

In Between Logic and Longing

Part 2 of the *Brief Encounter* trilogy

Chapter 1

"Jim you need to get down here."

"Why? What's going on?"

"Jim, it's Admiral Nogura."

"What do you mean?"

"She's down here in the sickbay; she was one of the passengers we rescued from the Atrades."

Kirk sat in his chair, stupefied for a moment. Nogura, here, on his ship?

McCoy's voice broke over the comm.-link again. "Well, Jim, are you coming or not?"

"On my way, Bones."

Kirk left his seat in a rapid, fluid, though distracted motion. He had no words at the moment. He merely looked at Spock and gestured to the command chair as he hastened to the turbolift.

As Spock moved to take his position, he himself was similarly distracted when Uhura immediately leapt up from her own chair and asked to be dismissed from the bridge. And before he even had time to summon a member of the Operation's staff to the communications station to take her place, she was already gone on the next available lift.

Kirk made it to the corridor outside of sickbay and heard the soft, rapid footfalls directly behind him, however he was in too much of a hurry to see who they belonged to. The door to sickbay swished open and Kirk, looking left then right, pass rushing med techs and at all of the started and stunned faces of the refugees, quickly determined that Nogura wasn't one of the group. He decided upon one of the more private examination rooms; here he had much more success.

She was sitting up on a bio-bed, her head down, the mass of wavy hair wild about her head and shoulders. When she heard his entrance, she glanced up, her expression, wry.

"I bet I was the last person in the world you expected to see turn up on your ship."

"Admiral?" asked Kirk, as if saying her title alone was enough of a question to encompass all of his immediate queries into one word. However, feeling extremely inane for asking her for her own diagnosis, he turned to McCoy, doing exactly the same thing. "Bones?"

"A broken wrist, she was also shaken up a bit; a few minor cuts and abrasions; she'll live."

"Well of course I'll live; no one dies from a broken wrist! I might die from the pain, though; shoot me up with something, will you?"

As soon as the hypospray left her neck, the Admiral just happened to glance up and over Kirk's shoulder, noticing the other occupant of the room.

"Why in the world are you *still* a lieutenant?"

Kirk's head whipped around to look behind him.

Uhura.

Uhura's lips curled into a snarl when she replied. "I'm still a Lieutenant because I never felt the *need* to sleep my way to the top... *Admiral*."

Nogura scoffed. "And that's the key word, isn't it? Need. I admit, I do have my needs, but you, on the other hand, you never needed anything or anyone. And sister, I just have to look to see that you *need* something really bad."

"You stupid-ass-!"

Nogura ignored the explicative and pressed on. "You should be a full commander by now. Is it Kirk? Is he holding you back? Typical!" she spat. "Just say the word and I can have you off this ship and out from under this jack-ass today, unless you *want* a chance to get up under him."

"I think you need to watch your mouth!"

"How about: bitch? Am I allowed to say that word? Bitch!"

Kirk's head was snapping back and forth at the heated exchange between the two women, finding himself in the rare position of not knowing what in the hell to do.

Uhura took two steps forward and calmly said, "Here's a word you're much more familiar with: whore!"

Kirk's head snapped to the left. He was even more shocked to hear such a word come from his usually professional and courteous communication's chief.

"And damn proud of it, too!"

"Right. *Right!*" said McCoy, stepping in between the two women when he saw that Kirk would not. "Let's get you squared away, Admiral. That wrist of yours will be stiff for a few days, so take it easy. All we need to do now is see about getting you some quarters; as you can imagine we're pretty full up at the moment, but we should be able to come up with something."

"She can have my quarters, Doctor; I'll see about bunking with Christine."

Nogura was all over that. "You will do no such thing, Lieutenant; I can bunk with you. I listened to you snore for four years, it's not going to kill me to listen to you snore for a few days more."

"What makes you think I want you sleeping anywhere near me?"

"Because you didn't scratch my eyes out as soon as you came in; that tells me that you may still have some regard for me. Don't make me pull rank, *Lieutenant.*"

Uhura didn't want to hear it anymore. She pivoted sharply and made for the door. The Admiral's next words stopped her cold; the hard edge of her voice now completely gone, turning into a soft plea.

"Ny, please. Please."

Unshed tears brightened the Admiral's eyes; she was holding it together as best she could and Uhura knew it wouldn't take too much more of anything before Admiral Nogura broke down completely.

Uhura moved quickly and had the battered woman in her arms in no time. She looked up to both men, telling them plainly with her eyes to leave them alone for

a moment; with Kirk making a silent communication of his own: he wanted an explanation and soon.

Admiral Nogura, sensing that they were finally alone, relaxed her posture and let her rigid body slump within Uhura's embrace.

"OK," said Nyota, "OK; it's all right; it's all right; go ahead, they're gone." She soothed the Admiral with her hands, stroking the matted, red hair while Nogura wailed pitifully against her, grabbing and clawing at Uhura's arms and shoulders as if she were drowning and needed rescuing.

"I just wanted to see him one more time; even if it was just an illusion; just one more time."

"Shhh. Shhh."

"You're the only one that understands. You're the only friend I have left. I love you so much, Nyota."

"I know, I know; I love you too, Gaila."

Chapter 2

Gaila walked around Uhura's quarters picking things up and putting things down again, almost as if she needed to inspect everything and anything in a fit of nervous energy. This was no formal Starfleet Admiral's inspection by any means, it was merely Gaila, the woman, trying to determine just how much or how little her friend had changed.

A curious musical instrument drew her notice and she walked over to it, strummed her fingers over the strings, and produced an earsplitting sound. She winced.

"This looks like some sort of harp."

Uhura did not bother to glance up. "It's called a Ka'athyra, more commonly known as a Vulcan lyre."

Uninterested, Gaila shrugged and continued on with her inspection of the lieutenant's quarters. She eventually walked over to the other side of the room to inspect the dressing area. Since she was once Nyota's roommate at the Academy, in her mind, she assumed that she was *still* permitted certain privileges. She opened the top drawer of the bureau and pulled out a long, sheer length of royal blue fabric and wrapped it around her neck.

"Can I have this veil?"

Uhura glanced up this time, pausing for a moment from the task of readying the cot that she would later sleep on.

"No, you most certainly may not," she snapped. "And it is not a veil; it is a tu'ruth, a wrap."

