

## And There's Another Country

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## And There's Another Country

by [B\\_Radley](#)

### Summary

Meeting family. Who's really the dumbass? The former captain of the *Excelsior* would like a word. Section 31 and a new recruit.

#### She is a Diamond

Decker Sinclair wonders when the reception after the award ceremony will be over. She sips at the glass of water that a server had brought; she knows that with all of this brass here, not to mention her mother, she should be on her toes.

Her officers had implied that there may be a party of tremendous magnitude before they raise ship and return to the frontier. She sees her birth-mother talking quietly to her ex-wife—more of a mother to Decker than anyone else. They appear to be talking easily, with smiles and occasional laughter.

To anyone else, this would be a good sign. Decker had been heartened before when the two of them had been on the verge of reconciliation. Her heart had been broken when Kim had left again, when Mary's self-centered propensities had popped up again.

She scans the crowd, looking for anyone else that she knew. Hunter is engaged in conversation with an older, very tall human in a Vice Admiral's uniform.

She feels the characteristic warmth of Deltan Threads. She realizes that these versions are different from Theelia's or Chandra's. There is something else in them. *When did you get to be such a connoisseur of pheromones?* the tiny Siobhan voice had asked in her head. She ignores it and turns around.

Decker has to look down to find the probable bearer of those threads. A pair of hazel eyes, showing bright blue, but with other hints in the artificial light, gazes up at her. She pulls her gaze down to the warm smile of greeting. The face could be described as elfin, with a slightly pointed chin, but with slightly rounded cheeks. It is when she reaches above the eyes that she realizes what might be different about this young woman's Threads.

A small swatch of hair is upswept from the center of her head, flipping down on the left side. The hair is black, with threads of white in them, giving it an almost pewter look. The sides of her head are bare as any Deltan's.

She wasn't fully Deltan.

The smile on her lips is just as warm as any Deltan's. *Except for those with pokers shoved up their afterburners*, comes unbidden into her brain.

Since she had been exposed to Deltans, with Theelia and Chandra, she'd learned a bit about their customs, as well as their taboos.

There weren't that many of the latter. She notices that the young woman is looking up and down her figure.

*Well, that's one that ain't a taboo*, she thinks. *When in Rome*, she adds in her head, returning the scrutiny.

"Hey, Brat," Chandra says from behind her.

The young woman smiles. "Hello, Mother," she says.

Decker feels her jaw drop. It doesn't hit the floor, but it is a close run thing. She looks between the two women. Both of them have a straight face.

Until they don't. They both burst out laughing at Decker's expression.

"Decker Sinclair, this is Kitana etal Prehaska. She is the adopted daughter of Rentor, my prospective mate."

Decker's expression doesn't change much in its amazement at this revelation.

Kitana extends her hand. Decker takes it. She gives a perplexed look when she realizes that the hand is cooler than Chandra's and Theelia's.

That and the hair tells her that something might be different about Chandra's once and future step-daughter.

She realizes that Kitana continues her scrutiny of Decker's body in her dress whites.

Decker keeps her eyes on the now-brown eyes, then shakes her head. *Don't be a dumbass*, she thinks. "No-ve-kri," she says. She hopes her accent isn't too atrocious.

Kitana's broad smile tells her it isn't. "No-ve-kra, Lieutenant," she says, giving the traditional response to the greeting.

"Kit hopes to get an appointment to the Academy," Chandra says. Decker smiles at the obvious pride she sees in Chandra's gray eyes.

Something that she has seen directed at her, at Kaylin, and at Siobhan, as well.

"Oh, have you applied?"

"Getting ready to," Kitana says. "I hope to be a science officer, though my aptitude tests gave me a wide amount of choices." She smirks. "Maybe I'll go for weapons/tactical/security," like my perrin-ef ta'ella."

Decker raises her eyebrow at that unfamiliar word.

"My prospective choice-mother," Kitana clarifies.

When Decker returns her gaze to her Captain (L), she sees something besides the warmth and pride. Just a glimmer of something, that only someone who had spent a great deal of concentrated time with Chandra in a short period might catch.

Uncertainty.

Decker steals a glance back at Kitana, to see if she had seen it, or maybe felt it in some level of the Threads that she didn't have access to.

There is no sign, but Decker admits to herself that she is no expert.

She turns away, contemplating the crowd as Chandra and Kitana both reach up to the bare parts of the back of their heads and pulls their foreheads together, closing their eyes. Decker feels the contact herself. She'd seen Deltan greet each other like this, but for the first time ever, she actually had felt something in her mind. Even with Chandra's uncertainty, she can feel the beginnings of that bond.

