

Welcome to Wherever You Are

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Welcome to Wherever You Are

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Summary

Prequel Short to Star Trek: Delta, Stars, & Anchor!

Stardate 45649.25: On the colony world of Kessik IV, Brigid Kelley celebrates her eighteenth birthday by enlisting in the Starfleet Marine Corps, much to the dismay of her family. Fleeing a troubled home life, she seeks a new beginning and the chance to prove herself, embracing the challenges and discipline of military service.

Notes

Read Before Reading: This short graphically depicts domestic violence, as well as the long-term trauma of emotional and physical abuse at the hands of a parent. It is **STRONGLY** advised that if such depictions trigger negative thoughts that you avoid reading this story.

Historian's Note: The events in this story take place between episodes "Ethics" and "The Outcast" of Star Trek: The Next Generation. The colony world of Kessik IV is also the home of B'Elanna Torres from Star Trek: Voyager.

*You're caught between just who you are and who you wanna be.
If you feel alone, and lost, and need a friend, remember every new beginning is some beginning's end.
Welcome to wherever you are; this is your life, you made it this far.
Welcome, you gotta believe that right here, right now, you're exactly where you're supposed to be.*

Lyrics by Jon Bon Jovi, Richard Sambora, & John M. Shanks - "Welcome to Wherever You Are"

Kessik IV

Federation Colony near the Federation-Klingon Neutral Zone

Stardate 45649.25 (August 25, 2368)

Kelley Township, Residential Sector

The rhythmic slapping of Brigid Kelley's feet against the wet footpath provided a sense of comfort as she left behind her home of eighteen years and faced the relentless Keshikan rainstorm. Drops of icy rain soaked her hair and pelted her left cheek; the cooling air soothed the hot sting of a developing bruise. She took the right turn toward the township's main commercial sector, known to the locals as "downtown." The distance between there and her parents' home she'd walked plenty of times in the late hours of the day and public transportation grew scarce.

She began her day with a mag-lev train ride to the capital city of Epimetheus; her destination being the Starfleet recruitment center. Her test scores and advanced placement university credits earned during her final year of secondary schooling assured her a high placement amongst the private recruits during basic training. Though Starfleet and its sister service, the Starfleet Marine Corps, offered several options for her to consider, Brigid chose the Corps.

Filled with joy about her secured strategy, she came back to her township and discovered her friends waiting near the train station. They all shared a meal and enjoyed their company while she brought them up to date regarding her plans. Her social group at the township's school all had their intentions for post-graduation. Brigid opted to cash in her completed credits for early graduation as part of her plans. The sped up departure left her friends feeling melancholy regarding the development. They wished her well and extracted promises to remain in contact.

Her closest friend, Alberta Neng, had cried when she heard the news. Brigid and Bertie lived four doors down from one another since the age of everyday childhood outdoor play. Developing a close relationship, Bertie's home became a haven for Brigid during the more trying times of growing up under her father's care. Although Bertie understood the logic, not seeing each other regularly had a strong emotional impact.

In the late afternoon on that winter's day, they returned to their neighborhood, then tearfully parted ways. They said good night and Bertie wished her a happy birthday.

When her father, the great-great-grandnephew of the township's founder and sitting member of the township's council, arrived home, her joy evaporated under the sudden, tense atmosphere.

As the eldest daughter of the Kelley clan, such a status brought with it the gravity of expectation levied upon her by her famous parents. After all, Franklin Hector "Heck" Kelley IV demanded nothing less than perfection and woe betide any issue of his that did not meet those high requirements. His disciplinary actions against any member of his family that dared to disappoint him resulted in corrective measures that often left her needing to cover any visible marks from anyone outside of their home.

That night, the family intended to celebrate Brigid's eighteenth year of life. Her mother, Persephone, managed a spread of favorite dishes, from chicken enchiladas to Bajoran hasperat. Of course, a single offering of Heck's favorite found its way to the table to appease him.

If only it had the intended effect.

