

Her Shining Bounds Increase

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Her Shining Bounds Increase

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Summary

House calls with the new doctor (and George). Assignments from the Praetor-Prime. The Empress-Claimant makes some deals. This meeting of Section 31 is called to order. Or is it?

George

Siobhan winces as she shifts her right shoulder to start the exercises that she'd been instructed to perform by the comm-doctor from Starbase 57.

The helm operator—the quartermaster, in ancient naval parlance for anyone not an officer or specialist—looks up from the helm and says, “Docking complete, Cap,” he says. “Supply onboarding beginning, along with the new personnel transfers.”

“Very well Jakwan,” she replies. “Have them report to their department heads and supervisors. I’ll see them with Captain Chandra when she gets back.”

“And the Doctor?”

“Have her come up to the bridge.”

She looks down at the screen, scanning the personnel transfer roster. All of them listed about half of what *Comstock* and several of the other ships actually needed, but it was a start.

Siobhan lets a slight gasp slip from her lips, just as she hears footsteps coming up the ladder. She feels a couple of hands grasp her arm. She turns around, ready to lay into whoever has laid hands on her when she looks into a pair of wideset brown eyes with just the right amount of concern and professionalism in them.

Along with a healthy dose of humor and snark. The woman wears her service dress uniform, minus the coat, with the delta and three pips on the center bar pinned on her chest. As Siobhan opens her mouth, she feels the pain subside. She realizes the doctor is grasping her arm in a way that intrudes on the nerve, with her fingers massaging it.

“I’m Doctor Kimberly Sinclair,” she says in a soft voice. “I’m your new group MO. Coming aboard to join.” She grins. “I’d give you my orders, Captain Lincolnton, but I’m a little busy, stopping your whining.” This last is said where only Siobhan can hear her.

Siobhan feels her eyes widen, not only at the sally, but the fact that she knows her name and recognizes her. Not exactly what she had expected from their brand-new doctor. Then her brain puts the last name into perspective.

“You’re Decker’s mum,” she whispers back.

“Guilty,” Sinclair says. She releases Siobhan’s arm. “I’ve got something in my supplies that’ll do more than take the edge off. It’ll heal the wound and provide pain relief without drugs.” The wide grin appears again. “You just got to get used to the tentacles.”

She hears one of the two crewmembers at the helm gasp, while the quartermaster’s mate adds a snort. She taps the intercom. “XO, you have the ship.”

A terse one-word acknowledgement is the only reply. She grits her teeth, knowing that there are certain crewmembers running a pool on how long it’ll take before she dumps Daronex from the airlock. With or without a pressure suit or field-support belt.

She feels Sinclair moving behind her as she stops at the wardroom hatch. She points to a cabin down the passageway. “There’s your cabin. The

sickbay isn't that far aft and starboard." She moves into the wardroom.

She turns and sees the doctor pulling a jar with a green gas in it from a case that had followed her obediently on an antigrav carrier. "Enough with the foreplay. Off with the shirt."

As she pulls her work/field shirt off, she gives only a thought to what another officer, perhaps Engineer Ishimoto would see if they walked in.

Communal sonic showers might have knocked any modesty away from anyone. She breathes out as Sinclair reaches in with a pair of tongs.

"Oh, fuck no," Siobhan says. She stares at the small creature on the end. It has turned from a brown color to a light blue.

"Don't be such a baby, Siobhan," Kimberly says. "Decker says you took that wound without a whimper. It was the recovery that she said made you whine and manifest high maintenance."

"Oh, she did, did she?" Siobhan replies. "What else did she say?" She offers her arm to the doctor. As she does, Sinclair drops the critter on her arm, directly onto the healing wound.

"Shit," Siobhan yelps. There is a sharp pain.

In an instant, it is gone. So is the dull ache. Only warmth remains in its place. She relaxes.

Siobhan looks at Dr. Sinclair, whose grin has morphed into a warm smile. "What the hell?"

"It's called a Rakjan. It's native to Andor, the planet that Andoria orbits around. It lives in pockets of flodinine gas in very deep caverns. When it attaches itself to a patient, it draws respiration from them, so it doesn't need to be in that atmosphere."

"How long do I wear it?"

"Just at night. I wanted to go ahead and introduce the two of you."

"Great. So much for my sex life, such as it is."

Sinclair smirks. "Who says you're not enjoying that right now? Or at least George is."

Siobhan stares at her. "What the hell do you mean?"