Decker is sure that this would only happen if the two of them wanted it to. She feels touched to be included. Privileged even.

Chandra breaks free from Kitana, with a touch of their lips. She turns to Decker. "We've got a layover for the weekend. I'm supposed to meet with some of the SpecOps staff. Shore leave for the crew until we raise ship on Monday afternoon." She smiles at Decker and touches her cheek. "That includes the ship's captain."

Decker looks over at her birth-mother, then at her mother-by-choice. She smiles at the unconscious use of the Deltan term. "I think I might stay on the ship, Skipper," she says, looking back at Chandra, "if it's all the same. I'll be seeing a lot of Doctor Sinclair, it seems." She looks away. "We'll need to schedule a dignified transfer for our shipmates."

Chandra nods. Decker can tell that she is seeing the three now-closed stasis tubes in the Aerfen's hold, with Federation flags draped over them. "You're right, Captain," she says, using Decker's title rather than her actual rank.

Kitana reaches out and touches Decker's arm. "My trah'ella and one of my trah'ebay'n are here. My brother has never been to Earth. We've rented a small house in San Francisco. Chandra-ta'Ella is coming. We'd love to have you."

She looks at Chandra who smiles. "I think that's a good idea, Deck."

After a moment, she nods. "Let me work it out with my officers. I want them to make sure that they get some time off, while covering the ship."

She sees Chandra smile approvingly.

Kitana reaches out and adds her own smile. She slips her arm through Decker's. "Come on. I need a drink."

Chandra rolls her eyes. "You're not on the Omri, hard-charger," she says, laughing. "You're just another teenager here."

"Oh, I guess I have to wait until the old folks are gone," Kitana says mockingly.

"Brat," Chandra says. She looks at Decker. "Try not to let my future daughter, corrupt you, L-T."

Decker feels Kitana draw her in tighter, as the Threads increase in setting. *Flirting inbound*, she thinks. She decides to head it off at the pass, probably clumsily and with great ineptitude. She looks down at Kitana. "Oh, I'm all for corrupting. Let's see if we can go off somewhere and make some of the stuffier uniforms tighter in here."

Kitana laughs, then reaches up and gives her a quick kiss on the cheek. Decker sees her commanding officer staring at her, attempting to keep a baleful gaze in her eyes. Finally, her lips twitch.

As they walk away, Decker wonders what the Andorian judges would give her on the suggestiveness/flirting category of the score.

### **Oh, What a Circus**

#### *The Outmarches*

D'Shaya t'Rrallion stares out at the stars as Francis, now serving as first mate, since they were through the Neutral Zone into Romulan territory, pilots the ship to where the cryptic message had sent them to. She looks over Fonseca, who is sitting at the weapons station, her hands behind her head. She sits with her feet up on the console.

D'Shaya grins to herself at Francis' baleful expression. For such a slob in his own quarters, sloppy and unkept control spaces sets his teeth on edge. He doesn't say anything, but every so often, he shoots a look at the Starfleet woman.

A look that is pointedly ignored as she plays a hologame on her PADD.

D'Shaya wonders if Francis is close to an aneurism.

There is a beep from Ava's console. She sits up and punches a few touchpads.

"Easy," Francis says.

"It's a *Goddess*. They take punishment better than you do, Francis."

"You don't get to call me that. Call me Captain."

Ava says something in a language that neither of them recognize.

"What was that?" Francis says.

"Portuguese," Ava says.

"No. What did you say?"

"You don't want to know, Francie," she says.

He smirks. "Don't knock what you haven't tried," he says. He jerks his thumb at D'Shaya. "Ask her."

Ava turns and narrows her eyes at her. D'Shaya shrugs. "I get bored easily," she says.

D'Shaya sees Ava look pointedly at Francis. "Not if you were the last sentient being alive, Francis."

D'Shaya turns to look at Francis' expression at that when she suddenly feels herself floating in the air, before slamming into the far bulkhead. Her eyes catch Francis as he manages to hang on to the helm. D'Shaya realizes that Ava has managed to reach the weapons console. D'Shaya sees crimson blood pouring from her forehead and over her eyes.

She hits the deck after a lag of about ten seconds when the artificial gravity's lag finally ends. As she gathers herself, hoping to help the other two, when she feels the ship giving a characteristic shudder.

She sees Ava's eyes focusing on the targeting scanner. D'Shaya makes it to her feet. She looks at the sensor screen, as she moves to stand over Francis as he jinks left and right.

"Increase speed," D'Shaya says. "We're in a targeting bubble."

"No shit," Francis says, his teeth.

