

Over Hill and Valleys

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Over Hill and Valleys

by [B_Radley](#)

Summary

By hook or by crook, two ships will be crewed and equipped. Elsewhere, a blast from Starfleet's past adds more layers to the chaos.

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Remnants of a Cold War—Temporal that is.

Escape

Leelix III

Deputy Marshal/Inspector Nina Bondarenko hands her sidearm over to the desk officer in the detention facility. There had been no further conversation with the prisoner, Sturgeon, as he had given his name, since the mysterious lawyer had shown up.

The Starfleet cop, Ambrose, was checking other leads, concentrating on the attack, rather than an assault. She hadn't been able to have a conversation with the one attacked, the bartender, Usura yet, as she hadn't been around the ruined bar.

Nina checks her chronometer, then stares daggers at the desk cop, who hasn't made any move to buzz her back to the interview room. He seems to be listening to something on an earpiece.

She closes her eyes and rests her head back on the cool permacrete wall. She thinks of the newly promoted Vulcan captain she had met in her time on the *Intrepid*, Saavik. She had managed to infiltrate the little cadre who had been loyal to the apparently late captain, Stivek. A group that was about to dump Saavik into space without a pressure suit, after she had been grievously wounded.

Nina had spent some time with the officer, who was around her own age, before she had left the ship. Ambrose and a sarcastic Starfleet lawyer named Cavendish had taken over the investigation after Stivek had disappeared. The evidence had pointed toward Stivek being splashed into atoms by an unknown Vulcan assassin. She had suspected that the lawyer had something to do with Intelligence, but that was way above her paygrade.

She wonders if Saavik had arrived to take over her new ship, yet. Rumor had it that she had taken temporary command of one of the starships that had helped relieve the attack on this base.

Nina's eyes snap open as she hears a noise at the gate. A large Klingon security operator steps out from behind. The desk cop returns the Klingon's pistol to him, as well as at least three knives. Nina nods at him as he passes her; he stares at her with what she is sure is contempt in his ochreous yellow eyes. She shoots the same look back at him.

"Inspector," the desk cop says as the Klingon exits.

She gets up and moves behind the counter and then through the door. She moves back to the interview room and enters.

The room is empty. She looks up at the camera, then raps on the door. "Is this some kind of fucking joke?" she yells.

A moment later, the desk cop steps through. His eyes widen. "He was just here. The Klingon wanted to talk to him," he says, a note of panic slipping into his voice.

Nina immediately moves back towards the front. She steps back to the desk, and stares at the monitor. The desk cop starts to play it back. He looks up at her in astonishment as the prisoner gets up, apparently slipping out of the cuffs on the table, and stands up against the wall. He grins and waves at the camera before vanishing.

"Send out a BOLO," Nina says.

She looks up as she senses movement. A Klingon steps out from behind the desk and heads towards the door.

The same Klingon.

"Hey," she yells. He draws his disruptor, which had been handed to the other version. She dives for cover, shoving the desk officer down as he fires.

The wall explodes above and behind them.

She crawls around. "Sidearm," she snaps at the desk officer. He is frozen. "Come on, dammit," she prompts. He finally opens a lockbox. She pulls it out and snaps her head over the desk, leading with the phaser.

The Klingon is nowhere to be seen. She runs out of the station. Passersby stare at her. She stops and stares around her.

Casey Ambrose comes running, her own weapon out. She holds up a PADD. "I just got the DNA profile of our little rabble-rouser in there," she says.

"Well, our little rabble-rouser just got out. Somehow disguised as a fucking Klingon," Nina says.

"There was a match to one small property," Ambrose says. "Related to genetic material on the *Intrepid* that we couldn't identify as Stivek's."

Nina raises her eyebrows at that.

“But wait, there’s more,” Casey says. “That one little property has another match. Way back in the 22nd century, on Earth’s *Enterprise*, the NX-01. It might explain how he escaped.”

Nina closes her eyes and curses, without even hearing the report. “Great,” she says. “Just fucking great.”

Going Viral

Sol IV/Mars

Saavik sips coffee in her ready room. Her Vulcan half doesn’t let her make a face at the now-cold temperature. She sets aside as she closes out the refit report on her ship. She looks at the chronometer on the bulkhead. It was well into the ship’s morning, 0400. Soon the overnight seven hour watch would shift into the five-hour versions.

When she had arrived on the *Titan*, when there had seemed to be some sense of urgency to get the ship done within a few days of the new captain’s arrival, the crew had been working watch-and-watch, four hours on and four hours off. She and Kaylin had put an immediate stop to that, moving them to the sevens-and-fives system which would give the crew more sleep time in most of the crew’s diurnal sleep cycle, while still getting the essential work done. The crew were divided into port and starboard watches, with some small sections provided for the few crew whose diurnal cycles were different.

There had been an almost palpable change in crew efficiency. The dockyard master had balked, as had the current chief engineer, but Kaylin, with Saavik’s blessing had ruthlessly replaced the Chief Engineer. The new chief engineer who had in fact come from the office of the Superintendent of the Dockyards, though not the prize that Kaylin had sought—Commander (E) Joelle Grayson, the Chief of Staff, who had already been poached by Chandra for the *Yorktown*—had immediately concurred, doing some ruthless replacing of her own.

