

They were near the exit and so far had remained undetected until the sound of soft, light footsteps padded across an intersecting corridor. Saavik and Maya pressed themselves against the wall and froze, but the young Augment—a teenage girl—had already seen them. The girl simply stared at them with wide eyes.

"Elena?" Maya guessed. Ten years had passed since they had seen each other. The girl probably didn't remember, and Maya wasn't sure she had guessed the right name. "It is Elena, isn't it."

The only response she gave was the slightest nod. Elena had been five years old when Maya saw her last, and even though she was just as intellectually brilliant as any other young Augment, Elena rarely spoke.

"Do you want to leave this place and go to Earth?" Maya spoke in a gentle whisper. "Enzo will be coming with us too."

This time Elena had no response, she simply turned and ran away like a frightened doe.

"Maya," Saavik, too, spoke in a low tone. "Regrettable as it may be, it seems that the best course of action may be to abandon the promise you made to your nephew. The likelihood of remaining undetected is low."

Maya's heart sank, but before she could respond, they heard another set of approaching footsteps, and from around the corner came Enzo. Maya held her free hand to her heart and breathed a sigh of relief.

"What an incredible stroke of luck!" She spoke louder than she meant to and felt an immediate twinge of regret. "Did Elena get you?"

"Yeah...she did." Enzo scratched the back of his neck and looked. "She's not coming, though."

"Well, come on, we don't have much time." Maya stepped back to the front and began to lead the way to where they had first been let into the compound.

"Wait," Enzo interrupted. "You shouldn't go that way. There's another way out." Maya looked to Saavik for approval.

"He knows the details of his home better than either of us. If he says there is a better way to the exterior, I trust his judgment."

"I'm still leading the way," Maya answered. "Just tell me where to go."

Maya still held her phaser ready as Enzo gave directions from behind. He led them back around, past where they had stayed the night, around one more left turn, and sure enough they found a heavy door to the outside. And right in front of that door stood Francesca with a wicked grin on her face.

"So predictable!" Francesca purred. "I almost expected that this little trap wouldn't work, but I suppose that would be giving too much credit to you weak half-breed intellect."

Maya had her phaser ready and her eyes narrowed on Francesca and her jaw clenched tight. "I don't want to kill you in front of your son, but

I'm also not afraid to do it. I'll leave Enzo, I'll stay behind myself, you only have to step aside and let the captain go."

"No, don't think I will." Francesca's tone was light and playful, an alarming thing to hear in such a situation. "And I think it would serve you well to drop your weapon."

"And why is that?"

"I can think of one very compelling reason." Claudius spoke from behind her, and before she could turn to look at him she felt his phaser pressed against her back, just between her shoulder blades. Maya let her own weapon drop to the ground.

"And when I shot a man in the back, I was called a coward." From behind, Claudius wouldn't be able to see that Maya was rolling her eyes.

"Don't give me a reason to kill you sooner than I planned on it. Captain, your communicator." Claudius demanded.

Saavik silently complied and handed her communicator to Claudius. He flipped it open. "Commander Caraccilo? I trust you're still there."

"Yes...who is this? Claudius?"

"Of course, who else would it be if not your captain? I'm afraid you will have to abort your rescue attempts, there has been a complication."

"What do you mean? What have you done?"

"Nothing yet. The hostages are of more use to me alive and unharmed, even if you did break the rules."

"Claudius..." Caraccilo paused, leaving everyone tense and eager to hear more. "It's becoming clear to me that I may need to rethink my initial refusal of your demands. These delicate negotiations, though, they really need to be done in person. I'd like to invite you onto my ship to discuss the matter, but we only have a window of a few more minutes before the storm intensity will interfere with our transporters."

He smiled a twisted smile. "I agree completely. Be ready to beam me up, I will be outside and waiting momentarily."

"You sure you're not walking into a trap?" Francesca asked.

"Do not underestimate me. Khan very nearly took a ship on his own, and I have the advantage of having learned from his mistakes. Soon we will have the empire we deserve."

Chapter 12

“Permission to speak freely,” Hollis began. His voice and a sense of urgency, and there was fire in his eyes.

“Go ahead.” In contrast, Caraccilo was cool and calm and wore a thoughtful look on his face.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing, inviting a hostile Augment on board?”

“Setting a trap with bait too good to resist.” Caraccilo punched a few buttons on the arm of the command chair. “Caraccilo to sickbay.”

