

The Blue Peter

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1354) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1354>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M , Gen
Fandom:	Borderlines
Character:	Ensemble Cast - BAN
Additional Tags:	Crew as Family , Border Patrol , Canon-Typical Violence , Trauma
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of Borderlines: Book I - We Sail At the Break of Day
Stats:	Published: 2024-02-14 Words: 4,236 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

The Cost. Chandra deals with a recalcitrant foster-sister, with a fellow survivor, her late bond, and a pain in the ass. All in the space of mostly one watch. But, it is time for a beginning, of sorts.

Notes

Some depiction of past trauma. I'm not sure it's graphic, but wanted to make sure of warning.

Prelude

Kaylin makes her way aft in the early morning hours. At this time of the morning, when Leelix III's primary hadn't peaked over the horizon, this section of the ship is deserted, as it is even below the dormant engines and the ship is running off of external power.

She takes a deep breath as she comes to a particular hatch with the marking she was looking for. She places her hand on the hatch, then rests her head on the cool metal. She feels the hatch start to shift open. Knowing that this door is one that has to be opened manually, she starts, then moves down the passageway, before coming to a darkened alcove. Her eyes widen as she sees the Captain (L) step out of the compartment.

Kaylin grew up with this woman, with only three years difference between them. She has seen Chandra at her darkest, lowest moments, particularly in the last year, when she had pulled Kaylin, Siobhan, and about fifty other crewmen from hell, by sheer force of will.

She recognizes the pure pain and grief on Chandra's face. A face that with her heritage, was designed to know lightness and laughter. She had spread that lightness and laughter among those she had kept alive.

She had done the same with those who had survived the recent battle with whoever it was that had attacked the FOB. Only Siobhan remained in sickbay, though she was moving around the ship, constantly complaining about being 'kept down by the man.' The other injured had been at least returned to their quarters; no one had to be transferred to the Level I trauma center in the capitol city of the small settlement.

Kaylin watches as Chandra closes her eyes in the open hatch. She knows this pose as Chandra steels herself for what is next. Her face is calm when she opens them and moves away. Kaylin, who had spent hours talking to her when they were growing up in a large partnership family, with Kaylin's birth-mother away a great deal of the time, knew that all wasn't healed with her foster-sister.

She could see it in the gray eyes.

She waits and makes sure that Chandra is gone, then moves into the compartment. She stands there, probably as Chandra had, staring at the three stasis chambers. She moves over to the nearest one, the young crewman who had fired the salvo that they had needed to survive. As his last act.

He looks peaceful, but having seen him die, with the shard of metal through his body, she knows it is an illusion.

None of them had died peacefully.

She feels her body react to something. Her mind catalogues the sensation, from growing up with the young woman who had just left.

A sensation not of the Deltan pheromones, but of the deeper connection. The empathy that is as a part of a Deltan as their high-capacity heart

and lungs, that made their endurance so much more, in spite of most of their delicate appearances. The same empathy that had helped save them on Vostus, she is sure.

She closes her eyes. For about the thousandth time, she wonders if the decision that she is made, the one that she will tell the captain of later in the ship's morning, is the right one.

Her emotions roil in the aftermath of the Link. She is no closer to an answer.

Administrivia

Chandra sips her coffee as she sits at the desk of her tiny ready room. She finds herself drifting as she studies the impossibility that is her current duty roster. A group that is supposed to have twelve other ships, besides the slightly larger *Morrigan* that she sits in, has only three, including this one. *No*, she thinks. *Four*. The security cutter *Malcolm Reed* had arrived three watches ago. The captain, a career security officer that she had crossed paths with many times, as a starship's security officer, had immediately gone out to investigate the wreckage of the marauder mothership.

She sighs, rubbing her right temple, near the front edge of her scar. She doesn't know how long she can have Jaigguur Grasp out looking into this. The half-Orion, half-human is one of the best investigators she'd seen, but she will need his ship. The gunboats that had attacked are still out there; the planetary defenses and the marine ship hadn't been able to get them all.

Thoughts of the marines of the Security Field Forces/Rapid Deployment Force that made up most of the crew of the *O'Bannon*, the other *Puller*-class security cutter, brings another stabbing pain to her head. When Grasp had reported to her, the SFF/RDF Major, Declan Starros had followed him in uninvited.