"That pain you felt at the beginning ain't from George's teeth."

"So, I'm going to give birth to one of these things?" she asks, feeling the panic coming into her voice.

"Oh, hell no. You've been watching too many twentieth-century alien horror movies. Deck told me the both of you watched them." She snorts with laughter. "In addition to getting the ability to respire from your blood, it produces genetic material. So when I get another one, the two of them will exchange the genetic material from various patients and produce about fifty more between the two of them. It's a completely symbiotic relationship with you."

She stops for a moment. "But they will have some of your DNA. There'll probably be one with freckles and sarcasm built in."

Siobhan shakes her head, as if trying to send that thought from her head. *It ain't working*, she thinks. "Is this one only mine?"

"No. After treatment is over, he'll wean off of you. He works for most species, except, surprisingly the Andorians and the Aenar." She keeps her expression even. "Don't worry. You won't have to pay child support."

Siobhan rolls her eyes. "I know you outrank me, but I think you're going to be as big of a pain in the ass as your daughter, Doctor."

Sinclair laughs. "Call me Kim, when we're away from the crew, Siobhan," she says. Her face grows serious. "Besides the minutiae of life, Deck's only told me that you've been a good friend in the last few weeks. I think she really admires you."

Siobhan is quiet. "I admire her, too," she says finally. "We both have a lot to learn and were starting to make a good team."

Kim nods. She reaches up with the tongs and taps George in a specific way. He—and Shiv is sure that the pronoun is used loosely—moves from her shoulder to the tongs.

She nods, moving the arm in all directions. "I think the range of motion has improved as well."

Kim places George in his jar and puts it down. She looks at Siobhan with a blank, 'doctor-like' expression.

"What?" she asks as Kim picks up her gear.

"Time for both of you to go smoke a cigarette."

She ducks out of the wardroom as Shiv throws her balled up shirt at her.

Dance of the Praetors

chRihan (Romulus)

Ra'tleihfi (The Government District)- Ki Baratan (Capitol City)

Two standard weeks before.

Megara moves into the large office. She stops, staring at the two men standing near the floor-to-ceiling windows.

They both turn to look at her and gaze at her, their expressions militarily-correct and blank.

The oldest and highest ranking smiles at her after a moment. She isn't sure if the smile is actually one of greeting or if it is a precursor to being splashed into nothingness by the disruptor of the younger man, dressed in the uniform of the Tal Shiar. She sends thoughts of what she had heard about this man's twin from a report.

A report given by the young human behind her, wearing a golden collar. She keeps from turning to look at him.

The Tal Shiar Major, Simv tr'Ddelasu, stares at Covenant, as the human is known to most on this side of the Outmarches, either in Rihan or Standard. His dark, elongated eyes narrow in something like distrust. The older man, Commander-General Khav tr'Salron neg t'Rrallion, notices and shakes his head slightly at the secret policeman/spy.

Megara turns her attention to the woman behind the desk. She motions for Megara and Covenant to walk over. Megara comes over, with Covenant walking behind her, as usual in front of anyone else, at least that aren't related to either one.

Llara t'Rrallion, the Praetor-Prime for the Romulan Star Empire, also known as aierh te'nuhwir, or 'First Among Equals,' smiles her own wolfish smile at the pair. Megara keeps her expression even as she sees Llara's amber eyes move up and down Covenant's body, with something other than a look she would give a rival.

Megara keeps her calm, because she knows that Covenant has already used the heart of that look to his and her advantage with the woman.

"Greetings, Praetor," Llara says.

"And you, Praetor," Megara replies. She notices that Covenant is bowing.

Neither Salron or Ddelasu have reciprocated for her. She turns and stares at them.

Llara snaps at both of them, her voice angry, as well as her features. Salron stands up straight, to attention, then gives a military salute. He stares at Ddelasu. The Tal Shiar's smirks, then copies his movements.

As slowly as possible.

"I train my servitors to show respect, Praetor," Megara says, her voice icy.

Rrallion turns and stares at Simv. "Get out," she says, with an even harder look.

He stares at her for a moment, then at Salron.

"Don't look at him," Llara says. "He won't be able to save you if I order you to be strangled."

He snaps to attention, then turns with military correctness and exits.

"Thank you, Llara," Megara says.

"Of course, Megara."

She walks out from behind her desk and motions towards a large L-shaped couch. She and Covenant move to the upper section, Llara and Khav sit on the other.

