

## We'll Follow the Road

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## We'll Follow the Road

by [B\\_Radley](#)

### Summary

Our heroes continue to build and come closer. Paths are chosen with new homes.

# New Experiences

## Chapter Summary

Memories New and Old are born and recalled.

### **Destruction**

*Forward Operating Base Merlin*

*Leelix III*

2297

Agon Zhiq'thihq stares at the destruction in his bar. They hadn't even been able to come in here, until some busybody from the Starfleet Corps of Engineers—a bunch of civil engineers—groundpounders, not true engineers like him, had deemed it 'safe.'

Safe had been a relative term, as he wasn't sure how much longer that their living quarters would still be on the upper floor and not down here. He sees Theelia directing some of the bar's loyal customers, as well as crewmembers from the remaining squadron—no, flotilla—he'd seen the memo from Chandra's foster-mother outlining some changes. Changes that he knew had been welcomed by the Border Dogs in those three remaining ships.

Lieutenant Commander Felix Marquez, the commander of the torpedo boats that had arrived late to the party, surveys the damage as some more of his crews move into to assist Theelia. His XO, Lieutenant Siraa Sh'sholnat, a tall woman of Agon's people stares at him with something like loathing.

He ignores her and nods at the senior officer, clad as all of his crew are in the green trousers and the black long-sleeved T-shirts of what had once been the landing-party uniforms, but were now known as field greens.

That had been another change that the new Head Dog had decreed. When on active service in border theaters, Border Patrol crews were not authorized to wear the Service Dress uniforms in any of their incarnations. Even the working blues, which had been developed to give Starfleet crews a less dressier option than the Monster Maroons, as well as one that had less differentiation between officers and crew, were only to be worn on dressier occasions. The working blues were in danger of being abolished, as they hadn't been popular with crews other than the Border Patrol or the Frontier Rescue Service.

The line crews had preferred to just wear less formal versions of the Monster Maroons.

Agon rolls his eyes at the thoughts of Starfleet bureaucracy. An organization that had abandoned both him and Theelia. All because a Deltan had chosen him as her mate, without either of them informing their chain of command.

"Hey, ChEng," Marquez says, using the shortened form his former title. Agon doesn't bother correcting him, as he would have in the past. Not a former assistant Chief Engineer who had stood by him and had left starship duty when Agon had left. "I've got as many as I can helping you, but we're it as far as defense and patrol, until Group gets us more boats back here."

Agon nods. "I understand, Felix."

"You going to rebuild?"

"I don't know. I'm looking at some other irons in the fire." He looks at his wife, who is laughing at something one of the Border Dogs had said. He knows that her laughter hides her sorrow. This place had been her dream, a place where she could realize her people's need for contact and rebuild a life for them both.

His eyes widen as he sees another figure stepping into the bar. A very tall south Asian male, his heavily bearded features familiar in the destruction.

"Hello, Francis," he says.

"Hello, Agon. Have I got a deal for you."

Agon sees Theelia staring at the two of them. Her eyes roll to the ceiling.

### **Only the Beginning**

*Utopia Planitia Dockyards*

*Sol IV/Mars*

*En Route to Graving Dock 23-Alpha*

Chandra watches as Decker expertly pilots the utility pod through the various drydocks that make up the relatively new Utopia Planitia dockyards above Mars. Her eyes fall on a *Shangri-La*-class attack/defense cruiser, one of the last classes of true large warships that the Federation possesses, along with the *Continent*-class assault carriers.

She feels her anticipation growing, but she tamps it down, not knowing how her wayward Threads would manifest that emotion. She shoves an

image of the pod on automatic pilot while she and Decker attempted to 'mitigate' whatever she projected.

She sees Decker's lips curl upwards slightly; she doesn't blush, which is progress. "You do know that you are resistible, Chan, right?" she says.

Chandra says nothing for a moment. "So how is your selection course going?" she asks, as idly as she can.

Decker grins. "It's going well. The usual jockeying for the top spot. I'm up there."

"Who's your competition?" Chandra asks.