The sound of an approaching ground car heralded Heck Kelley, forming the familiar knot in the pit of Brigid's stomach. Smiles on the faces of her mother and sister disappeared, and the soft music in the background ceased on a verbal command from Persephone. The trio took their positions to welcome him home, each one hoping that his day at the town hall left him in good humor.

To their delight, Heck arrived home with flowers and gifts for his eldest's birthday. Brigid embraced the offerings, thanking her father for his generosity (as expected) before removing them to her bedroom for storage. When she returned to the common area downstairs, her father and mother danced together while music played from the recessed speakers overhead.

Brigid sighed in relief. Perhaps her last birthday on Kessik will be a happy one.

Heck's fork clattered to the plate below. "What do you mean, you have 'induction in thirty days?'"

The dining room's air chilled. Her father's tone lowered to that of a growl. Brigid cast a quick glance to her mother for support, but their eyes only locked for an instant. Persephone quickly shied away to look down at her hands now clasped in her lap.

"Sir, I spoke with the staff sergeant at the recruitment center," Brigid explained in the most respectful tone she could. "The next basic training class is in thirty days on Andor. She recommended I fly out on the next runabout to Starbase-"

Before she could continue, Heck interrupted her with a loud cracking sound. He had brought his fist down on the table with such force that his plate jumped in the air. The remaining food atop it slid off in the motion, spilling to the table's surface. Persephone got to her feet to clean up the mess, but he stared her down and back into her seat.

"I did not give permission for you to join Starfleet," he intoned through clenched teeth. "No daughter of mine is going to run off and join Starfleet without my approval. Do you *hear* me?"

All three women at the table froze under the emotionally terrorizing words from Heck's lips, including the youngest daughter, Riley. The effect triggered memories of past tirades for all.

Brigid said nothing. Not responding was the worst choice when dealing with her father's anger. At that moment, her fear limited her to only thoughts of self-preservation.

Her father redirected his anger toward his wife. "And you allowed her to leave town and make these plans? Where the fuck were you? Sleeping? Being lazy... *again*?"

Persephone stammered out a response. "I-I didn't think-"

"THINK?!" He bellowed. "You *knew* I would not approve of this."

Breaking free from her fear, Brigid's need to defend her mother moved her lips. "Mom didn't know. I made this decision on my own."

Heck turned his eyes back to her. "Don't interrupt me when I'm speaking to your mother!" He lifted his right arm up and drew his hand back.

Brigid recognized the motion from years of seeing it used against her mother and now her. Shortly, his hand would connect with her right orbital bone. Throughout the years, it served as his favored target for both herself and her mother. Her little sister still received spankings to correct her perceived misbehavior. After the age of sixteen, she received the same level of violence as Persephone.

She brought her hand up and deflected his attack with her right forearm. The move was instinctive, as she spent the previous year in physical training readying herself for Starfleet service, including martial arts. The panic that ensued after the retaliatory strike overshadowed her pride in her block.

Angered by Brigid's temerity, Heck grabbed his daughter by the back of her shirt and lifted the petite woman out of her seat. While he served on the town's council as a chair-warmer, all sons of the Kelley family grew up working the family quarry outside of town. Decades of hauling rock and handling heavy equipment left him with an intimidating muscular physique. Eyes closed, her back collided with the dining room wall.

Brigid laid out her hands to slap against the wall. The intent lay in spreading the impact out as much as possible. The nominal act resulted in her gasping for air as she had the wind knocked from her. She slumped to the ground as her father moved to stand over her.

"How dare you!" he screamed at her. "Is that what you've been up to all those late nights? You were learning how to fight back?"

Persephone recognized the level of rage emanating from her husband and called out, "Honey, don't-"

"Don't what?" he replied, not bothering to look at her. "*You* telling me what to do?"

"She didn't mean it," she pled with him, her voice beginning to break into a sob. "We can fix this, you don't have to hurt her."

"No," he said with finality. "She needs to learn her place." He turned his head to see his youngest covering her face with both of her hands. "Take Riley to her room and both of you stay there while I deal with this little ingrate."

