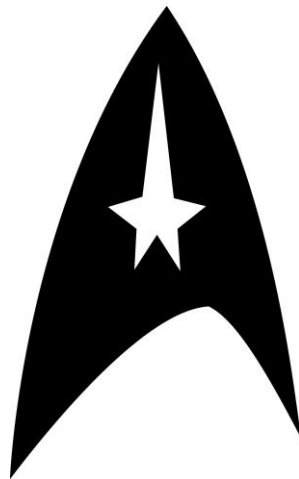


UNITED FEDERATION of PLANETS

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Weeping Woman

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What We Talk About When We Talk About Love

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Mindo

Ensign Keselowsky was at the main terminal before the Warp Core, working away, completing assignments and filling reports. Nearly done with his work, he noticed a new message coming in from an unknown source. It took only a few taps on the screen to see that the message did originate from within the Tornado. Opening it, his terminal went blank, save for a login prompt.

"Oh," he sat back, "it's one of those again."

Looking up from a data report one of the underlings had given him, Mindo said, "One of whats?" He walked over to see what Kes was looking at.

"Well, sir, it's one of these secret messages that Cara...er...Lieutenant Eunidas likes to send. She used to do these pretty frequently when she first started as Chief Engineer, but they kind of tapered off." He turned the terminal so that Mindo could see the blank screen with a login prompt. He also tilted it downward. "As an exercise in information security, the Lieutenant would send us, at random, messages. The information is usually not secret at all, but opening them, that is the real trick. We have only one opportunity to log in and to view the message before it deletes itself. On top of that, she provides us with two hints as to whose login information we need."

Keselowsky tapped on the screen. "And the hints are," he waited for them to display. "I can fix that. I'm an engineer.," he said questioningly, "and 'Elanin Singer Stone'." He looked to Mindo. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"No," Mindo lied, "but I think I can crack it. I'll take it in my office. It's probably for me anyway."

"Sure thing boss," Kes said as he backed out and forwarded it to Mindo's computer.

Mindo hurried into the Chief Engineer's office and pulled up his terminal, typed his login and password, and pulled up the message.

There was no message, at least there was no text. A diagram of the Tornado appeared before Mindo's eyes. The diagram rotated and zoomed in on the Navigational Deflector room, literally the forward-most part of the ship. An overlay, displaying heat signatures appeared over the diagram and Mindo could see only a single occupant in that room. The heat signature was too low for any humanoid. The figure looked as though it sat there, looking out of the diagram of a window.

Mindo was suddenly unsure of what was going on. The heat signature could be anything, though he was sure it was a person. Caradan? The hints seemed to fit Cara, but Mindo knew there were spies aboard. He remembered that pesky Yeoman knew about the singer stone. Was she a spy? Wouldn't surprise me, he thought.

Mindo stood up and headed out, trying not to look too suspicious. As he passed Keselowsky, he said, "Need to take care of something." He grabbed a toolkit, just in case. "Kes, you have Engineering. Try not to blow anything up."

"What, me blow something up. Hey, guys," he called out to everyone in Engineering, "when was the last time I blew anything up?"

Mindo left Engineering as hands rose and voices called out and within five minutes entered the Navigational Deflector room.

Sitting on the floor and looking out at the stars, was Caradan. She turned as the door opened and Mindo stepped in. "You got my message." She smiled at the sight of him. Even thinking about him made her feel better. Seeing him and being able to spend time alone with him, well that made her feel almost larger than life. "Were the others surprised I still played that old game?"

Mindo smiled, relieved to see Caradan there. "You didn't fool anyone, if that's what you mean." Mindo walked over to Caradan and wrapped his arms around her. "I missed you," he said softly, hugging her tight.

"I missed you too," she said with a sigh of relief. Now that the time since they last had time to spend together was at zero again, now that there was not some pressing matter of duty or obligation interrupting their personal time, "I missed you greatly." Holding him tightly in return, she looked out at the stars. "I love you Mindo," she said as though finishing in the middle of a thought.

Mindo buried his face in her shoulder and said, "I love you, Cara."

They held their embrace for a good, long moment. Then they pulled back, face to face, arms interlocked. Mindo smiled.

"You are always so beautiful," he said. "While I'm a freakin' mess." He felt haggard and worn, and his hair was thoroughly tousled. "I forgot how much more hectic things get when you're the Chief."

"Handsome Mindo," she said with a smile. She then leaned forward and rested her forehead against his, looking into both of his eyes with both of hers. "Want to switch jobs for a bit. Me the chief and you the XO?"

Mindo grinned at that. "You really want me pushing you around?"

She pushed him away playfully. "I don't push," then, "Do I?" Caradan shook her head. "No, I only wanted to get across how hectic things are being the XO." She lowered her voice some, "And dealing with that commander of ours." She reached out to Mindo and pulled him close again. "It truly is great knowing I have someone to turn to. I..." she started as though about to say more, but cut off her own words.

Mindo waited for a second, wondering what she was going to say. "What is it?" he asked. "You can tell me."

Caradan thought back to her meeting with Ixelom. She never thought to take advice from a Tellarite, but this Tellarite in particular was the ship's counselor and she made a rather good point. On top of all that, someone had to make the first move. "I..." she started, "I still do not understand many things and I know it is against Feserian culture as you have told me plenty of times, whereas Changelings do not even have a culture, much less social norms to even begin to understand such things or even anything in the way of scripts for others to act on, but..." Caradan suddenly concluded she was not making any sense whatsoever. "I told Riaan, Dr. Rrareth, that I love her. We've actually gone on a couple of dates. I do love her and this does not negate that in any way because, as I said, I do not fully understand these things as I..." was beginning to go senseless again. Caradan took a breath and enjoyed the sensation of air filling her mimicked lungs and then being forced out. "Mindo, when I think of love, and when I try to understand the concept of coupling with another, I only think of you. I love Riaan, and probably others, but I have come to understand there are levels and various definitions to love. And...if I were to choose between anyone, anyone that I have ever interacted with..." Caradan looked longingly into his eyes, "I would choose you."

Mindo nodded, his face serious as he listened. Afterward, he looked down for a moment, trying to gauge his own feelings.

"I think," he started, then paused for a second. "I think... I understand." He took her hands and rubbed the tops of them with his thumbs. "When Feserians think of love, we do not think of the concept of being 'in love,' but rather the concept of simply loving." He paused, trying to think of the right words. "Lately I've been seeing Ziara, Riaan's wife. She's fun, and I like her a lot. I haven't said 'I love you' to her because... because it's just not something Feserians say. When I say 'I love you,' specifically you, Cara, I mean it in a way that I care about you romantically and personally, and in a way so deep I can't fathom being without you." He paused to clear his throat. "For me, for all the people, men and women, that I have loved, you're the only one that's really mattered. Don't feel bad about your loving Riaan. It's not a betrayal to me, not in my eyes. Feserians don't take things like that as personally as other peoples. Am I making sense?"

Caradan gave a nod, and a smile. "You are. You make perfect sense." She looked back out at the stars. "I was just..." her form shifted slightly, primarily the side of her face and her left arm almost liquefied, but she maintained form. Caradan flexed the fingers of her left hand. "I had a dream recently. Yes, we Changelings do dream. I was all alone in a hostile place. I tried to bring someone to me. I called out your name, then Riaan's, I called for Kalin, Laurel, but no one came. When I awoke in my bowl, I thought of the captain, being a prisoner, I thought of Commander Shaqdac, and his hatred toward me." She looked back at Mindo. "I thought about the last time we were together, you and I, and I knew I had to do something, knew I had to say something." She looked down at her hands in Mindo's and enjoyed his touch. "I understand, I think, your culture and your ways. Please, don't read too much into my words. I guess I am just, what you may consider, a nervous wreck right now, you know, with the captain, and the commander, and that Trill pet of his. I'm sorry," she reclaimed her hands, "I'm letting my emotions get the better of me."

Mindo chuckled. "I think that's what love is supposed to be... emotions besting us." He looked down. "I've had my own struggles and conflicts too. Not just with Engineering either."

Caradan could hear the pain in his voice and she grabbed his hands gently, massaging just his fingers. "I was there when you told us...when you detailed your experiences on the Rhys." She realized she was dwelling only on her own feelings and emotions, almost completely forgetting Mindo's. "I'm sorry. I should have..."

Mindo's face turned serious, and he let go of Caradan's hands. "It's been a few months since Greep vanished and I still find no signs of him. Then there's the knowledge that this ship may be bugged, and that all of our lives could be in danger. Things have been quiet lately, but you know... something could..." Mindo trailed off, and he looked out the window into the stars, deep in thought.

"I was selfish," she admitted. "For that, I am sorry." She put a hand on his shoulder, slid it down his arm and rubbed lightly. "I am here for you Mindo, always here for you. If the ship is bugged...I have nothing to hide. Even if

Captain Prost himself is listening. If we were being spied on by those who would turn us over to the SoK, I think we would be in deep trouble by now. I do not know how much danger we are all in light of possible spies, but I do know this," she stopped rubbing his arm and squeezed where her hand stopped, over his bicep, "whatever happens...we can and will face it together. When things look bleak, I will not stop fighting for you." She embraced him in a hug. "And I miss Greep too."

Mindo put his hand on the side of Caradan's face and kissed her gently on the lips.

"We should probably get going," said Mindo, "before our superiors find us out. Do you happen to know if Davmorda has told anyone about us?"

"I've heard nothing. I really don't even care if she does. Besides, it seems the only person who would take issue with 'us' would be the commander. I may get an earful, he may look lowly upon you, but there is nothing else he can do. I don't let such things get to me," then she remembered why she lured Mindo to the Navigational Deflector room, because things were getting to her. "Though sometimes, life seems a bit too much for one person to handle." Caradan kissed him back. "I'm sorry I called you here for us to..." she cut off her own words to avoid keeping things deep and depressive. "Tell you what. Come by my quarters after your shift tonight. For all the time I have been on this ship, my bed remains unused. Still made up as the first day I arrived. Let's make use of it tonight."

Mindo smiled and put his hands on Caradan's shoulders. "I can't wait," he said, and kissed her again. "I'll see you tonight."

Cold Realities

by Ivy Sharzin & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth

Riaan's Quarters - Holodeck 2

Riaan sat in her chair, reviewing some of the results that she had been getting. The door chime activated and Riaan told them to come in.

The door slid open to reveal Ivy standing there in an over stuffed and thick fur coat. The fluffy fur was all white and seemed to have hair 3 to 4 inches long. A big smile was on Ivy's face, so big her eyes were even squinting.

Riaan wanted to smile at Ivy, but couldn't. There were only two people on the ship that she could smile easily at, Ziara and Caradan. "Ivy, welcome, it's good to see you. I wanted to talk to you about the results of some of the tests we have been running, so you could stay up to date on what we are doing."

Ivy stepped into her friend's quarters and was intrigued by the information provided. "That sounds interesting. Will it take long?" She really was interested, but was actually more interested, at the moment, in another idea. "I understand one of the holodecks has a public use time with a frozen ecosystem to explore. Would you like to come?"

Riaan thought about it for a moment, she would have to rearrange things on her schedule around a tiny bit, but she could do it. "I'd love to."

Riaan's answer pleased Ivy, who smiled and added, "I have never seen snow, nor any quantity of frozen water before."

Riaan filed that away in the back of her mind somewhere. "Then this will be an interesting experience for you. There are some places where snow is very common." Riaan said, putting together the PADD.

She stood and handed the PADD to Ivy. "We can walk and talk. This Padd contains everything that we've managed to learn about your species from you. While we can't generalize yet, there is a lot of fascinating trivia we were able to learn."

Ivy accepted the PADD, very surprised that someone was coordinating the information about her and her species. She followed Riaan out of the quarters as she was focused on the display in her hands. Ivy couldn't take her eyes off of the many pages of descriptions and definitions laid out. There were several diagrams as well.

Riaan continued, "Also, when you leave the Tornado, you should take at the very least the data here with you. It will help any doctors that try to treat you."

"This is truly amazing," Ivy exclaimed. She looked to her friend with a big smile and said, "Thank you."

Riaan wanted to smile at the compliment, but couldn't so she just blushed slightly. "Thank you, we worked hard on it, and if you let us, we'll keep building on it."

"Oh," Ivy began, "that would be wonderful." She looked down again at the display as they continued down the corridor.

Riaan nodded, "It's what we, the federation, do. A lot of us are out here because we want to find new species, explore strange new worlds, to boldly go where no one has been before. You're a part of that."

Ivy thought about the entirety of Riaan's statement. She was slightly transfixed by its enormity. She looked to her friend with a blank face, "I know I have read that before, but I guess never understood it . . . until now."

Riaan nodded, "I think that we're not out here as some sort of interstellar tourists, but here to do good. To help wherever we go." She said as they arrived at the open holodeck doors.

Ivy's expression changed to one more of clarity and confidence, as she stopped before the open door, turned to her friend and replied, "Then that is exactly what I want to do as well. Now, I just have to find out how I can help the most."

The edges of Riaan's mouth quirked upwards for an instant. But the almost smile disappeared. "Then welcome to the team, we'll help you figure out what you'll be best at."

With that said, they both stopped, arriving at their destination.

[Holodeck 2]

The large doors opened and Ivy turned to look into the holo-deck to see fields of white below evergreen trees. Before them was a packed path in the white fluffy snow. Her hands went up to wrap around her front, as she began to feel the freezing cold air waif through the open door.

Riaan felt the cold, and shivered slightly. It was a rather forceful reminder that Cardassia was a warm world. Although she was always cold aboard human ships, it was a difficulty she had learned to live with. However, to her, this cold felt different, almost threatening. She grimaced as she stepped into the holodeck and saw that there was a small

closet with long coats provided. She took one down and handed it to Ivy and took one for herself. "Here, the coat will help keep you warm," She said.

Ivy accepted the coat gratefully and quickly wrapped it about her, fastening up the connections in the front. Her body did not create much heat. She knew this was going to be a real challenge. The feeling in her shod feet began to feel numb, and began to stomp them a little looking down, but then saw some overshoes in the small closet as well. She reached past her friend and picked up a pair that wrapped about her. She was then also grateful to see that they were heated and activated the thermal system. This would do wonders for her circulation while in the fridged chamber. She stood up and looked to her friend to see that she too seemed ready for the white and cold temperatures. Ivy shyly said, "Well, . . . I think I'm ready for this."

Riaan nodded, slipping on the heated shoes as well. "This is going to be an adventure for us both then."

The two of them walked along the trail through the wood. Every so often there was a sign that talked about the various kinds of trees and wildlife that the holodeck was simulating for them. Riaan stopped at one of them, 'The Hengrauggi is a predatory creature native to the ice planet Delta Vega. It competes with the Drakoulias while hunting for prey both above and below the surface of the frozen seas of Delta Vega.' The sign read.

Ivy felt a little nervous after reading the sign. She asked, "They sound very dangerous. I wonder how big they are?"

Riaan spotted the creature starting to emerge from the ice. "I think you are about to see." She said, pointing at the huge creature.

Ivy's expression went blank as she saw a massive creature erupt through the ice sheeting that covered the frozen lake. She involuntarily took a couple steps backward. She had feelings of terror, but knew this to be a program and supposed to be safe, but that knowledge didn't seem to be helping her at the moment.

Riaan looked at Ivy, "don't worry, it's just a hologram. The safeties would keep anything from happening, even if it did come for you. That and it's probably going to prefer to come after me, I'm made of meat."

Ivy was about to say 'I know' to her first statement, but it wouldn't have been a very good response to her last statement. Though, she was right about the creature probably preferring meat. Ivy's next thought was if the creature could discern the difference from this distance. Ivy stood her ground and simply responded, "Ya, but I would rather not see." A smile came to her face as she looked to her friend.

Riaan tried to force herself to smile at Ivy, but couldn't. "Lets see what's next then." She suggested.

Ivy gave an approving nod and looked toward the creature. Ivy pulled her left collar a little which allowed another eyepod to slip out of Ivy's neck. It opened slowly.

Riaan looked at the eyepod, "That's interesting. want to keep an eye on the creature?" She asked.

Ivy smiled in response to her friend's curious question. She then explained, "With this eye I can see in the ultra violet frequencies. Unfortunately, this is not a real creature and the computer has only created enough for most humanoids to see it."

Ivy continued, "I guess I was hoping to see something of the animal under its skin." The eyepod in her neck closed up and retracted itself into her neck.

Riaan contemplated this for a moment before nodding. They walked on, the bitter cold seeming to get worse as they wandered from exhibit to exhibit. Riaan thought that they had gone a touch overboard with the temperature. Then suddenly she realized that Ivy was no longer with her.

Riaan doubled back, looking for the plant. It did not take her long to find her curled up in a ball against one of the rocks. Riaan knelt beside her. "Ivy, what happened to you?" She asked.

Ivy heard the translator say her name, and then something else. It all seemed so far away and darkness was about her. She couldn't feel the extremities of her vines. It was a very odd and slightly scary feeling, rather like when she was in the Escape Pod. With a bit of concentration, Ivy forced herself to expend energy creating internal heat, at a great expense, and tried to open her eyes. Above her, she could see Riaan standing over her. She asked curiously, "Why are you standing over me? What's going on?"

"I think..." for a moment Riaan's mind blanked out for her as well. She could feel the cold effecting her too. "I think we should get out of here." She said, reaching an arm out to Ivy to help her up.

A bit of relief was expressed on Ivy's face. "Exit!" She called weakly, but with authority. They took steps toward the opening door. She was glad that Riaan was there . . . and cared. They walked together, toward the exit, clutching each other's arm for warmth. Ivy felt very happy to have a friend in Riaan.

CQ-What?

by Ensign Ixelom Vejeem & Meera Deloria

Holodeck A

"Standard training drills people. NOT ad-hoc! I see someone do something NOT in the standard training cycle again, I will personally put your ass in the deck and have you promptly cycled to a station duty far from any border-region!"

For all the additional training programs Deloria had been running, in particular the ones helping bring crew up to Marine standards for weapons handling, ship combat, and of course, as today, Close Quarters Combat, or CQC, it was still important to make sure that everyone was able to still match the standards expected of them. Mind, today was NOT one of those additional training sessions. Everyone but her in the holodeck today were Starfleet Security, who were all needing to re-up on their evaluations for, well, Security Restraining Training.

Meera knew these programs, she made sure she herself was up-to-date on them. That was why she was running the evaluation. Only a small number of the crew at this point had been on board as long or longer than the Orion Marine. Gave her a warm fuzzy feeling from time to time thinking on it. Mostly though, it was just a whole lot of headaches as she had to rework her programs to deal with things.

The holodeck in this case was arrayed in a generic training space, so there wasn't anything in particular 'special' about the space to define it.

Ixelom Vajeem, the Tornado's portly Tellarite counselor, was lost in her own thoughts when she walked past the open holodeck door. A few meters past the door, she stopped, frowned, then backpedaled to peek inside the holodeck.

"Is that even anatomically possible?" she asked with bemusement, staring with amazement as a small human woman twisted her opponent's torso in a way that simply looked impossible.

Glancing back at the voice that spoke up, Meera nodded. "Yup, and done correctly too. Let him go. Computer, reset subject Alpha for next evaluation." Meera stated, watching at the Security officer let go of the man, and then the hologram 'reset' into his armed and aggressive stance.

"Ensign, you're up." Meera said, pointing to the Andorian next in line. "Something I can do for ya Councilor?" Meera asked, watching the next Security officer go through the evaluation program.

"Oh no, not really..." Ixelom mused, still hovering on the holodeck threshold as she looked in at the various men and women grappling with their holographic opponents. It was oddly fascinating, seeing them grapple, throw and strike with such fluidity and speed. "I was just passing by and...well, I was curious. Oh, I'm sorry Lieutenant, I really don't mean to be nosy, but you could sell tickets to watch this show."

Meera snorted in amusement. "Maybe. But I wouldn't be able to give regular showings, as this Security folks here are going through their evaluation tests to keep their rating, and more important, their job." She says, watching as the next person went through the program.

"Though I can only imagine one show many on board would love to see. And I ain't getting that flimsy of wear." Meera says, shaking her head at the matter.

Ixelom glanced at Meera with surprise, then walked up to her, carefully navigating the various training pairs. It was a testament to their discipline (and, Ixelom thought wryly, just how much authority Meera had over her people) that the Security officers didn't spare the squat Tellarite more than the odd glance.

"So I get this is necessary and all," Ixelom said curiously as she came to a stop beside (and below) Meera, "but is it really that much fun? Because they look like they're enjoying themselves. A lot."

Meera shrugged. "For some of them, it's determination not to let a few, incidents that happened to us never have a chance to happen again. Others, well... I can't really say." She replied, watching over the training personnel, and only sparing Ixelom a glance as she approached.

Watching the various men and women, Ixelom placed her hands behind her back. "They have a variety of motivations, really," she said more quietly, so that only Meera could hear. "Some of them just want to be the best, no matter what, and some, like you said, don't want past events to repeat themselves."

Ixelom jerked her chin at one security officer who successfully grabbed his opponent's hand as he blocked her strike, then swiftly flipped her onto her back in a furiously quick movement. "He, on the other hand, is angry. Really, really angry."

Meera looked over at the person in question, and nodded. "Yeah, some people have anger issues. This sort of thing let's 'em get the anger out and not get in too much trouble." Meera remarks, chuckling. Of course, she was also writing down scores for the evaluation on the PADD she had in hand. It was nearly over though.

"Anyways, Once I've gotten these last couple of eval's done, we'll be vacating the holodeck." Meera states, giving Ixelom a nod and a smile.

Rolling back and forth on her heels, Ixelom smiled back in response. "Oh, I wasn't planning on using the holodeck. I'm just being a nosy busybody. It's half of a counselor's job, really. Anyway dear, if you ever want to chat, you know where to find me." Turning to leave, she added cheerfully, "Maybe I can give you tips on how to stop your subordinates from staring at your tits!"

"Ha, I have to maintain SOME Orion traditions!" Meera replies grinning, before focusing on the evaluations she needed to clear up.

You and Me and the Bottle Makes Three

by Lieutenant JG Mindo & Ensign Ixelom Vejeem

Mess Hall

It was 0200, and Mindo couldn't sleep. He was suffering from mania after pulling a double shift.

<i>I should make Brad and Tiffany scrub the turboshafts if they want another night alone, </i> he thought. Still, the engines and ship systems were at one hundred percent for a week now, with little to no incident to cause otherwise. Mindo wanted to keep it that way, if he had to power the warp core itself.

The mess hall was quiet at this hour, with just a few crewmen burning the midnight oil. Mindo held a bottle of something called "Ebanza" under his arm. The dark blue liquid reminded him of sweet and sour chicken, an old Earth dish Mindo quite fancied. He set the bottle down at a table in the far corner and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, Ixelom was standing next to him.

The Tellarite counselor made an odd face, scrunching up her mouth, and then jabbed her finger not-so-gently into Mindo's arm. "You," she declared officiously, "look like an idiot."

Mindo's eyebrows went up at this, and he was noticeably startled by the Tellarite's out-of-nowhere appearance.

"There's an old story about a pot and a kettle," he said, letting his words trail off.

Ixelom actually had to think about that for a second, but when she realised what he meant, she snorted...a distinctly impressive sound. "I like humans, but that expression is just stupid. Who better to call a kettle black than a pot who is an expert on the subject?"

With that, she energetically jumped up on a chair opposite Mindo, grinning at him from across the table. "So," she said with a conspiratorial tone, "what has Mister Cheerful feeling so gloomy at this time in the morning?"

Mindo glared at Ixelom for a moment, never quite understanding the peculiar ship's counselor.

"Just pulled a double shift," he said. "Can't get to sleep. What's your story?"

"Oh, I'm a few hours ahead of you, dear," Ixelom said pleasantly. "I'll be off to bed soon enough. I just like to prowl around sometimes, see the night owls and all the guys on the night shift. How is everything going down there with that big death furnace of yours, anyway?"

"The 'death furnace' is at one hundred percent, I'm pleased to report," said Mindo. "How goes picking the Starfleet brain?"

Ixelom shrugged, grinning. "In-progress right now. It's my favourite late-night hobby to hammer on some innocent little victim's head. If the death furnace is fine, why the long hours?" Before he could answer, she raised a hand as if in revelation. "Does it have anything to do with why Keselowsky was looking like he'd won a Dabo jackpot? I just saw him coming down the corridor a few hours ago with a box of chocolates under his arm."

"Sounds like he really did have a night with Crewman Crismore," said Mindo. "I don't know what she sees in him. Hopefully he won't be too hungover tomorrow. The second-to-last thing I need is a grouchy shift leader. The last thing I need is a grouchy Kes."

"Uh huh," Ixelom remarked, giggling for a moment, before eyeing the bottle meaningfully, still beaming. The Tellarite girl was distinctly unlovely by most humanoid standards, with a large snort, bushy eyebrows and lots of wrinkles, but her cheerful countenance was undeniable. "Now that we're engaged in an active conversation that involves at least one joke and a common subject of interest, this when the textbooks say you should share your booze."

Mindo cocked a half-smile and passed the bottle over to the counselor. "We don't want to overrule the textbooks," he said. Mindo liked Tellarites and their blunt honesty, but he would never make the mistake of sleeping with one again. The smell alone was enough to make him nauseous.

"Good man," Ixelom said with satisfaction, bounding off her chair to grab a couple of glasses from the small bar that the Mess Hall offered. After she'd returned and filled up their glasses, she considered Mindo for a moment. "So...how's Caradan?"

Mindo shot a little look at Ixelom. "She's... managing," he said, trying to choose his words carefully. "We both are. Shagdaq, or 'The Shag' as I like to call him, doesn't quite mix with us. I think he sees our relationship as disgusting. His yeoman puppet doesn't help much either. I don't trust either of them." He grabbed the bottle and poured himself a glass. "Of course, this is all off the record... if you don't mind."

"Honey," Ixelom said with a more sedate smile, "everything you say to me is off the record. Nobody can force me to reveal what we talk about. Not Brad, not Caradan, and not even The Shag."

"Good," said Mindo. "I was never one for therapy. They tried to make me go at the Academy, with not so good results."

"Not to worry sweetie," Ixelom said with a grin. "You're far too small, far too skinny and far too pretty for me. I like my men big, hairy and Tellarite. Besides, I think Caradan has pretty much claimed you."

Mindo shrugged. "It's been a bit harder since Cara's promotion. We rarely find a time where both of us are off duty. Then there was that time on the turbolift..."

Filling up their glasses again, Ixelom waited patiently for him to continue. "And?" she prompted gently.

Mindo looked down. "I'm a little scared she thinks I'm paranoid. I felt kind of stupid after telling her about the listening device. I was so caught up in my paranoia that I forgot about her." He thought for a moment. "It was pretty cold in that turboshaft, but I really should've taken advantage of being on <i>top</i> of a turbolift with someone than just inside. I think I may have disappointed her."

"How so?" Ixelom said quietly, cooling her typically boisterous nature in response to Mindo's serious tone.

Mindo took a drink, then poured himself another. "We didn't do much in the physical sense. I was a little preoccupied with other things." He took another drink. "I think we've both been preoccupied lately. We had a nice encounter recently, but it was a bit short. When she and I were in the same department we had plenty of time to spend together. I guess that would make sense, though." Mindo thought for a moment. "My drive has been going crazy, though. This ship's pretty small. It gets difficult to find someone to... you know."

Sipping her drink, Ixelom nodded slowly. "You miss her, don't you?"

Mindo nodded. "I do."

Now Ixelom couldn't help but smile warmly, even as she double-checked that there was nobody nearby who could hear them. Indeed, they had the Mess Hall to themselves.

"I know that you've said the words to each other," she said softly, "but honey, that's your proof. You are officially and gloriously in love." Pausing, she considered for a moment. "Have you considered synchronising shifts? Or sharing quarters, so you can at least sleep together?"

"What if we want to sleep with someone else?" asked Mindo.

The counselor took another sip of her blue drink, considering. It was extremely tricky to avoid discussing what she'd learned from Caradan in their own talk, when the Changeling had indicated her desire for a monogamous relationship with Mindo.

"Then that's something that you and Caradan will have to talk about," she answered, "and make arrangements for. Hun, there's a difference between <i>sexual</i> promiscuity and <i>romantic</i> promiscuity. One does not necessarily lead to the other. The important thing, as clichéd as it sounds, is to talk to Caradan and lay out exactly what you both desire."

"Has she said anything?" Mindo asked, but seeing the neutral expression on the counselor's face made him double back. "Of course. You can't tell me." Mindo sighed. "You're probably right. I should talk to her."

Ixelom smiled in response, even as another question tugged at her with all its consequent problems. "Bingo. I love it when my patients follow my advice. It means I don't have to ram the idea into their brain until they get the message." Pausing, her smile gained an amused edge. "Now, when you mentioned that listening device earlier, do you mean that you recorded you and her...?"

"What?!" Mindo shouted, a little too loud. The other conversations in the room got quiet as their attention was suddenly turned to Mindo and Ixelom. Mindo ignored them and leaned forward, talking much more quietly. "What would I do with tapes of her and I doing it?"

"I don't know," Ixelom said quietly, her voice strangely meek even though she held her ground, looking straight back at him. "I'm sorry Mindo, I didn't mean anything, it was a joke in poor taste. You just mentioned a listening device..."

Mindo looked away again, making sure everyone had gone back to their drinks and their business. "I found out my quarters were bugged. For what reason, I'm not entirely sure. Shae, a friend who left the ship around the same time you came on, told me she knew that there were still spies on board the Tornado." Mindo caught himself before saying anything more. He suddenly felt very conscious of his words. He poured himself another drink, a stalling tactic he was sure the counselor could spot immediately. "It's rather complicated," he said, taking a drink.

"I can see that," Ixelom replied gently, letting Mindo stall as much he liked.

"You've read the report," said Mindo. "Haven't you? Of what happened on the USS Rhys?"

Ixelom nodded sadly. "Yes. It...it wasn't comfortable reading. It felt like one of the test cases they gave us at the Academy, the really awful ones..."

"I learned, first from Greep and again from Shae, that there were more spies on the Tornado. I don't know who they are or what their motives are. But I've decided I don't care. I'm putting all of this past me." He paused for a moment and there was a brief silence. "Sometimes I wish I'd never left my home world."

"But you did," Ixelom said firmly, her voice gaining strength. She sighed after a moment. "Mindo...that only works in the short term. For a time you can live like that and you can be happy, but in the long term, you need to find a solution. Otherwise, that sensation of being watched can consume you."

Mindo shook his head. "I wish I had answers."

Now Ixelom just outright laughed. "Oh honey...we all do! Do you know how many of my patients say exactly the same thing?" She giggled again. "Just focus on the short term, okay? Chat with Caradan soon, then if you feel like it, make love to her until you're both delirious. Right now you're depressed and fatigued, which is no way to find answers, but I think you at least know the right questions. What happened to these people you were talking about, anyway? Your friends?"

"Cailus and Shae?" said Mindo. "They got transferred. In fact, last I heard they're on the complete opposite side of the galaxy. They've probably forgotten about me already. But I do miss them."

"Cailus?" Ixelom frowned. "Is he that grumpy guy I met on Earth? Security?"

At this, Mindo busted up laughing. "That sounds like Cailus," he said smiling. "But he's a good guy once you get to know him."

"If you say so," Ixelom said doubtfully. She glanced at the bottle of Ebanza which was now quite finished, before grinning. "Okay, you. Professional advice: go sleep or go have sex. I don't care which. Just get off your ass and get out of here, because I'm both tired and drunk and I want to sleep."

"I think that is a great idea," said Mindo. They stood and Mindo picked up the empty bottle and went to dispose of it. When he turned around, Ixelom was already gone.

Barge after match..

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Ensign Elena Reis

Ready Room

Leaning backwards in his chair he had his eyes closed as the silence was sinking in. The report of what Aki had to do towards both Starfleet and the Klingon Ambassador was everything but pleasant. Their failure to get all prisoners were put on his shoulders and he perfectly accepted it. Yet the new mission was something he was not all too excited for. He had summoned his command team to report, to get operations moving again.

Elena was surprised to be summoned to the ready room. She didn't take much time to arrive once she was called though - a bit more sullen than her normal self. The Cygnian was a bit quiet, a bit tired - but ready to jump at the sign of a mission direction. "Commander," She added after arriving, and stepping to one side of the ready room.

"Just make sure they are all fully repaired for the next encounter, Eunidas out," Caradan spoke into the air as the doors parted and granted her entry into the Ready Room. She slapped at her commbadge thus deactivating it. "Commander," she said as she saw the man. "Ensign Reis," she nodded to Elena. Caradan also made a quick scan of the room and noticed Shaqdac's Trill was not present. Was he gaining some form of camaraderie with her Changeling XO? Somehow Caradan knew that was not the case.

"Nice to see you make it to this private party Lieutenant" Aki stated as he leans backwards "We are facing a problem, one of the prisoners has escaped our grasp and the Empire wants us to get her" Aki smirks at the end of his line.

"I reviewed the profile that the Klingons have on her during our last search," said Caradan. "The only bit of information that was provided was a name, Kri'Zhya Hur'q. There was no other information, no image, no criminal charges. If I understand Klingon culture well enough, then this lack of information means she has been a bad girl. So bad they the Klingons decided to erase her very existence and send her to Rura Penthe."

Nodding towards Caradan "Yes that is correct, But it seems the planet that we are going or where this Hur'q went to is a cursed world by the Empire. I got no idea what to expect there, but it doesn't feel right. So I want the ship on alert and ready for anything" Aki pointed out to both of them.

"I will see to it that Yellow Alert remains constant," said Caradan, "and that Battle Stations are manned at all times. All departments will be fully staffed during all hours of the day and night." Caradan was unsure reminding him that she was Changeling was a good idea. Still, she wanted to make sure he knew the options he had. "If my talents and abilities will aid us in this mission, sir, then I am yours."

Elena gave a quick nod. She hadn't said much. "We'll be ready," She said after a second. She didn't have much else to add, but there was something about the orders that made her uncomfortable. Maybe it was just the region, or the idea that someone slipped through there fingers. Or, maybe something else. She couldn't put her finger on it, so she didn't speak up.

Nodding towards the young Ensign as Aki thought for a second about what was needed next "You are both dismissed, resume your duties as best as possible" Aki stated as he made a mental note to himself to get ready for the debriefing.

Back to basics

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Commander Landon Milo MD & Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Mindo & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth & Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson & Meera Deloria & Ensign Ixelom Vejeem

Conference Room

The Chiefs were asked to report towards the Conference Room for a briefing on their new mission. The Tornado was fully operational and there were no real problems among its duties. Aki entered the room and put his PADD on the table and sat down in his seat as he takes a quick look at the information.

<I>This is going to be interesting</I> thought Doctor Milo as the man made his way down the USS Tornado's corridor, a PADD in hand. Being a Chief Medical Officer was nothing new for the half Betazoid. However, for the past year Landon had been aboard the USS Beifong as the starship's Commanding Officer. It was a long story and at some point he was sure someone would want to hear it, but not now, not here.

Rounding a corner and taking to joining corridor, Doctor Milo arrived at the Conference Room. The doors slid open and the Chief Medical Officer entered, finding the room was already occupied by the Captain of the Tornado. <I>Unsurprising. I would be in here early making sure everything was ready</I> thought Landon as his blue eyes locked onto the man. "Captain" he said with a polite nod as he proceeded to take a seat at the table.