Of course, the system only worked when command officers set the example and had not worked until four in the morning. She shakes her head slightly, making a note to work in her quarters, rather than her duty station on the bridge or just off of it in her ready room. She looks around the room. She hadn’t had any time or actual inclination to decorate the room. She had acquired a table that she could sit at if needed.

She brings up another form. The current duty roster for department heads. Kaylin was still working on the tactical/security officer, Salieri. Saavik hadn’t inquired too deeply into the goings-on at Starfleet Detention, at Kaylin’s request. Something about ‘plausible deniability.’

The Romulan part of her had been the only thing that had allowed her to let her first officer foster the sense of a pirate ship in starship’s colors, as she moved to seat new senior staff.

Saavik herself had been working on the science department. Even though the *Titan* was a defense cruiser, she still didn’t feel comfortable not having a full Sciences Department. They were a starship, with the dual mission that gained that designation, but with a smaller proportion allowed for science and exploration than allowed for any other ship with that designation, but with enough that they weren’t classed as a heavy or medium scout such as a destroyer or a frigate, or as one of the larger single-purpose warships like a *Continent*-class assault carrier. She had her own leads on that, with actual help from Chandra, who was of a similar mindset as hers.

She grins to herself as she thinks of the officer that Chandra had already tried to pawn off on her. A capable Edosian physicist with engineering skills, but not fit for the command or XO position on a Border Patrol ship.

Kaylin had put, as she called it, ‘the kibosh’ on that one. Lieutenant Daronex, who had actually received a promotion after the Battle of Leelix III, would grow and learn on the *Yorktown*.

Her comm buzzes. She pushes the button, replying, “Saavik.”

Her duty comms crewmember, a technician gaining experience on the bridge, says, “Holocom requested from Starfleet Intelligence, Captain,” he says. “A Lieutenant Commander Cavendish.”

Her right eyebrow raises. She looks at the time. She nods and says, “Put her through.”

Nell Cavendish arrives at her small conference table. She walks over and sits, gazing at the slightly younger officer. Nell looks remarkably fresh for the hour. “Burning the midnight oil, Commander?” Saavik asks dryly. Nell smirks.

“I could say the same of you, Captain,” she replies, “but no. I’m on Leelix III. There’s been a development that I think that you should know about.”

“What is it?”

“It’s about the assassin who killed Stivek. There’s evidence that he was a shape-shifter.” Her face grows serious.

“A Suliban.”

Recruitment

Kaylin Stone-Hunter, the new XO of the Starship *Titan* sits waiting in a brig’s visitation room, pondering what she had learned from her check-in with her captain. Saavik had relayed the information on a secure, encrypted channel. It makes this meeting more critical.

To find a good, stable tactical and security officer for their ship.

She thinks about what she had researched about the Suliban. They had been an issue for Jonathan Archer’s *Enterprise*—in truth it was the first issue of many, culminating in the Earth-Romulan War. The Suliban, who had been the soldiers in what the classified histories had referred to

as a ‘temporal cold war’, had been genetically modified.

There had been no sightings of the genetically enhanced versions in centuries. The Suliban who remained were peace-loving, wanting nothing to do with that part of their heritage, focusing instead on recovering from the oppression by the inhabitants of the sectors that the Suliban had settled in after the loss of their homeworld. These oppressions, particularly from the Tandarans, had become more prevalent once it was revealed that some Suliban had become part of the Cabal, one faction in that war.

Kaylin is surprised that the Department of Temporal Investigations had allowed her to access this information. She looks up as a young woman of her age is brought in.

Lieutenant Jade Salieri grins at the sight of her classmate. She isn’t in prison garb, but clad in the undershirt and trousers of the service dress uniform, wearing security/tactical green on the undershirt. Her hands aren’t wearing handcuffs, either, signaling that she isn’t exactly a desperate criminal.

“Hey, Kay,” she says. She shakes her head. “Commander,” she adds belatedly.

Kaylin says nothing, but motions to the seat across from her. She gazes at Salieri. The officer is a little taller, maybe an inch, than Kay. Both of them are of Eurasian extraction, though Jade’s Asian features are a bit more prominent than Kaylin’s.

“So how the hell did you wind up in the brig?” Kaylin asks. “Did your mouth and/or fists outstrip your brain’s ability to think clearly?”

“They call it ‘striking a superior asshole,” Jade replies.

Kaylin says nothing, waiting for more of an explanation.

“And the charges have been dropped,” Jade adds, almost as an afterthought. She looks away. “The other witnesses testified that the XO had shoved me out of the way before I shoved him back.”

Kaylin snorts. “Is that what you are going with? You didn’t shove back. You punched him.”

“After he tried to abandon one of my security teams to their deaths on a landing party. Along with a scientific survey.”

“That’s why we’re still having this conversation,” Kaylin says. “I was told by your captain that the XO has dropped the charges in return for not being charged with dereliction of duty. He’s also resigning from Starfleet.”

Jade says nothing in reply.

“So why are you still in the brig?” Kaylin pushes.

