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S.C.E.

#48

CREATIVE COUPLINGS

Book 2

Glenn Hauman & Aaron Rosenberg



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New York London Toronto Sydney

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1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY
10020

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ISBN: 0-7434-9689-2

First Pocket Books Ebooks Edition January 2005

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Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Rabbi David Honigsberg, for keeping the ceremony Kosher.

Chapter

1

“Typical.”

Tev glanced again at the door, but it remained closed. Where was he? Not that Stevens would use the door, necessarily, but it provided a good focal point. And he was long overdue on checking in. He and that Starfleet instructor, Sparks, had dealt with the malfunctioning turbolift, and had rescued Ben Martin, the student trapped within. That was over an hour ago. Martin was back in engineering now, but Stevens should have reported in himself, to let Tev know what had happened. Especially since Martin had mentioned that Stevens had been injured.

“Computer,” Tev called out, “Locate Specialist Stevens.”

“Access denied.”

Damn and blast! Of course, he’d tried locating Stevens several times already, and that had been the response each time. For most requests, the computer still recognized his authority and complied, but when it came to shutting down the program, exiting the suite, or locating Stevens and Sparks, it refused. Tev dearly wished he had access to the holosuite’s programming panels—then he would teach it to respect him properly. Unfortunately, revealing those was another thing it refused to do.

He glanced around the captain’s quarters—his quarters—again. TheHyperion was not a large ship by any stretch, but the rooms were well arranged and certainly this was larger than his cabin on the *Vinci*. It was actually larger than Captain Gold’s rooms there—Tev knew this because he had memorized the measurements of every room on the ship before he had gone on board. It would be hard to give this up, once the exams were over.

Next to his bed was a small nightstand, a flask, and a book sitting atop it. Tev frowned. The flask was

his, a present from his granduncle upon finishing first in his scholastic exit exams, but the book did not belong there. He walked over and picked it up. It was a handsome volume, leather-bound with gilt edges, and had a certain comforting heft to it. Then the title caught his eye:

The Plight of the Hyperion

Intrigued, Tev flipped the book open to the first page and read:

Tev, it's Stevens. The computer's locked us out, and we're stuck in ghost mode. I tried sending you a direct message through the communicators, but it was blocked. Looks like someone's programmed the computer to cut us off from everyone else, in every way possible. Then I thought of this. The computer is still letting us alter things, as long as it doesn't lead to anyone stopping the program. So I created this book.

Alex and I think tha

The text ended abruptly there, and began again a page later with some drivel about a kidnapped spaceship and a band of blue-haired teen rescuers. Stevens clearly had not written that. Tev tossed the book onto his bed and began pacing. The computer was locking them in, as Stevens had called it, ghost mode? That would explain why he'd been unable to—

He lost his train of thought when something moved off to the side, at the edge of his peripheral vision. Turning, Tev found himself facing his bathroom mirror, and his own reflection—which was frantically gesturing to him. Approaching the mirror, Tev saw that his reflection was holding its hands oddly.

“What exactly are you doing to my image?” he demanded of the mirror. “That posture is unbecoming of a Starfleet officer, much less a starship captain. I demand that you straighten up at once!”

The reflection started banging its head against the glass. Then it raised one hand and thumbed its nose at him.

“How dare you! If you were a real person, instead of my own reflection, I would have you brought up on charges of insubordination! You're worse than Stevens!”

At that, the reflection nodded. And Tev understood.

“Stevens? What do you mean, hijacking my reflection? Ah, wait—the computer caught on to your book idea, and so you switched over to here. Fine. Who is behind this?”

The reflection shrugged.

“No idea? Is it someone within the holosuite?”

The reflection nodded but then shrugged again.

“You think so, but are not certain?” Another nod. “Is Sparks with you?” Nod. “Is he injured?” A shake of the head. “Are you injured?” Nod. “Badly?” Nod and shake. “Moderately?” Nod. “Do you require medical attention?” Nod. “Is your life at risk?” Shrug. “I see.”

Tev idly stroked his chin, but the reflection did not move. “I will monitor the students, and watch for any signs of complicity. Since the two of you are trapped in this intangible state, you'd best spend your time

studying the matter. Perhaps you can deduce who is behind this. Communicate with me when you have any new information, via any method necessary.”

The reflection nodded, then mimed writing something and shrugged again.

“The exams?” Nod. “Of course they should continue. The students are trapped here as well, and they should put that time to good use. Keeping them focused on their testing should help quell any panic. I will simply remind them that this is Starfleet, and thus anything could happen.”

The reflection nodded again, and waved.

“Yes yes. Stop making me slouch and get back to work.” His reflection shifted, straightening up and moving its hands to match his own. Stevens had gone.

Tev sighed. Leave it to Stevens to get locked out of a holographic program. With anyone else he would think it was bad luck, but Stevens had a way of finding difficulties. Or vice versa. He was almost as bad as Gomez herself. Of course, the S.C.E. commander was supposedly relaxing on board the *Vinci* during this trip, but Tev had a suspicion that wasn't the case. If anyone could walk into trouble on a regular basis, it was his superior officer.

Chapter 2

Captain Gold had never felt like a bigger screwup in his life. He wondered if they'd ever find him if he moved to an island in the South Pacific, just him and a replicator.

He was sitting behind the desk of the Klingon ambassador to the Federation, in his embassy office. The décor was not conducive to calm, rational thinking. He thought that if Klingons had just used a few more windows and a few less torches and things with antlers on the walls, the galaxy might have known peace a century ago.

He sighed. Back to the task at hand. It was time for Captain Gold to sit down and make a list of his own. He'd asked everyone else to make one; it seemed only fair. And Captain Gold found it soothing to go through the list of problems in front of him. He found that by doing so, it allowed him the time to breathe and calm his mind.

He looked around the desk for a pen and paper—the pen was easy enough, but there didn't seem to be any paper, and he didn't want to rummage through Lantar's desk. He was reasonably sure that looking through the desk of the Klingon ambassador to the Federation was tantamount to spying, and could get him shot on sight.

He considered it for a second. Tempting. Instead, he flipped over the list from Khor and began to write on the back.

First, a list of what had happened to date.

He had come back to Earth to perform the wedding of his granddaughter, Esther. Actually, he had been called upon to co-officiate the wedding with his wife, Rabbi Rachel Gilman, all at the request of Khor, son of Lantar and intended of Esther, to provide the military pomp dictated by Khor's father, being the

important government official. The concept was simple; the implementation was turning out to be anything but.

Gold had expected the planning of the wedding to go incredibly smoothly—Lantar had insisted on being involved both as the father of the groom and as a representative of the Klingons but he was an experienced diplomat, Rachel was an exceedingly reasonable person who had conducted hundreds of weddings in her day, and Khor and Esther were two young people very much in love.

What went wrong?

He couldn't put his finger on the exact moment things had begun to turn sour; it was simply a bunch of people being stubborn. And strong-willed. And boneheaded to the point of ridiculousness. He took it upon himself to play referee and send the fighters back to neutral corners, and gave them each the task of coming up with their own separate lists of what were, in their own minds, the ten most crucial things to be involved in the wedding. He would then try to find a way to resolve any conflicts between the lists and make it all work out.

Each of them came to him in turn with their list, and tried to wheedle special considerations out of him, to make it all work out. Khor wouldn't budge on the few requests that he had; Rachel didn't even come to him with a list, saying that he should know what's important to her, and she invoked both religion and the mother of the bride; Esther couldn't narrow her list below two dozen; and Lantar threatened a major diplomatic incident if he didn't get his way.

Gevaltandgeshryin.

Somewhere in here, there was a solution. That was, after all, what the S.C.E. did—found solutions to the insoluble problems. What was going to be required, though, was more diplomacy than had been in evidence so far. How was he going to get everything to work together smoothly?

Clearly, he was going to have to get one of them on his side and then try to build the coalition from there.

He looked at the list again. Who was going to be the person who was going to cause him the greatest amount of trouble if he didn't resolve things well? And who was he going to want on his side backing his play?

Only one person fit both criteria...and boy, he was not looking forward to the groveling.

Maybe he should open Lantar's desk after all and take the easy way out.

Chapter 3

Sonya Gomez paced the da Vinci bridge.

"Anything on the comm channels?" she demanded.

"No, sir," Shabalala replied. "Just routine dock chatter and standard requests. Nothing for us."

"Damn. Where's a nice catastrophe when you need one?" She ignored the tactical officer's puzzled

glance and continued pacing. If only something turned up, no matter how small. Something for her to do.

Because, face facts, she was bored. Severely bored. Unbelievably bored.

All of the repairs from the damage they'd taken at Phantas 61 and in the Lokak system had been taken care of. Theda Vinci was as good as new—better, actually. Soloman had finished his diagnostics, and had already corrected the few minor glitches he'd discovered in the ship's systems. He'd even started building a complete computer model of the ship, so that in future they would be able to examine possible alterations ahead of time, in holographic form. And she'd finished her book. There was another in that series—apparently about the same group having lunch at the same place over and over again—in the ship's library, but she didn't feel like downloading it. The first book had been cute, but she wasn't sure she could handle reading more of the same.

Maybe one of her crew would have a problem for her to handle. Of course, Pattie was still out shopping—no help necessary there. Abramowitz and Hawkins were off somewhere, Bart was spending some much-overdue time with Anthony, and Lense had simply vanished. She knew better than to interrupt Gold, and Fabian and Tev were doing that holosuite thing at the Academy. So what did that leave?

She sank down into the captain's chair. Not a thing.

Just then, the comm panel beeped. "Incoming voice signal," Shabalala said. "From Stevens."

"On audio," Sonya said quickly. Fabian probably just wanted to tell her how much fun they were having, and to share a joke at Tev's expense, but it was better than nothing. "Fabian, that you?"

"Commander, thank God!" His tone made her sit up straight. "Are you busy?"

"Not even a little," she said. "What's up?"

"We've got a situation down here. I hate to ask, but do you think you—?"

"Absolutely!" She leapt to her feet. "What do you need?"

Fabian gave her a quick rundown of the situation, and Sonya whistled. "Nasty."

"I'm actually surprised the computer let me contact you, but I guess it just doesn't want us talking to anyone else inside. It did block Sparks when he tried contacting his dean, but it must not consider theda Vincia direct threat."

"And Tev and the students are trapped with you? Are they safe?"

"That'd be a big yes to the first question, and a resounding no to the second. The safety protocols are off, and it won't give us access to turn them back on. So all the threats are real now. Tev's warned the students, but that may not be enough. Especially since somebody else has added situations to my setup, and a lot of them are designed to cause maximum damage."

"Okay, first things first. You need someone to look at that leg, which means getting you out of there. Let's see if we can beam you up here—that'd be easiest." She tapped her combadge. "Gomez to Poynter. Lock onto Fabian down at the Academy holosuite and beam him directly to sickbay."

After a pause, Laura Poynter's voice sounded over the intercom. "I can't get a lock on anyone in the holosuite, Commander. I just tried Tev as well, but something's blocking the beam."

"Well, it was worth a try." She sighed and sat back down. "Okay, I can't get in and you can't get out. But I'll do what I can to help you from up here."

"Thanks, Commander," he replied. "I get the feeling we're gonna need all the help we can get."

Chapter 4

Gold walked down the hall of the embassy, stopping in front of the room his wife was supposed to be in. The door beeped. "Who is it?" he heard his wife call from inside.

"It's me."

"nuqneH," she said.

"It's me, David."

"I know who it is.nuqneH! "

Uh-oh. She was using the traditional Klingon greeting not because she didn't know who it was, but because she did know. And since the door wasn't opening, and since the literal translation of the phrase nuqneH was What do you want? Gold wasn't getting off to a good start.

"Honey, I would like to start off by saying I was a jerk."

"No, you really weren't." It was not said in a tone of reconciliation.

"No, I really was."

"No. Think bigger."

Gold winced. "I was a fool?"

"Wrong direction."

He sighed. "I was amomzer? "

The door opened, and Rachel was standing there. "That's the one. I'm glad that we agree."

"Fine. May I come in now?"

"Be my guest." She stood aside. He entered, and the door closed with a sigh. Like it knew.

"To be fair, you were trying to manipulate me, Atalanta."

"Stop calling me that. I just thought makinglatkes was a nice thing to do for you. I shouldn't have had to

manipulate you.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“You should have just gone along with me.”

Sigh. “Dear one, you know that I love you. But you also know that I can’t blindly ally myself with you in this case. Doing so wouldn’t have solved anything—it would still be several sides attacking one another. Someone has to mediate, and I had no stake in this beyond a successful wedding for my granddaughter.”

“Are you saying I was letting—”

“Yes. And you know it.”