"Who the hell's shooting at us?"

D'Shaya exhales as she looks up at the viewer. The quadruple-winged spears shift in and out, firing disruptors.

"They're a Romulan dart-swarm. Or at least a half-swarm."

All three of them curse as one.

Wondering in at least three different languages in their minds who the hell had betrayed them.

### **The Actress Hasn't Learned the Lines (You'd Like to Hear)**

Chandra watches the two young women walking towards a quieter corner of the reception hall. She reaches out and snags a flute of champagne from a yeoman's tray. As she takes a sip, the excess bubbles tickling her nose, she watches as Decker and Kit laugh at something over in the corner. She smiles to herself, witnessing her young captain getting a slight chance to be a semi-normal twenty-year old, without life and death responsibilities. She wonders, with her birth-mother, if she'd ever gotten that chance.

Looking over at Kim Sinclair, who seems to be talking with another medical officer that she doesn't recognize, she is sure that Decker had gotten plenty of chances while Mary Decker was away building her career. She shakes her head, gritting her teeth. *None of my business*, she

thinks.

Unless it interferes with her officer's well-being.

"Enjoying the reception, Captain?" asks a deep male voice, with just a hint of what she could only term a slight superiority. She closes her eyes for a half-second, gathering herself, before turning.

"Admiral Styles," she says, nodding her head slightly. At least they were off the drill field and her hat is with the others, next to Decker's, neatly arranged in rows, and she doesn't have to salute him.

His dark eyes gaze at her, with the quality of the drill instructors that she'd known and despised from her time at Beast Barracks, the summer before the start of her plebe year. As if looking for any mistake or weakness. They're about the same height, the fact that his spine seems unbending makes him seem a little taller.

Idly, she wonders if that could be because of how he holds that pretentious little swagger stick or whatever it is tightly under his arm.

She manages not to wince at that thought. *Judgmental, much? You barely know him.*

He does hold out his hand. "Congratulations," he says. "I'm not sure how you actually have that award around your neck."

*Okay, there it is. First impressions are the best.* "I'm not sure I follow, Admiral?"

"You disobeyed Captain Harriman's orders to go after that group. By rights, you should've been court-martialed after you survived."

She breathes out and downs her drink. She puts the flute down on an abandoned tray. She takes a deep breath, wondering if it is worth it.

"You *and* your little merry band," he adds.

*Yep, it's worth it.*

"That's an opinion, sir," she says, hoping to keep the conversation neutral.

"One shared by others. Captain Harriman should be getting that award," he says, pointing to the ribbon around her neck.

*Yeah, those others named Harriman, she thinks. No, that's not fair. Harriman did come after us. He could've ignored the Chief Engineer and the other officers.*

"That's interesting, sir. Captain Harriman actually recommended me for the award. From what I understand, he did it against the wishes of daddy."

She sees his eyes flash. "Show some respect, Captain. Or I'll have you up on charges."

At some point, Chandra knows she should quit while she's behind, but this supercilious prick was getting under her skin. "Go ahead, Admiral Styles. Then you can find someone else to command the 17th. We can barely get officers to command my ships, much less an effective group commander."

"Careful, Chandra," he says. "You're not replaceable."

"And you're not in my chain of command, sir, with all due respect," she says, choking on the last four words.

He smiles. "Oh, maybe not directly. I'm the new chief of staff for SPECOPS. And if I read the tea leaves right, I'll be the new Commander, Border Patrol within six months."

*Fuck, Chandra thinks. And in six months and two minutes, I'll be lucky to command a garbage scow.*

"I wouldn't count the points on your cross just yet, Larry," says a deep, gravelly voice. She has the satisfaction of seeing Styles grit his teeth at the hated diminutive.

"Lawrence, Admiral," he corrects. At that moment, Chandra realizes it might not be the swagger stick under his arm that makes him look taller. *Probably the twin of it that's shoved up his—*

She cuts that thought off, turning to look at the tall Vice Admiral. Jameson McCall stares at Styles with those piercing eyes that she remembers from history classes at the Academy, that he still taught, even today, with even less spare time.

Styles starts to say something, but thinks better of it. Especially as a human woman in her fifties walks up to them, dressed in a civilian suit. She gazes placidly at him with deep brown eyes. Her short brown hair is immaculately coiffed, with a defiant white streak in front. Without another word, Styles nods at McCall and the woman, then makes a hasty retreat.

Jameson turns the gaze on her. It softens quite a bit.

Chandra starts to say something, but he holds up his hand.

"We don't have time, Chan," he says. "Need to let you know something that might be happening." He nods at the civilian woman. "This is a certain friend to both of us. You can call her Madame President. Of Universal Exports."

