

STAR TREK:
This Side of Darkness

Part two
By
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EPH
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This story is the sixth in a series. Book One “A Touch of Greatness,” book two “Another Piece of the Action,” book three “Both Hands Full,” book four, “Necessary Evil,” and “The Seventh House” are available at free-ebooks.net or can be attained in PDF format from the author. (Put Trek in the subject line so the author can readily distinguish from the nonessential emails) I suspect this will be the last of the direct, Trek Fan fiction. There are others writing equal, if not better stories. “Prelude to Axanar is probably one of the most successful fan fiction, and it ended up in litigation and an attempt by Paramount to change the definition of ‘fanfiction.’ Failure to recognize sometimes the fans know something executives don’t is not a part of our paradigm. It’s even more complicated than that, as multiple entities own rights to Trek, and they don’t see eye to eye, hence the new evolution of Klingons, and the surprisingly absent Romulans. The author recognizes the issues and valid criticism from the previous books, knows there is room for improvement in his endeavors, and hopes to continue to grow as a writer and human being.

The delay in publishing this is in part due to me giving time to my bestest creation ever, the joy of my life, my son, Eston Gerik Ege; and due to being in human in general. All my love, J E E.



Prologue

An’Ko, daughter of the House of Moshe, holder of the Legacy Stone, found herself in a strange sort of hell that had no apparent relationship to anything her cultural myths offered to explain about the Universe. The lighting was different, for one. These were frequencies that were not natural. It was full spectrum, from a Sol perspective. The people she encountered lacked distinctive facial features. They didn’t even resemble the ghosts from her legends. Ghosts had ridges. They had scales. Finding a scale was proof one had fought with a paranormal and won. Further, their voices were light, the chatter they made almost musical at times. It sounded ‘happy.’ Happy for no apparent reason. They could be serious, but they lacked true expression. Anger was rare. She saw them as being disconnected from reality. This was a ship of fools.

Zara Undine, Captain of the USS New Constitution, was not human. She was at least appropriately stern. An’Ko attempted to talk to her, and she was redirected to go through the appropriate chain of command. They were disciplined in their protocols, but it was infuriating that there weren’t bypasses. She wanted to share something without telling everyone. She definitely didn’t want to write it down or alert the computer that she was aware of something.

The computer was ever present. This bothered her.

“Computer?” An’Ko asked.

“How may I assist you, An’Ko,” the computer responded.

“Nothing,” An’Ko said, in Klingon, harsher than it needed to be.

“Please let me know if I might be of service.”

Life was not bad here. It was different. Grandfather Moshe’s death had resulted in her being here, and in some ways, his promise that her future would be secured had been fulfilled. There were Klingons in the crew. They seemed to be carrying the appropriate emotions. They wore armor most the time. She had been denied full armor. Ten forward offered her the perfect spot to watch the crew, and see outside. Space looked fake. Part of her wanted to return home, but she knew she could not go home until she had proven herself. The outside view revealed the ship had dropped out of warp. It was sudden. There was no obvious destination. Empty space. Between the stars. It made no sense to her. Why would they stop here?

“An’Ko,” the Computer said.

An’Ko jumped. No one else was near her. She knew it was the computer but no one seemed to realize it had called her out. In truth, the sound technology had sent the voice to her directly. No one else had heard it.

“What?” An’Ko asked. She whispered this, looking down at the table to make sure no one saw her lips move. The computer heard her. She was pretty sure it read lips. She was equally sure, it could read minds.

“You asked to be notified in the event that Admiral Garcia was on board,” the computer said.

An’Ko saw no other ship, but assumed that they had come out of warp for a space rendezvous and collected the Admiral.

“Where?” An’Ko asked.

“Admiral Garcia is presently in the shuttle bay,” the computer said.

An'Ko got up from her place and headed that way. She moved at a reasonable speed, that was not running, but not so slow crew might stop and talk to her. They had an annoying habit of trying to test her English. It also annoyed her that they would ask 'how are you doing?' She hated that question. She didn't have answer to that. Did they think she was an invalid? Was she under the care of a wet-nurse? She had thought the correct response was "I'm fine," but that phrase tended to have people asking her more detailed questions. Humans were too curious about the wrong things. They were all in her business, but not in Tama Orleans business. Was she hated, favored, or just being blocked?

A block presented itself. As far as she knew, Garcia was just on the other side of the door. A security officer intercepted her. He was human. He was tall and broad in the shoulders. If his posture was meant to be intimidating, it had failed. She saw the smile as a challenge.

"Come with me, please," An'ko said.

"I need to see Garcia," An'Ko said.

"I need you to come with me..."