“Because the former XO has some buddies that might still have it out for me,” Jade comes back with.

Kaylin nods. “The captain told me about that as well. I’m working on getting you out of here.”

“And then what?”

“My new captain is offering you a second chance,” she replies. “Or a third or fourth, depending on your perspective. Every CO or XO that I’ve talked to has said that you’re an exceptional tactical and security officer. You just need to realize that you may not have all the answers, so that maybe your mouth can stop writing checks that your ass can’t cash.”

“My ass can take care of itself just fine,” Jade replies.

“Nope. It can’t. That’s why Captain Saavik is bringing you to the *Titan*. We’ll be going in harm’s way, most probably along the Klingon border. We’ll need a security officer that can cope with that. But we’ll also need one that can use her brains and discretion to let us handle the other shit.”

“I can do that,” Jade says after another moment.

“We’ll see,” Kaylin replies after the same length of time. “My former captain, Chandra, is dealing with another officer under her command who at one time had the same issue.” She grins. “And you do realize that if I’m the ‘superior asshole’ you plan to hit, you need to remember that I’ve hit back before, Toots.”

Jade says nothing, but narrows her eyes at her Academy classmate. She rubs her jaw.

The Staffing Plan

Chandra sits down with Decker in her new ready room. Somehow she misses the cramped version on the *Comstock*, with its antique drop front desk. She, like Decker had rolled her eyes at the cover name for her former command ship—somehow the *Stone’s Heart* just didn’t fit.

At least not yet.

She looks around the compartment, relishing the ports across the length, on the port side of the bridge. She will definitely be changing the polished power desk with the two minion chairs in front; the conference table is just the right size.

Most early *Constitution*-class heavy cruisers hadn’t even had a ready room, but the Yorktown in its ‘II’ refit had been an exception. She may put a variable standing desk in there, based on her preference to stand as much as possible. She will make sure there is a couch, to be near the bridge.

“So I gather I have a Chief Engineer,” Chandra says.

Decker picks up her PADD, but puts it back down, not needing it. Chandra smiles slightly. She looks at the aiguillette on Decker’s left shoulder, signifying an admiral’s aide. All of the students in the command fellowship selection course had been assigned to admiral’s staffs; they will work for their flag officers in addition to attendance at the seminars and working on their projects and completing their theses.

“Yes, Captain,” Decker replies. “Unless you object. Commander Grayson is an exceedingly skilled engineer. She comes highly recommended, from people whose names aren’t Decker.”

Chandra nods. “And how much independence will I have from the Chief of Staff for the C-in-C?”

Decker’s eyebrows raise to the center of her forehead. “Joelle—Commander Grayson will be your chief engineer, Captain. She won’t work for my mother any longer. She’ll give you candid advice when it comes to engineering matters, but she is trying to get away from staff work. And there is no guarantee that my mother will be offered or accept the job she’s acting in.” She grins sheepishly. “And if you’re worried about someone keeping tabs on the ‘admiral’s baby’, we have a CMO for that.”

Chandra laughs.

“Unless you’re going in a different direction, there,” she says. Chandra can see a slight bit of worry in her eyes.

“Well, she hasn’t killed a patient yet. She’s doing great work for Siobhan. I think I’ll keep her.” She looks down her nose at Decker. “Unless her daughter has any objections.”

Decker’s smile splits her features, warming Chandra. “No, Captain. None whatsoever.” She grows serious. “And your XO?” she asks. “Lieutenant Commander Rosewarne is already going to be the CO for Croft’s ship. You’ve already notified Commander Storm that she’ll be the Deputy for the Squadron.”

Chandra exhales. “There is a newly promoted full commander. She’s had commands and already served as XO of a *Sal-ah-din*-class destroyer.”

Decker looks at her. “She was supposed to take over the *Aerfen*,” she says, looking down at the table. “Morgan McMurtry.” She shakes her head. “Morgan Michaela McMurtry-Walsh,” she corrects, using the full name.

“We’ll just go with Commander McMurtry,” Chandra says. “She’s the one that I trust for this. Part of my original prelanka-soné, from the Academy.”

Decker finishes typing on her PADD. “Okay, so we’ve got a ChEng, an XO, and a quack. Any others for now, as far as department heads?”

“That’ll do for now, I think,” Chandra says. “Should I tell your mommy that you referred to her as a quack?”

“Go ahead. I’ve called her a butcher and a barber before. So quack is kind of mild.” She puts her PADD down. “Captain, I have to ask. Do you have a place for me?”

“Science officer.”

Chandra is treated to the panic in Decker’s eyes. She is only able to hold the straight face for no more than fifteen seconds before she bursts out laughing.

Decker’s eyes calm, then narrow at her. She says a word in Deltos, one that Chandra didn’t know that she knew.

“Is that any way to speak of your captain’s parentage?” Chandra asks.

“Kit uses it all the time to describe you.”

“I can’t figure out who is more of a bad influence,” Chandra says. “You or her.” She reaches over and takes Decker’s hand in between her own. Decker reaches over with the other one to take Chandra’s warmer versions in that hand.