"Couple of admiral's grandsons. Terry Ramirez and Steve Turner."

Chandra raises an eyebrow. "Starfleet royalty. Not just admirals, but two members of the Board of Admiralty—Grand Admirals. One who led Starfleet during the Klingon War, the other a legend of exploration. You really do pick your fights, love."

"Oh, they shouldn't be any trouble. They're both going for the seduction route."

"What do you mean?" Chandra asks.

"Oh, they've been trying to eliminate the little girl who's just a commodore's granddaughter. I've gotten some nice dinners out of it." She looks sideways at Chandra. "And some exercise."

There is a flash of something through the Link. Chandra widens her eyes. "Don't forget your great-grandfather," she says, shoving the image away, again. "He was an admiral, as was your great-grandmother. Not to mention your mother."

"And a long line of captains before that," Decker replies.

"You'll be careful, right?"

Decker nods. "I will. It's harmless fun. I think they both separately think they'll distract me from the prize. Or wear me out." She gives Chandra a sideways glance. "But I've learned a few things from the master. I won't be the one getting worn out."

"Great. I've created a monster," Chandra says. "I have talked to the proctor of the course. He said that his top three ingrates, which includes you, are among the most talented he's seen in twenty years of this course. And very close to each other in scores. So enjoy the fun, but keep up the hard work. In the end, the juice might be worth the squeeze—your hard work, not the extracurricular activities. You'll get those lieutenant j.g.'s bars back, permanently." She closes her eyes, knowing what is coming next.

"Oh, I'm doing some squeezing alright," Decker replies, keeping her expression even.

"Brat," Chandra says. She realizes that Decker is taking her close to the Shangri-La. Her eyes fall on the name and registry number.

USS *Titan*. NCC-1777.

She breathes out. "That's Kaylin's new assignment. Under Saavik," Chandra remarks quietly.

"Yeah. Thought I'd show her to you. She's been in refit since Khitomer. Almost four years."

"The *Enterprise-A* and the *Excelsior* weren't the only ships engaged with Chang's insurgents," Chandra says. "Jamie was aboard, as was Saavik. I was on the *Enterprise-A*."

Decker nods. "I'm actually doing my thesis project on her, for the command course." She looks at the ship in awe. "The Giant of the Red Line," she says, exhaling. "The Battle of Epsilon Ardentis."

### **Captain Taggart Took The Field**

*Epsilon Ardentis*  
*On the Klingon Border*  
*Fourteen parsecs from Khitomer*  
2293

Lieutenant James Blackthorne watches as the navigator is carried away, electricity arcing from his body and his console towards Jamie. Saavik catches his eye as she works to shut down the console.

He looks over at the tactical console behind the captain's and first officer's position. Captain Taggart Ronaine gently lays his first officer on the deck, her eyes fixed and staring at the overhead.

They'd barely had time to learn her name. Today had been her third day on the ship.

Jamie switches his gaze to the viewscreen. He sees the *K't'inga* heavy showing her stern as she moves away after the devastating blows she and her fellows had given their ship. He hears Ronaine start to say something, but he anticipates it.

The red, sparkling sphere detaches from the stern tube. He feels the ship lurch to the left and hears his crewmates yell as they fall.

The photon torpedo arcs by, just missing contact with their shields. He looks back over at the tactical station.

Lieutenant Commander Pennington lies dead, the chest of his security armor, as well as the chest it had covered, if not protected, blasted away.

Jamie punches a button, then looks down at the screen inset flat into the helm console. He sees the crosshairs line up on the aft part of the Klingon's nacelle. He punches the trigger, hoping the crews on the weapons deck can and will respond to the new director control.

There is a slight burst of fire where the phaser bolt touches the Klingon. The K't'inga does some heeling of her own.

"Good shot, Croft," he hears Saavik from where she stands over him. She uses a nickname that she had learned from their brief time on a training cruise together, almost eight years ago now. One that had turned out as disastrous as this patrol.