She felled him one kick and as he went down, she shoved him to the side, and went through the door. She made her way to the airlock door, but was pulled aside. She turned to fight, and found herself suddenly on her back, looking up into the face of Captain Undine. There were several guards there. Doctor Jurak was there. Admiral Garcia was there. The guard came in, clearly hurting, and took a chair.

"How difficult is it to keep a 14 year old girl out of here," Garcia asked.

"Sorry," he said.

Undine helped An'Ko back to her feet.

"Go to you your quarters," Garcia said.

"No," An'Ko said. "I wish to speak to you. It's urgent."

"Do as you're told," Undine said.

"Hold on," Counselor Rossi said. "I want to hear what she has to say."

"This is not an impromptu counseling session," Garcia said.

"She hasn't spoken more than a few words to me and I want to hear what she has to say," Rossi said.

An'Ko was clearly re-evaluating her relationship to the counselor.

"You have now established your rapport," Garcia said. "An'Ko, return to your quarters."

"She just assaulted an officer," Undine said.

"You're not putting her in the Brig," Rossi said.

"He'll be alright," Jurak said, his medical assessment having been a casual glance.

"We don't have time for this," Garcia said.

"You never have time anything," An'Ko snapped, reverting to Klingon. "You don't have time for me. You don't have time for your daughter. You will listen to me!"

The tension was high, and the stares Garcia got were uncomfortable. He seemed amused.

"Okay," Garcia said.

An'Ko blinked. She didn't know what to make of that.

"Time's a ticking," Garcia said.

"It would be easier for me to tell you in Klingon," An'Ko said.

“Go ahead,” Garcia said.

An’Ko communicated her belief that Tamma Orleans, Garcia’s daughter, was possessed. She interpreted their faces as disbelief.

“Thank you,” Garcia said. “Return to your quarters.”

“That’s it?” An’Ko asked.

“I will look into it,” Garcia assured her.

“No you won’t,” An’Ko said. “You already dismissed me before I entered the room...”

“What makes you think Tamma is possessed?” Counselor Rossi asked.

“No. We’re not discussing this” Garcia asked. “An’Ko. Return to your quarters. Forget about this. I got it.”

“You don’t have targ shit,” An’Ko said.

“Quarters, or Brig,” Garcia said.

“I will not drop this! Regardless of whether you interpret this as spirits or aliens, there is an entity trying to take over the ship...”

The power went off, emergency containment locked them in.

“That’s new,” Garcia said.

“You’re aware?!” An’Ko said.

“We’ve been monitoring the entity’s activities for a while,” Undine said.

“Entity?” Rossi said. “Tamma is really possessed?”

“No,” Garcia said. “Yes. Kelinda has created a telepathic bond with her and has been trying to access our gate so she can capture her granddaughter.”

“And you didn’t tell me?” Rossi said.

“You’re her counselor,” Garcia said. “I didn’t want you to slip that you knew something... Did you confront her?” This last was to An’Ko.

“Yes,” An’Ko said. “And she tried to kill me.”

“You knew, and you’re using your daughter as bait?!” Rossi demanded.

“Yes,” Garcia said.

“That’s is severe violation of ethics, protocols, and just humanity! You’re her father!” Rossi snapped.

“I want to end this,” Garcia said.

“At all cost?!” Rossi demanded.

“One life for hundreds of billions? Yes,” Garcia said. “Do the math.”

“I am doing the math. You math sucks,” Rossi pushed back.

Outside the glass Tamma Orleans Garcia arrived on the Shuttlebay. Garcia stepped out of the shadows and presented himself to her. An’Ko was confused. Garcia was here, and in the Shuttlebay. Tamma pointed a phaser at her father. He held up his hands, showing he was unarmed. The Garcia inside the airlock dissipated like a hologram.

“Tamma,” Garcia said, softly. “Don’t do this.”

“You can’t stop me,” Tamma said. “I see through you and all your lies. Computer, reveal the Stargate.”

The Stargate that had been cloaked on the Shuttlebay was now visible. She touched the tech interwoven into her sleeve. The gateway started the dialing sequence.

“Tamma, please, don’t do this,” Garcia said.

“I am going to be with my grandmother,” Tamma said. “I am going to be with people who love me.”

“You are loved here, more than you know,” Garcia said.

“You have no clue what love is!” Tamma said. “You have impregnated half the galaxy, is that love? You have hundreds babies on the way and you can’t be with them all. You never spent time with me, and if this is how I feel, you want to bring more like me into the universe? People that will never know a father? How many stories of stepfathers molesting children they should never have had access to have to happen before parents stop bringing children into a loveless world? I hate you. I hate everything about you. I want this in the fucking history books. Everyone thinks you’re great but that’s because they don’t know you like I know you. You’re nothing. You suck as a father. You suck at maintaining relationships. And you suck as a Starfleet Officer. You’re a monster. I wish I had never met you! At least then I could have had what everyone else has, the fiction of you.”

