

A photograph of two women sitting on a wooden porch swing. The woman on the left is younger, with long dark hair, wearing a white jacket over a blue shirt and blue pants. The woman on the right is older, with short grey hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and blue pants. They are both looking towards the camera with serious expressions. The swing is on a wooden deck with several potted plants. In the background, there is a rural landscape with trees and a white building under a sunset sky.

**STAR TREK:
THE LEXINGTON ADVENTURES**

A SLIGHT LITTLE DETOUR

**An Original Short Story
by Lexington creator
Joey Bonice**



“A Slight Little Detour”

**Story by
Joey Bonice**

**Star Trek: The *Lexington* Adventures based on Star Trek[®] created
by
Gene Roddenberry**

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“Doctor’s personal log and never mind the stardate... I’ll get to that later. I’m reporting for another day of work and it seems like an easy day for now. Just some routine physical exams, two follow ups on surgeries I did yesterday, and some appointments for some minor ailments. This is nothing like my residency days in Sydney, let me tell you! Life is going way too easy right now so I suspect something big is going to happen to me very soon.”

Doctor Dawn Mathias was sitting in her office at Starfleet Medical in Perth, Australia, watching the sun come up as she held her second cup of coffee of the day. She turned off the recording on the PADD sitting on the desk and called up her schedule once again, taking a drink of hot coffee from her ever-present coffee mug. The schedule was still the same as it was a few minutes ago. Her appointments started at 0930 and it was 0815 so she had some time to go follow up on the two surgeries she did yesterday.

She sighed contentedly as she put her mug down. Her duties at Starfleet Medical, Perth was a cinch compared to her residency at Sydney Medical Center. Not only did Dawn was just busy enough to keep occupied but it was also close to home for her. Since Dawn had graduated in the top five percent of her medical class (no mean feat considering having Doctor Leonard McCoy as the supervising doctor of her class), she received Perth as a reward for doing so well in her studies. She found that she was enjoying coming home every night and going to her parents’ ranch on the outskirts of Bunbury whenever she had a free day or two.

Dawn reached for her mug once again when the PADD chimed, meaning she got a message. She looked at the screen and blinked hard when she saw that her whole daily schedule had just been changed without her knowledge. Her lunchtime appointments had just been reassigned to another doctor and now Dawn had a meeting she knew absolutely nothing about. The message didn’t say who it was who she was meeting but the sender indicated the person was coming from San Francisco. In her mind, that meant her visitor had to been coming from Starfleet General.

What did I do that would have warranted a visit from someone at Starfleet General? she thought quizzically. I’ve been a good girl and even though I’ve a secondary duty as one of the medical officers on the Odysseus, I’ve made it clear I don’t want to go anywhere! I know starship duty is coming but I want to stay here and be close to my family while I still can!

She called up her supervisor, Doctor James Borgnine. He was in an office with a better view of Perth than what she had but she didn’t mind. James was from Vancouver so he was already used to what Perth had to visually offer.

It only took a second for the computer to connect her.

“Dawn!” he said cheerfully, trying to act like he didn’t know why she was calling.

She started in on him without preamble. “James, what’s this about some big shot coming to see me at lunchtime today from San Fran and Starfleet General?”

“You saw, huh?” *Playing dumb isn’t one of your strong suits*, Dawn thought.

Her tone got an “are you kidding me” tone. “I wouldn’t be calling you if I hadn’t. And since the meeting has your code on it, what *else* would I be thinking?”

Borgnine snapped, not liking her tone, “Other than you’re wrong about the VIP coming from Starfleet General?”

That took her off guard. “But... but... James, the VIP *is* coming from San Fran, right?”

He nodded, sort of glad he got Dawn a little flustered. “It’ll give you just enough time to get your morning rounds completed before the VIP comes.”

“But who in the hell *is* the VIP? If they’re not from General, then they’ve got to be from the Admiralty, right? Which now begs the question of who is there who wants to see me so bad they’re coming here and changing my entire schedule to do it?”

James sighed before answering, as if this was taking too long for her to get the point. “Look, Dawn, I really don’t know who it is. All I know is that I got an automated message saying that a VIP from San Fran desired to have a meeting with you today at 1130 Perth time. The message did not say who it was but it did come from the General Staff so it’s a *pretty high up VIP*.” He stressed the last four words to underscore his point.

Dawn looked puzzled, then comprehension started to set in. “Well, that narrows the field down quite a bit. It’s got to be some stuck up, pain in the arse admiral who wants to make my life suddenly interesting. Any odds on who it could be?”

The image shrugged. “I’d give even odds right now. And from seeing the clock, you’ve barely enough time to get your morning rounds completed before they come.”