Gaila ran her fingers over a few partially recognizable letters embroidered on the edges. Her Vulcan language skills had always been atrocious; she spoke it better than she actually read it and that in itself wasn't saying much. She tried to make out the words, but "yelkam" was all she got, and that didn't make any sense.

"This is Vulcan, isn't it? And where, may I ask, are you going to wear a Vulcan wrap?"

"It was a gift, now put it back, please."

Gaila studied herself in the mirror, comparing the hue of her skin and hair and finding nothing about the wrap complimentary in the least.

"Not my color, anyway." She took it off, bunched it up, and shoved it back into the top drawer.

Nyota sighed tiredly. "That reminds me, I have a nightgown you can wear."

Uhura dropped the sheet she had been unfolding, went to her bureau, opened up the second drawer and took out a long white cotton gown and handed it over. Without missing a beat, she opened the top drawer, took out her tu'ruth, and carefully refolded it again.

Gaila held the nightgown aloft and away from her body in disgust.

"Nothing ever changes with you: same granny gowns, I see. You probably still wear those hideous white granny panties, too."

Uhura ignored her. "I've got to get back up to the bridge, so I will leave you to your rest. If you want anything to eat just call for the captain's steward; his name is Holliday. The Captain's yeoman is Duncan; she can get you squared away with the quartermaster, although, I doubt very much if there's an Admiral's uniform available in the ships stores. I'm off duty at 1800; if you like, we'll have dinner together if you're awake then."

Gaila looked at the floor while nodding, bit her lip, and took a hesitant step forward. Uhura thought she looked small like a little girl just then.

"N-Ny, before you go, tell me-Hikaru-." Gaila, uncertain, glanced up.

Uhura looked off into the middle distance and blew out a long, slow breathe.

"Look Gaila, I'm not going to lie to you, you have a lot of work to do there, I'm afraid. He hasn't gotten over it; he still blames you."

"Ok, I understand."

"He's currently away on leave."

Gaila's eyes returned to the floor. "I see."

"When he gets back, I'm not sure how he will react if he—"

"OK, I said; I got it!"

"You asked!"

Gaila's voice grew small. "I asked."

Kirk swiveled around quickly and his eyes alighted on her as soon as the turbolift doors swished open. Uhura felt his eyes following her all the way to the communication's station where she dismissed her relief.

"The Admiral?" he asked, in his usual shorthand.

"I've got her settled, sir; I think she'll sleep for the rest of the afternoon."

"Good," he replied concisely.

To Uhura, Kirk's eyes were inquiring for so much more, but fortunately for her, he had always been blessed with tact and would most likely save his inquiries for later. Kirk, done with her for the moment, turned his chair slightly to the left.

"Report, Mr. Spock."

"I've tracked the ion storm that disabled Captain Mar-ku-set's ship. It's on a heading of 233 mark 7. On that course, it will pass very near the Deltan system. I recommend that we issue a warning to Deltan Space Central as a precaution to prevent the same mishap that befell the *Atraides*."

Kirk turned back to Uhura. "Very well; got that, Lieutenant?"

"Aye, sir."

"And Lieutenant Uhura—" Uhura stopped what she was doing and looked at him quizzically. "—please join me for lunch today in the officer's—" he paused, changing his own course mid-sentence. "Better make that the *captain's* mess at 1300."

She turned back to her console and bent her head down in defeat. She knew very well that Kirk never used his personal mess for anyone other than the most important visitors; apparently *she* was going to be very *important* that day.

"Aye, aye, sir."

She entered the captain's private dining room to find Kirk alone. She immediately came to attention.

He was staring at her, a good, long stare, almost as if she was a Gorn and he was determining his next strategic move. And when he spoke, Uhura immediately knew that his voice was deceptively calm.

"At ease, Lieutenant, at ease. Have a seat."

When he moved to hold out the chair for her, she gulped; this couldn't be good.

"Thank you, sir."

Kirk took his own seat and a second or two later, the Captain's steward appeared with two steaming plates of spaghetti and meatballs. Uhura licked her lips, briefly wondering if the meatballs were real meat or the horrible kind usually served in the officer's mess, the kind made from reconstituted protein granules.

"Ahhh!" said Kirk, moaning in delight, "Real meatballs? Holliday, you've been holding out on me."

"Aye, sir," replied the steward, smilingly, as he placed the steaming plates in front of them.

Kirk looked into her eyes then and grinned, the kind of smile that he reserved for the things that he was about to devour... whole.

"Do you want know what's funny, Lieutenant Uhura?"

She nearly said no.

“Sir?”

“The fact that we’ve served together for almost five years and I have no idea if you even like spaghetti and meatballs.” He cocked his head to one side, his eyes doing that twinkling thing that they sometimes did. “Do you, Lieutenant?”

“Yes, sir.”

She laid her napkin neatly across her lap and waited. She knew that it couldn’t be long. This had always been Kirk’s way: polite conversation, first, the dressing down, second.

As Holliday fussed about, pouring out the glasses of iced tea from a carafe already on the table, Kirk continued playing the patience card.

“Funny isn’t it? All the new things you can learn about a person in one day, one hour, one minute, even; amazing!”

Uhura really didn’t have a ready reply; she just parroted back his words even though she actually wanted to groan in agony.

“Amazing.”

He took a slow sip from his own glass, leaned back in his chair, and regarded her narrowly until Holliday disappeared back through the galley doors. Uhura’s insides clinched in anticipation.

“That was quite a show you and Admiral Nogura put on this morning, Lieutenant!” he snapped.

Uhura rushed to explain. “I apologize, sir—the Admiral and I—there’s a history; it’s complicated. It won’t happen again.”

“You’re damned right it won’t happen again!”

"Of course, sir."

"I won't have it said that the crew of the Enterprise don't know how to carry themselves with the proper decorum and protocol befitting senior officers in the service of Starfleet!"

"Yes, sir."

"Not only was your attitude totally uncalled for, your use of explicit language was absolutely deplorable. If anything like this ever happens again, it will be your head on a platter. Is that understood, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, I understand, sir."

Silence reigned for a good thirty seconds as the captain's words hung in the air. Uhura's appetite for real meat was now completely gone.

Kirk then took up his fork and began hacking away at the large meatballs. He sighed deeply and lowered his voice.

"Well, if she didn't bust you down to crewman recruit for speaking to her in the way that you did, I can't very well do so myself, now can I?"

"No, sir." Once the words were out of her mouth, Uhura winced and squeezed her eyes shut. "I'm sorry, I mean, yes, sir."