"Report, Mr. Saavik," Ronaine, man of medium height in his mid-fifties, with blue eyes and red-gold hair, says in his soft brogue.

"Shields down to thirty percent. Port nacelle is venting plasma and the mains are down. We have half-impulse power. Photon torpedo tubes are offline, but the Gunner (T) is working on them."

"Casualties?"

"No report, Captain. The sickbay took a hit in the first attack."

Jamie takes a deep breath. He and Saavik, who apparently is now the first officer, lock eyes. He nods. He realizes that Josiah, a junior helm officer stands behind him. A navigational technician moves to take over as quartermaster's mate to his right. He notices her wide eyes at the blood on the console.

"Jamie, lad, take over at weps. You'll be able to fight the ship a lot better from the main console," Ronaine says. He looks at Josiah as he rises. "You're the driver, Bas," he says. "Don't dent my ship."

"More than Croft and the Klingons have already?" Josiah replies dryly.

Croft moves behind the captain to the tactical station.

### **Clarifying the Position**

*Sol III/Terra*

*Malibu, CA*

2297

Jamie Blackthorne walks up the driveway towards the small house at the mouth of the canyon, facing the ocean. He stops and takes in the scene.

His eyes survey the stilted, glass-enclosed structure. It appears to be one complete room, save a water closet and some storage rooms—the open concept that hadn't lost its popularity in the three hundred years since this house had been built, though taken to the extreme.

He moves under the house and climbs the stairs. There is no doorbell, but he is sure that he is under surveillance. Given the person who had given him the instruction to be here.

Jason Richard George opens the door. He is clad in the remnants of his business suit, an open-collared white shirt and suit trousers. Jamie feels his eyebrows raise as he glances down and sees that George is barefoot. He moves into the house. He sees the three figures in the living area, staring out at the windows that extend the width of the house overlooking the Pacific Ocean and stretch of beach.

One, the oldest, is known to most people only by a letter and controls the Federation's civilian intelligence apparatus. She turns and gazes at him, her eyes falling on the captain's insignia on his shoulder.

The young woman standing next to her, leaning back on the balcony's rail, her thin face turned up to the morning sun, looks at him over a pair of sunglasses, pulled down on her upturned nose. Both women are clad in parts of business suits.

A muscular Andorian woman comes out of the full kitchen, wiping her hands on a towel. She surveys him with dark blue eyes. She places her bare arms over her chest, looking at him with skepticism. She snorts and turns away. "Free Agent, my ass."

"Is dinner ready?" he asks, ignoring the sally.

"As soon as I spit in your omelette."

"You certainly have a way with people," the young woman standing next to C says in the light accent of her home, a small village just outside Brussels.

"I took lessons from all of the borderline personalities in this room," he says. "Present company excepted, of course, Chantelle," he adds hastily.

Chantelle DeBruges gives a light laugh. "Hers may be the most borderline," C says.

Jamie looks at George, his apparent new boss. "Is there anyone else going to jump out of the clown car?" he asks. He points to the cook. "If C and her minion are here, her well-armed shen'ar can't be far."

Shryri zh'Raohrar sticks her tongue out at him. She turns back to plating the food.

"Zhenia will probably be along," C says. "I figured I was safe with the newest, high-speed Federation Free Agent here and didn't need my bodyguard."

He says nothing. Neither, thankfully, does anyone else, until they are seated, tucking into the food that Shryri had prepared.

She had apparently put extra fheri-peppers in his omelette. He makes sure that he doesn't show any discomfort; she appears to be judging his resilience

When they are finished, George pushes back from the table. "I guess we need to discuss your first assignment," he says.

"Then how come the Prince isn't here?"

George looks at C, who gives him a look that says something like, 'this is your hole to dig yourself out of.'

"The Prince will no longer be involved in your handling."

Jamie stares at him for a moment. Finally he gets up, wiping his mouth and dropping his napkin on the table. "Then I'm out. When I finally gave in to your dubious charm and agreed to join your little boy-band, it was with the understanding that Starfleet Intelligence would be a part of what I was doing. Nell Cavendish and those from my Academy class—along with a couple of others that are growing on me—are the only ones I actually trust to have my back."