So, it’s either you really don’t know who this VIP is, she thought, or that VIP ordered to keep your trap shut and let me find out the hard way.

Dawn sighed, knowing that the conversation would not yield any more useful information. “Okay, James. I’ll go make my rounds. But don’t think I’m going to rush through my rounds just to make a meeting. I’m not going to rush making a proper diagnosis on a patient who really needs me all because there’s a VIP who thinks I’ll jump when they say to jump.”

“You should be careful about that attitude, Dawn,” James warned. “Or you could find yourself in a pretty little pickle.”

“Patients first, VIPs second, James. If I’m not in my office at 1130, it’s because I’m tied up with a patient and I’ll be double dog *damned* if I will speed things up for a VIP.”

“I hope you remember that when you’re on some ice planet waiting for your resignation to take effect.”

At 1145, Dawn was fast walking from the hospital proper to her office on the 15th floor. That last patient had caused her to run late since he needed a lengthy treatment before she left so she could not just walk out mid-treatment.

The irony of her earlier conversation with her boss, particularly where she said treating a patient came before a VIP, was not lost on her. She would have laughed if she hadn't been puffing.

Quickly, Dawn came to her office. She slowed her gait so it would not be noticeable that she had been near running the entire time. Dawn finally came to her office door and she stood just out of the range of the door's sensor so she could finally catch her breath.

When she finally entered, a distinguished gentleman with grey-white hair and wearing a simple Class A admiral's uniform was facing the window so she could not readily see who it was that had upended her day so abruptly. He didn't turn to look at her.

"Sorry about the interruption to your daily routine, Doctor," he said with a slight Western American accent. Dawn debated for a moment whether she would tell the truth and let him know exactly what was on her mind or lie her ass off.

"Not a problem, sir," she lied. "It only upended my whole day by you being here."

The admiral turned to face her and she saw that it was Alexander McKnight, the current Starfleet Chief of Staff, the number two person in Starfleet. Alex may have had gray-white hair but surprisingly, he was rather trim for someone in their mid-60's.

"I didn't set this meeting up just for the hell of it," said Alex. "What I'm about to tell you isn't something I'd leave a message or make a phone call for, Dawn. Especially since I just found out myself this evening, California time."

"What is so important that you came all the way down here to tell me in person, Admiral?"

"You're my daughter-in-law, Dawn so call me 'Alex' at least." She had married his son two years ago. She got along with Alex and his wife but didn't get to see them much since her husband didn't get along with his father so he tended to avoid his father and step mother. Dawn was an innocent bystander.

"Okay... Alex. Why are you here?"

Alex motioned to the desk and two chairs. "Can we sit down? You may want to sit when I tell you what's going on."

Dawn skeptically walked around the admiral and stood behind her desk. Alex, for his part, just took the closest chair without any formalities. *A simple man with simple tastes*, she thought. *Rare to see in admirals. Nice to see that he's also like that on duty as well as off duty. Makes things a little easier.*

"Do you want anything to drink, Alex? I could use a coffee." She walked over to the replicator.

"It's 2050 for me but I had a coffee a couple of hours before I left so I'm good. Just won't get much sleep tonight."

Dawn ordered a large coffee with cream and sweetener. "That's not good. Having caffeine that late is going to throw off your sleeping rhythm."

“You should have told my dad. I’d see him drink a straight black coffee after an 24 hour alert, then go to bed. He’d be out like a light within 10 minutes. Angie tells me I’m about the same.”

“Still, though,” she said, picking up her mug and walking over to her desk. “You’d get better sleep if you stopped the caffeine in mid-afternoon. Now, as to why you’re here...?”

He watched her sit down in her chair. For the first time ever, she saw Alex grow uncomfortable. He even cleared his throat nervously before he spoke.

“There’s no simple way of saying this so... here goes. I’ve been relieved.”

She took a sip of coffee. “I’m still getting used to the peculiarities of Starfleet traditions. What do you mean ‘you’ve been relieved’?”

“In layman’s terms, I’ve been fired from my job.”

She barely managed to contain her surprise. *How does a living legend like Alex get fired?*

“How did you manage to do get fired?”

“Let me answer you by asking a question of my own.” He paused as Dawn took another sip. “How much do you know of what I’ve been doing lately, Dawn? Have you been watching the news?”

She shook her head, dark brown hair that wasn’t in her ponytail flying into her eyes. “I don’t watch the news very much these days and on my days off,” she said, brushing her hair back to behind her ear, “I go to my parents’ house where outside news isn’t what we watch. My family usually watches football matches.”

“You mean soccer, right?”

She speared him a look. “I’m Australian, not American.”