The gate came to life. She backed towards the gate, keeping the weapon on him.

“Wait,” Garcia said. “One question.”

Tamma hesitated.

“If I could go back and do it all again, never meet your mother, do you want that?” Garcia asked.

“I guess you’ll never know,” Tamma said.

Tamma stepped through the gate. She was confused. She arrived on the other side of the gate to find herself- on the other side of the gate, still in the Shuttlebay. The holographic illusion of the gate faded, and she realize the actual gate was nowhere near her. It was, however, next to her father. Her eyes grew in realization that she had just been played.

“I love you,” Garcia said.

Garcia stepped through the gate.

Tamma screamed ‘NO!’ firing her weapon at her father. She made her way to the gate, but was dropped by security firing a phaser at stun. Undine opened the door, revealing the power hadn’t actually been cut, and rushing security to the gate. Two security officers made it through. It shut off before Undine got there.

Rossi came up beside her. “You were a part of this?”

“It was the fastest way to get to Kelinda,” Undine said.



Tammias Parkin Arblaster arrived at the other side of the Gateway. He didn’t take time to study the scenery. He identified an active Iconian gateway and went through. Unlike his gateway, this portal was a two dimensional image; a literal two dimensional door in the air, and only he could see it. He was gone before his security team arrived. On the other side of the dimensional gate, he could see the planet he was just on. He had traveled even further- the two security officer, phasers in hands, were looking around for Garcia, and not finding him. Tama Orleans phaser had clipped him as he was coming out of the gate, sparking his energy field to life. Triggering his emergency life belt probably saved his life. It was a curious fact in his head that he felt compelled to remember. The ‘god’ Hades was there, waiting, clearly surprised. It was not Hades. It was Kelinda. She had usurped

his body, taken over his primary lair of operation, which was contained in the heart of a star. A perfect, a bubble oasis, in the center of a star, with practically unlimited, direct energy in the form of plasma, heat, electromagnetic waves, and immense pressure.

The only thing she could think of was duplicity, and she cursed Tamma even as she opened fired with energy from both her hands. Garcia's shields took the brunt of the energy and he nearly stumbled backwards through the gateway behind him. His eyes glowed. He leaned into the energy like leaning into a storm, descending the stairs into the room proper. Three steps down. He blocked, his hands up and out and projecting energy beams of his own; he met her energy for energy. Kelinda was stunned, not understanding. Garcia's eyes flared, intensely bright. The energy dissipated and Kelinda found herself caught up, pinned against the ceiling, five meters off the floor.

"You've lost, grandmother," Garcia said. It was not Garcia's voice. "You're not the only player in the Universe."

He held his right hand up. An object materialized, as if by transporter beam, leaving a geodesic shape, polyhedral- a decahedron, in his hand. He tossed it to the floor, and rolled to a stop like a die. Out of mild curiosity Garcia had written numbers on the sides. Twelve was on top. His eyes dimmed, but remained shiny.

"It always comes up twelve," Garcia said.

Garcia could have used the Kelvin technology available to him to turn the decahedron back into Kelinda, but instead, he used the power within that had been made available to him by the gods- a power that would also be the death of him. He had access to the same information that the Kelvan tech had given him, plus a thousand times more. Most of it he couldn't sort. His brain was evolving in complexity to handle the information, and the longer he went, the more information began to fall into place. But then, because he was also cycling in time, he would find clarity, die, return to the past saved point, and find the clarity he had gained escaped him. It was like waking from a dream and not being able to hold the content. The longer he went in cycling, the less information he brought back. His perfect, eidetic memory was gone.

He turned the decahedron back into a body. Kelinda's body was suddenly there, the decahedron gone. Kelinda's face was unhappy. This was not Kelinda, but Hades. He reached for the Kelvin tech on the left wrist.

"Don't," Garcia said, blocking with only a gesture.

Hades, in Kelinda's body, found himself suddenly levitated, spun about, and pinned to the ceiling next to Kelinda, who was in his body. Kelinda had switched them using ancient tech, the same as used against Kirk so long ago. That tech that was actually still being studied by a branch of Fleet- a branch with very little oversight. A branch Garcia was technically working for. Section 31. Something Losira had taken control of in his absence. The interesting thing about the tech was it gave them evidence that all their theories on consciousness was wrong. Something he wanted to explore, but in the present now, didn't have to consider it further than what it was.

"Just hang out there, get to know each other," Garcia said. "Maybe have some tea, sing 'I love to laugh.' Or, I don't know, end this Freaky Friday shit and switch back into the right bodies already."