“Go ahead.”

“We’re going to be catching a genetically engineered tyrant. Send your two strongest people to wait just outside the doors to transporter room two, and have them each armed with a hypo spray of a double dose of the strongest sedative you have.”

“Understood.”

Caraccilo then turned toward the security chief. “They’re going to need backup, phasers set to kill but only as an absolute last resort. Can’t negotiate a prisoner exchange with a dead prisoner.”

A few more buttons pressed so Caraccilo could get the final step in motion. “Caraccilo to transporter room two.”

“Petrokokkinos here.”

“Do you have that signal?”

“Yes, Commander.”

“Stand by for now, I’m on my way down along with a team from medical and security. We’re going to give our esteemed guest quite a welcome.”

Only Caraccilo and Petrokokkinos waited in the transporter room, ready to greet Claudius. Caraccilo stood with his hands clasped behind his back and a neutral expression on his face. His first few seconds with Claudius, at least, would be diplomatic.

Petrokokkinos furrowed her brow as she focused on the controls on the console. As she worked, Claudius began to materialize on the transporter pad, though it took longer than usual. He appeared before them wearing layers of protective clothing and immediately removed the hood that covered his face.

“Welcome aboard!” Caraccilo’s tone was warm and chipper. “I’m Commander Caraccilo. Now, I’d rather not waste time. If you’ll join me in the ready room we can have a proper discussion.”

“Of course, Commander,” Claudius purred. “And what an honor it is to meet you in person.”

Claudius extended his right hand, and Caraccilo hesitated before he reached out to shake his guest’s hand. However, instead of offer a polite handshake, Claudius gripped Caraccilo tightly by the wrist and yanked hard to pull him closer. With his left hand he pulled out a knife that had been hidden within his robes and swiftly stabbed Caraccilo in the stomach.

Caraccilo shouted out in pain and doubled over as he clutched his wound in a desperate attempt to keep the flowing blood inside his body. Meanwhile Claudius turned his attention to Petrokokkinos. He lunged toward her from the other side of the console, but Petrokokkinos ducked down, crawled around from the back and escaped into the corridor.

As Petrokokkinos rushed out, the teams from medical and security rushed in. Two men with hyposprays charged toward Claudius to inject the sedatives while the security team surrounded and attempted to restrain him until the drugs took their full effect.

Even a crowd of humans was no match for an augment. Claudius pushed them away easily and bolted out into the corridor, but he was unsteady on his feet. He didn’t get far before the sedative began to take hold and his speedy getaway turned into a drunken stumble. The security team was able to catch and restrain him, but he was still lucid enough to make a feeble attempt to struggle free.

One of the medics ran back to the transporter room where Caraccilo had fallen into a heap on the ground. He was bleeding badly but still awake and aware. The medic knelt by his side and tended the wound with a dermal regenerator.

“We got him. He’s stumbling around like a sloppy drunk even though the dosage was four times what it would take to knock out a regular human, but we got him.”

“Good. Guess that means I need to get back to the bridge.” Caraccilo moved slowly as he straightened himself up and got to his feet.

“No way, Commander! You need to get to sickbay that wound checked out now.”

“Are you sure it’s that urgent? I feel fine.”

The medic let out a beleaguered sigh. “Your first convenience, then.”

En route back to the bridge, Caraccilo made an effort to sort out his appearance. He smoothed out his hair and straightened his uniform. Luckily, the heavy maroon fabric of his jacket did a decent job of hiding the blood stains.

Caraccilo slumped back into the command chair, glad to sit down as he was beginning to feel a bit dizzy and fatigued. Maybe he should have gone straight to sickbay.

“I wouldn’t say it went smoothly, but we go him. Put me through to the planet, I’ve got some negotiating to do.”

“You’re connected,” the communications officer answered.

“Enterprise to Ceti Alpha V.”

“This is Francesca,” a harsh female voice replied. “Go ahead.”

“We’ve had an interesting development in our negotiations. Claudius is under heavy sedation and locked in the brig. I will happily return him to you unharmed if you return the favor and release the hostages.”

“Sorry, don’t think I’ll be doing that.”

“What?!” Caraccilio sprang out of his seat and instantly regretted it. His heart raced, his head spun, and his knees wobbled. He slumped back into the command chair and took a deep steadying breath as he hung his head.

