

role model

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by [TechnicolorRevel](#)

Summary

"You Illyrians need to learn how to have fun," Pelias pronounced, as if she was making some sort of declaration from on high.

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me," Pelias said. "You Illyrians. So worried about making the right impression, you forget how to have fun!"

"You Illyrians need to learn how to have fun," Pelias pronounced, as if she was making some sort of declaration from on high. She was looking especially disheveled, with a smear of oil on her uniform, her hair fighting to escape the clip. It made the declaration that much more... galling

Una looked up from the inventory of the weapons locker, and she frowned over at Pelias. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me," Pelias said. "You Illyrians. So worried about making the right impression, you forget how to have fun!" She was holding a tumbler of something that smelled strongly of licorice, and she was sitting on her work table, her feet dangling down.

"Should you be drinking that on duty?" Una stood up fully, stretching with her arms over her head. There was the beginning of an ache in her back from leaning over, and her eyes had that gritty, hot feeling from reading in had light for too long.

"See, this is *exactly* what I mean!" An emphatic gesture with the tumbler, which was bright green and had a rainbow Starfleet logo on it. "If you had more of a mind for fun, you might have noticed that my shift actually ended twenty minutes ago."

"So why are you still here?" Una clicked on her PADD, signing off on the inventory. "Don't you have... whatever fun sorts of things you do in your free time to go do?"

"I can't have you wandering around my space without supervision," Pelias said, shaking a finger at Una. "I'll come back with everything rearranged for better efficiency or some crap like that, and it'll take me a week to find anything."

Una took a deep breath, let it out. "There's nothing wrong with efficiency," she said evenly. "And I know how to have fun," she added, perhaps a tad more defensive than she'd meant to be.

"I've heard your charming little nickname, y'know," said Pelias. She leaned back, leaning on one arm and taking a long drink from her tumbler.

"Well, there are always mean things said about superior officers," Una said, and she was doing her best not to snap at Pelias.

She's doing it on purpose, she reminded herself. *She likes to get under people's skin. Maybe she gets bored after all that time and she got sick of breeding petunias or whatever other things people do with infinite time.*

"But I'm not wrong about Illyrians," Pelias said, and it was that same know it all tone that made Una's jaw clench.

"We have plenty of fun," Una said, and oh *no*, she was letting herself be baited, wasn't she?

How did Pelias always manage to get on her nerves like this?

"I think that your people have put so much effort into being respectable that you've sanded off all your rough edges!" Pelias was standing up now, standing up and jabbing Una in the chest with one pointy finger. "Every Illyrian I've known has been a stick in the mud!"

"Why are you talking to me like this?" It helped to retreat into protocol, when she was feeling especially nonplussed or insulted.

"Because nobody else does, and it does you good to be reminded that you're not hiding that part of yourself anymore," Pelia said promptly. "I remember what it was like for me, back when I still had to hide that I wasn't human."

"Our situations were a little different," Una snapped, before she could stop herself.

Damn it. Why did Pelia always get under her skin like this?

"Oh, I don't think they were as different as all that," Pelia said archly. She was looking straight up at Una, her head tilted back, her chin pointing up.

"Why do you care about how boring or unboring I am?" Una crossed her arms.

"What do I care?" Pelia held both hands, a *who, me?* gesture that was so innocent it made Una want to kick her a little bit.

"You're the one who started the conversation," Una said, indignant.

"Conversation, nothing," Pelia protested. "I was simply making an observation!"

That's how conversation works, Una thought, but she didn't say it, just took a long, deep breath. "Do you need to keep me under observation?"

"I don't want you to be getting into *mischief* while I'm not here," Pelia said severely.

Another long, deep sigh. "Thank you for your input," Una said, aware that she sounded especially robotic.

Pelia held out the tumbler. "You know," she said, "you'd probably be a lot of fun if you stopped worrying about how everyone saw you as an Illyrian, and just tried to be yourself."

"Excuse me?" Now Una's voice was flat. Something *cold*, sizzling along her nerves.

"I can see it on your face," said Pelia. "You're always off to the side, watching. Never willing to let go enough to actually feel something. God forbid!"

"Are you this rude to all of your superior officers?" Una asked, retreating to the comfort of rank.

"When I'm being myself, I'm not worrying about whether I'm making all the other Lanthanites look good," Pelia said, which wasn't actually an *answer*. "I was lucky enough not to deal with a court martial, since us Lanthanites don't get involved in any of that genetic modification hanky panky." She took a slug of her drink, then wrinkled her nose, presumably at the burn as the alcohol went down.

"You can't possibly understand what it is that I've had to do," Una breathed, and her hands were balling into fists.

Why was she so *angry*?