Garcia went to the central control panel. Part of his brain was amused, thinking he was in the TARDIS, only better- the controls which ranged from analog to digital, complete with rows and columns of buttons and blinking lights, seemed more fitting of a

device that can open gateways to any place within space-time. The instrument clusters made him think of Christmas. Every wall around him was a gateway. Five gates. The room was pentagon shaped. There was the classic symbol for a star on the floor. This was Iconian gateway tech on steroids. All those aclemy symbols of the past: were the simply passwords for accessing future ancient tech? There were several worlds he recognized. Vulcan was one. Romulus was another. They were not temporally static. It was an accelerated time frame. There was a time loop being played out on the two worlds. The Romulus Star would explode, and take out the planet. Shortly after that event, the Vulcan world would implode. It wasn't just video. It was real and now that he was looking, he found new information accumulating his brain. Garcia's amplified telepathic sense felt the loss of life- on both planets. It was palpable. Even bright eyes can cry. He felt the loss, then felt the relief, and then the loss again. It was so distracting he had to turn the emotional centers of his brain off. Implants allowed him to be aware that there was an emotional signal, but exist outside of its affect.

Garcia had flashbacks to staring at a Christmas tree, fixated on ornaments that showed a g-type star going nova. He remembered the strange feeling of being disconnected. He remembered arguing with the image, thinking g-type stars don't do that. He remembered Guinan's voice interrupting his thoughts, drawing him out of the trance...

"You can't change it," Kelinda said, laughing. Her voice drew him back. "You are it."

"I don't know enough," Garcia agreed, circling the panel.

Information overload. Just tracking all the streams he was taking in put a stutter in his brain that forced him to pick a consciousness stream. He heard a voice in his head, not Ilona's, not Duana's, not Troi. He was comforted by it. It was Lal. She said 'Choose.' He chose the familiar. His eyes dimmed further, but stayed shiny. 'Choice' saved his life. Listening to Lal saved his life. Apollo arrived through one of the gates ways. Garcia eyes sparked as he and Apollo exchanged energetic rays.

"Hello, little fly," Apollo said.

"You're responsible for all of this!" Hades yelled.

"Not alone," Apollo said. "Venus had her hands in this."

"You're interfering with my work!" Hades said.

"Tit for tat..."

Garcia escalated, bringing in Fleet and Kelvan tech at his disposal. Apollo stumbled backwards. Apollo laughed, even as Garcia drove him backwards towards the gate.

"You can't win," Apollo said.

Charlie X arrived through another gate, his eyes going bright, his forehead coming down as if he would ram Garcia. All the angry, scary faces in Garcia's memory, no face held a candle to Charlie's. Charlie brought his hands up and unleashed a torrent of lightening. Garcia went to his knees. His life belt flared and failed. He diverted his energies to block Charlie's attack. He was now divided between the two. Hades and Kelinda nearly fell to the floor, but extra effort was used to push them back up.

"If I can't have her, no one can!" Charlie said.

Apollo rushed the control panel and slammed his palm down on a single button. Both Hades and Kelinda were protesting even as his hand was coming down. It was

essentially an easy button. It turned off the protective barriers that maintained the base. It was a huge base, maybe the size of Jupiter's biggest moon, Ganymede. An attempt of humor rose into his conscious, wondering if Buddy Holly was alive and well here. Who knew how many people Hades had ripped from time and stored in the depths of his base. The base was honeycombed with storage chambers of tech and species, many of which were no longer 'on the playing field.' These gods were collectors, not preservers. The Gateways snapped off, revealing the solid walls that held the gates. Walls went from dark black to white hot and then everything was gone...

Captain Simone

Chapter 1

Tammias Parkin Arblaster Garcia awoke with a start, coming up out of the bed gasping, and in pain. He was compelled to stand, putting weight on his feet to kill the leg cramps. He stood, hands touching the wall, waiting for the cramps to go away. Once the pain was gone, he calmed, then cursed again. It was as if his entire life was a dream, and because of the suddenness of his waking he had lost the dream contents. One technique for not losing a dream on waking was not moving until you had recalled details and anchored them into waking conscious. The leg cramps were so bad, there was no way he could lay still. He was moving out of bed before being solidly conscious of what he was doing. It took time to orientate. He was in his private suite at Club Bliss. He couldn't identify the when. He was alone. How long had it been since he cycled last? How far had he gone this time? He hadn't remembered waking up at this particular place before. Was this a new reset point? If it was, he was lost.

Brock entered his room, carrying a weapon. The Ferengi pointed the weapon at him. Garcia had clarity about the where and when. Try as he could, he couldn't recall the precise dialogue that was about to happen.

"So you think you're a god? You can just sleep with anyone you want and it's okay?" Brock asked.

"This is about your sister?" Garcia asked.

"She's my sister! We're colleagues! There are rules of engagement," Brock said. "You didn't ask my permission. You didn't pay me."

"She initiated," Garcia tried.

"You always have an excuse. You took advantage of a helpless, cognitively impaired, female being..."