She exhales sharply. Having worked in Starfleet Security, she is slightly aware of the company that is the cover organization for Special Section of Federation Security, also known as the Institute. The civilian intelligence body for the Federation. This woman is probably known

to others only as 'C'.

"And what does this have to do with me?" she asks, knowing the answer, remembering Nell Cavendish's briefing.

"As you know, certain of our shared working groups have an interest in a certain Free Vessel that you seemed to have contracted with to fill out your ranks."

*Meaning that ship is a wholly owned subsidiary of Starfleet Intelligence, Inc, she thinks. Maybe even the 'funny people,' naming the commonly used nickname for employees of Universal Export.*

"We sent them into the Neutral Zone to make contact with a certain entity. One that might be making contact with other entities."

She stares at him. "And?"

She sees McCall glance at C. "We've lost contact with them," he says quietly.

Chandra feels her left eyebrow go up. She exhales slowly. She stares at them. "With one of my officers on that ship," she says deliberately.

C stares at her. "We've lost contact before. I don't think that is cause for alarm yet."

*Yep. She's involved in it.* "And what's Special Section's interest?"

She manages to keep the triumphant smile off of her face as C's eyes flash fire at her. McCall flashes a grin, but stifles it when the dark eyes turn towards him.

"I think we might want to come clean. A little bit," he says to C.

C studies him for a moment. For a moment, the active part Chandra's Link detects something pass between the two of them. It is gone in an instant.

"We've got a big operation going," she says.

"I gathered that," Chandra says. "Are you going to read me in?"

"Nope," C says. "Not all the way. No more than Commander Cavendish did."

"Then find someone else to do your dirty work," she says.

"We could order you to," C says.

"You can't order me to do shit. You're not Starfleet." She points at McCall. "Neither can the Prince here. He isn't in my chain of command. And I'm pretty sure neither of you want to bring another flag officer in. One that won't tell you to pound sand."

The two women stare at each other. Out of the corner of her eye, she can see McCall looking from one to the other. "Don't cross me, Captain," C says. "It won't go well for you."

Chandra smiles dangerously. "I've had my brains scrambled by a bat'leth, Director," she says. "A threat from a pissant bureaucrat is nothing."

C holds her gaze for a moment. Finally she shakes her head, giving Chandra a wry grin. She looks at McCall. "I like her."

She takes a deep breath. "We've got an asset at the highest level of the Gold Forces government," she says, using the euphemism for the Romulans.

"Are we sure?" Chandra asks after digesting that. "We've had fits and starts before."

"We're pretty sure. We have an asset of our own there as well."

Chandra narrows her eyes, then looks at McCall. "Is he in danger?" she asks.

"Well, he's around the Praetorate, what's left of it. It can't be good for his health."

She is silent. "Do you need me to head back to the Zone tonight?"

"No. I don't think so. You couldn't get there in time. Plus, it might call too much attention if you were suddenly to depart. But if I can get someone at the Federation Command Authority-level to authorize it, we could borrow one of your ships for a quick incursion."

"Then I'd rather it be me."

"Can't wait that long, Chan," McCall says.

"We're in the middle of refitting Commander Stone-Hunter's ship with heavier weapons. So it'll have to be the jarheads of the RDF, or one of the boomers."

"You got somebody you know on the boomers? They might be less chaotic than the jarheads," McCall says.

She grins. "Marginally. I don't know the squadron CO. But there's a lieutenant who just got command, who served under me on the *Enterprise-B*. Torbert of the *Crusader*. NCC-3743," she finishes.

“Is he or she discreet?” C asks.

“She. And yes she is. For somebody with at least a hundred photon torpedoes at her fingertips.”

She notices McCall typing on a PADD that a redheaded woman wearing dress whites with a Senior Chief’s insignia on the shoulder boards—the old-time gold furled anchor with a single silver star above it had handed him. The woman gives Chandra a hooded look, with a look up and down her body.

“Turn it down, Castellan,” McCall notices and says.

“Part of my job is your security, Prince,” she says in an accent from a southern nation-continent in Earth’s Pacific Ocean. “I was checking her for weapons.”

McCall ignores her. She turns away and moves off with her drink and the PADD. “You should be getting the orders within the hour, Chan,” he says.

Chan nods. “Are they going through SPECOPS?”

“No. Direct to your division commander, at least for the operational order. He will be briefed generally.”

“Hunter made it clear. Your orders are explicit. You don’t sail until Monday.”

Chan stares at him, in yet another contest of wills. This time C looks from one to another. Finally Chandra nods. “Aye, Admiral.”