He turns and starts to walk out. "Sit down," George says, a hint of menace creeping into his voice.

He stops and turns, but doesn't sit down. "Name one good reason why?"

"Because those shiny little captain's bars are only on your shoulder strap because of what you're doing. Do you think Starfleet would ever entrust you with a starship?"

Without a word, he lifts his hands to the strap and quickly removes the pin. He drops it on the glass table. It is followed by the one from his sleeve. "I'm happy being someone's XO or navigator, or tactical officer. Or even a major of marines."

C gets up and walks over to him. "You're right. You have a right at your level to have your own people in place. The days of Sola Thane traveling around the galaxy by herself and commandeering whatever support she needed are gone. Especially since there are only two of you, now, rather than five or more, as in the past." She places her hand on his chest. "Come on, Croft. I know JR can be an asshole. But we need you to continue what you're doing over the Gold Line. Especially since we have that other one embedded so much deeper in there."

He finally nods. He stares at George, who stares back at him. Clearly, the Free Agent-King is not on board with the warm and fuzzies.

Croft walks over and sits. He makes no move to pick up the rank insignia.

"So what's the plan?" George asks. "Since clearly I can't fucking control you."

"It's pretty simple," Croft replies. "I'm going to put my ass on the line, along with Athena and hopefully kill the Praetor-Prime's ambitions, putting someone concerned with the Romulan people rather than her own ambitions in charge."

The room is silent. "You don't want much, do you?" Chantelle says quietly.

"Yeah," George says. "You're probably going against the entirety of the Romulan character these days."

"Ael seems to be onboard with it. So does Megara, the other Praetor."

"So how are you going to do all that?" C asks. "Are you concentrating on Operation Vandal, now?"

"Always have been. I've just gotten roped in to your little campaign against Section 31. And a few little Klingon diversions." He looks around the table. "Oh, and one other thing. Chandra gets read in on everything that I am. If she's going to risk everything, including the lives of her crews, she'll know what I know."

He can see that his words have all the popularity with at least two of his dinner companions as a photon grenade dropped in the middle of the table.

"I'm assuming she's finding out what ship she'll have, as we speak," he adds.

## **Now Boarding**

Chandra watches as the pod moves around the *Titan*, headed for yet another freestanding drydock. "So we're headed to what seems to be your command project?" she asks.

Decker says nothing for a moment. "Yeah. Hunter has assigned me to it. She's meeting us onboard."

"So how much work is your little project?" she asks.

"Not too much. They'd completed the decommissioning process, so all the systems are having to be replaced. Should only take a couple of months. I hope the new captain might see it in her heart to give me a spot on there."

"She might consider it," Chandra says, "if you tell her which ship she's headed to."

Decker grins. "Can't really do that, Captain. On pain of keelhauling by Admiral Hunter and Commodore Rosen. The expression turns softer. "You got to see her for yourself, Chan," she says.

She falls quiet for a moment as the pod moves through the endless night. Chandra can tell something is on the young officer's mind.

"I've got a little bit of a side project, Captain," she says finally.

Chandra feels her eyebrow raise. "Oh yeah?" She smiles, suddenly realizing. "The *Aerfen*," she says.

Decker nods.

"I didn't realize that anyone was allocated to her refit," Chandra says.

"They're not," Decker replies. She focuses on the controls.

Chandra nods, not pressing any further. She turns back to look out the port. Her eyes focus on another thin shape, with a larger shape inside. She exhales sharply as she sees the two upraised nacelles over the secondary hull.

The saucer of the primary hull starts to gleam in the light of the drydock.

"How do you feel about commanding a cruiser?" Decker asks suddenly. "A starship?"

Chandra stares at the approaching ship. "It's what I've always wanted," she admits.

Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Decker raise her eyebrows. "I didn't know. I thought you'd always wanted to be a Border Dog."