“I’m going to take care of you, na’soné,” she says, using the suffix for their new bond—the bond of all, the heart, the mind, and the body among her people. “I’ve got a couple of ideas, depending on the outcome of your course. I think it’s a given that you’ll be driving this bus.”

With that, she pulls both of Decker’s hands up to her lips, kissing them both.

The Wrong Foot

Three Weeks Later

Daronex, newly promoted to full lieutenant, due to his time in grade, as well as his performance on the engines of a scout ship in battle, watches as the world reassembles around him. He gazes at the officer standing next to the duty transporter technician, a lieutenant junior grade wearing sciences blue-gray.

“Welcome aboard, Lieutenant,” the human female says. “I’m Jiemba. Acting assistant chief science officer and ship’s astrophysicist.”

He takes in his new subordinate. She is very tall, nearly six feet, with light brown skin and dark hair. Her name implies a connection to the native peoples of Australia, but there are European features in her physical makeup, if he is any judge. After a moment, he nods. “Thank you, Mr. Jiemba. Take me to the captain.”

The woman does something with her dark eyes, but maintains a correct demeanor for a superior officer. "I'm to show you to the new XO," she says in a definitely different accent than he is used to from humans. "The Captain is tied up with other matters."

Daronex wonders if his disappointment shows. He has a sneaking suspicion that Captain Chandra wants nothing to do with him, since he had rightfully challenged her on the *Comstock*. Her and her captain, Lincolnton, who isn't aboard this ship.

He follows the junior science officer out. The j.g. had shown no inclination to find a yeoman or someone to take his bags. "Are you the lead for the astro sciences?" He sees the officer's back stiffen.

"We don't have a big enough department to divide up everything. The individual disciplines have officers over them, even if some are ensigns. We have a complement of technicians who are mainly generalists to assist the officers and specialists we have. Senior Chief Ar'daoth oversees them."

"I'm not sure that is the most efficient way," he observes.

"It may have to be. We're assigned to the Border Patrol. We'll do as much research and exploration as we can, but we have a squadron of Border Patrol cutters and support ships assigned to us."

"I will speak to the captain."

"About what?" a woman's voice asks in the compartment that they enter. Daronex realizes that Jiemba has lead her to the main wardroom. A woman sits at the large table sipping coffee, while reading a PADD. She is dressed in a command-white turtleneck with the sleeves rolled up. Her jacket hangs over a chair; he can just make out the commander's insignia on the strap.

The woman rises; she is tall, but not as tall as Jiemba, who nods and exits. The woman holds out her right hand, while pushing back the dark auburn hair out of her eyes. Those eyes are the human shade called blue. He feels himself off balance at the intense gaze.

"I'm McMurtry, the XO. I'm assuming that you're our new science officer?"

"I am. Lieutenant Daronex. I'd like to speak to the captain about reorganizing my department."

Her eyes do narrow and her lips purse. "You've been on this ship all of five seconds and already you want to reorganize?" she asks.

"Yes, Commander," he replies.

"So tell me, Mr. Daronex. Will the captain and I still have jobs when you finish your reorganization?" she asks in a dry voice.

He steps back, unsure of how to respond. "I'm assuming so, Commander," he replies, hoping to regain his equilibrium at that question.

"Good. Glad to hear it," McMurtry replies. "I'll discuss any reorganization of your department once we actually get underway and in deep space. Until then, learn your department."

She jerks her head at him towards the hatch. He realizes he has been dismissed. On the other side of the hatch, he stares back at it.

"Let me guess. You just got your knees taken out from under you," a familiar and unwelcome voice says.

He turns to see Decker Sinclair, wearing an ensign's insignia, rather than her temporary lieutenant j.g.'s insignia, standing there, a senior yeoman standing next to her.

"I did not," he says, recovering. "And I will thank you to respect my rank, Ensign," he says.

She just smiles at him. He realizes that she is wearing the cords of a staff officer on her left shoulder.

Probably for a flag officer.

He exhales as she turns on her heels and walks down the corridor without saying anything else.

Daronex shakes his head in confusion. He isn't sure if this has gone the way he had planned. He turns and sees Lieutenant Commander Grasp, the large security officer with a light Orion complexion from the Border Patrol Group standing there, his massive arms crossed in a short-sleeved, dark green, Service Dress Delta uniform shirt.

He shakes his head, quirking his lips. "You just can't help yourself, can you, bud?" he asks in his deceptively quiet voice.

The Stone's Heart Gains an Engineer

Emma Rosewarne steps down off of the ramp of the *Comstock*, looking around her at the civilian landing field. In the months since the attack by the KFS and whatever sanctioned 'rogue' elements of the Romulans, she'd seen much progress in rebuilding. She looks back at her ship. It was no longer painted the gray and silver standard for Starfleet vessels, or even the subdued painting that some of the other Border Patrol cutters were clad in.

She was now showing a dark green color, with black highlights. A thin gold stripe next to a dark purple is present along the middle of the hull. She knows that the ship has a few extra special goodies on it, including a reactive camouflage scheme that could change her appearance.

