

Whiskey and Wine: The Perfect Pairing (New Year, New Us)

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Summary

In the New Year, the newly minted Commander Erin McLaughlin has a video date and a drink with her boyfriend to celebrate climbing the Academy ladder. They realize their tastes are a perfect pairing.

Notes

A small language note:

Since it is canonically established that Rios is Chilean (a nod to his portrayer, Santiago Cabrera, who was born in Venezuela to Chilean diplomat parents, I used a bit of common Chilean/general Spanish slang in this work.

In Spanish, the phrase "Poner las pilas" translates to "put in the batteries." The phrase is often used to mean "Wake Up!/Pay Attention!" It's also quite common for Chileans to shorten the phrase "por favor" (meaning "please") to porfa.

Because I used a command, I also used the reflexive form of poner, thereby making the phrase "Ponte las pilas" ("Put in your batteries.")

Erin McLaughlin stared out the window of her room at the Starfleet Academy. This was the last time she'd wake up in these halls again, hurtling headfirst into her final semester. She tapped absently on the PADD that her now steady boyfriend had given her and blushed brightly at the blinking notification on her screen.

Captain Cristóbal Rios of the unregistered freighter La Sirena had always promised he'd return in time for her graduation. She was thrilled and terrified by the prospect of serving aboard a starship. She wondered what her mission would be and what she might encounter along the way.

"You have an incoming message."

"Computer, identify sender."

"Cristóbal Rios." Erin's heart skipped a beat at the sound of her former librarian turned boyfriend's voice. He had been floating around space paying off a debt, but he'd promised to be home in time to see her walk across the Academy stage and get her first assignment as a Starfleet officer.

"Computer, play message and activate private listening."

"Private listening activated. Initializing video messaging."

"God, I wish I could see your face right now, *cielita*. I never thought I needed anyone before I met you. Now I miss you so damn much it hurts. Just two quarters til you get your assignment and fly off without me, eh? Always knew you were going to. Have you needed to move the roses into the hothouse, yet? I'm on an assignment in the middle of nowhere— better you don't know what I'm doing or who I'm working for."

"Cris."

"It's almost as if you're here with me. Like I can hear you saying my name."

"Cris, I—."

"If I didn't know any better, I would think you were in the room with me."

« ¡Porfa, amor, ponte las pilas! »

"Damn, your Chilean slang has gotten better since the last time we talked. You've been practicing and— wait, I actually called you? Thought I was leaving you a message."

"Hello to you too, handsome."

"See, I told you command would suit you. Giving orders already."

"Ha ha ha. How's the transport, Captain?" She got a sigh in response. He had promised her that things would be different this year. A new year, a new him. But she'd seen through the darkness of his mood. Cris was a functioning alcoholic with trauma who covered with dark humor.

"It's— um. It's interesting."

"Okay, so how's it all going? When was the last time you had a drink?" Cris winced but shrugged it off. His brain involuntarily answered for him.

Last night. When the loneliness was too much and the pain wouldn't leave me alone. I would never admit that to her, except . . .

"I think my ship's haunted."

"Wait a minute, you sound intrigued by this. By whom? Or what?"

"Former owner— a Klingon named Verengan. Died right here in this seat surrounded by his own cargo. Treasures." Erin whistled.

"So, you're a space pirate now?"

"You gonna turn me in, Ensign?"

"Permission to speak freely?"

"You always do."

"You think I'll start at ensign? Cute. I was pulling double duty when you met me, Commander— oh, I'm sorry—*Captain Rios, sir*. Due respect, check the tabs."

"My sincerest apologies, Lieutenant. Congrats. How's it feel?"

"Heavy as all fuck. But you know that, sir. To answer your earlier question. Of course, I'm not going to turn you in. You know better." Rios sat back in his chair, taking it all in. Seasons didn't feel like seasons in space, not the way they had on Earth. It would be winter now, and he would ordinarily be flying off some place warm to celebrate the new year. But this was different. He was off on new adventures.

"You know, you don't need to 'sir' me. I'm a civilian pilot now. Do you have alcohol service in your quarters, *mi vida*? I say this calls for a toast." Cris grabbed a glass and the brandy from his console, surprised when she gave him a smirk.

"Sauvignon Blanc, chilled glass."

"Look at you, all fancy."

"Is this a celebration or isn't it, Captain?"

"I suppose it is. In which case. . . Whiskey, neat. I'll have another later, if I need it." Erin's fond smile was enough to make him feel warm and nearly lightheaded before he'd ever taken a drink. She'd always had that effect. Magnetic and pulling him in with every word. He wanted to make a habit of this, of her alone with him. Just the two of them and a drink. But he wanted no screens in the way.

Whiskey and wine. We're a hell of a combination, huh, querida? He longed to feel the taste of it on her tongue, to savor her more than anything, but he promised himself it would come when she had shore leave. Assuming of course, that he could make it in time to meet her. She raised her glass, and he did the same.

"To promotions."

"To a new year, and a new us.", she followed with a smile, making his eyes light with laughter. It was not lost on him that she was making time now, making room for him even when she had duties to attend to and a ship to aid. Maybe she was the right girl to introduce to Raffi after all, when he was back on world and they both had the time to answer all of his friend's questions.

For now, however, they could revel in the idea of a perfect pairing. They went together like whiskey and wine: intoxicating, and perfectly complimentary. The tastes would linger on their tongues the way they lingered on each other's hearts. At least it would do until they made it home safely again.

Before he hung up, Cris stood and smiled at the screen. He was proud of her, even if he couldn't say the words. It made him happy to see her

following her dreams. He didn't need to hold her to any expectations or ask her to wait.

She would always be there, right when he needed her. She was *his* perfect pairing.

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