He glanced up quickly then looked back down at his food.

"How do you and the Admiral know each other, anyway?"

"She was my roommate at the Academy, sir."

"I take it, then, that you have not kept in touch over the intervening years."

"Not really, sir; the last time I had any information about her, I heard it from Sulu."

Kirk's brow furrowed. "Sulu?"

Uhura paused for a moment. She didn't exactly want to out her friend. She had faithfully kept his secrets all these years.

"Sulu and Gaila – it's not really my story to tell, sir."

"Come now, Uhura. It's not as if I'm the gossiping sort. What you tell me will be held in confidence. So, what is it? Do they know each other?"

The way Kirk's eyebrows rose, she could see what his assumption was, which was wrong.

"Sulu and Gaila are –." She looked heavenward for strength. "Sulu and Gaila are related – through marriage, sir."

Kirk's eyes shifted back and forth a few times as he processed this new information.

"Wait a minute! Are you saying that Sulu and Admiral Nogura – Admiral Heihachiro Nogura, I mean, are – what to each other, exactly?"

"His uncle, sir; his mother's half brother."

Kirk's voice rose. "Why don't I know this? How is it possible that I don't know this?"

"Sulu doesn't broadcast the connection, sir. He wishes, like most people, to be judged on his own merits and abilities, not on the accomplishments of his prominent relations."

Kirk's look was incredulous. "Are there any more secrets about my crew that I should know about, Lieutenant?"

Uhura chuckled slightly. "Other than the fact that Chekov is the Tsar of all the Russia's?"

Kirk flashed Uhura a look that clearly said that he was not amused by her attempt at humor. Kirk spoke again.

"It is the general understanding that Admiral Heihachiro Nogura died almost two years ago on Orion Prime—some sort of diplomatic mission gone array—all very hush-hush and swept under the table, as I recall."

"It was a little more personal than that, I'm afraid, sir."

"Oh? How so?"

"Admiral Gaila Nogura has a younger sister. The plan, as I understand it, was to negotiate her release from the... establishment that she was contracted to. Somehow it turned into a midnight rescue attempt which he was undertaking on his own—very much alone. He ran afoul of Orion security—and Sulu—."

Kirk twirled the pasta around his fork, one eye quirking in her direction. "No, let me guess: Sulu blames this Admiral Nogura for the loss of his uncle."

"Yes, sir; he was his favorite uncle, responsible for pushing him in the direction of Starfleet and he was like a second father to him. Plus, there was all that talk back when she first made Admiral, just before she married Nogura—those hints of favoritism and all. Sulu believes that Gaila used her... talents with his uncle and—possibly with others to influence them in her elevation. It grated on Sulu at the time to think that his uncle, always so stalwart, so beyond reproach, could be made so gullible by the face of a lovely woman."

"So, I take it then, that our esteemed helmsman will not take kindly to her presence on the Enterprise once he returns from leave in two days time."

"No, sir."

"Then we'll just have to get her off this ship as soon as possible. If we didn't have the Atrades under tow, I could drop her off tonight. That being the case, we will put into Star Base 7 in the morning to let off Captain Mar-ku-set and his passengers and crew. She will naturally go with them and that will be that and we can all breathe a little easier. Agreed?"

"Yes, sir; agreed."

Kirk nodded down to her plate.

"Something wrong with your spaghetti, Lieutenant?"

"No, sir."

"Well, eat up or my steward will think you dislike his cooking. We only have a month left on this mission and I very well can't have Holliday crying for that entire time. Sometimes, dealing with him is worse than dealing with an entire squadron of Klingons."

Uhura allowed herself to smile and Kirk smiled in return, only this time, there was a definite friendliness behind it. And to add to his devilish charisma he graced Uhura with a wink when she finally picked up her fork.

Chapter 3

From the mere touch of his fingers on the controls, sometimes, he could sense the impression of her consciousness as it radiated out from her being by means of the panels of the adjoining communication's console.

Spock had never purposely sought Uhura out this way. It was one random, uneventful day, several weeks after she had first joined the Enterprise's crew, when her essence had simply found him and he could not help but feel astonished at the energy of a non-telepathic mind.

Over the years and at certain periods, especially during particularly quiet intervals upon the bridge, he could generally perceive the level of her fatigue, knew when she was especially happy, and even frequently he was able to ascertain whether or not she was about to fall from her chair, which, on more than one occasion proved to be quite helpful. From that point on and for some unknown reason, he found himself becoming especially watchful of her.

However, after her brush with NOMAD nearly three years previous, he began to comprehend that this simple state of watchfulness, was beginning to bear all the markings of a certain level of over-protectiveness.

He reduced the number of away missions she was assigned to; he purposely stood by her chair whenever they engaged in a battle; and, on more than one occasion, he questioned the need for her to communicate face-to-face with any alien species whose civilization ever had the remotest leanings towards any types of violence in their distance past.

It was after their encounter with the Tholian's which gave him the first hint that something was amiss in their professional shipboard relationship. He merely wished to protect her from her own self when he sought to disprove her theory that she had actually seen their missing Captain in the mirror in her quarters. However, once her observation had proven correct, he found that her demeanor towards him for several weeks after the incident was rather cool.

This culminated in the event where she snapped at him in the middle of a staff meeting for denying her suggestion, that she, as the only person on-board fluent in Cormari, should to act as interpreter on a trade negotiation with several Cormarian dilithium miners. He rejected her resolve to beam to the male-only mining camp on the surface for the simple reason that he *thought* they might look at her in a certain lascivious way.

It took exactly three weeks of intensive meditation until he finally convinced himself of the logical rationale of *not* permitting himself to become so over-protective of a woman who was not his mate, eventually deciding after feeling the waves of her abhorrence for those same three weeks that perhaps it was best *not* to use his connection with her through the ship's console too often.

Personally, a year or two after Uhura's encounter with NOMAD where her memories of their time spent together had been erased, he eventually had a few fleeting relationships himself, but nothing of any significance, and definitely nothing and with no one that he cared to remember. He sometimes wished that her memories would return, even though he knew deep within himself that wishes were too much like regrets and regrets were always highly illogical.

Once in the final year of their five year mission and with harmony and equanimity finally restored, their relationship was back to being as cordial as ever. He had some consolation in the fact that she took Ka'athyra lessons from him once a week where they would sit together in a quiet corner of the recreation room and make music to their heart's content.