The meeting had gone downhill from there, with both men questioning each other's skills, as well as their parentage, while she watched, growing increasingly unamused. She'd wound up throwing both out of her ready room, with a display of invective that had impressed even the hard-bitten Starros, who'd started his career as a local defense force private, without any time in the regular Starfleet security departments.

As Jaigguur had turned and left, he had given her that particular smirk over his pale green features, that had once encouraged her to forget the oath of celibacy, even when they had been rivals for efficiency scores on their respective starships.

Now, it only served to infuriate her even more.

She snorts. It had probably infuriated her even then, except when they were breaking the oath.

She grits her teeth as her connection to the Link that they'd shared chooses that instant to come alive, where it mostly has sputtered. She sees the infuriating smirk looking back up at her as she rode him, trying her damndest to wipe it from his face.

There is a knock on the hatch to the ready room. She sighs and says, "Come in."

Kaylin Stone-Hunter walks in, wearing her service dress coat without the belt and the turtleneck pullover, as prescribed in the new uniform regs for something a tiny bit dressier than just the zip-up working pullover. Once again Chandra thinks that this combination is a shitty uniform, shapeless and ill-thought out. She hopes that the 'uniform comma working comma with coat' will go away on the ash heap of uniform history in Starfleet. She smiles at her squadron commander and acting group XO.

"Hey, Kay," she says to her foster-sister.

"Captain," she replies formally. She remains standing. Chandra turns her chair around and motions to the one other chair. The ready room was set up with the desk against the bulkhead by the hatch, so that she found it hard to have crew members reporting to her.

Kaylin remains standing, her expression militarily correct.

"What is it, Commander?" she asks, managing to keep from sighing.

"Just letting you know. I had an appointment with Rear Admiral Hunter."

Chandra says nothing. The fact that Hunter is Kaylin's birth-mother doesn't cross her mind, with the formality of Kaylin's tone.

"And?" she asks.

"I've requested a transfer."

Chandra feels the ice in her heart at her words, even though she'd half-expected it. "And what was the Admiral's response?"

"She said that I should ask you," comes the reply.

Chandra exhales. "As she should," she replies quietly.

Kaylin waits expectantly, still at attention. Finally, she says, "And?"

"Denied."

Kaylin looks as if she is about to choke. She starts to open her mouth, but thinks better of articulating what is forming in her brain, particularly when that articulation seems to be starting with the beginning of a sneer.

Chandra watches as she turns her expression back to the even, correct version. She also exhales, in harmony with Chandra.

“May I ask, why? Captain,” she adds belatedly.

“I didn’t think you had to ask, with our current situation,” Chandra replies. She relaxes her face and once again points to the chair.

Once again, Kaylin remains standing at attention. Chandra grits her teeth. She feels her Threads project. She manages to reel the pheromones back in. “Sit. Down,” she spits.

There is no misinterpretation that her words might constitute a request.

Kaylin still holds her position for a heartbeat, then sits in the chair. Her back remains rigid, with her hands on her knees.

Chandra wonders if she will have any enamel on her teeth left after this interview. The bottle of whisky in its rack in her cabin flashes in her head.

Along with the feel of Grasp’s muscular back under her hands after he had flipped her over. She concentrates on Kaylin’s rigid features. She feels herself relax; she wonders if there is overspill from her emotions, through the pheromones that seem to work with all the regularity of an ancient AM carrier wave radio.

“Talk to me, sis,” she says.

Kaylin stares at her, probably not expecting the softness of the tone. Or mention of their relationship. For a moment, another memory flashes. That of a young girl, with the same slight overbite and golden-tan skin, on the ground, her skinned knees bleeding, and tears streaming down her face, while older girls surrounded her.

Another memory, an instant later with two of the older girls going down under the fists of a Deltan girl three years older, and taller.

Kaylin looks down. “I had the Group for a full year. I’m only two years behind you in service. I felt like I’d kept morale up after Vostus. I tried like hell to rebuild it. The divisional admiral said that it was mine.”

Chandra gets up and walks over the chair. She crouches down and lifts Kaylin’s hands into hers, holding them in a loose grip. “He shouldn’t’ve promised you anything. And you’ve been in Starfleet long enough to know that promises are just that. They’re not chiseled in stone.” She takes a deep breath, then moves her fingers up to Kaylin’s chin. Chandra lifts her face to look her in the eyes.