She was blessedly silent to that. Gold drummed his fingers for a moment. “Look, I’m going to assume that you and I are going to work together to get Esther married and to avoid sundering an alliance while we’re at it. Am I wrong in this assumption?”

“No, you’re not wrong.”

“Fine. Now that that’s settled, what do you think are the important things that need to be dealt with in the ceremony, and what has to be included?”

“Well, honestly, as long as they sign theketubah and put everything in writing, and they exchange rings, I’m okay with whatever pomp and circumstance needs to be put in.”

Gold blinked in surprise. “What about breaking the glass? Having achuppah? Doing the blessings? These are important aspects of a Jewish wedding.”

“Of course they’re important. But it’s like the conversation between Hillel and the Convert.” Rachel leaned forward, getting into full professorial mode, which made Gold smile. This was a side of his wife he rarely got to see. She went on: “The Convert asked to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one leg. Hillel told the Convert, ‘What is hateful to you do not do to your friend. The rest of the Torah is an explanation of that concept. Go and study.’ Similarly, the glass is a tribute, thechuppah is a reminder, and the blessings are a sendoff. To make it a Jewish wedding, the bare essentials are the contract and the rings. Everything else is ceremony.”

“That’s all?”

“That’s it. The Klingon gods are dead, they—”

“We’ve been having a huge fight overthis? ”

“No, we’ve been having a fight over you not knowing what I want and not knowing your own religious background. Will you get that through your head?”

Gold smirked. “I always had you to keep that stuff straight.”

“If you’re going to have someone else attend to your religious faith, perhaps you should have someone else run your ship.”

“That was low.”

Rachel glared at him. “That’s my point.”

“All right. I’m sorry. But I wish you had just handed me the list, so that I didn’t have to keep it in my skull. I had enough other things on my mind, and I am not a mind reader. Saying ‘you should just know’ doesn’t cut it.”

“I am not one of your subordinates on your ship. I am your wife.”

“Wife, I refer you to Genesis, chapter 3, verse 16. ‘Unto Eve the Lord said thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.’”

She shook her head. “Damn. You were almost paying attention.”

“Almost?”

“In the same verse, the Lord also said unto the woman, ‘I will greatly multiply thy sorrow.’”

“My dear,” and here the captain got down on one knee and took her hand, “I apologize for any multiplication of sorrow on my behalf. It won’t happen again. Atalanta shall always be my equal.”

“You bigmomzer. Apology accepted, provisionally.” She pulled him back up to standing. Gold was thankful for that—he really wasn’t as young as he used to be. “As I was saying; the Klingon gods are dead, they happily admit it, so there’s no conflict with the Commandments. If we have to do everything with a heavy Klingon flavor, then so be it—although I have had some thoughts on combining the two. I think there’re enough spaces in the respective traditions that are complementary, without any contradictions as to how the relevant cosmologies play off each other.”

“You’ve been waiting your entire academic career to do something like this, haven’t you?”

For the first time since Gold walked in the door, Rachel smiled. “Is it that obvious?”

“Yes—and it also goes a bit to explaining.”

“How so?”

“It was a perfectly lovely idea right up until you had to use it with actual Klingons.”

“No, dear, it worked fine when I suggested it to actual Klingons. It’s when I brought it up to Lantar that I started to have problems.”

“Point conceded. Do you think we can get Lantar to go for it now?”

“I don’t know.”

“Shall we take it to him and try it out?”

“Are you planning on shooting any more poor, defenseless, innocent light fixtures?”

“No.” Gold looked thoughtful. “And to sweeten the deal, I think I’ll give him an additional platform

where he can showcase Klingon grandeur.”

“Really? What did you have in mind?”

“You’ll see. And with any luck, it’ll also solve a little problem that I hadn’t quite gotten around to dealing with.”

Her eyes narrowed. “What sort of problem, dear?”

“I’ll tell you later, I promise. For now, let’s go and find the ambassador. Oh, and while we’re on the way, would you take a look at these lists and see if there’s anything in here that gets in the way of what you have in mind?”

“Certainly.” She took the lists from him, and expressed a low whistle. “Esther wants ice sculptures?”

“Oh, that’s not the least of it. Keep reading.”

Pause. “You know, suddenly I’m glad we’re not trying to accommodate Jessica’s wishes too. I don’t think there’s a chapel big enough.”

Chapter 5

Sparks shook his head. “It’ll never work.”

Fabian grinned at him. “You never know. And if it doesn’t, I’ll try something else.” They both watched as a small horde of tiny black ants raced across the bridge and stopped just to the left of the command chair, immediately catching Tev’s attention. Not to mention frightened looks from Latha Meru, who was currently on bridge duty. Apparently she had a problem with small insects.

“Computer,” Fabian said, “have the ants disperse themselves to match these patterns,” and he wrote several words on his padd. Hopefully, the computer would treat them as patterns instead of words, as instructed, and would allow it.

It worked, and the ants spelled out the following message:

CHECKED ACTIVITY LOGS. EXAM CLEAN. NO OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE.

The letters dissolved quickly, but not before Tev had read them and nodded. “I concur,” he said to the air in front of him. “I performed my own inspection, and found nothing to indicate inappropriate entry. There is no one interfering from outside this suite, which means the culprit is on theHyperion itself.”

Fabian rubbed absently at his left leg. It was still numb—he needed a real doctor, and soon, or the damage might become permanent. “Damn,” he muttered to Sparks. “I was hoping he’d found something we hadn’t.”

Sparks nodded. “But how can it be an inside job? We locked the students out of the program, just before that problem with the lift. And we’re not doing it. Could Tev be responsible?”

Fabian laughed. “You clearly don’t know him. He’d never do anything inappropriate—oh, he’ll make a cutting comment or two, but that’s it, and he’d never let it interfere with his work. He wouldn’t do this sort of thing.”

Sparks sighed. “I didn’t think so, but I had to ask. But what does that leave?”

Fabian shook his head. “I don’t know. You’re sure the computer shut down anything pending?”

“Absolutely. Anything the students had set into motion at that point, it removed.”

Stevens shook his head. “Which means it had to start before then, and finish as well.” Sparks looked confused. “Think about it. You told the computer to find anything that was in the works and shut that down. But if they’d programmed something in, and it had already done its damage, the computer wouldn’t have noticed that—the program was no longer active.”

Alex nodded. “Makes sense. But I didn’t find anything in the system except your tests. If someone had added some mishaps of their own, I’d have seen them.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” Fabian frowned. He’d seen enough of Alex’s work these last two days to know that he was a good engineer, and a thorough one. He wouldn’t have missed something like that.

Fabian sighed. “Well, we might as well go back to our office for now. At least there we can sit down. Maybe Commander Gomez will come up with something on her end.” He hoped so. As he limped off the bridge, he realized that things were getting worse. The students had already dealt with two new problems this morning—a short circuit in one of the bridge consoles and a faulty replicator that added poisons to everything it created. Both situations could have had lethal results, but the students had handled them fine. The question was, how much longer could they keep this up?

* * *

Unfortunately, Gomez wasn’t having much luck herself. Her first idea had been to contact Starfleet Academy and have them shut down the holosuite. But the suite had been designed to be self-sufficient—it had its own internal power supply, and while it was running no one without the proper codes could access its systems. And since Fabian had been given the codes before the exam had begun, she was betting the computer wouldn’t let anyone shut it down, inside or out. So calling the Academy would only make a lot of people very nervous, which wouldn’t solve anything.

Her next thought was to contact Fabian’s friend Kendra Dolby. TheHyperion was her design, and this entire test had been her idea. Unfortunately, she and the rest of Starfleet R&D were making their annual presentation to the oversight committee. It had taken several hours before she’d been able to respond to Sonya’s page.

“Dolby here,” the attractive blond on-screen announced. “You’re Commander Gomez?”

“That’s right,” Sonya replied. “You can call me Sonya. I’m Fabian’s CO.”

“Oh, call me Kendra.” Kendra grinned. “Fabe’s CO, hm? I bet you’ve got some stories to tell.”

“A few.” Sonya grinned right back. “But Fabe’s a good guy, and a great engineer. I’m happy to have him on the team.”

“Yeah, he’s the best.” Kendra frowned. “But if this wasn’t to trade Fabe stories, why did you call?”

Sonya had been dreading this part. “Actually, it’s about your Hyperion project; more specifically, the test at the Academy. There’s been a problem.” She told Kendra what had happened, and watched the other woman’s face pale.

“Is Fabe okay?” was her first question, and Sonya was quick to reassure her.

“He’s got some nerve damage in one leg, but otherwise he’s fine.”

“Nerve damage?”

“Don’t worry, a doctor will fix it right up,” Sonya said quickly. She didn’t point out that they’d have to shut down the program before that could happen, but she could tell that Kendra had already figured that out for herself.

“And the rest? The students?”

“Everyone else is fine—so far. But that may not last.”

“What can I do to help?”

“Can you get back to the Academy?” Kendra’s grimace told her the answer even before the other woman replied.

“The committee’s taking a short break for dinner, then we’re doing the next portion of our presentation. I’ve got about ten minutes before I’m called back in. And the presentation’s going to take at least another day, if not more. I’m sorry.”

“Okay, we’ll just have to do this by remote.” Sonya tapped one hand on the arm of her chair. “First off, who’s got access to the Hyperion program?”

“Only a few people, actually. I do, of course. So do Fabian, Professor Sparks, and Lieutenant Commander Tev—at least, they did. My boss, Felder’nar, has access, though he hasn’t bothered to use it and he’s stuck at the presentation same as I am. The review board has access, and so does the dean of the Academy. Actually, I think all of the engineering instructors were given access, in case Sparks couldn’t make it and one of them had to fill in. That’s everybody.”

“Okay.” Gomez tapped some more. “So far, the dangers have been directed at the students—Fabe got injured pulling one of them out of the turbolift. But why would anybody want to hurt a student? Particularly the top students in engineering?”

“A class grudge, maybe?” Kendra chuckled. “Back in the day, there were at least three fellow classmates I’d have happily murdered.”

“Could be, I guess. I wasn’t that bloodthirsty, myself, but I did hate a few of them. Maybe someone saw this as the perfect opportunity.” She sighed. “Can you get me access to the students’ files?”

Kendra frowned. “Depends. The ones taking the test, sure—the Academy sent me their files, and I’ve got them here on my padd. I don’t have any others, though.”

“That should be fine to start with,” Sonya said. “If I were actually trying to off a class rival, I’d want to watch it happen. Send me the files, and take a look at them yourself. Between us, maybe we’ll find something Fabian and Sparks can look into.”

She signed off, then leaned back in her chair. It was pretty sad when she found herself hoping that one of Starfleet’s brightest potential engineers was a homicidal fiend.

Chapter 6

Esther was sitting on a sofa in her assigned room in the Klingon embassy, going over her list for the eighth time, playing with a Klingon knife she had taken off the wall. Grandpa Gold was clearly upset at her inability to trim her list down, and she was determined to have another go at it.

But really, is that fair? I already cut it down from thirty-five, and now he wants more? Whose wedding is this, anyway?

Her lips pursed. Khor obviously was beginning to think it was his father’s wedding. She would have been quite happy with something quick and quiet, like a bridal package on Risa, just to get it out of the way. But no. Khor kept going on and on about how it was important to his dad for political reasons, that this entire wedding should be a showcase for his friends and his ambitions. He didn’t come right out and say that, of course—he said that it should be a ceremony worthy for one entering the House of Lantar—but she could tell what he Really Meant.

And what he Really Meant was to make her life as difficult as possible, and to prevent her from having any enjoyment of her own wedding. Instead, she was going to be the centerpiece of a giant ceremony that had nothing to do with her. The figurine on her wedding cake was going to be more involved than she was—no, wait, she wasn’t even sure if Klingon ceremonies had wedding cakes. Well, the heck with that. She was going to get the kind of wedding that she always wanted. And nothing—not wind, water, or warp core breach—was going to get in the way of what she...

She shook her head. She wondered if she would be having such extreme mood swings if she was marrying a nice Jewish boy. She chalked it up as one of the great mysteries, since there was no way that was going to happen.

The door chimed. “Who is it?”

“It’s me, Esther.”

“Go away, Khor.”

“No. Now open this door.”

“Forget it.” The door slid open anyway. Esther turned to see Khor standing in the doorway. Her surprise must have shown on her face.

“Come on, Esther. This is the Klingon embassy and my father is the ambassador. You think I can’t enter any room in the compound at my whim?”

“Ooooh. Big man.”

Khor exhaled and counted quietly to five. “Esther, would you care to tell me what’s irritating you?”

“Are you sure we can talk freely? There’s no bugs or anything in the room?”

“The room is free of any insects.”

“Listening devices, you clod.”

