

Part of Me Will Always Stray

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Part of Me Will Always Stray

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Summary

A magical place. Help arrives, but so does a heavy. ‘Somebody better go back and get a shitload of marines.’ Piv-ot. Help’s on the way —until it’s not. Doing what we can. Counterattack. Fixing things for the relief.

Cooks and Bakers

Doctor Kim Sinclair materializes in an alleyway. She can see rubble strewn around her, as well as hearing the sound of energy weapons fire. She tightens her grip on the phaser pistol. She is comforted by the solid feel of Siobhan Lincolnton at her back, as well as the more diminutive presence of Senior Yeoman (Intelligence) 3rd Class, Dr. Sarah Quigley.

She smirks as she thinks of the other ‘doctor’ in their little cohort, a PHd. in cultural anthropology. In spite of her occupation, academic background, and shorter stature, Kim is just as comforted by Sarah’s grip on her phaser rifle. The intelligence advisor holds the weapon with confidence.

“Relax your grip, Kim,” Shiv says. “I’ve seen your scores. You can hit the broad side of a barn, as well as the locking mechanism. And you don’t even have to be inside.”

Kim turns to look at the youngest of them, as Sarah is in her midthirties, while several other three-person teams materialize. Shiv has a holstered standard phaser pistol on her hip, with what looks like a Klingon dagger on the opposite hip. In her hands, looking like it belongs there, is a decidedly nonstandard weapon, at least for regular Starfleet personnel.

A phaser pulse rifle, with attached pump-action grenade launcher. The standard weapon of the Rapid Deployment Force, the marines of Starfleet Special Operations.

She sees Shiv directing the teams to spread out, with one, a couple of remaining security operators taking point. She realizes that the rest of the small ad hoc force is made up of support personnel. Chandra and Shiv had picked over the remaining crew of the *Morrigan*-class leader corvette. Kim remembers reading a book about the old United States Marine Corps, one of the antecedents of the current force. *Every cook a rifleman*, she thinks, paraphrasing.

“We’re taking fire,” comes over her earpiece, from the point team.

“Relax,” says a deep voice, one she hadn’t actually heard before. “We’ve got ‘em.”

The unseen voice doesn’t have time to reply as Siobhan raises her rifle and fires the grenade launcher attachment. There is a sizable explosion, one bigger than she would’ve thought with the standard antipersonnel grenade.

Kim realizes that Shiv had used a low-yield photon grenade to wipe out the sniper’s nest in the tower of the building. Three Klingons, all armed with disruptor rifles tumble to the ground.

Their bodies shredded with the energy of the blast.

Her eyes narrow as she notices that Shiv has a strange look on her face, as she looks down at her weapon. Kim tracks back up to the target. She feels her eyebrow raise as she realizes that only the right side of the tower had been hit.

The probable owner of the deep voice, which was surprisingly quiet, walks up. She stares into the blue eyes of Jaiggur Grasp, the half-Orion security chief for the group. He looks her over, then lets a warm smile come over his face. She remembers being told about the overspill of the Threads when he and Chandra had blown most of the crew out with their orgasms a few days or weeks ago. She feels an idiotic smile come

over face as she realizes his magnetism.

She also sees Siobhan roll her eyes out of the corner of her eye. "Turn it down, Jaig," she says. "Let her get settled in her quarters before you go for ramming speed."

"Didn't have to for you, Shiv darlin'," he says.

Kim is treated to a slight blush on Shiv's face. *Welcome to the Border Dogs*, she thinks dryly. *It's a magical place.*

She decides to nip the conversation in the bud, as she has the most rank and is supposed to be the adult supervision here. "What's the situation?" she asks, hoping that she sounds like that adult supervision.

Grasp looks at her, then at their little force. "Where the hell are the jarheads? The situation is that we're screwed if these assholes are able to get to the main powerplant. We're keeping them away, because they haven't been able to land more troops, but we were already outnumbered."

Kim halfway wonders that as well, but she is sure that Chandra hasn't forgotten the reinforced company of marines on the *O'Bannon*.

"I don't know, Commander," she says. "I think Captain Chandra might be playing a long game."

"Well, she better pull it out and start letting us in on it, or we'll be shit-out-of-luck."