Erickson held his cup of coffee in one hand entered the briefing room. "Captain, Doctor," he said sitting down at the conference table. He was ready to get back out into the deep black and get started in the new mission.

In her quarters, Riaan fiddled with the rank pips. The room seemed so much bigger with Ziara missing. She was not sure what to make of her new job as Chief Science officer, but she resolved herself to do her best. She slid quietly into the room. She wanted to sit next to where Caradan might be but she was still nervous about the Captain, so she sat down at the far end of the table. Her fingers running nervously over her earring.

Yup, still in the Starfleet uniform. Yup, still wearing the Lieutenant's bar. Looked like Meera was still here and continuing on her job of keeping the ship safe. Walking into the conference room, she was double checking her latest personnel report, since there'd been yet more transfers around under her. She had one, maybe two people at this point she still personally knew under her command from when she first boarded the ship. So, settling into her chair, she waited to hear what their next bit of trouble causing, or solving as it may be, was gonna be.

Ixelom was the next to come in, waving jauntily with a PADD in hand as she entered, her habitual wide grin clearly evident. The Tellarite didn't say a word as she sat down however, instead reading the PADD with interest.

As he studied his PADD, Mindo became aware that no one probably saw he was even there. He stood on his chair and set the PADD down on the table. The room was eerily quiet, and Mindo couldn't shake the feeling that it had been a while since he was in this room. The room hadn't changed. It was as he remembered it. But a light sleep the night before gave him a very long dream in which he was Chief Engineer of a ship called the Pandora. The dream spanned a number of months, and mostly consisted of a freak love triangle with his old friends Cailus and Shae. Mindo had stopped by his department and found Tiffany and Mindo's second, Brad Keselowsky, arguing over neutrino sequences or some such nonsense. At least everything was where it needed to be, though it was odd not having Zo, who had mysteriously transferred to parts unknown. Mindo didn't even get a "goodbye." Mindo propped himself on his knees and leaned against the table, ready for the briefing.

Caradan had become something more than a novice at ignoring Davmorda. The Trill walked along side Caradan as they both made their way to the conference room. Davmorda was looking at her Yeoman's PADD, reading off a whole list of todos.

"Of course," said Caradan to whatever Davmorda last said. "I will get right on that as soon as this meeting is over." The doors slid open and Caradan eyed a room full of people looking back at her as though asking why the Executive Officer was among the last to arrive. She marched in and started toward her seat next to Shaqdac.

Davmorda followed suit and sat in the vacant chair opposite the man.

The Chief Medical Officer had a look around at those who had assembled. <I>An interesting crew</I> the man thought, he particularly was interested in what he concluded were the Chief Intelligence Officer and Chief Engineer. Erickson, Landon had never met but Laurel had shared some information about him. Landon had to admit his cousin had good taste in men. Then there was Mindo who was interesting because of his very youthful look which made Landon feel quite comfortable. Being part Risan, he always looked a few years younger than he actually was.

Erickson grinned slightly when he saw Caradan step into the room. He was ready to get this briefing started and getting back into his intel office. He had several projects that he was still working on and some others that he wanted to start. He closed his case on Caradan temporarily. He trusted her and that was enough for him.

Landon had a good hard look around the room once more. Despite his youthful appearance <I>praise good of Risan genes</I>, the Chief Medical Officer was feeling a wee bit matured. After studying the men and women in the room for a few minutes, the Doctor quickly brought his right hand up, curled the tips of his fingers and rested them against the pips of his collar to obscure them. Being a Chief Medical Officer and having taken the Bridge Commander's examination to earn your commander's pips was not unheard of.

Being in your mid 30s and doing so, less common, but it still happened. Case and point he was sitting in said situation. However, it was damn awkward to look at the head of the table where the Commanding Officer sat and seeing only three pips staring back at you. <I>And even better, Landon, you have seen his medical records. You're older than him</I> the Chief Medical Officer thought to himself nervously blushing and trying not to look awkward or uncomfortable. <I>Throw me a lifeline...start the briefing...start the briefing</I> he thought, almost praying for people to break the silence.

Of those present, Meera was probably the most 'beaten' of the crew, though not by the things the ship had been doing or anything like that. Nah, it was her time in the Dominion War that had worn it's edges into her. But even so, she was ready for this briefing to start. She needed to get things handled, and besides, she was curious to see what new trouble the ship was headed for.

Tapping on the table as Aki waited for everyone to sit down and get silence as his eyes shifted to his first officer and then back towards the rest "Let's get this briefing on the way, I cut the chase as we don't have much time. One of the fugitives manages to escape that barge and us. We are asked or rather demanded to go after her and fix the mistake" He rose his hand before anyone could interact "The Klingon Empire has a code of conduct when it comes to accepting missions, we accepted it and play by their rules. Even though they are in civil war, they keep to the honoring part. If we want Tornado to operate in their space, we finish this. Security gets the people trained to land on the surface of a hostile planet, we manage to get the information that she is heading towards a planet called...."

Aki looked at the PADD and smirks "Qj Hegh...if I pronounce it right. Science this is a one of a life time opportunity to get scans from beyond the borders as so far records state, no one has traveled this deep in their space. Medical I like you to get staff ready for wounded, we don't know what to expect at that planet. Intel take all the scans you can take from around the area, but keep it low profile and keep an ear out for any Sovereignty of Kahless communication. Questions?"

Riaan for her part didn't have any questions. She acknowledged the captain's direction with a nod. Part of it was that she still felt a visceral terror about the Captain. How he was treating Caradan was not helping matters. She did her best to minimize the contact that she had to have with him. She figured the best way to do that was to do her job quietly and effectively. She glanced at Erickson, mentally noting that they would need to have a conversation later. She began working through what scans might be best to run. There was one good thing about being the chief science officer on a Starfleet science ship, you never ran out of toys to play with.

The Chief Medical Officer's eyes widened a bit with the name of the planet. Working through the subpar Klingon pronunciation, the meaning of the words did not soften the blow. "I will have my medical staff ready, Captain. Though I cannot say I am overly keen on the thought of going to a planet with that name assigned to it" Doctor Milo stated.

Mindo cleared his throat and sat forward. "You said there could be wounded. Is the ship included in that statement? I've finally got us running at one hundred percent. I'd like to keep her that way." There was a brief pause, then Mindo added, "Sir."

"We are doing this at the request of the Klingon Empire," Caradan spoke up. "The fugitive we are after can potentially be a great asset to the Sovereignty of Kahless. The weaker the SoK, the sooner this civil war is over, and sooner we can find Captain Takato." She glanced over to Aki to see if he showed any sign of being impressed. "For the sake of the captain," she continued, "we must be willing to take this ship to its limits, beyond even."

"We looking at a search and destroy mission, or an securing an asset for recovery?" Meera asked, already opening up her PADD and starting to pull together a list of her ground-team.

"The main mission is getting that person back, so the later one Lieutenant" Aki pointed out as he looked at his Chief Engineer "I can't really say what to expect, but I want this crew to be fully operational and read for whatever is

there" He smirks a bit at the end and took a deep breath "Lets get this operation going, dismissed everyone!" He stated as he stood up and walked out of the room with his PADD's in his hands. Davmorda was quickly behind him.

Oh this was going to be so much fun on the ground. Asset recovery always had more issues than one wanted to shake a stick at. It just came with the territory. Still, that was the goal, and Meera would make sure that it would happen. Giving a nod as she stood up, she walked out of the meeting room only occasionally tapping at her PADD.

Erickson nodded and made a note on his PADD to bring up all the information that he could on the planet that the stolen Klingon database had on file. He stood and dismissed himself before leaving the conference room.

Riaan stood and left the room, having not said anything the entire meeting. She really didn't feel that there had been anything to say in the meeting, other then perhaps acknowledging what the captain had said, which she had done with a nod.

Ixelom, for her part, was utterly silent and undetectable in her chair, and among the last to leave. The typically merry Tellarite had restrained herself from speaking during the briefing, and indeed she even avoided making eye contact with anyone. Instead, the counselor had spent her time doing something productive, surretitiously watching everyone and observing as they reacted to their new orders.

Mindo left the room silently making notes on his PADD.

All this work and all the responsibility. On top of all that, Ari was the first to leave the room. The Captain was rarely the first to leave upon concluding a briefing. Caradan sat there a moment before gathering her PADD and slowly standing, making her way toward the door.

Report

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Mindo

Engineering Office

When she was the Chief of Engineering, things were so much simpler. Caradan had only one report to turn in; the Engineering report. A promotion to second in command later and now Caradan was having to look over all the reports from all the departments in generation of a Ship's Report to the captain.

After having both the Security and Astrometric reports synced to her PADD, Caradan scrolled through them really quick to check for completeness. Shaqdac made it clear that he wanted to reports to be complete and signed and spell checked and accurate and...Caradan put her PADD to standby and thrust it into her torso.

Know there was still some on the crew who were uncomfortable working alongside a Changeling, Caradan would sometimes slide the PADD under the back of her uniform coat and pull it into her being. That way, many would think she is just stuff it in the back of her trousers or something; as a way to stop reminding them that "HEY. CHANGELING HERE!"

This time though, Caradan could not have cared less as the front of her torso, uniform and all, liquefied, flowed over her PADD and then reformed.

Caradan had but one more report to sync to her PADD before generating her ow report for Shaqdac; Engineering. Though Mindo still had an hour before the deadline Caradan gave him, she was hoping he was done or nearly done.

"He's in the office," said Keselowsky as Caradan stepped up, "you know...in case Little Mindy is the reason you are here," he finished.

"I'm here for the Engineering Report," said Caradan. "Is it done?"

"Sheesh," he said as he started working at the terminal, "sounds like someone woke up on the wrong side of the bowl this morning."

Caradan only glared at him. Her wits were nearly depleted. It was only an hour since she oozed out of her bowl and was already feeling the weight of the day on her.

"Here it is," Keselowsky said. "Ooh." He leaned in on his terminal. "It is not done yet. Still in edit mode."

Caradan simply turned and started away toward the office.

"Lieutenant," Keselowsky called after her. He jogged to her as she turned around. "I know it is none of my business, but you really should not have taken that promotion. If nothing else, you need to see about taking some leave."

"I will take that under advisement. Now, if you will excuse me." Caradan turned and marched on to the Engineering Office.

Being the XO, she didn't need an invite as the doors opened immediately and she stepped in.

Mindo was working on his PADD when she walked in. He looked up and saw her, and got that look on his face that only Caradan could see. A small hint of a smile, and a more relaxed demeanor. Caradan loved that look and, for a moment, all the weight and responsibility of being the second in command under an animosity-ridden Bajoran had vanished.

"I'm finishing my report now," said Mindo. "Give me... one... more... alright. It's finished. Here you go." He stood and handed her the PADD as she entered the room and the door whished behind her.

"Finished," she said in more of a questioningly manner. Suddenly there was nothing stopping her from completing her task well before schedule. It only meant that Ari would have something more for her to do, something relayed to her through the Trill. "You know you still had an hour to finish this."

Caradan marched up to Mindo snatched the PADD from him and started tapping away. "You know that Shaqdac is watching everything I do." She brought up Mindo's report. "If he sees the Engineering Report highlighted in green," she bypassed protocol and overrode the security features and removed Mindo's signature," then he will expect my Ship's Report within the hour." She saved the, now incomplete, report and handed the PADD back to Mindo. Caradan went to the chair opposite Mindo's desk and allowed herself to fall into it.

Mindo smiled and set the PADD down on his desk. Activating his LEGs apparatus, he floated over the desk and into Caradan's lap.

"Mindo. No, I..." then Caradan found she could never refuse a moment with him.

"I hope you don't mind if I get more comfortable," he said with a smile, using the backs of his fingertips to gently brush back a lock of her hair. He absolutely loved Caradan's attention to detail.

She enjoyed his touch. Not that she knew precisely how humanoids perceived the sense of touch, she did enjoy that he was soft and gentle. Caradan especially enjoyed the little details he noticed.

"Mindo. I can't right now. I have work to do." She felt his fingertips on the side of her neck and realized the irony in her own words. "She says as she has just removed her lover's signature from his own report." Caradan put an arm around him and pulled him a little closer.

Mindo smiled and kissed the tip of her nose. "You said we have an hour..."

"Yeah," she said holding him away so as to look at him. "That's why I made the other departments finish their reports a little early." She smiled at him. "So we can have a little time to ourselves." Holding him close again Caradan sat back and let her head rest on top of his.

She was finally sensing something. Becoming more disciplined in her mimicking a human form, her sense of smell was reliant totally on her nose and a certain smell in particular seemed in higher concentration right after he last spoke. It was also something she had grown accustomed to during her time with Mindo.

"That smell. Mindo, have you been drinking?"

Mindo had rested his head on Caradan's chest and closed his eyes. The question hardly caught him off guard. He responded with a simple, "Yes."

"Whilst in uniform?" she asked. "Whilst on duty?" Unknowingly grabbing him like a mother would grab her small child, Caradan stood and sat him on the desk. "Mindo, you can't be doing that." She looked him in the eyes. First his left eye, then his right, then back and forth as she continued. "I know you have a great deal of tolerance, but we are deep inside Klingon space in the middle of a Civil War, our captain hates me, probably disapproves of our...relationship, and he is, in the eyes of the Cardassians, a former terrorist. And if there is even the smallest incident where alcohol could possibly be a factor..." she fell back into her chair and shrugged, "well, I don't know what he would do then." Caradan looked to the floor as though defeated and left with no other option. She looked back up at Mindo and hesitated shortly before saying, "As your superior officer, I have to order you to nothing above synthanol whilst on duty or in uniform."

Mindo smiled and looked down for a moment, trying to divert his gaze. In the months he had known her, he hadn't ever explained his apparent alcoholism to Caradan.

"Cara," he said, trying to be serious, but suppressing a grin. "I... Feserians don't get drunk very easily. At least, not on alcohol. We are a very... fertile breed, in that we breed a lot. Or, more bluntly, we have sex. A lot. The average Feserian has sex about twice a day. In some provinces there are even work laws that allow a one-hour break for sex, kind of like a lunch break. The urges we have are just too strong to handle. It's well-known on Feseria that alcohol can suppress these feelings if consumed at a moderate rate. Feserians will have sex any time, but there are other species who don't work the same way." He paused for a second, trying to come up with an explanation that made sense. "I don't drink to get drunk," he said carefully. "I drink so I can do my job."

"I," she started then Caradan looked around in something of an embarrassed state. She took a chair and scooted closer to him. "I'm sorry, Mindo, about that tirade. Starfleet Regs are clear on alcohol consumption but I suppose there has to be some exceptions, especially for Feserians and you must know them better than I." She sat back and slouched a bit. "It's just all the work Aki is pushing onto me. I have to multi-task a great deal. It's like I am being pulled in all these directions." She looked to the floor and her voice dropped to a depressing level. "Maybe I don't have what it takes to be a functional XO."

"Well I can understand that statement," said Mindo. "I mean, the Shag isn't exactly stable. There's something wrong with him. But you, you probably do more work than anyone around here. You're literally running the ship, talking to department heads and minions alike, you're responsible for everything that goes on here, and on top of that, you're working yourself even harder to stay in the same form for hours and hours." He took her hand in his and held it with both hands. "But who says you have to? Everyone knows you're a Changeling. What if you took your normal form while on duty? Form a mouth when you have to talk, hands if you need to hold something... it might make things a lot easier on you."

Caradan smiled upon seeing how much Mindo cared. She could see it all; the care for her in his eyes, hear the care in his words. "I still have my contract with Starfleet. Eventhough Captain Takato released me from it, I do not know about Shaqdac. He would most certainly take offense to that. Besides," she reached forward, even lengthened her arm just a bit, to place a hand on his leg, "I like this form. I like the way you look at me."

Mindo smiled back. "I like the way you look."

Caradan did not have to mimic a smile then. One formed naturally. "Let's get out of here. Go somewhere for a bit. Lounge, my place, yours. I don't care. I can get back to the report later. What's the saying, 'Skewer it'?"

Mindo laughed. "I think you mean 'screw it.'" He looked back at his desk, the unsigned report, the various other things stacking up as well. He turned his gaze back to Caradan, but his smile had faded a bit.

"Cara," he said, "maybe you should finish your report first. Then maybe we can call in sick the rest of the day and head to our cabin in the holodeck and screw it there... we'd have more time," he added.

Caradan stood almost violently. "OK, who are you and what have you done with Mindo," she said as she pointed right at him. "Because MY Mindo would never declare work to be done first."

"You have no idea how difficult it was for me to say that," said Mindo.

"You are right of course," Caradan said as she relaxed. "It's just the Ship's Report that Aki needs. Besides," she smiled at Mindo, "now that I know what follows, doing it seems far less dreadful."

"Then get on it!" said Mindo, hopping down from his desk. He pulled his hand up to his brow in mock salute. "Sir!"

Cabin Fever

by Lieutenant JG Mindo & Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas

Holodeck

"That was worth the wait," said Mindo, laying naked next to a clothe-less Caradan. They were in the upper room in Mindo's old cabin on Feseria... or at least, the holodeck version of it. The air smelled of pine trees and the temperature of the room was that of a brisk spring evening. There was a small window on the adjacent wall, and through it they could see the perfect Feserian sunset, with orange and purple and red layered together in the sky. Mindo had expanded the window in this version so they could see both moons in the sky. Outside, a barge went by on the river, softly sounding its horn, its wake making waves on the shore. Mindo couldn't have programmed it better.

Caradan looked out at that sunset as she rested her head on Mindo's chest. She had finally felt that she had found an adequate method of mimicking optic nerves to see the beauty in Mindo's creation as he saw it. She could never be absolutely certain however, just as she could not be certain she felt the pleasures of sexual relations the same as he. Their activities were enjoyable and, "Yeah. Well worth the wait."

Commander Shaqdac appeared marginally impressed that Caradan had gotten the report in early. Sure enough, there was more work to be done, but she was going to worry about that later. Right now there was only, "Mindo."

"Did I," she moved a bit to look at him, "did I react adequately? As a woman should during an encounter with a man?"

Mindo smiled at the question. He knew Caradan was doing her best to stay realistic. Truth was, it <i>was</i> different with her. But not in a bad way. He re-positioned himself to see her and kissed her forehead. "I have no complaints," he said. "I'm more concerned with my own performance. Do you... feel anything? When we're... you know."

"I do," she nodded then sent her eyes back out through the window. "I've been working on nerve circuitry and sensitivity. I just have no way of knowing for sure if I have things right." She smiled at the thought that, "you keep coming back for more. My experience is limited but," she reconnected eyes with Mindo, "you perform marvelously." She was uncertain if a change of topic was wise but the Counselor's words kept echoing in her mind at times. She remained quiet and allowed Mindo to process her complement.

Mindo looked out at the sunset, which was programmed to simulate a transition from beautiful hues to a black and starry sky.

"It's been a while since we've done this," said Mindo. "I don't want us to drift apart."

Caradan wrapped an arm around Mindo and held him close and tight. "I don't want us to drift apart either. I was close to Shae and Laurel and..." her body twitched and her form nearly shifted, but Caradan maintained herself. "And now they are gone." She thought about her relationship with Riaan. It was wonderful but there seemed to be a deeper and more profound connection with Mindo. "I don't want to lose you too." With people like Aki and Davmorda around, "I don't know what I would do or how I would press on without you."

Mindo squeezed back and let his left hand move down to her stomach. He lightly traced a circle around her naval. "Our ship's counselor told me we should do something about that," he said, remembering his conversation with Ixelom earlier.

"Really?" Caradan was unaware that Mindo met with Ixelom, though knew full well that she would have no reason to know. Caradan did recall a discussion with Mindo some time ago where he appeared a nervous wreck for possibly breaking with Feserian culture. Caradan did not want to push him into a situation he did not wish to be in. "What did she say? Only if you want to share with me that is. You don't have to. Patient/Doctor confidentiality and all." Caradan was held captive in suspense however, though she tried to not let that translate into bodily movements.

"She said we should do things so we could spend more time together. She suggested syncing our shifts." He chuckled a little. "She even said we should share quarters." Mindo had waved off the idea immediately. What if Mindo wanted to sleep with someone else some nights? Or if Caradan had a guest some time? He was always up for multiple partners, but found that other humanoid races weren't as receptive to that. In fact, most races frowned on it.

There was a twitch in Caradan's body. It would have been a heart flutter if she had a biological heart to begin with. This was a twitch that coursed almost throughout her entire being. There was a change that she could have Mindo all to herself, to live with him no less. A wild sensation washed over her body and she realized this was the first time she felt such a rush of emotional excitement. But there was also the issue of Mindo's cultural upbringing. They were in love but he needed to be open to others at the same time. What if he wanted to bring someone else home?

"I could always turn myself into a chair," her words came out barely audible. "I mean," she looked up at Mindo. "I spoke with her as well. She told me that everything we do is a risk and that, to truly discover what we want, we have to make a leap." She looked into his eyes. "I love you." From the memories she possessed of other Changelings from her time in the Link, she knew, "That is a rare thing for a Changeling to say. Having little experience in this I can't find it in myself to ask you to break from cultural scripts just to see if," she looked down at his free hand and played with it with her hand, "if we could be together exclusively."

"Cultural scripts," Mindo repeated. "I left Feseria a long time ago. But in all of this, I haven't been able to shed the way in which I was brought up. Being around humans and other races has really changed how I think of the universe. I still don't really understand the way sex is thought of in different cultures, but I suppose that is part of being a Starfleet officer." He paused for a moment, trying to process what he wanted to say. "That said, I want the best for you. I want whatever you want. If you want to be exclusive, I'd be willing to try it."

But, "I don't even know what I want." Caradan spent so much time doing what she wanted and then came Starfleet and its rules and regulations, and its multitudinous cultures. Save for Changelings of course. "Changelings do not even have a culture. So, there is no exclusive rule for sex. You can bring home whomever you want I suppose." She looked back up to Mindo and clearly had a confused expression spread about her face. "Would living together mean we need to get married?"

"No," said Mindo. "That I know for sure. Lots of people, lovers, live with each other without marrying. It's accepted in many cultures." Mindo did not add that he *never* wanted to get married. He'd been around long enough to know what a mistake that could be.

"That's good I guess," she said. "Us Changelings have had long discussions just attempting to understand the concept of marriage. I think I understand coupling." Her body pulsed lightly from the excitement as she continued. "I...would like...for us...to share...a living space if you find that arrangement agreeable."

She paused but spoke again before Mindo had a chance to speak. "Of course, with you being a department head, and me the Executive Officer, we will need the captain's permission to do so. I can already see Shaqdac fuming and turning red. I wonder what he would say."

"We'd have to go directly to him," said Mindo. "I can't stand that yeoman of his."

"Hmm," Caradan gave a short laugh. "Just wait until you get to know her. Then you may find yourself concocting various methods of body disposal." She shook her head slightly. "She is just doing her job, which is doing whatever Aki tells her to do. I think it is mostly to torment me."

"Agreed," Caradan decided to change the subject. "We shall go to Aki directly. I will set up a meeting, but let's do this tactfully. Maybe wait until this mission is done. He does not seem to want to deal with anything else."

"Sounds like a plan," said Mindo. He kissed Caradan on the lips, noticing how much she was improving in that department. "You're getting quite good at that," he said, adding, "Not that you've ever been bad at it," with a smile.

"What can I say," said Caradan. "I've had a good teacher."

Loose ends, haunt you

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Ensign Elena Reis

Lounge

Day to day operations was getting back on the way as Aki was reviewing past logs and old records of the previous Captain that had served the Tornado. Her name was Ryoko Takato, legendary in her tactical and direct choices, known by many people as the Ice Queen that did what was asked of her. But still, a name kept popping up at her reports on various duty assigned assignments 'Elena Reis' as he made it towards the Lounge to grab some food. He noticed the good Ensign and approached her with an apple in his hand "May I sit Ensign?"

It had taken a moment for Elena to notice, lost in some thought or song for the time, despite those minuscule movements that proved at least part of her was aware of him. She finally gave a glance up and a nod, "Of course, sir." She said with a brush of her hand across the table, away from the plate she had barely touched in front of her. "You're always welcome." She said politely, most likely instinctively.

"Thank you" He nodded as Aki sat down and took a bite from his apple "Riddle me this" He sat as he looked at Elena "The previous Captain, rest her soul to the prophets wherever she is at moment, was quite enjoying of having you around. Could you...do tell me why?"

Elena glanced up for a moment and stared at him. She didn't say anything for a time before finally giving a smirk, "I don't know, sir." She said with a shrug. "I couldn't explain it to you if I wanted to." She glanced at her food and then back at him. "Maybe I'm the only dedicated tac officer on board. Maybe we had some similar experiences." She sighed. The truth of the matter was she didn't particularly want to talk about it - it was a sore spot, and one she knew would get poked if he was legitimately on to something. "Maybe I forgot my meds during transfer." She then quickly added, "Why do you ask?"

Looking at the Ensign that was bad at not showing her emotions <i>So I poked right</i> Aki thought as he smiled at her taking another bite of the apple "Because while Captain Takato is viewed as a cold hearted....bitch...I mean we can be real about it. She was a royal pain in the ass for many officers both her own crew and flags" He pointed out as he tried to get under her skin "But I know for a fact that her logs changed before a month or so before she sacrificed herself" And Aki smiled again and points at her "And you are mentioned to many times in my taste"

Elena gave a little laugh. She nodded, "She could be a bit of a bitch, yes," She spoke, leaving out the little devious memory in her mind for a moment in her agreement. "I don't know anything about her logs." She paused for a moment and thought about it. She could just tell him - what did it matter now? She shook her head, and in her usual irreverent tone she asked, "How many times?" She said with a sip of her drink.

Looking at her as he winked at the last question "Why you want to know?" Aki smirks a bit as he takes another bite of the apple "I lost count after 30" He pointed out "Maybe it is my mind going wild that the Takato had a love interest in someone. Thought it would explain if she was falling for women, only men worked mostly under her"

"Curiosity," She didn't say much more than that for a moment. She wasn't sure what to say. So. she just pushed the subject. She was pretty sure she knew where he was going, so she just went there. She was tired - and there were a thousand other emotions swirling about in the back of her mind as well. "So, you think she might have been falling for me, hm?"

Looking at her as Aki was eating his apple and observing the Ensign "So, you miss her don't you?" He smiled as Aki leans backwards in his chair and thought about it for a second "Don't worry about it....I will keep it to myself but Takato was not really good at hiding it"

The Ensign gave a smile and shook her head. She felt his movements for a moment and closed those large eyes. She sighed and didn't answer that for a second. Then a thought hit her mind. "Yes," She said softly, barely audible. She realized that if they never found her, it didn't matter. If they did, she wasn't going to hide it when they did. Neither thought was calming to her. She shook her head though. "But, we'll find her," She added.

He nodded and soft up himself a bit as Aki looked at the clock-house of the apple remains "Be prepared for whatever status she will be in. Remember, those that are war prisoners don't tend to come back as themselves and need all the support they can get to recover" Aki pointed out as he looked at the Ensign.

"There isn't much that can prepare," She said softly, "But I've lived through an occupation. I know what helped me after." She gave a weak smile, "Maybe I can help, or help her find someone who can. Until then. Thank you for checking, sir."

With that said he stood up and smiled at her "Anytime Ensign, now better get focust. I need you on the bridge when we arrive at the planet. I got no idea what this person as planned out for us" He pointed out as Aki nodded at her and made his leave.

Past is past

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Lieutenant JG Mindo & Ensign Bradford Keselowsky

Engineering

Wandering a bit around as Aki ends up at Engineering, ahh yes Mindo the Lieutenant that has quite an interesting history. Records stated that Takato already wave some of past away and with a remark on it, that repeat of this would cost this Lieutenant dearly. But there were still problems in that service record that made Aki concern the situation at hand a bit more.

As Mindo was away for the moment supervising work around the ship, that left Keselowsky in charge of Engineering. He was on the other side, at Crismore's station chatting away with her. He finally turned toward the entrance after Tiffany gave him a few aggressive throat clearings and attention tossings.

Seeing his Bajoran Commanding Officer, Bradford broke from his conversation with Crismore abruptly and marched over to Aki. "Captain, I am Ensign Keselowsky. I have not yet had the honor of meeting you in person yet...Sir."

Seeing the Ensign standing before him "Commander Shagdac, I am looking for Lieutenant Mindo" He stated quickly waiting for a proper response.

"Little Mindy...I mean Lieutenant Mindo is away at the moment. Though he should be back any second now. I assure you. Shall I comm him for you?" After a second's pause, he followed that up with, "Sir."

Mindo walked out of his office and saw Bradford Keselowsky, his "second" in command, blathering on to the CO of the Tornado. He approached from behind Keselowsky and said, "There's no need, Ensign," he said which caused Keselowsky to jump in a start, "had you been paying attention you would know that 'Little Mindy' came back an hour ago. At the time you were..." he looked back at Crismore, "working diligently to keep the ship running, as you always do."

"Yes sir," Brad said. "Always do sir." He stood at attention before both men, darting his eye between the two.

Looking at the interaction of them both as he chooses to focus on the Chief that stood before him "Lieutenant, status report of the ship. We have suffered quite some bit or so the reports say. Are we safe in Klingon space or should I be requesting another Chief?" Aki joked a bit as he waited for a response.

"Engines are at a hundred percent," said Mindo. "All systems are go, sir."

"I can vouch for that," said Keselowsky raising his hand. "Everything is as fixed as fixed can get," he said then furrowed his brow after hearing his own words.

"Good, we are going to arrive at the planet for another 2 weeks or so and I got no idea what will be thrown at us. So I want to the systems up to its full strength" Looking at Mindo "Is that a possibility that you can do?" Aki asked as his eyes shifted towards Keselowsky and then back.

"We're ready for anything down here," said Mindo. Beside him, he could feel Keselowsky struggling to not make a comment about Mindo's size and whatever "down here" meant.

Narrowing a bit his eyes as Aki looked at Mindo "You are pretty reserved person Lieutenant, your records different" He stated as he crossed his arms over each other "I mean from a macho man to a nodder is quite a change."

"He's pretty macho, Sir," came Keselowsky. He could feel a confused set a little beady eyes on him. "A small stature says nothing about his skills as an engineer. We all may be a bit 'reserved' down here sir, but when the shit hits the fan, reservations are out the window and we are all macho men."

"Women too," Keselowsky added quickly. "We have macho women too. Or would that be macha?" Realizing he had dropped formalities, he added, "Sir."

Mindo shot an annoyed look at Keselowsky, then looked back at the CO. "I wasn't aware you cared, sir," said Mindo. "I'll try to be more predictable in the future." Mindo was beginning to get a bit annoyed by this visit. He figured the less he said to Shagdac the quicker he'd be out of his hair. Apparently "the Shag" had a different impression.

"Oh don't presume something if you don't know the person and you don't know me Lieutenant, I do care and thus I am here to see if my staff and my crew are doing well" Aki notice the irritation and he liked that, makes a person more alert "Lets hope women will not have influence again on your career, it seems to be a problem in the past for you has it not Lieutenant?"

<i>This is not going well,</i> thought Mindo. <i>I'm just about ready to punch this guy, Captain or no Captain.</i>

Mindo replied, "My romantic encounters won't affect my performance on this ship as long as I am permitted to take the proper steps to avoid them." He was, of course, referring to his drinking on the job, which helped keep his strong libido out of the picture.

"I too don't let the women-folk interfere with my job either, Sir," said Keselowsky.

"Oh please," said Tiffany, still at her station. Mindo shot her a look. This was not the time to make Keselowsky look bad, even if he was a troll. "Sorry," she said, turning back to her station.

His eyes went to Tiffany and then back at Mindo, there was more going on here than meets the eye "I will keep an eye out on your...performace Chief" Aki looked at them both "Good day" He finally stated and made his departure from the Engineering.

"That went better than expected," said Mindo.

In Search of Womblets

by Lieutenant JG Mindo & Meera Deloria

Engineering

"A what?!" said Mindo.

"A Dactarian womblet," said Ensign whats-his-face. Mindo didn't catch his name. He was some second-string helmsman or something of the like. Mindo didn't really care. What he *did* care about was the Dac-something wombat loose in the Jeffries Tubes.

"And why come to me?" asked Mindo. "Isn't that a job for security?"

The Ensign nervously scratched the back of his head and looked down. "It's a little..." he started. Suddenly, as if on cue, the lights dimmed and flickered. Mindo also recognized that "wurrrm" sound the ship made when something went wrong with the ship's systems. "...complicated," finished the Ensign.

"Define 'complicated,'" said Mindo, taking the PADD from Crewman Crismore that was the immediate report of a power fluctuation on Decks four through eight.

"It feeds on electricity," said Ensign Something.

Mindo nodded. "I see." He knew what this meant. Another quest into the tubes. Another wild goose chase... but with a womblet.

Mindo tapped his badge. =/\= Mindo to security. =/\=

Paperwork, weapon maintenance, paperwork on the maintenance, go over evaluation reports, paperwork on the paperwork... Times Meera missed just being a Sergeant and thusly the one NOT doing ALL the paperwork. And Security wasn't large enough to warrant her having an aide who's job was to filter the majority of it.

So when the call came in, Meera was more than happy to drop Form 341-A-698, Operational Readiness and Action Form, to answer. ^=This is Security, Meera speaking. What's the situation Chief? ^=

=/\= Ensign Something-or-Other lost his pet wombat... sorry, womblet, an animal that feeds on electricity. The womblet is believed to be loose in the Jeffries tubes. Care to meet me on deck four for an adventure? =/\= Mindo sounded slightly agitated, but the emphasis on the final word suggested excitement as well.

=^=Depends Chief. Are you looking at hand phasers or do you want me to break out the MAKO's? ^= Meera asked, referring to the normal hand phaser being an option, or those rifles that the Tornado was producing exclusively for Security as 'testing platforms for the viability of reusing and updating of an existing platform'. To all outward observers, the rifles looked like MAKO Pulse Rifles from the pre-Federation days of Starfleet, but anyone looking at their interiors would find they were as advanced as any modern phaser rifle, in a smaller and more easily managed package.

Mindo considered the idea of using the MAKO's, but the young Ensign was shaking his head. While Mindo would love nothing better than to vaporize the damn thing, he knew what he had to do. =/\= I think just the usual phaser on stun should suffice, though I know the MAKO's are still rather new. But I don't want to punch a hole in the ship. =/\=

=^=Didn't hurt to ask. How many people we gonna get on this? Not exactly flush in personnel on my end. ^= Meera said, standing up and heading to the armory section of her little office space, since it was also the security station for the ship. Yay double duty! At the very least she grabbed two hand phasers.

=/\= I think the two of us can probably handle it. Ensign Jeff here tells me womblets are pretty harmless to people. I figure stun it and take it back to Jeff's quarters. =/\=

Next to Mindo, the Ensign said, "My name's not Jeff." Mindo held up a finger to silence him. Just to reassure him, Mindo gave him a little nod.

=^=Well, you got a specific tube located? If so, I can meet you there. Otherwise, I'll meet you in Engineering. ^= Meera finishes, holstering one at her hip (she preferred the drop holster on her thigh personally, but that's mostly because then it wasn't in the way of the REST of her kit when geared up).

