

## I can feel the flames on my skin

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## I can feel the flames on my skin

by [Pixie](#)

### Summary

L'Rell and Admiral Cornwell successfully flee the Klingon Ship of the Dead and escape to *Discovery*

### Notes

Everything is the same in canon through "Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum" EXCEPT Lorca is not secretly from the Mirror Universe and Tyler is not secretly a Klingon; both are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress.

"The Klingon ship is hailing us, Captain."

Lorca frowns. Klingons don't like to talk. But this one is traveling alone, which is already out of the ordinary. They'd been discussing how to capture it— if they can get an invisibility screen to reverse engineer, it could turn the tide of the war. All the better if they don't have to fire and risk breaking anything.

"All right, let's hear it."

Bryce hits a button.

"Discovery—" Lorca's eyes widen as her voice fills the bridge. "This is Admiral Cornwell, permission to board."

The crew glance to the captain, poised at the edge of his chair, brow furrowed as his thoughts fly by too quickly and his heart pounds in his chest.

*It could be a trap.* That's his second thought. His first was *she's alive*, but he had to push that down and away and deal with the more likely option that it is a trap. A recording, the ship set to explode once they lower shields. He takes a breath and nods to Bryce to open a channel.

"Prove it."

"My codes would have been cancelled the instant—"

Lorca shakes his head at the comm. "I'm not interested in codes, Admiral." *Katrina*. "How can I trust it's you?"

The bridge is silent waiting for her response. Lorca glances at Rhys, who nods he's ready to fire on the ship if ordered.

"May fortune favor the bold."

Lorca purses his lips. All eyes are on him, none of them know if she's passed the test. Which, theoretically, makes it a particularly good response. He nods.

"Power down, Admiral, we'll bring you in."

There's a split second hesitation but trust is required on both sides. "Understood."

At a gesture from the captain, Bryce cuts the comm. Lorca stands. "Security and medical to the shuttle bay."

"Yes, sir." Bryce relays the order below decks.

"Mr. Tyler."

"Aye, Captain." He stands to join Lorca.

"Saru..." Lorca squints, and changes his mind, gesturing for the Kelpien to come along. And— "Burnham, you, too." She falls in step with the three men as they head to the turbolift. "You have the bridge, Detmer."

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The shuttle bay is crowded. Stamets is directing the operation, Cadet Tilly under orders to flood the bay and force the ship out if anything goes sideways. A full security detail, medical team, plus Tyler, Saru, and Burnham set to observe. Everyone is armed. Everyone is tense.

The Klingon vessel is the smallest they've seen, some form of shuttle or light cruiser. It looks used, and has been fired on. But so would a trap. As the doors start to part, Lorca signals security to be ready.

She walks out with her hands up and empty, signaling surrender, and stops at the edge of the ramp. Her uniform is torn. Hair matted. She's dirty, disheveled. Bruised. But alive. And unbroken. She's standing in defiance. Of the Klingons she's left behind, the phasers pointed at her chest, the crowd of people staring at her with a mixture of wonder, pity, and fear.

Her eyes land on him.

Lorca passes his phaser to Saru, closes the gap between them with barely three strides, and kisses her full on the lips. Kat's eyes go wide as he leans in, but instinct takes over the instant his mouth touches hers. Her hands lower to his shoulders, clutching the fabric of his uniform, the familiar space for her body to tuck against his chest as his arms pull her in close, as if she's something precious. She loses herself a moment, ignores her tired body, her angry heart, her cautious mind. But a clanging sound breaks the spell and she pulls back, eyes flicking past Gabriel's shoulder to see his crew. Half are staring, eyes wide and mouths open, like fish. The other half are looking anywhere else.

"Sorry," squeaks the young cadet, her face as red as her hair as she replaces a fallen tool, the source of the clanging, on the engineering station.

Katrina's eyes move back to Lorca's, realizing what he's done. Set her up. Compromised her position. Nothing she says about this captain, to this crew, will be taken at face value ever again. But his expression is neither passive, nor menacing. Calculating, maybe but there is real affection and...pain, in his eyes. She burns the look into her memory. His hands press into her shoulders, one swift, deep squeeze, and then drop.

"Admiral?"

The medic approaches, a hand out to take her away, to a bed, a pillow, a meal. Weakness washes over her, but she squares her shoulders.

"In a minute," she tells the doctor, eyes still on Lorca. "Captain."

"How did you escape?"

She presses her lips, turning back to the shuttle door. "I had help."

Lorca follows her gaze, instinctively signaling for the crew to raise their weapons even before he catches sight of the Klingon woman.

She's a kind of mirror for the admiral. Hands up and open, but head held high. Messy, bloody, silently fuming. His eyes harden at her scar. He raises a hand but it's empty, Saru has his phaser. Behind him, Tyler seethes, a dangerous energy pulsing off him in an almost visible wave.

"Tyler fall back." Lorca glances over his shoulder. "Burnham." Beside Ash, she covers his weapon with her hand and lowers it. Fury cut with fear crosses his face, but he steps back as ordered.

Watching, Cornwell frowns, and looks from captain to Klingon for an explanation. Gabriel's expression is a storm. L'Rell brushes a hand down the side of her face.

"He gave me this," she tells the admiral in accented standard.

Katrina pales beneath the dirt on her cheeks as realization dawns. The POW. The scars. She feels sick. But presses on. "She wants asylum."

"And you granted it?"