Her administrative profile could change as well. She, Nell, and Siobhan weren't the only ones who'd gone to intimidate low level bureaucrats as well. The 'owner' of the ship had spread his charm, along with his oversized second mate, and the second mate's Romulan wife.

She shakes her head at the last revelation. While everyone had figured that D'Shaya and Francis had been making the occasional beast with

two backs, they'd actually revealed that they'd been married for a year or so.

She was sure that it was the result of some con or another. Both had active and lucrative side jobs, in addition to whatever intelligence service they were swindling out of a paycheck at the moment.

Emma had heard that Theelia, the co-owner of the bar that she was headed to, had actually been the Celebrant, after gaining some mail-order ordination here on Leelix III.

As she moves through the neighborhood around the Starfleet base, known as Grisha's Folly, she can see more signs of renewal. Her eyes widen as they fall on the broad, muscular figure of who she had come looking for.

Agon Zhiq'thiq doesn't strain even a tiny bit as he holds a gigantic beam in place as it is secured. She smiles to herself, remembering a long-ago engineering rotation on a frigate when she had been a cadet.

He releases the beam and turns to the apparent owner of the shop, a tiny, furred denizen of a species that she didn't recognize. The owner pulls over and embraces Agon tightly around his leg. When he looks up and spots her, she can see that he is surprised and pleased at the effusive thanks.

He manages to disentangle himself, shaking his head at offers of food, just taking a cup of water.

"Good citizen Agon," Emma says. "It's a good look for you."

"Hello Prickly," he says, using a long-held nickname given to her by Morgan McMurtry, a play on her name, as well as her occasional personality. "So you've come to take me away from all of this?"

She raises her eyebrows. "Second thoughts, Agon?"

"Always," says another voice. Emma feels a burst of familiar warmth at her middle. She doesn't feel the warmth of the Link in her heart, like she does around Chandra, having never established the prelanka-gere, the bond of the heart with this woman.

Only the prelanka-dere, the bond of the body, on many occasions.

Emma turns and smiles at the newcomer. Theelia, his Deltan mate and business partner is standing there. She pulls Emma into a tight embrace, then kisses her for a long moment.

She turns in Emma's arms and looks at Agon. She has a duffel bag slung over her strong shoulder, as well as Agon's jacket.

Emma sees another woman, a human or near-human, who she recognizes as their bartender. There is something about the older woman, something she'd never been able to put her finger on.

"What about you, Theelia?" Emma asks. "We have a good pilot and navigator in Shiv, but we could always use one with your experience."

She can see that Theelia is torn, especially when she looks at Agon. Finally, she shakes her head. "Not this time. Maybe when we've got the bar up and running a bit more. I think Usura could use the help."

"Or I could use my owners out from under my feet while I get her going again," the bartender says in her accented voice. She rolls her eyes, but smiles with what she probably thinks is a good-natured grin.

Emma isn't so sure.

"I'll go with you to the ship, since you're not raising immediately," Theelia says. "It'll give me a chance to get familiar with everything. As well as put the fear of the gods in Croft for the safe return of Agon."

Emma laughs. Theelia takes her arm in hers.

"Tell me about your little boy," she says in an even warmer voice. "Everything."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Lots of joining, both of ships and otherwise.

Coming Aboard to Join

Lieutenant Jade Salieri stands at attention in front of her new captain. She knows that her Monster Maroon is pin-perfect and the cowlick that has perpetually plagued her short hair has been tamed with a planet's worth of product.

Saavik's eyes, which resemble the mineral from earth that had given Jade the first name, moves up from the PADD, which most probably contains all of her past Starfleet sins, listed chronologically and probably sorted by subject.

Kaylin Stone-Hunter stands at parade rest behind Saavik, against the backdrop of Mars in the open drydock. Her eyes are on Jade, Starfleet correct.

Probably hoping that her 'project' doesn't pee on the floor in front of her new captain. Jade tamps down the resentment. Apparently not quickly enough, as she sees Kaylin's dark eyes narrow at her.

"I see a great deal of good here, Lieutenant. Unbalanced by, as my XO would put it so aptly, 'a propensity for Fleet-level bullshit'."

The obscenity, even in a quote, seems to roll off Saavik's tongue easily. This is a woman, who in spite of her heritage is comfortable in the 'colorful metaphors' of various worlds.

Saavik's lip quirks up. "Stand at ease, Lieutenant. In fact, sit."

"I'd rather stand, Captain. It will make it easier when you toss my ass off your pretty ship."

Jade sees Kaylin close her eyes.

Shit, Jade thinks. You've blown it again.

"I don't need you to stand, Mr. Salieri," Saavik says. "I'm perfectly capable of, as you put it, 'tossing your ass off of my ship,' from a seated position."

Jade sits. She realizes that Saavik has referred to her by name, rather than just her rank, coupled with the familiarity of the 'Mister.'

"Something I don't intend to do," Saavik adds. "I trust Commander Stone-Hunter. I chose her as my XO, over many other more senior candidates. I value candid input, at least until I've made a decision. But you will give it to only me and/or with Kaylin in the room if it goes beyond normal discussion in the department heads' meeting. Not in front of other peers, and most certainly not in front of junior officers or the crew."