“There are none of those either.”

“Oh, really? I’m not in here as a prisoner?”

“Esther, I don’t know what you’re talking about or what your grievances are—”

“Fine, let me go through the list. One: Your father is a stubborn idiot. Two: You inherited it from him.”

“I—”

“I’m not done yet!” She moved closer to him. “Three: For reasons known only to God and Kahless, you still want your father’s approval. Four—”

“Enough! I came here to tell you something.”

Her eyes narrowed. “What, then? Out with it.”

Khor began to walk around the room, as if he were hunting something. “I—am intoxicated by you, as by the finest wines and spirits. The memory of you sings in my blood.”

Esther looked around. She considered the plate in front of her, but was looking for something easier to hold in her hand.

“As my pulse thunders, I come to you, guided by a flame that burns in my heart, a fire taken from the heart of a star.” Esther reached for a flower vase.

“And as I reach for you…”

She picked up the vase and threw it at him.

Chapter

7

Fabe nodded. “Okay, got it. We’ll check it out. Thanks.” He started to tap his combadge, then paused. “Wow, I’m an idiot.”

“No argument there,” Sonya’s voice replied. “But what was it this time?”

“I was about to go let Tev know what you just told me, by having one of the bridge viewscreens display

an array of shooting stars whose trails formed letters.”

“Clever.”

“Maybe, if the computer would let me pull that whole ‘letters as shapes’ trick twice. But then it occurred to me—I was able to call you just fine, and vice versa.”

“Sure. So? Oh.”

“Right.” Fabian rubbed at his leg. “If you can call me, you can probably call Tev, which saves me from having to orchestrate this whole elaborate light show just to create a terse sentence or two. But it took me this long to realize that. Hence, idiot.”

“I’ll call him now,” Sonya told him. He heard her tell Shabalala to connect to Tev, but then lost the connection. Apparently the holosuite would let her talk to either of them, but not at the same time because that would mean he could talk to Tev through the shared link. Smart program.

A minute later, Sonya called back. “I told him, and he said he’ll speak to her.”

“Great. Thanks, Commander. Alex and I’ll tail Tev, and I’ll let you know what happens.” He signed off, and hopped off the desk, gesturing to Sparks where he sat nearby. “Come on, Alex. Time to go haunt some corridors.”

* * *

Tev heard the door chime and automatically straightened, running one hand absently down his chest to make sure his shirtfront was perfectly smooth. “Enter,” he called out, and the door slid open. The young woman stepped inside, and blinked uncertainly until she spotted him. Tev knew that many people felt interrogations were best performed under bright light, to make the suspect squirm and have problems focusing, but he preferred the opposite. With the lights in his rooms set low, the cadet would have a hard time seeing him, and that would make her uncomfortable and keep her off balance.

“You wanted to see me, Captain?” She stepped a little closer, but Tev gestured for her to stop where she was. No sense in letting her get close enough to focus her eyes again.

“That is correct, Cadet Sturtze. It has been brought to my attention that you may be responsible for the Hyperion’s recent difficulties, and for the dangers you and your classmates have faced.”

“M-me?” The girl—Tev remembered that her first name was Tanya, though of course he would not use it—looked surprised, but she also looked scared. And a little guilty. One thing Tev loved about humans was that their faces were so easy to read.

“Yes, you. Did you not file a complaint one month ago, accusing your classmate Ian Gymis of stealing your thesis notion?”

“He did steal it,” she snapped, anger overcoming fear for a moment. “He claimed it was just parallel development, but that’s a load of crap! Ian’s a damn freeloader, doing as little work as possible and stealing anything that isn’t nailed down. He’s been ripping off classmates for years. But this time he tried it with me.”

Tev frowned at her. “These are serious accusations, Cadet. Yet the review board cleared Mr. Gymis of

all charges.”

She shook her head. “Sure they did. Ian’s a slouch, but he’s not completely stupid. He’d change just enough details to make it look like he could have come up with it on his own, and they bought it. He doesn’t even understand half of what his so-called thesis says, but he stood there and told them it was really his and they went for it.”

“You must have been livid when you discovered that he had also been chosen to participate in this exam.”

“What, you mean because he’s a slouch and a thief but conned his way into a test meant only for the best in the class?” Her lips peeled back in what, in a feline of any sort, would have been a definite snarl. “You’re damn right I was mad.”

“And so you rigged the exam, hoping he would be injured during these exercises.” But Tanya was shaking her head.

“I’d love to see Ian fail, sure, but I wouldn’t hurt anybody. Not even him.”

“So you did not tamper with the program?” Tev watched her closely as he asked this, and could see the guilt. If she claimed that she had never touched the systems, she would be lying.

But Tanya apparently knew that she’d been caught, and her shoulders slumped. “Okay, yes, I tinkered a bit. But nothing drastic. I bumped up the risk factors a little, and told the computer to add random twists here and there. Ian doesn’t think well on his feet—he only understands half of the stuff he’s stolen from other students. So when there’s a crisis and he has to have all of the knowledge on hand, he chokes. I wanted everyone to see that. And I did set up one prank.”

“Which was?”

She actually grinned up at him. “The synaptic scrambler. I knew Ian wouldn’t have a clue what to do about it, and I wanted to see him walking in circles and bumping into walls.” Then she sobered. “But that was the only thing I added. Honest.”

Tev grimaced at her, and leaned forward—it was an old trick to make him look bigger and more threatening, and it apparently worked, because Tanya curled in on herself and took a hasty step back. Then he straightened and nodded.

“Very well. Professor Sparks will deal with your interference after the test has ended. Now return to your duties.”

“Yes, sir.” She turned and walked away, and back out the door. Tev waited until she had gone before speaking to the apparently empty room.

“She was telling the truth,” he informed the air. “She is not the one responsible.”

The lamp near the couch blinked on once. Then it flickered, and a thick stream of smoke rose from it. The smoke had twists of dark gray among the light, and the dark twists slowly formed words:

WILL CALL GOMEZ. KEEP LOOKING. THIRD PARTY?

Tev nodded. “Clearly, if not the students it must be a third party. But no one from outside the suite has had access since we started the exam. It is a conundrum. Now go away—I wish to sleep, and I have no desire to share my room with a pair of invisible observers.”

The smoke puffed once and then faded, and Tev washed up. They were no closer to finding out who was behind the recent problems, or figuring out how to get everyone back out safely. Still, he had used his temporary rank and position to bully a cadet, so the day hadn’t been a total loss.

* * *

“Thanks for the update, Fabian. Hang in there—we’ll figure it out.”

Sonya signed off, shaking her head. The girl, Tanya, was clean—well, not guilty of rigging the recent death traps or locking Fabian out, anyway. And none of the other students had anything else on file that would give them reason to hurt one of their classmates. But if they weren’t behind all this, who was?

One of her first suspects had been the only nonstudent non-S.C.E. inside the suite: Professor Sparks. But Fabian had assured her that he had nothing to do with it, and he’d been working closely with the man for the past two days, so she believed him. Which meant yet another dead end. Besides, why would a Starfleet instructor want to hurt his students?

She paced as much as she could within the narrow confines of her room, tossing the question back and forth. Why would anyone want to hurt a student? Then she stopped midstride. What if nobody had?

What if hurting the students hadn’t been the goal at all? She’d assumed it was, because the threats seemed to be targeting them, but the only other people inside were Fabian, Tev, and Sparks. The students outnumbered them, so by statistics alone they’d be the victims more often. What if that was a mere coincidence? Perhaps whoever had set all this up hadn’t wanted to seriously hurt anyone—so far the only real injury was Fabian’s, and there was no way anyone could have planned that one.

Then she took it one step further. What if the point wasn’t injury at all? What if that was merely a bonus—or an unexpected side effect?

The door chime interrupted her musings.

“Come.”

The door opened, and Soloman stood there. “Commander, I have finished the security upgrades to the da Vinci. Would you like a detailed list of the changes I have made?”

“Yes, please.” Then, when he opened his mouth, she hastily added, “Write it up and send it over, okay? That way I can add it to the ship’s maintenance records.”

Soloman nodded, though she thought he looked a little disappointed. “Of course. If I may say so, I’m quite pleased with the changes. In particular, I was able to tighten our access protocols.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, during the diagnostics I discovered that anyone with a sufficient Starfleet clearance could gain access to our entire system. While I realize this is a Starfleet vessel, the likelihood of anyone needing to effect repairs without at least one of us present is extremely low. So I installed a subroutine, preventing

Starfleet personnel from gaining access to the higher functions without at least one member of the crew tapped in as well. And then I set up safeguards to prevent anyone from entering the lower-priority system branches and then sneaking through into the more restricted sections.”

Sonya managed to fight back the smile when she saw how serious he was, and how proud. “Do you really think,” she said finally, “that Starfleet officials are going to try tapping into our systems and modifying our ship’s programming without our permission or assistance?”

Soloman shrugged. “I would not expect it, no. But I have seen many strange things during my tenure on this ship, and irrational human behavior is one of the most common. It seemed better to eliminate the chance, especially since, if someone had gained such access, it would have been easy for them to then alter the code so that they could regain that access at any time, no matter what new security measures we added.”

“Right.” Sonya nodded. “A back door. Thanks, Soloman.”

He nodded and turned back toward the door. “I will have the report within the hour. I have also completed most of my work on that holographic model, and should be done with that shortly as well.” But she was no longer listening.

* * *

“Could someone have been aiming for one of you?”

Fabian glanced at Sparks. They were back in their office again, and Commander Gomez had just contacted them. Kendra was already connected to her—the presentation was done for the night, though she did have to go over tomorrow’s with her colleagues in a few minutes. Fabian had finally convinced his old friend that he’d live and that he didn’t hate her forever, at which point Gomez had asked the question that had prompted her call.

“Aiming in what way?” he asked her. “I got hurt getting one of the students out of the turbolift—nobody attacked me directly, and he was in more danger than I was.”

“Yet you’re the one who got hurt,” she replied. “That’s not what I meant, though. It’s not physical. Forget about the specifics of each problem, and pretend that the students aren’t behind it, but they aren’t the targets, either. Could anyone want one of you to fail?”

“I don’t see why,” Sparks commented. “What would anyone gain from this test’s failure?”

“Well—” Kendra sounded a little guilty, almost. “I suppose some of my co-workers might gain a little. I mean, if the Hyperion fails, that’s one less design for Starfleet to consider, which improves the chances for the competing designs. The only problem is, nobody else has a pet project for this slot. Oh, we’ve got a few other designs in the works, but none as far along and none more than a few tweaks on existing ship patterns. Even Felder’nar’s not that hooked on his own design—he entered it, but I doubt he seriously expects it to be approved. I actually think he only did it so that he could show he was working on viable projects instead of goofing off and watching those horrible docudramas all day. So taking mine out of the running might not help anybody.”

“Anyone at work have any personal grudges against you?” Fabian asked.

“No, I get along pretty well with my coworkers.”

He believed it—she'd always been good at that, even back in school. Most of their classmates had envied her ability, but no one had hated her for it, and everyone she'd worked with on a group project had been thrilled to have her on the team.

“Okay. Professor Sparks? What about you?”

“Call me Alex, please.” He waved one hand as if brushing away the formality. “I don't really have any enemies, I'm afraid. I get along well with the other instructors, and with the dean.”

“Do you have tenure?”

“Yes, I got it several years ago. I'm still one of the junior faculty members, though. Most of my peers have seniority on me.”

“Okay, so no professional reasons for anyone to go after you. Personal ones?”

He frowned. “No, as I said, I get along fine with the other instructors.”

“Fabian, what about you?”

He shrugged, even though Gomez couldn't see it. “I don't see how. I haven't been back here since our last trip home, and that was months ago and I was only on Earth for a few days. And before that it was the previous downtime, and the same before that—I've spent maybe a month here in the past three years. Who'd even know me to hate me?”

“You're sure there isn't anyone? It could be work-related or a private matter. An old grudge, perhaps?”

Fabian started to shake his head, then stopped. “Wait a second.”

Alex leaned forward, and Fabian could almost hear the other two doing the same. “What? Did you remember something?”

He nodded slowly. “Yeah. I do still know one other person here, and he's not too fond of me.”

“Crawfish,” Kendra replied, and they both laughed. It was still funny, even now.

Of course, Gomez and Alex had no idea what they were talking about.

“Crawford Pressman,” Fabian explained after he'd calmed down. “He and Kendra and I all went to Rigel for engineering.”

“You called him ‘crawfish,’” Alex said.

“Yeah, well, that was his nickname.” Fabian chuckled a bit, thinking back. So did Kendra. “He was long and disjointed and a bit sticky. Plus his whole face turns bright red any time he lies or fails. Or gets annoyed. Or seriously embarrassed. Ken and I used to torment him constantly.”

