

The Dearest and the Best

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1471) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1471>.

Rating: [Mature](#)
Archive Warning: [No Archive Warnings Apply](#)
Category: [F/F](#)
Fandom: [Borderlines](#)
Character: [Ensemble Cast - BAN](#)
Additional Tags: [Espionage](#), [Border Patrol](#)
Language: English
Series: Part 3 of [Borderlines: Book II - War Drums](#)
Stats: Published: 2024-03-20 Words: 4,590 Chapters: 1/1

The Dearest and the Best

by [B_Radley](#)

Summary

Every moment a test. Conversations between ex-spouses. Ol' Sol for a few days. Pirates, oh, my!

Testing

The Neutral Zone
Patrol Sector Epsilon 9-1
USS Aerfen (NCC-1794)

Decker Sinclair stares up at the repeater screen as her pilot puts the helm hard over, just managing to keep the *Aerfen* out of the Romulan dartship's sights. Her ship shudders slightly at another hit as two others of the quarter-swarm strike her shields.

"Have you sent out a call for assistance?" she asks the air, without taking her eyes off of the repeater.

The comm tech to her right answers. "Aye," he says. "Captain." The last is said hesitantly.

Not that I can blame him, she thinks. She'd just finished reading her commission to the assembled dozen-and-a-half of crew, when the general alarm had sounded.

Decker grits her teeth. "And?"

"No response as yet, captain. The swarm might be jamming our signals."

She looks down into the crew pit situated in front of the raised helm and command station, between her and the viewscreen, at one of her two barely-commissioned officers at the newest version of the Cohort holotable. It was, besides her, probably the youngest piece of equipment on the ship.

"Shields at 45%, captain." Unlike the comm tech, she hadn't hesitated on the title. Her blue eyes are steady between Decker's and the console.

Maybe it's the Redhead Club, she thinks. She shoves that thought away, then looks up at the repeater. She punches a command into her console, then looks at Eileen Madison. Her eyes narrow slightly, with something like recognition.

"Executing," she say. Decker grabs the arms of her chair. She feels the old ship respond as the Cohort system takes over the helm. Her stomach drops as the artificial gravity is just able to respond to the roll that Madison's command had incited.

There is a gasp, then a slight scream, followed by a curse from the pit as someone wasn't able to compensate and hold on. Decker keeps her eyes centered on the screen as the two dartships overcompensate and swerve to avoid each other, their disruptors continuing to fire.

She nods with satisfaction as a disruptor severs one outstretched double wing. The stricken dart slams into her fellow, igniting a plasma explosion. A third ship is given a glancing blow; she is trailing plasma as she pulls away.

Forming on the apparent leader, who had stood back, watching the fight.

"All power to phasers," Decker says. She rises. "Hit that wounded bird."

They don't have to as the leader fires on the slowing dart. Decker isn't sure if she imagines it or not, but the leader gives a slight waggle to her wings as she jumps away.

An almost mocking motion.

“Any sign of the rest of the swarm?” she asks.

“No, captain,” Madison replies. “Scopes are clear.”

“Very well,” Decker replies. “Is she across the Zone?”

“Yessir.”

“Secure from Red Alert. Maintain standard alert along the Zone.” She looks at Madison, as well as the broad Andorian at the helm. She realizes she doesn’t know his name. “Casualty and damage report within fifteen minutes. Get the offwatch folks fed,” she says. She looks at the comm tech. “Log the incursion into the Neutral Zone.”

“That’s the first officer’s responsibility. Or the tactical officer’s,” he replies.

Decker stops for a moment. She turns to him. “I just made it yours, comms. And yours alone.”

She turns and exits the small, cramped bridge. When the hatch closes to her quarters, she leans back against the bulkhead, closing her eyes.

“You did good, kid,” comes a warm voice with a hint of melody.

She opens her eyes. Chandra sits at her desk. She is clad in uniform trousers and the green fatigue jacket liner. Decker makes it her business to make sure she is concentrating on her CO’s blue-gray eyes rather than where the jacket is unzipped to. Or the fact that she wears nothing beneath it.