=/\= I'll meet you at the forward access panel on Deck Four. If you have an extra phaser, I could use one. =/\=

Mindo nodded to Crismore to take over in his absence. He then turned to the Ensign. "Don't worry Jeff. We'll get it back."

====Deck 4, Forward Access Panel====

Mindo arrived at the same time Deloria did.

"We've never been formally introduced," said Mindo, extending his hand upward. "I'm Mindo, Chief of Engineering."

Meera smirked, putting the hand phaser into Mindo's outstretched hand. "Oh we've met formally. It's actually finding time from all our paperwork and department fires to deal with to actually find time to get to know each other Chief." She says, checking her phaser to make sure it was ready.

"But for what it matters, I'm Meera Deloria, Chief of Security." She states, before kneeling to start opening the tube access. After a few quick code inputs and tugs to pull it out, the jeffery tube was opened to them. "You got a means to track this thing?"

Mindo held up his tricorder in response. With a nod, Meera ducked down and entered the tube. Mindo followed.

"OK," said Mindo, tapping on his tricorder. "I read him about two sections in, about twenty meters ahead. I've closed the access panels around the thing. According to Ensign Jeff, the womblet is a small creature, about the size of an Earth tarantula, or a horta larvae. Apparently he's also pretty fast."

Just then, the power began to fluctuate again, and the lights dimmed for a moment. "It should be pretty easy to apprehend," Mindo added.

Meera gave a nod, not at all concerned about Mindo being behind her. Sharp end of the stick, Marines were. "And hungry for power. Should make some of it easier to find. Can't be that many power lines running through these." Meera said. Oooh that inexperienced in the exact internal workings of a ship.

"It's probably feeding off of conduits," said Mindo as they approached the first access panel. Meera opened the small hatch and inside they found: nothing. There were exposed wires on the wall of the tube, electricity skipping and sputtering as they had been gnawed upon.

Meera couldn't see anything beyond gnawed wires and conduits, but waiting to see what Mindo had to say.

"That doesn't make any sense," said Mindo. "It should be right..." Just then, Mindo felt something brush past him. When he turned around he couldn't see anything. He immediately checked his tricorder. No readings. Following a hunch, he brought up the infrared display and saw a small blue glob with legs scurrying toward the way from where he and Deloria had just come.

"It has camouflage," said Mindo, already moving quickly to get it. When Mindo got to the access hatch and scanned the hallway, it was gone.

Chasing after the thing in the crawlspaces of the Jefferies tubes wasn't easy, especially when you couldn't actually SEE it. So, coming out, she had her weapon ready, and nodded. "Looked like. Any particular reason he got authorization to bring it aboard? especially since it could cause trouble AND be difficult to recover if it did so?"

Mindo gave a small shrug as he worked on his tricorder. "Perhaps our Captain was worried about other matters to really pay attention to some Ensign's pet. In any case, it's just down the hall, but it isn't moving." He looked up. "This way."

The small creature was only around the next corner, and when they found it, it no longer had its camouflage. It had brown, black, and yellow striped fur and small arms and hands. Its three-eyed face looked rather stunned.

Standing over it was another crewman, a Trill. She looked quite distressed.

"I accidentally stepped on it," she said. "Is it dead?"

Mindo knelt down next to it and scanned it. "No," he said. Just then, the little guy began to move again, slower this time. Mindo fumbled with his sidearm, but realized he wouldn't get it out in time.

With a quick flick of movement, Meera had drawn, aimed, set and fired her phaser, stunning the little bug. "Well then." She says, holstering her phaser again.

Mindo went over to it and gently picked it up. It was still breathing, which was good. It appeared hardly damaged.

"Thanks," said Mindo. "You're quite good at that."

"Combat reflexes honed in the heat of war." Meera said, shrugging.

Mindo stood up. "I should get this back to Ensign Jeff. I'm sure he can control it from there."

"Sounds good to me. That said, if you need any security work done, lemme know. Of course, if you want to get a better look at my ass, or other assets, we can talk about that." Meera said. "And hold onto the phaser till you get that thing back to his owner. Then bring it to the armory to be returned to storage."

"Will do," said Mindo. "Uh, rain check on the better look?"

Meera laughed. "It was a joke Chief. I try to avoid a bunch of the stereotypes, but there are some things that are just part and parcel of being an Orion." She says, giving a wave as she headed back to the Security office to turn her phaser into the armory, and get back to the paperwork.

Mindo stood in the hallway for a moment, not entirely sure if he should feel rejected or... teased. Chuckling to himself, he headed back the other way. Ensign Jeff would no doubt be anxious to get his pet back.

Movements of Light and Darkness

by Lieutenant JG Mindo & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth

Mindo's Quarters

Mindo needed company. He'd been drinking quite a bit. It was four hours after his little talk with Ixelom and he still couldn't get to sleep. He checked his chronometer again. 0618. Would he ever get some sleep?

He stood up and went to the living area of his quarters and pulled down the screen attached to the ceiling at the far wall. Setting up his PADD and tricorder projector, he began to browse through the millions of old films he had put in the ship's library. He needed something good... but what?

He got up and checked the duty roster, noting Caradan, his usual date, had just started the morning shift and would not be available. Who else was burning the midnight oil?

Then he remembered the standing date he had with Riaan. He'd promised her a movie. Noting that she was not on active duty for a number of hours, he walked back to the couch and tapped his console.

=/\=Mindo to Riaan. Are you up? =/\= he said, wondering if she was even awake. It was an odd time to call.

Riaan was wide awake reading reports. With Caradan on duty, there was little else to do to help her insomnia. Without Ziara, the cabin felt empty. While she enjoyed spending time alone, studying one aspect of things or another, it was starting to be a bit much. Mindo's call intrigued her, she hoped it wasn't the port positron sensor, again. She grabbed the commbadge off her desk and tapped it with her thumb. =/\= Riaan here. What's up? =/\= She asked, her soft voice carrying over the commlink.

Mindo smiled. =/\= I'm about to watch a movie. Would you like to join me? =/\=

Riaan nodded to herself, she did not know Mindo well, she mostly dealt with his minions. The only time they really had gotten to talk, it had been a short conversation. However, she knew that Ziara liked him, mostly physically, but as a person as well. =/\=I'd be happy to.=/\= She responded, getting up and slipping into casual clothes.

Riaan's red dress was not one designed to highlight her attractiveness. It was meant for everyday wear, but it fit her. She ran a comb through her hair and exited her cabin. Riaan made her way to Mindo's cabin, because they were both senior staff, they were close together. She touched the chime to let him know she was there.

"Come in," said Mindo. The door swished and suddenly Mindo felt rather under-dressed. Riaan looked very nice in her red dress, while Mindo just looked tired in blue striped pajama bottoms and a white t-shirt.

"Wow," he said, standing and walking over to greet her. "You look great!"

Riaan blushed and looked down, "It's nothing." She said, embarrassed at his compliment.

Mindo looked down at his own unkemptness and shrugged. "Sorry about my own appearance." He ran his hand through his hair, which was sticking up on one side. "I've been up all night. Let me grab something nicer. Please have a seat!"

Riaan sat down on the end of his couch, watching him scurry about the room curiously.

Mindo could've hit himself. He walked back into his bedroom and scrambled to put on a pair of pants and a randomly-chosen purple collared shirt. He grabbed a bottle of Tranya and went back out.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked, grabbing two glasses anyway and moving over to the couch.

Riaan nodded, "Yes, but I do have to be on duty in a few hours." She mentioned. She wondered if Mindo was trying to seduce her, he was a pretty person she could see what Ziara saw in him physically. However, she was not sure if she could deal with that right now.

"I keep a chilled bottle of orange juice around if you'd rather have that," said Mindo. "I'm not trying to get you drunk."

Riaan raised an eyebrow skeptically, "If it's syntahol, I'll have some. If not, then orange juice will be fine." Riaan said quietly as he went to get the drinks.

"Orange juice then," said Mindo, getting out the chilled bottle of orange juice. "What kind of movie would you like to watch? I have millions from all different cultures."

Riaan looked at Mindo, trying to judge what kinds of movies he might like for a long quiet moment. She supposed something lighthearted, but who knew? "I've always enjoyed a good enigma tale." She offered.

Mindo grinned. "I have plenty of those." He handed her the glass of orange juice with the bottle and set his own bottle down, grabbing the PADD and flipping through a few pages of a long list of films from different cultures and different eras. "There's this Cardassian director named Fol Gesset, who specialized in political thrillers. She lived about a hundred years ago. There's Radek of Romulus, whose films were so controversial they were banned for almost three

decades. That was about two centuries ago. The humans have this guy, Hitchcock? Genius. Tamarans have great cinema, period. But they can be hard to understand. What sort of enigmas do you like?"

Riaan's mouth twitched for the briefest moment into what might have been a smile. "I generally think the Cardassian directors are the best, I love how rich and complex they make them, but I'm biased. Radek does have some interesting plot points, but he tends to wax a bit too anti-authoritarian for my tastes."

"Oh great!" said Mindo. "I love Cardassian thrillers." He went to his PADD and flipped through it for a moment. Finally he came to a movie he thought she'd like. "Here's one. It's about eighty years old, from an obscure director named Paka Urdun. He only made a few films, but this particular one, called 'Descent of the People,' is very good. Have you heard of it?"

Riaan thought for a brief moment. "I've got mixed feelings about it, Ziara liked it though." Riaan paused, thinking about her wife for a moment. "Do you miss Ziara?" She asked absent mindedly.

Mindo stopped looking at his PADD for a moment. It had been some time since he and Ziara had interacted, and that was before she had left Tornado.

"Yeah, I miss her," he said. "She was fun to be around." He paused and looked back at Riaan. "Do you miss her?" he asked, wondering why she had brought the subject up.

Riaan was quiet a moment as she put her thoughts in order. "Every moment, Ziara is the better part of me. The part that actually likes people and keeps me going. She always has this way of looking on the bright side of things."

"I feel that way about someone," said Mindo. "I think."

Riaan cocked her head, "Who?" She asked.

"Caradan," said Mindo. He leaned back, and his mind was envisioning her in that green dress she had worn for him once. Well, she hadn't really "worn" it. She'd formed it as part of her body. Mindo had never met a Changeling before he met Caradan, and he'd never been in love with anyone until Caradan.

"I really love her," he said. "It's... intoxicating."

Riaan felt strange, because she also felt that way about Caradan. She wasn't sure how to react. "She really is, isn't she." Riaan numbly agreed as she tried to work through her feelings.

She loved Caradan, if she didn't she would have left with Ziara. Somehow, Mindo felt like a threat. That her feelings and Mindo's were in conflict, even though they were the same feelings, for the same person. She knew that she should be fine with this. That she had been the Caradan for Ziara and Caradan. That Ziara had been happy for her. "I'm happy for you." She said, hoping that by saying it it would become true.

Mindo did not know Riaan well enough to really know for sure, but he felt there was more behind that statement than just the surface. "Do you... do you love her?"

Riaan shifted, knowing the answer to the question but not sure how to answer. She seemed to shrink into the couch. She should be honest with Mindo. She could feel her heart beat faster. "Umm..." Her already soft voice faded in and out as she worked on the words. There was a long silent moment that hung in the air. She let out a small breath, "I do." She said almost inaudibly.

"Oh," said Mindo. He recalled Caradan telling him she loved Riaan, but would put him first. While he had no problem with that, he now realized things may be different for Riaan.

"Is this... a problem?" he asked, not sure how she would respond.

Riaan didn't want it to be a problem. She had known for a while that Caradan and Mindo were also together, as well as Mindo and Ziara. "It wasn't a problem with you and Ziara." She said, but that wasn't the whole story. She wasn't afraid of Ziara leaving her alone, she was still scared of that with Caradan. There was a short silence, and she said what she felt like she should say, how she should feel "It shouldn't be, no."

Mindo thought he sensed something more than "it shouldn't be," but didn't want to press it any further.

"Oh!" he said, turning back to his PADD. "Here's one. It's called 'The Gul of Molten Sky.' Ever heard of it?"

Riaan was too distracted by her own turbulent emotions to listen to Mindo. "Put it on" she murmured as she grappled with how she felt about coming to grips with the relationship between Caradan and Mindo.

Dancing to the Music of Love

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth

Caradan's Quarters

Caradan was in her quarters. Sitting on the floor, she stared out at the stars and pondered the infinite possibilities trying to understand how and why she ended up as Executive officer under a commanding officer that seemed to hate her with every fiber of his being.

And that Trill...

Caradan rocked a bit. She enjoyed the sensation. Using her mimicked lungs, she drew in a deep breath of air and slowly let it out, enjoying the feeling her of chest expanding and contracting.

That was what seemed to get her through the days as of late; the little things that she could enjoy.

Thoughts went through her mind as well; thoughts of the two other Changelings she had encountered and what they were up to not to mention how and why they left the Link in the first place.

All the weight, responsibility, and thoughts were nearly unbearable at times. As it was nearing time for her to regenerate, Caradan looked to her bowl. That was yet another little thing she could enjoy but that would not take away any of the stresses awaiting her.

She sat there on the floor, staring out into space and pondering the infinite possibilities.

Riaan for her part was lonely. Even though she had known that Ziara's departure would mean that she would get the whole room to herself, somehow the quarters seemed even emptier without Ziara's vibrant energy. Ziara had left her model of the Tornado with her, as well as a small doll that looked like Ziara. Riaan knelt and prayed at the small shrine, but it somehow felt different without Ziara beside her.

She was naturally quiet and used to spending long times alone. However, she needed companionship. She changed into civilian attire and crossed the short distance to Caradan's quarters. She rang the chime, telling it to say who she was.

Caradan did more than simply stand up from the floor when the chime came and when the Computer informed her of who was calling at her door. Caradan simply liquefied and formed a standing column from which her usual self emerged from. In addition, she changed her clothing to finally get out of her Starfleet uniform. She absorbed her combadge into her chest as she got to the door.

As the door slid open, she smiled at, "Riaan. Aren't you a..." she paused a brief second. "What's that saying? A sight for sour eyes?" Caradan stood to the side and motioned for Riaan to enter.

Riaan nodded, not familiar with the expression herself. "It sounds right, I think." Her soft voice just loud enough to be heard by the two of them and no more. She stepped into the cabin and reached out a hand to caress Caradan's form with her hand. Caradan was now the only person on the whole ship that she felt comfortable touching and being touched by. Even this light touch was intimate for her. "I don't want to be alone right now." She honestly admitted to Caradan.

Caradan guided Riaan into her quarters. Caradan had nothing in the way of decoration or customization. Her bed was made perfectly and appeared unslept in. Her chairs were barely used. Her lavatory was spotless but never needed cleaning. The only thing that made the room appear lived in was a regeneration bowl sitting along a wall between two windows. Despite the drab and templated appearance of her quarters, they were home to Caradan.

A silent and empty home.

"To be honest," she guided Riaan to the sofa. "I was rather tired of being alone as well." Caradan greatly enjoyed Riaan's company. There were few aboard the ship that could hope to have an idea of what Caradan felt. "Just a moment ago, I was sitting right there," she pointed to the middle of the room, "along with my thoughts to keep me company." She looked away from that spot in the middle of the room and looked off into nothingness. "Not the best company mind you."

Riaan nodded sadly, "My thoughts betray me more often than not." Riaan looked at the room and the wide open space. "You want to dance, or something?" She asked, stepping into the middle of the room.

Caradan followed after Riaan. "I am afraid I am not a very good dancer. I also don't know any good music, though I do have a singing stone that Mindo gave me. Only, the music does not seem much for dancing." Caradan stood before Riaan unsure how to stand or even what to do as the idea of dancing was still somewhat foreign to her.

Riaan nodded, "Don't worry about it, everyone has their first time. I like ballroom dancing personally. So you put your hands like this," Riaan showed her, taking her hands. "Now because your going to be the leader, you are going to

step like so, then back and together." Riaan said, showing her the basic pattern. "Everything else is a variation on this pattern."

"So, I can step like this?" Caradan asked whilst looking at her feet. Riaan moved likewise. "And then like this?"

After another two steps, Caradan nearly stumbled as their feet almost got tangled up. "Sorry," she said as they righted each other.

Riaan smiled, "It's ok, you can't be too worried about stepping on toes when your learning to dance. Falling is a part of learning to walk. Let's try it again, perhaps a bit slower." She said, repositioning her feet with Caradan's.

As they moved again, Riaan gently instructed Caradan, "relax, forward-side-together, backwards-side-together."

Caradan smiled and a small laugh escaped her lips. "This is fun." She found the movement set was easy to perform. She found Riaan following her lead just as easily. She had a hand around Riaan's waist and held Riaan's other hand in her own. She enjoyed the feel of Riaan's soft touch. Looking into her eyes, "What is it like, with Ziara being so far away? If I may ask that is."

Riaan thought for a long moment as they stepped together, "I guess it would be like if you split off a bit of yourself and sent it somewhere. You feel that a piece of you is missing and you deeply want to reunite. You just won't feel whole until you do."

Caradan felt an immense void within her, one that almost made her freeze solid involuntarily, but she maintained herself after a slip of the foot and nearly stumbling. What she felt was her separation from the Great Link. All those other minds sharing together within an ocean of Changelings. And from that ocean, came a single mind. All the other voices went away.

Caradan was nodding. "Yes, I think I understand."

Riaan paused when Caradan stopped, supporting her so she didn't fall. "Are you ok?" She asked with concern lacing her gentle voice.

"I think..." Caradan stood there. Both of them held each other. "I think I understand what you feel better than you may know. For Changelings, being in the Great Link means to have the thoughts of all Changelings coursing the ocean through and through. When I left the Link, all that vanished. Millions of voices were suddenly silenced. Sometimes," she held Riaan a little closer, "sometimes I want nothing more than to know that once again. To go back to the Link. This silence I deal with many times has a name among the Changelings. We call it the Great Terror. No one has ever left the Link without planning on returning...soon." She looked Riaan in the eye and saw a deal of understanding. "If I may ask, why are you here? I mean...why did you not go with Ziara?"

Riaan nodded softly at Caradan's response. "I'm here because I don't just want to be with Ziara. I also want to be with you, because if you were gone, I think I'd still feel those same tugs on my heart." Riaan explained.

Caradan smiled. "I can honestly say that, through my years outside of the Link, my years of travel and searching, that I have never found someone so welcoming nor a sense of belonging than I have found here, aboard this ship."

Riaan held Caradan for a long moment, a part of her grew sad. "All things will come to an end. Even if we are together wherever, I will age and die. Then you may be alone again." Riaan said, sharing her thoughts. She shook her head, "Sorry, I'm not always in a good place."

"For the moment though," Caradan produced a small smile, "perhaps you are in the best place." She slowly pulled Riaan into a hug, then continued to move about in a slow dance. "You will always live in my memories," she whispered to Riaan. "And when the day comes that I do return to the Link, an entire species will know the name Riaan Rrareth."

Riaan blushed and looked down, she didn't have words for how Caradan had made her feel in that moment. She danced in a slow circle, holding the changeling tight against her. So much of the stress she had been under fell off in that moment. A wide smile crept onto her normally emotionless face. "Thank you."

"And thank you," said Caradan. "Because...too often do I find myself in the grip of silence stuck with only my thoughts and worries. I was in that state a few minutes ago." The pair slowly turned. "And then you came along."

Riaan smiled at Caradan, "and then you answered the door."

Resting her forehead against Riaan's, Caradan looked her in the eyes. "You really are a jewel Riaan. Ziara is truly lucky to have you as her wife."

Demotion and Promotion

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth & Ivy Sharzin

Science Lab

Caradan has some unpleasant business to tend to it seemed from the way Riaan sounded over the comms. Her voice was softer and a bit more profound than usual. Caradan had gotten used to Riaan's voice throughout their time together. Subtle changes that many would never even notice could mean the difference between Riaan having a good day and her about to break down. This time though, her voice contained the sound of business she wanted to avoid at all costs.

Riaan waited in her office for Caradan. From the sound of it, Ivy's encounter with her 'history' lesson had not gone well. Then again, Riaan supposed that learning the people who had picked you up had genocided an entire race of people like you was not exactly the most comforting thing. She was not sure of how to deal with it, so she had called Caradan for help. Perhaps the two of them could work out the best way to proceed.

The doors parted and Caradan stood there a second before entering. The lab was in good order. The only occupant at the moment was Riaan. Then there were two as Caradan stepped inside. At first she felt Riaan had some nervous or anxiety attack but she seemed well enough, save for the present look of distress.

"Riaan," Caradan crossed the room to her, "is everything alright? What happened?"

Riaan considered how to explain the situation. "I'm alright, but I'm worried that Ivy may not be ok." She briefly explained what had happened, what Legano had showed her, even the PADD with the information displayed. "I'm not sure I'm the best person to go and talk things through with her. I've been there when something like that was happening and I did nothing."

Caradan took the PADD and scrolled through it, looking at the past incidents where the U.S.S. Enterprise interacted with a vegetative species. One ended in genocide. It was in defense of the galaxy but it was genocide all the same.

Caradan looked up and connected with Riaan's eyes. "Lagano showed Ivy this?" She did not wait for an answer. "Working in the Science Department, he should have brought this information to you first, you to me, the captain, and then we figure a way to inform Ivy." She deactivated the PADD and put it away.

Caradan thought a moment, feeling Riaan's tension in the air. "Don't worry about Ivy. There have been no reports of anyone rampaging across the ship so she took the news well enough. She and I share something of a bond I think, so I will go speak with her." She could see Riaan's concerned eyes moving about and she moved until she caught those eyes. "Riaan, everything is OK. Though there is a difficult job I need you to perform. As Chief Science Officer, everyone in the department is now your responsibility. You need to reprimand Lagano. He came to you in confession so he knows what he did was wrong. Ivy needs to know these things but his methods could have proved disastrous." Caradan pulled her own PADD from out her torso and brought up Lagano's military profile. "I see Lagano is a Crewman 1st Class." She tapped on the PADD a few times. "It is not your duty to draw up the paperwork demoting him to Crewman 2nd Class. Perform whatever further disciplinary action you deem necessary. Make sure he sees your counseling statement for him. Make sure he signs it."

She could see anxiety growing in Riaan. "You can do this. You are strong Riaan."

Riaan looked at Caradan, "I don't know. I've never had to reprimand anyone before. It wasn't ill intentioned, just a bit of overenthusiastic over-sharing." Riaan tried to steel herself, "No, it wasn't a good idea. Well intentioned bad ideas are still bad ideas none the less." Riaan said, slightly torn. "I'm disappointed in him. I expected better."

"As we all," Caradan agreed. "He may have had the best intentions but his presentation was ill conceived. And that kind of work ethic is not becoming of a Crewman 1st Class, which is why he needs to be demoted. He could be promoted again...later, but he needs to show that a lesson has been learned. This is something the chiefs of all departments have to face at some point." Caradan felt a comparison was in order to better aid Riaan. "At least you are not dealing with a fight or a dispute between crew members. This is a simple infraction stemming from bad judgment. That is all it is."

Riaan nodded and spoke softly. "I can do it, I will do it." She gave a weak smile at Caradan. "All part of learning to be an officer." She said, trying to be hopeful and failing. Her eyes lingered on Caradan. The sight of the changeling she loved helped soothe the turbulent emotions she was feeling.

Caradan was relieved and had full confidence the Riaan could see this situation through. She was eternally grateful that this was not some serious infraction or dereliction of duties but just a case of bad judgment.

"Do you know where Ivy is now?" she asked Riaan. "As XO, it is my duty to make sure she is fine and that there is no cause for concern. I need to speak with her."

Riaan thought for a moment. "She is probably in her room, we converted it to be more like her home so she's probably most comfortable there."

Caradan was unsure if she should just show up at Ivy's door. Being the executive officer aboard the Tornado made her authorized to appear anywhere aboard the entire ship unannounced, but Ivy was, by definition, a civilian.

As she watched Riaan prepare herself for her own unfortunate duty, Caradan slapped at her commbadge. "Eunidas to Sharzin. Ivy, do you read?"

Hearing the speaker in her quarters, Ivy almost dropped her food, as it's little flippers flapped and tail wiggled in her hand. She tapped the comm-link on her uniform with her free hand. "=^=Ivy here. Is there something I can do for you Lieutenant=^="

"Ivy, can we meet?" Caradan asked. "Right now. And...in private?"

Ivy looked down at the water dwelling animal in her grasp and frowned. The expression on her exterior face followed suit as expected. She replied, "Yes. I can . . ." She was about to explain her situation and realized that the XO probably didn't care for any reasons at the moment, so she queried, "Where would you like to meet?" She grimaced again, still looking at the fish that wasn't moving as much anymore, thinking she should put it back in the water tank, she had installed in her quarters for food such as this.

"I can drop by your quarters if that is acceptable," said Caradan. "I will not take up too much of your time."

Ivy, puzzled, glanced about her room of photo-quality wall murals of jungles, plants hanging everywhere, and a moist Earth smell in the air and wondered, <I>why she would want to come here ?</I> She shrugged and replied, "Yes. All right. I guess that would be fine." She looked down at the fish in her hand, barely breathing and quickly walked over to the tank, dropping it into the water with a noticeable, 'PLOP'!

Caradan heard the noise emanate from her commbadge and she furrowed her brow in curiosity as to what that was. "Well, I will be along momentarily. Eunidas out."

It was only minutes later that Caradan arrived and chimed her called at Ivy's door.

Ivy stepped over to the door and pressed the open activation button. She knew the voice activation for the door worked, but felt that not being at the door when 'one' entered her 'home' would be considered rude.

The door slid open, Ivy couldn't help but smile and said, "Hello Blue-eyes. Please come in," and she extended a hand motioning for the Lieutenant to enter. She certainly hoped it was acceptable to call her 'that' name. She was one of the few people that truly helped her after arriving on the Tornado.

"Hello Spud," Caradan said as she entered and looked around at the room in admiration. "Is it OK that I call you Spud? The name kind of grew on me. You are," she looked at Ivy's figure, "you are much bigger than a spud now though."

Ivy smiled at the familiarity that which Blue-eyes still had with her, even though, Ivy had come to understand, that she was the executive officer, meaning 2nd in command of this vessel. "You are most welcome to call me 'spud', although as I have learned from my reading, those things are usually reserved for private moments and not typically used in public situations." Ivy was pretty sure she got that right, and smiled again and said what she had learned, "Welcome to my quarters." She extended both arms out to her sides, encouraging Blue-eyes to feel free to look about.

Ivy was very pleased with the way the Operations personnel had helped her with the comfortable padded furniture with a foliage print, the lighting which was mostly indirect, and the one entire wall that was a display screen. It could be changed from time to time and even provide visuals of animals passing by.

"Thank you," replied Caradan. She took in the room in greater detail and sensed the various aromas with her being. "And you are correct. The pet names...I do not know why they are called 'pet names' as we are certainly not pets...but the pet names we use for each other are generally used in private." She shrugged. "Sometimes in public but in informal situations. You are looking well," she looked back at Ivy. "I trust you are getting along well aboard the Tornado."

Ivy was about to reply, but was cut short when Blue-eyes continued.

Caradan decided this was no time for small talk. She said her visit would not take long and she felt the need to honor that promise. "Actually. Riaan's reports indicate just that. I need to speak to you about another matter."

This comment brought Ivy's full attention. She looked at her friend with curiosity, her lips coming to a thin line and then nodded slightly.

Caradan stepped up closer to Ivy but maintained some distance as she was still unaware of the amount of personal space Ivy and/or her kind enjoyed. "I understand you spoke with Crewman Logano in the Science Department and that he shared with you some information involving Starfleet's past encounters with vegetative species. One encounter, I understand, lead to the eradication of the entire race."

As Blue-eyes' explanation took shape the expression on Ivy's face seemed to sag to being somewhat blank, moving to slightly repulsed. Ivy took a half step back, away from her friend. She slowly said, "Yes. It was a terrible . . . incident." Ivy chose to use a socially acceptable word, and not the word she wanted to use. She turned away slightly, looking down and away, but responded further, "I know now that I over reacted." There was a long pause as she remembered the incident, then said, "I do realize that sometimes the intensity of reactions can not be reversed, no matter how sorry one might be. But the devastation . . . was . . . a tragedy." She sighed, she wasn't sure what else to say, as she continued to look down and away, her shoulder sagging.

"I don't think you over-reacted," Caradan took a step closer to Ivy. "There are no reports of you rampaging, no one got hurt, there are no mysterious deaths. What was disclosed to you was...I believe I can imagine it. As you may know, my kind, Changelings that is, we were the founders of an organization called the Dominion. The Dominion went to war against the Federation. To my knowledge there was not any genocide going on though a team, standing against the Dominion did travel to the Delta Quadrant and decimated the surface of a planet that the Changelings once inhabited. We had left before then."

Still, Caradan could see the pain in Ivy's compound eyes, if she was reading those eyes correctly. "What I am saying is...I can commiserate with you if you need. I just came from meeting with Riaan. Crewman Logano confessed to showing you that information. Though you have the right to know, he should have gone through the chain of command instead of showing it to you himself. He is being reprimanded and demoted as we speak."

"Tell me," said Caradan, "how do you feel?"

Ivy thought for a moment about the question and how she currently 'felt'. She really had no desire to rehash all the emotions that she experienced recently. She replied, "At the moment . . . I feel good. And I have no desire to think about those awful things again. Well, . . . at least for a while . . . if I can help it." She smiled at her friend. She was very glad to spend time with her.

Being a Changeling, Caradan possessed many collective memories of conquered planets, destroyed civilizations and whole Quadrants in shambles because of the Dominion. All she could do was, "Agreed. Let's not dwell on things past, but make the best of now so we can make a better future." She smiled at Ivy feeling her to be another who could possibly understand her better than most.

Ivy smiled again, pleased with her friend's mutual attitude. She stepped back extending her arm toward a sofa, "Would you like to sit for a while?"

Caradan smiled. "I do have some time before I am due back on the Bridge." Nodding, "I would love to."

Ivy took a few steps to in front of the sofa and sat down gently, extending her arm toward the other cushion.

Understanding the gesture, Caradan moved closer and sat right beside Ivy. It seemed she had grown comfortable with others, Caradan even, being within her personal space. Caradan looked about the room again, taking in the sights and the smells. Ivy's quarters reminded her, through collective memory though, of a world the Changelings once inhabited.

Ivy now felt very perplexed. She realized that she never had considered what to say or do with a 'guest' once she got to this point. She hesitated with a questioning look on her face as she looked about her quarters.

Aside from the fish aquarium off to the side, there was little in Ivy's quarters for sound. The place looked and smelled like a tropical environment but the sounds of wild animals and insects was missing at the moment. Caradan felt Ivy either forgot to turn on any audio or had it deactivated before she arrived. She looked back at Ivy, smiled, then cast her gaze out at her quarters once again.

Ivy finally smiled, turned to face her friend, and asked, "What do you think of my decorating style?"

Caradan nodded a few times in acceptance. "It is very comfortable for you I am sure. For me as well," she turned to Ivy. "This actually reminds me, though collectively, of a planet my kind once inhabited. I have no personal memory of it, but the images are there." She looked about the arrangements of plants, taking in, again, the smells. "I will certainly applaud Lieutenant Mindo and Riaan for being able to modify the environmental controls for you."

"Yes!" Ivy exclaimed, "They have both helped so much." She looked about the room once more, as if for the first time, and added, "This is very much like the home I remember." Looking back at her friend with a sadder expression, "But no one to share it with." After a second, "One day I will find my family."

"Yes," Caradan nodded. "One day you will find them. Perhaps we can find them together. In the meantime," and she paused as she thought about the suggestion before suggesting it, "I could see about the installation of holo-emitters in your quarters. You could program some of your own kind to share this with. I know they will not be real but it could help. That, or maybe," and Caradan brought an arm up, liquefied it and reformed it similar to Ivy's arm, complete with an intricate weave of vines and fibers. Caradan's arm was spotted with small leaves. "I can mimic just about anything."

Ivy was considering the 'holo-emitter' idea and was really not prepared to see an arm like her own before her eyes. She was a bit shocked, but then made a motion of apology and said, "Sorry, that just startled me. I was thinking about the emitter, then you changed." Her face became concerned and a hesitant question came out, "I guess I don't understand. Why would you change into someone like me?"

Caradan's arm shot back to its normal state. "I was...just letting you know the options you have," she explained. "A holo-image is only that. And it is something you program to your liking. It is still only a holo-image though. My mimicking of your kind would be only a mimic. I would learn more of your species but you would have another sentient person to share this all with." She sat back and folded her hands together. "I have an idea of how lonely you may feel. There are no Changelings in Starfleet. None that I know of in this quadrant even. I have none of my own kind to socialize with." There was, of course, the two Changelings she knew of somewhere and plotting their own mischief. "I have only the crew of this ship, my friends, my family here. In time, I am sure you will view them similarly."

Ivy had listened to Blue-eyes' explanation and then thought for a moment quietly with down cast eyes and prim lips. She then looked up to her friend smiling and replied, "I think I understand now. You are offering friendship . . . even to the point of looking like me, for a time. That is a very generous gesture. Thank you." She paused for a moment and added, "I too hope that the crew here on the Tornado become like a family to me . . . as you have already."

Ivy's smile widened as joy filled her. It was a glorious feeling knowing that others about her wanted to become part of her life, provide her needs, but even more importantly provide new experiences and friendships.

"Well," Caradan started, "You can't make friends and family being cooped up in your quarters or in the Science Lab all the time. How would you like it if I were to see about a field promotion for you to Cadet? Possibly get you some time on the Bridge? You could even divide your time among several departments if you like. Try your hand at Security, get dirty down in Engineering, maybe some Operations. What do you think?"

As Blue-Eyes explained further, Ivy's facial expression changed. Initially the mouth dropped open in shock and amazement, but then every thing seems to 'sag'. A great deal of clicking noises exploded from her. The translator began to squeal a bit as Ivy began to bounce up and down, in place.

Caradan didn't know what to do. She thought Ivy was excited at first, but then she seemed distressed at the same time.

Ivy placed her hands over her face and physically turned away. It just took a few seconds before she turned back to face her friend.

"Ivy...," Caradan paused. "I am sorry. Did this come as a surprise or is this not what you wanted?" She also wondered if she said something or made a noise that would have translated into a stinging insult in her language.

Ivy then stood before her friend with a big smile on her face. She began making the usual clicks and snaps, which the translator replied, "I am soo sorry. I got soo excited . . . I guess I lost control of everything." The translator was able to pass along the Ivy's excitement in the reply.

Caradan stood likewise, finally realizing the excited and happy state Ivy was in. Smiling, "Well I am glad you are happy. Sorry, there is still much to learn about your species, I didn't know what to make of your response. Once this mission is done. I will speak with the captain."

Still very excited, Ivy reached forward gently, extending her hands toward her friend and stated, "Yes. Thank you so much. I would very much like the opportunity to learn and help out about the ship. If the additional opportunity is available to be considered a Cadet, then . . . I would . . ." She stopped, not knowing what else to say. Then after a moment adding, "I would very much desire to achieve that goal."