"She is not cognitively impaired and helpless isn't even on the map..."

"You and I are done. Consider this my resignation. I am taking my sister and going home," Brock said.

"Now, hold on," Garcia said. "There's some technicalities we need to sort..."

"No, there is not!" Brock said. "Stay away from my sister. If you come around again, I will kill you. That's it."

"She used alien tech to try and control me. In the process she forged a permanent telepathic link. If she doesn't spend time within a certain proximity of me, she will suffer severe depression, perhaps even experience suicidal ideation."

"In other words, she'll be normal," Brock said.

"What?!" Garcia asked.

"Women are supposed to be depressed! Rules of acquisition. A happy woman won't celebrate your return," Brock said. "Every male past the age of 4 understands this one. A satisfied woman won't spur you to work harder."

"What is wrong with your species?!" Garcia asked.

"So much for your enlightened, culturally sensitive Fleet perspective," Brock said.

“There are some things that are just wrong, Brock,” Garcia said.

“I agree. Sleeping with my sister was one of them,” Brock said.

“You can’t have the acquisition rule, ‘go where the market takes you,’ and then get mad when the capital gets acquired,” Garcia said.

“My sister is not a market!” Brock snapped. “She is not resource.”

“Either she is a citizen, with all due rights, or she is property,” Garcia said.

“You’re about three seconds from dying...”

“Brock, you don’t have a clue...”

Brock discharged his weapon. Garcia’s bed was cut in half. It was surprisingly louder than a normal Fleet weapon. Silence followed. Then the noise of both ends of the bed collapsing inwards. Embers of burnt cotton descended like orange, black snow.

“You think I don’t know a set up when I see one? I will go to the Grand Nagus and tell him how you used my sister, my inheritance, and enslaved other women to be in your secret sex cult fleet,” Brock said. “I thought we were friends, but you have to have it all! Your level of greed is pathological. You have no moral boundaries. You can expect that you will be hearing from my legal accountants. I will take this all the way to Federation President if I have to. You slept with the wrong woman. You want to see the Ferengi at war, well, you won. Prepare yourself for your worst nightmare. Let the litigation begin.”

Brock backed out of the room. The door shut. Garcia stood there a moment, sorting. The room smelled of burnt mattress, metal, and ozone. He remembered having an electric HO scale train in one of his childhoods. He made himself go to the replicator. “Pickle juice, dill.” A jar of pickle juice arrived, one pickle. There was jar of peanut butter already on the stand. He removed the pickle, dipped it in the peanut butter and ate it. He then drank the juice in one go. He put the jar back. It was recycled. He entered the bathroom and stared at the mirror. He mentally touched his neural implant and ascertained the whereabouts of his inner companions. Troi was in an office, on the Pathfinder, speaking to Lt. Reginal Barclay. This image didn’t make sense and he wondered if it were real. Their conversation was pleasant, almost too pleasant, overtones of deeper relationship than what was on the surface. She laughed at his joke and touched him. Garcia wanted to be sick, tuned away from the inner sight and focused on his body in the mirror. The sensations from his body started with weight. He felt heavier. He was heavier, but he felt heavier than he actually was. He touched the artificial womb. Babies were kicking. He tried to remember if he had ever gone far enough into the future that they were born. He found himself groping for information and couldn’t find it. The absence of information that should be there bothered him. He turned back to what he could see inside. Lal was in Sickbay, on the New Constitution, reading aloud to the incubators- the artificial wombs. There was evidence the babies were responding to her voice. Duana and Ilona were on the Pathfinder, actually engaging in work. They were utilizing the two manifestation orbs, whereas Lal was a hologram, projected through Kelvan and Kalandan tech. She was as solid as Losira. Troi was using the same Kalanadan holographic interface.

All of this was likely adding to the decline in short term memory. It also slowing down the psychic evolution he was experiencing. He told himself this was a reasonable trade off. He told himself to say it again, only more convincingly. He tried to make it mantra.

Garcia stared into the mirror. He hardly recognized himself anymore. He found a subtle loathing towards the image. Losira came up behind him, touched his shoulder. The touch communicated love, compassion. She was there, but not in the mirror. This wasn't her hologram self, manifesting in real world, but an artifact of a projection directly into his visual centers of the brain via the neural interlink. He could see her- she was wearing Pathfinder uniform. Silvery, gold highlights, miniskirt, dark gold, sparkly hose, silver boots. She had a glow about her. It was subtle. She herself was bright, more illuminated than real objects in his vision. The aura helped him understand that she was a communication signal. The look of her increased his wanting of her. He could smell her. She had a complicated scent identifier, an unidentified flower, and something cooking; maybe peanut butter cookies. Another artifact that told him she wasn't here was the absence of a baby bump. Her primary avatar was pregnant and solid real, and would remain real until the child came to term.