“He was an easy target,” Kendra said. “And now he's one of the senior instructors here. He helped me get this whole test set up.”

“Which meant he had access the entire time.”

“Sure, but so did the rest of the instructors. Maybe one of them did it.”

“Well, let’s check.” Alex pulled up the suite’s activity logs—the computer was allowing them passive access to the programming levels, so they could look, they just couldn’t touch. “Aha.”

“What aha?” Fabian limped over to peer over his shoulder.

“Right there.” Alex pointed at a spot in the records, and Fabian nodded.

“Crawfish accessed the program, all right,” he told Gomez and Kendra. “About an hour before the exam started. And it looks like he added some new code. We can’t tell what, though.”

“That bastard!” Kendra snapped. “Sure, we picked on him, but that was harmless, and it was years ago! And now he’s trying to kill you, and everyone else in there, because we made fun of him? I’ll bite his head off, just like a real crawfish!”

Fortunately, Gomez was able to stay calm. “Let’s talk to him before we start plotting revenge. For all we know, he added some safety measures, or a test of his own, or simply a monitoring program so he could see how the students were doing.”

“The commander’s right,” Fabian said. “Crawfish was a pathetic little twerp, but I don’t remember him getting nasty. We’ll—” he paused as the *Hyperion*’s alarms sounded. “Whoops, got another crisis here. Alex and I’ll check it out. You two go ahead and check in with Crawfish. Just ask him what code he inserted, and see what he says. Don’t bite his head off just yet.” He signed off and headed out of the office, but not before he heard Kendra muttering something about hot sauce.

Chapter

8

“Ambassador, this is unprecedented,” Gold said.

Lantar merely sat at his desk, facing Gold and his wife, his fingers interlaced together at the first knuckle, and saying nothing—as he had for most of the conversation. Behind him, the same workmen who had repaired the lights earlier were busy polishing the wood and checking for any other imperfections in the office.

The captain went on. “Centuries ago, the ceremonies of the Klingons were much more fluid, tailored to each individual. So creating a ceremony that’s specific to Khor and Esther is traditional.”

Lantar raised an eyebrow. “It is traditional to forgo tradition?”

“It is traditional for nothing to stand in the way of two Klingon hearts who have chosen to join,” Gold replied.

“Go on.”

“And the old ceremonies honored family, faith, and strength. Our family is Jewish, and ours do the same

thing.”

“I am confused about one thing, Captain. I had always believed your people not to have any spiritual traditions.”

Gold managed to restrain himself from saying, Some ambassador you are. “Not at all—it’s just that there’s no one faith. Some have plenty, some have none, and regardless, it’s up to each individual. We recognize the equality of all religions, and welcome them all. In the case of our family, it’s Judaism. If you ask ten other humans, you’d probably get ten other answers.”

“If not more,” Rachel added.

“I understand,” Lantar said, though Gold wasn’t entirely sure he did.

“Then you understand that we value and honor the same traits that you do. And that incorporating some of the elements of a traditional Jewish ceremony shows respect to another ancient tradition, to those who have gone before.”

“Which in no way belittles the honor she gains by joining the house of Lantar,” Rachel added. Nicely timed, Gold thought.

“Yes, there is merit to your words.”

“I have asked Rachel to plan out a ceremony that honors both worlds, and would like to present the first draft for your consideration.” He produced a padd and handed it to Lantar.

Rachel piped up. “I think you’ll really appreciate the Haray Aht—that’s the exchange of the rings, which symbolizes the exchange of each other’s hearts. I believe this ties in very closely with the beating of two Klingon hearts from the traditional Klingon ceremony.”

Lantar looked it over. “I am pleased that you understand the values of the Klingon ceremony, for one so new in the field.”

Rachel smiled sweetly and nodded her head respectfully. If she opened her mouth, she would have told Lantar that she had studied the Klingon culture longer than his son had been alive, in very colorful language. But she was quite happy to take the quick shot for now. Gold knew it, so he tried to get things moving along quickly. “So, does all this work for you?”

“I believe that this is acceptable. It is respectful of our tenets. It seems to be heading in the right direction. Of course, I will want to see the final draft.”

“Oh, certainly.” Gold put Khor’s and Esther’s lists on the desk. “Is there anything on these lists that you object to, anything that you believe is contrary to the ceremony you have in mind?”

Lantar studied the pieces of paper in front of him—for longer than he needed to, Gold suspected, but he probably wanted to make the humans in front of him squirm. Lantar’s forehead wrinkled at various points (rather, it wrinkled more) and at other points he shook his head. At last, after what seemed like a short stay in purgatory, Lantar said, “There is nothing on his list that is objectionable—and although her list is somewhat frivolous, I am willing to be somewhat indulgent to my future daughter-in-law.”

“Good!” Gold gathered up the lists. “Then we can—”

“However,” and here Lantar stood up and began to pace around the room, as if he were striding to a podium, “the frivolity unsettles me.” He stood facing a window, his back to the two of them. “The ceremony...it still seems...too bland. And yet, too unconventional. A certain decorum must be observed for a man in my position, certainly you understand.”

Gold smiled. “I certainly do understand, and I agree. The Klingon Empire should have a showcase, to proclaim its might to the galaxy. In fact...” his voiced trailed off.

“Yes?”

“Lantar, why don’t we hold the reception for the wedding here, at the embassy?”

The Ambassador looked genuinely surprised at the suggestion. “Here?”

Rachel jumped in. “Of course! It’s brilliant! How else would you show the true meaning of the Klingon heart? What better way could there be?”

“No, honey, that’s unreasonable. There’s no way we could possibly expect Lantar to put together the equivalent of a full state dinner in just a few days—”

“Think nothing of it!” Lantar boomed. “The embassy staff thrives on such challenges!”

There was a quiet snort from one of the workmen, but nothing more.

“We will have a chance to show you true honor, passion, and romance.” Lantar paused. “Do you think Esther will be amenable to this plan?”

“Why don’t you let us discuss it with them?” Gold said. “You obviously have much to do—”

“Yes! My son is getting married! And we shall make it an event that shall not soon be forgotten!”

Gold and Rachel both got up. “We’ll let you get to it then,” said Rachel.

“Yes, yes—” Lantar waved his hand. “I’ll have to contact musicians. Songs are going to have to be written about this day!”

“Shall we, dear?” Gold offered his arm.

“Surely.”

“Let’s.” And they strolled out of Lantar’s office together. After the door had shut and they were halfway down the hall, Gold turned to his wife. “So, what do you think?”

“I think that you were very lucky that we were in an embassy where you could get away with belittling me to make a point. It was a cheap way to score points.”

“Yes, I know. I’m sorry. Again.”

“Oh, I understand why you did it, as long as you now know that I know. Now—”

“Did that make sense to you as you were saying it?”

“Knowing what I now know, did I know now? I knew. Nu? ”

Gold shook his head. “You’re too old for these word games. What do you think of the deal we got out of Lantar?”

“Seemed pretty well-handled. Now what was that problem that you said you had to deal with?”

He smiled. “Already dealt with it.”

Rachel was silent for the next ten paces, thinking. “You forgot about the reception, didn’t you?”

He mock winced. “I didn’t really forget—I just didn’t really have any place to put it on the ship. We’re not equipped to handle dinner for three hundred.”

“So you fobbed the job off on him, and made it look like a privilege. You played off his vanity and patriotism.”

“Yep. Let him do some of the hard work. I see no reason the Klingon government can’t absorb some of the costs of this megillah.”

“What will the kids think of all of this?”

“Khor and Esther? They’re young, they’re in love. They’ll be fine. They’re probably a bit jumpy right now, but that’ll—” and then Gold stopped, because he heard a crash come from Esther’s guest room. Then another. “Come on!”

They stopped at the door to the room, and they heard the door chime, followed by another crash. “What is going on in there?”

Rachel pressed her ear to the door. “I don’t know, hush for a bit.”

“Forget it, I’m—”

“Quiet!” Rachel could hear a loud male voice through the door, she was pretty sure it was Khor, saying something in Klingon—very, very impassioned. And then a very loud crash.

And then she heard Esther screaming, “You come to me, begging like a human?” Another crash. And then something like a snarl. . .

Gold started, “I’m getting a guard to open this up n—”

“No,” Rachel said, standing up. “I don’t think we are.” She quickly grabbed Gold’s arm and started leading him back from where they had come.

“What are you doing? Esther is in real trouble back—”

“No, dear, she isn’t. And we have a wedding ceremony to write.”

“But—”

“It’s best that you don’t think about it, because if you do your brain will probably melt and dribble out your ears. Come along, dear.”

Chapter 9

Sonya let Kendra do the honors, but she stayed online and even split her viewscreen so she could see both of them. She’d never met Pressman, but when his face appeared she had to smother a laugh. It was a long, narrow face, with a small sharp nose, a tiny pointed chin, and large, slightly bulging eyes. His hair was dark brown, receding, and thin, and pointed off his forehead in several so much so that, if she squinted a little, it looked like he had antennae waving over his temples. Crawfish indeed.

Right now he wasn’t red, though. And his expression was anything but angry or embarrassed. In fact, when he saw Kendra on his screen, he didn’t even give her a chance to speak.

“Ah, Kendra,” he said, deliberately dragging out her name. He was at his desk in the Academy, and leaned back a little. “I’ve been expecting your call.” He smiled at her—it wasn’t a friendly smile, or a pleasant one. “I’ve finally gotten even with you and Stevens for that thing you did with the fire hose. I expect you’re regretting that now, hm? And Fabian is as well—of course, not that he can tell anyone that.”

Sonya had spent several minutes before the call calming Kendra down, but Pressman’s smug manner and callous remarks undid that in an instant. “You insufferable little bastard!” Kendra snarled. “You pathetic, no-talent git! You endangered the entire graduating class—your own students—just so you could get even over a little—”

She didn’t get the chance to finish—Pressman, who had turned a vivid red (very crawfishlike, Sonya couldn’t help but notice) during her rant, interrupted her. “Wait, what are you talking about? What danger? What’s happened?”

Kendra was fuming too much to speak without cursing, so Sonya stepped in. “Professor Pressman, I’m Sonya Gomez, commander of the da Vinci’s S.C.E. crew. I’m Mr. Stevens’s CO. The reason we’re calling is that someone has sabotaged the Hyperion test.”

She now had Pressman’s full attention. “Sabotaged? In what way?”

“Well, Fabian had programmed in several tests, simulated crises for the students to deal with.”

“Yes, yes.” Pressman waved a hand. “I looked over the list. He was always a good engineer—much as I’d like to believe otherwise.”

“Yes, well, someone decided to add additional tests. And they deactivated the safety protocols, so the students—and Fabian, Lieutenant Commander Tev, who’s helping out with the test, and Professor Sparks—are all at real risk. Fabian’s already been injured saving one student’s life, and he needs immediate medical attention.”

“What?” Pressman had gone from red to white. “We need to get them out of there!”

“I agree,” Sonya told him. “Unfortunately, the suite seems to have locked itself—no one in or out. And we can’t shut it off.”

“Oh, no.” Pressman turned toward Kendra now. “Kendra, you have to believe me—I didn’t do that. I wouldn’t endanger my students, not ever. Or Alex, or that lieutenant commander. Or even Fabian himself—scare him, yes, but not actually hurt him. I didn’t do that.”

“We found evidence that you inserted new code into the program,” Kendra said curtly. “What did you do?”

Now he regained a little of that smug expression, though only a little. “I set it up so that, at a certain point in the program, once Fabian went into intangible mode he would be stuck there. I set Alex up the same way, mainly so that he couldn’t act as a go-between for Fabian and Commander Tev. I just wanted Fabian unable to talk to anyone else or to make himself seen or felt. I figured, with how much he loves to get into everything, it would seriously get on his nerves.”

Sonya nodded. That was a fair assessment of Fabian—he preferred things he could touch, and he was always the first to want to get his hands dirty. Being unable to do that would be driving him nuts.

“What were the actual lines of code you added?” Kendra asked.

Pressman nodded and typed in a few keys, then sat back again while Kendra and Sonya both read the lines he’d sent them.

“The ghost-mode trick itself is clean,” Sonya pointed out, but Kendra had already read past that, and then doubled back.

“Sure,” she said, “but that’s not the problem. Crawfish, you’re an idiot—don’t you bother to check your code before you implement it?”

He turned red again. “What are you saying? It’s fine!” He gestured toward Sonya with his chin. “She just said so!”

“Yes, the trick itself. But you used your instructor privileges to access the system so you could make those changes.” Kendra highlighted the relevant portion of his code so that all three of them could see it. “And then you never closed back out afterward.”