Kicking Tires, Starting Fires

by Lieutenant JG Mindo & Petty Officer 2nd Class Seepok & Petty Officer 3rd Class Vaimera Gherr & Petty Officer 3rd Class Tiffany Crismore & Ensign Ixelom Vejeem & Ensign Bradford Keselowsky

Engineering

Twirling her hair as she ran down the checklist in front of her, Officer Tiffany Crismore hummed quietly to herself a song from the Cardassian opera "The Deceit of Gul Rakoth," one of her favorites and one she and Brad had watched more than a few times. Finishing the checklist, she exited the screen on her PADD and brought up the home page, where she had two messages from Ensign Keselowsky.

The first was...

♪ Your lips so soft and red,
the thought of kissing you is stuck in my head.
Your beauty so bright and warm,
shinning through the darkest storm.
Your eyes sparkle like...♪

And the second was...

"Damnit! That was supposed to delete. Not send. Forget that one."

-For my Tiff-

♪ Why are you so beautiful?
Why do you take my breath away?
How did I get so lucky?
How are you perfect in every single way?
Your laugh should be illegal because it's too cute.
I never want to spend a minute without you.
The way you kiss me takes my breath away.
Seeing you is the best part of my day.
You are so special,
And I'm glad that I can say you are mine,
Because when I'm with you I feel extraordinary
All of the time.♪

Tiffany stifled a laugh. The poems were rather cheesy, but a girl couldn't resist such things. As much as Brad drove her crazy, he had his moments, and this was one of them. She shook her head and hit "Save," just as she had the last twenty or so poems he'd sent her that week.

Meanwhile, Officer Seepok was headed downward from the third level of the warp core to the ground on one of the small lifts on either side. Once grounded he headed to the Chief Engineer's office, where Mindo was finishing some reports of his own before calling it a night. As he entered the room, the aging Vulcan saw the other new addition to the Engineering crew, a young unjoined Trill named Vaimera Gherr, with whom he'd had little interaction.

"...but before you go," Mindo said to Gherr, "I want you to give this report on the aft shields to Brad. Make sure he approves of what you have here. I think it's a good idea, but Brad gets cranky if I don't include him in such decisions."

Gherr nodded and headed out of the office, with Seepok letting her pass before stepping in.

"Seepok," said Mindo. "How is the core's stability?"

Seepok handed Mindo the report. "It remains intact, with only minute structural anomalies."

Mindo scanned the report, not reading every word. Structure analysis was critical in Engineering, as a warp core breach could destroy the whole ship. A report on the subject was required every hour. It was tedious, and only ever got exciting when in battle or passing through some kind of strange particle storm or other such volatile occurrence. Then things got serious.

"These are indeed minute," said Mindo. "Normally I would ignore it, seeing as how these are... wow, microscopic. But I'd hate to tell Shag we saw an error and did nothing about it."

"Yes, sir. I will get on it right away."

"Don't tire yourself, Seepok. 'Anomalies' this small hardly deserve attention. When your decimal point goes three zeroes back, it's a safe bet we're not in any dire danger. Next time only two zeroes," Mindo said with a small smile.

"Yes, sir," said Seepok, already heading out the door to grab a sealant tool to patch up the microscopic errors on the core. Mindo would no doubt have him cut it short later, as such a task would take days to finish, assuming no other microscopic problems arose, which was impossible. Seepok would not be as eager to please next time.

Mindo walked out of his office to check on things, make his last round before retiring for the night.

As the engineers worked, Ixelom passed through the main doors, her expression a mix of curiosity and geniality. It was, she had to admit, partly deceptive. The counselor did love meeting people, that being the primary reason she had chosen the job. That was entirely true.

However, as she looked at the massive, cylindrical warp core, Ixelom couldn't help but shudder. She had only just graduated from the Academy, and thus her mandated study of starship engineering was fresh in her mind...as was her discomfort at just how unsettling a warp core was. Truth be told, if crew morale wasn't the literal definition of her job, Ixelom wouldn't have gone anywhere near Main Engineering.

Still, it was, and thus she looked quite cheerful as she saw Mindo leaving. "Hi!" she said to the chief engineer, choosing him as her first target. It was his domain, and if his people saw that she was being polite and proper and respecting his authority, it would encourage them to accept her presence.

"Hello Counselor," said Mindo. "Nice to see you again. Coming to check on us grunts? We've got a few new faces down here."

"I heard," Ixelom replied, smirking as she looked around. Main Engineering was relatively small compared to larger starships, but it was still a sizable chamber, and she could see a variety of engineers scattered around the place. "I won't hold you up from getting some rest," she said playfully to Mindo, "but who do you think should be my first target?"

Mindo smiled conspiratorially. "I'd start with the Trill, Gherr. I know the least about her."

It took a few moments to identify Gherr, but finally Ixelom did. The Trill engineer was talking to Keselowsky on the other side of the warp core, and she smiled devilishly; two birds, one stone.

"Thanks," she said quietly to Mindo, even comically rubbing her hands together. "Now get the hell out of here and relax, Mister Chief Engineer. I've got work to do, and they won't respond as well if you're here too."

Mindo grinned and turned to leave. "Go easy on them," he said. "But not too easy."

<i>'37. 38. 39. Damn, how many spots does a Trill have?'</i> Brad looked down at the PADD quickly as Vaimera looked up at him. "I like what you have here Vai. Can I call you Vai? You see this right here?" He pointed at a schematic included in the report. "That's my design. I came up with that. Yep. That's my work." He scrolled through the rest of the report a bit too quickly to have actually read every word. "Looks good. This gets the Keselowsky seal of approval."

Vaimera nodded and smiled a little. "Thank you, sir. And you're not the only one to call me Vai. It's fine if you do."

"No need to call me 'Sir'," Keselowsky said with a smile. "Us lowly Ensigns do not get that much authority. Brad will do. Or Bradford. Or just Keselowsky. Kes even. 'The Man' also works well."

"Brad, then," said Vai with a smile.

"Oh and...I do not know much about Trill social conventions, so stop me if I am wrong, but we have another Trill on board. A yeoman named Davmorda Rex. I think that means she's Joined or whatever that's called. We sometimes call her T-Rex, because she always seems to be on a rampage. But if Trills need to socialize with one another, then she would be your best bet."

"Oh, thanks. I'll look into that," said Vai. She had seen the young Yeoman around, but hadn't had any interaction with her.

"Don't look now," Keselowsky whispered. "Here comes the shrink. She's a Tellarite. I know how to handle them."

The Tellarite in question approached slowly, looking around the vast chamber in apparent fascination as she walked around the warp core, before coming up to Keselowsky and Gheer.

"Hi" Ixelom said, her smile set on maximum cuteness, aided in so small part by her friendly, beady eyes.

"Well aren't you as pretty as a hairy butt," said Keselowsky to Ixelom in his attempt to converse as a Tellarite would.

The whole room stopped. Everyone was now staring at the obnoxious young Ensign and the ship's counselor. Keselowsky just smiled real big.

Ixelom blinked, astonished.. She looked over Keselowsky head to toe for a long moment, her gaze unashamedly lecherous, before finally smiling with unquestionably evil intent.

"Bradford, I really had no idea," she said seductively. "I've never done human before, but if you're really interested, we can go up to your quarters and make mad passionate love to one another."

"Oh," Keselowsky tried to form words. "No. I. But..."

"Nobody has called me ass hairy in such a long time, and I didn't know many humans knew about that custom..." Trailing off, Ixelom glanced at Tiffany from across Engineering, twisting her hands together absent-mindedly. By now the counselor's eyes were set on full adorable, oddly similar to a piglet. "Will Tiffany be joining us?" she finished demurely.

Taken aback and blushing blood red, Brad nearly tripped over nothing at all as he took a few awkward steps back. "I...no...but...Tiff...no. No! I...I think the Tellarite...I mean the teleporter may be sex...sex...sex...AH! SUSPICIOUSLY acting up." He turned quickly and marched off. "Let me just go and," as he passed Tiffany he lowered his voice and finished with, "die in a corner somewhere." He went to a nearby terminal and brought up a random schematic, cringing infrequently.

Tiffany was first to break the awkward silence as she busted out laughing. Everyone else gave a rather nervous laugh, trying to be polite in the impoliteness.

"Oh god," said Tiffany between breaths. "I'm sorry... I'm so so sorry!"

Carefully maintaining a disappointed look, Ixelom nevertheless winked at Tiffany before shifting her attention to Gherr.

"So how are you settling in, Vaimera?" she asked the Trill girl dourly.

"Well," said Vaimera, "It's been almost a month since I've been here, and I think I'm beginning to call this place home. This is my third assignment and I'm finding it rather easy to fit in here. Lt. Mindo, sorry... 'The Chief,' as we call him down here, has been great to work with. I've never served on a ship this small, but I'm finding the crew is a lot closer than normal, and I really like that."

Ixelom smiled. "Yeah, I do too. It's a really lovely community here. How are you finding the computer systems?"

"Easier to handle than the last ship I was on. It was an old Galaxy-class starship, so there are things the Tornado does better than that ship ever did. Have you ever served on a Galaxy-class?" asked Vaimera.

"Oh, no, this is my first assignment," Ixelom said cheerfully. She surreptitiously kept an eye on things going on behind Vaimera, already planning her next move. "I only graduated from the Academy a few months ago. I've heard that Galaxy-class ships are gorgeous places to work, though, and their diplomatic facilities are supposed to be resplendent. Are crew quarters really as big as they say?"

Vai gave a small shrug. "Mine was small compared to the senior staff, but bigger than the one I have here. I had to get rid of some of my furniture when I transferred."

"Furniture logistics: not the kind of thing they teach in the Academy," Ixelom said with a toothy grin. "So...The Chief, Bradford, Tiffany, you, and...uh...what's his name?" She looked pointedly at the Vulcan engineer laboriously examining the warp core. "Seepok? Seipok? Sin...pok?"

"That's Seepok," said Vai. "He's new here too, but he's been in Starfleet for almost seventy years!"

"Seventy years!?" Ixelom whispered, her eyes wide. "Okay, that's actually a little...um...intimidating. Do you have any advice for talking to him?"

Vai shook her head. "Not really. I haven't conversed with him much, but he seems nice... at least, in his own Vulcan way."

"I know what you mean," Ixelom said with a conspiratorial smirk. She glanced at Seepok again thoughtfully before seemingly changing her mind, instead focusing on Tiffany. "Okay Vaimera, thanks! I'll let you get back to work now, but if you ever want to chat, let me know and we can schedule a time. And I do mean anything, sweetie. Even if you just want to gossip."

Vaimera snickered at that. "I'll keep you in mind, Counselor. Thanks."

Now the squat counselor began advancing on her new target, although this time she was a little more stealthy. She walked slowly around the perimeter, looking around with apparent curiosity, before eventually coming close to Tiffany as she tapped away at one of the consoles.

"Sorry about that," Ixelom said quietly, her smile now sheepish.

Tiffany grinned again. "He had it coming, believe me," she giggled. "On his behalf, I apologize."

Unable to resist, Ixelom giggled too, the sound coming out oddly high-pitched, and she moved a hand over her mouth to try and muffle the noise.

"Not to worry, dear, he was sweet," she said quietly, still grinning toothily. "How are you two doing, anyway? It must be nice to work together."

Tiffany stepped closer to Ixelom and spoke quietly. "It can be a living hell. He's pompous, impulsive, loud, and irreverent almost all the time." She glanced at Brad, who was definitely out of earshot, then looked back at the counselor. Her face softened. "But there are the times where he's just so sweet and caring. The weird thing is, he has no idea when he's doing it. He's so worried about his own image it's nauseating. But then he slips up and says or does something and I see the real him, the bumbling sweetheart underneath. He's much more complicated than he seems. Most of the time, I want to punch him. But I have to admit, I kinda like the poor guy." Tiffany giggled. "I don't know if I'm making any sense!"

"You're making perfect sense," Ixelom whispered with a grin, watching Keselowsky at the corner of her eye to make sure he wasn't watching them in turn. "How are he and Mindo getting along? They're both such sweethearts in their own way but weren't there some problems at some point?"

Tiffany sighed. "Brad still calls him 'Little Mindy,' even to his face. But they definitely get along much better now. To be honest, they have me to thank, though I don't think they know it. The Chief is a very sweet guy underneath that hardened exterior. And he's a great boss. He doesn't tolerate insubordination from anyone to everyone. He treats us all equally, even Brad, and he's a good leader. But yes, at first he and Brad clashed a lot. Lately, though, they haven't really been in each other's faces at all. In their own ways I think they respect each other."

The counselor grinned. "That's an improvement! I really thought things were worse than that from what I've read, but their ameliorative curve is steeper than I'd expect. Thanks Tiffany!"

"No problem," said Tiffany. "How have *you* been, Counselor?"

Ixelom blinked, plainly surprised by the question, before her smile returned, this time notably warmer. "Do you know how few people ask that question? It's hard work, much harder work than in a hospital back home, but it's just so rewarding!"

"I've always felt that way about being a Starfleet officer," said Tiffany. "Thank you for your visit, counselor. It's good to see you again."

A Little Too Easy

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Mindo & Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson & Ensign Elena Reis & Corporal Johnathan Higgins
USS Tornado

BRIDGE

"Aye Ma'am," said Ensign Hamilton at the helm. "Dropping out of warp."

Caradan sat in the captain's chair, again in command of the ship temporarily as Commander Shaqdac stayed behind in his quarters, undoubtedly giving Caradan another chance to fail.

Shaking her head, "Not letting that happen," she whispered to herself.

The Tornado slowed from warp and came to a stop in orbit of the fifth planet, though it was the fourth planet that was of interest. Caradan ordered the ship to stop sooner so as to get a better idea of the situation before they arrive at their destination.

"Corporal Higgins," Caradan kept her eyes fixed on the viewscreen with a tactical overlay displayed. There were no Klingon ships detected in the area. "Scan the space around the fourth planet. What do you see?"

Higgins looked over the scans. "String of defense sats Ma'am. Look to be a full planetary defense grid if I had to guess. Look like a few defense platforms, but they're the majority. Got several offensive ones if the massive main gun I'm seeing mean anything." He reports, getting the best scans he could with conditions as they were. "Can't give you any precise details though, solar flares are making any kind of solid scan for armaments or defenses difficult at best. And don't bother asking me about ground conditions. Uhh, Ma'am."

Caradan sat back and furrowed her brow, a gesture she had seen many do. "Well, this seems a bit too easy to be true. Ensign Reis," Caradan turned to the second officer, "Thoughts? Ideas?"

"Well, seems like that's true." Reis said. "I mean," She tapped away at her panel and looked over the information shown to her. "It could be a trap, it could be just a state of disrepair. It could be... well... a lucky break." She shook her head, "Really, we need to give those satellites a wide berth until we know for sure they're actually disabled, and we aren't slipping into a trap. Hard to scan and seemingly dormant." She gave a shrug, "We should be wary. Something always lurks in places like this. Might not be Klingons, might be worse."

Caradan slapped her commbadge. "Bridge to Engineering."

=^="Keselowsky here."=^=

"Ensign, where is Lieutenant Mindo?"

=^="He just got off duty Ma'am."=^=

"Well I am about to get him back on duty. I want two sets of eyes and a detailed scan of those defense satellites."

=^="Aye Ma'am. Keselowsky out."=^=

"Computer," said Caradan to the ceiling. There came an affirmative bleep. "Relay message to Lieutenant Mindo. Report back to Engineering. Detailed scans required. Order of Lieutenant Eunidas. Send message."

Moments later, Mindo exited the turbolift onto the bridge.

"I was closer to the Bridge," he said, walking briskly to the Engineering station behind the Captain's chair. "I can run my scans from up here."

"Sounds good," said Caradan. "Glad to have you up here lieutenant."

Moments later, Mindo spoke up. "Sir, my scans indicate the defense satellites are not powered at the moment. They're a little outdated, but could probably be accessed by our computer once we calibrate for the technology. I'm sending the information to Ensign Keselowsky now. They should have compatibility worked out in under ten minutes."

"We may not need use of these satellites," said Caradan. "Let's just be prepared in case unwanted guests do arrive. If you do run any simulations, do not access the satellites directly. I do not want to alert anyone." Caradan looked back to the tactical display on the viewscreen. "If anyone is watching that is."

Erickson stepped in to the bridge and handed a padd to Caradan. "The satellites should have any issues. The main power grid is no longer attached to anything." Erickson reported. "The moon around the planet is what we will have issues with. Trace elements will make transporting to the surface difficult. I was waiting for the scan results to come back to confirm sir."

"We will have to shuttle down then," Caradan said. "It seems we cannot scan the surface from this distance. I want to get a report from Engineering before we proceed."

"Aye sir," said Mindo.

Engineering

Crewman Tiffany Crismore looked up from her screen on the center multi-access console, known as the pool table.

"Brad," she said to Ensign Keselowsky, "I have the calibrations we need for the satellites but...how good is your Klingon?"

"On a scale of 1 to 10. 1 being Mindy's opinion of me and 10 being...he looked to Tiffany...10 being your opinion of me," he thought but a second, "I would have to say somewhere around my father's opinion of me. Probably a 5. No 6. Yeah, right around there. 6.5 maybe. 7 tops. It's good. Above OK for sure." He gave up and decided to look at the schematics. "Let's just find out for sure shall we."

Tiffany calculated in her head her opinion of him as a ten, then decided to calculate what she thought Brad thought was her opinion of him and then dialed it back a little.

"OK," she said after a second. "That's good enough. I'll need your help."

"Sure thang babe," Keselowsky said as he looked over the schematics displayed on his terminal. "It looks like these satellites are all independently operated...were independently operated. Perhaps a cascading command can be sent to one that will filter to all the others. Taken that we can get power to these things." Brad looked up at Tiffany, seeing an irritated look about her. "I'm sorry. What do you need from me?"

"Well so far, you're right on track, but what I really need is help configuring the universal translator to this dialect, and for that I need someone who speaks Klingon. Mindo isn't here, so I need you." She added, "And for the last time, don't call me babe while we're on duty."

"Sure thang ba...um...Yeah. Let's get on this." Keselowsky went to work on the universal translator in regards to the particular dialect of Klingon contained in the source code of the defense satellites. "I am having to account for the programming code as well. Of course, it is not the same as spoken Klingon." He tapped away at his terminal and mumbled things to himself. "This is a bit strange. There are words and phrases here that the computer is telling me," he looked over a few things again to double check, "have not been spoken or used for a long time now. Actually, this dialect was customary to the ridgeless Klingons; the augments." He looked up to Tiffany then continued working. "That is why the U.T. had trouble at first. Accessing language archives now."

As the universal translator started working on translating phrases and words, he sent the workspace back to Tiffany's work station. "You should have it now. Do your thang baaaaaeeeeiiiiiii...I am going to stop talking now."

Bridge

Within a few moments, Mindo turned back to Caradan and reported, "Sir, we have compatibility with the satellites and have already run a few tests. If we can bring them online, I think I could create a negative feedback, using their own satellites, that would jam any sensors they may have and make it harder for them to see us. Then we can get in closer for a more accurate scan."

"Hold that thought Lieutenant," said Caradan to Mindo as she looked over information on her PADD. Being out of the way, this entire system seem mostly to completely uninhabited." She dropped her hand by her side and stepped forward closer to the viewscreen. "It can't be that easy. Mindo," she spun to the engineering station, "have your team ready to initiate upon my command. If there is anyone in the area, I don't want to alert them to our capabilities. Erickson," she turned to Scott, "what is the likelihood that anyone, friend or foe, could be using the forth planet as a staging area or a lookout, anything?"

"Very likely sir. The moon around the planet makes it hard to transport down. It's in a better tactical area then the rest of the planets. Yet, just fits into class M properties. It has no direct claims to the any houses. The perfect place to hid in Klingon space." Erickson stated.

"And, just to add..." Reis piped up. "Neutral parties love places like this. I'd bet a weeks holodeck time that we're already being watched by someone, just not closely so far."

"It would not be Klingon Space if we were not being watched." Caradan thought a second and hoped that Reis was right about neutral parties. *'They may not be friends but they may not be foes either.'*

"Lieutenant Mindo," Caradan spoke up, "I want you to be ready to either take control of or throw those satellites into utter chaos the second they show any sign of operation. Higgins, Erickson, both of you keep your eyes, ears, and sensors open to anything threatening. Helm, set a course for the fourth planet, one quarter impulse. We will maintain Yellow Alert at all times. Engage."

Starfleet Horror Story: Davmorda

by Lieutenant Davmorda Rex & Commander Landon Milo MD

Sick Bay

Davmorda had her eyes stuck in her Yeoman's PADD as she trekked on down the middle of the corridor. Others had to move out of her way to avoid collision. She took note of the people she passed; male, female, those who were talking and what conversations they were having, who took special care to steal a few glances at her before, during and after passing her by, regular crew, petty officers, officers, children.

Davmorda stopped in her tracks and looked up from her PADD. Her brow furrowed as she looked ahead and down the corridor. There was no one else in sight or even within earshot.

<i>'Children?'</i>

Scrolling through the list of the crew she noticed no listing of any children on board. There was the Feserian but what her peripheral saw was, in fact, a child and no short adult, no Feserian.

She started walking again in the direction of where she saw the child and, as soon as she turned a corner, Davmorda saw the last glimpse of the child's foot disappear around the next corner. The child appeared to be running and Davmorda quickened her pace to that corner only to be met with the same thing as she rounded it. The last glimpse of a child running and seemingly playing. Only, this time, there came the faintest hint of a giggle, though a bit heinous sounding if Davmorda had to describe it to any detail.

She did not call after the child knowing fully well there were no children on board. Being the Yeoman, Davmorda knew who was or was not on board at all times. She pressed on toward where she last saw the child and, rounding that corner, saw the same scenario. Only, this time, the final glimpse of a foot disappeared before the doors to Sick Bay closed in its wake.

Davmorda looked this way and that and still there was no crew about. And no one came out of Sick Bay.

<i>'Got you now.'</i>

She placed her PADD on standby and held it by her side as she walked on toward Sick Bay. Standing erect with her head back, she entered through the parting doors. "OK. No more games," she said to the air as she saw no one else in the room save for Commander Milo in his office. She looked around and there was no sign of any child and the good doctor did not seem to have been disturbed by anyone or anything entering mere seconds ago.

The Doctor heard some commotion but thought little of it until the Captain's Yeoman came in looking as though she was trying to find someone. "I can assure you, I am not playing any games" he said with a small chuckle. "Yeoman, can I help you with anything? I don't have any patients at the moment. Were you looking for someone?"

<i>'Your head on a pike.'</i>

Davmorda looked around briefly and saw no child or even the presence of one. "I thought..."

<i>'You thought you saw a child. Go ahead. Tell him.'</i>

"I thought...I saw...a small..." Davmorda ended her quest to find any trace of the child. She straightened and composed herself. "A small swarm of fireflies. Just before my eyes. It happens to us Joined Trill at times during fluctuations in our isoboramine levels."

<i>'Quick thinking there.'</i>

"Could you check me out, doctor? To make sure I am in no danger of rejecting my symbiont?"

Five minutes later, Davmorda was out of Sick Bay and on her way about the ship, venturing in the general direction of her quarters.

<i>'Don't want to be alone with me do you?'</i>

Davmorda nodded to a few passers-by but kept her attention primarily on her PADD though it was the exact same information from minute to minute. She did not scroll or swipe. She just wanted to look busy.

She made no conversation with anyone, even decided to ignore the presence of another Trill, <i>'Unjoined? They still let those offworld?'</i>

Davmorda swiped about on her PADD to display something different. Anything to distract her from that inner voice. And...that child? She could have sworn she saw the final glimpse of that child from earlier as he disappeared around a corner.

Ignoring everything, Davmorda hurried to her quarters and entered. Sealed from the rest of the ship she marched right over to a bottle of Trillius Brandy waiting on her.

To be prepared of the unknown

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson

Intelligence Deck

The first and utmost importance of having the right information at the right time. Aki knew that they were radio silence and Starfleet was pretty much blind on the operations of Tornado, only the Klingons could pass that information to them. So whatever was going to happen, it was something that could endanger them and every step should be considered with lots of wisdom "Lieutenant, report" Aki orders as he walks towards him.

"Captain," Scott handed him a padd with all the information from the Klingon database that he is able to pull and other information that other intelligence operatives that had scans of the area that is within the ship's computer. "I have some other plans that I am currently working on with Lieutenant Riaan."

He takes the PADD and nods at the information "Do enlight me of the information you have for me or your plans as it most likely impacts the ship's health" Aki pointed out as he scans the information "This Civilian War is taking shape and the Empire still looks away when Starfleet asks about it, meanwhile our people are still prisoners" He mutters out of frustration.

Scott nodded and activated the display behind him. "I have some surface maps of the planet of interest. Possible locations for a hidden base of some kind as well. The planetary information hasn't been updated a few years inside the Klingon database I captured a while back. So the information is still sketchy. This area here the most likely location for a base of operations. There's breathable air on the planet but the gravity is 1.2 of standard. For ground teams I would recommend a three person team to each of these locations. The system is located deep inside Klingon territory. No house has claimed it under their own. The resources are limited to simple mining and hasn't been able to keep an active economy for even the minor houses of the Klingon empire. It's a perfect place for prisoners to hide out on." Scott pulled up from the map of the surface to show the main moon orbiting the planet. "This moon is heavy with unstable metals that radiate down to the planet. Transporter usage to the surface is limited to area where the moon is on the other side. If the prisoner is hiding in the projected area we may need to take while ship down or a shuttle to deploy an extraction team." Scott paused for a moment in the event the captain had a question.

Nodding towards the information of what was given to him "Good good, this is the kind of information I expect from my CIO. I will keep Tornado closer in orbit to make an easier escape if it needs, it would require our engines to run double shifts, but it will hold. You on the away team?" Aki asked.

"Yes, sir. I would be more useful on the ground than onboard the ship."

"Alright, consider you on the ground team. Any information you find, documents, records or whatever is down below there. Scan it and we will analyze it on the ship. Alright?" Aki asked of his CIO.

"Aye Captain," Erickson nodded.

"Good, I look forward towards the field report you make then Lieutenant. We can gain a lot of intelligence from this mission" Aki pointed out as he leaves the room "Good luck on the surface Lieutenant"

Failure is not an option

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Meera Deloria

Security deck

Backlog

The latest reports showed that the Security forces of the Tornado had dealt with severe and dangerous situations. The past few missions were hell for the crew and lost of life was most among the Security personnel. Aki knew that their Orion Chief did everything she could to get her team up to speed and ready for it, but an extra boost would always be welcome. He walked into the Security deck of the training area and observed his Chief at work.

His Security Chief being at work mostly consisted of dealing with reports, paperwork, and more. Granted, Meera had run a good crew as the Chief, especially through some rough moments. But still, she was here and trying to make it all work. As the door opened, Meera glanced up and gave the Captain a nod.

"Afternoon Sir. Anything I can help you with?" Meera asked, making sure to continue glancing over every so often to show she was aware of his presence even as she finished the latest operational report form to reflect the new members of security integration with those that were still aboard.

Looking at her "Lieutenant, wanted to catch up on the status of the Security force on the Tornado. Are we ready to face the enemy if needed?" Aki spoke as he looked at the training of some Security Officers "Sporty..."

"Yes sir. Some of the new crew are pretty green to combat, but the ones that aren't can hold their own. And the few that haven't been cycled off since I boarded are definitely ready to do what's needed." Meera replied.

Nodding towards her "Are you prepared for what is coming at us at the planet? Any suggestions on who you want for the away team that will go down there?" Aki asks as he looked back at the training Security Officers.

Meera sighed. "If I had my dithers on it Sir, I'd be one of those on the ground. Not a fan of all the desk work to be honest. But since I doubt that'll be an option, I'd probably have Corporal Higgins at the very least."

"I can have you down there, Reis can do the weapon control on the bridge. I need experience eyes down there and we can't fail at the lack of security down there" Aki spoke as he did not know what to expect there and he did not like it at all.

Meera nodded, adjusting the assignments she'd been working on. "Experience I've got." Meera states, glad to get on the ground again. She missed putting boots on the ground.

"Good" Aki replied as he looked back at his Chief "Erickson will be joining in the away team. So better get me that target Lieutenant" He smiles a bit at her.

"Oh you'll get them. The only question is alive or dead. I'd personally advocate alive, so that we can find out why the Empire wants her dead." Meera says, nodding.

Smiling at his Security Chief "I prefer alive" Aki pointed out "I better get going...there is still lot of things to do" He gave a formal nod towards her "Lieutenant" He stated and made his depart

The way we think

by Ensign Ixelom Vejeem & Commander Aki Shagdac & Commander Landon Milo MD

Sickbay

Entering the Sickbay seeing everyone working and preparing for the upcoming mission. Aki stopped close to the new Chief Medical Officer "Settling in Doc?" Aki said as he looked around seeing the Nurse Sutherland and the Counselor Vejeem working on their projects also.

Landon's senses were still weak as his road to recovery was fated to be a long one and his own physicians and psi therapist were unsure if he would ever be 100% again, but the past several months had shown that he was a lot tougher than he looked and that his determination would be his best medicine.

Needless to say, he was doing a hell of a lot better than when he was bound to a hover chair and relying on others to assist him. He was up and about, walking again and able to use his abilities to sense lifeforms around him. He was a good 40 to 60%, a great improvement from when he was at a complete loss of his abilities.

The Chief Medical Officer was leaning against a work station with his jacket on, PaDD in hand. When the Captain came in, Landon felt nothing out of the ordinary until the man was a few feet away. Then he could sense the change of emotions in his proximity, alerting him to the new presence. He turned to meet the man. "Ah Captain, a pleasure to see you" said the bubbly half Betazoid ship's physician. "Yes, yes. I am settling in just fine. Thank you for asking. Everything has been going rather swell down here. The ladies have been keeping me company this afternoon" he said gesturing to his Nurse and the Counselor.

Looking at his side again towards the two ladies working at whatever they were busy with as Aki narrows his eyes and looked back at the Doctor "Did you not wear a red shirt a while ago? Why did you step away from it and why this area of space doc?" Aki was curious what the driven motivation was of this man to join the Tornado on such dangerous task.

"Oh, leave him alone, Captain," Ixelom interrupted breezily, although she smiled at the captain from across Sickbay to defuse her words. "Asking rude questions is my job, after all. Besides, as far as I'm concerned, switching from red to blue is a sign of brilliance and psychological stability. Your job in command is so hard!"

"Some privileges I want to keep for myself Counselor" Aki bites a bit back with a grin on his face "Being in Command is pretty much delegate everyone to do what needs to be done in the right moment"

It was the sort of questioning that Landon had been used to by now and one he was prepared to face. "Thank you Counselor, but I can handle the Captain" interjected the Chief Medical Officer. He shot a flash of a smile "A spitfire that one is, but probably a lot gentler and non invasive as her predecessors" Landon added, having full knowledge of the sort of tactics used by Laurel Oakley.

"Captain, my getting into the red uniform was not planned to begin with. I was the CMO on a starship cut off from the Federation and our Captain had to be put in stasis to save her life. That's how I got into that red mess, and when we did return home, I thought I'd continue, my heart and soul is in the field of medicine. Your starship needed a Chief Medical Officer. I was available and have more experience in my somewhat young career than some physicians with gray hair and wrinkles" he went on to explain.

Nodding towards the explanation of the good Chief "Well welcome back towards the teal suit then doctor. But who knows, you might be needed to step up as you are the second high ranking officers on the ship" He smiled as he looked at the counselor "Ensign what is the current morale of the ship crew? Any problems so far?"

<I>I hope only for a limited time if need be</I> thought Landon when the Captain suggested he may need to step up and possibly hold down the fort as needed.

"Nothing too serious," Ixelom said casually, turning away from where she had been inspecting medkits. It was an important job and the counselor truly didn't mind helping the small medical staff, but she was pleased to talk about her actual profession. "The crew has mostly recovered from the bombing, the battles and the capture of Captain Takato. There are still mixed feelings about you, but the crew in general trust you. Right now they're just restless more than anything else."

Nodding to them as Aki took a deep breath with a smile on his face "Alright, that sounds good. Don't let me hold you all up, got more runs to make" He said as Aki turned around and left the Sickbay.

"Nicely worded" said Landon looking at the Counselor. "It was very diplomatic how you handled that question about crew morale and how they have mixed feelings about him" the Chief Medical Officer continued. "And what is your assessment of him?" he asked curiously.

"Creepy," Ixelom said, shivering in discomfort. "I don't know...something about him just freaks me out. His subconscious mannerisms, his language, his...you know...creepiness. I could be prejudicial, I guess, but..."

Landon chuckled "Tellarites are not known for being prejudice, just argumentative and opinionated, blunt and to the point equal opportunity offenders" surmised the Chief Medical Officer. "I concur with you though" he said shaking his head.

The Chief Medical Officer took a deep breath. "I have not yet come to fully trust my own senses again, but I'm cautious with what little I do read off of the Captain's emotions. He is...creepy" added Landon.

"So I'm not the only one?" Ixelom said reluctantly, her talks with Riaan, Mindo and Caradan on her mind even if she couldn't mention them. "Well, that's just peachy. I've got faith in your telepathic skills. Still...even if he's a bit creepy, that doesn't mean he's a bad captain, right? He could be great."

Tellarites were not known for being particularly good at shielding their thoughts and emotions. Perhaps because their culture was one of constant bickering and sometimes insulting among friends. Whatever the reason, Landon was able to get a quick flash from her that others did not feel too comfortable about this Commanding Officer either.

"No, it does not necessarily mean he is a bad Captain. He could be great. You're correct, but he also could be trouble, Counselor" replied the Chief Medical Officer crossing his arms. "If my cousin Laurel was here, she would be able to read him like an instruction manual. She could tell you what he ate five weeks ago for lunch and what he's planning on eating for his next Ha'mara feast" explained Doctor Landon Milo, growing anxious and mildly more cautious by the minute.

He let out a small sigh. "Not to sound like a Bolian conspiracy theorist, but Starfleet officers have gone bad before. Even Captains. Garth of Izar went mad, Rudolph Ransom threw his morality out the airlock in the Delta Quadrant, Calvin Hudson turned his back on Starfleet to fight alongside the Maquis...the list goes on" stated Landon.

He walked over towards a work station in Sickbay. "I can try to contract my cousin. She was First Officer here when Captain Takato was in command. She might be able to do some digging into Shagdac and turn over some stones." He looked at the Counselor "Maybe we should all be on the same page. If other members of the crew have their concerns about him, I believe a meeting should be arranged."

Ixelom hesitated, taken aback by how quickly the doctor was prepared to undertake such measures. She looked at him for a moment, rolling the question over in her mind.

"Let's take it slow, okay?" she urged, turning back to her own work with the medkits. "It's a slippery slope from 'meetings' to 'mutiny' and 'court-martial'. I mean...you're talking about undermining his authority, and the captain hasn't done anything really immoral or suspicious."

Even so the counselor couldn't help but add, "Yet."

A Little Too Lonely

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Commander Aki Shagdac & Lieutenant JG Mindo & Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson & Ensign Ixelom Vejeem & Corporal Johnathan Higgins

USS Tornado

Aside from the usual hum of the ship and the regular beeps from the computer terminals, the Bridge was utterly quiet. Only Ensign Hamilton at the Helm gave any form of vocal break to the silence with his regular updates of decreasing distance between the Tornado and the fourth planet. Lieutenant Mindo was ready with an Engineering firestorm should the defense satellites make any move. Higgins and Erickson maintained vigilance over scans of the surrounding space, the planet ahead, and the nearby moon. Caradan and her second officer Elena Reis kept their eyes glued to the viewscreen of the planet growing in size and the tactical overlay of the area.