"Your presence is desired on the Pathfinder," Losira said. He could hear her. Her voice was kindness, melodic.

"I am finding it increasingly difficult to make decisions," Garcia said.

"This one is easy," Losira said. "Come back to the Pathfinder."

"Why?"

"Because I am asking you to," Losira said.

"Give me an hour," Garcia said.

Losira nodded and walked out of his visual center. He leaned into the cabinet, stared at himself longer. He wondered what he was hoping to find. Something redeemable? If he sought companionship, he would be comforted. He didn't want to be comforted. Alone, but never alone. Clothing arrived on the counter. Pathfinder uniform. Silver, gold highlights. He touched it. Rainbow refractions in the material. Collar designation of Admiral. He felt as if it were a joke. He got in the shower and stood under the water. The twins always responded to the water. He felt an emotion. He wasn't sure he was feeling what he was feeling, but his brain translated it as joy. He felt disconnected from the mood.

Dressing was a chore. He was off balance putting on his underwear and pants. He nearly fell over. He took his clothes to the bed and was going to sit on it but decided to use the chair. Underwear. Pants. He stood, took off the baby pack and put on a shirt, and put the baby pack back on. Babies did not like being put down. They welcomed being back. He put a maternal shirt on over the pouch; it was poncho and blended nicely with his uniform. It had no collar and the sleeves were short.

He went down to the club, staying on a path that minimized the blaring sound of music from the club proper. The sound tech could make a path of zero noise, but walking out of a zero zone into full sound usually disturbed people. Low sound helped people acclimate. And, allowed for the patrons and staff to communicate needs. He paused to see a performer on stage. The species was amphibian, a mollusk species that was able to camouflaging to such a perfect degree that its shapes, colors, and textures could mimic real things or create patterns that could spur one to hallucinate. It became a coral, and bloomed a dozen flowers, drawing them away one at a time to reveal something new in increments, something new and enticingly sexy, until all the flowers were gone and it was human, female. Dancing, she became something else. Shadows and lights.

Cleo startled him. She laughed, and hugged him, and then kissed the babies. She was half dressed, skirt, and top, and lots of glow in the dark paint. Different areas of the club illuminated different patterns, so she changed as she pushed through the club. Her blond hair was clipped short, and was sort of an Egyptian bowl cut. "I love you two so much!" The babies responded. Then she came back to Garcia, who had returned his attention to the performer.

"He's gorgeous, isn't he," Cleo said.

"He?" Garcia asked.

"You forgot?" Cleo said.

"I probably should get my brain checked," Garcia said.

"Pregnant brain?" Cleo asked, laughing, hugging him reassuringly.

"That's not a real thing," Garcia said.

"Yes, it is," Cleo said. "Times two."

"I am a man," Garcia said.

"So, you think you're immune?" Cleo said. "Just being in a room with a pregnant woman affects your brain, too. Visually, your brain is responding. You're breathing in the same hormones that she's swimming in. You don't live in vacuum, Tam."

"I just have a lot on my mind," Garcia said.

"Want me to help with that?" Cleo asked. It was more than flirting. She had been pushing for time with him since they met. He had accommodated her, and she still wanted more.

"My bed is broken," Garcia said.

"Again?" Cleo said. "Was it that Yeoman of yours?"

"No," Garcia said. "It was Brock."

"Really? I thought you were hetero.."

"I am," Garcia assured her.

"I am not so sure. The way you were looking at Jynso..."

"He was looking like a female," Garcia said.

"It is okay, Tam. Bisexuality is actually normal for most species. It's more than physical. It's a symbolic act that unlocks higher functions of love and interaction between members of society. Take the Etero tribe from your planet, that believes that drinking sperm is a rite of passage of all adolescents," Cleo said.

He resisted the urge to be sick. He tried to frame it in sociological paradigm, reminding himself sexuality is more as much a social phenomenon as it is biological.

"You're studying Earth cultures?"

"Most of our patrons are humans and Klingons. It's in my best interest to understand our clientele, biologically, culturally, and historically," Cleo said. "By understanding the varied interaction patterns from culture to culture and era to era, I can better help normalize sexual thoughts and emotions. You'd be surprised, as enlightened as humans think they are, they are still rather backwards in disseminating knowledge on sexuality. Holodecks is not necessarily good for sex education. More often than not, the people that come to club Bliss are lonely. They're lonely because they think there is something perverse or pathological in their libido and their wants, which causes them to isolate. Isolating themselves only suppresses the biological urge, which can't be done forever, or even well, and that results in behaviors, usually behaviors that reinforce their

idea that they're broken. They come here because this allows them to vent some energy in the least destructive way.”

Garcia's perspective of her evolved in that moment.

“What?” she asked.