She finds herself nodding. "Understood, Captain," she manages, hoping that the emotion of finally finding someone who would not only give her a second chance, but would be someone she could follow into whatever level of hell that she needed to, doesn't cause her to burst into tears.

Saavik stands up from the conference table. Jade rises as well. "Thank you, Captain," she says.

"Welcome aboard, Mr. Salieri. Try not to be the patron saint of mediocrity."

Jade stands there, her mouth agape.

Did she just quote a twentieth-century movie about Mozart, referring to my ancestor?

She sees that Kaylin is grinning broadly.

Bigger Plans

Chandra takes Hunter's hand as she enters the ready room. Decker follows behind her, then allows Hunter to sit at the conference table before taking a seat along the bulkhead, the very picture of the dutiful junior aide.

There are no other senior aides. Hunter hasn't found a chief of staff or a flag lieutenant yet. Only Decker and a chief yeoman.

The door snaps open again. Morgan McMurtry, 'M-cubed' as Emma Rosewarne had called her, probably in revenge for the 'Prickly' sobriquet that she had coined, walks in. Hunter gets up and takes her hand, then pulls her into a deep embrace.

When they break apart, Hunter extends her hand to the newest department head for the ship.

Lieutenant Commander Ava Fonseca, the new Ops Manager as the position was now called, remains standing until Hunter gestures towards one of the seats.

“So we need to discuss what your secret evil plan is for the *Yorkie* and the Banshees,” Chandra says.

“I’m not sure the current crew of the *Yorktown* would be thrilled with you referring to them by the nickname of a small, yappy dog,” Hunter says dryly.

“Sorry. Old habits,” Chandra says. “Comes from serving on at least two versions of the flagship of the fleet, the Big E.”

“I think that you’ll need to get over it, Chan,” Hunter says.

Chandra nods. “Though a little bit of arrogance goes a long way.”

“We have two questions that we need answers for. One will be easy. Do you have an idea of organization and distribution of your cutters?” Hunter asks.

“I do, Admiral. I’ve discussed with with Commander Storm, who couldn’t be here today, as she’s actually meeting with the other flotilla commanders.”

“Are they getting your plan?”

“At least part of it. I wanted buy-in and input from them, in addition to yours.”

Decker hands Hunter her PADD. She scans the list for a moment. “I notice you still have *Aerfen* on here?”

Chandra avoids Decker’s gaze. “I do. I’m not sure she’ll stand with us though. I’m trying to at least keep her from the breaker’s yard.”

Hunter is quiet for a moment. Chandra can see the raw emotion in her eyes. Finally she looks directly at Chandra. “I see how you’re avoiding eye contact with my junior aide, so that tells me that she is involved in any shenanigans that I shouldn’t know of.”

Chandra says nothing, but sees Decker’s widened eyes. “And the other question, Admiral?” she asks.

“You’re going to be staffing up the *Yorktown* with officers that have primarily served in the Border Dogs, as well as some crewmembers. How do you expect to mesh the two?”

Chandra is silent for a moment. “Very carefully. All of my senior officers have served with the Border Dogs, that is correct. But with the exception of Decker—if you let her go—they’ve all served on starships and heavier scouts. They know starship crews. I think the biggest adjustment will be for the starship crews. Hopefully that sensitivity will go a long way.

Hunter nods. “And the uniform issue?”

“I may have to ask for a dispensation on that, Admiral. I’m not sure that putting everybody in field greens is the best idea. Hell, even on landing party missions, the crews will probably still wear the turtlenecks under the field tops.”

Chandra sees that Hunter is thoughtful. “Do what you think best on that Chan. Offer them the opportunity, but they probably don’t need to look like a bunch of pirates. Hopefully the Charlies and the Deltas will at least catch on.” She looks down her nose at her foster daughter. “Your little modified Bravo uniform, with your cleavage hanging out in the vest probably won’t go over well.”

“Might raise the morale,” Morgan says with a smirk.

The laughter fades after a moment.

“We’ll need to discuss your first mission, Chan,” Hunter says softly.

Chandra gestures to Ava Fonseca. “Lieutenant Commander Fonseca was on the *Starlight* before she went down. She has some suggestions for us.”

“I think that we’re going to have to be able to accept a certain amount of fleas,” she says.

Hunter’s eyebrows raise at that. She suddenly nods with realization. She looks at Chandra. “You’re going to be lying down with dogs.”

“Yeah. With a Targsbane to be precise. We have to do what we can to re-establish Croft with the fifth column or whatever the hell it is he was doing some lying down with.”

“So is our ‘diplomatic liaison officer’ going under as well?” Chandra asks.

Ava is thoughtful for a moment. “At least maybe with Ael’s crew. I think it would be safer, especially if we have to insert Croft deep again.”

“I think we’re going to have to do that,” Hunter says. “I’ll talk to that narcissist who is his new boss. I’m sure McCall and C will want to weigh in.”

When she mentions the last name, or initial, she looks straight at Morgan McMurtry.

Deviousness

Decker Sinclair watches her fellow command course students celebrate the ending of the first month of class. She sips her drink, a Horse’s Neck that the Academy bar specializes in.