Once left alone, Heck leaned down and grabbed Brigid by the front of her school-printed shirt. With only the strength of his right arm, he lifted her up to a standing position. "Tomorrow morning, you're going to march down there and withdraw your enlistment papers."

CRACK! Heck changed hands, holding her up with his left as he backhanded her across the face with his right.

"You're going to tell them you changed your mind. Starfleet allows withdrawals before induction," he explained to her. His tight tone accompanied his punch to her stomach.

Brigid coughed and sputtered, feeling the home-cooked meal jostle within her midsection. Her wide eyes stared down as she doubled over in pain.

Hold on... the pain had decreased. Her abdomen gained more definition over the months of training at school and after with Bertie. She admired her body's reaction for only a second before she felt her father's hands lifting her up by her chin.

"Since you think you're so tough, you're going to go work with your uncle in the quarry. I'm going to tell him to treat you like everyone else there," he promised her.

Brigid continued to cough, working hard to keep her meal down. "No," she gasped in between labored breaths.

"No?"

"Not your decision," she told him, glaring at him with anger. "It's my life."

"No, it's not. Your life is mine until you find a person who's willing to put up with your bullshit." Without looking over his shoulder, he raised his voice to his wife. "Isn't that right, *sweetheart*?"

From the entry leading into the kitchen, her mother whimpered. "Yes, honey. You're right. You're always right."

Brigid and Persephone locked eyes. A wordless plea conveyed from mother to daughter within that moment understood. With a slight shake of her head, Brigid reached the limit of her patience. The flood of fear broke the dam of her rage.

Feeling the full effect of her new physical condition, Brigid waited until her father turned his head to strike. She stomped on his left foot with her right. As he screamed his pain, she brought her other knee hard against Heck's groin, dropping the man to his knees as he grabbed it with both hands.

Brigid barely registered the surprise on Heck's face before she delivered an uppercut to his chin. His head snapped back, colliding with the table's edge, causing him to crumple to the floor.

Persephone's scream cut through the chaos. "No! Don't!" She threw herself beside Heck.

Brigid gaped at her mother's reaction. "What—?"

"Don't hurt him!" Persephone growled, her eyes wild. "Stop!"

"Hurt *him*? Mom, look at my face! Fuck this, I'm calling the cops!" Brigid spun on her heel, heading for the communication panel in the common room. She'd taken two steps when a hand clamped around her ankle.

It did not belong to her mother.

Heck had shoved Persephone aside and lunged, his grip like a vice on Brigid's ankle. Pain shot up her leg.

With a fierce cry, she yanked her foot back and kicked him square across the face. His grip loosened just enough. Brigid seized his flailing wrist, twisted it up at a brutal angle, and dropped her weight against his arm. A sickening pop signaled his shoulder's dislocation.

Heck's scream echoed through the room.

Brigid didn't relent. She rose to her feet, twisting his arm further, amplifying his agony. With a fierce snarl, she hissed, "You will never raise this arm against anyone ever again! Hear me?"

He writhed, his face contorted in torment as she maintained her punishing grip. "Fuck you, you little bitch," he spat through clenched teeth, his voice raw with pain.

"Fuck me?" she scoffed. She forced his elbow against the nearest table leg, leveraging it with her foot. Despite his attempts to swat her away,

Brigid stomped down hard. An audible snap echoed as the bone broke, leaving his arm to lie at an unnatural angle.

Under the tremendous amount of pain, Heck lost consciousness.

Brigid smiled down at the helpless man. Her eyes scanned his form, wondering if she could affect any additional damage to him before he woke up.

That chance never came.

She didn't see her mother's slap coming, but she felt it, especially as the impact hit the same spot her father had backhanded earlier. Brigid raised a hand to her face in astonishment.

"Get out of our house!" Persephone screeched at her.

Brigid, after a sleepless night within the town's transient housing facility, headed to the Starfleet recruitment center just as they opened.