The smirk in those gray eyes tells Decker that Chandra is aware of her view.

“You were watching?”

Chandra motions to the computer screen. “Yep. Figured I’d stay here out of your way.”

Decker stares at her. “Have you figured out if you’d made a big-ass mistake putting me here in command?”

“Figured out that I made the right choice before you were even jumped, Deck,” Chandra replies. “You may have to deal with that comm tech,” she says.

“Gonna let the department head do it. Until he doesn’t.”

“Good move. The Ops manager’s name is Regit Th’rolev,” she says.

Decker breathes out at her presence. “Did you notice anything strange about the swarm?”

Chandra nods. “No official Romulan markings. The only markings were on the lead ship. A flaming Klingon’s skull. Plus, I think the mothership was out of sensor range from the rest of the swarm.”

She looks as if she is going to say something else, but doesn’t, watching Decker expectantly.

Decker pulls her uniform pullover off, sniffing it. “Targbane.” She throws the shirt towards the refresher port. She watches it lie on the deck where she had missed. She draws a clean tanktop out and pulls it over her head, making sure her own fatigue jacket with the delta of her brevet rank pinned to the chest is handy.

Chandra nods. “Good to see you’re up on your Romulan mercenaries,” she remarks.

Decker smiles. “Gotta be prepared for anything when my group leader is watching everything I do.”

“Would you expect anything less?”

She exhales. “No, Chan,” she replies quietly. Promotion to command had brought her the privilege of using her Captain (L)’s first name, or even her diminutive, at least in private. It had brought the permission, if not the comfort level.

She sits down across from Chandra, holding her hand up as Chandra makes to surrender the chair. “Who’s on watch?”

“One of the chiefs. Got a couple rated as watchstanders.”

“Good move. You and your two department heads need rest, too.”

“You going to get me an XO? Preferably one that’s not an asshole?”

“You don’t ask for much, do you, brat?” Chandra asks with a laugh. “I’m working on it.”

The speaker activates. A different comm tech says, “Message from Starfleet Command, routed through Spec Ops, Patrol, Division and Wing. Addressed to both you and Captain Chandra.”

“Send it,” Decker says tiredly. Her eyes widen as she reads it.

She scans it quickly and looks at Chandra. “We’re going to Earth? For your Medal of Honor investiture?”

Chandra grins. “For your Bronze Cluster as well, hard-charger.”

Decker feels her face scrunch up in confusion. “Why? That’s usually done locally. Hell, it could be sent in the mail.” Realization hits her. It must show on her face as Chandra asks, “What?”

Decker grits her teeth, then reads further. “It’s at Utopia Planitia. I see my mother’s hand in this. Dammit.”

Chandra gets up and pulls her into her arms. Decker rests her head against her middle, the feel of the synthwool competing with the warm bare skin. Decker closes her eyes as Chandra strokes her hair.

As anticipated, she calms from the slight increase in Chandra’s Threads, as well as the Link that goes even deeper. She wonders if that means that she is approaching the status of the prelanka bond that Kaylin had told her about, and Theelia had demonstrated while they had danced, on a night that felt like it was years ago, but was actually only last week.

She doesn’t even wonder about which level it is.

Of the body, the mind, or the heart.

She feels herself slipping into sleep.

Chandra smiles down at her where she has laid her on the bunk. She reaches down and pulls Decker’s boots off, then her trousers, before she sits back at the desk. She feels her eyes narrow as she reads the encrypted brief on her PADD.

The Engineer and the Doctor

Utopia Planitia Dockyards

Office of the Dockyard Manager

Above Utopia Planitia Settlement, Sol IV (Mars)

2296

Rear Admiral Mary Elizabeth Decker looks out of the office window at the growing dockyards. The yards hadn’t been in existence for very long, but already was built up with multiple orbital facilities, all filled with ships being built, repaired, or dismantled. Her eyes fall on the second *Constitution* II heavy to bear the name of her father’s ship, the one that he had helped destroy the planet killer that had killed him when he had piloted the shuttle into its maw.

His sacrifice hadn’t been in vain, as it had given Jim Kirk the idea to pilot the abandoned *Constellation* into the machine.