Here he would offer guidance, give gentle encouragement, and on occasion, be permitted to touch her hand as he glided her soft fingers to the proper string. And she was the perfect student: always punctual for her lessons, always performing more than adequately and always listening attentively.

That afternoon, precisely thirty-two days before the end of their mission, Spock felt that Uhura's emotions were especially strong and it didn't take long to figure the reason why.

The very presence of Admiral Gaila Nogura onboard the Enterprise had caused Uhura's usual calm radiance through his fingers to send out waves of emotions that signaled that her control had begun to fray. However, when he looked over to gauge the situation for himself, she continued to portray the cool, collected Starfleet officer that she always presented to the world.

Minutes later, Spock suddenly sensed a fleeting wave of panic within her and he glanced over again. The first shift was now over and Uhura was standing up to turn her seat over to Lieutenant Palmer. His relief, Ensign Chekov approached the science station, so naturally Spock arose and joined several of the bridge crew, including Uhura, as they all entered the turbolift together to exit the bridge.

Spock stood on the far left of the lift and watched Uhura out of the corner of his eyes while she silently huddled on the far right, as the three other officers standing in between them chatted happily about their plans for the evening.

It was not unusual for Uhura to be the center of such discussions. Yet, at the present moment, she didn't seem to be listening to any of the conversation going on in front of her. She appeared distracted, detached even.

Reaching deck five, the other crewmembers bustled out noisily, but she remained, having held herself back, not realizing that the lift had stopped, her forearms wrapped tightly around her body.

"Lieutenant?"

Startled, she looked up, suddenly surprised by his voice and his presence.

"Oh, Mr. Spock; I'm sorry; I didn't see you there."

Whether it was because of guilt or embarrassment from having not noticed him, she glanced away. This only compelled him to take a small step forward.

"Is there something wrong, Lieutenant? May I be of assistance?"

She glanced up and favored him with a small smile, before biting her lip and looking away.

"Oh, no, sir; it's all right; thanks for asking, though."

"Very well."

He nodded for her to proceed and she had no other option but to move out of the lift herself. Their living quarters, though not in the same corridor, were in the same general direction, so he naturally followed her until they had reason to separate. However, a few meters from her door, she stopped in mid-stride and looked left then right as if trying to make a decision.

He moved around to face her. "Miss Uhura?"

She reluctantly glanced up. "Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"You seem somewhat indecisive. Are you certain that I can not be of assistance?"

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, sir." She turned away from him slightly and huffed impatiently. "I'm just—I'm just not ready to go to my quarters yet."

He had already deduced from her earlier conversation with the captain that Admiral Nogura was sharing her quarters; he sought to provide her with an alternative.

"The recreation room, perhaps?"

"No, too many people." She nervously chewed on her lip again, glancing back towards the turbolift. "I was only trying to determine where I could hide for the next hour or so."

"Hide?" He raised a brow. "Hiding is most advantageous when one seeks to remove oneself from a perilous and hazardous predicament? Since you are safely onboard the Enterprise, I assume that your need to hide for one of those reasons is highly unlikely."

"Yes, both perilous and hazardous," she replied, grinning, clearly amused with something he'd said, "something like that."

He did not understand.

"Might I suggest the observation deck, then? The number of crewmembers using that area of the ship is reduced significantly during this time of the day."

"No, the observation deck will be the next place they look."

"It would appear, then, that your only option is to pilot a shuttlecraft away from the Enterprise. Of course, the difficulty lies in getting the shuttlecraft off the ship without detection."

He observed the rolling of her eyes. "Are you trying to be funny, Mr. Spock?"

"The thought of being *funny* never occurred."

He watched as Uhura pressed her lips together into a dissatisfied line; whether she was dissatisfied with him or with her predicament, he could not determine.

She groaned. "This is a big ship, there has got to be somewhere I could go to be off the grid for a little while."

He had an idea.

"You are welcome to join me in my quarters for your Ka'athyra lesson, if you wish. No one would think to look for you there; then again, it would be a simple matter of seeking you out via the shipwide--"

She cut him off, her face covered with a grateful expression that even he had to admit warmed him immensely.

"That's an excellent idea, Mr. Spock! Oh, but my instrument --?"

"You are welcome to use mine."

She reached out to grasp his upper arms, but at the last second, she restrained herself.

"Are you sure? I mean, I wouldn't wish to intrude."

"It is of little matter. It presents an excellent opportunity to practice the higher-pitched notes that you have been having trouble with. You can now do so without disturbing the others in the recreation room."

She cocked an amused eyebrow up at him. "Why Mr. Spock, are you saying that my playing is somewhat lacking?"

"No," he said, raising an eyebrow of his own, "in this instance, I was endeavoring to be *funny*."

The first thing he noticed was the way she hesitated at the entryway. She stood there looking all around, taking it all in.

"You may enter, Miss Uhura."

She slapped her forehead and then chuckled. "Yes, of course." Spock didn't understand this either.

"Does something amuse you, Miss Uhura?"

"I was thinking how funny it is that after five years of serving together, I have never been inside your quarters before." She glanced casually to the left and studied his sleeping alcove. "Boy, you *really* like red, I see."

He, of course, knew that she *had* been inside his quarters before, but that particular memory, along with several others, were now gone.

"And the sight of the color red makes you laugh?"

"Actually, it's Captain Kirk who makes me laugh."

"Thinking of Captain Kirk amuses you?"

"No," she smiled and shook her head. "It was just something he said at lunch today; something about working together for so long and not knowing whether I liked spaghetti and meatballs. Do you?"

"Do I what?"

"Like spaghetti and meatballs?" At his raised eyebrows she quickly corrected herself. "OK, spaghetti, then?"

"How does my liking or not liking spaghetti fall into the realm of things that amuse you?"

"It really has nothing to do with spaghetti; the captain was simply trying to understand why he does not know *certain* things about Sulu and me."

"I assume you mean the fact that you have a long-standing acquaintance with Admiral Gaila Nogura, in addition to the fact Admiral Gaila Nogura is also Lieutenant Sulu's aunt by marriage."

Her brow furrowed. "How do you-?"

"Miss Uhura, I am sure you are aware that as the Enterprise's first officer it is my business to know everything about the crew. As captain, Captain Kirk has many more important considerations. What is currently unclear to me is why you seek to hide from the Admiral?"

"I am not hiding *from* the Admiral; I'm just... hiding." At his doubtful look, she ducked her head.