Brandy and ginger ale. The traditional drink of Royal Navy officers at least since the early twentieth century. She’d developed a taste for it

when she had been a first-class cadet and allowed to be served at this establishment.

A shadow passes over her. Terry Ramirez, grandson of Marcus Ramirez, who'd led Starfleet through the cauldron of the first Klingon war, gives her his twenty credit grin. Unlike Steve Turner, his version at least seems halfway sincere.

She wonders if the salespitch is coming next.

"Not bad, Sinclair," he says.

She raises an eyebrow, then takes another sip of her drink.

"You and Turner are neck-and-neck in the lead. They can't even measure the difference."

She sets her glass down. "You're not doing too bad yourself, Ramirez. Maybe a tenth of a point behind."

He nods. "Too bad about that circuit delivery to your project that you were responsible for. That may drop you a bit on the next one."

She manages to keep from narrowing her eyes at the mention of that mysterious glitch in the delivery software that had sent critical systems to another ship.

At Antares. With her ID codes on the shipping order.

She wonders which of these two assholes might've had the skill to hack the system, or at least know someone who could accomplish it.

She looks deep into his brown eyes. He spreads his hands a bit, palms outward. She realizes that he really does have a nice smile, at least when he isn't plotting against her to close that tenth of point's distance.

"I've heard a little bit about a side job. Something you're working on for extra credit."

Decker manages to keep her expression even. "Oh? 'Cause I hadn't heard about that." She hopes that she is a good enough actress to pull off the innocent act.

"Come on, Sinclair. I'm not Turner. I'm just trying to stay competitive. I can never compete with you two."

"You're pretty damned close, Terry," Decker says.

"I can help you," he says. "Especially if it's working on a ship. A certain type." He leans down and whispers into her ear. "I've got a line on some vintage fluidic circuitry," he adds, whispering.

Decker keeps her expression even. She doesn't focus on him. She watches out of the corner of her eye as Turner stares at the two of them talking to one another.

She finishes her drink. "I think that we need to go somewhere else. Too many prying eyes."

He nods and finishes his beer. "My place?"

She shrugs. "Why not?"

It doesn't take them long to get to his quarters in the graduate-level dorms. Her eyes take in the room, trying to find something of his personality here, where he is living.

She hadn't really found anything of Stevenson Bailey Turner, when he had borne her down to his bed in similar quarters.

There was a lot here. Family photos and the like, a few trinkets from the few worlds he had visited in his brief career.

Terry reaches down and brings his lips down to hers. She closes her eyes as he gently opens the kiss up.

Unlike Turner, he seems to be actually interested in letting her get some pleasure out of the act.

Terry moves his hands to the hem of her shirt, drawing it over her head. As she rests her forehead against his broad chest, she asks herself in her head, what her motivations are for doing this.

She thinks that it might be different than the motivation for when she had started down this road with Turner.

At the very least, she thinks that the fallout from this might distract both of them. As she closes her eyes to the feel of his mouth on her breasts, she senses something from the file in her brain marked 'Chandra's Link.'

Her captain gazes at her in the remnants of that Link. A slow eyeroll shows in the gray eyes.

No, she thinks. A tie is as good as a win when you're at the top of your game.

Oh hell no it isn't, comes another voice in her conscience. *It's nowhere near as good,* the voice says in something close to a cockney accent.

She shoves everyone out of her head as she flips him over and starts to kiss her way down his torso.

Switching Over

Joelle Grayson curses as the connector slips from her hand in the Jeffries tube. It bounces down to the deck and out of the tube to the

passageway. She curses again for good measure as she bangs her head on the overhead of the tube.

“Goddamned Cohort system,” she add for good measure. “What the hell is it doing on a *Constitution*?”

“A good question,” says a quiet voice. A light green hand, attached to a massive, muscular forearm clad in tactical dark green, holds up the connector. The device looks microscopic in his massive hand.

“You’re the tactical and security officer,” she says. “Grasp.”

“Guilty,” he says in a surprisingly quiet voice for one so large. She transfers the tool to her other hand and holds the other one out.

“Joelle Grayson. Chief Engineer.”

“I recognized you. Even though we haven’t had time for a proper sit down of all of the officers.”

She gestures towards the open panel. “I’m working on it. My propulsion assistant is working on it in Main Control. Getting it tied in and everything.”

“And I’m sure the captain appreciates it,” he says.

“You don’t, Commander?” she asks, her eyes narrowing.

“Call me Jaig. Or just Grasp. There’s a lot of commanders of one type or another around here. Getting hard to tell’em all apart. I’m not a big fan. It might be great for smaller ships, corvettes and cutters. But I’m not sure a heavy needs to be part of the network.”

Joelle shrugs as she takes up the two microconnections again. “You’re not wrong. But I think our Captain wants to know what’s going on.”

“She is hands-on,” he says, a dry tone in his voice.

She starts as she realizes something. “You’re that Grasp. The one that... She stops as she realizes what she is about to say.

His expression is somewhat guarded, but finally he grins. “I had a little help blowing out the crew.”

“Is that something normal under a Deltan’s command?”

“It might be under hers. You looking to try to have a private briefing?”