"I came to it late, sweetie," she says, turning to face her. "After Vostus. No. I've always wanted to command a starship. But I don't know if this is the right time or not. I still got things to do with the Border Dogs."

She sees Decker expertly bring the pod in from the port of the ship. She is sure that her ensign had intentionally kept her from seeing the name of the ship.

She can't help but see it now as the pod comes in to dock at the portside torpedo airlock. She exhales. She can feel Decker's wide grin, without even seeing it, as her eyes are fixed on the standard Starfleet font of the lettering.

USS YORKTOWN

NCC-1712.

# Worlds Apart

## Chapter Summary

Lawyers, spies, and bureaucrats, oh my.

### Reaffirmation

Megara t'Khnialmnae moves into the darkened chamber, escorted by her sisters of many decades. She isn't armed, as all of them are, the tan valanqs slung over their shoulders in easy reach. It isn't lost on her that any one of them could slice her head from her shoulders with ease.

They would only do that if it had been determined that she had betrayed the Qowat Milat, or the Way of Absolute Candor.

She had not, she had merely obfuscated her loyalty to that Way, in order to accomplish her quest. A quest that had started when she had been a child. A quest, like all quests undertaken by the Qowat Milat, adjudged to be a lost cause from the beginning. One that had taken her to the very heights of the Romulan Star Empire, as the sole remaining Praetor, outside of one who desired above all else to be the sole ruler of the Empire.

The two sisters at her elbows reach out and stop her. Her eyes lock on the head of this particular branch of the Order. Her eyes play over the dark skin of the Mother, Tiyana t'Lorcana. The sister of a woman murdered on the orders of the current Praetor-Prime.

The rest of the brief ceremony is a blur.

Later, Tiyana joins Megara in her own small cell in the House. "I'm glad that you did come to us for a Reaffirmation," the Mother says. She hands Megara a glass of their own House-distilled mead.

Megara says nothing, but sips the mead. Something that she has missed and only enjoyed occasionally since her leaving the House of this particular Chapter.

"So tell me. How close do you get to the Abomination?" Tiyana asks.

"As close as we did in this ceremony," Megara replies, knowing who she speaks of.

The woman who had ordered the painful, slow execution of Tiyana's older sister.

Tiyana nods. "I'm not sure that I could've gotten that close. Not without killing her. Even if it meant my death, it would've been worth it."

"Perhaps that is why someone else is undercover in the Praetorate," Megara says dryly.

If Tiyana is angered by her words, she doesn't show it. "I know. I can't let my passions get in way of the ultimate prize." She examines the liquid in her drink.

Megara finishes her drink up and asks, "How is the Klingon connection with this whole thing?"

"So far, so good. The Klingon Free States seem to be in disarray, with the defeat at Leelix III. That has thwarted the Praetor-Prime's plans to subvert the Klingon Empire. For now at least. If it became known that she had sent those unmarked Tal Shiar dartships to aid in the attack, she could lose some face in the Senate."

Megara shakes her head. "I think she's got built-in plausible deniability with her and her consort's Tal Shiar boy-toy."

Tiyana nods. "I know. But it might help chip around the edges. Especially if she uses him as a scapegoat in whatever little way."

"And what of the House of Klinzhai? Are they totally subverted from the path of the IKS?" Megara asks.

"Perhaps not totally. But it is a start."

"And your human-faced sister?" Megara asks.

She doesn't reply. Both of them turn and look at D'aina t'Sonrees, formerly known as Commander Daina Reese of Starfleet, as she stares into the flames of the brazier. A woman now dead to both sides of the conflict.

### Setting It Up

Decker watches as Chandra is greeted by several people with a great deal of braid and gold on their uniforms. Three of the higher-ranking well-wishers are people that Decker knows in varying degrees.

Including the acting Vice Admiral and chief of staff to the C-in-C of Starfleet. The woman whose own body she had emerged from, twenty-one years and few weeks ago, Mary Elizabeth Decker.

Newly promoted Vice Admiral Hunter embraces her foster-daughter. Chandra's own foster-sister, Kaylin Stone-Hunter, Hunter's birth-daughter embraces her as well.