"You both attended the academy together and shared a dwelling within the Archer Residence Hall. I always understood that such connections often increased the bonds of friendships in humans that often extend well into later life."

"Gaila and I—Admiral Nogura, I should say—lord, I'm never going to get used to saying that—we haven't spoken in—our relationship is complicated."

"And no doubt personal; understood." He quickly changed the subject. "Now, before we begin the lesson, shall you require a beverage?"

She reached out and placed her hand on his sleeve.

"I didn't mean to make it sound like some sort of deep, dark secret or anything, Mr. Spock. I mean, I don't mind if you know. I find that I really would like—I really do need to talk about it. Since Sulu isn't here, there's no one else on the ship to talk to who could listen to me objectively and without judgment."

He looked down at the hand resting on his sleeve and then looked into her eyes. She immediately removed her hand and looked down at her feet almost as if she knew she was asking too much of him.

He immediately sought to put her at her ease.

"I have no objection to listening."

When she glanced back up, he indicated one end of his sofa. After she sat down, he took the other end and waited patiently. As she ordered her thoughts, Spock calculated that she was silent for exactly sixty-four seconds before she spoke.

"Gaila and I met on the opening day at the Academy. She'd been assigned another roommate—a Deltan—who was apparently under some Starfleet ordered vow of celibacy. The Deltan took one look at the Orion who was not under a similar order and knew immediately that there was bound to be trouble. You see, both culture's sexual natures are such that you can't very well deny one of them something while permitting the other—"

Spock felt the beginnings of a flush in his cheeks. "I understand Miss Uhura; there is no need to explain further. Please continue."

She nodded and pressed on. "I was assigned to the room across the hall. My roommate had changed her mind at the last minute and decided not come. I was looking forward to having a room all to myself, but then, there was Gaila, cast off first by her people and then by her roommate... and she was sitting in the middle of the hall, surrounded by the few ragged possessions she had to her name... and she just looked so sad."

"I can well understand what occurred next."

"Oh, you do?"

"I have always found your compassion for others both pleasing and reassuring."

She bit her lip and lowered her eyes, slightly embarrassed by the tacit compliment. Once she regained her composure, she continued.

"As you can probably imagine, Gaila and I were as different as night is to day, but surprisingly, we got along very well. Of course, there were those times I just wanted to kill her." Uhura gave Spock a small smile. "You see, Gaila had a habit of bringing guys back to our room, for, you know—" Uhura simply held out both her palms hoping he understood what she meant.

Spock nodded in understanding.

"As time went by our love for each other grew stronger and stronger—we were, if you can believe it, like sisters. Being an outcast, she couldn't very well go back to Orion Prime for obvious reasons, so, almost every holiday, break, or odd weekend, Gaila came home to Tanzania with me. My family loved her, even all my friends—"

Here Uhura stopped talking, only to stand and walk over to the desk, fingering a few objects there. With her back to him she spoke next in a small, strangled voice.

"Would it surprise you, Mr. Spock, to know that I never intended to travel into deep space?"

Spock sensed the question's rhetorical nature and said nothing.

"You see, I had a young man back home. His name was Djefre. We were very much in love. He was studying Comparative Biology at the university in Nairobi while I was at the academy. We were planning to get married as soon as our

studies were completed. Djefre had been offered a teaching post in Munich and with that in mind, I had requested and was granted an assignment on Starbase One as an interpreter. That way I could beam down from the Space station and be home every night to be with my husband."

When she finally turned around to face him, just from her expression, Spock immediately sensed where the story was headed, but said nothing.

"For some reason and I never exactly figured out how, Djefre and Gaila had never met; conflicting schedules and school breaks, that sort of thing."

He swallowed involuntarily; illogical, he knew, but there it was.

"My parents threw Gaila and me a huge party upon our graduation from the Academy, and when I mean huge, I mean the entire village came, along with the chiefs and people from the surrounding villages. As you can probably imagine in such a crush of bodies and music and celebrations, I lost track of Gaila and went in search of her. I found her—she and Djefre were—they were—comparative biology my ass!"

Her face crumpled and Spock was on his feet and standing before her in an instant when he saw the tears glistening in her eyes.

"Miss Uhura, there is no need to go on; you are clearly distressed."

"I know it's silly of me; it was all so long ago, and yet it feels like it just happened." She met his eyes with her own. "One day, Mr. Spock, you will have to explain to me why all you men just can't seem to resist every Orion female that crosses your path."

He reached out then to remove a single tear from her cheek that had finally broken free.

"I assure you, Miss Uhura, I have personally never had that particular inclination."

Something in the way he said that made her smile. She brushed forcefully at the dampness of her own eyes and turned away to reign in her emotions. "Will you look at me? Behaving like a school girl." When she turned back, her face was bright and it was as if nothing had happened.

“She did apologize, you know, saying that she didn’t have any idea who he was and that if she had known she never would have done that to me, etcetera, etcetera. At the time, I couldn’t and didn’t want to hear any it. I mean, I had photos of him in my room; she had to know what he looked like. Perhaps she just didn’t care; I don’t know. Funny, I never heard from Djefre again after that and I was hoping to never hear from Gaila either. But the Fates were not finished toying with me.”

She took her seat back on the sofa; Spock followed, but this time he sat down right beside her.

“Gaila, who already had a plum assignment onboard the Constellation, somehow, and no points awarded for guessing how, got herself reassigned to Starbase One, she said, to be near me and to try to be my friend again. But she had a really funny way of showing it; I had to watch as she got special commendation after special commendation, and none of them were based on her professional abilities, if you know what I mean.”

Spock simply nodded.

“After her promotion to Lieutenant-Commander after only *one year* of Starfleet service, I should add, I just couldn’t take it anymore. I requested a change of assignment to a starship and here I am. Until today I had only heard bits and pieces about her through the usual Starfleet channels... and from Sulu of course. Sulu was in the year above us, but he knew Gaila, hell, everybody knew Gaila. When she got her hooks into his uncle, the Admiral, I can tell you Sulu was none too happy. And, of course, when his Uncle Heihachiro died on Orion Prime trying to rescue Gaila’s sister, I thought I was going to have to physically restrain him from going AWOL.”

Spock had a question. “And she was traveling on the Starcruiser Atrades because-?”

“Because she wanted to see her husband again, I gather.”

Uhura stood up to look at something glowing on the far wall before she leaned against his desk and crossed her arms.

