



STARSHIP REYKJAVIK

SLINGS AND OLIVE BRANCHES

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Cover image by Howie Day

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Klingon Military Outpost *Dun tlhoy'* – Former Neutral Zone

Sector Commandant's Office

Brigadier Kut'sHah stood glowering across at his guest, a human woman clad in the burgundy wraparound tunic of a Starfleet officer. Her black hair, shot through with streaks of grey, was tied into a single no-nonsense braid in back. Her features were deceptively soft, a full, round face with a prominent jaw line. However, her flinty brown eyes hinted at the duranium will encased within the unimposing body. The crow's feet at the corner of those eyes spoke of her cynicism as well as a deep reservoir of dark humor.

Kut'sHah, alternately, was a towering example of Klingon ferocity. He loomed over the woman, resplendent in armor bedecked with medals and ribbons, transforming his broad chest into a testament to a long career flush with many victories. His hair flowed back like a lion's mane, emphasizing his pronounced forehead ridges.

"So, the Federation sends... you," he punctuated the statement with an appraising look that suggested her presence as emissary was an insult to

his honor. "And what may I do for you, Captain?" He gestured for her to take a seat across from him, facing his imposing desk hewn from what appeared to be a single block of Gorn stavna-wood.

Captain Nandi Trujillo remained standing and offered him her most diplomatic smile. It was all artifice, and they both knew it, but the niceties must be observed.

"I have been dispatched to entreat you, once again, to use your influence and resources to end this latest surge of Klingon piracy along our mutual border."

Kut'sHah dipped his head fractionally, eyes narrowing. "Do you suggest I am not giving the matter my full attention?"

"I can only surmise that you haven't, Brigadier. The only alternative explanation for your obvious inaction is that you are incompetent. As we've only just met, it would be presumptuous of me to make that determination."

The barb had its intended effect, and Kut'sHah stiffened, growling, "You are unwise to make such allegations in my presence... unarmed." He placed a hand on the scabbard of his *d'k tahg* for emphasis.

Trujillo cast an unhurried glance out the office's sizeable viewport towards where the starship *Reykjavík* remained on station, awaiting her return. "Unarmed, Brigadier? My superiors do not send an attack cruiser to deliver good tidings. I am here to spur you to action. If you elect to continue doing nothing in the face of brigandage that damages both our nation's interests, I have been authorized to provide the consequences."

The Klingon laughed, an abrasive sound that echoed loudly through the compartment. "Idle threats? I expected better of the mighty Federation, Captain."

Trujillo didn't reply immediately, merely held Kut'sHah's steely gaze for a time. "I understand that with the decline in Klingon military power in the past few decades that many former soldiers of the empire have turned to piracy to support themselves. The Federation freighters that pass through this sector carry parts for the atmospheric processors that make the air on Qo'noS breathable. Those same supplies also support the gravity siphons that prevent shards of Praxis from falling on the heads of the High Council."

"Your point?" he inquired in a surprisingly controlled tone.

"My point is the security of your homeworld depends on this commerce. Starfleet safeguards the convoys to our border, but your people refuse to allow us to provide escort all the way to Qo'noS. You require they make the rest of the journey alone, without assigning any Klingon warships to ensure they make it there safely. Why is that?"

"As you said, Captain, our resources are spread thinly these days. We haven't the ships to spare."

Trujillo withdrew an isolinear chip from beneath her uniform belt and held it up. "Despite the Federation having no monetary system, the old adage 'follow the money' is still very apt."

"Starfleet Intelligence has done just that, tracing substantial sums from Orion financial houses to House Gantar's coffers. That's your House, if I'm not mistaken. These funds, some several million darseks per annum, are the proceeds from the illegal sale of Federation goods seized by the very Klingon pirates we've been discussing."

"Pagh tob SoH laH!" Kut'sHah snarled. "You come to threaten me with monetary tracing? This is a matter for accountants and shopkeepers, not warriors or statesmen!"

She cocked her head in response. "That's not a denial, Brigadier. As we suspected, a sizeable portion of these funds have been diverted from your family's accounts to multiple members of the High Council."

"I will hear no more of this foolishness!" Kut'sHah said angrily. He slammed a fist on his desk's comm-panel, calling for his personal guard.

"How will those council members react when their duplicity is made public by the Federation? What will be the fallout from the Federation withholding any further support for the relief efforts on Qo'noS?"

Kut'sHah advanced a step, and it took every fiber of discipline in Trujillo's being not to retreat in the face of his ire.

"Then we will have no choice but to attack the Federation and take what we need by force!" the Klingon sneered.