She flinches at the question—the accusation. She hadn't, she wants to explain, she was in no position to do so at the time. She was a prisoner, and she didn't promise anything.

"The Federation does not have a death penalty," L'Rell spits out, repeating Cornwell's words. Daring them to defy her.

Gabriel holds Katrina's gaze a long tense moment. "That's right. Secure her in the brig. Double the guards." Security closes in around the prisoner.

One of the medics raises a tricorder, gesturing toward the Klingon woman's open wounds. "Sir—"

Lorca waves a dismissive hand. "Fine, go with them. But no one is to be alone with her."

L'Rell is marched off in shackles, surrounded by security with two medical officers following. Tyler watches with dark eyes, body tight with tension. Michael's hand remains on his arm, for support, protection, more than restraint. Lorca watches, standing like a rock, ready, eager, to shield any of them from harm.

"Ma'am, please come to sickbay, now."

Gabriel looks over at Culber's quiet entreaty, a gentle hand trying to corral her to leave the deck. She looks exhausted. Raw. But fighting it, and not just the exhaustion. The doctor, too. Nothing new— she's always been a fighter and hates to be taken care of. It would be comforting if he didn't know her so well. He sees the fear beneath the fight. She's afraid if she lies down, she won't get back up.

"Go, Kat. We need you strong."

She swallows, stubborn. "Captain—"

He takes her by the shoulders. "Let the doctor look you over. Take a shower." She rolls her eyes. Good, she's listening. "I will be right there. We will talk. Barring an attack, I will make no decisions on my own. Okay?"

Exasperation contorts her face and it is abundantly clear she doesn't believe him for a second, but she nods succinctly and allows him to pass her over to Culber. They're only doing their duty. Respect requires her to do the same. Lorca watches until the doctor and his patient have disappeared around the corner. She doesn't look back.

As the remaining crew exit the bay, the captain turns his attention back to his chief of security.

"Tyler."

Ash straightens, tries to banish the shame clear in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Captain."

"Don't apologize." Tyler's eyes flicker with surprise. "But the admiral's right." Even in times of war it's important to adhere to the strictures of the Federation. Especially in times of war. And, because Lorca is more of a pragmatist than an idealist, "And we could learn from her."

Ash acknowledges his words with a curt nod. Lorca tilts his head to look Tyler straight on.

"That's not on you. Understand?" It needs to be clear. Tyler has no reason, or responsibility, to forgive.

He nods. "Thank you, sir."

Lorca drops a hand on his shoulder. He glances to Burnham, still planted beside Tyler. She nods, understanding. Trauma unites.

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Culber assures him she's as well as can be expected, and resting comfortably. The CMO has ordered her to be observed for 48 hours, and it will take longer to truly heal. "But she's okay, sir." Lorca nods, thank you. "Would you like to stay a bit?" He doesn't answer. "I'll get a chair." The doctor disappears.

She looks smaller sleeping.

A memory tickles his mind. One of those conferences, before the war. She wore a blue dress. They were hiding from his ex— Alexa. Not for any untoward reasons, he didn't want to deal with drama and she...well, she indulged him, like she always does.

*Why don't your girlfriends ever like me, Gabriel?  
Because they come and go. You stay.*

Culber returns with a stool and sets it beside the bed. He gives the readout a final glance before activating a privacy shield around them and slipping away.

"How do I look?"

He smiles. Of course she's not asleep. "Better. How do you feel?"

Her eyes flutter open and meet his. They hold the look, silent, for a long time. Finally she raises a hand. He takes it, sits and pulls the stool close to the bed.

"Your POW. She was..."

"Yes."

"And you."

He shrugs.

Kat pulls her lips in over her teeth, clearly distraught. He closes his grip on her hand.

"But not you," he reminds her. "That's a good thing."

Her eyes don't believe it.

"I didn't know."

"I did."

His voice is rough in the quiet. Her eyes flicker at the acknowledgement. At the enormity of it. He blew up hundreds of people to save them from the fate he sent her to. Or at least left her to. His hand tightens on hers again. He won't let her go.

"Stay."

"What?"

"Stay." She frowns in confusion. "On *Discovery*. Talk to your Klingon. Talk to my POW. Talk to me."

"I can't be—"

"Okay," he interrupts the old argument. "Not me." He strokes her hand with his thumb. "But a lot of people on this ship could use your help."

She wants to say, *I'm in no state to help anyone, least of all the collection of wounded and lonely on this ship. I'm tired. I'm so tired.*

She wants to slap him. To shove him to the ground. To scream that she isn't a vessel for his redemption. To hurt him, she wants to hurt him.

She wants him to wrap his arms around her to hold her together as she cries for days. She wants to run away together, like they should have done twenty years ago. Steal the Klingon ship and become pirates playing all sides. They'd be great at it.

She wants to hate him. She wants to never have met him.

She wants to stay.

She lifts her hand, under his too tight grip, and threads her fingers through his. Now they're equals. "Don't kiss me in public again."

He wants to say, *As long as I can kiss you in private.* He wants to tease her, fall into their comfortable banter. Wave away the rest.

He wants to pull her into a tight embrace, bury his face in her body, feel the weight of her, prove she's real and whole.

He wants to say, *I love you. Just because we never say it doesn't mean it isn't true.* He wants to argue. He wants to climb into the hospital bed and curl her body into his.

He wants to tell her how scared he is. All the time.

He wants to say, *I'm sorry.* But it wouldn't be enough.

"No promises," he answers, lips curled in a half smile. And that says it all.

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