Decker feels a familiar presence move up beside her. Dr. Kim Sinclair, Decker's other mother, and the woman who was most responsible for raising her reaches over and kisses her on her cheek. "Hey brat," Kim says.

"How's my favorite barber-butcher?" she snarks, earning her nickname from Kim. Kim rolls her eyes at the mention of the ancient side occupations for surgeons.

"I dunno. How're the ribs?"

Decker shifts slightly. "Not bad. Glad I was finally able to get that damned orthopedic matrix off."

"Crimping your sex life?"

"No, I was able to crimp that well enough my own self. Social ineptitude would do that, not some doodad on my chest." She pulls Kim into a deep embrace. "You checked out your sickbay yet?"

"Don't know that it's mine, yet," Kim says darkly.

"Why wouldn't it be? You're the Gr—squadron CMO," Decker replies.

"Haven't heard anything, yet," Kim says. "No orders."

"I think that Chandra will get the opportunity to form her command crew. I think you'd be a shoo-in."

"Only because she doesn't know any other doctors," Kim retorts.

"Self-deprecating, much?" Decker asks.

Kim turns and stares at her. Her lips quirk. "I learned from the best. I'm surprised that you didn't make some silly joke about how small your boobs are when you mentioned your sex life. What is it? Your 'mosquito bites'? Or something like that?"

Decker feels herself blush and look down at the mosquito bites in question. Kim decides to push further. "The mosquito bites don't seem to be cramping your style with those two classmates that you've been dancing with."

She grins as Decker narrows her eyes, knowing that Kim might've scored a point or two.

Decker looks over at Kaylin and her new captain, Saavik. She moves over to greet Kaylin and to meet the great Saavik. Chandra wanders over as well, as Hunter, Commodore Rosen, Chandra's immediate superior, and Decker's mother move off to confer, talking about admiral and commodore things.

Mary gestures Kim over to meet the other two admirals. Kim gives Mary a look, then moves towards them.

"Saavik, this is Ensign Decker Sinclair. She's one of my hard-chargers. And no, you can't poach her. Kaylin is the only one you get."

Decker is surprised to see a brief, but very apparent smile appear on the Vulcan's face. Decker holds up her hand in the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, Captain," she says.

The eyebrow raises as Saavik returns the greeting, in both the gesture and the words. She extends her hand, shaking Decker's. "It is good to finally meet you. Ensign Sinclair. Commander Stone-Hunter sings your praises and is always whispering into my ear to try and poach you."

Decker laughs as Chandra looks at Kaylin with mock anger.

"Have you any ideas for your command crew, Chandra?" Saavik asks. "And no, you can't poach Kaylin back."

Chandra nods, smiling at all three of them. "I've got some ideas. Some are already in my squadron. They're qualified for various positions, even though they've got light vessel commands now. They also have XOs and other officers that they keep whispering in my ears that they are ready for their own light vessel commands."

She returns the question to Saavik. "How about you?"

Saavik exchanges a look with Kaylin. "We're working on it. Kaylin has a lead on a tactical officer."

Kaylin smiles with what Decker thinks is a devilish cast. "Just as soon as I can get her released from the brig."

## **Interrogation**

Special Agent Casey Ambrose stands well away from the door of the FOB's detention facility. She inhales the smoke from the old-fashioned cigarette, letting the fumes relax her. The two Starfleet security operators watch her impassively as she enjoys the ancient vice, but one that is now a great deal safer for her lungs and the lungs of passersby.

The door opens and another woman dressed in civilian clothes steps out. Casey takes in the casual clothes. In spite of the cold, she wears no coat, only a long-sleeved shirt over work pants and work boots. A phaser is holstered on her left hip and a silver, haloed multi-pointed star is clipped to her belt.

"You Ambrose?" she asks, her amber eyes staring directly at Casey.

"Yeah," Casey replies. She doesn't bother producing her creds.



