

The Razor's Edge

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by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

Summary

Stardate 3997.09: Lieutenant Commander Taliah Chaudhari faces a career crossroads as unexpected news forces her to confront her own doubts. With the support of her commanding officer and old friend, Captain Zoe Valentinou, Taliah must decide whether to take a leap into the unknown or remain anchored in her frustration.

Notes

Historian's Note: This story takes place a week and a half after the events in "[Your Service Honors Us](#)."

NCC-1697 (USS *Gallant*)
En route to Antares Ship Yards, Warp 5.
November 11, 2322 (Stardate 3997.09)
Officer's Stateroom 3-A18

Lieutenant Commander Taliah "Razor" Chaudhari slammed the PADD onto her desk with a force that sent a sharp crack reverberating through the stateroom. The tension coiled inside her finally broke, tears slipping free as her chest tightened, each breath shallow and ragged. She shut her eyes, fighting back the overwhelming frustration, but the tears kept coming, falling onto the desk in synchronized drops.

The door chime interrupted her turmoil. Taliah flinched, hastily swiping the back of her hand across her cheeks. "One moment," she called, her voice straining for control.

She rushed to the head, grabbing a towel and pressing it against her damp face, willing the redness to fade. After a deep breath, she returned to the door, pressing the panel to let it slide open.

Captain Zoe Valentinou stood on the other side, her eyes heavy with concern. "I saw the notice," she said quietly, her Cypriot accent softening the edges of her words. "Can I come in?"

Taliah silently stepped aside, allowing Valentinou to enter. The door hissed shut behind her with a quiet finality.

The captain moved toward the desk, her gaze falling on the PADD lying face down. With a practiced, unhurried motion, she picked it up and skimmed the notice. A soft sigh escaped her. "I know you had your heart set on that post," she murmured, her voice gentle. "I'm sorry, Taliah."

Taliah's shoulders rose in a dismissive shrug, though her clenched jaw betrayed her. "It's Starfleet. You don't always get what you want."

Valentinou placed the PADD back on the desk with deliberate care, then turned to face Taliah, arms folded across her chest. "True enough," she conceded, her eyes narrowing slightly. "After all, who'd want the fleet's oldest light commander anyway, right?"

"Gee... thanks," Taliah replied, her voice laced with bitterness.

Valentinou quirked a crooked grin. "Just giving voice to what you're thinking."

Taliah snorted. "Since when are you Betazoid?"

"Careful, Commander. That's a lot of lip for a subordinate."

"Shove it up your fucking ass, Zoe."

Zoe chuckled at the sharp retort. "Okay, easy, *Razor*," she said, invoking Taliah's callsign. "I'm simply reminding you that your mouth is your worst enemy. You should've been wearing a captain's device by now. With that reputation, is it any surprise they passed you over for *Arcadia*?"

Taliah dropped into her chair with a frustrated sigh. "It was my best shot at full commander," she muttered, running a hand through her hair. "But I seem to have a real knack for getting in my own way."

Zoe eased into the seat across from her, uninvited but welcome. "You're damn good at what you do. One of the best pilots to wear the uniform. I'm just lucky enough to be one of the few in Starfleet who sees it."

"And I'm lucky enough that my Academy bestie has her own ship," Taliah added with a faint smirk.

Zoe chuckled, a wry glint in her eye. "Well, that doesn't hurt either." She hesitated for a beat, then leaned forward. "Look, I know your current tour's wrapping up, and you're searching for your next assignment. And... well..."

Taliah's eyes narrowed with suspicion. "What did you do?"

Zoe shifted slightly, her voice faltering before she sped through the confession. "Let's just say I called in a favor."

Before Taliah could respond, the PADD on the desk chimed, signaling an incoming message.

"What did you *do*?" Taliah repeated, rising from her chair to grab the PADD.

Zoe remained silent, letting her friend process it herself.

Taliah's eyes darted over the message, then back again, as if rereading it would make it more real. "*Musashi*?"

Zoe leaned back in her seat, arms folded casually. "Brand new construction. Command cruiser, finishing up over Mars as we speak," she explained. "They're looking for a new Cee-Ess-Gee. The billet requires a full commander, so you'll get a brevet promotion."

Taliah blinked, still in disbelief. "And this wild captain accepted me without so much as an interview? Who does that?" She paused, then read the name again. "Captain... Leo Verde?"

Zoe corrected her with a small smile. "It's pronounced *bear-day*, not *ver-day*. Anyway, he's big on second chances, so I think you'll get along just fine."

Taliah raised an eyebrow. "One of your friends, then?"

"Friend is a bit of a stretch," Zoe replied, her tone casual.

Taliah narrowed her eyes, her voice teasing. "What... is he an ex or something?"

Zoe snorted, shaking her head. "No way!"

Taliah leaned against the desk, folding her arms as she eyed Zoe from a distance. "Close enough for him to take on an officer based on your recommendation."

Zoe shrugged, a wry smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. "If you must know, Leo used to be a JAG attorney. We crossed paths when I was XO on *Norwich*. You'll understand what I mean when you meet him."

Taliah's expression shifted from curious to incredulous. "Oh, perfect! A JAG lawyer in command of a starship? What the hell have you gotten me into? My career might never recover from this!"

Zoe frowned, her usual banter slipping as she spoke more seriously. "I wouldn't set you up to fail, Taliah. Leo cut his teeth in the Border Service, spent six years on frigates. And he didn't get his captaincy through favors—Admiral Saavik herself put him in command. You know she doesn't tolerate incompetence."

Taliah blinked, the surprise flickering across her face. "*Saavik*? Okay, that's reassuring."

"So relax," Zoe said, turning fully to face her. "I know today's been a punch in the gut, and I get how much you wanted to serve with Captain Locke. But I really think Leo's a solid alternative, especially since he and Locke were academy besties, too."

Taliah nodded slowly, letting the tension drain from her shoulders. "Alright, fine. Sold." She gazed out through the wide viewports, watching the warp-stretched stars blur in the distance. A sigh escaped her. "Guess, either way... I'll be out of here in two weeks, right?"

Zoe's expression softened into a sad smile. She stood, crossing over to join Taliah by the view. Resting her head gently on the shorter woman's shoulder, she held her friend tightly. "Yeah... It's never easy saying goodbye to a *gallant* lady."