“Since the Enterprise discovered that planet where anyone can have any experience they want simply for the asking, people from across the quadrant have been flocking to it like seagulls; all wanting to be adventurers or to fight a

Gorn or to reconnect with lost loved ones—and Gaila, I’m assuming from something she told me this morning, wanted to recapture the life she had with her husband. You know, I must admit, I’m having a very hard time wrapping my mind around that one.”

“How so?”

“Because that would mean that she loved her husband. The Gaila I knew never loved anyone—a man, I mean. On the outside, when it came to men, it was always about indifference with her, and yet, on the inside... she must have had a deep and lasting love for him. How can people do that to themselves? How is that possible, Mr. Spock?”

Spock stood, clasped his hands behind his back, and slowly took a few measured steps towards her. And he was just about to explain to her just how *possible* it was to give all the appearance of disinterested logic on the outside, while longing for someone desperately on the inside, his communication’s console beeped.

“See, I told you they would find me,” she mumbled under her breathe.

He leaned around her and pressed a bottom on his console to open the comm.

“Spock here.”

“Palmer here, Mr. Spock; I have an incoming transmission for you from the planet Vulcan, sir,” the communication’s officer said. “It is coded priority one; shall I patch it down to your quarters, Commander?”

Spock released the comm. bottom.

“Well, that sounds like my queue to leave,” Uhura said quietly as she turned to go; Spock stopped her with a touch to her elbow before opening the comm. once more.

“Lieutenant Palmer, please relay the communiqué down to me in exactly two minutes.”

“Aye, sir.”

Spock again closed the comm., and stood tall, looking down into the Lieutenant’s eyes. They were standing so close that he could feel her sweet breath upon his chin.

Uhura looked up at him in her usual, friendly, though impassive way.

“Thanks for listening, sir. Perhaps, if you ever get tired of being the Enterprise’s science officer, you could take a stab at being the ship’s counselor. You are a great listener, you know, and counselors are always great listeners.”

“My door is always open to you, Miss Uhura. Any time you feel the need to *talk*, you only need ask.”

“Thank you, Mr. Spock. Keep suggesting nice things like that and I just might have to consider making you as my new B.F.F.”

“B.F.F?”

“An old Earth term; it means: best friend forever.”

There it was again, the *friend* word. Spock took a small step back.

“It would seem that there will be no time for a Ka’athyra lesson this evening. Our regular practice time on Thursday evening will have to suffice?”

“Yes, of course. It will give me a chance to practice those high-pitched notes in my playing that you find so irritating.”

He cocked his head to one side. “I never said that your playing was irritating, Miss Uhura.”

“OK, *lacking* then.” She smiled mischievously. “Perhaps, if I’m lucky, those high-pitched notes will be enough to irritate the Orion currently inhabiting my quarters enough to drive her away.”

“As you wish,” he said, unemotionally. The door swooshed open as soon as she approached it.

“Miss Uhura?”

“Yes, Mr. Spock,” she replied, turning back to him and pausing before making her exit.

“Djefre was a fool.”

She flashed him the largest, the most blinding smile Spock had ever seen and his heart fluttered wildly in his side. When she was gone, he sat down at his console and sighed deeply in satisfaction. Perhaps he had been too quick in giving up in

his pursuit of the Lieutenant. Perhaps he had been wrong to keep certain things from her. Perhaps, when this mission was finally over he would—his console beeped. Reaching out to turn on the viewer he was somewhat surprised by the sight of his father's face filling the screen.

"Greetings, my Father."

"Greetings, my son; you appear to be in health."

"I am in the best of health, my father."

"Your mother will be most pleased." And almost as an after thought, he added.

"Your mother wished me to extend her regards."

"Thank you, Father. Please extend my regards to her, also."

That was the usual extent of the greeting portion of their conversation. Spock waited to hear what else his father had to say. It must have been important for his father would never have contacted him outside of the prearranged times that they already had in place. He didn't have to wait very long.

"Spock, a delicate situation had been brought to my particular attention and I need your assistance. In fact, you and your shipmates are the only ones who can help with this most important matter."

Chapter 4

When Uhura returned to her quarters she found Gaila wearing her brand new Elaasian silk robe that she herself had not had an opportunity to wear. The Admiral was sitting on the edge of the bed, with her arms folded and a scowl on her face. Captain Kirk stood before her, smiling brightly, while explaining his plans for her disembarkation.

“-then tomorrow morning when we put into Star Base Ten, the entire complement of the Atrades will be put ashore. From there, arrangements can be made to transport you back to Earth or wherever else you wish to go.”

Gaila’s expression went from sour to contemptuous.

“Can’t wait to get me off your ship, can you, Kirk?”

Kirk did what he did best when standing before a difficult woman: he flashed her his most flirtatious smile.

“On the contrary, Admiral. The Enterprise is always honored to host one of Starfleet’s most distinguished flag officers. But, I am certain you recognize that you will be much more comfortable on a Starcruiser better suited to passenger transport.”

Gaila stood and answered him sarcastically. “So you can, what, *rush* back to patrolling along the Romulan border?”

Kirk’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “I didn’t think you knew –”

Gaila rolled her eyes and looked heavenward. “Just because I’m in Starfleet Public Affairs, doesn’t mean I don’t keep my eyes and ears

open as to what's going on in Fleet Operations. Admiral Komack and I meet regularly—someone has to smooth things over in the press when you throw the prime directive out the window.”

“I'm certain that—”

Gaila didn't let him finish.

“I've lost count of how many times you've bent the rules. And that little stunt you pulled on Ardana—well, let's just say, I wrote the press release on that one personally.”

Kirk's eyes glowed mischievously and he waved dismissively. “I assure you, Admiral that it was no more than a simple misunderstanding—”

“You kidnapped their High Adviser from Stratus!”

Kirk held up a finger to make his point. “Kidnapped is a very strong word.”

“—and forced him to mine zenite with his bare hands!”

Kirk made an impatient tugging motion at the sides of his service tunic. “But, we *eventually* settled our differences.”

“Differences which sovereign governments have a right to maintain regardless of how James T. Kirk personally feels.”

Uhura had to blink at that statement: she never thought of Gaila as the type to be “up on things” like regulations, let alone even know what a sovereign government was.

Kirk shrugged and took a deep breath, obviously looking for a new angle and failing. “I uh—you see, it was like this—.”

Gaila, done with Kirk for the moment, cut him off again by raising a hand in front of his face. She now turned to Uhura.