"Where do you need us, Grasp?" Siobhan asks.

"That's Lieutenant Commander Grasp, Lieutenant. Right here. I've got most of my folks at the main power plant. A lot of the civilians are either sheltered in place, or hunkered down in the hospital. Your bartender buddies are leading a civilian militia to protect them. I may use you as reinforcement, wherever we need you."

"Good to know," Shiv says. "Whatever you need, Jaig," ignoring his reminder about rank. Or maybe not. "Oh, just so you remember, the title is 'Captain' Lincolnton." He shoots her a sour look in response, but doesn't say anything.

There is a scream as one of their yeomen goes down, the full force of a disruptor set on kill dissolving him. Siobhan snaps up her rifle and fires on the Klingon who is about to find another target.

Kim feels the full-on surprise as Siobhan, who is closest, misses, striking the wall to his left. Kim feels the discharge of the pistol in her hand; she hits him dead center.

She only has a moment to mourn the violation of the Hippocratic Oath as she sees Siobhan staring at her weapon in astonishment. Her doctor's eye notices Shiv's left eye twitching slightly.

Kim meets Grasp's eyes. Concern shows over his face.

Resurgence

Chandra manages to keep her chair as the *Comstock* shudders from the latest barrage from the intruders. She relaxes her grip on the arms as the acting Cohort manager, a Tiburonian female chief looks at her. Somehow, Jovar manages to make maintaining balance look easy as she stands.

"We can't take much more of this. The Birds of Prey seem to be holding their own and maintaining heavy weapons fire. Our shields are down to sixty percent. Other ships seem to be battered even more. All except for the marine ship."

Chandra nods. "Decker, see if you can keep us out of their firing solutions. At least until we can spring our secret evil surprise on them."

"You sure you don't want to share that secret evil surprise with the other ships?" Decker remarks over the intercom.

"Well, if we shared it beyond us and the *Crusader*, then it wouldn't be so secret. Or a surprise," she replies.

"Or as evil," Chief Jovar says.

"Exactly," Chandra says with a smirk.

"Wonderful," Decker remarks as the *Comstock* slides out to port, allowing a disruptor barrage to miss them.

The low-yield torpedo slams into their shields though.

"Hull breach," Engineer Ishimoto says. "We have plasma and atmosphere breaching into space from Engineering."

"Injuries?"

"Minor," he replies. "We'll handle them, since *somebody* sent our only doctor down to get herself perforated."

"Belay that, ChEng," Decker says. "Lock it down. Make sure we maintain power."

Chandra closes her mouth at the young woman's words. Words that she had been about to say to Ishimoto herself. Chief Jovar grins at her, the scar through her lips, combined with the thick eyebrows gives even that light of an expression a slightly sinister bent.

"Hard charger," she mouths to Chandra.

“Signal from Javelin 204,” a comms tech—new to the Comstock—says. “Ready to execute Secret Evil Plan #4A.”

Chandra laughs at the words from the young human male. She searches for a name, but at least finds a nickname. “Thanks, Cheese,” she replies. “Execute.” She gets up and saunters over to the tactical display on the table.

She sees ten red, glowing, shapes detach from the blue graphic in close orbit. At the same time, she see the other blue triangle, the one marked ‘Hellhound 104’ disappears.

For a microsecond, appearing close in to the four newly-arrived deuterium carriers, just outside the atmo.

“Commence firing,” she says.

Jovar’s finger slams down on the ‘commit’ button, as all of her ships open fire on the first attackers.

Chandra looks away from the viewscreen as a powerful explosion lights the skies above Leelix III. The aftermost Bird-of-Prey reels from the torpedo hits.

Just as the four deuterium carries all ignite, slightly outside the atmosphere, their payload expanding silently.

To engulf at least one of the Birds-of-Prey. The one not splitting apart under the torpedo barrage.

The lead ship heels over, tumbling.

“Captain, the Klingon leader isn’t answering her helm,” Decker says.

“All ships. Pour it on the leader,” Chandra says.

“You think that was the leader?” Verag, the sibling of the warrior who had killed her love and another who had nearly killed her, says over comms.

Her heart sinks as a *K’t’inga*-class First Line battlecruiser shifts into the visible spectrum.