Pressman shrugged. “So? I left it open, in case I wanted to monitor it—and so that I could switch Fabian back out if I needed to.”

Now Sonya saw what Kendra had meant. “But you left the door open, Professor Pressman. Anyone who found your code in the program could tap into it and add extra lines branching from there, and the computer would treat them as if they had instructor privileges as well. In other words, you gave anyone who wanted it free access to every level of the test program.”

He had turned pale again as he’d realized what she was going to say before she had finished. Now he slumped back against his chair. “Oh. I didn’t think that—no one else would have reason to—”

“You thought that you’d be the only one who wanted access, so it was fine to leave it open,” Sonya stated, and he nodded. “And if you’d been right, this would have been fine. Fabian and Alex would be stuck in ghost-mode and seriously annoyed, but no one would have gotten hurt. Unfortunately, someone

else did want access, and you gave them that opportunity.” She paused then, because an idea had just popped into her head.

“Okay, so now we know this idiot is responsible for letting someone in,” Kendra said, gesturing toward Pressman. “But we still don’t know who, or exactly what, they did. And we still don’t have any way to stop it.”

“That last part may not be true,” Sonya replied, still thinking. “In fact, I think Professor Pressman’s mistake might actually help us fix things.” She held up a hand to forestall the questions she could already see Kendra forming. “Hang on, I need to check on something first. But if I’m right, Crawfish may have just given us a way out—or, in this case, a way in.” She turned away from the viewscreen, and tapped her combadge. “Gomez to Soloman.”

* * *

Meanwhile, in the engine room of the Hyperion, the students had their hands full.

“Everything’s shutting down!” Ian shouted. “I don’t know what to do!” He was frantically punching buttons on his console, to little or no effect.

“We’ve lost main engines.” Santar was reporting to Tev on the bridge. “Impulse drives at twenty percent and failing. Life support also at twenty percent. Backup generators offline. Emergency beacons—”

“Dammit!” Tanya stepped back, shaking her hand, as sparks flew from the open panel where she’d been working. “We just lost the—”

“—offline,” Santar continued, updating his information. “Predicting complete shutdown in fifteen minutes.”

“Engineering, shunt all available power to life support,” Tev said. “Jettison warp core immediately, and prepare to abandon ship.”

“Abandon ship?” Malcolm asked, glancing up from his console. “Where does he expect us to go?”

“Hull doors and airlocks not responding,” Ben reported from another console. “We’ll have to open them manually.”

Latha started to say something, but was interrupted by a klaxon. “Proximity alert,” she said after a glance at her console. “Another ship just appeared, and it’s approaching fast. Thank the stars we still have sensors working.”

“All hands, this is your captain speaking,” Tev said a moment later. “A ship has been spotted nearby, and is rapidly approaching. Long-range scans indicate —” A groan from Latha told the others that this was not going to be good news. “—that it is a Jem’Hadar warship. Prepare for possible combat.”

“With what?” Tanya asked. “We’ve got no shields, no phasers, no torpedoes! We’re sitting ducks!”

“We might be able to modify one of the lifepods,” Zoe suggested, “transform it into a guided missile and fire that at the warship.”

“That is a worthwhile notion,” T’nok said. “If we can create the illusion of life-forms on board, the Jem’Hadar will seek to capture it rather than destroy it. And that will put it inside their hull when it

explodes.”

“It’s the only shot we’ve got,” Tomas said. “Zoe, start prepping one of the pods. Trick its systems into thinking there are three people aboard. Ian, set the engines to overload in ten minutes. Malcolm, find some way to boost that explosion when it happens. Everybody else, keep salvaging what you can here. See if we can draw power from anywhere to get our shields back up, otherwise we’re goners with the first hit. Let’s move, people!”

* * *

“Not bad,” Fabian said. He and Alex stood off to one side, watching as the students scrambled from console to console. Right now Zoe, Ian, and Malcolm were leaving the engine room at a run—a few of the others glared at Tomas, but they all did what he’d suggested. “I’d probably want to use the warp core itself as a weapon—prime it to overload, then jettison it directly at that warship—but the lifepod’s a nice idea. And Tomas did a good job of assigning tasks.”

“Yes, he’s a born leader,” Alex agreed. “Much to Tanya, T’nok, and Latha’s chagrin. The four of them often compete for control, which is why I don’t normally assign them to the same groups.” He glanced around him. “Things seem to be building to a head here.”

“That they do,” Fabian said. “One way or another, the next few minutes are going to get pretty interesting. I just wish there was something we could do.” But the computer had caught on to most of their communications tricks by now, and they were left with no way to contact Tev or the students. Not that they had much to share about the current situation. All they could do was stand there and watch, and hope that these youngsters were as smart as they appeared to be.

* * *

“Warp core shutdown in progress,” T’nok reported a few minutes later. “It will be completed in one-point-three-five minutes. But it will need to be jettisoned manually—the regular systems are not acknowledging me.”

“Life support is good for another minute, two at most,” Ben said. “I shunted some of its power over to the shields, so we might survive the first hit, but I doubt we can take a second.”

“We’ve lost impulse drive,” Latha said. “I managed to get us maximum inertia, so we won’t be at a full stop for several more minutes, and we can even execute minor course changes—nothing preprogrammed, but navigation might be able to dodge an attack if they’re careful. And I shunted what was left of the power into the lifepod, to fully charge its engines.”

“I’ve—” Tomas started, but then paused as his console beeped. “Hang on, we’ve got a second ship incoming! Just off our starboard bow, and coming right for us!” His fingers moved rapidly across the controls, and then a grin split his face. “It’s a Starfleet ship!”

The others cheered and hollered. “Sovereign-class?Defiant -class?Galaxy -class?” Ben asked eagerly. But Tomas shook his head.

“No,Saber -class. Definitely too small to take on that warship.” He glanced around. “Still, it can probably get us out of here.”

As if on cue, a voice spoke over their communicators. “Hyperion,this is Commander Gomez of the U.S.S. da Vinci.I’m beaming all of you across in ten seconds.”

Several of the students cheered again, but T'nok tapped her own communicator. "Negative, Commander," she replied. "I will need one-point-two-three more minutes here."

Ben and Zoe stared at her, but Tomas and then Latha and Tanya all nodded. And then Tomas tapped his communicator as well. "Commander, this is Tomas del Fuego in engineering," he said. "We need at least one more minute to properly shut down theHyperion's systems. Otherwise, this ship could pose a threat to other starships."

* * *

"Fabian?"

He reflexively tapped his combadge, still staring at Tomas and the others. "Commander? How'd you—"

"I'm still locked out," Gomez told him quickly. "The da Vinci is another hologram, and I've got a holographic version of myself captaining it, though I'm inputting my responses as we go. What do you want me to do about this request?"

"This is just a hologram," Fabian said. "Once we shut it down, this version of theHyperion will be gone for good, so it's not like it could really hurt anyone."

But Alex, standing next to him, shook his head. "That's not the point though, is it? They're willing to risk their own lives to do their job properly, and to prevent others from being put at risk. Isn't that exactly the sort of person Starfleet wants on its ships?"

Fabian nodded. "Yeah, you're right. They're good kids, and they're doing the right thing. So let's reward them for that. Give them the extra minute."

"You got it," Gomez said. "But I'm beaming you and Alex across right now—I've reset the codes so that, when you hit the da Vinci, you'll no longer be ghosted. And you, Mr. Stevens, are going to land in sickbay, where my hologram Lense can take a look at that leg."

"Great," Fabian muttered as he and Alex dematerialized, "because Lense in the flesh isn't stiff enough."

* * *

"Engineering, you have eighty seconds," Commander Gomez informed them. "I am beaming your captain and bridge crew away now, however."

The students didn't bother to acknowledge her message. Instead, they all got to work. Zoe, Malcolm, and Ian launched the lifepod—now that it had been turned into a makeshift bomb it could not be safely left on theHyperion—while T'nok and Ben jettisoned the warp core. Then Tomas, Latha, and Tanya made sure the ship was safely shut down, and that the computer had been purged of any important Starfleet files. They had just typed in the last command when Gomez announced, "Beaming up, on my mark," and they all vanished from theHyperion—

—to find themselves standing on the bridge of the da Vinci. Tev was there, and Santar, and so was Professor Sparks, who greeted them all with a smile. "Well done, class," he informed them. "You've handled yourselves very well indeed."

* * *

“And that should do it,” Sonya muttered, typing one last command into her own console on board the realda Vinci. “Fabian, why don’t you do the honors?”

“Happy to,” he replied, fresh from his bed in the holographic sickbay. “Computer,” he called out, “end Hyperion program.”

Instantly the da Vinci disappeared, leaving the students, Fabian, Tev, and Sparks standing in the empty holosuite.

“Everybody out,” Fabian announced, gesturing toward the open door, and the students quickly filed through it. Even as they did, Sonya tapped her combadge. “Gomez to Poynter. Laura, can you lock on Fabian now?”

“Yes, sir, him and Tev both. Want me to beam them up?”

“No—but beam me down to their location.”

A moment later, she materialized outside the holosuite, where Fabian, Alex, Tev, and the students were milling about—as was Kendra. She, too, had beamed over.

“Are you okay?” Sonya asked Fabian, and he nodded over Kendra’s shoulder—she wrapped him in a hug the instant he’d cleared the door.

“That hologram of Lense knows her stuff,” he said, gesturing at the bandages on his left leg. “She got me patched up right away, and I should be fine.”

“We’ll have the real Elizabeth take a look once she gets back,” Sonya said with a smile. Then she nodded at Tev, who nodded back, and turned to Sparks. “Professor Sparks, I’m Sonya Gomez. Nice to meet you in person.”

They shook hands, and Sparks smiled. “Likewise, Commander. Thank you for the timely rescue. But if you don’t mind my asking, how did you manage it?”

She smiled. “Actually, you have Professor Pressman to thank for it, at least in part.” She nodded to Fabian. “Yes, we talked to him, and he did have something to do with this. But by no means all of it.” She explained what he’d told them. “So he’d allowed someone else to gain access, but he hadn’t set any of that up himself.”

“And since the door was still open, you could slip in yourself.”

“Soloman had just built a holographic model of the da Vinci for diagnostic purposes, so I tapped into the hololab and then downloaded the da Vinci. Pressman’s lock on you was specific to the Hyperion—he hadn’t counted on another ship being in here.”

“There was no reason he should,” Tev said. “It would take most engineers at least a week to build a passable ship model.”

“Good thing we have a Bynar on staff,” Sonya said. “Soloman managed it in two days flat. I was hoping that all the other traps and flaws were also centered on the Hyperion, and that once everyone was off it the computer would respond properly again.”

“Which it did.” Fabian shook his head. “And not a moment too soon.”

They all nodded. Even if theHyperion had been fully functional, it might not have survived against a Jem’Hadar warship. And with theHyperion barely afloat, theVinci wouldn’t have stood a chance.

Tev glanced over at the students, who were standing nearby but just far enough for the adults to converse in private. “It has been a pleasure to serve as your captain,” he said. “You have all demonstrated the skills Starfleet looks for in its officers, and I would be proud to have any of you under my command again.” He glanced from face to face, then frowned. “But I count eight of you. One of you is missing.”

Fabian and Alex looked up, then quickly scanned the faces themselves. “Where’s Malcolm?” Alex demanded.

The other students glanced around, but no one seemed to know. “Leave it to him to screw this up,” Ben muttered, but not quietly enough.

“Yeah,” Ian agreed softly. “I don’t know why he was here in the first place.”

“What do you mean?” Sonya asked them. “Why shouldn’t he have been?” None of the students replied, so she glanced at Alex.

“Malcolm is a solid student,” he explained, “but he spends far too much time playing jokes to earn top grades.” Alex frowned. “To be honest, I was a little surprised when I saw his name on the list. But I wasn’t privy to the final selections, so I assumed some other factor merited his participation.”

“So the class clown took part in an honors exam, and now he’s missing?” Kendra asked. “Why does this sound fishy to me?”

Fabian stepped back over to the computer panel beside the holosuite door. “Computer,” he said, “how many students were on theHyperion?”

“Eight students were present,” it replied. Fabian glanced around, and assumed that his face had the same surprised look as Tev’s, Kendra’s, Sonya’s, and Alex’s did.

“Computer, display student files from that exercise,” he requested, and it promptly displayed a list of files. He tapped in a few commands, and scrolled through several screens before stopping. “Aha.” He gestured, and the others crowded closer. “Right here.”

“Clever,” Kendra said, nodding. “He reprogrammed it to include his name.”

“But the computer said we had only eight students,” Alex pointed out. “Yet Malcolm was there the whole time.”

“There, yes,” Tev agreed. “But I did not notice him once we’d beamed onto theVinci. And he did not exit with us.”