Her eyes tear as she sees that the saucer would probably be gone within a couple of weeks. She is about to turn around again and stand at her desk, going over plans for a future class of starship, when she catches a glimpse of herself in the glass. She shakes her head at the thought of Kirk. As she always does when that name comes up, she thinks about what might have been.

For her father and her brother. Kirk had been present at both of their deaths. She closes her eyes. Or Will’s loss.

She’d never given up hope.

Her red hair is swept up off of her neck and shoulders, and gathered into a sailor’s queue. Her hazel eyes, showing blue at the particular moment in the light of the dockyard, gaze over the strong jaw, coupled with the dimpled chin that she shared with her late older brother. The freckles on her cheeks she shares with her daughter, though the numbers on Decker’s cheeks far outnumber hers. Her operations-gold pullover shows that she is still in shape, even though she is approaching her fiftieth year—she won’t say how close it is bearing down on her—and still would catch the eye of anyone interested in looking. She sometimes wishes that she had her daughter’s height, but she is well past the time for a growth spurt to gain that extra five inches.

Mary closes her eyes, cursing herself, as she gives into the vanity. She lets them open as her comm dings, reminding her of why she is probably thinking of such things.

She turns as her chief of staff, Commander (E) Joelle Grayson steps in. She smiles at what look like large, black plastic-framed eyeglasses covering her dark eyes. She knows that they aren’t spectacles, but screens that allow her to see at least four different messages or memos.

Grayson pulls the data readers off and perches them on her black hair, piled on top of her head. “She’s here,” she whispers.

Mary nods, then lifts her jacket from the back of her chair, pulling it on and securing the flap. She knows that she doesn’t need to do this for her guest, but it helps armor her.

Probably because she knows that anything her ex-wife could sling her way, would be the truth.

She also knows that she won’t sling those barbs back, in spite of her reputation.

A tall woman in her late thirties, again not as tall as Mary’s birth-daughter and the woman’s in all-but-blood, but taller than Mary steps in, nodding at Joelle with a warm smile.

One that isn’t returned by the loyal staffer.

Dr. Kimberly Sinclair steps in, her service dress uniform with the light green of the Medical/Life Sciences division. Mary feels her heart twist, as well as other places as her eyes fall on the wideset brown eyes and high cheekbones that had captivated her years ago, along with the slim body, so much so that she had once risked exposure to take the woman into a closet and let each other tear their uniforms off on the repair facility she had commanded in the Drapede Drift.

As the door closes, Kim stands there, as if unsure of what to do. Mary isn't sure either.

Finally Kim moves over and pulls her into a tight embrace. The feel of Kim's body against hers at once centers her and unmoors her.

She moves her face against the approximate location of the younger woman's collarbone under the uniform. A place that had been a favorite when they were wearing less clothing.

Kim breaks away, then stares at her. Mary curses to herself as she recognizes the expression.

"What the hell are you thinking, Mary?" she asks, her voice hard. "Why did you pull strings and get Decker's medal ceremony scheduled to be awarded here? You know she doesn't want you interfering in her professional life. Either of us, really," Kim admits.

Mary grits her teeth. "Can I help it that I want to see my daughter get recognition? In a place of my choosing?"

"It's not your choice," Kim says quietly. "It's Decker's."

Mary shakes her head. "It's already planned. The President will be here to give it to her."

Kim apparently starts grinding her own teeth. "What the fuck, Mary Elizabeth? For a Bronze Cluster with V? If it didn't have that 'V' on it, it'd almost be a goddamn participation trophy."

"I read Chandra's citation. It probably should be a Silver Palm. Or maybe even the Starfleet Cross. Besides. The President is here to give Chandra her Blue Max."

Kim looks as if she is on her last nerve at the use of the ancient slang expression for the Medal of Honor. The Federation's highest award for bravery. A look that Mary has seen a great deal. When they were in the same room. She keeps her expression even. A look that was usually mitigated by certain other activities that were brought on after they fought. She sighs. Kim doesn't look like she is ready for the 'mitigation,' yet.