Covenant does wait to sit. Llara smirks and motions to him.

He sits next to Megara, with an expression of attention. Llara gazes back at him with that earlier expression.

As does Khav.

"What can I do for you, Praetor?" Llara asks after breaking free from his gaze.

"We've gotten some indication that certain individuals from the Federation are attempting to make contact with some of our citizens."

Llara narrows her eyes. "Who?"

"I haven't ascertained that, as yet. I have certain people looking into that."

"How did you come by this knowledge, Eminence?" Commander-General Salron asks.

She smiles without mirth. "Sources and methods, khre'riov," she replies. "It might be a bit sensitive and risk destroying whatever leads we have."

"Has this been brought to the attention of the Tal' Shiar?" Llara asks smoothly.

Megara smiles. "No," she says without further elaboration.

Khav narrows his blue eyes. "Why should we take your word for it? You've made no secret of the fact that you want to restore the Twelve."

"Don't you, Khre'riov?" she asks calmly.

Khav stands up, as does Megara. Covenant, to his credit, stands up as well. Llara smirks. “No, dear. You wouldn’t last one minute against my consort.”

You haven’t seen him fight our kind. As well as the Klin, she thinks.

“Careful, Commander,” Megara says, switching to Fed Standard. “He’s my property. And it’s been a while since my blade has tasted blood.”

“Yes,” he says, “it has been awhile.”

“Enough, Khav,” Llara says finally. “Put it back in your pants.”

Khav continues to stare at Megara. Finally, he relaxes and smiles what even Megara has to admit is a charming smile.

He would probably have the same smile on his face when he slipped the knife into her heart.

It would freeze on his face with my blade in his throat, she vows to herself.

“So what do you need?” Llara asks.

Megara turns away from Khav, shoving him from her mind. “I’ll need to make certain contacts. Or at least someone I trust will have to.”

Llara turns her gaze to Covenant, who has sat back down, after his mistress has. “Who will he need to meet? Will he be meeting the traitors?”

“No, Llara,” Megara says. “My military aide, who is another I trust, will have already met their go-between.

“Young t’Stolna?”

Megara says nothing. She catches Khav looking pointedly at Llara. Llara says nothing, then nods. She shifts her gaze to Covenant. “And what do you think of this plan? Are you prepared to die in this cause?”

He lifts one side of his mouth. “I serve my Praetor,” he says.

Megara notices that he doesn’t differentiate between the two of them.

Llara nods. “Very well. I’ll give you just enough cord for you to strangle yourself on, Meg,” she says, using the diminutive that she had used when they were classmates, both before, then during the Fleet Academy.

Megara says nothing. Llara looks at Khav. “Go with Khav and he will set you up with what you need.”

After a moment, Megara stands and gives her a military salute. “Shouldn’t be much, Praetor-Prime,” she says. “Just need you to drop Covenant off and then leave him alone.”

“See to it, my love,” Llara says to Khav.

She turns to Covenant, who stands silently. Without taking her eyes off of his face, she says to Megara. “Perhaps I could have a private briefing with your operator?”

Megara grins briefly. “He’s had all of his shots. Just don’t break him or even wear him out.” She looks at Covenant. “I’ll collect you in the morning.”

Later, Covenant watches the Praetor sleep, her naked body entwined with his. He reaches over to the nightstand and picks up his chronometer. He points it in all directions. There is no sound from the device, indicating that the Tal Shiar doesn’t seem to share her propensity for voyeurism.

Next, he pushes another sequence on the device, then waves it over her head. It sends a couple of bursts of light over her sleeping features.

Llara doesn’t stir from the stimulus. The slight bit of the drug tingles on his lips; he’d already taken an antidote. He slides out from the bed carefully, then pulls on a pair of gloves from his pocket. He lifts her comm, then marries the chrono to it.

He looks back at the sleeping woman. She had lived up to her reputation again and had come close to breaking him in halves with her strength, energy, and lust.

She had also been a much more tender lover than she’d been in their previous encounters.

When he is finished, he places the comm just as he’d found it.

He rejoins her in bed, his work done.

Jamie Blackthorne closes his eyes.

He feels Chandra’s touch in his mind, the remnant of her Link.

There is another in his mind as well. One who, unlike Chandra, has gone to the other side.

Confab

The Neutral Zone

Two Weeks Later

Chandra stares at her *former? current? once and future?* bondmate. In spite of her anger at him, for a host of reasons, she feels her middle jump with remembered sensations.