“How would you like to be the new club manager,” Garcia asked.

Cleo hit his arm. “Don't fool around.”

“I already fooled around,” Garcia said.

“Did you fall in love?” Cleo asked.

“Fuck, you have so been doing your homework,” Garcia said.

“I want to be close to you,” Cleo said.

“Cleo, I am promoting you to full manager. You're in charge of Club bliss. You will be part owner, we share the profits, minus the stipend going to Brock until I sue him for breach of contract. Which reminds me, hire a Ferengi lawyer to serve him papers. Derelict of duties. Left his post unmanned. Threatened me with violence. He destroyed my bed. Make that happen today. You have full autonomy to run Club Bliss and our alternative revenue schemes,” Garcia said.

“You have to sleep with me right now...”

“I am not that kind of boss,” Garcia said.

“The hell you aren't!” Cleo said, and drug him into the nearest, private, ‘entertainment’ booth.



Captains Losira and Simone were present when he arrived on the Pathfinder. Losira had her hands behind her back. So did, Simone. He had experienced the new boundaries with Losira sufficiently that he no longer protested, but it still felt abnormal. Simone, well, this was her norm, minus a couple months every seven years. She swears it was, and will only ever be, just the one time. He had evidence it could go either way. Garcia was presently in the ‘we'll see’ camp. He suspected there were Pathfinder crew betting on outcomes. He was further certain that the betting was started by Duana and Ilona.

“You cycled,” Simone said. “You agreed to return to Pathfinder on cycling. We need to debrief you.”

“I don't remember that arrangement,” Garcia said.

“How far did you go?” Losira asked.

Garcia searched his memory.

“Come with me to Sickbay,” Simone said.

“No,” Garcia said.

“Excuse me?” Simone said.

“I would like to speak with Data,” Garcia said.

“You may speak with Data,” Simone said. “You will not leave this ship until I am satisfied.”

Garcia was sorting the statement.

“That was not an invitation to engage in sexual activity,” Simone said.

“I wasn't thinking that,” Garcia said.

“You were so thinking that,” Losira said.

“Yeah, she didn't have to know that,” Garcia said.

“You were just actively with someone,” Simone said. “You think I can’t smell her on you?”

“He has always had a high libido,” Losira said.

“Or one of the neural implants is malfunctioning,” Simone said.

“Wait wait wait. Implants? Plural? I just have the one...”

“You will not leave this ship until you have satisfied me in Sickbay,” Simone said. She turned and left.

Garcia stood there with Losira, watching the Princess leave. She was wearing the Pathfinder Uniform, trouser options, with a maternal shirt. He forgot when she was due. It looked like it would be soon.

“I wish she would use another expression,” Garcia said.

“Why? Can’t get no satisfaction?” Losira said.

“Why do I feel like there are a lot of jokes being made at my expense?” Garcia asked.

“Increased paranoia due to frequent temporal shifts, and bilocating,” Losira said. “You really should go to Sickbay first.”

Garcia shook his head no. He wasn’t ready to spend time with Simone.



Data’s laboratory was on one of the lower levels of the Cone section. It was one of the compartments with slide out sectioning to increase work space. It also increase the number of view ports. Data looked up from his station, frowned, and went back to work.

“Be with you in a second,” Data said.

Garcia went to the far end of the slide out. He searched the sky for the triad-star system they had discovered. On not locating it, he assumed the system must be on the other side of the ship. He searched for other recognizable patches of the sky. He found nothing. He was just as lost in a sea of stars as anyone would be. Data’s second became a minute. It became five minutes.

“Data?” Garcia asked.

Data pushed away from the desk, rotated his chair, and faced Garcia. “What?” It was harsh. It was so charged with emotions Garcia wondered if this was Data. He found Data’s in multiple time streams, and remember his was emotional, and aged. This was what data would look like if he was human and older. Garcia used a site to site replicator to manifest a chair. He went and sat down in front of Data. He tried maintaining eye contact with Data, but the fierceness in them made him look away.

“Is it me, or has the whole of Fleet become angry, melancholy?” Garcia said.

“You’re not melancholy?” Data asked.

Garcia frowned. “I am in flux. I waver between euphoria and despair, and touch every level between the two,” he said. “This will pass. I was so close to an epiphany today, I think I am a little more on the angrier side of things than just melancholy.”

Data said nothing. Garcia’s eyes came up to try and read his face. It was not the Data he remembered and loved. This was an old man. This was a human face, aged, wise, kind... Not grandfatherly kind. Angry?

“I have this song fragment in my head, and I can’t get it out, and I can’t resolve it, and it’s distracting me,” Garcia said.

“You’re bringing me a song fragment?”

“Well, there’s some other things I would like to sort with you. I don’t suppose you want to link with my chip and do a brain scan,” Garcia said.