She has the calm look on her face. The one that could be a harbinger of further storm. She tries what she can to head off that storm. "The President can give Decker her medal. He won't mind."

Kim shakes her head, a disgusted look on her face. "Have you read Decker's letters? She worships Chandra. She will mind. Decker would be mortified if her getting that medal puts a pall over Chandra's day."

"I get the idea that Chandra could give a shit about that medal."

Kim looks heavenward and growls. "Goddamnit. You just don't get it. It's not about you. It's about our daughter."

"She's mine more than yours," Mary says before she can stop herself. She looks away.

"You gotta be kidding me. You left me with her so you could go out among the stars, doing what it is—whatever the fuck it is you do—knowing that I'd be on Earth to take care of her."

"Oh, so this is what that's about. Your life spent raising our kid."

"You asshole," Kim spits. "Excuse me, Admiral Asshole. I wouldn't want to get written up for disrespectful behavior because I'm just a Surgeon-Commander." She takes a deep breath, calming herself. "I'm not going to let you throw this back at me. Once again, I'll take the high road. You need to calm it down a bit. Just because Decker didn't follow you into engineering; she followed your dad and her uncle into command, you can't keep doing this. She's twenty years old, for Christ's sake. She's about to get her own command, even if it's temporary. Her group and squadron commander, as well the captain of her light scout think that much of her."

She stops at what Mary knows is her poleaxed expression.

"What?" Mary manages.

Kim slumps. "I guess she didn't tell you. She's got temporary command of a *Goddess*-class gunboat, the old *Aerfen*. She's bringing Chandra here for the investiture."

"I didn't know," Mary says, her heart falling down to her ankles.

"Because you don't listen to your daughter." Kim's eyes flash. "Our daughter. I'll say it again. It ain't about you. You can't be the corpse at every funeral, the bride at every wedding and the baby at every christening, Teddy."

Mary laughs at the quote about Theodore Roosevelt. From his own daughter, Alice.

"I guess." She does her best to look contrite. "I hadn't even figured out how to approach the President's office about giving Deck her medal."

Kim smiles in spite of herself. "My Mary. My engineer. Great planning, but the follow-through leaves something to be desired."

Mary shakes her head. "You think I could give her the award? I'm a flag officer."

Kim looks thoughtful. "Hunter's going to be there. You might let her do it."

Mary closes her eyes. As she does, she feels a smile come over her face. One that she is sure Kim also knows so well. She mentally checks her schedule.

When she opens her eyes and sends a text to Joelle, Kim sighs. She starts to take her coat off.

Later, as Mary lays on the couch, her head pillowed on Kim's bare stomach, she keeps the smile of triumph from her face as they both try to catch their breath. She doesn't see that Kim's face, where it lies against her own thigh, is troubled.

We can't keep doing this, Kim thinks. It isn't healthy for either of us. Or Decker. And it won't last.

Investiture

Chandra watches as the escorting pod breaks off, as the *Aerfen* moves up to dock at the main administrative facility for the yard. She watches calmly as Decker sees to the shutting down of the ship after the docking. Chandra grins to herself.

Like Chandra, Decker hadn't sat in her command chair, for fear that the spotless trousers would be creased on her dress whites. She looks over her junior officer. Her uniform is immaculate, the hat and the white gloves are placed next to Chandra's, more gold encrusted version on the console.

"We're docked, Captain," Decker says quietly.

She smiles at Decker, then lifts her hat and gloves. "Well, we can't put it off any longer," she says.

Decker nods, then says, "You have the bridge, Mr. Madison," she says.

Eileen nods and sits in the chair.

They walk in silence to the hatch, their hats under their arms at the regulation angle, the gloves already donned.

Chandra sees Decker stop short at the airlock. The entire crew is there, clad in their service dress-alpha uniforms. "Ship's company. Attention on the upper deck," intones the Chief of the small security detachment, the senior technician aboard.

She smiles at the pleasure of witnessing Decker's wide-eyed look at the small crew.

"Congratulations, Skipper," the Master-at-Arms says.

Decker finds her voice. "Thanks, Jaunty," she replies, giving the age-old nickname for his position, a holdover from the Royal Navy of three hundred and more years ago.