“You aren’t ready, Kay,” she says. “You hadn’t even had a squadron command yet. You’re a helluva leader. You’re one of the reasons that we are all alive—especially me—after Vostus.”

“Only because you’d already saved us by killing that Klingon chieftain. And Croft had blown up the world, or at least that BofP.” Kaylin’s face crumples. “And your love, T’varilyn had already sacrificed herself.” She chokes. “For me.”

Chandra manages not to let her tears show, or the fact that her grief is still overwhelming. She looks away, gathering herself.

“I can feel it,” Kaylin whispers. “I can feel your grief.”

Chandra manages to firm her emotions up, as she can see the tears starting to spill from Kaylin’s eyes. She hardens herself. “I think you need some time, before you get a Group. You’ve only been a commander for less than a year. You kept the ones together that were left, but you also lost strength to other Groups. That’s not your fault, but maybe a more experienced Group commander could’ve found a way to keep more of them.”

Kaylin’s eyes flash with familiar anger. Chandra says nothing, but keeps the gaze.

“I think you’re wrong,” Kaylin says. “I don’t think even you, the great hero, Chandrelle could’ve kept those assets.”

Chandra lets a smile come over her face. *Time for another direction.* “We’re about to find out. We’re getting a squadron of torpedo boats. A new one just came on line, with almost-new cutters. So maybe you can prove me wrong. I need a solution for more *Lancers*—patrol/escort boats. Solve it, Commander.”

Kaylin is taken aback. She hadn’t expected that. A grin slowly comes over her face, the familiar one that her foster sister had always found engaging. It told her that Kaylin was ready to put her head through a wall to prove herself right.

Or Chandra wrong.

“On it, boss,” she says.

Chandra continues to kneel by Kaylin’s chair. They are both quiet. Chandra finally rises just a tiny bit and places her lips against Kaylin’s forehead. Kaylin places her palm against Chandra’s cheek, then brings her forehead against hers, in Deltan family fashion. She then gives Chandra a quick kiss.

When Chandra returns to her desk, she looks at the screen. Her eyes move over various ship dispositions and squadron configurations. She saves the file, setting it aside. All except for one aspect that she cuts and pastes it, saving it in a memo for the one who will have to enact it.

She doesn’t send the message.

That will be another battle.

The Past - Acceptance

Kaylin comes into the room that she and Chan share. They can hear the voices in the old house of the large partnership family. Eight adults, with numerous children.

This was the first time since Chan had come home on her leave that they had to themselves. She puts a smile on her face as she sees her older foster sister reading a PADD. Kaylin takes a deep breath as the warmth from Chan's pheromones moves up and down her body. She holds the breath until Chan realizes what she is doing. Five years since Chan had come to live with them and Kaylin still hadn't quite gotten used to what Chan referred to as the Threads.

Only recently, she had started exploring the sensations a little bit more, as she had gotten older. She knows that Chan had been exploring them a great deal more, with certain people she had met from the Deltan consulate, and probably, to a lesser extent, in the Academy.

As was appropriate in her culture.

Kaylin releases the breath, realizing she'd probably been holding it a bit too long. Chan raises her left eyebrow, one that was almost as deadly as some she'd seen from Vulcans.

She smiles as she sees that Chan's cadet uniform is hanging over a chair. She is wearing a wrap that shows off a great deal of skin, in true Deltan tradition.

To move Chan's focus away from what the pheromones are doing to her, she asks, "Are you having fun, now that you've finished your plebe year?"

Chan grins, then looks down, suddenly self-conscious. "It's good to be home," she says quietly. Kaylin realizes that she is losing what is left of her accent from her homeworld, called *daíGon tu Omri*, in her birth tongue, or the 'Known World of Joy'.

To some, it is merely the Known World.

"Have you decided what path you're taking?" Kaylin asks.

"I've narrowed it down. Command/Pilot, with a secondary track of Weapons/Defense/Security."

"So you're continuing on with the officer's track? The degree?"

Chan closes her eyes. Kaylin knows that she isn't sure how Kaylin's mother and her foster mother would accept her choice. She reaches out and touches Chan's bare knee. Hoping that it gives her reassurance.