Staff Sergeant Arieta Palamo opened the entrance to see her latest recruit staring into the darkened windows. "Good morning, Ms. Kelley."

"Good morning, Staff Sergeant," replied Kelley with a wan smile on her lips.

Palamo wondered, "You're not here to withdraw your enlistment, are you?"

"Does that happen a lot?"

The staff sergeant stepped aside to permit Brigid's entry. "Well, not a *lot*, but enough. Kids will sleep on their decision and sometimes it looks different than it did the day before."

"Thankfully, Starfleet allows you to withdraw before induction day," Brigid said, repeating the comment made by her father. "Lucky for you, I'm not intending on withdrawing. I'm leaving just as soon as I wrap up some loose ends here on Kessik."

Palamo laughed in relief. "Good, good. What, then, can I help you with?"

Brigid explained the events of the previous evening, though leaving out the violence. "I checked in to a transient berth overnight, and I'm heading to the station to catch a mag-lev to the capital."

"*Nile* is the runabout at the spaceport standing by," Palamo explained. "When you get to the station, contact them and they'll save you a seat. Give them your enlistment contract number for confirmation."

"That much I've got down, but..."

"But?"

"The, uh... downside of my abrupt departure left me with nothing but the clothes I'm wearing," Brigid said with a sigh. "I don't suppose that you've got any traveling clothes available here?"

"Ah," Palamo said with a quick nod. "Give me five minutes." She disappeared beyond the door with the placard to the side that stated no unauthorized admittance. In less time, she returned with a full set of marine clothing. A full set of battle dress items, including a space black jumpsuit, belt, and boots.

"Very nice." Brigid accepted the stack with an appreciative grin. "Mind if I use your restroom?"

"Head, Recruit. We call it a 'head.'" Palamo raised a hand and gestured. "Be my guest."

When Brigid returned from the head, she carried her civilian clothing and waved it around. "I don't suppose you could recycle these for me, Staff Sergeant."

"Can do," assured Palamo. She examined the shirt once it touched her hands. "This is a school shirt. You sure you want to part with it?"

Recruit Kelley, with her hands now free, fastened the belt as she replied, "No doubts and no regrets."

"Well, all right," Palamo chuckled. "I guess you're really all-in on this, aren't you?"

Kelley adjusted the jumpsuit for a better fit. Satisfied with the minor adjustments, she looked Palamo in both eyes and nodded. "Semper Fi, Staff Sergeant."

"Semper Fi, Recruit," said Palamo approvingly. "You need anything else from me?"

Kelley shook her head. "No, Staff Sergeant," she said. "Thank you very much for your help."

Palamo held out her right hand. "Hope to see you again, Recruit. Maybe you'll have sergeant's stripes by then."

"I'd settle for a commbadge," Kelley said, looking down at the uniform's bare chest.

"Oh, you gotta earn the Delta, Stars, and Anchor, Recruit," said Palamo. "When you finish Basic, you'll earn the right to wear it."

Kelley entered the train station and checked in for the next ride to Epimetheus. While waiting for her departure, she approached a public access terminal to check her messages. Her heart tightened when she saw a new message from her mother.

The message was blunt and cold: *You are no longer welcome in our home. Your father has disinherited you. Do not contact us. Do not contact Riley. Do not return here unless you wish to be arrested, convicted, and sent to a rehab colony.*

A wave of sadness washed over her as she read her mother's words, thinking of Riley's well-being. Her anxiety peaked before it ebbed, replaced by anger stemming from the betrayal of her mother. She felt the urge to tap out a quick reply, but after several attempts to word it, she decided ultimately to let it go.

No contact, no return.

She deleted the message and called up the timetables for flights off-planet. The next runabout (USS *Nile*) would leave Kessik two hours after the mag-lev arrived in the capital city. With the press of a control, she used her contract number to book her seat within the passenger compartment. *Nile* would take her to Starbase 10, where she'd board the marine transport ship *Guadalcanal*.

Three weeks and three days later, Recruit Kelley reported in to Marine Corps Recruit Depot Andor.

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