“Inspector Nina Bondarenko. Triangle Marshals. I’m the investigator assigned to this asshole,” she says, jerking her thumb at the jail.

“I’m just the comic relief. He’s all yours, unless we can uncover a connection to the attack.”

A smile creases Bondarenko’s face. Just as quickly it is gone, showing her ‘resting investigator’s face’ to the universe.

Casey puts out her smoke on the heel of her boot, then pulls out a small metal tube, inserting the remnants in and resealing it.

“You like the equivalent of a structure fire in your lungs?” Bondarenko asks.

“These things aren’t much different than the candy cigarettes they used to let children have, back when the tobacco was actually harmful and addictive, but they promoted and marketed it.”

“So you just do it for the sophisticated look?”

Casey feels her irritation rise at the needling questions. They get through the ritual of getting in to see the prisoner.

The short, skinny human stares at them from the other side of an interrogation table, his hands cuffed to the bar on the table.

Casey takes her first look at him. The only word that she can use to describe him is *bland*. The next word might be more polite, but mousy isn’t much more descriptive. This human would never stand out in a crowd.

Bondarenko sits across from him. Casey leans against the wall, just out of the Deputy Marshal’s peripheral vision. From the set of the woman’s shoulders, she can tell that her positioning is irritating her.

“I’m Inspector Bondarenko of Federation Security, and this is Special Agent Ambrose of the Starfleet Investigative Service. Why did you attack the woman who was trying to aid you?”

The man is silent for a moment. Finally, the colorlessness extends to his voice, as he replies quietly, “Because she wasn’t trying to help me. She was trying to kill me.”

“And why would she do that?” Bondarenko asks, the skepticism dripping from her husky voice.

“You’d have to ask her. You just need to realize that she isn’t what she appears to be.” He takes in both of them with a glance. “This interview is over. Someone is coming to get me out of here.” He looks behind him.

An Andorian stands there. Bondarenko’s PADD buzzes with a text. An electronic business card pops up on the screen.

ATTORNEY-AT-LAW is all that Casey can make out, with a Federation Bar Association identifier.

“Lawyer,” the prisoner repeats, this time more insistently.

### **K’hrella - Kissing Babies and Shadows**

K’hrella walks down the street of the Federation settlement. She sees the angry, fearful looks at the Klingon part of her features, as well as from some who recognize her Romulan heritage. For this reason, she had chosen to wear Earth-standard civilian clothing, rather than her uniform and armor.

She spots her destination. She walks into the now empty remnants of the bar. The two owners were, as she had heard, discussing their options.

Options, her contact had told her, included one or both of them shipping out on a wealthy collector’s newly purchased ship. One that she isn’t sure won’t be separated completely from Starfleet, even after a massive purchase of the wreck.

She turns and watches as three of her soldiers stand erect, boxes of rations and medical supplies opened.

None of the locals seem to be taking them up on the relief supplies, as the three soldiers stand looking like they usually do, especially to those not Klingon.

Which is to say, entirely threatening and unwelcoming.

She spots the woman who she had come to meet. Usura, as she is known, reaches in and grabs a ration pack. She hands it to a passing human with a smile. She turns and gives the three Klingons a hard look.

They each reach in and take a pack, holding them out.

The passersby start to accept them. K’hrella walks over and lifts her own packs. She gives the denizens a careful smile. Soon the cases are empty, with others being brought to replace them.

She turns to follow Usura into the bar. A quick look around reveals that most of the debris has been swept away and cleaned up. One table in the center remains.

A look around reveals that no one else is in the bar.

“Report,” K’hrella says softly.

Usura narrows her eyes. “I managed to keep the locals from getting overwhelmed. I think that you coming here has helped reinforce that their anger should be directed at your traitors.”

K'hrella nods. "What else? Do the Feds suspect that you might not be who they think you are? Including your two employers?"

"They don't," she replies, her dark eyes hardening. "And one thing we need to get straight. You may be my other employer, but you aren't my mistress. I could snap your neck without a second thought, before you could clear your disruptor or your knife."