Caradan realized she was asking at irregular intervals and with growing frequency, but "Anything yet Higgins?"

"No Ma'am. No change since you asked me..." Higgins replies, pausing a moment to check the chronometer on his display. "7 and a half minutes ago. Got empty space, shit image quality on the surface, and a bunch of inactive or dead sats." He states, sighing. He understood the nervousness going on. Things were tense, and honestly, no one really knew what to expect from all of this.

"Well keep at it Higgins," said Caradan.

"Still no change in the satellites," said Mindo. "Continuing scans."

"Perhaps they truly are inactive," said Caradan to no one in particular.

Sitting at the back of the Bridge, Ixelom snorted loudly. "And perhaps the Enterprise itself is going to sail in and back us up. If we're dreaming of fantasy, let's dream big!"

Caradan looked back to the counselor, but did not have any words for her. It was in that moment that Caradan had an inkling of realization as to why people were sometimes religious, because she was hoping, in fact Caradan found herself nearly praying for outside assistance to keep these defense satellites benign. Who would provide that outside assistance though? Caradan decided to dwell on that later. For now, hoping that the satellites truly were inactive was the best she could do.

As the ship got closer, Higgins was finally able to start getting viable field imagery. "Okay, doing some low-level sweeps... I've got a bunch of varied lifeforms. Mostly rudimentary, as expected of a barely M-class. Prelim scans show mostly invertebrates, with a few potential vertebrates starting their evolutionary track according to the system... Wait, got something. Klingon lifesign, steppe region at 37 degrees 14 minutes geological North, 89 degrees, 20 minutes geological West." He reported, working on getting a better scan of that locale.

"How many Klingons," Caradan asked but kept her eyes on the viewscreen. "Are there any ships on the ground? Any organization? Weapons?" She silenced herself knowing she was beginning to ask too much of Higgins.

Erickson stepped in. "I'm picking up a shuttle in the surface, partially covered near a hill. Engines are cold. No signs of other ships in the area. Small hand weapons and a partially completed anti-fighter turret. Also what looks like a bunker of some kind. I'll need boots on the ground to confirm structure and stability."

"You may be getting that pretty soon, Scott."

From behind, Mindo made a noise that sounded something like "Whoop!" And just then his computer began beeping. Mindo sprang into action. "Sir, one of the satellites just came online. The one closest to us. The compatibility program is complete. Awaiting orders."

"Maintain Yellow Alert. Standby on shields," Caradan barked out. "Whoever it is down there, they may just be curious as to what and who we are." She knew the ship would be just fine against just one defense satellite. Still, if there was to be any hostility, she would rather not make the first move.

"Higgins," Caradan involuntarily showed a little impatience, "how many Klingon lifesigns are you reading?"

"Single lifesign Ma'am. Female." Higgins reports actually getting enough clarity on his systems to give that much. "Still watching the space around us, just in case."

"A single female Klingon," Caradan said to herself trying to understand the situation. So far, this matched the description of who the Klingon Empire was looking for. "Counselor," Caradan turned back to Ixelom. "What would make someone, a Klingon, and a female at that, go into a voluntary isolation such as this? There is not enough of a power grid to power these satellites and she is not trying very hard to hide."

Ixelom was silent for a moment as she looked at the viewscreen, her large nostrils flaring.

"A Klingon fugitive is a contradiction," she said slowly. "A fugitive wants to run, to escape and to find safety, but Klingons find it very hard to run away, even when pitted against impossible odds. Military units and groups of warriors can flee from battle because they're trained to, but it's a lot less likely for a single Klingon to do so. They're much more likely to only run until they can find solid ground, fortify it, and meet their pursuer head on."

"So maybe the question is, where's the pursuer?" said Mindo.

"That would be us," answered Caradan immediately. "We are currently working for the Klingon Empire whilst they are in an armed conflict. "Her pursuer would then be the Empire and, thus, us." Caradan sighed in irritation. "I long for the days when we can just explore again." She swiped at her commbadge. "Commander Shaqdac to the Bridge," she said in something of a regrettable tone.

"On my way" A short reply came back to Caradan request.

Caradan was quick to step out of the man's way and allow him to assume his rightful chair. She did not even formally hand command of the Bridge over to him. She just launched into her report. "Sir, we have arrived at the fourth planet containing only one lifesign; a Klingon female. There is a system of defense satellites about the planet but they are inactive. Only one has powered up but it seems to be scanning us as though trying to ascertain who and what we are. We maintain constant scans of the area. There seems to be no additional ships or unwanted guests in the system."

He looked at the screen where the planet was in view and the red target blimps had the satellites at lock <i>'Why the overkill on defense systems?'

Caradan took nearly a second too long to respond as she was nearly in shock by the compliment. "No sir. We will have to use shuttles or wait a few hours before we can attempt a transport." She figured taking the initiative would be the best move. "I'll assemble my team right away and head down."

"Erickson," Caradan wasted no time, "You wanted boots on the ground? You're with me. Drop by Security and inform Lieutenant Deloria she is going down too. We will need a security team. Ensign Vejeem, this Klingon may have been isolated for a while and she's has been imprisoned for quite some time. She may need some kind words. Lieutenant Mindo, we may need someone to see about the machinery down there. Gather a team, some of your newcomers. We meet in the Shuttle Bay in 10 minutes. Hamilton, prep the shuttle. Let's get this done."

A chorus of "Aye, sir" and "Aye, ma'am" cluttered the bridge for a moment, then people began preparations.

Sitting back in his chair, he smiled as the ship was operating as it should. Though those satellites were not something he was fan of. "Good luck down there, keep me up to date" Aki spoke.

For Science!

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Staff Warrant Officer Grace Grayfield & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth & Ivy Sharzin

Science Deck

Backlog

Looking at the latest files that got in about the region, it was quite a feast for the Science crew to get all this data. Daystorm Institute would have a day trip when receiving this data. Grace taps onto the console as she analyze the information and notice the Commander entering the labs <i>'Great here comes trouble'</i> Grace thought as she looked at the Commander "Captain what can we do for you?"

The Commander did not look at once at the Enlist as Aki took a deep breath "Where is your new Chief?" As he saw the Enlist point towards the office where Riaan was settling in "She is quite busy sir"

Ivy peaked her head out from an open doorway of a small bio-lab. She found the conversation quite misleading. The words she heard and the tension she felt were quite different. She certainly did not want to interfere, so continued to watch for the moment.

Riaan was busy, looking at reports and scheduling experiments. There was a lot of administration to her new job. She looked up at the commotion outside her office. It was the captain, and she felt a pit open up inside her. Even though he had been the one to promote her and give her the job, she still felt the fear when he was near. She knew it wasn't rational, but it was there anyway.

She looked back at the PADD for a moment while Grace played interference. She took a moment to steel herself for the conversation. Then she stood and pushed her hair back over the ear that had the bajoran earring. 'Prophets help me.' She thought and stepped outside of her office. "Something I can help you with Captain?" She asked in a soft cool voice.

Seeing the hybrid Cardassian/Bajoran standing there, he had to swallow in his past and gave a bit of a forced smile at her "Wanted to catch up on the status of all departments, how is yours doing Lieutenant?"

Riaan considered for a moment, trying to decide what would get him to leave the quickest. "Good, we are reconfiguring some of our sensors for better passive detection. We are also rearranging some of the multi-use labs to help us shift through the data. We are also working to acquire long range scans of the planet, and hopefully getting some good data on what is 'beyond' it."

Ivy continued her listening and peeking out the door toward the Captain and now Riaan. And that was the part that seemed even stranger. Riaan was explaining some things, but not everything. Especially not some major issues they were having with some of the scans. She knew it definitely wasn't her place to correct the Lieutenant. Ivy certainly wouldn't come out and interup. But she thought, <i>What if the Captain asks her directly? What should I do then?</i>

Looking puzzling a bit at Riaan as he noticed someone at the door. "Who is there?" He looked at the direction as he saw the curious plantish creature, "Ah...Ivy why are you hiding?" Aki asked as he looked at her.

Riaan also turned to look at Ivy in the door.

Ivy stepped out into the main room timidly. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to offend." She bowed slightly as she had recently read about, how one humbled themselves in a situation like this. "I was just curious and did not want to interrupt." Her lips came to a prim line, her eyes casting down slightly, still trying to be humble.

He smiled at her "Don't worry, you did not offend anyone about this," Aki said. "How is life for you on the ship so far? Anything you wish to report?"

Ivy stepped forward a few steps more, stopping a few paces away, with the reply, "I have been quite well. Thank you for asking." She had been learning many speech patterns and proper ways to respond in kind. She found much of it to be useless and redundant, but every culture had their quirks about communication and physical contact.

She smiled and added, "Report?" Saying the word aloud in the form of a question. She quickly added with a bit of excitement in her words coming from the universal translator, "I should report that I now have hair." She reached up and stroked her fingers through the thin bright green strands of leaves on her head that were about 8 to 10 inches long. The long thin leaves like blades of grass laid mostly over the top and down the back of her head. They were still in a bit of a mess, but she stroked them back and they mostly stayed out of her face.

Riaan's lips twitched, she wanted to smile. She was happy for Ivy and the progress that Ivy had been making. However much she wanted to, all she could manage was the tiniest twinge.

Smiling at Ivy, "Good, hope you are learning alot from Riaan?" Aki asked on a friendly tone looking at Ivy with curiosity as he awaits a reply.

"Yes," Ivy stated with a positive tone. "Riaan has helped a great deal, learning of science, social mannerisms, and some expectations by others."

Aki looked at Riaan for a second and then back "Good, I hope I can also relay then on you for future science questions Ivy" He stated "I would advice you to look the LCARS up for any information on history and science."

Ivy began bobbing her head to the positive, "Oh yes, yes. Access to the computer has been so very helpful," her eyes seemed to drift off slightly as she thought about her recent queries, "getting details on different cultures, expectations, hard science verses analytical presumptions."

Nodding towards them both "Good keep it up! I need to redirect my attention towards other matters, my apology" Aki stated as he nods to both of them with a friendly smile and leaves the Science area.

[Riaan and Scott]

by Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth

Intelligence office

After the meeting, Riaan went to Scott's office. She pressed the chime to let him know she was there and waited for his response.

"Come in," Scott said turning around from the main terminal.

Riaan slipped in quietly, moving towards the desk. "I figured we should talk about the upcoming mission." Her voice was soft and slightly sad.

Scott nodded. "I have some information on the Klingon planet we are heading too."

"Good. I'll need that, but I'll also need to know what we should be looking for? Not just near our destination but elsewhere." She asked softly as she took a seat across from him.

Scott pulled up the geographical maps on the planet and sent it to a padd. "Here are the maps on the area that the database has... are you okay Riaan?"

Riaan gave Scott a careful look, trying to assess what she could tell him. She sighed and sat back in the chair, "You already know what's wrong." She said.

Scott wasn't really sure. Their was so much going on. Was she as worried about Captain Takato as he was? Or was there something more. "I understand. However we have a current mission to focus on. I don't have enough information on who the target is. We need to be ready for anything."

Riaan nodded, seeming ever so slightly relieved, but there was still tension there. She was not sure she wanted to talk about Ziara's leaving, her promotion, her fear of the captain, or how uncertain she still felt in her relationship with Caradan now that Ziara wasn't around. "Well, that's why I'm here. We have a lot of tools, but the problem is going to be putting our eyes in the right places." Riaan agreed with him. "I don't know where those right places are, I think you do."

"I have marked some locations that would provide us with tactical advantages. The ones in blue are insertions points, red are secondary areas and green lines are the most possible routs from each of the areas listed. Once we get more planetary scans we'll be able to determine the best possible outcome." Scott said. "I have map out some locations also for the shuttle to go in the event the Tornado gets held up."

Riaan shifted slightly to get a better look at the map. "Given that it's related to our mission, I can get scans of those locations pretty easily using powered sensors. We might even be able to scan beyond the planet with them. However, we are pretty far behind the border, so I'd like to know what else we should be looking at." She was focused on their work now.

"The area is very barren. There's a class G sun, 2 inner plants and 3 gas giants. Dense asteroid field. The next system is 6.5 light years away. The planet itself has no tactical or political advantage. It's a planet where one can go and hide."

Riaan sat back, "Is that all you think we can do?" She asked, sounding disappointed not about the scanning, but in him.

"Once we get closer we can get a better idea of the layout. I have back ups for the back ups. For know this is all I can do, once we get boots on the ground it will be more clear. What is it that you are looking for?"

Riaan thought for a moment before replying, still disappointed. "No, I expected you to be better than that." There was a pause as she brought up the specs and her voice was professional, if still soft. "Our usual scanning routine is a few light-years, true. However, I don't think we are necessarily in a routine situation. I don't know if you have heard the latest from the Argus Array about subspace transmission interception. I think we can modify our passive sensors to listen much farther then we can normally."

Erickson raised an eyebrow. "Do you need to get something of you chest Riaan?"

Riaan took a breath, trying to sort out what she wanted to say. She didn't really have anything that she needed to say to him. However, she was disappointed in him, his lack of imagination about what they could do with the sensor array, his apparent lack of interest in his actual job description and what the captain had told them to do. She could say nothing, just leave it be. Then she remembered what Ixelom had told her.

Riaan sat forward, her voice returning to it's quiet disappointment. "It's nothing major mister Erickson. I'm just disappointed in you, I expected you to be better. You are an intelligence officer, it's your job to collect intelligence. Rather then try and figure out with me how we might extend the range of our sensors, targeting them for what we are

looking at, you dismissed the possibility. You also seemed to dismiss the possibility of collecting data on route, I don't know if this is an oversight on your part or a lack of curiosity, but you should be better than that."

Riaan's tone changed and her voice rose to normal speaking levels, for her that was almost shouting. "Most relevantly, you underestimated me, I am the chief science officer of a Federation ship. They might praise the engineers who can turn rocks into phasers, but it is my knowledge that lets them do that. My sensors are the best that the galaxy offers. With them I can track every grain of sand in a Vulcan sandstorm, spot the distortions in the interstellar medium by cloaked ships from light-years away, and pierce the toughest interference. Mysteries remain unknown at my discretion." This was the most that Scott had ever heard from Riaan at once and it was not driven by anger, but by pride. Riaan was proud of her ship, her department, and what they were able to do.

"Riaan, I have never questioned your ability or the ability of my ship and crew mates. Before I was the Chief intelligence officer I was an infiltration specialist. I had all the information that was required for me to do my job. So trust me. I am good at my job. I am giving you the current information I have on a previously uncharted system by the federation, I'm getting this information from the Klingon database that I took from them. Finding the Klingon on that planet is my job. Leading the away team and preparing them for the extraction is my job. I don't need an imagination to get the facts. I just need the facts."

Erickson crosses his arms on his chest. He was hurt by her words. Even though she was right. Since Laurel left the Tornado he wasn't able to focus straight, she helped him get his head clear so he could focus. When Captain Tokato was captured it broke him.

His job was to protect the crew. He needed to protect his captain and he failed her.

Riaan nodded solemnly, "Soon as we have scans of the planet and the area of interest, you will have them. I'll adjust the scanners so we can get it a bit farther out than usual, giving you more time to make your plans." She said, returning to the quiet soft voice she normally used and no longer sounding disappointed.

"Thank you, Riaan." Scott said, "Next time just tell me what I'm missing before you make feel like I am a disappointment." Scott said with smile.

Riaan nodded, she wanted to smile at Scott, but couldn't. "Sorry, I'm new at being in charge of some things. If I mess up, feel free to tell me." She said softly.

Scott nodded and got back to work.

Of Mothers and Children

by Lieutenant Davmorda Rex & Meera Deloria

Mess Hall

Meera had hoped to enjoy a decent meal right now, and while she had to give whoever programmed the replicator props for getting the food accurate and not tasting horribly, her mood was slightly soured by what she was reading on the PADD on the table with her.

"Why now? Why start throwing threats like this all over again Mother?" She grumbled, having done her normal thing of checking her personal mail while having her lunch. Sure, she was used to her mother sending demands for her to return to Caju Deloria. Yeah, there was the whole fact that Deloria was the one who was supposed to inherit being the leader of it, but damned if Meera wanted to live by Syndicate rules and mentalities.

Meera had gotten away from that life on purpose. Joining the Marines was just another step for it. Because she fought tooth and nail for her place thus far, she felt all the better for it. She'd EARNED this. But had she been in Caju Deloria, she'd basically have stolen it off the backs of helpless victims sold into slavery after being manipulated.

Add to that her mother's 'glowing' remarks about how Meera's sister was doing over on some independent station near the trifecta of the three factions, and wondering when Meera herself was going to do something as noteworthy... Damn it all, there was that twinge as her pride was hit in a small but important way.

Davmorda stepped into the Mess Hall. Her focus was stuck in her PADD as she scrolled through messages. Primarily, they were admirers from her time at the Academy. She deleted them all upon seeing the sender's names. One message she would save for later though was from the resident Trill aboard the Tornado. "PO3 Vaimera Gherr" she read, scrolled down, "Unjoined." Davmorda lost interest and swiped the message away without deleting.

<i>"Just delete it. She's an Unjoined little girl."</i>

<i>"I'm still a Trill. She may have an application. She may need a sponsor."</i>

<i>"You can sponsor her to her grave."</i>

Davmorda approached the replicator and "Computer, 6 ounce cut of sabrebeast steak and," she looked quickly around as though a bit embarrassed, "a grilled cheese sandwich, pickle and sweet tea."

With her plate of a mismatched meal in hand, Davmorda stepped away from the replicator. Looking about, she saw Meera sitting alone and similarly focused on a PADD. Her expression looked as though she wanted something to break her from it though. Davmorda would rather have company anyway.

<i>"You really think this is going to shut me up?"</i>

Half way to Meera's location Davmorda heard the echo of a child giggling as her last thought was thrown away.

"Excuse me," she said as she approached the table where Meera sat. "Mind if I sit with you Lieutenant?"

Meera looked up, and nodded. "No regulation against it Lieutenant." She said, waving to the empty seats nearby. "Mostly just checking my messages while I eat." She said, putting the PADD down and actually taking a bite of her food since she'd sat down.

Despite the flavor being exactly as it should be, she couldn't help but blanch a little bit as she bit down. Damn her mother ruining her appetite.

Davmorda sat, took a bite of her sandwich and then started cutting into the steak. "Seems to me," she swallowed, "that one of those messages has your food tasty foul." There was something to Davmorda's food as well, which she quickly deduced was something her nose was picking up.

<i>'Orion pheromones.'</i>

Symbiotic memory brought on a load of knowledge from her previous host and though Orions serving in Starfleet did generally take pheromone suppressing treatments, a Trill's nose was a bit more keen, especially a Joined Trill.

"I trust everything is well with you," Davmorda finished.

Meera gave a small shrug. "Message from my mother. Another one of her demands I return to the Caju and be a proper heiress to it. This one however, is more than just an idle demand. Seems she's got something in the works to force me home. What, I haven't a clue. Ain't intelligence, so I can't even begin to guess what angles she plans to pull." Meera explained, sighing.

Of course, noted in her profile that Davmorda would know, is that while Meera didn't take the suppressant treatments, she did regularly wear an inhibitor on her undershirt to do much the same. It wasn't QUITE the same, but it was enough to keep it from being a problem.

"Well you are a Marine," said Davmorda. "Coming from a Marine background myself I dare say you can begin to guess. You may not be Intelligence, but you are intelligent. Marine training should provide you with the knowledge to formulate battle plans and to strategize. Do not let not knowing be a problem, but a challenge to overcome." Davmorda chewed on a small bit of steak and swallowed. "Generate a list of what your mother is capable of. Both what you know she can do and what she can hypothetically do. Order that list by the most probable scenario and prepare from there. Because Marines should never be caught surprised."

A child's laughter echoed through her consciousness and Davmorda thought she saw the movement of a child running around out of the corner of her eye. She pressed her eyes shut a moment deciding to ignore it.

Sitting back, Davmorda opened her eyes and reconnected with Meera's attention. "That is, of course, how Trill Marines are trained, how Refkin performed his duty."

"No different for Federation Marines. No, the thing that has me worried is the phrasing. I'm thinking she's got an edge I ain't aware of, something she had to have gotten recently because this is the first time her message actually sounded confident to succeed this time." Meera replied, shrugging. "That's what has me upset. I've been away from the Caju long enough that my mother could have done any number of things to get an edge she can use. It's been 16, near 17 years since I ran away and joined the Federation."

Meera huffed. "Suffice to say, this has me concerned, and I'm not sure if I should be worried for the Federation... Or my mother."

"In my opinion," Davmorda took another bite of her sandwich, "Concern yourself with neither and let what happens...happen. In my hundreds of years I have seen and I have fallen into situations where concern over something was what started an incident in the first place. Therefore, you," she reached forward and slid Meera's PADD away several inches, "should do nothing. You are aboard a Federation vessel and are therefore surrounded by friends and colleagues. Orion vessels would not openly threaten or attack a Federation vessel as that would appear an act of war. The only way for anyone to hope to gain an advantage over you, is to get you away from the Tornado. If you do see that scenario a likely one, it would be best to have someone accompany you. A fellow Marine would be a wise choice."

"Still, it's worrisome." Meera said, sighing. "My mother wouldn't make such overtures, not when she has such a 'good thing going' in the region of space between the Romulans, Klingons and Federation." She says, leaning back and pinching the bridge of her nose. "I know, I know, I shouldn't focus on this so much, but something's up."

"Perhaps," Davmorda sat back and looked shortly at her mismatched meal. "Perhaps her use of 'such overtures' is an act of desperation. Tell me, as I am somewhat unfamiliar with Orion practices, do Orions typically ask for help? Do they ever beg another for help? Or do they seem more prone to verbal violence and even the threat of actual violence as a means to enlist the assistance of another?"

"Depends on what's at stake." Meera states, thinking on it a bit. "As for verbal violence, no. But the threat of actual violence yes. In addition, they're also not afraid to use manipulations of all kinds to get what they want as well. The only benefit I get is she can't hold hostages against me personally."

"I see." Davmorda thought a second attempting to contemplate a full range of possibilities. "It seems to me that Orions can oftentimes be prideful and prideful people seldom admit their mistakes. Considering your mother's continued attempts, could it be that she and Caju Deloria may, in fact, be in trouble? Financial trouble? Someone attempting a hostile takeover? This situation could perhaps be a result of some mistake. And her only course is to enlist your involvement, even if it is a the point of a blade." Davmorda relaxed, picked up her sandwich and held onto it. Before taking a bite, "I only ask as a method to consider all possibilities. Do stop me if I am wrong though."

Deloria shrugged. "I'd more likely see it as either she's planning a hostile takeover, corporation style, or knocking out a rival Caju. Caju Deloria is one of the who knows how many, mid-level Orion Syndicate Caju's that I'm aware of." She remarked, huffing. "Though, I can't imagine her standing in the Syndicate is overly high since I, her heir, bugged the hell out of the family business and joined the Federation. Much less the Marines."

"Maybe she always thought you would grow weary and return," Davmorda said. "As she is beginning to realize that is not the case, she is now turning to threats. Remember, you have a Marine friend to back you up should you need. And any threat to this vessel or her crew will be met with due diligence."

"Only way my mother's gonna find me alone off the Tornado is I'm ordered off." Meera said, grinning. "And I highly doubt she'll come this far out of her Territory. Not worth the costs." She stated. "I better get back to it though. Thanks for the chat Lieutenant." Meera stated, picking up her plate and PADD, and disposing of the first and walking back to the Security office.

<i>'So, the only way to make things interesting is to have her ordered off the ship'</i>

<i>'That is outside of my abilities and you know that. Why am I even considering this?'</i>

Through a small pinprick of Davmorda's awareness, she felt eyes on her. "Wittle Weffy wants to pway."

Shooting her head around so fast so as to give her a slightly dizzying spell, Davmorda saw the final glimpse of a child's foot disappear as he ran off down the corridor as the doors closed behind Meera. Meera did not seem phased by the running child which let Davmorda conclude once and for all that the child was not real.

<i>'That means you are losing your mind.'</i>

Davmorda returned to her meal and pushed the steak away. She only wanted the sandwich.

A Little Too Close

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Commander Aki Shagdac & Commander Landon Milo MD & Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson & Meera Deloria & Ensign Ixelom Vejeem

Shuttle/Surface

Lewis Hamilton flew the shuttle down from the Tornado toward the planet. Beside him sat Caradan, monitoring the scene and the readings. There was still only one life sign and enough interference to prevent teleporting onto or off the planet.

Caradan looked back to check on everyone riding along. Behind her sat Commander Shaqdac and Lieutenant Erickson. Mindo, Ixelom, and Corporal Higgins were in the back of the shuttle performing final preparations. Following behind was another shuttle with more engineers, security personnel, and equipment. That shuttle contained Lieutenant Deloria and Doctor Milo.

"Entering atmo now," said Hamilton.

Caradan checked the readings. "Captain, our ETA is 10 minutes. Hamilton, set us down a few kilometers away from the derelict shuttle and life sign."

Looking up at Caradan and simply nodded as Aki looked back at the PADD with the information about the planet.

Higgins was mostly checking over his weapon systems and kit. Like most Marines, he seemed to be much more comfortable in the Marine Utilities over Starfleet uniforms. Nonetheless, he was focused on his job, which was providing security for the first team.

Meera, in the second shuttle, had already done what Higgins was doing, and now seemed to just rest in the shuttle's bay, utilities and equipment settled onto her from comfortably as combat experience taught her, while they descended. "So Doc, when's the last time you had to do a field treatment?" Meera asked, cracking open an eye to look at Commander Milo.

The Chief Medical Officer's blue eyes flashed over to look at Meera. <I>I feel overly protected right now</I> he thought with the security personnel around. "When is the last time anyone told you that you looked a little green?" he retorted back at her with a smile. "I did not earn this rank by sitting at my desk in Sickbay, Lieutenant. I can certainly assure you that much" he added.

Landon was triple checking the medical equipment that he had brought along with him. Not quite enough to constitute being a mobile hospital, but he had definitely ensured that he came prepared. "I'm no stranger to house calls and I am no stranger to being on the front lines" he added to his previous response.

=^="All hands this is Lieutenant Eunidas,"=^= came Caradan's voice, ^=="We have a hurricane 200 kilometers due north. It will not be any trouble at all but doe expect some turbulence and wind shear."

Caradan looked at Hamilton as the shuttle rocked a little. "Just get us onto the ground Ensign."

"I guarantee that is going to happen."

"In one piece," she added.

Scott looked up from the sensor station he had changed into his infiltration uniform with his gear ready to hit the ground running. "I didn't count on a hurricane coming into the area."

"It should not be a problem," said Caradan. "Sensors do not show it moving in our direction nor toward our destination. It is just giving us some wind shear."

Meera chuckled. "Never a 'little green'." She says, and nodded. "Just thought I'd ask." Still, listening to the comms cause Meera to shrug, and settle a bit better into her seat to relax for the trip down. "Just give me a heads up when we're 5 minutes from LZ. Till then? I'm gonna haze on out." She states to the pilot, closing her eyes and relaxing into her seat, seeming to go into a meditative or sleeping state.

And it only took five minutes for Caradan's voice to come over the comms. "Five minutes to LZ. Pilots, keep an eye on your attitudes. This wind shear is causing some turbulence."

The shuttles descended through the atmosphere gracefully and their trajectories smoothed as they got below 5000 feet. The second shuttle followed suit as Hamilton piloted the first to a clearing not a terribly long walk from where the life sign was detected. A fair hike in the other direction was the derelict shuttle and possibly some more equipment Engineering would probably find interesting.

As the shuttles set down and started powering down, Caradan was the first to set foot onto the ground. As she looked around, surveying the area, everyone else was preparing to depart the shuttles.

"Security," she called out. "I need 360 surveillance. I need to know of any threats, concerns, and the best path to our Klingon prisoner."

Higgins was more than a little upset that Caradan deboarded first, but he made damned sure he was second off, rifle up and scanning physically for targets, before he took a knee a standard 5 meter distance from the shuttle to create a security bubble.

Scott moved out the of shuttle behind Caradan, he started scanning the area with his tricorder. "Still reading just 1 life sign."

"Be sure to also scan for any wildlife," said Caradan whilst looking over the somewhat desolate landscape. "Though I think we may luck out there. Have your men keep an eye out though. And scan for dangerous flora, anything poisonous, airborne allergens and bacteria. A planet capable of supporting life yet has no life on it. I want to know why."

"Don't complain, no wildlife means no predators," Ixelom interrupted grumpily. The Tellarite counselor had silent for the entire trip down to the surface, and now she looked downright disgrunted as she departed the shuttle. "I really don't like this planet. It's cold."

Meera piped up as she disembarked, the last member of Security to do so. "Caradan, do you want to do my job? My people aren't so stupid as to not know how to perform their job." She stated, checking over the perimeter established even as she did so. So far all good.

"No bacterial hazards from what I can tell. The wild life could be scarred from the shuttles landing or from the hurricane around the area. I am not picking much on the scanners. The transporter interferes could also be a hazard to the small animal life." Scott noted.

Caradan stepped up to Commander Shaqdac as he was stepping out of the shuttle. "Commander, everything seems to be going according to plan."

She was trying her best to much towards Aki liking but played along "Understood, continue the operation" Looking back at the rest of the staff "Keep in mind folks, we are here on unwanted grounds...relics, ancient stuff and stuff like that is no touching. Thought I wont stop you from scanning"

"Which means no souvenirs showing up on the Tornado," Caradan called out. "Squads, form a Wedge Formation around the Commander , pointed South Southeast. Maintain constant scans and keep your eyes and ears open. All of you. Lieutenant Mindo, gather your team and head to that derelict shuttle our prisoner rode in on. See what you can make of it. Prepare to move out."

Meera couldn't help but roll her eyes. Since Commander Shaqdac took command, Caradan had been trying to do EVERYTHING it seemed. Including micromangement. "Alpha Squad, you're on point. Patrol Formation. Bravo, with me. We're on security bubble on the non-combatants." Meera ordered, watching as her people formed up and readied to move out. Looking to Aki, Meera nodded. "Ready to move on your order sir."

Caradan looked back to Shaqdac whose washboard of a nose was stuck in his PADD. She turned back to her 12 O'clock. *No. Don't think like that. Maintain professionalism.*

"The order is given," Caradan called out. "Move out," and she made a large circle in the air with her arm which was body language for what was just spoken.

The Doctor interjected "And let's remember that I'm rather fragile and irreplaceable. If one of you get injured, I might be able to save you...if I get injured..." Well, then we are probably screwed thought the Doctor.

A Little Too Dire

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Commander Landon Milo MD & Lieutenant JG Mindo & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth
& Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson & Ensign Ixelom Vejeem & Ivy Sharzin

Tornado, Qlj Hegh

<h>

Tornado

Riaan, Ivy and Crewman Logano were in the Science Lab. Logano was looking at some readings from scans of the planet and made a startling discovery. Having little knowledge of the Klingon language, he sought to back up his find. He scrolled through his PADD, launched the universal translator and...

Logano slapped his commbadge and immediately wanted to call the Away Team, but looked over to Riaan, doing her own duties. He quickly decided that she was too busy to be bothered and that he could deliver the newly-found knowledge to the Away Team, but, even more quickly, decided she needed to know first. He did not want to be demoted again in such a short time.

"Um, Lieu...Lieutenant Riaan," he stammered a little. "I found something that you need to see."

Ivy looked from her work. She had been classifying different vegetation species that were native and non-native to the planet. Interruptions took place like this all the time and she went back to her work.

Riaan moved from what she was looking at to join Logano. "What have you found mister Logano?" She asked, her eyes scanning the data on his screen.

Joey backed away from the microscope so Riaan could take a look. "Please ma'am. Have a look."

As Riaan looked into the scope, Joey narrated what she was looking at. "That is a pathogen that appears to be corrosive to anything metallic. What you are looking at is a simulated reaction to the pathogen coming into contact with sodium. Scans of the planet's atmosphere seem to have low concentrations of this pathogen. But the concentrations are increasing." He brought up the information graph on his PADD. "If you will have a look at this, you will see that the increased concentration of the pathogen happened only within the past hour...When our Away Team landed." His eyes went wide again as he fully realized his revelation. "Something on the planet seems to be reacting to our presence down below. The Away Team is already exposed. And..." he pointed back at the scope, "that simulation is sped up 100X. And it shows that the total corrosion of sodium can occur in about 12 hours." He swiped frantically on his PADD. "But that is not all. This pathogen is also attracted to Iron, Calcium, Iodine...all the metals that are required for mammalian life. This pathogen essentially corrodes bone structure and all metals circulating in anyone's bloodstream." Through a nervous twitch he dropped his PADD.

Hearing an abrupt noise, Ivy looked up to see Riaan and Joey, but they seemed to be very nervous about something. She moved away from her station and walked over to them.

As Joey bent to pick it up, "If there is a refugee down there, then there must be a cure or vaccine. And..." he brought his PADD back up and showed it to Riaan. The running app was the computer's universal translator. He had, typed in, the name of the planet below; 'Qlj Hegh' and the translation that was displayed read, 'Black Death.'

"Without a vaccine," he said, "the Away Team has about 10 hours before they..." he could not put into words the side effects of the human body with absolutely zero metallic content.

Ivy's mouth opened in shock and fear for their crewmen on the surface. She looked to her friend Riaan, hoping for an answer to the situation.

Riaan nodded silently. "Scan the away team specifically. See if they have been infected." Given the vector, she already knew they were infected, but on the small chance they were not, she was going to pull them out. Then she tapped her commbadge. "Rrareth to Milo, Caradan, we have something that you need to look at." Her voice was still soft, but tinged with concern.

On the surface, Caradan was busy looking at the landscape with Meera and Scott. The three were plotting out the easiest route to the location of the refugee woman. Caradan did look back to Milo with a nod for him to see to what Riaan needed.

The Chief Medical Officer looked nervously at Caradan. Though he quickly responded. "This is Doctor Milo, I am on my way" the man swiftly replied.

Logano finished scanning Commander Shaqdac, Lieutenant Eunidas, and Lieutenant Deloria. He looked to Riaan as they awaited Dr. Milo's response. Shaking his head, "Three scans complete. It seems they are already infected and

cannot return to the ship without a vaccine, otherwise they would infect the ship. Only Lieutenant Eunidas appears unaffected.

Ivy looked down, slightly sad for the crewmen's situation. She didn't know what to do or say, but would help if she could.

On the surface the Doctor walked away a bit to speak, "What do you have for me?" he asked curiously. He quickly assessed it was a discovery or finding of some sort.

Riaan quickly ran down the pertinent information for Milo. "I'm transferring all of our Data to you PADD. We could quarantine you here, but I'm not certain of our ability to find a cure in time. However, I'd be willing to bet that the target has a cure of some form. Your best chances will be to find the cure on the ground rather than just sitting around up here." She said, completing her analysis.

Milo teetered with Riaan's opinions. "This would not be the first time I was faced with finding a cure before the sands of time ran out" replied Landon. "However, I do agree with your assessment Lieutenant. It may be prudent to make this attempt" added Landon

Riaan nodded even though Milo couldn't see it. "We'll be looking for a cure up here. Let us know if there is anything you need from us?"