“You’ve done me a great favor, Commander.” Francesca teased. “I should thank you for removing my greatest rival. Enjoy dealing with Claudius once the sedation wears off.” The communicator cut off.

Caraccilo rubbed his temples. “Try to get in touch again, I’m not giving up that easily.”

“No response, Commander.”

“Dammit.” Caraccilo lifted his head, and the room was still spinning. “Holis...you have the bridge. I need to get to sickbay.” He stood up and felt the shakiness in his legs but tried to force a smile to discourage some of the concerned looks. “I’m fine. It’s nothing.”

Chapter 13

Francesca tucked her communicator away into a hidden pocket and let a smile of twisted delight curl onto her face. “And this is as it always should have been: regent until Enzo is old enough to rule for himself.” She studied the few Augments who stood before her. “I hope you all find this change agreeable.” No verbal protests, a few quick nods. “Good. Restrain the prisoners. Claudius made the mistake of giving them too much freedom.”

The Augments swarmed in on Saavik and Maya and with little effort held them still and bound their wrists behind their backs. Maya fought back fiercely: squirming, kicking, and trying to bite. Saavik, however, remained calm and seemed to accept her fate. In a moment of calm amidst the chaos, Maya glanced to Saavik and felt her heart sink to see the captain so compliant. Had she given up so easily?

Francesca led the way to a secluded corner of the compound, with a pair of Augments dragging Saavik and Maya along with them.

“Leave us.” Francesca demanded, and without a word the Augments left. Francesca watched as they walked away and waited until they were well out of sight before she spoke again. “Dear, sweet Maya...Clever enough to kill my eels, but not clever enough to realize how easily the little bastards can be found. I shouldn’t be surprised.”

Francesca cupped Maya’s chin in her calloused hand and smiled as she looked into her eyes. “Imperfect though you are, at least you’re a pretty one. I can think of one good use for you, but I require absolute obedience, and you’ve forgotten your proper place.”

“You don’t need the eels for that,” Maya answered softly, not daring to look away from Francesca’s eyes now that she knew what the Augment was after. Her heart raced, and her skin crawled to try to guess what Francesca might have on her mind, but it was to her advantage to play along.

“Is that so?” Francesca’s twisted smile grew.

Maya nodded, as best as she could with her head held still. “I always feared that I was undesirable, that no one would want me when they were surrounded by better prospects. To be wanted by someone so superior to myself is all I’ve ever wanted.”

Francesca narrowed her eyes. “Strange that you would admit that in front of the Vulcan. You seem awfully attached to her.”

Maya hesitated before answering, but her gaze never wavered, “She means nothing to me, not anymore now that I know I have better prospects. Why would I want an unaltered Vulcan when a genetically perfected human?”

“Maybe you know your place after all.” Francesca closed her eyes and leaned in closer for a rough kiss. At first Maya played along. She closed her eyes and locked lips with Francesca and shared a moment that almost seemed tender until Maya bit down hard on Francesca’s lower lip. Francesca’s eyes snapped open, and she tried to pull away, but Maya bit harder and pulled away with more force. The momentum pulled them both backward, and Maya simultaneously felt the back of her head hit the hard ground and felt her teeth tear clean through Francesca’s skin. The injury only served to anger Francesca, who closed her hands around Maya’s throat. Only after Maya began to feel lightheaded and starved for air did she let go of Francesca’s torn, bloody lip to gasp for air.

Saavik sprang into action. She kicked Francesca sharply in the ribs over and over again until she loosened her grip on Maya’s throat and scrambled to her feet to defend herself against the Vulcan attacker. Saavik stood with a wide, steady stance and wiggled her arms to try to break free from the ropes that bound her wrists. Francesca moved toward Saavik, and Saavik inched back until the ropes worked loose and fell to the ground. Maya got back on her feet too, but only struggled against the ropes when she tried to work herself free. Whatever Vulcan trick Saavik used, Maya hadn’t been able to figure it out, and her bad shoulder began to ache from the strain.

Saavik held her fists up in a defensive stance. She was able to block the first blow, but Francesca was both brutishly strong and impossibly fast, and her hit to Saavik’s jaw set the Vulcan off balance. Even though her hands were still bound and her body ached, Maya had not resigned herself to standing by. She came up to Francesca on the side and threw her weight against Francesca’s side. Maya didn’t have enough force to knock Francesca over, but she did throw her off her balance. While Francesca recovered, Saavik grabbed a heavy ceramic jug from a shelf on the wall and slammed it into the side of her head. Francesca stumbled and then collapsed to the ground.