Along with her heart and mind. She hears the dry voice in her mind of their shared th'y'la. *Let it go, Chan, T'vari says. Let go of the guilt and the blame. I died. The blame lies with the Klingon that killed me. No one else.*

Tell him that, Chandra sends back.

“You seem comfortable on a Romulan ship’s bridge,” she says. “For someone who is a deserter.”

His lips quirk briefly. “I’m sure if I’m getting to talk to you, the Last Word here,” he says, pointing at Cavendish, “or someone, has read you in a bit. She refused to tell me.”

“Maybe you should’ve been better in bed,” Chandra replies dryly, before she can stop herself. She sees Nell’s smirk form. He looks around at the Rihannsu officers, who seem to find great amusement in her words.

She wonders how many of them, of any gender, he has proven that alleged mediocrity to.

Chandra sees Ael, the Empress-Claimant of the Romulans roll her eyes. She also sees a great deal of humor in those dark, almost black eyes.

“It is good to finally meet you, Captain Chandra,” she says, with no hint of an accent to her Standard. Her voice, as noticed, is currently manifesting its warm timbre and color.

She isn’t sure she wants to experience the cold duranium that the voice hints at.

“Commander-General,” she replies. “I don’t know what else to call you. Your majesty?”

She laughs. “How about Ael? I think your Duchess or whatever you call her is the only one that gets an honorific.” She looks at Nell with what resembles fondness, at least on a human. Nell responds as Nell does, sticking her tongue out at Ael.

“So what is this about?” Chandra asks.

Ael looks at Jamie. He nods, as if in silent communication. “We have an asset, who has gone to pull one of your assets from the Fire element,” Ael says.

Chandra nods. “And what do you need from me?” she asks, not giving any idea that she had already gotten an authorized mission to send a torpedo scout to pull the assets from the fire.

“The asset, who your man Covenant knows well,” she says, pointing at Croft, “would need to meet with you, to establish more of what you’ve been read in on. At least you and maybe a couple of other officers.”

“Four or Five. Other than me.”

Ael nods. “Your little group that he has intimated about. Your Academy group.” She allows a bit of warmth into her expression. “Your Deltan bond group.”

Chandra nods after a moment. “A bit oversimplified, but close. Most of them will be joining me. There are three younger members who might need to be added, simply because we might need them to work independently on this project. To varying degrees.”

“Do you trust them?”

“With my life.” She looks at Blackthorne. *Croft*, she substitutes. “Tell her,” she says in a harder voice.

He doesn’t break her gaze. Finally, he says. “I would trust them with my life. The ones that she wants to bring in, I would trust her with my life, to bring the right people in.”

Ael locks her gaze with his, then finally looks away. “Very well, Captain. Bring who you need to in, but I ask you to keep them under ten. And that they absolutely be ones that you can trust.”

“You have an entire ship’s crew, Commander, who seem to be read in. I think I can be trusted to bring in who I need to.”

She looks at Croft. “Deal with it, Covenant. It’ll be your ass hanging out there with the Praetorate.”

With that she turns and exits the bridge. The other crew turn to their stations. She sees Croft casually pick up an ear bud and insert it.

“What are you doing in Rom space?” she asks.

“My job, Chandra. It’s what I seem to be good at. Other than getting my friends and loved ones slaughtered.”

She says nothing, but shakes her head slightly at his words. “Do you think anyone blames you for T’Varilyn’s death?” she asks. “The only one to blame is the bastard that killed her. And I killed him.”

Chandra falls silent, wondering if he believes her. Especially since she’s not sure she believes herself.

At least when it comes to her own role in their lover’s death, as well as others in her crew.

Subtle Revelations

San Francisco, CA
Now

Commander Daina Reese walks along the waterfront. Her eyes adjust to the dense fog of the early morning as they look to the odd numbers. She shivers slightly as she sees the two shapes of the ancient Earth ships still docked there as museum pieces at Pier 45. She pulls herself deeper into the plain traveling cloak she wears over her uniform.

She turns to her left and moves down an alley. A touch of her finger near a wood panel enables the panel to slide open. She looks around her and steps in. The panel closes behind her. She pulls out her PADD—one that isn't on the Starfleet network and turns the low lights on. She her preternatural hearing detects the inaudible-to-most beings hum of the compartmentalization field.