During a pause in the conversation, Joey managed to get in a word. "Lieutenant," he said to Riaan, "May I ask Ivy for a sample, a leaf at least, to test in this simulation?"

Riaan considered it, "What for?" She asked.

"Well ma'am. Um..." Joey glanced at his PADD then back at Riaan. "This pathogen seems to be attacking only organic-based metals. There is much metal on the planet and beneath the surface but nothing rusted or corroded, which leads me to believe it is attracted to organic-based life forms. There is flora on that planet and many species of flora acquire energy from various metalloproteins...That is...metal-based proteins that contain metal ion cofactors. If the flora down on the surface is not affected by this pathogen then..." Joey's words ended as he shot his eyes to Ivy.

Riaan thought for a moment, then nodded slowly. "You may ask, politely."

"Yes ma'am," said Joey as he stepped away.

Riaan turned to the whole science crew, she did her best to speak in a confident tone of voice. "Ok, looks like we have a infection scenario on the ground. We can't be certain that the fugitive is going to have a cure. Therefore, it falls to us to work our magic and find one ourselves. Let's get to work."

Surface: Team Shaqdac

Caradan broke from her position next to Scott and Meera and walked up to Dr. Milo waving for her attention. He detailed everything Riaan had informed him.

Caradan nodded. "Understood." She slapped at her commbadge, "Caradan to Away Team," which activated the commbadges of all, to include Mindo and the pilots in the shuttles, "We have an infection scenario. It have been discovered that we have approximately 10 hours before we start to face fatalities. We cannot return to the ship for fear of spreading the infection. Something in the atmosphere is attracted to and attacking the metallic makeup of our biologies. Shuttle pilots, seeing as how our shuttles are equipped with biological neurosensors, you are to take off immediately and return to space. Do not...I repeat, DO NOT return to the Tornado. I will check in with you every hour. If you have not heard from the landing party in two hours, scan for life signs and return. Lieutenant Mindo, maintain your progress and alert me to any discoveries or if your team starts to show symptoms. Again we have approximately 10 hours and we are close to our objective. Our target has been here for days already which means she could possess a vaccine. We are moving forward with this operation. Eunidas out."

"If that Klingon woman has a vaccine, or a quarantine containment forcefield," Ixelom suggested hesitantly, a small quiver of fright in her voice, "and she's really hostile to us...she might try to wait us out. Just hold us off for a few hours until we're...um...not in a fit state to keep going after her."

"Well we can be there in an hour's time at regular pace," Caradan said as she looked at her tricorder. "And our Klingon shows no sign of fleeing." She looked back at Ixelom, taking in her short stature and decided to act a little like a Tellarite. "Think you can keep up if we double-time it from here?"

The counselor shot Caradan a scathing look in response, but her indignation did at least settle her nerves a little. "Trying to appeal to my Tellarite pride? Nice try. Yes, <i>sir</i>, I can keep up. We Tellarites are fantastic marathon runners, and I haven't gotten that fat since I graduated from the Academy."

"That settles it," Caradan said. She rose her voice so that all could hear. "OK, check it out! We are going to double-time it from here. Watch for wildlife though we have seen none. Watch the terrain and your footing. It should be easy going from here. We move out in five minutes." She finished speaking and looked at Commander Shaqdac for approval. The man seemed ill-interested but not disapproving at the same time.

"Sirs, permission to break off from the team and infiltrate the base on my own, I think I found a way in. I can secure the entrance and find the refugee before the rest of us arrive." Scott asked both Commander Shagdac and Lieutenant Eunidas.

Caradan nodded to Scott's request. "As the rest of us move out in five minutes, you have permission to break formation. Being our infiltration specialist, I don't need to tell you to watch yourself out there. Getting in should be relatively easy. We still pick up no sign of any shielding and no other life signs. Remember Scott," her words grew serious, "We are working for the Klingon Empire but we are still Starfleet. The Empire said 'dead or alive' but we take our prisoners alive. And we don't shoot first."

"Yes sir!" Scott nodded set his rifle to stun and moved out. "I'll report back once I am inside the facility." He sprinted out. He was thankful that having a desk did not make him lazy. He estimated the facility to be a 15 minute run. Assuming nothing got in his way.

Surface: Team Mindo

Mindo grunted and sighed, turning to address his team, who looked a bit worried by this news.

"OK guys, not our problem right now," said Mindo. "I'm sure science and medical are having a blast figuring this out, but we're neither so let's not worry about it. Get back to your scans." Looking back down to his own tricorder, Mindo said to the security officer behind him, "Wallace, what can you tell me about the Klingon shuttle?"

Security Crewman Wallace was looking through the oculars as Mindo gave his spiel about safety and accountability. The announcement that they were all infected and had less than half a day to live was a bit nerveing to say the least. Darrell decided to hold to his security training as he peered at the derelict Klingon shuttle in the distance through his oculars. "Sir," he said as Mindo floated up to him, "the shuttle is powered down almost completely."

Mindo looked up from his tricorder and pointed it toward the downed shuttle. "You said, 'almost?'"

"Yes sir." He switched to infrared. "The engines are cold, but..." he switched to another frequency setting, "there is a power source that is still active and transmitting something. It seems to be some form of disturbance, perhaps intentional." He lowered the oculars and turned to Mindo. "Could be amplifying the atmospheric disturbance keeping us from using the transporter."

Mindo heard what Wallace had to say, but his attention was on the readings he had just done on himself.

"Um," Mindo said, hiding his readings. "Take Crewmen Gherr and Crismore and get a closer look. I'll be over in a second."

"Roger that sir," and Darrel performed a sing-handed pushup aiding him in jumping to his feet whilst securing his phaser rifle. "Gherr, Crismore, on me. We make for the derelict."

As the three were off, Mindo tapped his comm badge once he was just out of earshot of the rest of the team.

"Mindo to Eunidas. You said to report if anyone was feeling any side effects."

"^="Just a moment."^=" A few seconds passed. Long enough to her to step away from her team. ="Go ahead."="

Mindo looked back at his team, now moving toward the shuttle with scanners out. "I'm afraid my Feserian biology, not to mention my size, is disagreeing with this pathogen a bit more than everyone else. I'm afraid I don't have the luxury of ten hours. I'm looking at more like five or less."

Five kilometers away, Caradan stood apart from the rest of her team, all preparing to move out. She knew this was not the time for indecisiveness, but found herself truly at a loss for words. There came a sudden desire to break with her team and go running toward Mindo's location. She knew this team needed her, that the mission needed everyone precisely where they were at that moment. She then thought on sending a shuttle back down to pick him up,

but that was not going to change anything as he could not get back on the ship without quarantine procedures which could take any number of hours. Besides, Mindo was the team leader of his team. There was truly nothing Caradan could do for him at the moment save for telling him to, "gut up," she said softly at first.

"Gut up," came her voice over Mindo's commbadge. This time there was more emphasis in her words. "We are about to move out. The plan is to double-time it to our destination. We will be there in about half an hour. We see no sign of shielding or any form of containment. This Klingon may be a fugitive but she should have a vaccine if she has been here this long. I need you to tough this out as long as you can."

Mindo nodded to no one and replied, "Aye sir." He turned back to his team, still a few dozen yards away and began heading toward the shuttle for a report from Wallace.

Gherr and Crismore were in the derelict shuttle double-checking their findings. Crewman Wallace stepped out of it to maintain security of the area. He lowered his phaser rifle and stepped forward to meet with Mindo, just arriving on the scene.

"Sir!" Wallace snapped to attention. "Scan of the shuttle is complete. No enemy combatants. The shuttle does appear to have been cannibalized and repurposed to amplify the disturbance inhibiting our transporter. The central computer is the only thing running. The Warp Core appears to have roughly two years running time remaining. End report."

"Thank you, Ensign," said Mindo. "I think it's safe to search it. Crismore and I will look for some kind of log in the computer. I want you and Gherr to salvage any kind of supplies, especially medical, that may have been left in there. Let's go."

"Roger that, Sir."

TORNADO

Joey approached Ivy slowly as she appeared deep in her own work. "Um," he started, "Excuse me. I...Ivy, m...may I..." He stopped speaking and took a deep breath as she looked up at him. "May I ask for a specimen from you? A leaf or a twig of vine maybe? Drop of sap perhaps?" He grew a little nervous in asking and more nervous as he continued to ask. Joey was always one to speak more when he grew nervous.

Ivy had heard a voice and turned from her work to find Crewman Logano, who seemed to be stuttering. He was finding it difficult to speak to her for some reason. She had learned from her friend, it was better for both parties if the person speaking was allowed to struggle through the situation, for whatever reason. Her expression changed from curiosity to a concerned frown as she pondered the request. Giving up a leaf or twig was not a significant loss to her whole, but she didn't quite understand why he wanted it.

Still with an expression of concern Ivy asked, "What's this all about Crewman? Why do you want part of me?" She waited for her translator to explain her question before she raised her eyebrows with curiosity and expectation.

"Well, I...uh..." he looked back at his work then back at Ivy. "I have been running simulations based on our scans of the atmosphere. There seems to be an increase in the concentration of a pathogen we did not pick up before. This...this pathogen seems to attack the metalloproteins of organic life but not the flora on the surface. If I could get a sample of you being, and run some simulations, I could potentially find out why the planet's flora is immune."

Ivy listened intently to the young man. She felt his reasoning seemed sound. Giving up one leaf and a bit of a twig wouldn't be too bad. A question then came to mind, "Um, . . . would you rather have an older grown or something new?" She thought about it for a second and said, "My thought was that my old growth has been exposed to more, which may still contain something that is no longer in the current environment, like a new leaf might." She raised both eyebrows questioning the scientist.

"I...um...uh...I...suppose both would work nicely. Something older and something new." Joey pondered the thought. "I could scan one and you the other. My work is synced with the main computer. You can draw up a duplicate of the simulation and we have plenty of microscanners." He smiled at her. "Double our efforts."

Initially, Ivy thought that this Scientist wanted a 'clipping' of her to run experiments. She now realized that he also wanted her help. A soft smile came over her face as she replied, "I think I can provide those samples." She hesitated a second and added, "I would very much like to assist you in this work." Her smile broadened.

"Thank you," Joey smiled, "I am confident we can find a solution to this problem very soon."

Ivy thought this was going to work out 'just grand', but then she began to think where an older leaf on her might be. She had no leaves inside, easy to find an old cutting there. Most of her exterior 'skin' was made up of finely woven leaves. This material was typically replaced often in a rotating basis. She had to think of the oldest part and then realized that it was an area she typically sat upon.

Ivy looked up at the Science officer, looking a bit nervous and stared hesitantly, "I think I should do this in private. If you don't mind." She raised an eyebrow in a questioning fashion.

"Of course," Joey said. "Um...uh...yes...sure...privacy. You got it," and he turned and started away back toward his workstation.

Surface: Team Shaqdac

Everyone had spread out the closer they got to the facility where the single female Klingon life sign was picked up. Still, there were no power signatures powerful enough to produce any form of shielding. Finely tuned scans showed the place was not even environmentally sealed to keep out the pathogen, so quarantine was out of the question. Whatever this was, it was a fair bet that the Klingon woman was infected as well.

Caradan's thoughts waivered many times during their double-timed trek across the hills and the flat land. But her thoughts came back into focus upon their mission as the team arrived upon the facility.

A set of large bay doors started to open and the metal on metal contact of gears could be heard. There came squeals and clicks, all echoing as the bay doors parted. With a fist in the air, Caradan halted the team and they all took knees. Security wielded rifles whilst everyone else wielded tricorders.

Considering some of the other derelict equipment lying around, Caradan concluded the bay doors were meant to harvesting equipment though there did not seem much was to be harvested now.

As the doors opened wide enough, the single female Klingon stepped out. No tricorder was needed for Caradan to see that the woman was advanced in her years but still very capable to take care of herself. Caradan saw no feature about her that would make anyone immediately think her to be one meant for Rura Penthe, much less a criminal. Caradan saw an additional reading on her tricorder; human life sign. Obviously Scott Erickson was inside and keeping an eye on things as the scene continued to unfold.

With the hand order for the rest of the team to stay put, Caradan stood and started walking toward the Klingon woman. She kept her phaser holstered as the two grew closer.

"Kri'Zhya Hur'q? she asked.

The Klingon woman scoffed and spat. "Hur'q is Klingon for 'Outsider.' Kri'Zhya will do."

"Very well. Kri'Zhya," Caradan remained alert. "As you know, you are a fugitive as pronounced by the Klingon Empire. We are here to take you into custody."

"Oh," Kri'Shya smiled, "I am not going anywhere. That is unless you want your crew to die."

Kri'Shya did not at all appear able to kill anyone with her bear hand, not to mention an entire crew. She must have meant, "the pathogen? You're still alive. That means there must be a vaccine."

"To make you immune?" Then Kri'Shya gave a nod. "I do have that. Which you are free to try on yourselves. As I surrender myself, unconditionally to you, you are free to do what you will with my research. You will still carry the disease though. Which means...you are all now prisoners of this planet."

Caradan could hear some commotion from among the rest of the team. She was just thankful for a means to keep Mindo from dying a horrible death. As for getting off the planet, that was another obstacle to tackle.

The Confession of Kri'Shya

by Commander Aki Shagdac & Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Scott Erickson & Meera Deloria
Qlj Hegh

Commander Shaqdac, Lieutenant Eunidas, Ensign Vejeem and Lieutenant Erickson sat around as Kri'Shya detailed her dilemma. Lieutenant Deloria stood off to the side, ready with her weapon in case anything should happen. Kri'Shya was a fugitive after all, and their prisoner.

"This planet, you see, was not always called Qlj Hegh. 'Black Death' came along after the pathogen. It was a long time ago. This planet was once a trading outpost and stopping point as it lied enroute to Praxis. Praxis is gone of course, and the purpose for this planet became obsolete. We started farming it however. I was the wife of a farmer. I looked after the children, took up nursing, and became something of a scientist. Many do not think of Klingons as farmers but we are around though few and far between."

"Something, was introduced into the air. Whether it was intentional, a natural phenomenon or something underground was released, I do not know. But this something infected the population. Some started dying before they knew they were even sick. I got to work on it and found that the dead had no metalloproteins in their bodies whatsoever. The children died faster. I started working on a cure. Many who deemed my progress was too slow started leaving the planet. Many got away but the Empire showed up and started bombing areas of population. They could not afford this pathogen from getting off world."

"As it turned out, as you have seen with your own eyes, my progress was too slow. I did manage to find a vaccine to make Klingons immune to the pathogen, but the child I tested it on was too far gone. He became immune but was too weak to survive. He was my own son. Instead of bombing this place into the Barge of the Dead, the Empire sought to make an example of me, to put fear into those who do not get the work done in time. I was transported into a quarantine chamber for a year to make sure the pathogen had left me and was no longer living in the air. I pleaded my case, that I had found a vaccine though no way to kill the pathogen. I could make people immune but no way to make the planet habitable again."

"You see, I am an innocent woman, guilty of nothing but failing to find a cure in time. I was thrust into an impossible situation. Then I was thrust into another one. The High Council needed someone to blame for the deaths of so many Klingons, so many children that would never grow up to be warriors, and death to an entire planet. They chose me to blame. It took one, only one councilmember to call me a witch for everyone to accuse me of worshipping Fek'Ihr, for bringing about Qlj Hegh, 'the Black Death.' They ignored my words as I tried to explain my work and how I was immune. My immunity only enraged them all the more."

"I was made an example of. The house I was from was disbanded. My family sought and slaughtered. My identity erased. The only thing I had left was my name. I was eventually put into that barge meant for Rura Penthe. Many of the prisoners were loyal to the dishonored Klingons believing they follow Kahless. My heart remains with the Empire, just not its leaders or its council. The Sovereignty would not bring it upon themselves to kill an elderly woman when they liberated the prisoners from that barge. So, they gave me a shuttle in which to leave. I came back here, set up my camp and put the transporter inhibitor in place hoping anyone who happened along would do a thorough scan of the atmosphere before shuttling down. Even that did not work it seems."

"Commander," she leaned forward and rested her weight on her arms upon the table. "I am your prisoner. You have captured the fugitive Kri'Shya. But until a real cure is found, I am afraid there is no leaving this planet. If your crew does find one though, I implore you for asylum within the Federation, protection against the current council of the Empire. I have no desire to join the dishonorable Sovereignty, but I refuse to allow myself to be a prisoner again and to be made an example of for something outside of my control. I only sought to find a cure and save those lives. I never worshipped Fek'Ihr, I never summoned any form of death. I am but an innocent woman, begging you for asylum. How many times have you heard a Klingon beg, Commander?"

The whole surface mission Aki was reserved to himself and let Caradan do his thing. It surprised him that Ixelom did not put question marks on the sudden withdraw behavior of her Captain as his biography was more extroverted and taking lead in situations. Aki listens towards the situation, so they are all infected with plausible death at the end of the route. He let the information sink in as in this situation it was not healthy to respond in panic and it would not resolve anything. He looked at the woman "Can you transfer your research of the vacine towards the Tornado?" He did not answer her plead just yet, aki needed to secure the safety of his crew first.

"Transfer, yes," said Kri'Shya. "Transport, no."

"There is disturbance in the atmosphere, Commander," said Caradan. "It is preventing us from using the teleporter. Lieutenant Rrareth and the Science Department are already working on a cure. Dr. Milo and his team are researching the vaccine. I am assured they will have something soon."

"You see commander," said Kri'Shya, "Your crew's safety is being looked into. Your hyposprays will stave off death, for a time. If I can assist in making the vaccine universal for all, do let me know."

Aki did not react facially towards this news as he taps his finger on his arms as he thought about the situation. As he finally looked at the woman "Is your computers still working here? Are your notes still around? If so...Lieutenant contact Doctor Milo to get here" He asked Caradan as Aki looked at Scott "Scott ...look around" Knowing enough for what he needs to do "Doloria secure the area and our prisoner"

Meera shrugged. "Perimeter is already secure." She reported, but was starting to walk towards their 'prisoner'. Seemed a bit redundant right now, but she was following orders.

"Sir," replied Caradan, "Dr. Milo is already in the lab working away with her notes and digging through her computer system."

Kri'Shya placed both her hands upon the table awaiting arrest. "I will not resist you commander. I only ask you to consider my confession and my request for asylum. Would you sent an old woman, innocent of the charge against her, to her death?" She looked up at the Orion security officer as Deloria stepped up to her side.

Not responding towards Caradan Aki kept his eyes at the woman "Cuff her Deloria..." He orders as Aki looked at Caradan "Get me a report from our doctor then...now" He demanded as he looked around the room.

Meera was already doing so when he gave the order. Once Kri'Shya was securely cuffed, Meera tapped her comm. "Higgins, any sign of anything approaching?"

=^=Negative Lieutenant. Other than the wind, this place is as quiet as a tomb.=^=

"Roger, keep an eye open." She replies.

"Captain, can I have word with you?" Erickson asked Shagdac, "Alone if possible?"

Looking at his side "Sure Lieutenant " he stated as he walked with him to a more distance area of any people in ear range "What is wrong?"

"Something is off about this situation sir, I am not sure what it is just yet, but infiltrating this space was to easy. Finding her was to easy and she came without even a fight. I am not certain that this mission should be going in this route. I think we should grant her the request for asylum and allow her to assist us in getting a cure." Erickson said. He crossed his arms and out pressure on his core to help calm his nerves.

Taking a deep breath Aki looked at his side where the woman was talking to Caradan " I expect that the Klingons know that she will ask this. If it's true what she states, letting their black sheep go into our hands is unacceptable" Looking back at The lieutenant "Riddle me this, why ask a Rhode Island class with a history of being taken over be accepted to go deep into Klingon space to a woman that has this kind of history?" Aki shrugs knowing the answer already...ambush and let it show that it was SoK.

"With respect sir, this was an ambush from the start. However, the past of someone can't allow us to determine their future. She will be killed once she is taken back to Klingon space. At least with us we can save her and allow her to live the rest of her life as she sees fit."

Nodding towards the Lieutenant "I tend to agree with you Lieutenant, but why you think Captain Takato sacrificed her own life? It is the very thing every damn Captain has to do. Protect the crew at all cost" He smirks "Before I send that asylum request towards Starfleet...the Klingon Empire will be suddenly appearing to clean it up I bet. Accidents tend to happen" Aki did not like it as much as his Lieutenant or any of the Away Team did, but the life's of his crew was outweighing on prisoner "Questions?"

"No questions, sir." Erickson said. He felt beat at this point. "Permission to stay with the prisoner?"

Caradan turned away from Kri'Shya being taken into custody by Deloria. She approached Aki position where he was speaking with Scott. "On my way to get an update from Dr. Milo, sir," she said as she passed them by."

Nodding towards both Scott and Caradan "Alright, lets hope we get some answers soon" He stated mostly to himself as Aki saw everyone do their job.

Looking a Bit Pale

by Crewman Darrell Wallace & Lieutenant JG Mindo & Petty Officer 3rd Class Vaimera Gherr & Petty Officer 3rd Class Tiffany Crismore

Qlj Hegh

Darrell was watching the perimeter from a nearby hill as Gherr and Crismore were working about in the derelict shuttle. There was little of use as far as he could tell save for the low energy emissions that was disrupting transport, and for good reason it seemed.

Looking through his oculars, Darrell performed a slow spin keeping an eye out for any trouble. There came none. He scanned over hills, flatland, a river, a savannah, the faroff facility where the commander and his team were located, some mountains, then he scanned his vision back to the shuttle. Gherr was standing on top of it and performing some scans.

"Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen...oh come on. Stop moving so much." He lowered the oculars from his eyes. "Just how many spots does a trill have?"

Crewman Wallace had not yet grown accustomed to Mindo and his stealthy ways, though he knew it was not intentional. Mindo needed his LEGs to help him get around as fast as the larger species. Those LEGs though, gave the lieutenant the ability to float around rather quietly. And it just so happened that the Feserian floated up to Darrell as he was partaking in an attempt to count Gherr's spots as opposed to keeping an eye on the perimeter.

"One hundred seventeen," said Mindo. Wallace looked up from his specs, startled. "There are one hundred seventeen spots." Mindo dropped down to the ground and tucked his tricorder under his arm. The tricorder looked a lot bigger in Mindo's hands than most other officers. It would be comical to see if it were another officer's hands and not Mindo's. Ever since his rather aggressive encounter with his subordinate officer Keselowsky, the crew knew Mindo was not one to be messed with. Likewise, they were also familiar with his more relaxed approach to things, which made him a lot less scary.

"Sorry sir," said Darrell. The man straightened. Normally, the attentive stance would have one looking straight out. In this case, though, he would have looked straight over Mindo's head, not looking at the man himself. Darrell decided on a more relaxed stance. They were out in the field after all. "That was unprofessional of me. It won't happen again. It's just..." there was nothing else to do out there but he decided quickly not to voice that. "I've been hanging around Kissy too much I suppose." He shrugged knowing Mindo knew just what he was talking about. "That's what we call him sometimes."

"While on duty, we'll refer to Ensign Keselowsky as 'Ensign Keselowsky' or simply 'Kes,' as that is not a derogatory version of his name... I appreciate the gesture, though," Mindo added.

Mindo cleared his throat and massaged his temples a little. "Do you have anything to report, Crewman? Is there something about Crewman Gherr's spots I should know?"

"No sir. There's nothing to report on that front." Darrell turned east. "In that direction," he pointed with his full hand, "is the facility Commander Shaqdac and team entered. I had to use maximum magnification but saw no sign of trouble. I've heard nothing so everything must be going according to plan. Over there," he turned and pointed northwest, "the hurricane that was spotted from space is moving away. There is a forest in that direction," now looking south-southwest, "which I believe someone could use for cover should they want to launch a sneak attack. I have seen no unusual movement yet and the Tornado assures me there are no other life signs on the surface. A valley in that direction," now due south, "could be another avenue of attack. Again, no unusual activity. No lifesigns at all. Our shuttles are in a low orbit. The pilots report decreased levels of the pathogen inside to the point that it would take days of quarantine for it to die in that environment. In case we start showing symptoms, Crewman McIntosh, from Medical, gave me a First Aid kit. I left it down there with Gherr and Crismore while I do a round up here."

"That...and..." Darrell finally made a close inspection of Mindo's features. "Are you feeling OK sir? You are looking a little pale."

Mindo activated his LEGs again and rose to the Crewman's height. "I'm fine, Crewman. Since there is no apparent threat in the area, why don't you help us with the shuttle?"

"Roger that sir. Will do." Darrell looked around once more. From any direction, he estimated a full hour before anyone could be upon them. "I will perform another round in 45 minutes." The man shouldered his phaser rifle, put away his oculars and snapped to attention. "Sir," he saluted. Performing a left-face, he was off down the hill back toward the derelict shuttle.

Mindo coughed as he followed the Crewman back to the shuttle. His chest was starting to hurt. His appearance wasn't very good either, but he worked through it.

Once back at the shuttle, Mindo went straight for the medkit. Crismore snapped to attention and followed him into the shuttle.

"Sir," she said, brushing away some black hair from her face, "The encryption on the shuttle's computer took a little time to crack, but Gherr and I think we've just about got it."

"Excellent," said Mindo, applying a hypospray to his neck. He hoped the advanced antibiotic would help his situation and perhaps stall it.

From the cockpit, Gherr yelled, "I've got it! Universal Translator is deciphering the log now."

Mindo and Crismore made their way to the cockpit, eager to see the results.

"My name is Kri'Shya," came a Klingon female's voice from the speakers. The image on the primary terminal flashed then went dark.

"Can you get that back?" Mindo asked Gherr.

"Not a problem," she replied, adjusting the controls.

The image came back and the elderly Klingon came into focus. The feed seemed to have some video and audio disturbances but was still fully understandable. The image of Kri'Shya pixelated then refocused. "My name is Kri'Shya. Whatever news you have heard of me, disregard it all. I am innocent of what they accuse me of. I was charged with the deaths of everyone on this planet, though my only failing was not finding a cure in time. So, please, for the love of Kahless, do not come down to this planet. I am placing a transporter dampener in place in hopes that you will find this message and perhaps even scan the atmosphere for the corrosive oxygen isotope targeting the metalloproteins of organic beings, before you dare to fly down. I do not know the origins of this isotope or if it was weaponized. My only goal is to find a cure. I have yet to find a cure but I have found a vaccine to make Klingons immune. I do not know enough of alien biology to be sure this will work for other species. If you cannot see the isotope with your sensors you can at least see that no other living animal, save for me, is living on the surface. I am leaving this log decrypted, open and on repeat for anyone to pick up. If you are from the Klingon Empire, then this planet is now my prison. If you are from the Sovereignty, I already said 'No.' I will not join you. Everyone else...Kahless guide you."

The image of Kri'Shya leaned forward. Her hand ventured off screen as through reaching for something and the feed went dark. The speakers silenced.

"What do you think, sir?" said Gherr, looking back at the Chief Engineer.

Mindo cleared his throat, sounding more congested this time. "Wallace," he said to the security officer. "Tear this ship apart. Try to find the Klingon vaccine and any other medical supplies. Check for weapons, too, though I doubt there will be any."

"On it sir," Darrell replied then snapped to it.

Mindo turned back to the cockpit. "Crismore, Gherr, I need your thoughts."

Crismore's brow furrowed. "I wonder if anyone else has seen this message... and if so, where are they now?"

"I had to decrypt it," said Gherr. "We must be the first."

Mindo shook his head. "Kri'Shya said she left the message decrypted."

Crismore frowned. "Then someone else must have encrypted it."

"Which means we aren't the first to find this shuttle," said Mindo. "Or perhaps Kri'Shya went back and encrypted the message herself. Maybe she had a reason for someone to not see it."

Gherr leaned back in her chair. "Then why not delete it?" she asked.

"Good question," said Mindo. "Nevertheless, someone didn't want us to see that message. I want to know who and I want to know why. Check the computer for further tampering; look for any signs of further use of this computer. Be thorough. I'll be right back."

Mindo turned and left the front of the shuttle, heading outside.

Walking a few meters away from the shuttle, Mindo's hand went up to his comm badge to contact Caradan when a coughing fit hit him. The phlegm in the back of his throat loosened a bit and Mindo spat. His throat hurt, and his stomach was beginning to feel unsettled. He wiped some sweat from his brow and hit his badge.

"Mindo to Caradan," he said, clearing his throat again. "We found some... things in the... thing..." he cleared his throat and coughed again. "The shuttle," he managed to say. "We found the shuttle log."

"Shuttle log," came Caradan's voice. "Good job. Report."

Mindo shook his head a little, trying to clear his mind. His eyes came back into focus, and he realized he was still holding the hypospray. He gave himself another shot of the medicine. Almost instantly, the feeling in his stomach, as well as the dizziness, began to subside. He cleared his throat again and continued.

"There are some inconsistencies in the ship's log. I'm having my people get as much information out of the computer as possible. We believe the message was tampered with, but we don't know by whom."

"=^="Tampered with?"=^= her voice said in a near whisper. She returned to normal volume and said, "=^="Well keep at it. We are speaking with Kri'Shya now. There seems to be a vaccine. It works only on Klingons at the moment but the doctor and his team are working on expanding that."=^= There was a brief pause and Caradan's voice lowered again. "=^="How are you doing?"=^=

Mindo looked back at the shuttle. Everyone was still inside. No doubt Wallace had found something to report.

"I'm fine," said Mindo. "I'll keep you updated. Mindo out." Tapping his badge again and closing the channel, he headed back. Stepping into the shuttle's cabin he said, "Wallace, report."

Darrell was at the terminal tapping away. The front panel was open and he frequently scanned his tricorder inside. "I asked Gherr and Crismore to check out the dilithium matrix for anything unusual, mostly because I did not want anyone else to see this until you do, Sir." He cleared his throat and dove straight into his report. "I see signs of definite tampering. And I mean mere minutes after this log was made. Giving Kri'Shya maybe enough time to wrap up in here and start walking...I'm not sure...maybe a quarter kilometer given her age. So if there was someone then they were very close. But that is not the strangest thing, sir." He worked the controls to replay Kri'Shya's log. As soon as she started talking, her voice turned into a squirrel's as he fast forwarded the video a little. He found the spot of interest and then ran the video back a few seconds. "See that box behind her on the left attached to the wall in the feed? That is a standard Mot'Kon KX-17 Communications module, standard for all Klingon shuttles of this design. I know, I served on one during an infiltration mission during the last dustup between the Klingons and the Cardassians regarding a border dispute."

Darrell spun in the chair and pointed toward the back of the cabin toward the communications module attached to the wall. "That is the KX-17. Klingons are never ones for redundancy so these shuttles all have just the one module and they are always attached to the wall to the right of the door leading to the back." He spun back toward the screen and pointed at the module behind Kri'Shya. "This one is to the left of the door. And you can see right here," he ran the feed forward a few tenths of a second, "as she leans this way a little, you can see the far edge of the one to the right. But," he spun back around and pointed at the wall to the left of the doorway, "the module that is in the feed, the one on the left, is not here now. And there is no sign and no indication that anything was ever attached to the wall. No cables, no holes, no relays." Moving Mindo's attention back to the screen. "There is no reason that module on the left should ever be there. For that matter there is no reason for a shuttle of this design to have two modules. But if there was one when she made this log, then where is it now?" Darrell continued working then wrapped up his report with, "Sir."

"Strange," said Mindo. "Is it possible this is a false log? Perhaps taken from a different shuttle? We already know this shuttle has been tampered with. Who's to say this isn't the same shuttle at all? Are there any other inconsistencies? This log seems to be full of them."

"It's the same shuttle sir," said Darrell as he tapped through lines of code. "The source of this log contains the same manufacturer allocation code as the shuttle itself. Kri'Shya was sitting exactly where I am now when she recorded this log. Not being a comms officer or in engineering, she would probably not think it strange for the shuttle to suddenly have two communications modules, if she recognized it at all. Much less be able to remove it and not leave any sign that it was ever there." Crewman Wallace turned in the chair toward Mindo. "Aside from the encryption, I see no other evidence that this log was tampered with, nothing showing that someone came in and inserted the image of a second module. For whatever reason, it was physically there," he looked at the blank spot on the wall. "And someone removed it. I would recommend the Tornado perform another scan of the surface for any life forms. A narrow-band search for precision, perhaps for anything out of the ordinary."

Mindo tapped his badge. "Mindo to Tornado. I need you to scan the surface again. Be thorough. I don't think we're the only ones down here."

"=^="Affirmative, sir,"=^= returned a voice. "=^="Scanning now. Narrowing the pattern. One moment please."=^= And that moment seemed to stretch on forever as Mindo and Darrel waited for that voice to return with results. "=^="In no particular order, sir, I am reading Lieutenant Mindo, Crewmen Wallace, Gherr and Crismore at your location. The other location contains the Klingon female, Commander Shaqdac, Lieutenants Deloria and Erickson, Commander Milo,

Crewman McIntosh, the rest of the security team. Outward scans show no signs of anything else. There are no apparent dampeners being employed either." =^=

Darrell furrowed his brow and whispered almost inaudible to Mindo, "No mention of Lieutenant Eunidas."

Mindo didn't quite hear Wallace's complete sentence, but he did hear the name Eunidas.

"Tornado, what is the location of Lieutenant Eunidas? You may want to adjust sensors to detect life signs to include beings without body heat. Changelings, Borg, anything." Mindo sincerely hoped there weren't any Borg near by. Of course, Changelings wouldn't be all that good either. And who knows what else could be down here?

=^= "Lieutenant Eunidas is located at the facility. We had to track her commbadge as we lost her lifesign after a sensor sweep. Sweep intervals are every 15 minutes. She apparently made herself too human and was being effected by the atmosphere. She has since reformed to her natural state with a human appearance. Adjusting sensors now...Affirmative, she is at the facility. She read as human earlier. There are no Borg, no androids, no anomalous entities. We pick up nothing else down there sir." =^=

Mindo sighed, then coughed. "Thanks for the info," he said. "Mindo out."

As Mindo finished up with the Tornado, Darrel did some calculations in his head trying to figure out how much ground could be made in a span of 15 minutes. He nodded then shook his head. "It makes sense that they cannot maintain constant scans if they are trying to keep eyes on the entire surface." He calculated some more. To himself, but aloud, he said, "how much mischief can one cause in 15 minutes?"

Mindo coughed again. His throat was beginning to get sore. He needed water.

"Wallace, I need you outside... right now," said Mindo. "Take your tricorder and give me a thorough scan of everything within a five mile radius. Look for irregularities. Be thorough. If someone else was here then they had to have left more indication than just a missing communications box and an altered computer. Take Gherr with you. You'll cover more ground that way. I'm going to contact Eunidas."

"Sir," affirmed Darrell as he stood. He grabbed his phaser rifle and tricorder and made his exit.

In the shuttle, Mindo tapped his comm badge again. "Mindo to Eunidas."

=^="Hold that thought a moment,"=^= she said to someone else. =^="Go ahead Lieutenant."=^=

Mindo wiped some sweat from his brow. "We've found evidence that someone else has been here. I need to know about a communications box taken from the shuttle. Does Kri'Shya know anything about it?"

=^="Stand by."=^=

There was a brief moment of silence. Then Lieutenant Eunidas came back.