“I thought we grabbed their only one on Vostus,” she says, her despair apparent. She shakes her head.

“Well, I guess they had another one,” says a new voice.

“Federation signal, Captain,” Jovar says.

Another shape jumps in, just over the forward hull of the battlecruiser. A shape similar to *Comstock*’s, though smaller. One made to carry a Fleet Security Force, but with some modifications.

The *Malcolm Reed* opens fire.

“Thought you could use some help, sis,” Kaylin Stone-Hunter says.

Watchers

Ava Fonseca has one eye for her scope, and one on the man next to her in the reactive camouflage uniform. Just like he had made her wear. Though she wasn’t wearing the silly little green beret.

Blackthorne, or Croft as he was called by some, keeps his eyes on the target. She follows his example.

She’d lost count of the converted deuterium carriers at about twenty-four, all of them sitting idle on a large landing platform.

Along with about twelve Birds of Prey.

“I’ve counted about fifty troops, all marine-equivalent,” Jamie says.

“Yeah. And a good number of automated defensive systems as well.”

She glances over at him again. He smiles, not taking his eyes off what appears to be a major Klingon Free Systems base.

All located in what is ostensibly Romulan space.

“So what are you grinning at?” Ava finally asks.

“Again, I guess it’s time to eat crow with jarheads.”

“Well, good thing we know somebody with a reinforced marine company,” she says dryly.

He closes his eyes as the smile fades. “Yeah. That’s why I’d prefer to find any other marine company than that one.”

It is her turn to smile. “Good thing you’ve got somebody lying next to you who actually worked well with that particular jarhead major.”

Croft’s eyebrows knit together behind the binocs. He turns and stares at her.

“Starros doesn’t work well with anyone,” he says. “Why should you be different?”

“Because he likes me. I’m not the Fort,” she replies, using the less-than-friendly nickname for the captain of the marine assault corvette.

“So you just bat your big brown eyes at him?”

“But of course,” she replies. “You should try it.”

“My eyes are green,” he says dryly.

“Exactly,” she says.

She is about to add something else when he suddenly shoves her out of the way. She rolls down a slight incline as he engages with two Klingon marines.

Croft kicks away the first Klingon’s mek’leth and disruptor. He manages to snag the mek’leth, hitting the ground and rolling.

Ava stares at him from where she lies winded. She realizes that on the backswing of grabbing the blade, that he has sliced into the Klingon’s throat, starting a fountain of violet blood.

The second Klingon doesn’t have time to pull the comm from his belt before Croft is on him, yanking the bat’leth away and making another slice into yet another throat.

Both Klingons lie spasming on the ground.

“I take it back. I don’t understand why you and Starros aren’t better buddies,” Ava says as he levers her back up the slight slope.

There is another squelching sound as the t’Lemaska who was watching their back takes care of a third. She watches them silently as she cleans her blade, before returning it to her back.

“So how the hell did you get here?” Ava asks.

“Trade secrets, little mouse,” she says.

“What’s your name?” Ava asks. “And mine is Ava. Or Commander Fonseca.”

“My name is Rahola, Commander Little Mouse,” she replies. “I have no clan name. “

“Come on,” Croft says, before Ava can respond. “We need to make contact with Chandra. Then hide these fuckers. They’ll be missing them soon.”

A New Plan

Kaylin dissects what she knows from the Cohort display. She hasn’t linked their system with *Comstock’s* yet, as her phasers and photon torpedoes hammer the bridge of the apparent-Klingon Free Systems battlecruiser.

It arcs downward, but returns heavier fire to her cutter.

“Evasive maneuvers,” she says.

“Nice of you to finally join us, brat,” says a familiar voice with a slight London accent. A voice that in spite of the snark is as warm as always.

“Oh, well. You know me. Stopped for a coffee and to have my nails done,” Kaylin replies.

“You and at least one other seem to be big on personal care. Can’t wait to see them, babe,” Chandra says. “As long as I see them when you’re rubbing my feet.”

“Do I get any of that foot-rubbing action?” Decker breaks in.

“Maybe,” Chandra and Kaylin say simultaneously.