Maya stared down at Francesca as Saavik went to her side to untie the ropes that held her wrists. “She won’t be out for long.”

“Which is why she will need to be restrained.” Saavik went straight to work tying Francesca’s wrists and ankles.

“What if she knows the same trick to break free like you did?”

“That trick was simply a matter of flexing the wrists to create slack. It cannot be done if she is bound while unconscious. My greater concern, however, is with our escape. Commander Caraccilo said that the next calm in the storm will not come for another three days.”

Maya wiped the blood from her face as she looked down at Francesca’s motionless body. “Pick her up. I’ve got an idea.”

Saavik knelt beside Francesca, but before she began to move the unconscious body she reached into Francesca’s pocket to retrieve the communicator, which she flipped open. “Saavik to Enterprise.”

“Caraccilo here. Am I relieved to hear your voice.”

“Temper your optimism. Maya and I are safe for now, but it is uncertain for how much longer. It is unlikely we will be able to remain so until the storm clears in three days time.”

“I can send down a shuttle as soon as possible, but that will still take a few hours.”

“Not ideal, but more attainable. Saavik out.”

As she stood up, Saavik supported Francesca’s limp body. “May I ask what your plan is?”

“Just trying to assert my dominance.”

Saavik and Maya (with Francesca in tow) made their way back through the compound and crossed paths with a young Augment, one of the other teenagers. She gasped to see Francesca in her bloody, battered state.

“Gather the others in the main hall,” She ordered, but the girl did not comply. “Now.” The girl turned and darted away, and Maya and Saavik continued on their way. When they reached the main hall, a handful of Augments were already gathered. The rest began to trickle in, and soon everyone was accounted for—except of course for Claudius.

Maya’s heart began to swell with both fear and pride. For the first time she had an audience gathered and eager to listen to her, but what to say? These people had never respected her before. She took a deep breath, remembering the gravitas her father used to speak with and hoping she could do a decent imitation.

“Francesca and Claudius have both walked right into a trap, yet they both still live because I learned a sense of compassion in my ten year absence. Let them, and my dead brother, serve as a warning to anyone who would work against me.” She paused to read the room, everyone was still listening. “Superior intellect, it seems, is not enough to overcome superior arrogance. My brother and father made the same mistake and died because of it, and it seems as though each and every one of you has doomed yourselves to the same fate. Ten years ago I left a planet full of people who cared so deeply about not only their own lives but their legacy and their lineage.”

With Claudius gone, only one of the two surviving older Augments remained—Runa Hassing. Maya addressed her specifically, even though the older woman had disdain in her eyes. “You survived the Eugenics Wars, centuries lost in space, and taming a wild planet, yet your choices—all of your choices—would make this the final generation.” Runa’s face had softened, but she still did not seem perceptive. If Maya could not sway the elder Augment she was unlikely to sway anyone else. “May I ask you a question?”

Runa crossed her arms. “You may.”

“Do you ever miss Earth? And I don’t mean feeling scorned over a planet you meant to rule. I mean...” Maya’s tone became wistful. When she wasn’t being provoked and could think more clearly, she could easily form a compelling appeal. “I mean the music and the art, the ability to access information. Fruit that doesn’t have an alkaline aftertaste. And I’m sure whatever technology you left behind all those years ago would still be a marvel to anyone who grew up here.” She gave Saavik a desperate look.

“The original offer still stands,” Saavik began. “If not for yourself, I at least ask any parents to consider their children’s future.”

After a heavy pause, Enzo stepped forward, and after taking a quick look at his mother’s bloody face he addressed Maya. “I wasn’t lying about wanting to go to Earth...if you think you can forgive me.”

Maya smiled. “I don’t blame you at all. I once felt perfectly justified doing terrible things to try to impress my father.”

The room was nearly silent before Runa offered her response. “If I’m meant to answer for my crimes on Earth, I would not be able to live a dignified life, but the same is not true for my granddaughter.”

Runa exchanged a thoughtful look with one of the teenage Augments, Aada. After a pause, Aada stepped forward. Umeko and Elena joined her.