Joelle says nothing. “This isn’t the Border Dogs,” she says. It sounds lame even to her.

He grins. “Well, technically we are.” He looks down at her hands. Her eyes follow his.

She realizes that she has made the connection she’d been trying to make for the last hour-and-a-half.

“See,” he says. “It might do you some good.”

Joelle looks into his blue eyes.

Reporting as Ordered

Commodore Sandiyi Prandi checks her dress blue uniform for any sign that it isn’t absolutely inspection ready. A Starfleet security operator eyes her, his own armor polished to a high sheen.

The door swings open. She walks through, checking herself out in the mirror one more time. The new, broad gold stripe, a remnant of the old style of rank insignia, on her sleeve gleams in the light of the marble entryway, along with a new Bronze Cluster with jewel, the indicator that the medal had been awarded in combat.

The first combat decoration she had received in twenty years.

She isn’t sure that she had actually deserved it. She didn’t think she had even accomplished her mission for Section 31.

An elderly officer in Service Dress Alphas, a commander, motions to her. She follows the ancient mariner through the marble passageways of the Board of Admiralty.

Finally, he manages to make it to a door. Before he can knock, a clear voice says, “Come in.”

The door swings open. A woman wearing the rare insignia of a Grand Admiral—basically a Fleet Admiral’s insignia with an extra wreath rises from a comfortable chair. She looks at Sam with narrowed blue eyes.

Sam waits for a sign. She knows the woman’s actual age, but she looks much younger. The eyes are as clear as the voice and there is still gold in the long hair, flowing loosely around the shoulders. She feels her eyes widen as she realizes that the old woman wears her black delta openly on the breast of the bomber version of the Alpha jacket.

Finally, she holds out her hand. Sam crosses over and takes it. She feels the strength there, even knowing that age.

“So, Starfleet gave you a promotion,” Charity Brannigan says. “What exactly did you do to deserve it?”

“Besides making sure that your ancient ass isn’t sitting in a jail cell at a penal colony, rather than this temple to Starfleet’s past? Not much.”

She does notice that the right side of the woman's lips quirk briefly.

"And we're still in the shadows, Sam, dear. Still in hiding."

"But we're still in existence. Starfleet Intelligence, in the guise of McCall's lackey Cavendish is looking heavily into a connection with the Romulans, via both the Romulan agent, Reese, and whatever the hell Stivek was doing."

"Have we established a connection to Cartwright and Stivek? To Nanclus or Chang?"

"There are several possible leads."

"Goddamn Lance Cartwright. I hope he rots in hell, for what he caused Section 31," Brannigan spits, with unexpected vehemence.

"Who else has Intelligence and Special Ops roped into this?"

"Chandra and her squadron. Plus close ties to a Federation Free Agent. A new one."

The old woman exhales. "Let me guess. Blackthorne's whelp."

"I'm not privy to that," Sam says.

"Then get privy. And see what you can do to find out more about what Chandra and her people are doing. I want to know what the connection is with the Roms. I don't want us to be connected with foreign powers anymore."

"I'll do my best," Sam says. "I am just a starship commander, still."

"And that is where Section 31 needs you." Her eyes gleam with interest. "I think we need our own ship again. Start transferring our people to your crew."

"We aren't that many. It could put us in trouble if we lose the ship."

"Then don't lose the fucking ship," she says.

Sam stares at her, then turns away without acknowledging the old woman.

The Hunter

The operative rests against the bulkhead of the old freighter. One of the crew walks right next to him without noticing him, as he blends into the gray of the metal and the paint. He manages to not say anything when the crewmember steps on his foot.

He grits his teeth, wanting nothing more than to lash out and snap the Tellarite's neck. He eases his anger by thinking about his former partner, who had caused him to be captured and arrested.

His former mate, Usura.

He can't feel anger at her.

Silik, and the shadowy leaders of whatever faction he had sold his loyalty were the ones that he was angry at.

For stranding them in this time period with no support and no way to get home.

No other enhancements than the ones that they had come here with.

It had only been his contact with yet another shadowy organization that had ensured their survival. He had only had to agree to carry out certain assignments for them.

Assignments that both of them had been uniquely qualified for.

Until Usura had turned on him on a mission. He'd managed to stab her after she'd shot him; he'd thought that she was dead when she had fallen from the cliff.

The target, a young child had escaped with his nanny, as the hunter hadn't been able to go after them.

He'd mourned Usura; he'd truly loved her at one time. He had seen a change in her, almost from the time they had been tasked with those assignments by the new shadows. A group known by a number, ostensibly in the background of the descendent organization of Archer's Starfleet.

He hadn't been sure if he was working for Section 31, or just one member, a Vulcan officer.

It had been on another job when he had found out she had been alive.

She'd shot him again, foiling the job of killing.

Then she had vanished into the mists of this time

Now his contact with Section 31 was dead. Killed by his hand under new orders. He had found Usura, but he knew she was untouchable, as she seemed to be working for one of the numerous factions of Klingons.

He closes his eyes. Remembering a time before, when he had purpose—even if it wasn't one he had chosen.

Now he was adrift.

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