"Then you would just be a refugee, out of time," K'hrella observes. She knows that her particular phrasing isn't lost on the woman.

"What of the human that the Feds and the colonial authorities have in custody?"

Usura nods. "He is a fellow refugee. One who has been trying to kill me for the last forty years, and I him."

"Are you sure that's all he is?"

Usura grins. "Once we were fellow soldiers, bound to each other and to our masters. Now we are just lost to history. Because of a choice he made for both of us." She looks away. "I think that he has other guardian angels, as the Feds would say."

K'hrella blinks, as suddenly the human-looking woman has been replaced by a large, male Klingon soldier, wearing naval insignia, indicating that he is a security officer. "I think I can get in to take him. Then we can figure out what his new employers have him doing."

## **Building A Legend**

Siobhan looks at herself in the mirror in the waiting room, dressed in an unfamiliar business suit, her hair slicked down and back within an inch of its life. She isn't wearing the eyepatch; she can see the blurry spot in the midst of her vision, hopefully she won't have to shoot anybody.

She'd been practicing with her left eye closed with optical sights, as well as iron sights, but she hadn't exactly felt comfortable, not being able to see what else was around, other than the target. She starts as the door open. Her eyes widen as two other women step in. Both of them older than her, about Chandra's age. She'd met both of them briefly. The slightly shorter of the two, with the large, round brown eyes that could be called sparkling, bronze curls tied back, who looks almost at home in her civilian business suit as Siobhan does nods at her.

"Report," she barks at her supposed first mate.

Siobhan manages not to scratch her eyebrow with her middle finger. "Still waiting on the bureaucracy, Captain," she replies. She points at the bureaucrat in question, who had taken her request for a ship registration and had placed it aside, while continuing with whatever the hell it was he was doing.

The Frontier Registration Office for Civilian Traffic at the Department of Commerce and Transportation wasn't exactly doing a flourishing business.

'The Captain'—newly promoted Lieutenant Commander Emma Rosewarne in her day job—turns and looks at the taller woman. One whose demeanor isn't exactly as light and airy as Emma and Siobhan's.

Both of whom stare daggers at the bureaucrat.

He suddenly realizes that Eleonora Cavendish is staring down at him, her entire persona suddenly screaming 'lawyer.'

And an expensive one at that. The bureaucrat apparently sees that all three women are standing close to his desk, the two shorter versions looking at him like he was some sort of a bug, with their arms crossed.

Siobhan also is sure that he is looking at their business suits anew, calculating their worth. His manner suddenly loses the bored look of disdain.

"My name is Cavendish. I represent a very powerful businessman who has just purchased a ship from Starfleet surplus. As our officer told you, we'd like it registered for traffic in the sectors immediately surrounding the Triangle and border areas."

The words are produced in an icy tone, one that Siobhan is certain might drop the temperature around the bureaucrat's testicles, if he still has any in his job.

They may have just shriveled up at Nell's look, accompanying the words and their tone. He suddenly starts to look on his desk. Siobhan reaches down and pushes the package she had handed in an hour ago.

He inserts the plaque into his computer. His eyebrows rise. "A Mr. Stone Lawless?" he asks, sounding if he is wondering if he'd read the name right.

Just as Siobhan had the first time she'd read it.

"Yes," Cavendish spits.

"Ah, here it is. Sounds like the ship was registered as the *Comstock* in Starfleet? Registry number NCC-3007?"

*Still is, technically*, Siobhan thinks.

"Yes," Emma says. "It will now be called the *Stone's Heart*," she says with barely concealed disdain. "Leelix III Registry number TK-9007."

All three women stare at him with flaming looks. He fumbles for a moment, then pushes a button on his console.

"All done. Thank you ladies," he manages to say.

When they are in the street, Siobhan looks at Emma and Nell. “What dumbass came up with a name like Stone Lawless? Sounds like a holoporn name.”

“Which dumbass do you think?” Nell replies.

Siobhan remembers what Chandra, Emma, and the others had called Nell, from those days in the Academy.

The Last Word.

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