"It's about time you showed up. You said we'd have dinner at 1800 hours – it's now 1837."

Uhura sighed. "I'm sorry; I had to speak to the first officer."

"About what?"

Uhura answered sarcastically. "Nothing that would interest you, I'm sure."

Kirk cut his eyes at her, communicating in that one, serious glance that she was walking a very fine line.

Uhura now took a cleansing breath. "If you are ready to eat now; I can have something sent up from the galley."

"What, you don't want to be seen with me or something?"

"I was only going on by the way you are currently dressed and thinking that if you were still tired--"

"If you usually eat in the officer's mess, Nyota, then that is where I will eat, as well."

Kirk, however, had other plans.

"Actually, Admiral," he said making his eyes do that "sparkling thing" that they sometimes did, "I thought that you and the Lieutenant might like to join me for dinner in the Captain's dining room. You could also meet with some of my other officers."

"Is Captain Mar-Ku-Sett going to be there? I'm not eating with you if that fellow's going to be in attendance. He handles his ship like an Bolian garbage skoal. I wouldn't have broken my wrist if he navigated half a damn."

"No, the Captain and his crew have chosen to enter into a prayer state for this evening to thank their deity for a safe deliverance from the ion storm."

“Good; somebody needs to pray for his ass. When I get back to headquarters I’m going to look into getting his master’s license revoked.”

Kirk just wanted to do something right in her eyes and was quick to change the topic. “Shall we say Captain’s mess in one hour, then?”

Gaila’s face showed her impatience. “Listen Kirk, I will eat with you and your officers if you like, but none of that spit and polish nonsense. Casual dress this evening, no uniforms, dress or otherwise; is that understood?”

Kirk nodded, happy that he could get her to agree on something. “As you wish, Admiral.” Turning and exiting quickly, he left the two ladies alone. Gaila immediately lit into Uhura.

“You didn’t answer my question. What was so important that is kept you from returning to your quarters on time?”

Uhura blew out a stream of air. “Commander Spock and I were merely discussing a personal matter.”

Gaila did not believe in fishing for information and got right to the point.

“Is there something going on between you and Kirk’s Vulcan?”

Uhura’s temper reasserted itself. “What?” she snapped.

“I’ve been looking around your quarters while I was waiting. You seem to have a lot of Vulcan stuff in here: a Vulcan harp, Vulcan clothes, Vulcan perfume—”

“And so from there, you leapt to the conclusion that, what— that we must be sleeping together?”

Gaila gestured widely. “The signs are all here.”

Uhura's had known all along that she and Gaila would have it out before long, she had merely hoped that on this occasion she could keep her temper in check until the Admiral left the ship. But Gaila had now crossed the line and there was no turning back.

"So, what does that mean for you? Full-steam ahead? How long will I have to wait for you to entice the first officer into your bed, or should I say, my bed since you are the one sleeping in it at the moment!"

"Dammit, Ny, it was just a question! I was only curious about what's going on in your life right now."

It was out of her mouth before she could stop herself. "Just like you were curious about Djefre?"

Gaila tensed, closed her eyes, and spoke very slowly as if to make herself perfectly understood.

"Djefre was a mistake—I told you; I couldn't help it—it's biology—Orion biology. I can't turn it off. Most men, especially human males can't stop—they don't have any resistance to our pheromones—pheromones that, I might remind you, come out on their own!"

For Uhura, to hear those words again cut through her like a hot knife through butter. "I don't want to hear it. We've been through this before."

"But apparently I need to keep saying it again and again. I'm sorry, Nyota, and I will keep saying I am sorry until the end of time if it's necessary!"

Uhura threw up her hands. She loved Gaila and yet she hated her. She wanted to forgive her, and yet, at the same time she wanted to strangle her. Her relationship with Gaila, it would seem, was doomed to be forever warped and twisted.

"I'm taking a shower."

Gaila stepped before the bathroom door and blocked her path.

“Nyota, will you try to listen to me. Besides my husband, you were the only real friend I ever had and I would do anything – anything to have that friendship back again.”

Gaila’s eyes were bright with unshed tears, and she looked at Nyota so beseechingly that Uhura had to turn away. After a long interval of silence between them, Gaila spoke again.

“If the Vulcan makes you happy, then I’m happy,” she said sincerely, only to screw it up a moment later by adding, “Besides, I’ve never had much luck with their kind anyway.”

Uhura groaned and pushed pass Gaila to enter the bathroom; there just wasn’t any getting through to her sometimes.

When Uhura emerged from the bathroom to begin to dress, she noticed that the quartermaster had found something for Gaila to wear. Gaila was zipping up a deep green jumpsuit and then began to tug on a pair matching boots. The outfit, though somewhat form-fitting, was, in itself very modest and left no actual flesh exposed. However, the combination between Gaila’s emerald skin tone and the color of the outfit created the illusion, upon first glance, that the wearer was completely naked.

Uhura said nothing and merely pressed her fingertips to her temples while shaking her head.

When she herself had finished dressing in a short, white tunic of Andorian design and a pair of white jeans and sandals, she led her temporary roommate out the door and down the corridor into the direction of the Captain’s mess.

They had not been walking ten seconds before Uhura guessed what exactly was going on: apparently the Admiral’s pheromones were wafting off of her at full force and the effect it had on the male crew-members passing by was instantaneous.

Those she walked by, who were not tripping over themselves to get a better look at the sultry red-headed siren, contented themselves with just stopping and drooling. And Gaila did not need to do a thing to attract their particular attention; she simply glided by and they ogled.

And the tangibly giddy atmosphere was doubled in effect within the enclosed confines of the Captain's mess. Captain Kirk was being far too solicitous. He kept asking after the Admiral's comfort or about her enjoyment of the evening. And when he wasn't grinning at her inanely, he was fetching drinks and tidbits of food from the sideboard like an eager young errand boy of twelve and making his equally oblivious and distracted steward, Holliday, superfluous.

McCoy was a *little* better at controlling himself, although he had a very noticeable shimmer of perspiration across his brow and upper lip which he kept nervously swiping at with the back of his hand.

However, the most obvious one of the bunch was Mr. Scott. He kept grinning stupidly at Gaila throughout the entire meal, with his eyes drifting to the swell of her bosom at every opportunity and making no effort whatsoever at hiding his admiration. When he wasn't staring at her chest, he was licking his lips lasciviously while his eyes glazed over at some far-away thoughts probably best not shared at a dining room table.