Chandra says nothing, moving to exit the ship before her junior captain.

There is a sea of white in the ceremonial uniforms. Uniforms prescribed for a Medal of Honor ceremony, among a lessening number of other occasions. As they are assembled on an artificial drill field, all hats are placed correctly on the heads of beings whose cultures allow them to wear them, or who physically can.

After a quick-briefing from a no-nonsense public affairs officer, Chandra finds herself standing in front of Ra, the Efrosian President. Decker's red ribbon is already on the breast of her uniform, courtesy of Hunter, who winks at Chandra.

He doesn't waste time. He pulls out a PADD and activates it. "We are gathered here today on a happy, yet solemn occasion to honor Captain Chandrelle et Prehaska ne Songet for her service last year on the Klingon Free Systems' prison asteroid, Vostus."

He pulls up his reading assists and places them on his nose, to read the citation. "With great intrepidity, as well as great risk to her own life, Captain, then ranked as Commander Chandra, led and executed a daring escape from illegal captivity, which resulted in the freeing of fifty-two captive Starfleet personnel, as well as the destruction of several Birds-of-Prey and the retrieval of a *K'ting'a*-class battlecruiser from the insurgents, allowing it to be returned to the Klingon Empire. Her quick action resulted in relief of all of the prisoners, with only the loss of two lives among them. One who had been executed earlier than the escape efforts, and a member of the Intelligence team that had infiltrated the asteroid to assist her."

Chandra keeps her expression even; she hopes she will be able to maintain her composure at the mention of the anonymous member of the Vulcan Security Ministry's V'Shar.

"I'm here, t'hy'la," that member says in her brain. "Always."

"In addition, during the month and a half of captivity, Captain Chandra's crew testified that she was the driving force behind keeping morale up and keeping the crew focused on survival, along with two other officers who have already been recognized for their work, Commander Kaylin Stone-Hunter and Lieutenant Siobhan Lincolnton with the Starfleet Cross and the Silver Palm, respectively. Her strength, her spirit, her intelligence, and her single-minded commitment to those under her command, universally attested to by them, including Commander Stone-Hunter and Lieutenant Lincolnton, reflect great credit on her in the highest traditions of the naval service of the United Federation of Planets."

Ra removes his assists and gazes at her, his blue eyes framed in his slightly tanned face and the long white hair. He smiles quickly, then nods. "I call on Rear Admiral Hunter, again, to help present the award. Admiral Hunter is Captain Chandra's foster-mother."

Chandra feels the ribbon draped around her neck. Hunter steps back and raises her hand to the brim of her hat. Chandra follows suit, they both lower their hands slowly. Chandra manages to keep from laughing as Hunter crosses her eyes.

It is later, when she is accepting the congratulations of strangers that Hunter moves over. She pulls Chandra into a deep embrace, her lips touching Chandra's ear.

"I love you, na'ta'balin'gere," she says. *My daughter of my heart.*

“I love you, na’ta’ella’gere. *My mother of my heart.* “Afana.”

“I’m so proud of you,” Hunter continues.

Decker walks over. A tall woman with the green-edged shoulder boards of the medical field walks next to her. The medico, a commander, has dark brown eyes and a slight overbite that enhances her wide smile.

“Captain Chandra?” Decker asks.

Chandra smiles and holds out her hand to the woman. “You must be Doctor Sinclair. Decker’s mother.” She feels the cool hand as the woman’s eyes lock with hers.

She makes sure that she keeps the Threads under wraps, ensuring that they behave themselves. She can only hope that the damaged brain cells that control them won’t choose this moment to blast everyone in the vicinity with her appreciation of the doctor’s appearance and her mind.

Her mind? T’Vari snarks in her head. *You’re not holding on to her mind with a death grip, Chan.*

She lets go of the cool hand quickly. The woman smiles warmly at her; if she notices Chandra’s social ineptitude, she doesn’t say anything.

Decker does. She smirks at Chandra. *She’s her mother, you idiot,* she thinks to herself. *Reel in the horny.*

“Congratulations, Captain,” Doctor Sinclair says.