“The shuttle will be arriving soon,” Saavik added. “And the promise to provide further supplies and assistance as needed will be honored.”

There were no further discussions. Maya looked once more toward Francesca. “I only hope the shuttle arrives before she comes to. She’s going to be furious.”

Chapter 14

Francesca, it seemed, had not been as well-liked among the Augments as Maya remembered. After a decade of acting selfishly, trying to grasp power for herself, and putting herself on a pedestal simply because she gave birth to Khan's grandson. Though there were a few protests, Runa was content to leave Francesca bound and gagged until Saavik, Maya, and the children were safely off of the planet.

Quickly, they prepared to meet the shuttle, dressing in layers of protective robes and veils. Saavik chose to leave behind the EV suits. For a short walk to the shuttle, the improvised protective gear would do. Those who had to survive on this planet would have more need for them.

Saavik's communicator chimed, and she promptly answered it. "Saavik here."

"Just landed." Demora responded. "Ready to go when you are, Captain."

"On our way. Saavik out."

Aada hung back for a moment for a final goodbye with her grandmother, but when she stepped away to join the others, Maya turned back to speak to Runa.

"May I ask you a question?"

Runa nodded.

"I'm sorry, I don't know how to say this without sounding insulting, but since the last time I saw you, you seem so much less..."

"Hateful? Unhinged?"

"I was trying to be a bit less blunt," Maya answered with a smile. "But yes."

"Years of quiet contemplation, old age, and maybe getting a bit spiritual and thinking that what I've endured is some sort of cosmic consequence for the atrocities I committed on Earth."

"And are you certain you wish to remain behind?" Saavik asked.

Runa gave a solemn nod. "I need to live my remaining days paying penance, and I can best do that on this dead rock. I've made my bed, and now I must lie in it."

"I understand." Maya's tone was soft and respectful. "And thank you for your help."

Saavik held up her hand in the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper."

The entire group turned to leave, but before they were more than a few steps away, Runa called out.

"Wait...I have something more to say."

Maya and Saavik turned to listen.

"I don't know if I made it into the history books, but if I did...I don't think you would have such a charitable view of me if you were to look me up."

"At least you realized you did something wrong." Maya answered. "That puts you ahead of most of your contemporaries."

They did not leave Demora waiting much longer before they made their way back through the compound and opened the heavy exterior doors to the roaring sandstorm outside. The shuttle was parked closer, but with higher winds and less than ideal protective equipment, the walk was more challenging than when Maya and Saavik had first set foot on the planet. When the group stood close to the shuttle the door opened, and they began to pile in: first the children, then Saavik. Maya had one foot on the threshold when she swore she could hear footsteps rushing toward her, barely audible in the wind. She paused to turn her head and nearly screamed when she saw who was rushing toward her. Francesca had broken free and sprinted through the sandstorm. She wore no protective gear, only her plain clothing.

Before Maya could retreat into the safety of the shuttle, Francesca lunged at her and tackled her to the ground. They struggled in the sand, and because Maya was so outmatched in strength she had no choice but to fight dirty. Maya grabbed a fistful of sand and threw it into Francesca's face, but she miscalculated the direction of the wind and ended up with as much sand in her own eyes as in Francesca's. As the pair struggled in pain, Francesca let down her guard enough that Maya was able to inch away and try to get back on her feet. Her eyes were on fire and watering, and though she could barely keep them open she could tell that her vision was reduced to a blur of color and lights. The lights were unimaginably bright, and Maya kept her head ducked to keep her eyes in the shadow. She managed a few unsteady steps back to the shuttle, but Francesca grabbed her from behind and pulled her back to the ground.

Francesca was back on top of Maya, and this time she pulled a knife and pressed the blade against Maya's throat. "How dare you try to take my child from me," she spat through clenched teeth. Maya tried to push Francesca away, but all of her effort only served to tire her body. She could feel the sharp edge of the blade bite into her skin, and as she tried to flatten herself into the ground as a final attempt to escape the sound of phaser fire cut through the storm and Francesca collapsed lifeless on top of her. Maya shoved the lifeless body off her. Between the sandstorm and the eye injury, she could not guess who had fired that fatal shot.

Maya scrambled back to her feet and into the shuttle. Once the door closed behind her, she tried frantically to rub the sand from her eyes. "Demora..." She tried to look up to speak to the pilot, but the lights were too bright and focusing her eyes was impossible. "Was that you?"