“So he was confined to theHyperion,” Kendra said. “Just like the traps.” She reached over Fabian and tapped a few commands of her own, shunting the display to a different screen. “Right there.” She tapped a line. “He pulled one from your book,” she told Sonya. “But he did it first.”

“He was a hologram?”

“Not just any hologram,” Fabian commented, reading the rest of the associated code. “He programmed himself in with an AI, so that his hologram could react with autonomy. Most of the pranks were his.” And, as he glanced around, Fabian had the feeling the final piece of the puzzle had just slid into place.

* * *

“It all makes sense,” Fabian told the others. They were sitting in Kendra’s office—her group’s presentations had finished just before she’d met Sonya at the Academy, so they’d been free to move here after sending the students home for some well-earned rest. “It wasn’t anybody’s fault—well, no one person alone.”

“Malcolm inserted an AI to play pranks on the other students,” Alex said. “It should have been on the surface of the program, and only able to cause harmless problems. He didn’t intend to hurt anyone.”

“But Crawfish left the door open,” Sonya added, “so the AI moved itself up to the command level, where it could rewrite aspects of the program itself.”

“Cadet Sturtze increased the risk factors,” Tev noted. “That would have allowed the AI to create more dangerous pranks with impunity.”

“And we had just switched off the safety protocols when Crawfish’s little prank kicked in,” Fabian mentioned. “We were about to turn them back on at the default levels, but we were stuck in ghost-mode and the computer wouldn’t allow us to change anything.”

“So suddenly,” Kendra picked up, “we had an AI designed to play pranks, inserted at command level, with encouragement to increase risks and no safety protocols restricting its actions. No wonder things went haywire.”

“It’s a good thing you beamed everyone over to the *Vinci*,” Fabian told Sonya. “Malcolm’s AI was stuck on the *Hyperion*, so it couldn’t cause any more trouble after that.”

“What happens now?” Sonya asked, and everyone else turned to Alex. He squirmed a little—Fabian had noticed that the instructor didn’t like being the center of attention, except with his students.

“Malcolm will be disciplined,” Alex said, “but not severely. His was meant to be a harmless prank, and it wasn’t his fault that it got out of hand. Actually, the programming he did was far above his usual work, so he’ll have a reprimand, but I’ve also given him credit for the actual design. Tanya won’t have anything appear on her record—Tev already spoke to her during the test, and I’ll speak to her again in a day or so. I think she’s already learned, however, not to bring her personal issues into the workplace.”

“And what about Crawfish?” Kendra demanded. “This was all his fault.”

Fabian surprised even himself by shaking his head. “It really wasn’t, Ken. Sure, he set up a prank for me and Alex—but I can’t really blame him for that, not considering all the pranks we pulled on him over the years. And it wouldn’t have hurt anything. Oh, sure, I’d have been a little annoyed, but that would’ve been it. He made a stupid mistake and left his code open, that’s all. And Tanya and Malcolm both took advantage of it, without realizing it. It happens.”

“So you’re saying he’s going to get off scot-free?” she asked.

He grinned at her. “Oh, I wouldn’t say that.”

Chapter 10

Captain’s Log: First Officer Sonya Gomez reporting. Eight bells and all is well.

Captain’s Log: First Officer Sonya Gomez reporting. Nine bells and all is well.

Captain’s Log: First Officer Sonya Gomez reporting. Ten bells. See previous entry.

Captain’s Log: First Officer Sonya Gomez reporting. Eleven hundred hours. Ditto.

Sonya Gomez looked around at the bridge and drummed her fingers on the command chair.

Well, that was exciting, she thought. Now that the Hyperion situation had been straightened out, it was back to the humdrum, monotonous, workaday grind that she had established for herself and the crew of the *Vinci* while Captain Gold was busy with wedding preparations.

The ship was running fine. Just about every conceivable diagnostic test had been run, with the exception of running diagnostics on the diagnostic equipment itself. They were on the verge of polishing the chrome.

She was bored bored bored out of her skull.

But, you know, boring occasionally is nice. Peaceful. Quiet. Nobody shooting at you. She sighed. Maybe I can catch up on my reading of technical manuals. No, wait, I can’t do that, I’m on duty. Well, I probably could, but I don’t want to now. Maybe I can—

“Excuse me, Commander.” Gomez looked up, startled. Soloman was next to her chair. “May I speak with you for a moment?”

“I’m a tad busy, Soloman.”

“Clearly. I will be brief. May I speak with you?”

“Certainly. What is it?”

“Privately, please?” His eyes looked over at the turbolift—the doors had just opened and Tev had come out.

She was curious. What could Soloman have to say that he couldn’t say in front of Tev? “Okay. Tev, you have the chair.”

“Aye, sir.” She noted a bit of a spring in Tev’s step when she handed him command. She went to join Soloman, who had already walked to the turbolift. She entered and the doors closed behind her.

“Yes, Soloman, what is it?”

“Deck four, please.”

“Are we going somewhere?”

“Yes.”

She was expecting more. Soloman stayed quiet. “Where are we going?”

“To the shuttlebay.”

“Oh, no—what’s wrong? Is it going to mess up the wedding?”

“Nothing is wrong. We are going to the wedding.”

“Turbolift, halt.” The turbolift obliged. She counted to ten. “We are not going to the wedding. First off, there is no ‘we’ to go to the wedding.”

“We are not going as a ‘we.’ I am escorting you.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I thought that you would not want to escort me, so I am escorting you.”

“Soloman—”

“Commander Gomez. From my observations, you are in a closed programming loop. It is a loop I have found myself in from time to time.”

“Soloman, I thank you for your observation, and I don’t mean to invalidate it, but—”

“I was the same way when 111 died.”

Sonya was taken aback by the starkness of what Soloman said, but she tried to respond. Soloman held up a hand and said, “Tev is perfectly capable of taking the center chair himself. In fact, I’m sure he is even more enthusiastic about it after his recent experience at the Academy.”

“That’s what worries me. His little taste of power—”

“—is a concern for another day. You are making an excuse to avoid a social occasion that you would have attended with Lieutenant Commander Duffy. As such, I offer my own services as escort.”

She stood there, stunned for a moment. Then she tapped her combadge. “Gomez to Tev.”

“Tev here.”

She took a deep breath. “I’m going to be taking a few hours here. I hope you don’t mind. I’ll rearrange your duty schedule later.”

“Understood. Oh, and Commander? Thank you for taking my place. I find Klingon weddings to be tedious, overblown, and irritating.”

It took most of Gomez's willpower to avoid making the obvious retort to that remark. Instead, she simply said, "You're quite welcome, Tev." She sighed. "Turbolift, resume." The gentle movement started up again. "Thank you," she said to Soloman.

"I just hate going to bonding ceremonies alone. Hopefully, Pattie has saved us seats."

Chapter 11

Sonya was convinced it was the first time the shuttlebay had been cleaned since the *Vinci* had been relaunched.

The ceremony had required the shuttlebay—the number of guests couldn't be fit into any other single space on the ship. However, it did mean that a lot of the equipment had to be moved, along with the shuttlecraft themselves. The crew, quite logically, solved both problems at the same time by shoving all the clutter into the shuttlecrafts and then shoving them out into space.

An innovative solution, though she had to wonder once she got the ships back how long it would take for them to actually empty out the shuttle and put everything back—if not to where the items might actually belong, then at least to their previous piles.

Sonya did have to wonder if they got everything, though—there seemed to be a sort of sickly sweet smell, some sort of chemical she couldn't quite identify. She sniffed.

Pattie, who was sitting next to her, said, "Is there something wrong?"

"I don't know. There's a scent of—I don't know what it is, precisely."

"Oh, I'm sorry. That would be me."

"You?"

"I always secrete at weddings."

"Oh." Sonya didn't really know how to respond to that—she certainly wasn't going to offer Pattie a handkerchief—so she just looked around the room.

The captain and the rabbi were standing in front of the airlock, which was open to space with standard force fields keeping the air and guests in. The captain had given specific instructions to the helm, in order to give the best backdrop possible—the sun was just becoming visible over the earth, with the orbit maintaining that view. The crew was especially proud of the polarizing they were doing with the shields to keep everybody from being blinded.

Many of the crew were there. The invitation had been optional for most of them, as space was limited and there were ship duties to take care of, and Captain Gold clearly didn't want to make it mandatory for his crew to show up at a wedding where they didn't know the couple getting hitched. But let's face it, if your ship's captain is performing a wedding, you tend to show up anyway. Sonya was sitting on the groom's side, as the bride's side was already full.

Sonya heard a deep female voice whispering from her side of the aisle. “Realvar’Hama candles. That takes class—nobody takes the time to do that anymore.”

And then the strains of Mendelssohn started up. That was Rachel’s extra touch—she couldn’t stand Wagner, and tried to make sure it was in as few weddings as possible.

Esther’s bridesmaids, Audrey, Nikki, and Elaine, entered. As was traditional, one was tall and dark, the other short and blond, one red-headed and a bit chubby, and the dresses looked amazingly wrong on all of them. Three Klingons accompanied them, each with amastaka in his free hand.

Then Khor’s Dawl’yan (loosely translated as “sword bearer,” Sonya recalled) walked in. He was a stout fellow named Timrek. It looked like the deprivation of kal’Hyah had been a bit wearing on him, although he probably could have stood to lose the weight. He carried four bat’leths instead of the traditional two. Timrek was accompanied by Esther’s sister, Leah, who was the matron of honor. And the two of them were followed by Khor himself, escorting Lantar and Jessica down the aisle.

Finally, Esther entered. She wore a gown that gave off a faint pearly glow. She was on the arm of her father, Daniel, who looked uncomfortable with all the attention.

Sonya heard another whisper from the groom’s side. “She wore white to the wedding? How improper...”

While Khor removed the veil from Esther’s face, Timrek handed out bat’leths to the groomsmen. Together, they placed the tips of them at the four corners of the chuppah, and raised them over the heads of the officiators.

Gold smiled and began to speak. “Since the days of the first wooden sailing ships, captains have enjoyed the happy privilege of joining two people in the bonds of matrimony. And so now it is my honor to unite you, Esther, daughter of Daniel and Jessica—my granddaughter—and Khor, son of Lantar, together in marriage here in the sight of your friends and family.”

Rabbi Gilman gestured behind her at the open airlock. “We hold this most sacred of ceremonies under the stars, as a sign of the blessing given by God to the patriarch Abraham, that his children shall be ‘as numerous as the stars of the heavens.’”

Gold continued, “In Starfleet, our mission is to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations.” Someone in the room coughed; Sonya couldn’t tell who.

Gilman took up the thread. “But the two of you are about to create a new world together, a world filled with new life of your own.”

Gold read from his notes. “With fire and steel did the gods forge the Klingon heart. So fiercely did it beat, so loud was the sound, that the Klingon gods cried out, ‘On this day we have brought forth the strongest heart in all the heavens. None can stand before it without trembling at its strength.’ But then the Klingon heart weakened, its steady rhythm faltered... and the gods said, ‘Why do you weaken so? We have made you the strongest in all of creation!’ And the heart said...”

Khor stepped under the chuppah and said, “I... am alone.”

Gold acknowledged him with a nod of his head and continued. “And the gods knew that they had erred. So they went back to their forge and brought forth another heart.” And Esther came forward,

resplendent in her gown. This was her moment, and she knew it. She walked under the chuppah, and began to circle Khor while her grandfather continued. “But the second heart beat stronger than the first, and the first was jealous of its power. Fortunately, the second heart was tempered by wisdom, and said...”

Esther said, “If we join together, no force can stop us.”

“And when the two hearts began to beat together, they filled the heavens with a terrible sound. To this day, no one can oppose the beating of two Klingon hearts.” Gold cast a brief look at Lantar, who didn’t quite seem to get what he was implying.

Gilman then brought forth a glass goblet filled with a nice Chateau Picard ’53. “We now recite the blessings over the wine.”

Sonya heard grumbling from the groom’s side of the aisle when the rabbi began her benediction.

When she was done with that, she said, “You may now drink of the wine.” She handed the glass to Esther, who took a sip, and then to Khor, who drank the remainder. Gilman smiled and took the glass back, wrapping it in cloth while her husband began to speak again.

Gold turned to his granddaughter. “Esther, daughter of Daniel—does your heart beat only for this man? And will you swear to join with him and stand with him against all who oppose you? For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health?”

She smiled. “I do.”

“And Khor, son of Lantar—does your heart beat only for this woman? And will you swear to join with her and stand with her against all who oppose you? For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health?”

Khor looked at the captain blankly...and said nothing.

And continued to say nothing for a whole second.