Now it was Trujillo's turn to laugh. "With what, Brigadier? The empire is facing rebellions on Krios, Valt Minor, and a host of other conquered worlds. The Tholians took Ocadus Secundus from you, and we know all about General Duras' attempt to seize the dilithium mines on Reshar and how the Romulans handed you your asses. Your fleet has withered to less than two-thirds its size since Praxis exploded while our Starfleet has nearly doubled."

Two burly Klingon warriors charged into the office, but Kut'sHah held them at bay with a raised hand.

Trujillo glanced over her shoulder at the guards and then back to the general. "You really want witnesses?"

Kut'sHah dismissed them curtly, withdrawing his *d'k tahg* as the door closed behind them. His eyes flamed with murderous intent.

"You can kill me and beam my body back to my ship. That won't change what's already been set in motion," Trujillo warned. She pointed towards her ship while holding Kut'sHah's eyes. "There are silhouettes of three Klingon birds-of-prey and a K'tinga-class cruiser painted on my hull, Brigadier. My first officer is something of a braggart, and if truth be told I don't do enough to rein in his baser impulses. If you refuse to cooperate,

regardless of whether I live or die, my first officer goes back to hunting Klingon pirates while you have to explain your ineptitude to your benefactors on the High Council."

She could hear his teeth grinding and the blade in his hand trembled.

In a softer voice, she noted, "As you well know, the chancellor has made plans to put down the insurgencies on your rebel planets and to then expand the empire spinward. New territories to be explored, new worlds to be conquered. The promise of honor and glory for many houses. That can't happen if the Federation withdraws its support for the homeworld's recovery operations. You are in a position to put down the piracy, safeguard the reputations of your benefactors, and then seek command of a conquest fleet. Such a venture would make the profit you're collecting here pale in comparison."

With deliberate effort Kut'sHah drew the blade across the palm of his other hand, bleeding it before returning it to its scabbard. "It will be done," he said simply, adding, "Leave now."

Never one to overstay her welcome where Klingons were concerned, Trujillo dutifully tapped her combadge. "Reykjavík, bring me home."

She rematerialized in her ship's transporter room, surprised to see her executive officer standing alongside a full medical trauma team, replete with an anti-grav gurney. She nodded to Lt. Commander Glal, a stout Tellarite with porcine features partially obscured by a scraggly thatchlike beard. "Is this a vote of confidence in my diplomatic abilities, XO?"

Glal snickered. "No, Captain. Merely insurance. Klingons can be ever so temperamental."

Trujillo turned her gaze to the others. "Doctor Bennett, though it's good to see you, I'm glad your services aren't needed. Please, everyone, give us the compartment."

The others filed out leaving Trujillo still standing atop the dais looking down at Glal. After the doors to the corridor had closed, Trujillo unclasped her tunic at the shoulder allowing the flap to fall open to loosen the neck. Her knees sagged and she bent over, bracing her hands atop them.

"Oh-shit-oh-dear," she breathed, "I really thought he was going to kill me." She looked up to fix a baleful expression on Glal. "You shouldn't let me do things like that."

"I did warn you not to, sir," he offered helpfully.

Glal snapped two of his thick fingers as if suddenly remembering something of import. He activated his combadge, "Glal to transporter room two, beam back those demolition charges during the next gap in the station's sensor cycle."

She stood erect and stepped down off the dais as Glal's order was acknowledged. "You beamed explosives over to the Klingon station?" she said accusingly.

"Yes, sir," Glal confirmed. "If your life signs terminated and they'd raised their shields, I was prepared to cripple their defenses and beam you back."

She glowered at him, not unlike the expression Brigadier Kut'sHah had so recently favored her with. "That was reckless, Commander."

He shrugged. "In my defense, you left me in charge, sir. Besides, it was easily done. The Klingons have grown lazy and complacent."

"Not my point and you know it," she chided. "You'd risk turning a diplomatic incident into a war."

"Respectfully, Captain," Glal countered, "Starfleet Command sent you to deliver an especially unwelcome message to a man with well documented anger-control issues. I wouldn't allow an attack on my captain to go unanswered." He offered her a broad grin, "If nothing else, it would have given me the excuse to paint a big Klingon star-fortress silhouette on the hull next to our birds-of-prey."

Trujillo shook her head and moved for the exit. "And again, I'm left to wonder what misdeed of mine provoked the karmic balance of the universe to inflict you upon me?"

He fell in alongside her, remaining just a pace behind as they transited into the corridor. "If I remember correctly, sir, you requested my services. Sang my praises, even."

She sighed, the sound of the long-suffering. "That's right."

"Sang!" he repeated enthusiastically, "chorus of angels and all that."

"At ease, Mister Glal," she insisted as the doors swished closed behind them.

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