Demora shook her head. “No, that was an Augment who had followed her outside.”

“Runa Hassing.” Maya answered softly. “Too bad I can’t thank her.”

Chapter 15

A quick trip to sickbay was all it took to fix Maya's eye injury, and she fully appreciated the fact that if the same thing had happened to someone on her home planet they would be faced with a lifetime of severe corneal scarring. The pain was gone, her vision was restored, but Maya still kept her head tilted downward to shield herself from the bright lights.

"Is this as good as it's going to get?"

"Give it another hour or two for the light sensitivity to subside, maybe take a nice nap." Joanna offered as she put away her tricorder. "And maybe don't throw sand if your opponent is up wind."

"That sounds like a Vulcan proverb."

"No, I don't think they'd need a proverb like that, they've got these third eyelids... Anyway, go get some rest."

Maya hopped off of the bio-bed and turned to go, but she stopped when one more question came to mind. "How are the children?"

"A little undernourished, but otherwise fine... physically at least. It's really outside my area of expertise to speculate much on what sort of emotional state they're in, even if they seem alright."

Maya nodded. "I know what that feels like."

"And about Enzo... he wants to live with you."

"After I killed his father and was directly involved in his mother's death?"

"Maybe he feels a connection because you're the only family he has. Well, you and La'an."

"I wouldn't ask that of her. She's done enough without suddenly and unexpectedly adopting a child."

"That's not what I had in mind. I was going to say that whatever happens, the two of you, especially you, should be present in his life. All their lives, if you can. You share a unique experience, you could be a valuable role model."

"Raised by tyrants and war criminals, going from subsistence living to modern life, and burning out early on. If anything I'm a lesson in what not to become."

"But you landed on your feet eventually." Joanna smiled. "You're just being too hard on yourself."

Maya shook her head. "If only I knew another way."

Maya went back to her quarters, and though she laid down in the dark she couldn't sleep. Her mind raced, considering what Joanna had said. No matter how many times she had been told to be less impulsive (and made stupid mistakes for not thinking through her actions) once the idea was in her head, she couldn't stop thinking about how she needed to be the one to adopt Enzo. Maybe the girls too... no. Even with such poor control of her impulses, she could see what a bad idea that would be. She couldn't take home four children, especially not when she had never considered having just one until an hour ago.

She sat up and stretched. "Computer, lights... fifty percent." The lights came on but were still too dim for her liking, that was a good sign for her healing. "Computer, increase lights." Good, no lingering discomfort. Maya was determined to take Joanna's advice and find a way to be a positive influence in these children's lives, and she could start right now with a few communications to earth.

Saavik dove back into her duties as captain without taking time to rest and recover after being held captive on the planet. It was unnecessary, as she was uninjured and did not experience any emotional distress from the experience. She went down to the brig to speak with the prisoner. Claudius had been kept under the strict security: a pair of guards outside his cell at all hours, restraints on his wrists and ankles, and high doses of sedation administered at regular intervals. He sat on the floor in a crumpled heap, and though he had been given a longer period between doses to allow enough lucidity for a meaningful conversation, he struggled to hold his own head up.

Cladius held his head up and strained his neck to look Saavik in the eye. "Your commander used a cowardly tactic." His speech was slow and slurred.

"Commander Caraccilo made the logical choice to use all of his available resources." Saavik stood in sharp contrast to the drugged man in front of her: she stood straight and tall, with her hands clasped behind her back and a look of calm confidence on her face. "In spite of your recent actions, my prior offer still stands. You may return to Earth, where you must answer for any crimes you committed during the Eugenics Wars, but where you at least will be safe."

Claudius chuckled softly, and his head drooped back down. "You think I would accept defeat so readily?"

"Then you wish to return to Ceti Alpha V?"

Claudius struggled against his restraints as he fought to get to his feet. Though he tried to make a display of strength and determination, his body was weakened. He stood for only a moment before he lost his balance and fell to his knees. "I wish to take this ship!"

"And I will take that as a refusal of my offer. Prepare another round of sedation, we will be beaming him back to the planet's surface as soon as the storms subside."

The days sped by as Enterprise made her way back to Earth. Maya's job was done, but she still kept busy with lengthy discussions and documentation with social workers on Earth. It seemed that wouldn't be much issue with her adopting Enzo, but it was the three girls she worried more about. No one seemed to know what to do with them. Equally troubling was the fact that Saavik had hardly spoken to her: no conversations, no invitations to play chess, or even any indication if she ever wanted to pick them back up again.