“Might better calm the talk of foot-rubbing,” Chief Jokar says. “You might distract the crew even more than you usually do.”

“Oh, okay, Chief, I’ll rub your feet, too.” Kaylin retorts.

Kaylin had Chandra’s voice grow serious. Something that she’d heard on a couple of occasions. Including when both Kaylin and Siobhan had been in danger of being disemboweled, hanged, or beheaded.

Or all three.

The comm beeps again. “Incoming message,” her comm tech says. “It’s for both you and Captain Chandra.”

Kaylin nods. Chandra’s face comes on above the console. Kaylin and Chandra both raise eyebrows at the other person on the holocomm.

“Wondered when you were going to show up,” Chandra says.

Jamie Blackthorne narrows his eyes at her. “And why did you expect me to show up?”

“A little birdie told me that you were working something.”

Croft looks off pickup. "I'm assuming you're talking about a certain officer of yours who is serving with the two ingrates on the *Starlight*."

"Takes one to know one," Chandra replies. "Why the hell do you think I've been holding my marines back?"

Croft is silent, then he gives that crooked grin, then looks down and to the left, an expression that Chandra had once told Kaylin about.

"So I think I can take care of your problems with a reinforced company of jarheads. Can I borrow them?"

Chandra appears to be thinking about the request. "I thought you'd never ask, stud," she says.

"Sending you the coordinates, love," he says and is gone.

"So, you got anything else to back him up, in case this inevitably goes sideways?" Kaylin asks.

Chandra gives her own wide grin, bordering on a mischievous smirk. "I thought you'd never ask, babe," she repeats.

En Route

Saavik sits in the command chair of *Pathfinder*. She is silent; she absorbs all of the activity and communications around her. She is sure that no one in her crew would think she was sitting here, just relishing the fact that she is in command of a *Constitution*-class starship and soon will be in command of a *Shangri-La*-class defense cruiser when she gets back to Earth and the *Titan*'s refit.

The comm officer steps up and hands her a PADD. "Message from DSAC, copied to Task Force 51 and OPSTAR," he says. "They're monitoring communications from Leelix. It sounds like the battle is escalating. A *K't'inga* and three BOPs jumped in, along with a number of filled, remotely operated deuterium carriers. The Banshees managed to defeat the three BOPS and destroy those carriers, but the heavy is still there. They've gained another cutter, their converted security cutter, but the others haven't arrived there." He takes a breath.

She continues to read, giving him a respite. "So they're fighting ground forces, as well, with ad hoc forces?"

"That's what I got, Captain," he replies. She looks back at Thelek, who is sitting at a vacant console, allowing Saavik to command the ship.

He raises an eyebrow, his antennae undulating with curiosity.

"They have a reinforced, independent marine company. Why are they fighting a ground action without them?"

Saavik nods, taking this in.

"Captain, the marine ship has left the system at high warp," the science officer says.

"That makes no sense," Thelek says.

Saavik remains silent. "What?" Thelek says. "You know something I don't?"

"No, Commodore. Someone." She doesn't wait for a prompt. "I know Chandra. She wouldn't send off a seriously needed asset, unless she was sure of a definite reward for doing it."

She looks at the science officer. "Track it. Extrapolate course."

It only takes a few minutes. "The track will take her into Romulan space, but just on the edge of disputed territory between the Klingon Empire and the KFS."

"Thoughts, Saavik?"

"Recommend that we follow," she says without hesitation.

"Explain," Thelek says, his antennae twisting again.

"I think that might be the key to the attacks on Leelix. It's the right distance for anything to hit Merlin. They could hide there without any difficulty," she replies.

"I don't know if I'll get Prandi to follow," he says.

"Well, you are her commodore. Admiral Walsh appointed you in command."

"Easier said than done."

"Then we'll go," she replies after a moment. "*Pathfinder* will. You can transfer your broad pendant to *Constitution*."

"She'll love that even more," he says.

Saavik says nothing.

Finally, he sighs. "Signal *Constitution*," he says to the comms officer. "Instruct her to continue on to Leelix. We are following another lead on our own."

Saavik turns back to her console. "She acknowledges," the officer says.

"Change course," Saavik says.