"I'm going to keep going. As long as I pass the practicals every year, as well as my major's exams, I'll be able to."

She places her hand on top of Kaylin's knee. "So what about you? You're only a year or so away from Beast Barracks and your own plebe year. Are you going for the officer track?"

Kaylin closes her eyes. She feels Chan wrap her hand in her own. She concentrates on the warmth of her smooth skin, much warmer than hers, to calm her.

She'd already had an argument with Chan about this. Her mother was now a full captain, having entered after only one year of the crew track at the Academy, rather than the officer track. She'd finished her credits after five years as an Ensign (Crewmember), attaining the grade of Master Chief, before being given the field commission as a Lieutenant j.g after an intense border battle.

"I don't know. I know it was good enough for mom, but I don't know if I could achieve what mom did. I think I may have to keep plugging away at the degree."

She opens her eyes. She sees Chan shaking her head. She waits for an explosion.

It doesn't come. At least not in the way that she expected.

"You're selling yourself short, Dahlah," she says. Kaylin melts at the word, delivered in her warm, sultry voice. Beloved. "Not many people can get accepted into the Academy. You've always worked your ass off. You can do whatever you want." She pulls Kaylin into a tight embrace. Kaylin feels the smirk against her cheek. "You could even be a starship officer, rather than the e-lite Border Patrol weenie."

Chan yelps as Kaylin wets her index finger and plunges it into her ear. Their laughter rises as Chan finds the forbidden spot, just under her bellybutton, under the short T-shirt.

When the laughter subsides and Chan straddles Kaylin in triumph, they fall silent and look at each other. Kaylin pulls Chan down, to where they lie in each other's arms. They hold each other, as both fall asleep.

Kaylin comes back to herself, in the present. She thinks of the past, as well as the conversation that she'd just had with her sister. She wonders if she had overcompensated now for that lack of confidence back then.

If she had been arrogant to think that she could be an early-promoted captain.

Her eyes focus on the viewscreen on the flight deck, from her position in the center seat.

She sees the four cutters slowly coming in on approach for landing. Decker Sinclair turns back to look at her, as they both spy the massive dual torpedo launchers on the upper hulls.

Each holding forty-eight photon torpedoes. One hundred total, with the four individual launchers on the ventral hull of the boats, pointed aft.

Improvisation

Chandra comes into the CIC, after a quick nap in the offwatch period. She checks the comm reports from the crewmember at the comms console, a young man looking at her with wide eyes. She manages to smile neutrally and nod at him, before turning away, gritting her teeth as she fights to bring the Threads under control.

She wonders if she will have to take the suppressant that McCoy had researched, under his protest, of course. She reaches up absently and rubs the scar. She sees another crewmember, one who had been on Vostus with her, a prisoner of the Klingons. This young woman had been next to the yeoman who the commander of the ad hoc prison camp had killed with his mek'leth, almost casually striking him down.

All for the theft of food. Chandra had offered herself to the blade, but to no avail. This particular weapons crewman had been the yeoman, Dayton's, best friend.

She feels a hand on her arm; she realizes that Erin Carmen is standing next to her, gazing at her with sharp black eyes, under the large halo of natural hair. Carmen had been made to remain kneeling next to her friend's body for the rest of the day and the night to remind Chandra of her expected good behavior.

It had been a gruesome killing.

Like most of the prisoners who'd managed to free themselves, Carmen had been promoted, in her case to chief, as well as offered the chance to leave the Patrol. Chandra had even seen to it that Erin had the opportunity to be advanced to midshipman, for the chance to become an officer. She'd had the degree credits that she'd completed after leaving the Academy after two years to go out on the Fleet, during her years of service.

Carmen hadn't made up her mind to even stay in Starfleet after ten years. She and Chandra continue to gaze at each other, in silent communion.

None of the other crewmembers in CIC had been on Vostus.

"No, Captain," Carmen whispers. "Live with our ghosts. Including T'varilyn." Chandra nods, wondering if she sees the mek'leth killing Dayton, just as Chandra plays the flash of the d'k tahg in her mind, along with the emerald blood covering her as she tried to save T'vari.

She notices that the other crewmembers are looking elsewhere, at their screens, giving them this moment.