=^="Eunidas to Mindo. That is a negative. Kri'Shya claims to know nothing about any communications box. The only thing she took from the shuttle was medical equipment and some scanners for her work here."=^=

Mindo sighed and rubbed his temples again. His headache was coming back fast. "I think there may have been or may still be others on this planet. Someone our sensors didn't pick up. They could still be here. Heck, they could be aboard a cloaked ship in orbit. My hands are sort of tied here. I really need to get back to the Tornado and run some scans. Something isn't right."

=^="Dr. Milo is working with Kri'Shya's vaccine now to see about an immunity. And the Tornado is working on a cure. We will have something soon. I will get back with you as soon as we have something. At the moment, there is no returning to the Tornado."=^=

Caradan's words ended but she did not report an end to their conversation. That, however, shot to the bottom of Mindo's list of concerns as, "Comms have been disabled," came Crismore's voice from behind. She possessed no sense of urgency in her voice. There came another sound; the sound of her unholstering a phaser. "Don't reach for your phaser," she said. "And do turn around, slowly."

Mindo turned slowly, his hands held outward. *What now?* was the thought that went through his mind at that moment. *This is not my best away mission.*

"Please tell me," Crismore started with a furrowed brow, "that you know I am not your crewman. I would much rather avoid that conversation as I am short on time."

"Funny," said Mindo. "I'm just short."

She kept her phaser trained on Mindo. "And, before you ask, your girl is sleeping soundly. She's just a little unconscious...and a bit tied up. Got something to write home to her parents now I think."

"Not really. She's missing the best part," said Mindo. "What do you want?" Mindo kept his hands up. He was no fool. Any sudden movement might get him or anyone else shot. And at this range it would likely be fatal.

“Straight to the point. That’s good,” she said. She took a few deep breaths and her eyes shifted, squinted. “I’m ordered not to harm anyone,” those words had to be forced out. Her hand on the phaser seemed to want to disagree. “Though I will defend myself if I have to,” she was quick to add. “This phaser is set to stun and I think it hurts a lot more on children your age. What we want however,” then she scoffed, not wanting to admit what was next, “is the First. We are nothing without the First. My orders,” and that last two words were said in disgust, “are to keep you all here as long as possible...and not to kill anyone,” though her tone of voice got across a desire for handing out some death. “I believe I have about eight minutes before your ship does another sweep of the area and ten minutes before the two you sent out return from the diversion I sent them on. It seems I have enough time to answer...or ignore any questions you may have.”

Mindo's legs began to weaken. He could feel his body start to shake. Suddenly he wasn't sure how much time he had before he passed out. Keeping his hands raised, he slowly went down to his knees and into a sitting position, resting on the backs of his feet.

"I suppose my next question," he said, "is who are you?"

The Changeling that was posing as Crewman Crismore shook a little. Her face contorted. “Aahhh!” she said almost as though in pain. “How do you solids do it? How do you live with a conscience; little whispers in your heads telling you what to do and what not to do; what’s right and what’s wrong? We Founders are free to do what we please,” she said as she thrust the phaser toward Mindo a little with each syllable. She kept her distance though. “You solids are all beneath us. I like to think I don’t have a conscience; have no need of one. But my second...” again she appeared hating have to admit to this, but, “my Second told me not to kill anyone and my Second’s voice echoes within me. It is the closest thing I have to even begin to describe what a conscience feels like and I hate it.” She took a few breaths and, with obvious disgust, “I am the Fifth. Do you know what that means? It means I am nothing. My word means nothing; my opinions. Just do this and do that, don’t kill anyone, wait until we come for you.”

Her free hand shifted and reformed involuntarily. Looking at it but keeping that phaser trained firmly on Mindo, “It’s the Great Terror. I am sure the First must have told you about it. The silence and the dread of being separated from the Link. Millions of voices all gone. There is not one. Nothing but memories and I cannot wait until we...” She stopped speaking and stopped moving. Those eyes grew wide and stared right at Mindo. “You’re trying to keep my talking aren’t you? Trying to get information out of me. Well you will get nothing.” She jerked her head around and looked about the shuttle. “Almost time for another sweep. I have to get a move on. You won’t tell anyone about me will you little boy? Just tell the First we are set and we await her arrival. That...and we mean no one any harm. Just stay out of our way.” The likeness of Crismore backed away a little. She stopped and seemed to think a bit, back to the announcement of her primary mission, “to keep you here as long as I can. Actually,” she sounded calmer now, “do tell your ship about me. I will have them scanning and sweeping the surface for days while we...” and she let the words trail off. Crismore smiled and began to laugh. “There you go again; about to get information out of me.”

“Sorry.” Making her way toward the door, “Not this time. Do take care of yourself. I would not want this to be our last meeting if you know what I mean. And,” she actually looked a little concerned, “you do look awfully pale little boy. You may want to see a doctor about that. Or call your mommy and daddy.”

Dropping the phaser, the likeness of Crismore liquefied and ran from the shuttle.

Dropping his hands, Mindo let out a huge cough. Spitting out the phlegm at the back of his throat, Mindo was now on hands and knees. It had been hard to stay strong in front of the Changeling.

Wiping his mouth, Mindo grabbed the hypospray from his tool belt and injected himself once more. His vision immediately began to clear up, but his head was still clouded and somewhat dizzy. Mindo scrambled out of the cockpit and found Crismore... the assumed the real Crismore... tied up and gagged. Mindo removed the restraints and gag. The young Crewman looked up with worried eyes.

"Sir! Gherr and Wallace..." she said.

"I think they're fine," said Mindo. "Our guest said something about them coming back from a distraction."

"I'm so sorry, Lieutenant," said Crismore. "I didn't even..."

"I know," said Mindo. "It's OK."

"How long do you think they've been here?" asked Crismore.

Mindo sighed. "I suspect a while. The extra communications box must have been one of them in disguise."

"Extra box?"

"Never mind," said Mindo, shaking out the cobwebs in his head. The shaking led to even more dizziness.

"Are you OK?" said Crismore, putting her hand on the Chief Engineer's shoulder.

"No," replied Mindo. "The virus is affecting me at an accelerated rate. I'm not going to be much good in a few minutes." Another coughing fit, then, "And I probably have just a little over an hour to live."

Crismore was shocked. "Why didn't you say anything?"

Mindo coughed again. The hypospray had worn off so much faster this time. Mindo dropped to his hands and knees and coughed more.

Crismore put her hand on his back. "Mindo, you're..."

"I know," said Mindo in between coughs. "I need to lie down."

Crismore helped Mindo to a more open spot on the floor of the shuttle. She unzipped the jacket of her uniform, leaving her yellow turtleneck on. She gently set Mindo down and put her jacket over him. The jacket was big enough to cover Mindo almost completely. Mindo coughed again and curled into a fetal position.

"You're in charge of the team, Tiffany," he said in a raspy voice. "Wait for Gherr and Wallace. Then get back to the shuttlecraft and reactivate communications." His vision began to black out. He was passing out. He had to talk fast. "Eunidas... could... be... First." With that, he blacked out. Crismore tried to revive him to no avail.

Just then, Wallace arrived with Gherr. Upon seeing Mindo unconscious, Gherr let out a gasp.

Crismore stood up and faced the two Crewmen. "Mindo's OK for now, but we don't have much time." She knelt down and further wrapped Mindo in her jacket.

"What happened?" asked Gherr.

"I'm not sure," said Crismore. "I was attacked from behind and never saw my attacker. I don't know what he looks like." She took a breath, and noticed she too was feeling a little light headed. She knew it could be from the virus, but it wasn't as bad yet. She could still think clearly.

"Wallace, report," said Crismore.

Darrell was still a little winded from all the walking he and Gherr had done and was in the middle of catching his breath, calming his heart. He held up a finger. "Sorry, still catching my breath. Getting a little under the weather too it seems." He composed himself better. "Gherr and I found suspiciously placed rock, as though it had been moved recently. That led to us discovering some tracks. Actually Gherr found them first, but the tracks match nothing in the tricorder database. I thought we had discovered a new animal but the tracks just started out of nothing and they ended similarly. The tracks circled us around the shuttle and started heading back here. I figured it was a red herring so we double-timed it back here."

"Our comms are down," said Crismore. "Mindo ordered us back to the shuttle to restore them. We have to contact the rest of the away team."

Gherr stepped forward. "We can't just leave him here!" she cried.

"We *are* leaving him here!" said Crismore. "We have our orders, and we have less than an hour to carry them out. I suggest we hump to the shuttlecraft as quick as possible."

"The shuttle..." Darrell placed his hand on the back of a chair. "Oh man," he slowly sat down. His heart was still racing. He continued as Gherr moved to fetch the med kit with the medical tricorder. "The shuttles are in orbit right now. Lieutenant Eunidas hoped that the air purifiers on board would help with the pathogen if the shuttles were no longer exposed to this atmosphere." He looked at his tricorder. "There is going to be a sweep in one minute. Once they see Mindo's weak life sign, the shuttle will come to us," and that was about all the strength he had for the moment. Darrell sat back in the chair and relaxed attempting to calm his heart.

"Tiffany, I need to sit down too," said Gherr, rubbing her temples.

"It looks like we have a little time," said Crismore, herself relieved for the brief respite. "There are enough hyposprays to last us for about an hour, but we must use moderation." Reaching into a nearby med kit, Crismore injected herself with the medicine. Immediately her head began to clear up. She tossed another hypo to Wallace, and one to Gherr. "We rest until the shuttle gets here. Try not to fall asleep."

"Roger that," said Darrel. He followed that up with a smile and, "Ma'am." His eyes were starting to get heavy.

Just hold on...

by Ryoko Takato

Prison - Unknown Location

"Arggh..." Sergei had difficulty keep his momentum up as he was put back on his knees by two Klingons "Your will is interesting and very strong like your fellow colleagues..." Maharf stated with a smile on his face as he points his blade at him "I almost envy you..." As Julia screams out of pain as another Klingon guard pierce her shoulder with a blade slowly "You bastard...leave them alone!" A logical reaction from Sergei, he was a man that would sacrifice himself to ensure that everyone is alright. Look at his latest action a few months ago, he saved his crew by deceiving the Klingons so that they could escape. But it was at the same time his biggest weakness "... don't hurt them!" Sergei said again.

Maharf smirks as he closes by to Sergei face with the knife at his neck "Give me the codes and we will stop...this enjoyable parade of wonderful screams" He grinned at the broken Captain that was on his knees in cuts, bruises, and wounds as he wanted to speak up to give in to his demands "I...I..."

"You are so lame..." A laughing voice came as Maharf grin disappeared as he looked a the direction of the voice "Ryoko...don't" Sergei begged as Ryoko looked at him with blood strip dripping down the side of her mouth "You think he has the codes? Really? I mean come on, are you a member of those eh" Ryoko shook her head as if she was thinking "Those...that renamed themselves ...from being Targ?" Maharf growls and stood up with a quick move slammed Ryoko in the face with a fist and she slides onto the floor as she coughs blood onto the floor "Yea...only wuss from those Targs hit like a woman" Ryoko barely got out as she tried to get up as another guard hits her into the stomach as she lifts off the floor and twist against the wall "Argghh"

"I...I have stories of the woman that survived a Klingon sniper shot. Those are deadly Captain" Maharf points out as he grins again "You know, the ways of our people have changed so dramatically that it is the right call for the SoK to finally see the real ways" Maharf became totally religion on that topic as if he was putting the idealism of the Sovereignty into a holy term.

"I...really don't like you so much" Ryoko smirks as she let her head fall to the side to look at them "I mean, at first I thought you were trying to seek your manhood. But really did loss it?" Ryoko smirks as she tries to sit up. A Klingon wanted to hit her again but the gesture of Maharf stopped him.

Maharf smiled on a dirty way towards her "You know what was so fun in the old days, their methods of keeping order" He looked at Sergei "Choose your victim Captain" Sergei looked at him confused and then towards the other Captains then back "What you mean by choose?" Maharf walked towards him and looked down at the weak man "I mean that you need to choose your victim. Will it be one of those women or yourself? We Klingons keep order in chaos, it is our method to turn you against each other...choose or you will die" Sergei eyes were big, he had to choose one of the two colleagues that were already suffering as bad as he was only to make it worse?

"CHOOSE YOUR VICTIM" Maharf scream as he tied his grip on his knife.

Conflicted by emotions, Sergei was broken in his principals of self-sacrifice for great good. Give the codes would mean hundreds or even died, choose someone and that person will get whatever Maharf will live or die by his blade. He could not choose, as a tear rolled over his cheek he could hear a voice "Choose me, Sergei..." His watery eyes looked at the direction of the voice as it stopped at Ryoko that looked directly at him "Do it.." Sergei closed his eyes and looked away as Judith looked down to the floor. Maharf laughs seeing Sergei point at Ryoko "Have fun boys....until next time Captains" With that said Maharf turned around and left the cell as three Klingons charge into Ryoko kicking and punching her, showing her every corner of that cell. While Judith kept her eyes closed as fear hits her, while Sergei tears rolled over his cheek. Both unable to do anything to help their friend.

After a while, they left the cell with Ryoko bearily breathing on the floor. Both of them went to her "Ryoko, I am so..soo sorry" Sergei said in tears as Judith did her best to path her broken friend up "We can't keep going like this, where is Starfleet?!?" She growls as Ryoko opened her eyes still in agony of pain "They...will find us....Tornado won't give up"

Make it Work

by Crewman Shannon McIntosh & Commander Landon Milo MD

Qlj Hegh

The climate was harsh and the air breathable save for the nasty pathogen slowly destroyed all the metalloproteins contained within everyone. The facility Kri'Shya resided in was an old harvesting station as the planet was probably once used for crops. Not the planet was devoid of all animal life and it was intent on staying that way unless a cure could be found. As Kri'Shya had said, the vaccine would only make them immune but they would carry the pathogen still, which made it impossible for anyone to return to the ship. And, as the others aboard the ship worked feverishly to find a cure, Dr. Milo was tasked with one mission.

"The cocktail I slapped together," said the elderly Klingon woman, "is good for only Klingons I am afraid." She pointed Dr. Milo in the direction of her lab. "My work is all in there. The equipment works...partially. If you want your friends to survive, find a way to make the meds work for them."

The Chief Medical Officer of the *Tornado* took a deep breath. No pressure. No pressure at all... he tried to tell himself, but he knew and felt the pressure greatly. "Which means I had better make progress and fast. Klingons tend to be much harder to kill than my friends" he added.

In the lab, Crewman Shannon McIntosh, from Medical, and on her first Away Mission stepped up to Dr. Milo. There was a bit of fear in her eyes as the deaths of everyone was only hours away, but there was determination there as well. She had confidence in Commander Milo to know what needed to be done.

Landon looked at Shannon. "Not how you expected to spend your first assignment, is it, Crewman?" he asked of her. The answer was rather obvious. "Oddly enough, this is not the only time I've been in a situation like this" he noted.

"Good to know sir," said Shannon. "To be honest, I have no doubt you will find something. I just..." she let her words trail off before she composed herself and set her mind on the work to be done. "If you want my opinion, sir, I think we should start by looking into the RNA sequencing of this vaccine. Kri'Shya is Klingon and Klingons do not always think outside their own biology when faced with diseases."

Landon scoffed. "Crewmen, it is a rarity that we have come across the work of a Klingon scientist or physician. They make up such a small percentage of the Klingon Empire's population. You are lucky to even find someone aboard a Klingon vessel that is 'qualified' to act as a combat medic" he explained. "It is usually a hack job in the modern sense. Laser scalpel removal of limbs and if it seems as though the warrior would be unable to battle again to die with honor...they will not make attempts to save lives" the Chief Medical Officer stated.

"RNA sequencing I concur with" Landon nodded in agreement. "What works on a Klingon will not likely work on our crew or anyone else. Hell, it could even kill them."

"We certain do not want that sir. Remember, Kri'Shya could not even find a cure, only a vaccination so that the pathogen could not infect her again. So, we don't need to find a cure, just a way to immunize the Away Team. The *Tornado* is working on a cure as we speak." She immediately went to her station. It was a tad slow as she had to wait for the universal translator to turn all the Klingon into something she could read. She started looking into the RNA coding to find a way to make it work on humans and other species, not just Klingons. "Let me know if you need anything sir."

"Thank you, I will let you know" he said simply. "Immunization is my primary concern, but if I happen to come across a means to a cure...I'll take that blessing" he added.

Caradan entered the lab abruptly and headed straight toward Milo's location. "Dr. Milo, the commander needs an update on your progress. Please report."

It took some time and unconventional thinking on his part, but Landon had found something. That something lead him down the path towards an answer. "You can tell the Commander that their faith in me was well placed. I have something that should be effective" he reported.

"That is great news doctor," said Caradan with a smile. "How long before we can dispense the vaccine to everyone?"

"Give me a few more minutes. I need to finalize a batch, but I should have it done in about fifteen minutes. I should be able to inoculate everyone then" he added.

Caradan was clearly effected by the news, but was also overly concerned over Mindo's well-being. He sounded a bit cryptic the last they spoke. It was as though he was feeling the symptoms of the pathogen but trying hard to power through it all. "Let me know the second you have something doctor." Caradan turned and started back for the room where the Commander and the others were.

Don't Go

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas

Qlj Hegh

Mindo, Wallace, Gherr, Crismore were still in the Klingon shuttle. Mindo was unconscious and the other three were fading away into a deep sleep as the last of their metalloproteins were being corroded.

Darrell sat there, trying to keep his eyes open but those lids just grew too heavy. He was reduced to wanting to close his eyes but for just a moment. Only a moment.

=^="Tornado to Away Team," ^= the voice emanated from all their commbaadges. ^= "Tornado to Away Team. Come in." ^= There was a short pause. ^= "We are keeping this channel open. Tornado to shuttle Kilimanjaro." ^=

=^="Hamilton here. I hope you have good news. My hypospray is about out." ^=

=^="Understood. Recent sweep shows four life signs in the area of Lieutenant Mindo's commbadge. Three fading. One very faint. Descend upon their position and provide aid." ^=

=^="Affirmative," ^= Hamilton returned after a brief hesitation. ^= "Beginning my descent." ^=

=^="Tornado to Away Team. Shuttle Kilimanjaro is on its way to you now. Away Team, come in." ^=

=^="Eunidas to Away Team," ^= Caradan's voice broke in. ^= "Eunidas to Away Team. Eunidas to Tornado, status of Away Team." ^=

=^="Life signs are faint ma'am. We just dispatched shuttle..." ^=

=^="We have a vaccine. I'll deliver it myself. Eunidas out." ^=

<i>See,'</i> Darrell thought he was speaking out loud, <i>Nothing to worry about. The cure is on its way.'

=^="Tornado to Away Team," ^= the voice sounded confused then continued, ^= "there is an...an albatross...We are picking up a large albatross heading quickly in your direction." ^= The voice cut itself off and came back only seconds later. ^= "Correction and disregard. Lieutenant Eunidas' commbadge is contained within. I repeat, Lieutenant Eunidas is on her way to you now. Away Team come in please." ^=

Some minutes had passed and then the shuttle door opened in the back and rushed footfalls could be heard. "Mindo," came Caradan's voice. "Mindo!" She entered the holding area where Mindo and his team were. Wallace was sitting in a chair as we Gherr. Crismore was on the verge of falling out of hers and Mindo lied on the floor, seemingly peacefully.

Outside, the shuttle Kilimanjaro was easing down to the ground.

Caradan rushed to Mindo and sent the hypospray up her arm and into her palm. "Hold on Mindo." She pressed the tip against his neck and sent the medication into the bloodstream after a gratifying hiss. She quickly moved to Wallace and administered the hypospray to him then to Gherr and Crismore.

With the hypospray nearly depleted, Caradan pressed it to her chest and absorbed it into her being for storage. She hurriedly sat next to Mindo and lifted him up into her arms, cradling his limp body. She could feel his warmth and the faint beat of his heart. All seemed to be well but they were nearly too late.

Caradan sat there and only looked at Mindo. "We did it. Doctor Milo, found the vaccine. Now we just need the Tornado to find the cure and we can all go home. All of us." She held Mindo almost as though cradling a large baby. Letting out a few whimpers in a near cry, Caradan rested her head atop Mindo's. Despite the vaccine running through his veins and the proteins giving him the strength and energy he needed, Caradan could only imagine what she would do or how she would feel if Mindo had died.

Tiffany was the first to show any sign of waking up. The others followed suit after a moment. As they all began to stir and recognize their surroundings, regaining their senses, Caradan kept her attention focused solely on Mindo. He was showing no sign of waking up. "Don't go Mindo. That's an order. Don't go."

Finding a Cure

by Crewman Joey Logano & Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth & Ensign Elena Reis & Ivy Sharzin

Tornado: Science Lab

From before

- this pathogen seems to attack the metalloproteins of organic life but not the flora on the surface. If I could get a sample of your be...being, and run some simulations, I could potentially find out why the planet's flora is immune." -

In the Science Lab, everyone worked feverishly to find a cure for the pathogen down below.

Joey Logano remained stooped over his desk as he ran simulation after simulation. So far, nothing. He was still waiting for Ivy to return with samples of her being so she and he could both start working to see why the pathogen seemed to avoid the flora of the planet below.

Riaan was supervising of course as well as doing her own work. And there was word that Elena Reis, currently in command of the Tornado was on her way to see to the progress personally. Riaan liked Elena personally, however, her Orion side gave her pheromones that make Riaan anxious due to her time spent with Orion slavers.

Ivy returned to the Science Lab with a flat tray in her hands. Upon the tray were two sections of compound green/flesh-tone leaf material that had just recently been part of her 'skin' covering; one older than the other. Next to them were two short lengths of dark green vine. Here again, one was older than the other.

Stepping up to Crewman Logano Ivy said, "I have the samples you requested." She glanced down at the tray in her hands and she added, "The items on my left are the older material, while those on the right are the newest biological material I created." She extended the tray toward him and hoped that he would not ask from where on her body the cuttings were taken.

"Thank you," he said taking the tray. "If you could please, ma'am," he was not sure what to call her, but she seemed to have been treated as though an officer of sorts, so he went with 'ma'am.' "I will take the older sample and you the newer. If we are both running simulations, then we are doubling our efforts."

Ivy considered his proposal, but replied, "I can see how that method might help us go faster. However, if we each take the data from all the samples and do our analysis separately, we should then come to the same conclusion. If we come up with different final data, then we may need to reconsider the method of testing?" Ivy ended her statement in a question, hoping that the scientist would see that her recommendation had some merit.

Joey was the crewman in the situation and Ivy was the civilian with a pending field promotion to Cadet. By default, that meant she has superiority. On top of that, she did seem wise. Joey gave a few nods. "I see your point. Let's proceed as you suggest."

Ivy was very pleased that the Crewman Logano had seen it her way. She smiled in appreciation and set the tray down on the counter. A concern came to her and Ivy wondered if the Crewman actually liked her idea or did he accept it because he thought she might be in charge. It wasn't something to squabble about, but glad they were working together toward the needed goal.

They divvied up the samples as Ivy recommended and Joey took his portions of Ivy samples and placed it in his microscanner. As the device performed a thorough scan, breaking the material down to its base DNA and elements, he was programming the computer to recreate the material in simulated form and insert that into microprogram where the pathogen simulation waited for its next prey.

Ivy took the portions of her samples to another station to evaluate them. In addition to breaking down the cells properties and DNA structure of each, she also cross referenced with the closest plant life that was in the Federation database. She thought this might lead to other circumstances that might provide other clues.

Riaan for her part was quietly studying how the biology of the plants of the world compared to the biology of other plants. However, she was not working as quickly as she might have liked because she had to coordinate the efforts of the various science labs to work together on the issue.

"I really hate to interrupt," Elena spoke quickly as she came into the science lab. The computer had trouble keeping up with Cygnian language as she spoke, but translated to the best of its ability. "But can someone" the translation cut off, but the tone of the word was clear to everyone in earshot, "give me some idea on just how" there was the word again, "our senior staff is?" She paused for a moment as her footfalls stopped and the cygnian's large eyes scanned across the room. "Sorry."

Joey wanted to speak up but he truly had little information except for the well-being of the Away Team despite their deaths in the coming hours. He stilled his tongue and continued pressing his face against his microscanner observing what was happening on the microscopic level. Afterall, the only 'someone' in the lab at the moment was the highest ranking officer among the Science team and that was Riaan.

"I need an update. I need it now. Whatever you have," Reis spoke in a surprising shift of tone, at least for a second. There was a little shiver of her form, as she realized the tension in the room - well, some of it. She still couldn't really sense Ivy. Then, it was back to her quick speaking. "And, to be 100% honest, you're going to have to use small words. This is completely outside my expertise. And way, way above pay grade..." She muttered the last point.

Ivy turned nervously toward the Ensign's insistent request. Her eyes glance to Joey and then back to Ensign Reis. Ivy was barely considered a Cadet, and really didn't want to speak up. She hoped that Joey would speak up about the dual testing where they were searching for markers from her sampled biology.

Riaan considered Elena for a moment. Thinking what would be the best way to talk to her about the issues. What she wanted to tell her was to straighten up and act like an officer, if not for her own sake, then for the crew's. However, she couldn't say that in front of the other members of the crew. "There is a virus that has infected this world. It would be lethal within twenty four hours to anyone on the surface. The rouge has a way of preventing it from killing them, but they will remain carriers. That means that if we bring them aboard, we would have to use quarantine procedures. At the moment, the science labs are working on solutions, but we have not found any yet. The plants on the planet are not effected, even though they should be by the virus. A promising line of research is what Ivy and Logano are pursuing, seeing if the answer may lie in how her plant like body reacts to the virus." Riaan explained softly.

Elena nodded a bit, "Okay, good to hear." She added, "But I have to know how promising." She said lightly with a shake of her head. "I know that's not possible - if you're confident, tell me what you would need." She glanced across all of them, "All of you. Even if its just a favorite tea. What do you need?"

"Things do look pretty promising, Ma'am," Logano spoke up from his workstation. With his face pressed against the microscanner, he continued. "It looks like this infection is the result of a toxic and unstable isotope of oxygen." He sat back in his seat and addressed Elena. "Of course flora thrives on CO2, but it also takes in oxygen. I am simulating what would happen if the pathogen came into contact with a specimen taken from Ms. Sharzin's being. The pathogen seems to want to avoid the specimen entirely because of the duo-isophloronine contained within Ms. Sharzin's biology. It is avoiding that in a way any predator would avoid the wrath of a larger and perhaps more dangerous predator, in this case, a benevolent one; duo-isophloronine."

Ivy took a uncertain step forward, not sure if she should be speaking up at all, but wanted to say, "I concur with what Crewman Logano provided. I did find one thing interesting that might be associated with this." She took a step back toward the display at her workstation and read, "From the data acquired from the planet, I was able to cross reference a small note, where they had discovered a new plant life on their southern continent last year. A low hills area that was growing a flowering vine next to a creek in a narrow ravine. This plant life has similar properties, as Logano described." A prim smile came to her face as she looked from face to face about her, hoping for some confirmation that she had done the right thing utilizing the planet's database.

"Good," Elena said with a quick nod, "That sounds promising. I think." She took a second, her eyes moving in a way that clearly showed she was thinking, maybe literally wrapping that up in her mind. "Keep it up. And both of you," She looked at the crewman and Ivy, "I'm a comm-badge away - if you need anything. Don't hesitate."

Ivy looked to Crewman Logano and back to Ensign Reis, "Yes Ma'am. We will let you know."

They watched as the Ensign left the lab, but as soon as he door shut Ivy looked to Joey, because he appeared to be full of either energy or anxiety.

"Now," Joey stepped up to Ivy, "stop me if this is completely insane, but...I think...if we overpopulate our simulations with duo-isophloronine, the pathogen may either withdraw completely or be destroyed by this bigger, badder, and benevolent adversary."

Ivy looked down and took a step to the side in thought as she considered his proposal. She turned back to face him with a finger up pointing with emphasis, "As long as we closely monitor the hydroxyl radicals. Even in the 'Duo' state they may degrade the molecule and therefore it's structure."

"You're right," Joey realized his over-enthusiasm. "We can't oversaturate so as to make the molecule turn cannibalistic. "Okay," he returned to his station and started programming as he spoke, "Computer, record results. Test #1. Duo-isophloronine to pathogen ratio. 10 parts per 1."

Joey stuck his face to the microscanner and observed. The duo-isophloronine molecules remained dormant at first until the pathogen, ignoring Ivy's sample, went for one of the molecules. The duo-isophloronine immediately attacked and started neutralized the pathogen removing spare neutrons from the toxic oxygen isotopes. Hydroxyl radicals flooded the simulation and the duo-isophloronine, now acting as predator, seemed to go after molecules of its own design, reducing the duo-isophloronine molecules to mono-isophloronine, even before all the pathogen was neutralized. Everything went back to ignoring each other as the toxic oxygen just sat there, awaiting an unsuspecting victim.

Ivy had stepped behind Joey in an attempt to see the reactions over his shoulder, but couldn't see into the viewer, of course. So, she has stepped to the side and brought up the same display on a small view screen to watch along with him.

=^="Test #1, Complete."=^= said the Computer.

Joey sat back and looked at Ivy. "Test #1, failure. Too much duo-isophloronine. It turned on itself before all the pathogen was neutralized."

Ivy made a sad expression as she thought about the procedure and its failure at STP (standard temperature and pressure). Ivy's compound eyes went wide as she raised a finger and said excitedly, "But these experiments were conducted at 'STP'. We need to match them to the planet's atmospheric conditions, which are different." She pause for a second to let her suggestion sink in and added, "And run the test again."

"Correct," Joey said with a finger in the air. He was a little embarrassed for not thinking of that himself. He pressed his face against the microscanner again then worked the controls. "Computer, record results. Test #2. Duo-isophloronine to pathogen ratio. 5 parts per 1. Adjusting oxygen/nitrogen content of the atmosphere. Adjusting CO2 levels. Accounting for slightly higher gravitational levels. And slight electro-magnetic disturbances of the upper atmosphere." Joey felt he was being a little too precise but this science had to be precise.

Ivy smiled at Joey, almost grinning, because of his enthusiasm to try again and be so meticulous. She found that to be a very attractive characteristic in another person.

Again the duo-isophloronine molecules remained dormant at first until the pathogen went for one of the molecules, still completely ignoring the sample Ivy provided. The duo-isophloronine immediately attacked and started neutralized the pathogen. The hydroxyl radicals spread about once again and the duo-isophloronine, now acting as predator, seemed to go after molecules of its own design, reducing the duo-isophloronine molecules to mono-isophloronine. It still went after the pathogen, but as the concentration of the duo-isophloronine lessened, so did the amount of it going after the pathogen."

=^="Test #2, Complete."=^= said the Computer.

Joey sat back and looked at Ivy again. "Test #2, failure. Still, too much duo-isophloronine. It turned on itself again. But it took longer for it to do so. There is still some of the pathogen left though considerably less."

Ivy said nothing. She actually pouted and turned away, crossing her arms across her chest. She really hoped that this might have worked and been helpful.

After everyone had a chance to talk to Elena about what they needed, Riaan gently motioned towards her office. "My office" She suggested quietly.

"Okay, quick, though." Elena added before heading to follow the lieutenant to her office. She had a suspicion about the reason, but didn't say anything except and inquisitive, "Lieutenant?"

-----Science Office-----

Riaan looked at the young Cygnian hybrid and suddenly felt much older then her thirty years. That somehow her time with the Orions had caught up with her. Elena looked so young, in Riaan's mind young enough to be her daughter. That was nonsense, but she felt that way regardless. There was so much the young officer needed to learn. Riaan didn't know if she had the answers to give her.

Riaan switched the glass to the science lab to opaque and moved next to the replicator. "I want to make sure you are ok, and your ready for what comes next if the worst happens. Two shots of synthaholic Cardassian Whisky." She said, taking the glasses and passing one to Elena.

Elena glanced to the glass and waited a second before picking it up. She thought about making a quip for a second, and in most situations she probably would have. But, she didn't. Maybe that just showed a bit more where her head was. "No, I'm not okay." She said simply before taking the drink as a shot and setting down the empty glass. "I'm

barely out of the academy. There are many, many more experienced officers on board who should be handling this..." She sighed, "I just wanted to fly."

But then she gave a smile. "But... I'm the only real tactical officer here." She swallowed. "And, maybe, one of the few willing to cheat." She glanced down at the empty glass for a second, tracing her finger along the rim. "That doesn't answer the question. Am I ready?" She shook her head. "No. I'm scared, want to cry or run... but, I'll hold out until we find a fix, or time is up. And I haven't said it to them," She motioned out towards Ivy and the Crewman, "But I know how long we have... when time's up, it's up. I'll live with my choice then." She smiled a bit. "Still not really an answer. Sorry."

Riaan nodded, taking a sip of the drink and thinking about Elena's answer. "I'm not a command officer. I don't have magic words to say that will give you the right answers. I can tell you what my people need. They need you to act confident and decisive when the time comes. That doesn't mean that you won't actually feel scared, intimidated, or whatever. They can't see that, they can only see how you act."

Riaan paused, considering the advice that she had given. "And when you feel like breaking; find me and I'll give you a warm drink and a listening ear so that they only see the confidence."

"Yeah..." Elena dragged that word. "Even when confident, it's hard not to let my natural self show on the surface." She sighed, "But I'll try to do better to keep that in mind." She said, "Thank you." She added at the end. "And I will." She added on the end of that statement. Then another thought came up, and she spoke. "What do you think of what they are doing? Optimistic?"

Riaan considered, "Cautiously, yes. There are some markers that make me suspect that this is a possibly incomplete bio-weapon of some sort. If the designers wanted to leave a way for them to take the planet after using it, then there is probably some form of backdoor. That said, they might not want to make the cure easy to develop. So it cuts both ways. The plants are a clue that they did want to take the planet, and we lucked into having Ivy aboard so we are already ahead of the game. We have a good crew, if it is possible to solve it in the time we have, then it will be solved."

-----Science Lab-----

Ivy sat at her science station reviewing the results of the original pathogen and the data on the two experiments already conducted. She sighed, which was a very non-Sharzian thing to do, since she actually didn't breathe the air with internal lungs. But, she was trying very hard to fit in socially with others through mimicry and social equivalence.

The Sharzian reached for another empty specimen container and noticed the multi-shadow underneath her hand, caused by the multiple light sources from above. The thought then struck her like going to Warp in a space suit. She held her hands mid air, not knowing what to do with them. She turned her head frantically about looking at each person in the Lab. She still was so excited that she couldn't speak. She decided to focus her efforts. She knew the others would follow along when the time came.

Being very focused on the control panel she instructed, "Computer prepare 3rd analysis of samples of Duo-isophloronine to pathogen, ratio 5 parts per 1. Adjusting oxygen/nitrogen content of the planet's atmosphere. Adjusting CO2 levels, slightly higher gravitational levels, and slight electromagnetic disturbances of the upper Atmosphere, and the high photon acceleration of a bright day from their sun."

Ivy looked up to see several faces looking at her. She was so excited that this testing might actually help save lives. Ivy explained, "They haven't had a sunny day since we arrived here."

"And weathermetrics did report a hurricane off in the distance," Joey said. "It was not supposed to cause any problems, but..." his words trailed off as he stepped closer to Ivy's station and observed her work. She moved incredibly fast and with a determination he felt was unmatched.