His face was expressionless, but Gold saw the flickering in Khor’s eyes—the same flicker he was sure he’d had in his own eyes on his wedding day, the knowledge that his life was going to change forever, that he could no longer go back to being who he was before.

Two seconds now. If Khor didn’t say something soon—

“It’s an easy question, Khor,” Esther said very quietly, her lips unmoving. “The answer is ‘Yes’ or you die where you stand.”

Khor turned and gazed at his bride, a huge smile on his face. “Now that,” he replied softly, “is a Klingon response.” Then, loudly, “I swear.”

“The ring, then, if you please,” said Gold.

Khor turned to Timrek and cleared his throat. Timrek leaned in and looked confused about where to put his sword while he dug out the rings. Finally, he handed the bat’leth to the groomsman on his right, and handed the rings to the captain, who then handed them to his wife. She said, “Khor, place this ring on Esther’s finger and say, ‘Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and

Israel.””

“Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel.”

“Esther, place this ring on Khor’s finger and say, ‘Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel.’”

“Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel.”

Rachel smiled. “May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord show you favor and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn in loving kindness to you and grant you peace. . .and let us all say Amen.”

And the congregation said, “Amen.”

Gold brought the wrapped glass forward as the rabbi continued speaking. “There is a tradition of our people of the breaking of the glass, to symbolize that in celebration there should always be awe and trembling, as well. And that even in the height of their joy, the couple must pause in remembrance of sad events of the past. The shattered glass is a reminder to all in attendance that the world is replete with imperfection and it is an imperative to all to partake in the mending of the universe. Khor and Esther, you should consider these marriage vows as an irrevocable act—just as permanent and final as the breaking of this glass is unchangeable.”

As Gold placed the glass down on the floor, a few Klingons started to sing—a deep, throaty rumble of a dirge. Sonya thought of Kieran Duffy, and her lip quivered. After the first verse, Khor joined in to the end of the second, then exhaled, and smashed the glass with his foot. Cries of “Mazel tov!” came from the bride’s side of the aisle, with more inarticulate grunts that the translators couldn’t handle from the groom’s side.

“Well,” came a comment from in front of Sonya, “that’s the last time he gets to put his foot down in the marriage.”

The rabbi smiled. “Then let it be known to all here that this male and female are married.”

And then the groomsmen attacked. And a wonderful time was had by all.

Chapter 12

“That is a wonderful tradition you have, Rabbi, the breaking of the glass at the end of the ceremony.”

“Thank you, Lantar,” Rachel said with a bow of respect to the ambassador. “That’s very kind of you to say.”

“I do have a question, though. Does the groom always wear footwear during it? It seems most. . .restrained.”

Rachel got the impression that the sudden elevation in status for her people had just dropped a bit and could plummet quickly based on her answer, so she simply shrugged and said, “It’s a Reform thing.”

Lantar seemed satisfied by that, so he went on. “How do you like the reception so far?”

“I’m truly stunned.” That was putting it both politely and mildly. Rachel had never seen a spread quite like this before. The Klingon embassy was going all out, as they would for a full state dinner—but without any of the polish that they might put on for a diplomatic affair. This was all Klingon.

“Rabbi!” She looked around, and saw that some people over at the buffet were waving for her attention. “Could you come here, please?”

“Would you excuse me, please, Lantar?”

“Of course, go ahead.”

She went over to the buffet table, a traditional gathering place for Jews at a wedding reception—except the ones here were just standing in front of the spread with suspicious looks on their faces. “Yes, how can I help, folks?”

“This stuff here—what is it called?”

“It is calledgagh,” Rachel replied.

“Yes,gagh. Um, Rabbi...” The woman lowered her voice to an exaggerated whisper. “Is this kosher?”

“Sadly, no. They crawl upon the ground.”

“Oh, okay. Sorry, sir. What else can you recommend?”

“Well, we have this...”

“Rabbi, is replicated food kosher?”

“Of course. What do you think gefilte fish is?”

* * *

“How are you doing, Captain?”

“Fine, thank you, Hawkins.”

“That was a lovely ceremony. A truly fascinating hybrid of cultures.”

“Thank you very much, Abramowitz.” He continued to nurse his drink.

“Sir, are you okay?” Vance Hawkins said. “You look like you’re having a bit of a stress headache. You can relax now, your job is done.”

“I know—I’m just having a very hard time getting used to a small Klingon orchestra trying to play klezmer music.”

“Really?” said Carol Abramowitz. “I like it.”

“Of course you would,” said Gold.

Hawkins rolled his eyes, hoping he wouldn’t get dragged into this.

“Hawkins, what do you think?”

The deputy security chief’s luck was running true to form. He looked at the glass in Gold’s hand. “You know, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you hold on so tightly to a drink before, sir. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“In a manner of—”

“Daaaaavid!” It was said from only halfway across the room, but there was a good chance it could have been heard from orbit. Hawkins, out of reflex, moved to interpose himself between the sound and the captain. Abramowitz saw a very large woman heading toward them—not so much large as wide, but—

“David, that was a very, very lovely ceremony.”

“Hello, Mother Gilman.” He turned back toward Carol. “Chief Vance Hawkins, Dr. Carol Abramowitz, I’d like you to meet Eva Gilman, my mother-in-law.”

“Oh, a doctor? How lovely!” Eva said. “Maybe you can help me, I’ve been trying to find someone to help me with my knees, I’ve been told I have to have them replaced, you know, at my age, it’s a horrible thing, and I can’t find anybody on the West Coast that I like, they’re all these technicians, no bedside manner at all, it’s like they don’t even want to talk to you as a real person, so do you know anybody?”

“I’m sorry, Ms. Gilman—”

“Eva, darling, it’s Eva.”

Abramowitz smiled. “Eva, I’m sorry, I don’t think I can help.”

“Oh, you must know somebody on Earth, I know that you must spend a lot of time in space with David, but there must be someone.”

“No, it’s not that. My field of study is cultural anthropology.”

“Oh, so you’re not a real doctor, Carol?”

Abramowitz smiled even more. Hawkins knew that look and was suddenly worried for Eva Gilman’s safety. Captain Gold rubbed his temple with his thumb.

* * *

“Wasn’t that a lovely ceremony?” Bart said to Anthony. The two of them were tucked away at a quiet table, each nursing a drink.

“That’s all you can think to talk about, how the wedding looked? Nothing about how good I look in a tuxedo?”

“I never thought you could get away with wearing leather to a wedding.”

“Only after the summer.”

“Well, of course. Heatstroke.”

Anthony looked over at the bride and groom, who were going from table to table doing the meet-and-greet, yet another tradition that transcended cultures. “It really was lovely...I bet we’d look good in those outfits.”

Bart arched an eyebrow. “Which of us wears the leather instead of the dress?”

“Me.”

“No.”

“Vain.”

“Beast.”

“Stereotype.”

“Stereotype? Moi?” Bart put his hand to his chest and fluttered. “You’re the one trying to put me in taffeta.”

Anthony rolled his eyes. “Seriously, Bart.”

“Seriously? Here we were, having a nice time at a wedding, and you ruin it by talking about getting married.” He swallowed the rest of his drink. “I’m empty. Can I get you a refill?”

“Sure. Whatever.”

* * *

“Proprioception? What is that?”

“It’s a rare offshoot of my Betazed heritage,” Rennan Konya said. “Rather than having empathy or telepathy, I have proprioception.”

“Yes,” Dantas Falcão said, “but what is it? I don’t think I’ve come across it in the medical books.”

“Oh. It allows me to tap into other people’s motor cortexes, specifically. I can sense what an opponent will do in hand-to-hand combat before it happens. It gives me a great advantage in martial arts fighting.”

“Rrrreally. Can I test it?”

“Sure. Come at me. I’ll even close my eyes, make it easy on you.”

Dantas looked at him, then lunged straight at him. He blocked her easily, grabbing her by her shoulders and stopping her a few inches from his face. Quickly, she leaned forward and kissed him.

He opened his eyes, surprised. “Well, I didn’t expect you to do that.”

“Can it be used for anything else? Such as...dancing?”

“What kind of dancing?”

“Let’s get on the floor and see what happens.” She smiled wolfishly. As he knew she would.

* * *

“Once upon a time, not long ago,” Rachel said to the assembled crowd, “there lived a princess named Atalanta, who could run as fast as the wind. She was so bright, and so clever, and could build things and fix things so wonderfully that many young men wished to marry her.”

“This is the Atalanta of Greek mythology?” Abramowitz asked.

“More or less, but that’s not how I heard the story, and that’s not how I explained it to Rachel,” Gold said.

“Oh, a later reinterpretation?”

“Yes,” Rachel said, “and if you’d let me finish telling the story, you’d see how.”

“Sorry, Rabbi.”

“Where was I? Oh yes. Everyone wanted to marry her, which was vexing to Atalanta’s father, who was a powerful king. ‘So many want to marry you, and I don’t know how to choose.’

“‘You don’t have to choose, Father,’ said Atalanta. ‘I will choose. And I’m not sure that I will choose to marry anyone at all. I intend to go out and see the world. When I come home, perhaps I will marry, and perhaps I will not.’ The king, of course, did not like this at all. He was an ordinary king: powerful, and used to having his way.” Lantar cleared his throat. Rachel smiled, ignored it magnificently, and went on. “He told Atalanta, ‘I have decided how to choose whom you will marry. I will hold a great race, and the winner, the swiftest and fleetest of them all, will win the right to marry you.’

“Now, you must know that Atalanta was as clever as she was swift. She told her father, ‘Very well then, let there be a race. But you must let me run in it too. And if I am not the winner, I will accept the wishes of the one who is. If I am the winner, I will choose for myself what I will do.’ The king agreed to this. He would have his way, marry off his daughter, and enjoy a fine day of racing as well.”

“The king agreed to let his daughter race?” Khor said. Esther shushed him, a rapt expression on her face.

“He felt he had naught to fear from her actually winning—it was unheard of. But Atalanta was preparing for the race. Each day at dawn, she went to the field in secret, until she could run the course in just three minutes—more quickly than anyone had ever run it before.”

“Captain,” Hawkins whispered into his ear, “isn’t this your story? Shouldn’t you be the one telling it?”

“She’s made it her own. And besides, I’m not going to interrupt a storyteller in front of her audience.

Look.” He indicated the growing crowd, with a number of Gold grandchildren and great-grandchildren sitting and looking on, as well as a number of Klingons who were curious at this new story. Even Esther—this was one of her favorite stories from childhood.

“As the day of the race grew nearer and nearer, suitors for the hand of the fair princess began to crowd into the town. Each was sure he could win the prize, except for one. That was young John, who lived in the town. Young John saw the princess only from a distance, but he understood how bright and clever she was. He wished very much to race with her, to win and earn the right to talk with her, and to become her friend. ‘For surely,’ he said to himself, ‘it is not right for Atalanta’s father to give her away to the winner of the race. One so alive and filled with life must choose for herself whom she wants to marry, or whether she wishes to marry at all. Still, if I could only win the race, I would be free to speak to her, and to ask for her friendship!’ And so, each evening, after his studies of the stars and the seas, John went to the field in secret and practiced running across it. Night after night, he raced as fast as the wind across the twilight field, until he could cross it in three minutes, more quickly, he thought, than anyone had run it before.

“Finally, the day of the race came. The young men gathered at the edge of the field, along with Atalanta herself, the prize that they sought. Then a bugle sounded—” She mimicked a bugle cry, which got laughter from the children. “—and the runners were off!” And now she started to move in a small circle, playing to the kids.

“The crowds cheered as the young men and Atalanta began to race across the field. At first, they ran as a group, but Atalanta soon pulled ahead, with three close behind her. As they neared the halfway point, one of them put on a great burst of speed and seemed to pull ahead for an instant, but then gasped, and fell back. Atalanta shot on!” The kids squealed.

“Then another drew near to Atalanta, reached out as if to touch her sleeve, stumbled for an instant, and lost speed. Atalanta smiled as she ran on. ‘I have almost won!’ she thought.

“Just then another man drew near to her. This was young John, running like the wind, as steadily and as swiftly as Atalanta herself.” At this, Gold came up next to his wife. “Atlanta felt how close he was, and in a sudden burst, she dashed ahead.” She took a step forward and continued. “But John didn’t give up.”

“Nothing at all,” said Gold, “will keep me from winning my chance to speak with Atalanta.” And he took a step, to be side by side with her. The children stared, enraptured.

Rachel continued. “Atalanta was aware of him, and she raced even faster. But John was a strong match for her. And, smiling, Atalanta and John reached the finish line together!”

“A tie!” Esther said, and led the young children in a cheer as they shouted and leapt about.

Rachel affected a stern king voice, and addressed David. “‘Young John,’ said the king, as John and Atalanta stood before him, ‘you have not won the race, but you have come closer to winning than any man here. And so I give you the prize that was promised: the right to marry my daughter.’”