They are no more than five minutes into their new course, when Thelek turns to her. “Saavik, I—

He doesn't get to finish when an explosion sends him careening into the far bulkhead. He slides down and doesn't move, his head at an odd angle.

Escalation

Chandra helps the engineering technician run a bypass line under the Cohort table as Chief Jokar struggles to get the system back online.

“Kaylin,” she says into the air. “You may have to take over as Cohort Manager. We've got a burnout creepage from that last hit. We can't link.”

“Acknowledged, Chan. But we're about to shake apart. Our impulse manifold is overheating. We're trying to keep it cool with recycled wastewater.”

“That can't smell good,” Decker says dryly.

“Only like Shiv after eating beans,” Kaylin snarks back. All of them fall silent as they realize that they haven't heard from the ground in awhile.

“We both have a lot to do,” Chandra says. “We'll check on them when we can get clear of this.”

“Speaking of which, does anyone know how many ships we're actually facing and we've actually got?”

Another voice comes on. Chandra recognizes it as the voice of Patience Brannigan, captain of the *Panhandle*. “I think we've got the three deuterium carriers that were left, but I'm not sure who's running them. But the *K't'inga* and the Bird of Prey is enough to overmatch all of us, no matter how much we mass against them.”

“And what have we got to fight them with?”

“The *Crusader* is rearmed, but taking on perimeter watch as well. She is dropping torpedoes on the cruiser, keeping them honest, but she probably shouldn't engage her alone.”

“And everything else?” Chandra asks.

“We've got eight ships in total, still left. But all of us have taken a pounding. *Crusader* has maybe twenty torpedoes left on her second rearm. I don't think we can get anymore boxes up here, as we're not sure if the armory is still being defended on the ground or not.”

Another face comes over the holotable, joining Kaylin's. Chandra recognizes the woman as the latest squadron commander to join with her *Lancers*. “Lieutenant Commander Jana Storm, CAG,” she says. Her dark features are grim, as well as smudged with dirt and ash. “Hellhound Actual.”

Chandra nods. Emma had given her good reports on her new CO—something difficult for Prickly, she knew. “Sorry we're meeting under these circumstances.”

Storm smiles, revealing how wide and warm the smile is, especially when connected with the warm eyes and high cheekbones. The Deltan part of Chandra finds it endearing, when matched with the rest of the package on her first meeting.

The Captain (L) part of Chandra tells the Deltan part to pound sand.

For now.

“What's your report, Commander?” she asks.

“About the same. Last legs. No torpedoes left in my *Lancers*—we didn't have many to begin with.”

“Captain, new contacts!” Jokar breaks in at an auxiliary console.

“Two dozen,” she adds. “Romulan dart ships. With no insignia or signals.”

Chandra hears Storm curse.

“I agree, Hellhound Actual,” she says. “Let's do what we can.”

No Plan Survives Contact with the Enemy

Theelia watches as Siobhan returns the fire of the enemy soldiers. They had consolidated some of their forces, keeping a small unit of trained security operators at the powerplant, while sending Kim, Siobhan, and the other ad hoc forces from the *Comstock* to the hospital, along with their civilian militia thrown into the fire.

So far, they had managed to keep the Klingons at bay, with only light casualties and no deaths from their group of fifty, armed with whatever the hell they could come up with.

To underscore that idea, a Klingon sticks his head above the parapet near their closest position. There is a roar and his head is shredded.

By ancient buckshot from a double-barreled shotgun.

Theelia turns her attention back to Shiv. She is covering her sector, but her face is expressionless. She is quieter than Theelia would think from past experience.

Her left eye seems to be half-closed. She remembers when Siobhan was injured, in the original attack. The older doctor, McCoy, who Theelia remembered fondly from her service, had mentioned that there had been an injury to her left eye in the attack—a piece of shrapnel or something—but there had been no other mention of it.

She'd never shown any other issues with it.

Theelia wonders if they are imagining an issue, based on one miss with a phaser pulse rifle. Something that most Starfleet personnel weren't trained on.

She looks over at her one bartender/server, Usura. Someone who isn't having any trouble using a PPR-17. In fact, she has just opened up with a fusillade of pulses, holding down the trigger in burst mode.