Ivy turned back to the console, reviewing the readouts of the testing parameters and stated, "Begin test."

Joey turned away from the microscanner where a war between pathogen and savior was waged. He turned to look at the terminal monitor with Ivy. All the parameters were displayed and all the levels fluctuated minutely as though simulating a true atmosphere. One level turned green. Another greened up. The population number of duo-isophloronine increased somewhat but not to the cannibalistic levels of his previous attempts.

Using his PADD, Joey compared Ivy's test to that of the simulation of the planet below. Surely enough, the PPM of the pathogen was dropping in the simulation as the duo-isophloronine spread throughout the atmosphere. Taking into account Ivy's parameters, his PADD showed that total planetary coverage could happen in a matter of days.

"Test complete," said the Computer.

Joey looked up at the readout and all the parameters were green, the duo-isophloronine had started turning on itself again, but the pathogen was completely neutralized and the toxic oxygen isotopes were now stable.

Ivy couldn't believe her 'ear-pods'. She was so excited, she began to speak in her natural language, full of clicks, snaps, and pops. The translator was not able to understand nor keep up. The Sharzian realized this wasn't helping and slowed down. Finally her translator said, "Now that we have something that is helpful. How do we get it to the others?"

"I have an idea about that," said Joey as the Science Office door slid open. Elena and Riaan stepped out and they could see the excitement shared by Joey and Ivy.

Torpedoes Make for Large Pills

by Ensign Bradford Keselowsky & Petty Officer 2nd Class Seepok

Engineering

The first woman that Brad felt a true connection with...the one who stayed the longest that is...was down on the planet and, as rumor had it, would be dying soon. He knew both Medical and Science were all over the situation trying to figure things out. Continually asking them about their progress would only slow them down.

On top of all that, the ship was running flawlessly, the Warp Core was purring soundly and not even a computer terminal needed repairing. Being the Engineering Chief in Mindo's absence normally would give him a sense of pride but a ship that needed no repair offered no excuse to show off that pride. Brad's girlfriend was down on the planet, possibly dying and there was nothing he could do about it.

Brad wanted something to do but the computer ready back to him that the ship was functioning nominally. There were no engineering tickets that required his personal attention as they were issues to be handled by the enlisted. There were no reports, no evaluations, nothing to do...but worry.

Slamming his hands down on the desk, Keselowsky stood and started for the door.

"Report," he said, storming out and into Engineering.

"Nothing to report sir," came Robinson. "Everything is the same as it was 10 minutes ago."

"Only 10 minutes?" he asked and did some calculations in his head. "Surely there must be something in need of repairing. Seepok," he started in Seepok's direction, "Surely those ears of yours picked something up."

"Not at this time," said the aged Vulcan. "Is this what you humans call, 'twiddling your thumbs?'"

"Yeah," said Brad looking around anxiously. "Twiddling your thumbs, sittin' on your hands, thumb up your butt. It's all the same thing." He raised his voice to a near yell. "We're sitting on our asses doing nothing, sitting pretty while people may be dying down below. I mean, I got friends down there." He looked around at others looking back at him. "OK, I have 'A' friend down there. Do you have a friend down there?" he asked while pointing randomly only to look and see he was pointing at Seepok. "Oh not you Seepok. You ain't got any friends." He withdrew his hand and started into a pace around the Warp Core. Anything to keep him moving.

"Why would you put your thumb up your butt?" asked Seepok after a moment of nervous silence.

"I don't know," Keselowsky said as he came back around. "Some people do it to look stupid, because they got nothing better to do. Some people enjoy it. I wouldn't know. I've never tried it. That is why I stick with twiddling my thumbs. Why are we even talking about this!?!?" He paced back and forth a second. "It must be so easy being a Vulcan Seepok. Our crew is down there, possibly dying. You're all sitting pretty while the rest of us are shaking in our pants." He looked around at the others. Everyone was doing their respective jobs, calmly, gracefully. "Well...we each show anxiety in our own way."

Seepok remained as stone-faced as ever. "I can assure you Mr. Keselowsky, my primary concern is always for this ship and my crewmates. It is true that Vulcans are not as expressive as you humans, but I am very concerned for Lieutenant Mindo, Crewman Crismore, and the rest of the crew as well. However, there is little logic in sticking a finger into my rectum because I have 'nothing better to do.' Also, there is little need for excessive worrying, as our crewmates still have a few hours left before they will be unable to do their duties."

"Oh!" said Keselowsky wide-eyed. "A few hours? Before they die you mean. Thank you mister light-in-a-dark-tunnel." Calming just a bit. "I guess that would put me in charge," but his mind went to Tiffany. "No. No. We have to remain calm. All of us," he said as he looked around Engineering. "You all hear? That is an order. Remain calm. There is no need for us to lose our heads."

Keselowsky's eyes darted around at everyone. They all appeared calm enough. "Good. Let's keep it that way." He walk back to, "Seepok. There is no need to be concerned. Our science team will figure things out. You believe that don't you?"

Seepok raised an eyebrow. "I believe our science officers will endeavor to do their best. Since I am new to this ship, I cannot make a sound estimate on how good that will be."

Seepok could see this was not making Brad feel any better. "I also believe our department is very capable of performing their jobs." Seepok couldn't tell if that helped any.

Keselowsky was teetering back and forth between calm and losing it all. Sure he was good at his job but what good was being good at your job when the first girl in ages to date him as long as she did was down there possibly dying. What good was he when there was nothing he could do to save her.

“You know what,” Brad said. “You’re right. We are all very capable...and everything is running smoothly...” he needed to simply get away for a moment if there was nothing else he could do. “I am going to the replimat. I could use a pizza or five.”

Bradford Keselowsky made his way toward the corridor and, as the doors slid open, he was suddenly face to face with Crewman Logano. Brad stopped himself before bumping into the man then looked him as the young crewman appeared shocked and at a loss for words. “Is there something I can help you with...crewman?”

“Uh...yeah,” Logano brought up the PADD he was holding. “Riaa...Lieutenant Rrareth wanted me to give you this.”

Keselowsky looked at the PADD then took it from Logano. Swiping at it, he turned and slowly paced back toward the Warp Core. Logano, not dismissed seemed hesitant to make any move.

“We are to bomb the planet.” Keselowsky announced. “This is a schematic to repurpose four torpedoes to distribute duo-iso...phlor..online...I’m no scientist...into the atmosphere. Seepok,” he raised his voice for all to hear. “Let’s get with that armory and get us some torpedoes.”

Seepok furrowed his pointy brow. “I’m afraid I do not recognize the term, ‘Duoisophloronine.’ I could perform my task better if I had some knowledge on what we are putting in the torpedoes.”

“Oh man,” Brad said as he continued swiping through the PADD. “There is a bunch of scientific-ness here. In short,” he dropped his hand by his side and looked at Seepok, “We are just to take some torpedoes and remove the warheads, take the casing and prepare them for what Science is going to provide us with. This duo-iso-flood-9 is not our concern. But it’s going to cure everyone down there. All we need to do is operate on some torpedoes.”

Around the Mulberry bush

by Lieutenant JG Riaan Rrareth & Ensign Ixelom Vejeem

Counselor's Office

Riaan once again stood outside of Ixelom's office, she was less nervous than last time, but she still felt strange. They would probably have a lot to talk about this session. There were the unresolved issues with the captain from last session, and then there were the new issues with Ziara being gone. She took a breath and pressed the chime.

In keeping with her typically awful timing, Ixelom had been in the shower when the door chimed. She froze at the sound as it carried over the sonic emitters, then swore loudly as she scrambled to get out of the shower. It took a good thirty seconds to towel herself dry, swearing anew that she liked a nice warm mist with her shower, and then another few seconds to scramble into a simple white shirt and black skirt.

By the time the counselor opened her office door, she was out-of-breath, barefoot and her hair was a damp mess. "Riaan!" she exclaimed upon seeing her patient. "I'm really sorry, I was in the shower!"

Riaan nodded sagely, "I can come back later if I'm interrupting something." She offered quietly.

"Oh no, hun," Ixelom said dismissively, "come in, sit down, relax. I just lost track of time. I've only been out of the Academy for a few months and I'm already losing my timekeeping...I'm really such a klutz when it comes to that kind of thing..." She moved to the replicator and added, "Would you like a drink? Tea?"

Riaan nodded, "Tea would be nice." She said softly. As Ixelom went to get the drink she said, "I guess you know about some of the changes, since we last talked." She offered.

Handing Riaan some mild Cardassian tea, Ixelom smiled back as she sat down in a comfortable chair. "Oh yes, some of them. I know that Ziara got promoted."

Riaan nodded, "And transferred to the USS Venture. It's a good ship I hear, and she's making friends, like this Zen character. It's the first time we've had different assignments in three and a half years. I don't know if you read about my first assignment, but that was the only one that I've done away from Ziara before now."

"And how have things been going here?" Ixelom asked gently, cradling her tea as she snuggled into her chair.

Riaan took a breath, "Not as good as I like. I'm still scared of the Captain. My new job is overwhelming. I'm constantly worried I'm not good enough. Not good enough for my job, not good enough for the captain, not good enough for Caradan."

"That's absolutely natural, Riaan," Ixelom said soothingly. "Ziara has been your primary support for a long time, so it's normal to feel that way with her away. Besides...is there anyone on this ship better qualified to be the Chief Science Officer than you? Is there even one person on the crew who can match your scientific credentials and experience as a Starfleet scientist?"

Riaan shifted in her chair uncertain. "I have a doctorate, but until the last year or so, while I've been on the Tornado, I haven't really put out that much work. There are a lot of scientists on the ship who have equal degrees and more papers than I've done. I've been moving around with Ziara and often working on projects that don't quite match what I do. I'm a comparative xeno-biologist, but I spent six months on a geosciences team because that was the only science slot they had available. I guess I have a diversity of experience because of that, so I can talk to a lot of them and know roughly what they are doing. But sure, there are people who can do the science better." Riaan explained in her soft voice.

Ixelom listened patiently as she pulled up her legs to sit cross-legged in her chair, the very picture of comfort. "Nope," she said simply, smiling goofily.

Riaan was not sure how to process that. Was the counselor making fun of her? She didn't know how to feel. "Nope?" She asked, not sure what Ixelom meant by that.

"Just...nope," Ixelom affirmed, now outright grinning, her large porcine nostrils flaring. "Dearie, I've read your service record, your papers, your aptitude tests, all of it. I can tell you, without reservation, that you are the most capable and qualified scientist on this starship. Other officers may have published more papers, but you've got better depth, more outright experience and the best temperament to be a boss. Starfleet didn't promote you on a whim, honey."

Riaan didn't look convinced, "I'm not sure about that, what happens when I have to be the disciplinarian? I don't know if I'm good at that. I don't like hurting other people. I'm also not sure if I'm assertive enough. I don't always like being noticed."

The counselor nodded sagely. "That's a normal concern, Riaan. Many other officers have exactly the same worries as you. They also, more often than not, end up being very successful at command. Lots of captains and admirals start out exactly the same."

She paused meaningfully, allowing that to sink in before continuing. "The important thing is that if you ever have to be a real disciplinarian, and you have to really put your foot down, then that's because your subordinate has done something *wrong*."

Riaan nodded, "I don't know if they like me, but even if they deserve it, I'm going to feel bad. I expect my people to be the best, and if they fail, it means I've failed too." She paused and considered for a moment, "I'll probably need to talk to you afterwards."

"And I'll be here, Riann," Ixelom said gently, smiling. "Command is scary, but you'll do fine. We'll all work through it together. I'm sure Caradan will be happy to help too, or even Mindo."

Riaan took a breath, "Now there is another thing. Mindo, Caradan, and me. Mindo also loves Caradan, I should be happy for them, but I feel..." Riaan grasped at the air for the right words, "I don't know what I feel, uncomfortable perhaps? with their relationship. It's silly and irrational of me."

"Uncomfortable in what sense?" Ixelom asked kindly. "Are you concerned, or is there a little unsettled pit in your stomach when you think of them together?"

Riaan thought for a moment, "More of the unsettled pit. I don't think Mindo is the type to hurt someone deliberately like that, Ziara wouldn't have taken him if he was. It's not concern about Mindo hurting Caradan, or Caradan hurting Mindo. It's more personal."

Riaan paused, "Ziara's very... outgoing. It took a long time for me to build up the trust and the relationship I have with her to the point where I felt comfortable with her dating other people too. I was constantly scared that she would find someone else and leave me. It wasn't until I realized that I felt the same way for Caradan as I did for Ziara that I could feel comfortable with Ziara dating others. Ironically, I was the one that stayed with the other lover, not her."

Riaan shook her head, "Part of it is that I know I shouldn't feel this way. It's pretty hypocritical to want to deny someone else a freedom you enjoy."

"That's the old issue with polyamory," Ixelom said gently. "It's absolutely wonderful, but also supremely complicated. You were looking forward to navigating an entire new love with Caradan, just the two of you, and now you miss her."

Riaan shook her head, "I don't miss her, well I do, but it's not Mindo's fault. She is always working, like Ziara does sometimes, because the Captain is being too hard on her. I don't know about you, but a Captain and First Officer who don't get along is a bad combo for the whole ship. Not to mention the fact I'm still terrified of the man which, might be my fault, but that doesn't help things. I don't think I said anything at our last meeting. Should I have?" She asked, thinking.

Riaan refocused, "One issue at a time, I miss Caradan a lot because she works too hard right now. If she wasn't working so hard and I was still seeing her less that might be a problem. No, my problem, my fear with Mindo is that he's going to destabilize our relationship. I don't think he would do it maliciously, but I think he might be doing it." Riaan explained.

Ixelom was very still in her chair, her legs folded beneath her as Riaan spoke. "You're talking a lot about Mindo's intentions, Mindo's actions," the counselor said quietly. "It sounds like a see-saw...a solid beam with a pivot point supporting the center. You're at one end, and Mindo is at the other, and you're both balancing on Caradan, the fulcrum. If I remember my physics correctly, though, the most critical part of that equation isn't either end of that beam. It's the center, the fulcrum. Caradan."

Riaan wanted to smile at the physics at the last, but couldn't. "I have a hard time gauging what she's thinking a lot of the time. With Ziara, I love her dearly, but there is probably only about a half dozen things that she's probably thinking about and it's pretty easy to tell which one. I can guess pretty well what Ziara's going to do in a situation. She can probably do the same for me. I'm still trying to get a handle on how Caradan thinks. I don't even really know what Caradan sees in Mindo. I know what Ziara sees, but not Caradan. Does that make sense?"

"Sort of," Ixelom said with a shrug that masked the lie. There was an uncomfortable point to be made, but it had to be done delicately. "Let's say, hypothetically, that Mindo and Caradan split up. It's an acrimonious separation, and they're both really hurt. How would that make you feel?"

Riaan thought about the question. "I probably wouldn't be too happy about it. I wouldn't want Caradan to get hurt and chances are I'd take her side. I don't consider Mindo and I to be friends persay, but I don't want him to get hurt. Caradan probably has friends who I don't know about, if they were just friends, I could deal with that. I think." Riaan said, perhaps a bit doubtfully.

"And if they aren't just friends?" Ixelom pressed gently. "If Mindo and Caradan's relationship is just as profound as what you have with her?"

Riaan looked at Ixelom, trying to figure out where the Tellerite was going with this. "Then we are back at square one. I feel uncomfortable about their relationship, even though I shouldn't."

Sensing that she was losing Riaan, Ixelom shifted to a more direct track, mentally wincing at her own inexperience; a better psychiatrist, or a more experienced one, could've done this far better.

"Riaan," the counselor said, "what I'm hearing is a mix of genuine concern, a little jealousy and good old fashioned fear of the unknown. It's absolutely normal for this kind of situation, especially when one of the people involved is so radically different from you. I suppose one question is...have you considered talking to Caradan about all of this?"

Riaan shook her head, "No, it's silly of me and it's my problem, not hers. I already shouldn't feel this way, I don't want to go pressuring her with it."

Ixelom was sorely tempted to swear and snort in indignation, but only her many years of training kept her docile, still curled up in her chair. "Honey, 'should' doesn't come into it. You're a scientist, after all. You don't deal with what *should* be, but what *is*. Now, you've been married to Ziara for how long?"

Riaan thought back, "Four years next month. It's going to be our first wedding anniversary apart." Riaan said, saddened at the thought. She looked out the window to the stars.

"Four years, hm?" Ixelom mused. "And after all that time, don't you talk to each other? Trust each other? Share your concerns and worries?"

Riaan thought for a moment. "We do, but Caradan already has so much on her plate and I'm the one who is the problem, I know it's a problem, so I shouldn't have to bother her with it. But if you think I should talk to her about it, I will."

"Her problems are your problems, and vice versa," Ixelom said with a smile. "That's how relationships work, dear. Trusting your lover in such a manner can have surprising results."

Riaan nodded, she knew that but knowing something and applying it were two different things. "Her problems at the moment seem to mostly stem from having a Captain who hates her. It probably doesn't help I'm still scared of him."

Ixelom grinned. "At least you and Caradan have something in common there."

Riaan considered for a moment, "I'm starting to wonder if things might be better if we left for somewhere else. Caradan had a good relationship with our last captain. There are plenty of captains in the fleet who aren't terrorists. I feel like there is this tension in the Command staff and it's tearing the Tornado apart. I've been on other ships and I know this isn't normal. More importantly, I think we might be setting a bad example for the junior officers, like Elena. I guess the worst part is that I don't know how to fix it. I mean, us leaving would fix it, running isn't a solution, it's a bandaid for a deeper problem."

Riaan sighed, "I came into Starfleet because I wanted to help people like Starfleet helped me when I was in a bad spot. However, more and more I just feel like things would be better for Starfleet and for me if I just left. I've always known that a lot of people in Starfleet don't like me. It was easier when I could just work in my own little lab and come home every night to Ziara. Then I could just look down and escape into my work. Now, now I don't just have my own problems to solve. I have everyone else's and when I go home, I'm just alone."

"You know, humans have a saying for this," Ixelom said thoughtfully. "'The training wheels are off.' It's not as elegant as my people's equivalent, 'Push the little trotter off the cliff and watch it fly', but whatever. Maybe something is lost in translation."

The counselor focused on Riann then, meeting her patient's eyes with sudden intensity. "Like I said earlier, you're operating without your primary support mechanism. Without your wife near you, everything might seem harder, tougher, but as time passes, you will get better at handling everything, even if it seems overwhelming right now. Besides honey, the captain's creepiness and crew morale aren't your problems. You're the chief science officer. Crew morale is *my* problem."

Riaan nodded thoughtfully, a beep came from her padd. Riaan looked down in surprise, time had flown quicker than she thought. "Thank you councilor. I have a meeting with several of my scientists that I need to get ready for. I will consider what you have said."

Ixelom grinned, bowing her head. "Have fun!"

Get Well Soon

by Lieutenant Caradan Eunidas & Lieutenant JG Mindo

Mindo's Quarters

Mindo's recovery seemed to be going much better than the doctors had anticipated. He was still weak, but they let him go back to his quarters to rest for a few days before returning to duty. Mindo used his time to watch movies. At least, the movies were on the screen Crewman Crismore had set up in the bedroom, but he found himself dozing off several times.

He'd been watching an old Earth film called, "The Crying Game," one of his favorites. He'd managed to stay awake through most of it, and was coming to his favorite part, the revelation. It was almost to that scene when he heard his door chime go off.

"Computer, pause film," he said. "Come in!" he called, then went into a coughing fit. He had found yelling was still hard on his chest.

The door slid open invitingly and revealed Caradan standing there with flowers, a card, and a bottle of some alcoholic beverage Mindo was unable to easily identify. Not having to mimic a smile upon seeing Mindo, one came naturally as she entered.

"I just got off duty," she said. "I am as done with my reports as I can be for the moment." With work out of the way, "I wanted to drop by and see how you are doing. And..." she looked down at the gifts in her arms, "and bring you these." She stepped up to where he was seated. "Flowers, a get well card...signed by everyone in Engineering and me, and...even though some cultures suggest a box of chocolates...a bottle of something called Bailey's Mudslide."

Mindo's face brightened and he sat up. "Oh! Bailey's Mudslide! I've been meaning to try it. Crismore really likes it." He took the bottle and placed it next to him on the night stand and then took the card and read the inscriptions. He laughed. "At least Brad tried," he said, showing Caradan the note from Keselowsky.

"To the Little Engine-er That Could' signed Big BK," she read aloud. "There is an Earth reference in the note. I've given up on understanding all the references he comes up with."

Mindo shrugged. "I hardly know what he's talking about half the time."

Caradan found a place for the flowers and returned to Mindo's side. She motioned for him to sit up just a little. She sat as he did and Caradan lightly pulled him to recline against her.

Mindo closed his eyes and wrapped his arms around her, feeling better in her embrace. They held each other for a good moment. Then Mindo sat back up. He smiled and ran his fingers through her hair and down the side of her neck and bringing her in for a passionate kiss.

The two gazed into each others eyes for a moment, savoring their affections. Finally, Mindo's face straightened a little and he leaned back against the wall.

"What happened with the other away team?" he asked. "Is everyone else OK? Were you ambushed as well?"

"Everyone is well or on their way to a full recovery. My team was not..." and her words trailed off as she, based on Crismore's testimony, had a theory as to why her team was not harassed in any way. "Wallace and Gherr have already returned to duty despite being offered time off. Crismore has yet to return to duty. She mentioned being attacked and is being debriefed by Lieutenant Erickson. She is fine though. Numerous scans have revealed nothing else down there. My only theory is that..." Again her words trailed away. "Mindo," she said as she looked into his eyes and caressed the side of his face, "was there a Changeling down there?"

"Yes," said Mindo. "I only met one, but I think there were several. One of them attacked Crismore and assumed her shape. I was very foggy by that point, but they referenced someone called 'The First.' Ring any bells?"

Caradan looked around, even at the paused movie, at anything to try and change the topic. She returned her eyes to Mindo, at his questing eyes. She nodded minutely but it was recognizable enough. "Only that it was part of the rank structure developed for the Jem Hadar. The First was the leader, the highest authority of the unit. I cannot even guess at who this Changeling may have been referring to." Caradan grew uncomfortable. Her being stiffened almost to a board. She grew cold and could already see Mindo's growing concern.

"She seemed to think I already knew who the First is," said Mindo. "I've only ever met one Changeling... at least, that I know about. That's you. This other Changeling said she or he was the Fifth? She said something about Fathers or Finders doing what they want..." There was silence for a moment. Caradan didn't move. Mindo broke the awkward silence. "Cara, I know what it's like to have a dark secret. And I know you haven't shared all of yours with me. I

understand that. But I had a phaser pointed at me close range and one of my crew was hurt and tied up. I'll keep whatever you tell me to myself, but I need to know. What's going on?"

Caradan, peering into Mindo's determined eyes, drew in a deep breath and sighed it out slowly. She enjoyed the sensation of doing that as it helped her get through what was next. "To be honest, my being here was not entirely a social visit. Lieutenant Erickson wants to debrief you as well. I told him I would see to it." She looked up and around. "Now it seems I am the one who needs a debriefing."

She sighed again. "I do not know their motives, but I have a guess. This Changeling you encountered must be one I have not yet. So now it seems there are three running about. I highly doubt there were any more on that planet, but one thing is for sure...they are keeping an eye on me. Probably as much as Starfleet Security. Mindo, if I am the first at anything, then I was the first, in a long time, to leave the Link."

"I linked with one of them some time ago. He actually initiated the link, so it was a surprise to me to see another of my kind. I have little experience in linking with other Changelings one on one, but I did come out of that with a few memory fragments from Yana. That is what he calls himself...Yana. I have been piecing together these images ever since but I think they may see me as some form of revolutionary; that I left the Link out of rebellion. I did not get any information as to how many have left but it seems we have adequate evidence to conclude that there are at least three Changelings."

"There is one more thing. When I linked with Yana, I did get a sense that they are seeking to create a New Dominion. If the Changeling you encountered referred to me as the First, then they must think I am their leader, their Founder. If Yana considers himself the Second, and if they are operating as the Jem Hadar did, then Yana is making the decisions he feels I would find acceptable."

Caradan realized the full impact of her words as she spoke them. She sat back. "I don't want to lead. I'm no founder. I just want to live my life." She placed a hand on the side of Mindo's face and gave a minute smile. "Make my own decisions. Be with whom I choose."

Mindo sat quietly, thinking for a moment. A New Dominion? Some kind of Changeling plot? This worried Mindo a little. *Could she be telling the truth?* he thought.

He brought his hand up to hers and brought it back down so their hands were in between them. Then he took her other hand and held it tight.

"There's very little I know about Changelings," he started, looking directly into her beautifully morphed eyes. "But I know a lot about you. And I know in my heart you would never lie to me." He paused to clear his throat. "This all does sound very serious, but as you know, I'm very good at keeping secrets. If there's anything you need, Cara, I'm always right here."

He gently pulled her forward and brought her into a soft kiss on the lips.

"And I am here for you," she replied. "Knowing you are here helps me climb out of my bowl." Shaking her head, "I didn't join Starfleet to fight this Klingon civil war. I didn't join so that Changelings could stalk and harass me. I wanted to find my own way; to fix things. That's why I became an engineer."

Returning Mindo's kiss, Caradan pulled him into a hug. "Once this war is over; once we find Captain Takato, I intend to fix our Changeling problem, even if I have to search for them myself; to deal with them myself." She thought about recruiting Captain Prost. He was the bad cop kinda of ally to have around but he was still one of the 'Good Guys.'

"I would hesitate only if it took me away from you, dear Mindo."

Mindo put the back of his hand to her cheek and brushed away a strand of black hair, a gesture he enjoyed and often wondered if she morphed her hair that way so he could do that.

"I know what the need to find your own way feels like," he said. "I never felt truly at home on Feseria. In fact, I've never felt at home anywhere... except with you. I will always love you. Even if we are on opposite sides of the universe."

That made Caradan smile. "And I feel more at home here with you than I ever did in the Link. There was a time I could hardly imagine life outside of it. Now I can hardly imagine life apart from you. Should fate take us away from the Tornado, I hope it does not take us far away from each other. And if it does, I want it to bring us back together."

Mindo smiled back and caressed her face. "I'm not leaving you," he said quietly. "I promise."

"Listen," she smiled then started another topic, "I know we talked about getting with the commander about sharing quarters, but Shaqdac seems more bent out of shape than ever at the moment. We're about to unload Kri'Shya and a research team is going to that planet, but we've been ordered deeper into Klingon Space. Admiral Anin believes

we now have a good lead on finding Captain Takato. I think it is best if we hold off just a bit longer before discussing this with him. What do you think?"

"I think that's a good idea," said Mindo. "Shagdac has other concerns. Takato is the priority."

"Then that is that. We save the captain. And then we...well...we will not need to go to Shaqdac if Ryoko is captain again." She looked to Mindo and pulled him to her in a tight hug. A quick thought of the other Changelings getting in the way flashed through her imagination. She tossed it away just as fast as it reared itself.

Helping Engineering Part 1

by Lieutenant JG Mindo & Petty Officer 2nd Class Seepok & Petty Officer 3rd Class Vaimera Gherr & Ivy Sharzin

Main Engineering, Deck 7

NOTE: This post takes place a few days after Mindo's recovery from the virus.

ON:

Ivy walked casually down the passageway on her way to Engineering. She knew that the Tornado, a Rhode Island Class vessel, was actually one of the smaller vessels in Starfleet. There were others, many others, that were much larger. She had read and studied about them recently in her vessel identification and orientation Class.

Ivy liked the turbo-lifts well enough. But now that she had her freedom to roam the ship as desired, she preferred to walk the corridors and climb the ladders between decks. She found that making her way deck to deck was more enjoyable. Her habitual ambling about the ship gave her the opportunity to see and meet more of the crew, and they in return began to find her as a 'regular' and expected part of their day.

Cadet Sharzin entered Engineering's upper level, where she walked along glancing and smiling at the other crewmen. She glanced over the railing and looked down upon the dylithium crystal chamber, the Warp core, and the power conduits that extended from it. She knew about warp core from the previous ship she had been on. This one was so much more powerful.

Ivy then saw Lt. Mindo, and headed to the closest lift. Stepping off the lift she walked over to the Lieutenant, "Good afternoon Sir."

Mindo hovered just a few feet off the ground, about Ivy's height. He had heard of Ivy's training time and had gladly made room in his busy schedule to help her out.

"Hello, Cadet," he said, turning to face the young... something. He extended a hand. "Welcome to your first day in Engineering!"

Ivy gave a kind smile and replied, "Thank you Sir." She held back the whole truth, not wanting to possibly hurt his feelings unnecessarily. True, it was her first day in this Engineering Room, but definitely not the first time she had helped out Engineers before.

Mindo smiled. "Engineering is probably the most important department you can have on a starship. Everything we do helps every single person do their job better. From modifying equipment to damage control to, the most important thing, maintaining the warp core, engineers are in my humble opinion the hardest workers on the ship. This is because an engineer is always needed for something. Even a Rhode Island class starship as small as the Tornado needs constant caring for." He held out a hand directing Ivy to the central control station.

Ivy tried not to change the expression on her face. She really wanted to smile at this Engineers unrealized arrogance, but it wasn't her place to correct him. In her experience, similar things were said by all other department heads. They, of course, were right, from their point of view.

"Allow me to introduce some of my staff," he said. "My second in command Ensign Keselowsky is currently not on duty, however we are in the capable hands of Crewmen Gherr and Seepok, right over here." He gestured to the two officers.

Cadet Sharzin responded with a polite tone from the translator hanging from her neck onto her chest, "It's very nice to meet you crewmen."

"Right now," Mindo continued, "I have them doing a maintenance check on deflector control and forward sensors. This helps the ship dodge any space debris that may be lingering in our way."

This was extremely basic for Ivy, and she should have corrected or cleared up the misunderstanding, but she chose to let the Lieutenant proceed as he best thought. She parroted, "Forward sensors, lingering debris. Check."

He clapped his hands together. "OK, Ivy. I take it you've used a standard terminal already?"

"Yes Sir," Ivy responded quickly and confidently. "I have assisted the Science Department with several key experiments utilizing a similar 'terminal'."

"Oh!" said Mindo. "So some of this stuff is familiar to you." He smiled sheepishly. "If you worked with Science, then you probably also know pretty much everything I just told you... am I right?"

Ivy considered that statement, which contained several assumptions. She had no desire to mislead him, nor misinform him. "Well Sir, that is not exactly the entire truth. I have used a similar console before, and I am somewhat familiar with the Engineering terms, but not yet had the experience with the federation control interface."

"Well then," Mindo said, clapping his hands. "Since you already know what these things do, then it will probably be pretty easy to teach you *how* you do them! Let's start with what you've learned already and go from there." He gestured to the central terminal.

Ivy nodded her head agreeably.

"Real quick," he said, before starting. "Do you know what a Pool table is?"

A confused look came over her face, because she wasn't sure what a billiards table had to do with Engineering. She replied, "I'm not sure how a sporting table of slate and balls have to do with Engineering, but I'm willing to learn."

"It's just a side note. Nothing important. Because of the size and shape of the console, we Engineers like to refer to it as the pool table. Just a little joke we have."

She scowled quickly considering his explanation and the shape of the console in question. She the expressed acceptance with a shrug and a half smile, "Okay. Works for me."

Mindo proceeded to show Ivy the various aspects of the "pool table" and how it differed from the other consoles she may have used. He showed her how to run different kinds of diagnostics and even had her run a few. He also showed her things like how to monitor the warp core, how to run damage control, and also how to modify sensors and phasers.

After about forty-five minutes, Mindo turned to Ivy and said, "So, do you have any questions?"

"Well," Ivy started to speak and then hesitated. So much had been explained to her in the recent hour. She had many many detailed questions, but knew many of them would be answered by experience with the equipment over time. She looked about the console then back to Lt. Mindo and continued, "You have shown me so much. I appreciate all your effort. It is a lot to take in." She looked again at the console, "I'm sure I will need more time assisting . . . if I may in the future."

"Sure!" Mindo replied, smiling. "Of course, there's a lot more to learn than just the terminal. But we can get into that next time."

As soon as the Lieutenant finished speaking a red light began to flash console before them and data began to stream on a screen. Ivy looked to the streaming data and stated, "It looks like an AUD Unit is surging on Deck 4." She turned to Mindo.

Mindo glanced down at the panel. "Those are connected to the computer subsystems," he said. It was a pretty common error, but one that needed personal attention by an engineer. Looking up at Ivy, Mindo recognized a chance for a learning experience.

"Well, Cadet, what course of action do you suggest?" he said, crossing his arms and giving his apprentice an inquisitive look.

Ivy thought about several solutions and then replied, "Well Sir, I would recommend rerouting power for the moment, so that we can shut power flow through that junction. Then, we go there and replace the unit." She smiled slightly and raised her eyebrows in hope that she had chosen the right solution.

With a half-smile, he turned to Seepok. "Crewman?" he asked.

Seepok nodded. "Her solution is adequate."

Mindo turned back to her. "Well then, I guess we need a spare AUD unit." He motioned to the storage locker located at the opposite end of the room, then looked back at Ivy, putting a thoughtful finger up to his cheek. "I wonder who can help me replace it..." He smiled. "You up for it, Cadet?"

Seepok cut in. "Chief, that is not an action a cadet is allowed to..."

"I'm capable of supervising," Mindo cut him off. "Besides, everyone has to learn eventually. Whad'ya say, Cadet Sharzin?"

Sharzin smiled up at Lt. Mindo. She felt she was fully capable of performing the replacement task, with a little oversight of course. But then a slight doubt of 'speaking out of turn' came to mind. The smile half fell away as her eyes darted to Seepok, then back to Mindo again with a full smile. She felt she had to give it her best and replied, "I'm up for the challenge Sir."

"Great!" said Mindo. "Seepok, supervise our capable cadet while she diverts power. I'll be right back with a proper AUD unit."

Sharzin took that comment as instructions. So, after the Lieutenant stepped away, Ivy glanced at Seepok and then turned fully to the control console before her. She knew it best to talk about what she was going to do as the task was being performed.

Seepok brought up a screen on his terminal across from Ivy, then put his hands behind his back. "I will monitor your progress from this terminal," he said. "Please proceed."

With concentration Cadet Sharzin described as she went threw the motions, "I first pull up the power grid of the localized area affected. This is Deck 4 and looks like part of Deck 5. I then identify the point of failure - the surging of the AUD. I confirm power flow is stable on the secondary routes. I then close of switches at these three points." She pointed to the conduit switches that were nearest the AUD. "I deactivate them. I reconfirm secondary power is flowing about the neutralized area. And I take sensor readings again for that sector."

Seepok nodded as he checked the results. "That is the correct procedure," said Seepok as Mindo returned with a small box-like object and two toolkits.

Handing Ivy her own toolkit, he said, "Take this, it's your toolkit. We're going to need it. And this here in my hand is a spare AUD unit. Notice the nodes at the top and bottom. That's where we'll hook them in. Are you ready?"

Ivy accepted the toolkit with a smug smile. She actually wanted to open it, right then, and see what it all contained, but she suppressed her eagerness. She took a quick examination of the AUD when the Lieutenant displayed it before her. She replied with a smile, "Yes Sir!"

To Be Continued...