Chandra feels a familiar presence in the compartment. Jaigguur Grasp stands there, his arms crossed over his broad chest. Carmen pats her arm one last time and turns to her work, her eyes instructing the other CIC crew to keep focused on what they were doing.

She sighs and moves over next to him, as he moves into an empty corner. She intentionally doesn't move to her ready room, which is just off of the CIC, deep inside the cutter. He is at least another hand's length taller than she is.

"Have I got a deal for you," she says without preamble.

A brief smile quirks his lips. She finds herself looking at the dark beard around those lips. She grits her teeth as she finds her eyes lingering too long on that particular part of his face. She shifts her gaze up to his blue eyes, vivid in his pale green face.

Goddamnit, she asks herself. What're you, twelve?

No, thirteen, says the dry voice in Chandra's head, a hint of what she recognizes as merriment in T'varilyn's voice. And you're a Deltan.

You just go back into your little box, she projects to the presence.

How can I? I keep getting distracted by pretty things. Pretty things that you won't partake of, T'varilyn snarks.

And I keep getting distracted by a horny Vulcan in my head, Chandra shoots back.

"Well, Cap, I'm waiting for this deal," Grasp says.

She shakes her head slightly, as T'vari falls silent.

For the moment.

"I need your ship."

She sees his eyes widen, then flash with anger. "How the hell is that a deal?" He stares at her own eyes, probably showing anger of their own. "Sir," he adds.

"Well, you and your Security team gets to transfer to the *Comstock*. We can reconfigure one of the empty holds into quarters, including for some of your four officers. We can also distribute the ones we don't have room for among the four boomers that are coming."

"Again, I ask, *Captain*, how is that a deal?"

"It's a deal for me. As well as a deal for this group, who is short of ships, especially those who can move in close and slug it out."

"A *Puller*-class? With her point-defense phasers?"

She closes her eyes. "All of these Patrol cutters are modular. We've got most of the stuff here to add heavier weapons, as well as beefing up the Cohort system. What I can't get, I hear that Siobhan is good at finding things like that. She's on light duty. That doesn't constitute heavy

lifting. And if it does, she'll have a big strong security commander and his knuckle-draggers to help."

He continues to stare at her. She can see that some of the CIC crew are staring at the somewhat quiet conversation in the corner. She jerks her head, not towards the ready room. It is just too small, and Grasp will fill it. They move to the passageway. When they are in her quarters, she wonders if this was a mistake as his eyes move to the bed.

"You forget, you're not too far removed from being a knuckle-dragger yourself. Why don't you offer this to the jarheads? Spread them out."

For fuck's sake, Chandra thinks.

I agree with the sentiment, if not necessarily the delivery, T'vari adds, back to the 'logic voice.'

"Because they are my blunt instruments," she says, enunciating each word. She smiles, hoping to stroke his ego. "Your redshirts are more my finesse and subtlety."

Oh, even I think that's bullshit, as Croft would call it," T'Vari sends.

So much for the logic voice, Chandra projects back.

"You know, you could just order me to do it." he says finally.

Got him. "I thought that's what I was doing."

Grasp snorts. A devilish gleam comes into his eyes. He holds up his hands, palm out. "You beat me. You know, back in the day, while I was showing you how to be a security commander, when I was on the *Yorktown* and you were on that overrated bucket, the *Enterpoop*, when one vanquished the other, there might be a celebration." His eyebrow goes up.

Chandra closes her eyes. She resists the urge to rub her own eyebrow, where the Jaigguurr Grasp-sized headache is adding to the Kaylin Stone-Hunter-sized. Not to mention the one she is stuck with in her brain.

When she opens her eyes, he is much closer.

As they both remove each other's clothing, somehow without injury or damage to the uniforms, she thinks, *So much for the oath of celibacy. Not to mention thousands of years of naval discipline.*

Well, there's always flogging. Or at least spanking, T'varilyn retorts.

Oh shut up, Chandra finishes as she and Grasp fall to the bed, facing each other on their sides. As the light builds in the Link, and she shares it with him, accompanying the surprisingly tender kiss from him, she wonders which ship in her Group his ass will be pawed off on.

Another image builds in her head. The image of a blue and white flag, from naval history.

A symbol for a voyage, or a journey, beginning.

The Blue Peter.

Everything is coming together.

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