And here Gold took up the story. “Young John smiled at Atalanta, and she smiled back. They had found their match in each other. ‘Thank you, sir,’ said John to the king, ‘but I did not win this race, and could not possibly marry your daughter unless she wished to marry me. I have run this race for the chance to talk with Atalanta.’”

Rachel laughed. “‘And I would like nothing better than to spend the afternoon with you.’ And she held

out her hand to young John, who took it.” And so did Rachel and Gold. “Then the two of them sat and talked on the grassy field. Atalanta told John about her books and her studies, and John told Atalanta about his globes and his star charts. At the end of the day, they were friends.

“The next day, John set off by ship to discover new lands, and Atalanta set off on horseback to visit great cities. Perhaps someday they’ll be together for the rest of their days, and perhaps they will not.

“In any case,” they finished in unison, “it is certain they are both living happily ever after.”

Rachel grimaced. “To this day, he calls me Atalanta whenever he thinks I’m being too much of a princess.”

“But what does it mean?” said a young Klingon to his mother.

“It’s a silly human story,” she said as she led him away from the gathered people.

“But I thought she was brave....”

* * *

“Look, fuzzy—”

“My name is ge’Nilet, madam.”

“Ge’Nilet, all I want is a tequila. Is that so much to ask?”

“I’m sorry, we don’t have any of this—what did you call it?”

“Tequila.” Domenica Corsi spoke very slowly and deliberately. “I could have sworn you would have it. It’s an alcoholic beverage with a worm in the bottle. Klingons should love it.”

“Oh! You wantgaghtlhuth. Just a moment.” The al’Hmatti bartender reached under the bar and pulled out a black bottle.

Corsi looked at the bottle dubiously. “I assume the skulls painted on the side are just for decoration?”

“Oh, it’s quite mild.” He poured out a small amount. It had a reddish tint and seemed a bit oily.

Oh, what the hell. “To your health,” she said, and sipped at the rim of the glass. Spicyspicyhothotwow!

“Do you like it?”

“I’ll take the bottle,” she gasped. “I have phaser rifles I can clean with this stuff.”

“Happy to oblige.”

Corsi eyed the oversized, bearlike bartender. “What are you doing here? I would have thought that everyone working this event would be a Klingon.”

“Oh, I’ve been with Lantar’s House for a long time. So long, in fact, that I’m first in line to be the al’Hmatti ambassador to the Federation, when that day happens.”

“God willing, then, and praise the al’Hmatti.” Corsi toasted the bartender.

* * *

“Captain, although that was a lovely story, it’s not quite in line with the traditional version in mythology.”

“Oh? How so, Abramowitz?”

“Well, in the traditional myth the suitor won, not tied. And he won only by tricking her along the way. And those who lost the race were put to death.”

“Hmmm.” He stroked his chin in exaggerated thoughtfulness. “How about we don’t tell her about that version, then?”

“Of course, sir.”

“Good.”

“Daaaaavid!” The captain winced again.

“Would you excuse me for a moment?” Gold asked.

“Are you sure you don’t want us to keep you here for a while?” asked Hawkins.

“Thank you for the offer, but no. I better go deal with her, lest she undo the last ten years of treaty negotiations.” He moved off quickly on an intercept course between Eva and Lantar.

Hawkins watched his captain go to face a peril worse than death. “Well, I guess I know why now.”

“Why what?”

“Why young John is still off sailing the seas.”

Carol looked up at him for a second. Then she stepped on his toes. Slowly.

* * *

Anthony continued to sit in the corner, silently observing the ebb and flow of people around him. Over there, a couple was beginning to dance.

“Hiya, Anthony. Do you mind if I join you?”

He looked up, surprised. “Dr. Lense?”

“Please, it’s Elizabeth.” She sat down next to him, a bit ungracefully.

“Why come over here? I thought you’d be the belle of the ball.”

“Nah. The Klingons want no part of me whatsoever. They heard I was the savior of Sherman’s Planet. Apparently, it’s still a sore spot in their history. Something about the great tribble hunt of eleventy-seven or something.” She gestured over to the gathering of humans. “And the bride’s family wants to ask me

about all their little aches and pains.” She looked at the glass in her hand. “And I am also, I suspect, a little bit drunk.”

“Ah.”

“And what about you? What are you doing here?”

“Waiting for Bart, I suppose.”

“Bart? Last I saw, he was in line at the bar, chatting with Fabian and being a general social butterfly.”

He looked over at her. “Let me ask you a question.”

“As long as it doesn’t require a physical exam, shoot.”

“Why do most relationships break up?”

“You are asking the wro-o-ng person, Anthony.” She looked up at the ceiling. “I don’t think I’ve ever had a successful romantic relationship in my life.”

“Do you think these two will make it?”

She sighed. “I don’t know. The odds are good in so many ways—but there’s a lot against them too. They come from different cultures—”

“Don’t we all, when you get down to it?”

“Point.”

Anthony leaned forward, looking more intent. “Really, what do you think makes one coupling work over another?”

Lense pondered that for a bit, and then said, “Po.”

“I beg your pardon?”

Lense leaned forward, and spoke very slowly. “Po.”

“Doctor, maybe it’s time that you switch to drinking synthehol.”

“No, no, no...” she waved her hand, as if swatting at flies—or for all Anthony could tell, green fairies. “Po. One word. Two letters. P-O. Concept described by de Bono.” No sign of recognition of the name came to Anthony’s face, so she continued. “Edward de Bono was born in Malta on Earth in the twentieth century. He attended St. Edward’s College during World War II and then the University of Malta, where he qualified in medicine. He proceeded, as a Rhodes Scholar, to Christ Church, Oxford, where he gained an honors degree in psychology and physiology and then a D.Phil. in medicine. He also held a Ph.D. from Cambridge and an M.D. from the University of Malta, and held appointments at the universities of Oxford, London, Cambridge, and Harvard. Brilliant, brilliant man.” She rattled off the credentials as if she’d just finished writing her college thesis on the man.

“I’ve never heard of him.”

“And this is what passes for a Federation education these days? De Bono’s special contribution was to take creativity and, for the first time in history, put the subject on a solid basis. He showed that creativity was a necessary behavior in a self-organizing information system, and how the nerve networks in the brain formed asymmetric patterns as the basis of perception. He was ten years ahead of contemporary mathematicians dealing with chaos theory, nonlinear and self-organizing systems.” Still nothing. “He invented the term ‘lateral thinking.’”

“Okay, that I’ve heard of.”

“Oh goody.” She was beginning to warm to the topic. “He showed that the logical alternatives are easily explored in most situations—either ‘yes, it is,’ or ‘no, it isn’t.’ But logic isn’t effective in coping with open-ended problems. It takes a long time before an unjustified step is taken, because no one feels justified in taking it. Yet only unjustified steps are likely to open up new patterns of thought.”

“So what does Po have to do with this?”

“Well, de Bono suggested that to solve a problem, the thinker should relate the problem at hand to a random input, such as a word chosen by chance in a dictionary, and then see if he can, by connecting the two, open up a new approach to the situation. And the word he created to couple the two concepts was...” Here she paused.

After a second, Anthony realized she was waiting for him to reply. “Po?”

“Gold star! Head of the class! I have competition!” She raised her glass to him, took another sip—a big sip—and went on. “So you use it to combine concepts and see where it takes you. Like diamondpo spaceships.”

“Or rabbitspo flight.”

“Kidneypo electricity.”

“Marblespo frontier.”

“Holodeckpo headgear.”

“Klingonspo Judaism.”

“Yes! That’s it exactly. Maybe it’ll work, maybe it won’t. But if a coupling of complete non sequiturs can be made and held together, even for a little while, something new and exciting can come out of it. And that’s what a marriage needs. Creativity. Being in an ongoing relationship means that things always have to be kept new and interesting, yet at the same time secure and stable. People love nothing more than to be pleasantly surprised—even by the familiar and the comforting.”

“You have to give the other what they want and need, but not always what they expect?”

“Exactly.” She leaned even closer to him, putting a hand on his shoulder. “That’s exactly what I mean. Sometimes you have to look in strange places to get something new, and sometimes it’s right there all the time, you just have to find a new way of looking at it.”

“You’re right. Thank you.” And he kissed her on the lips, a kiss that lingered. After a second or two, he

pulled back. "I'm going to go find Bart and talk with him. See you soon."

Elizabeth sat there, not moving at all except for blinking.

"Yes," she said at last. "Exactly like that."

* * *

"Nice ceremony," Kendra commented, handing Fabian a glass of champagne.

"Yeah, it was," he agreed. "Though I think I'll stick with the old 'I do's.'"

She nudged him, smiling. "Got someone in mind there, mister?"

He laughed. "You never know, Ken. You never know."

Just then Kendra's padd beeped.

"Trouble at work?" Fabian joked, but stopped when he saw the look on her face. "Ken, is everything okay?"

She had turned completely pale, and looked a bit stunned. "Fabe, I—"

Quickly he pulled the padd from her hand and read the message. Then he glanced up at her.

"Ken, they approved theHyperion! That's fantastic!"

She still looked shocked. "But—I don't understand. It failed."

"Not at all," he assured her, and she looked at him, then looked again. He was trying to hide the smile, but knew he wasn't succeeding.

"What did you do, Fabe?"

"Me?" He laughed. "Nothing. Well, okay, I did point out to Starfleet that none of the problems were with your design—they were all from outside sources. And I also mentioned that no existing ship design could have handled so much damage for that long. I guess they agreed."

"But—" She was still at a loss for words, and Fabian hugged her.

"Ken, relax. You did it. TheHyperion's a great design—trust me, I spent two days going over every inch of it. You did a great job, and Starfleet saw that. They do occasionally notice such things, you know." He held up his glass, and she finally raised hers.

"Here's to good friends," Kendra managed, smiling at him. "I couldn't have done this without you, Fabe."

"Maybe you could have," he replied, "but it probably wouldn't have been such a mess." Then he clinked her glass. "To old friends. And to theHyperion."

"To theHyperion." She started to move her glass, but paused as she saw the look in his eye. Sure

enough, Fabian clinked his glass against hers again.

“And to a good prank,” he toasted, and she laughed.

“Always,” she said. “To a good prank.” She sipped her champagne, then grinned at him. “So what did you do to Crawford?”

Fabian grinned back. “Oh, just a little of his own medicine. But I’m not the one who did it.”

* * *

“Computer, open this door!”

“Access denied,” the computer replied.

Crawford Pressman banged on his door again, but to no avail. Somehow the computer was refusing to recognize his voice or his password. Which meant that, since his door had inexplicably locked itself, he couldn’t open it. And he’d been stuck in here for hours now!

“Computer,” he shouted again, “this is Professor Crawford Pressman. I demand that you open this door!”

“Access denied,” the computer replied again. And was it his imagination, or did it sound a little smug?

“Dammit!” Pressman pounded on the door again. “Someone, help me!” He was starting to feel faint from hunger. And he desperately needed a bathroom. “Anyone!”

Outside his office, several students glanced at the door on their way past, and laughed but kept on walking. Alex Sparks watched it all from where he leaned, directly across from Pressman’s door. He had to admit, imagining the look on his colleague’s face was entertaining. And the looks from the students were priceless. Perhaps there was something to this whole prank thing, after all.

“Help!” Pressman called again, though Alex could barely hear him through the door. Chuckling a little, he levered himself away from the wall and walked off down the hall, whistling softly to himself.

About the Authors

When last we left GLENN HAUMAN’s biography in Book 1, he was going to tell you about his company LotAuctions.com and the patent he has pending for that business—however, he was recently surprised to find out that he missed out on having the patent for the Internet shopping cart. This means he’s missed out on being an Internet millionaire five times over instead of four, as he previously thought. He consoles himself in his spare time by being Star Trek’s answer to Nicholson Baker, and by running the websites for GrimJack.com, JonSable.com, PeterDavid.net, and BobGreenberger.com, and writing the Photoshop blog for Weblogs, Inc. Because, you know, he’s not in this for the money, but for the power and prestige.

AARON ROSENBERG writes role-playing games (including the Origins Award-winning Gamemastering Secrets), S.C.E. eBooks (including the Psi Phi Awards Hall of Fame inductee Collective Hindsight), short stories (“Inescapable Justice” in Imaginings: An Anthology of Long Short Fiction), educational books, and anything else people want to pay him for. When not writing, he runs his game publishing company Clockworks (www.clockworksgames.com), reads comics, watches movies, or spends time

with his wife, their daughter, and their cat. Every so often he sleeps, just for variety.

Coming Next Month: Star Trek™: S.C.E. #49

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by David Mack

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