She notices that Agon is watching Shiv as well, his blue eyes concerned as he ties a bandage around the thigh of a young orderly from the hospital who had come out to aid in the defense.

He notices her looking at them. He ties off the bandage and smiles at the young woman.

She moves over to him, then kisses him.

"I think we need to take the fight to them. I'm not sure how many of them are left, but I don't think they're getting reinforcements. Chandra seems to be taking care of that."

"I wonder how they're doing," Agon says. "If all of our friends are okay."

She looks up as Siobhan crawls over. Her eye isn't twitching; the liquid brown pool is focused on them. "You think it's time to counterattack?"

Agon nods. "I think so, Shiv. What do you think?"

She exhales quietly, then nods. "Let's do it. Let's coordinate with Grasp."

"Do we gotta?" Agon asks.

She smirks, a little bit like her old self. "Yeah."

It only takes a few moments to coordinate. Theelia watches Shiv going up the line, joking with her crew and the civilians.

"We've got the right wing," Theelia says. She looks at Usura, who stares back at her blankly. For a moment, Theelia wonders if she actually knows her. She looks away.

Shiv looks left and right, then comes up on the line. She fires the flare from her launcher. They step up and advance.

As they open up while charging.

When they get about ten meters, they are suddenly hit from their flanks.

Screaming Klingons, waving various bladed weapons rush forward like a tide.

Theelia takes a shot. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Shiv lift her rifle and fire, striking her target square in the head.

Theelia turns around as she hears different voices screaming, from behind the current crop of Klingons.

More Klingons.

But You Get What You Need

Saavik closes Thelek's staring eyes. "Report," she says to the XO, another Andorian.

She doesn't say anything for a moment, continuing to stare at the dead captain. Saavik walks over to her. "Commander," she says gently.

The woman jerks up, her antennae coming straight up. She takes one more breath to gather herself, then nods. "Main energizer hit captain. Shields are holding, once they activated. I should have targeting up in another minute."

"Casualties?" Saavik asks.

"The captain is the only one dead. Sickbay reports several injuries in engineering."

Saavik turns to tactical. The officer at the station in the port alcove's head is bleeding, but he is working his console. "Who is that attacker?"

He brings up the tactical display on the main viewer. "Deuterium fuel carrier, Captain," he says. She searches for his name. "She's been converted. She's coming around again."

"Mr. Vermiliya, arm aft photon torpedoes."

His face shows puzzlement. "Aft, Captain? She's coming from the forward port quarter."

"Do it. Helm, stand by to pitch on the negative 180°." She touches the allcall button. "All hands stand by for negative gravity influx."

"She's closing, Captain," Vermilya says.

She sits and brings the restraints over. Odds are the gravity generators won't keep up with this crazy-ass maneuvering.

Neither will the crew, for that matter.

"Execute," she says.

The ship lurches sickeningly. She is just able to detect that the artificial gravity is about two steps behind the ship's motion. She watches the attitude on the dials in front of her. She nods to herself.

"Yaw 90° to port," she says. "Continue negative pitch." She looks at Vermilya. "Match bearings and shoot."

He hesitates for only a microsecond, before they feel the thumping sound of the torpedoes leaving the tube.

"Full spread, Captain. Highest yield."

She realizes that the gravity has adjusted. The crew yells as the torpedoes strike the engine area of the attacker.

The carrier reels, then explodes in a burst of light. The cheering fades, probably as the result that they realize that they are alive.

"Right the ship, helm," she says quietly. She touches the intercom control. "Engineering," she says.

"Fraser, here, Captain," comes a familiar accent from that quarter, though a woman's voice. She is unaccountably warmed by that comforting burr. "Are ye through turning us ass-end over tin cup?" she asks.

"Perhaps, Mr. Fraser," she replies. "If you can get our main energizer back on line, that might help me make the decision on whether I flip us again."

She hears something like a smile in the voice. "She's back on line. Rerouting power around some damaged couplings, I'll have warp drive in five minutes."

Saavik exhales. "Thank you, Mr. Fraser," she replies.

"Helm?"

"She's answering. Which course shall I return to? To Leelix?"

"No. Continue on those coordinates we'd switched to."

She stands up as a couple of medtechs and security operators lift Thelek's body. The other officers do as well.

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