She had to leave her quarters to clear her head: a change of scenery, an IPA, a nice meal. She forgot about those wants, however, when she saw Joanna sitting alone at a corner table with a bowl of tomato soup. Maya walked over to the table and waited for Joanna to look up before she spoke.

"Do you mind if I join you?" she asked. "I'd like some advice."

"Go for it. So, what's on your mind?" Joanna set her spoon down on the napkin beside the bowl.

Maya sat down across from Joanna and rubbed her temples. "The girls. I've been in communication with Eath, trying to find a solution."

"And?"

Maya shook her head. "Frustration at every turn. They need to stay together, but the social services doesn't seem to think that should be a priority because they're not sisters."

"Well, I'm on your side." Joanna picked her spoon back up, but she only stirred her soup around. "Have you spoken to La'an yet?"

Maya sighed and leaned back. "No, because I already told you I don't want to bother her, and I wouldn't dare ask her to take in three teenage girls."

"You don't need to do anything like that. Ask her for advice, talk through your feelings, and maybe ask her to be another advocate for those girls."

"It's difficult for me to talk to her." Maya looked away. "I did some foolish things that hurt our relationship."

"Well, if it's all down to your own actions..." Joanna dropped her spoon suddenly enough that it clinked on the edge of the bowl. "Well, forgive me for being blunt, but I think you need to get over any uncomfortable feelings you might have and just talk."

"You're right." Maya shook her head. "I don't like to admit it, but you're right."

Chapter 16

“Sa-mekh, I wish to discuss a personal matter.”

Somehow Saavik was exhausted. She had no lack of sleep, and it would be extremely difficult for a Vulcan to fail to get what little sleep they needed, but Saavik still felt as though her eyes were heavy and her thoughts and emotions difficult to control. At first she attributed these challenges to stressors endured on the surface of Ceti Alpha V, but no matter how much she tried to deny it, the real cause was her accidental bond to Maya Noonien-Singh and the distress it gave her. She thought about the human woman and felt her presence more strongly than her own bondmate, and her attempts to keep Maya at arm’s length did nothing to dissuade these feelings. And so she followed Demora’s advice, something she should have done a while ago and reached out to her father.

“What is on your mind, Saavik-kam?” Spock asked. Humans found Vulcan’s difficult to read, but Saavik could see the slight signs of worry on his face.

“I have experienced something that I previously thought was impossible. I believe I have bonded with a second mate, a human.”

Spock raised an eyebrow. “An uncommon situation, but not an impossible one. Rare, but not unheard of.”

“Such information offers minimal reassurance, as it does nothing to uncomplicate my situation.”

“Saavik-kam, relationships are complicated more often than not, even for Vulcans.”

Saavik spoke with her father for hours, and for the first time—with his family or with anyone else—Spock shared deeply personal and private stories. He told her of when he first knew that Jim Kirk was his T’hy’la, his failed engagement to T’Pring, and a brief dalliance with a human nurse that left both of them hurt. Hearing these stories showed Saavik the vulnerable side of the person who had always been the strongest and most stable presence in her life, and being trusted with the knowledge of such personal memories brought the two of them closer, but it did not give Saavik insights into her own circumstances.

“Sa-mekh...” She began. “I appreciate your sharing your personal experiences, but I am in need of more direct advice.”

“Saavik-Kam, no one else can tell whether or not you are bonded with this woman. However, if you are, and if you part ways forever, you will regret it the rest of your life.”

Saavik looked down and silently considered her father’s advice. When she spoke her response, she still did not look up at the screen.

“Thank you, Sa-mekh. I know what I need to do. End transmission.”

Maya sat in front of the viewscreen with a cup of coffee—a cafe lungo, essentially a full cup of pure espresso. With a palate that preferred bitterness and a high caffeine tolerance, it was a better fit for what she expected from a cup of coffee. La’an still had not responded to her latest communication, but Maya went ahead and reached out to Earth’s social services again, even though she had nothing new to say.

She held her cup of espresso in both hands when the image of the case worker from Earth appeared on the screen. “Maya,” he began. “I have great news.”

“Go on.” Maya had taught herself to not expect sudden and unexpected changes to the situation. This “great news” was probably something insignificant.