Nyota found that the only rational creatures in the room at that moment were herself, Mr. Spock, and Nurse Chapel. She and Christine shared wry glances and rolled their eyes in unison at every ridiculous thing said by the human males in the room. Commander Spock merely kept silent and contented himself with his meal.

Holliday absentmindedly placed a basket of bread next to McCoy – the same McCoy who had not touched a morsel of food on his plate the entire evening because he had been far too busy hanging on every word the Admiral had said.

“Would you pass the bread, please,” asked Christine.

Doctor McCoy started, as if suddenly remembering he and Gaila weren't the only two people in the room.

"Sorry, you say something?"

"The bread," she pointed, "may I have it?"

But the doctor had already turned his head back towards the conversation, forcing Christine to nudge him with her elbow, hard.

"What?" replied the doctor, impatiently.

"Oh, never mind," said Christine, reaching across the doctor's plate to get the basket for herself.

Gaila was in her element: holding court effortlessly as a heady mixture of sweat and testosterone floated throughout the room. Kirk, McCoy, and Holliday may have been distracted by the Orion's presence, but Gaila hardly seemed to notice, for it was the chief engineer who had the benefit of all her attention.

"...and just a week ago, at lunch, Admiral Fitzpatrick said that he always favored the Farragut, but I had to put a stop to such nonsensical talk. It has always been the Enterprise which I had a great fondness for."

Uhura resisted the urge to roll her eyes for the tenth time; she was quite sure that Gaila had never set her eyes on the ship before it came to her rescue.

"Do try these Rigillean keva fruit tarts, Admiral," said Kirk, interrupting. "They are one of my chef's specialties."

As soon as Uhura reached over to select one of the delicacies herself, Gaila flicked her wrist for Kirk to take them away, leaving Uhura's empty hand hovering in mid air.

"Aye, the Farragut is a fine ship, lass, but you are correct: she is no match for the lovely lines of the Enterprise."

Spock, hearing something quite illogical, finally spoke at length for the first time that evening.

“Mr. Scott, your comparison of the two ships is flawed. The Farragut and the Enterprise are of the same class and configuration: they are virtually identical in every way.”

“That cannae be right, Mr. Spock.”

“Really,” said the Vulcan, raising his eyebrow in what would have been a challenge if he made a habit of challenging people. “How so?”

“Well—the uh—the arboretum on the Farragut is to port, while the arboretum on the Enterprise is to starboard.”

Spock’s lips thinned in a manner that Uhura recognized as his way of silently saying: *indeed* but at the time finding his verbal opponent somewhat ridiculous.

“More wine, Admiral?” added Kirk, as if totally unaware of what exactly was happening around him. “I obtained this bottle on space station K-7 a few of years ago. I’ve been saving it for a special occasion and having you, Admiral Nogura, on-board the Enterprise, counts as a *very* special occasion,” oozed the Captain.

Kirk filled Nogura’s glass even before she asked for any and he totally ignored Christine when she held out hers.

Apparently excited at what she’d just heard from the chief engineer and *not* from the Captain, Gaila reached out and touched Mr. Scott’s arm and gushed, “Ooh! An arboretum, you say? I just *adore* an arboretum. How did you know, Mr. Scott, that an arboretum is the very thing I so admire on a starship—so large and airy—one is able to breathe in an arboretum. My quarters here on the Enterprise are so small and confined, nothing like what I am used to at all. I feel so very closed in there.”

Uhura reeled. Gaila, in her hormonal silliness, had just criticized and complimented the Enterprise in the very same breath and

Montgomery Scott was currently too simple-minded at that moment to either know or care.

“Might I remind you, Admiral,” exclaimed Uhura, not giving a second thought to what the Captain might say, “that it was *you* who insisted on staying in my *small and confining* quarters!”

Her statement fell of deaf ears.

Scotty beamed to be so singled out. “Then a turn around the arboretum just might do the trick, lassie.”

Gaila brushed aside his casual way of addressing her and favored the Chief engineer with her largest smile.

“That seems a excellent idea, Lieutenant-Commander. But how am I ever going to find my way there on my own? I guess I will have to ask an Ensign to show me to way.”

The Admiral’s voice was so girlish and absurd that Uhura thought that she was going vomit.

“Aye, I can do better than that,” answered Scott, his thick, lusty Scottish brogue getting thicker and lustier by the second. “I’ll escort you there personally and, if I may, I will see that you get back to your quarters in safety.”

Gaila eyes widened in a way that Uhura thought artful and disingenuous, but she used everything within herself to keep from fleeing the room in disgust.

“Would you do that for me, Mr. Scott?” grinned the Admiral.

“Admiral,” Uhura interjected, icily, “I feel it necessary to remind you that you have a long day of travel tomorrow. Surely you wish to turn in early.”

“Oh, Nyota, such nonsense! It’s not even 2100 hours. The Enterprise may be a large ship, but I shouldn’t think that a turn in the arboretum requires more than thirty minutes.”

“But-.”

“Now, Nyota, there is absolutely no need to worry-”

“Worry?” About you? It’s Mr. Scott-”

“-and I will be back in our quarters long before you miss me.”

“Miss you?!”

“Now, now, Lieutenant,” she said sternly, then quickly going back to her girlish lilt. “I insist.” She turned back to the chief engineer and seemed to inch a little closer. “You heard him, Nyota; Mr Scott said that he would take care of me for the rest of the evening, won’t you, Mr. Scott?”

Scott, hoping that her words “take care” actually meant something totally different, was on his feet in a fraction of a second, pulling out the admiral’s chair.

The other officers arose as well, with Kirk and McCoy watching helplessly as a man of lessor rank, lessor male beauty, and lessor romantic ability, easily out-maneuvered them both.

Nogura, in a rush to be gone, stood as well.

“Thank you, Captain, for the meal and the, uh—well, good night.” She nodded towards the doctor, nurse, and first officer. “Gentlemen, I’m sure I will see you all in the morning,” said Gaila, who then glanced briefly over her shoulder at Uhura’s incredulous face before she left the room on Mr Scott’s arm.

And it *was* officially morning when anyone did, indeed, see Gaila again. In fact, it was at *three* in the morning when Uhura, hearing the door to her quarters swish open, sat up. And in stumbled a *supposedly*

dignified Starfleet Admiral, clearly disheveled, singing a raunchy highland's drinking song, and reeking strongly of Scotch.