"You've had a hard life," Pelia said, and there was genuine kindness in her voice.

That made it worse.

"I have," said Una.

"But so has everyone else." Pelia crossed her arms, planted her feet. She was staring up into Una's face, her expression entirely too... canny. "To live in the world is to be hurt by it. Not enjoying yourself is just suffering for the sake of suffering."

"Why do you assume that I don't have fun?" Una demanded.

The heat rushing to her face was a lot like rage. So was the energy making her hands shake, and she took a deep, careful breath.

"Different people enjoy different things," she said, and now she was making a point of keeping her voice calm and even.

"I'm just saying -" Pelia began.

"Commander Pelia," Una said severely, "I need to finish this inventory. As I am evidently keeping you from your *fun*, I would recommend you stop interrupting me and let me finish my duties."

"Some people can't take a hint," Pelia said, all wounded dignity, "but far be it from me to be one of them." Her boots were very loud on the floor as she walked away.

Una sighed, staring down at her PADD. She was drumming her fingers on it, staring without seeing.

It isn't as if she can understand, she thought. *Illyrians can be fun. How many would she know, anyway?*

When was the last time she'd thought about any Illyrian customs? What had been fun things in her childhood, to hold on to?

Neera would probably say it was a sign that she was disconnected from her culture and was possibly a sign of her shortcomings, but Neera was always saying that sort of thing.

With a sigh, she squared her shoulders and went back to work.

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"Must've been a bad day," said La'an, and Una looked up from the bowl of strawberries she'd been staring into.

"What makes you say that?" Una popped a strawberry into her mouth, the sweetness exploding on her tongue like a firework.

"I'm perceptive like that," said La'an, coming to sit across from Una. She had a drink of some kind in her hand, and she looked tired.

Or possibly Una was projecting.

"I miss Hemmer," Una said, which was possibly a bit more... intense than she'd meant to be.

La'an nodded, and she shifted in her seat, wearing that same awkward expression that always came out when feelings were being discussed.

"Pelias is a brilliant engineer," Una added quickly, because it wouldn't do for a senior officer to badmouth a member of the crew. "Absolutely brilliant."

La'an nodded, but she was still looking at Una with a thoughtful expression.

"He was a lot more... cooperative," she said, possibly to fill in the silence.

"I think he'd be insulted to hear you say that," said La'an, and she was grinning now. Her nose wrinkled when she smiled, and it made Una smile back.

"Oh, definitely," Una agreed, then: "can I ask you a personal question?"

La'an nodded, although her face was starting to close again. She always got nervous about... well, anything to do with personal things.

Not that Una could blame her.

"With your last name," said Una, "do you ever..." She trailed off, trying to find way to get her complicated thoughts into words. "Do you ever feel as if you're having to prove that you're so much better than everyone expects?"

"Isn't that everyone?" La'an asked, the furrow between her eyebrows getting deeper as she frowned.

"Well, yes, everyone wants to present their best self to everyone else," said Una. "But... more than that."

La'an looked at her expectantly.

How much of my perfectionism is because I'm just like that, and how much of it is because I had to be a good example of what an Illyrian can be, was not exactly a thing she could verbalize to someone else.

Not even if that someone else was La'an.

"I know that your feelings about your family's history are complicated," Una said at last, "but for what it's worth, I think Starfleet would be lucky to have you if you were even a tenth as talented and brave and smart as you are." La'an was blushing now, in that slightly awkward way that made her cheeks go blotchy and her ears turn red.

"Thank you, Chief," La'an said, and she cleared her throat.

There was more silence.

"I think you'd be just as accomplished if you weren't an Illyrian," La'an said. "For what it's worth." One hand came forward, hovered over Una's, then rested on top of it. Una's eyes darted from La'an's hand to the stricken look on the younger woman's face that she always got when expressing an emotion. "I didn't mean that as an insult," she added.

"And I'm sure if you weren't human you'd still be equally accomplished," Una said, trying to keep a straight face.

La'an looked so *anxious*, and the ridiculousness of the whole situation crashed down on Una's head. She was laughing before she could stop herself. Ugly, snorting laughter that made her double up and wheeze. She'd glance up at La'an, and then it would set off another peal of laughter. La'an was joining in now - giggling through her nose, and then it was that same cackling laughter that rolled through them both like a wave.

Was this really the first time she'd made a joke about not being human? Fancy that.

There was a cleared throat, and La'an and Una both looked up. There was a moment as they both tried to get their bearings, and then they were meeting Pelias's eyes.

The engineer was standing by their table, still holding her tumbler. Maybe she'd been coming to apologize? There was an air of surreality to it all.

La'an and Una made eye contact again, and it set them both off again. The confused expression on Pelias's face made it that much funnier.