“There’s been an applicant to adopt the girls, all three of them.”

“Really?” Maya sat up straighter and leaned forward. She was not expecting to hear that, maybe not ever. “Can you tell me who it was, I’d love to talk to them.” She took a long sip of her espresso as she awaited a response.

“I...figured you had already. It was La’an Noonien-Singh.”

Maya suddenly swallowed her mouthful of coffee, and so much hot liquid at once burned her throat. She covered her mouth and turned her head away to cough a few times. “Excuse me. I may have mentioned it to her, but she never told me that she was serious about going through with it. Can we talk again later? I need to speak with La’an.”

“Of course, we’ll keep in touch.”

The screen went dark, and Maya took another sip before putting in the commands to send a communication to La’an. Her heart raced as she awaited a response, she couldn’t stand to wait to talk about this...or maybe it was the caffeine starting to hit her. When La’an appeared on screen, Maya’s nerves did not dissipate.

“So, when were you going to tell me?” Maya demanded, skipping over any usual pleasantries.

“Tell you about...oh!” La’an gasped. “I was hoping to wait until after it was too late for you to try to talk me out of it. And, truthfully, you are in no position to criticize me for a lack of communication.”

“Fair, but I still think you’re out of your mind for wanting to take in three teenagers, especially when I’ve never known you to want any children.”

“I don’t think it’s so different than when I took in an Augment with a criminal record, or you for trying to adopt a nephew you never

knew.”

Maya smiled. “Maybe not. I had very briefly entertained the idea myself. It’s just...three is a lot.”

“It is, but I’m not one to change my mind easily once it’s made up.”

“If this all works out, La’an, you’ve gone and solved a problem I didn’t think could be solved.”

“Glad to hear it, but I’m not doing this for you.”

“I know. I’ll keep in touch, and I mean it this time.”

“You had better.” La’an teased. “End transmission.”

Chapter 17

Less than 48 hours until they were scheduled to reach Earth, and Saavik hadn't bothered to speak to her again. At this point, Maya was trying to make peace with the fact that, even though she still felt their telepathic link, whatever the two of them had was over. She kept herself busy, speaking with La'an and the social worker on Earth every day and trying to get to know her nephew. Enzo wasn't very talkative, but enjoyed sitting in the lounge to play a game and watch the stars go by. He was especially interested in three dimensional chess, but as a beginner herself, Maya felt like a poor teacher. Saavik would have been a better teacher. Anyone would have been a better teacher.

She sat with Enzo, focusing on one of those chess games, though Maya's spent more of her attention worrying if she was teaching her nephew correctly. Maya paused to arch her back and stretch when she saw Joanna McCoy approaching.

"Joanna!" She called as she waved Joanna over. "Please tell me you've come to relieve me, I think I've already taught him everything I know and a few things I've made up."

"Glad to, but I'm really here to deliver a message. Saavik wants you to meet her in the gym. Immediately."

Maya stood up and gasped. Her heart jumped/ "Really? What for?" She knew it was probably something dry and procedural, but she craved any kind of interaction with Saavik.

"No clue, she was cagey as hell, but you had better go."

Maya made her way through the corridors of the Enterprise at a clipped pace and with a spring in her step. Her heart was racing and her head spinning when she reached the gym. The doors slid open, and Saavik was waiting alone, standing with her hands clasped behind her back.

"Captain." Maya took a calming breath. "Joanna said you wanted to talk to me."

"Yes. I had tried to deny the reality that we are, in fact, bonded, but I have recently come to a different conclusion. To accept reality as it is would be more logical."

"Glad to hear it." Inside Maya felt a fluttering swirl of energy, but given...everything it still didn't feel real. "Embracing the truth usually is, but what about your husband?"

"He will have to accept the truth of our situation as well. And, as I embracing our reality, I wish to reconsider an offer that I previously refused."

Maya stepped closer, eager but unsure what offer Saavik was talking about. "Remind me, what was that?"

"Computer, play music." The music began, and a slow, elegant waltz filling the room.

"Oh no!" Maya gasped. "Saavik, this is all wrong. I can't agree to this." Her expression changed to a sly smirk. "This is a standard waltz, and I dance viennese. Computer, play The Second Waltz by Dimitri Shostakovich."

The new song began, faster and bolder than the first. Maya took Saavik's hand and led her into position.

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