She sits down at a desk and pulls a canvas tarp from it, revealing a sophisticated communications console—almost starship-level. She inserts the PADD into the slot. Then, irrationally looking around again, she pulls a small object from her pocket and looks at it.

A black version of a Starfleet delta, with no other identifying marks on it. She inserts it next to the PADD and waits.

The Vulcan's face soon shows only in shadow on the two-d screen.

"Report, Commander."

"Things are in place," she replies. "Styles is poised to become the new head of the Border Patrol."

"Does Admiral Harriman suspect your involvement?"

Daina tries to keep the irritation from her face. "No," she says. Even to her ears, it sounds like 'of course not.' "I'm not having to use any of the information we have on him and his son.

"More the father than the son, correct?"

"Yes, Captain."

The door opens behind her. The Vulcan looks up. His eyes narrow for a moment, then return to their flat stare. A human woman with thick red hair and freckles pulls off her civilian coat. She is dressed in a higher-graded technician's service dress uniform, with the insignia of a Senior Chief.

The black delta is prominent on her chest. She runs a hand through her reddish-blonde hair and sits next to Daina.

"And your part of this, Captain?" the shadowy Vulcan asks, looking at the newcomer.

"The old man suspects nothing," she says.

"Be precise," the Vulcan says.

"No. I won't. You don't outrank me. I'm not a lackey.

Daina sees the contest of wills, between the Vulcan and the human woman, that she knows only as 'Carmen.'

"And what about your end, Captain?" Daina asks.

He turns his gaze to her. "Your work in getting Captain Prandi in place will play dividends. She is finally on her way after the engineering casualty. You can impress upon her the consequences of failure. I won't accept excuses for the poor quality of her engine maintenance."

Daina manages to keep her eyes from rolling at his Vulcan pomposity. She is just able to stifle her mind's contempt for her genetic brother.

"Then we will soon have the border locked down for Section 31," she says. "We'll be able to prevent this asinine project to suborn the Praetor-Prime's aim. We'll have one voice to deal with," Daina says. She looks at Carmen, then at the Vulcan. They both nod.

"Extraordinary measures," he intones.

"For the Federation," Carmen and Daina reply.

Later, when Carmen has left, she sits staring at the screen. She pulls another piece of metal out and inserts it into the comm panel.

The visage of a woman of her true species stares back at her. She keeps her expression even as she realizes that the Praetor is naked and that a figure can be seen in the bed behind her.

She is able to just make out the figure's bald head and rounded ears, turned away from the pickup.

"My Praetor," Daina says, inclining her head.

"Hello, Subcommander," Llara replies. "You have a report?"

"It's all coming together. Soon you will own Section 31 and their entire network."

The Praetor nods. "Very good. And with it, will come the Federation. From within."

Her visage softens. “How are you, dear?” she asks in an almost solicitous manner.

The same manner that Daina had seen from her viewpoint, kneeling in a chamber in front of her ship’s company. Waiting for the infernal machine that she knelt over to deliver her from this world. After twenty minutes or so of the most intense agony she would’ve experienced.

A death that had already been dispensed to another.

The penalty prescribed for those who had committed the most serious of crimes against the Empire.

Treason.

“I miss home,” she says. She grits her teeth at the demonstration of vulnerability she has just shown.

The Praetor smiles. “Soon, dear. Soon you’ll be home.”

When the screen is blank, D’aina t’Sonrees, daughter of chRihan, wonders if she will be breathing and able to enjoy what she misses.

She closes her eyes, visualizing the vast Plains of K’h’rall and the distant, verdant green mountains—her family’s holdings.

Now in the hands of the woman she had just spoken with. Because of her one mistake, in underestimating that woman.

Epilogue

Vice Admiral Jameson McCall stands in the shadows near Pier 45. He resists the urge to stamp his feet against the cold leeching into his seventy-year-old bones. He burrows deeper into his long coat, concealing his mouth and its mist.

The figure walks up to him. He turns and smiles. “So,” he says.

The woman known as Castellan to some, but ‘Carmen’ to others, returns his smile. “I think we’re good. They suspect nothing, Boss.”

He nods. “Good, ‘Captain’,” he says.

She shakes her head. “Nope. I actually work for a living and know who my parents are.” She pauses. “Sir.”

He snorts, then lets his expression soften. “Be careful, Sarah,” he says. “You’re the one with the most to risk here. For my gain.”

“Nope. For the Federation’s gain. For democracy.”

Not to mention, exposing those numbered assholes for what they are, he thinks as he turns away.

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