Chandra looks at Decker. “Call me Chandra. You must be very proud.”

“You have no idea,” Sinclair says, looking at Decker herself. The powerful look of love that Sinclair gives Decker nearly bowls Chandra over. “And it’s Kim.”

She looks back at Rear Admiral Decker, who is speaking with the C-in-C and the Secretary of State for Defense. Kim’s expression is neutral. “I know that Decker’s birth-mother is proud as well.”

Her daughter’s expression remains just as even, now standing next to the Admirals. Another young officer pulls Decker aside to talk.

Kim and Chandra watch her go. Kim looks as if she wants to say something, then stops.

“You can speak freely, Kim,” Chandra says.

“I understand from Deck that you’re looking for a surgeon for your group?”

Chandra feels her left eyebrow raise at that. “I’ve been looking for one, among other things.”

“Can I make it easy for you?” Kim asks.

“Who do you have in mind?”

She lifts one side of her mouth, giving herself kind of a crooked grin. “Me.”

Chandra lets the other eyebrow join its fellow. “You?”

“I’m an emergency room surgeon. I’ve served time in disaster aid stations on various worlds, so that checks the box for meatball surgery.” She looks away. Her eyes fall on Decker, then on Decker’s other mother. They are talking quietly. Mary Decker hugs her daughter close to her.

Chandra can’t tell how enthusiastic her officer is.

“I need to get off Earth, Chandra. I need to be doing something meaningful,” she says. “Now that Decker is out of the house, I’d like to take my shot.”

Chandra nods. “This won’t be easy. But I don’t think I would question your motivations. Others, maybe, but not yours, from what Deck tells me. Have you talked to her?”

“I have. She’s encouraging, though she said I shouldn’t cramp her dating style.”

Chandra bursts out laughing. “I don’t think that’ll happen. We’re a tight-knit group.”

Kim smirks, then gives what Chandra would call a hooded look. “Maybe she’ll cramp mine.”

Once again, Chandra sees Deck adding her own smirk at her from across the room.

Targsbane

The Outmarches

Ael’a t’Khnialmnae, known as t’Stolna to all but her closest family, including in that ‘all’ a certain Praetor-Prime, steps into a large audience chamber of the ship with the sigil of the flaming Klingon skull. Two gigantic guards, both of whom dwarf her petite frame, watch her as she comes in.

A woman steps over and gives her a perfunctory and only a little invasive search. She steps closer to the figure who sits in shadow at the back

of the compartment.

“My lord Targsbane,” she starts, gritting her teeth.

“What makes you think I’m a lord?” comes a modulated voice. The figure doesn’t move.

A’ela says nothing to that.

“Never mind. What do you seek?”

A’ela takes a deep breath. “The people I represent wish to hire you,” she says, not dancing around.

“What do they want to hire us for?”

“To watch. To not raid, but keep information flowing to us in the Outmarches.”

“A monkey could do that. I’m a bit more pricey.”

“We’ll pay.”

“But for how long?”

She can’t answer that.

“Leave us,” the voice says.

Ael’a grits her teeth and starts to turn away.

“Not you, my dear,” Targsbane says.

The two guards exit. When they are gone, the figure moves for the first time.

“Come closer, my dear.”

She takes a breath and moves closer to the raised dais. As she moves closer, she comes into the light. She realizes that the figure that she had seen appears to be smaller than what she had thought; the lighting had played up the shadows a great deal. She holds her breath as she comes into the light bathing the dais.

Her eyes widen as she sees the true figure of Targsbane, the nemesis of Klingons everywhere.

A tall, thin young woman with brownish-golden hair piled on her head. Bronze eyes gaze at her, from a face of pale green skin

Delicate pointed ears show just under the piled up hair, contradicting presence of the deeper green skin.

“Hello, Ael’a,” the young woman says.

A’ela chokes with recognition. She is soon in the young Orion woman’s arms.

She wonders if either of her grandmothers knows who the identity of Targsbane is. A half-Orion, half-Romulan former playmate of their granddaughter.

She closes her eyes at the warmth.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!