“The last time we did that, you nearly died,” Data said. “I was seriously reprimanded.”

“I am sorry,” Garcia said.

“I chose that. That was on me,” Data said.

“So no?” Garcia confirmed.

“No,” Data said. “I can shift through the data Simone collects. You should go see her.”

“I think she wants to kill me,” Garcia said, too cavalierly.

“Paranoia,” Data said.

Garcia met his eyes. “I get the sense all of you are colluding against me.”

“Tam,” Data said. “You asked us to build a time machine. We built one. A huge one.”

“The Elemartay Star system?” Garcia said.

Data opened a hologram showing the three stars. They were in extremely tight orbit, chasing each other, never colliding. The inner space was devoid of matter. The further out one went from the stars, the more matter one found. A sheet of dust and larger particles and clouds and lightening. In a way, it was like looking at a specular, 3-D record.

“Given the correct velocity, any star could potentially result in a slingshot through time,” Data explain, using holographic animation. “The proximity of these three stars, combined with the extreme mass of each which is literally churning the fabric of space time, combined with the enmeshment of electromagnetic fields, has resulted in a temporal conduit. Threading the needle between these stars results in a natural flow of particles backwards and forwards through time.”

The temporal fields resembled a magnetic field. The temporal fields were larger than the magnetic fields, extending to extreme ends of the Universe, the beginning and ending of time, only to loop and come back. One could exit a stream at any point and be somewhere else in space and time. The fastest way to the other side of the Universe was to first travel backwards in time, and then come forwards, the same way going to Japan from California was faster if you went North over Alaska, as opposed to a straight line there.

“Yeah,” Garcia said. “Where is Elmartay?”

“We sent smart probes back in time with instructions to build a Dyson sphere around the stars,” Data said. “We were successful. Our sphere arrived instantaneously in the now and we were able to communicate with the probes in the past to correct instabilities in real time.” The holographic displayed had the Dyson sphere, containing the star. The stellar debris field around the star was now gone. It was now the Dyson sphere. It became transparent so that Data could illustrate points. “The Dyson sphere is sufficiently far from the stars that outwards expulsion of hydrogen can be regulated, converted directly into energy. We now contain the entire energy output of this system and if you were looking this direction from Earth, you might see this star system winking out. We have just become a Type Two civilization.”

“Type two doesn’t include time travel, does it?” Garcia said.

“That was not factored into the scale,” Data said.

“Where are the stars?”

“In order to block any potential temporal distortions that might erase our work here, we have moved the Elmarty star system to be slightly out of phase with the universe. Any temporal distortions, such as the one that will occur when you change the time line, will not affect us. This region of space is essentially an anchor point, a temporal island in a sea of space time. Specifically the area inside and immediately surrounding the Elemarty Dyson sphere is static, immune to larger scale temporal flux. We have gathered sufficient evidence that temporal flux is not only common, but the norm.”

Garcia was sorting this.

“This is Star Fleet first time machine, Mark 1. We are in the process of tweaking it further. The inner surface of the Dyson sphere is ready for habitation. We suspect we can set up permanent temporal gateways inside. We could have Iconian style gateways extending across the universe in real time and in past times. We should have them online soon.”

“And gateways into the future,” Garcia said.

“No,” Data said. “The future blocked.”

“What?”

“We can go back in time. We can come back to our present time. We cannot travel beyond our present time,” Data said.

“That doesn’t make sense. We should be able... Blocked. It’s not a physical block.”

“We have made contact with a new entity,” Data said. “A future Confederation of many species. Specifically, every intelligent species that has ever been are members of this group. They have always been aware of us. They have been guiding us in small measures. They have a prime directive, as we do, but their imperative is to preserve the future We are not being blocked from time travel per say, but we have been given clear limits to what will be allowed.”

“Isis,” Garcia said.

“She is one the guest presently on the Pathfinder,” Data said.

“I am not just being paranoid, then,” Garcia said. “I am being railroaded into this.”

“The timeline has changed. That is a done deal. You are participating in that event in a very direct way,” Data said. “We all are. Some more or less direct.”

“I don’t want to be the one that changes it all!” Garcia said. “I have feet in a very clear and present world- universe. Not this universe, not this timeline, but I am there and from there I can see clearly, this wasn’t supposed to be! It’s the closest to Utopia we humanity has ever gotten. And, at the same time, I find footing in a dystopian epoch, and I swear everyone prefers to be in this world than the other. It’s like people have just gone nuts... These futurists... The future confederation. Don’t they care?”

“They seem to care a great deal. They are also clearly withholding information. We have caught several of the representatives in direct lies. There seems to be competing factions within this Confederation. We lack sufficient information to determine the nature of the game,” Data said.

“Seems pretty clear to me. The victor writes the history,” Garcia said. “Literally.”

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