C holds out her hand. “It was good to meet you, Captain. You come highly recommended, and not just from this old man.”

“Thank you, C,” she says.

She turns and starts to walk over to Rear Admiral Hunter and Decker.

Ellen Cantrell looks at McCall. “We’re agreed. We’ll read her in on Operation Vandal?”

After a moment, he nods. “Yeah. But not Visigoth. I’d like to keep her as far away from Section 31 as possible. Especially if this goes to shit.”

### **I’d Be Surprisingly Good for You**

Lawrence Styles sits in his new office, looking out at the night sky. He thinks of his conversation with Chandra at the Utopia Planitia dockyard, which was synced in its artificial day with that of Earth.

He closes his eyes as he envisions himself with the triangle shaped insignia of a Vice Admiral on the flap of his service dress uniform. All that he has to do is ensure that he can keep Hunter, the biggest rival for the position he seeks.

No one would be able to stop him. Unlike his past when he had been deprived of his command of the first *Excelsior*-class, with the experimental transwarp drive.

When the *Excelsior* had been sabotaged by that damned Scottish engineer of Kirk’s. No one had blamed him for that, at least tacitly. But when Kirk had been given a slap on the wrist after stealing the *Enterprise*, the whispering had begun.

It had only been a matter of time. When the transwarp experiment had ended and the *Excelsior* had been transitioned from experiment to ship of the line, he’d been promoted to commodore, but he’d never had a starship command again.

Kirk’s own hand-picked lackey, Hikaru Sulu had been given the *Excelsior*, eventually, after the transwarp equipment had been removed.

Styles opens his eyes. His new aide, Reese, stands there. She stares at him blankly. “What?” he asks.

She takes a beat or two before answering. “The officer that you requested is here, Admiral,” she intones. Her voice is as blank as her look. He doesn’t often analyze people, but he detects something more than neutrality in her voice.

Contempt?

He shakes that thought away. A young lieutenant steps into his office; she remains at attention. She is of medium height with blonde hair framing large blue eyes. He can’t read her expression.

He opens up her file. “Lieutenant Patience Brannigan. Late of the *Excelsior*, as an assistant helm officer, then head of the Navigation/Helm department. You were on duty when the *Excelsior* was struck by a gravitic mine. You struck your first officer when he wouldn’t listen to you.”

“No sir. I shoved him out of the way, when he was about to cut off a compartment that was leaking coolant.”

“So you were willing to risk the ship for three lives?”

“No sir,” she replies. “I was willing to give them ten more seconds to get out. I calculated the rate of travel of the coolant would’ve been twenty seconds. He wouldn’t listen. Commodore Sulu agreed with me.”

“Commodore Sulu wasn’t in command at that time, on temporary assignment. Captain Wharton and the first officer relieved you and transferred you. You somehow escaped punishment.”

“I was given an Article 32 hearing,” she says. “They agreed that there was no further action needed.”

“I didn’t. I was the convening authority.”

She stares at him, with something that Styles doesn’t need to have any innate skills at reading expressions. Pure loathing is all over her doll-like features.

“So you’re the one who put the brick on me. Why I’ve been cooling my heels without an assignment, working in a supply warehouse.”

He smiles, then holds his hands out wide in what he would interpret as a magnanimous gesture. “That’s all about to change. You’ve received your orders?”

“You’re sending me to be a Border Dog?”

“I’m sending you to command a *Lancer*-class cutter,” he says. “Your own command, subject to your squadron commander. It’s an appropriate posting for a young officer of your experience and rank.”

“What’s the catch?”

“Catch, Lieutenant?”

“Come on, Styles,” she says. “With your type, there’s always a catch.”

Daina Reese walks up behind her, intruding into her space. For some reason, for an instant, she wonders if Reese is going to kill her. She has that expression on her face. Instead, she whispers into her ear. “Respect, dear Patience. He’s giving you a shot.” She smiles dangerously and looks at Lawrence. “Just like I’ve given him one.

“You’d be wise to take it, just like he has.”

The threat hangs in the air.

Styles takes a deep breath. “I need to know what’s going on in that Group. Anything unusual, you’ll report to Commander Reese.”

“Or what?”

“You’ll find yourself on the ash heap of Starfleet history,” Reese says into her ear. “You’ll never leave that supply depot on Alpha Centauri.” Her smile widens, which doesn’t do anything to soften her expression. “It’s a dangerous place. You might have an accident there.”

In spite of his exalted position, in spite of the path that he is taking to higher command, Lawrence Styles feels himself grow cold at her words.

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