“Sorry. Dumb statement.” Alex took a moment to pause and gather his thoughts. “Some of what I’m about to tell you is classified ‘Top Secret.’ Repeat, ‘Top Secret.’ Understand?” Dawn nodded. “What I can tell you is that there’s been a bad... ‘incident’ out in the Mutara sector. I mean *real* bad.”

“Just how bad?”

“Oh,” he said nonchalantly, “nothing much. Only enough to start a full-scale interstellar war with *both* the Klingons and Romulans if certain things are handled delicately. I don’t know how much worse it can get than that.”

Dawn looked down at the coffee mug in her hands. “Okay. I get that. Go on.”

“During the resulting investigation, there were certain... *elements* who wanted to hang the entire debacle on Jim Kirk.” Dawn could tell that even this was enough to upset Alex. He was working on controlling his temper. “Problem is that this entire incident wasn’t Jim’s fault. It was a case of the right hand not knowing what the left hand had done.”

Now Dawn speared him with a questioning look. “And that was?”

“Can’t say, Dawn,” said Alex apologetically. “But an educated guess would not be far wrong. In any case, these ass... er, *entities* tried to pin it all on Admiral Kirk. And the bigger hell of it was that they managed to get most of the Federation Council to agree with their line of bullshit.” The irritation in his voice was clear now. “The biggest kicker was that they did it while Kirk was on the *Enterprise*. *Enterprise*,

which is reported to have gotten the ever-loving hell kicked out of her, is slow in coming back to Earth so Jim isn't here to defend himself."

Now Dawn was starting to get the picture. "So, you jumped in and defended Admiral Kirk since he wasn't here to do it himself. And when you went to defend Kirk, these same arseholes didn't take it so well."

"Right." Alex nodded. "I couldn't take this shit lying down and neither could Harry Morrow. While I don't know the full details of what has happened in the last couple of days, I do know this. Harry is being forced to retire as soon as he can get a replacement up to speed. For myself, I was given a choice... I could take an involuntary demotion to Captain or keep my rank and involuntarily retire tomorrow."

"I can only guess which option you chose, knowing your reputation."

Alex nodded. "Which brings me to why I am here."

If Alex didn't have Dawn's full attention, he did now. "Now I'm all ears."

"As you already surmised, I took the demotion. Starting tomorrow, I'm back to being a Captain which is revocable only on either the Starfleet Commander or Federation Council orders."

"Which means you'll be shipping out soon."

"Not quite. My ship is finishing up construction at Newport News yards." He smiled, knowing Dawn was no one's fool.

"The *Odysseus*," she said as Alex nodded. "You got the *Odysseus*."

"Actually, I got my old ship." Dawn looked at him confused. "I got the *Lexington*," he amplified.

"But the *Lexington*'s an old refitted *Constitution* class that's being converted to a museum ship. You're going to command an old decommissioned ship? Seems fitting, don't you think?"

Even with everything, Alex chuckled at Dawn's slight joke. "This is why you should watch the news a little more. Now that *Enterprise* is severely damaged, the odds are she will be decommissioned and the old *Lexington* taking her place in the Fleet Museum. Now the *Odysseus* will be renamed *Lexington* so there will be a *Lexington* in the Fleet. They're just waiting until the new ship launches before they rename her but she'll be the new *Lexington*. Registry number NCC-1709-A."

Dawn took a sip of coffee and found it would be the last of this batch. "Once again, all nice to know but what's this got to do with me?"

"Will Kennedy hasn't picked most of his command crew, aside from Bill Gee, who's busy with her construction. Since I'll be taking over her new captain, I get to pick the remainder of my command staff. And guess whose name appeared as a medical officer who's on secondary duty?"

Dawn proved she was no one's fool. "Oh *shite*!"

"An 'Oh shit' would be an apt response."

"But... but... but... I don't want to go!"

"A little on the repetitive side, Dawn," Alex observed. "But I need someone who's both good and isn't afraid to speak their mind. Someone who isn't afraid to stand up to me and for the crew. I can't think of anyone else better suited for the job."

Dawn could have been blown over with a feather she was so flabbergasted. “Don’t you get it, Alex? I don’t want the job! I love it here and I don’t want to leave!”

Alex looked at her calmly, as if he knew this would be her reaction. “You wear the uniform, Dawn. That means we sometimes we don’t get what we want.”

“What if I resign?” she said pointedly. Her tone was starting to get agitated and the volume of her voice was starting to rise. “I want to stay here, Alex!”

“Then why in the name of hell did you choose to enter Starfleet, Dawn?” he instantly shot back, somehow keeping his cool. “You might have been on the medical path but I know *for a fact*,” he pointed at Dawn, “that you were told that this may happen. You know you’re due for a tour on a starship and I’m offering you the chance to work in the most advanced sickbay ever installed on a starship.” He put his hand down, keeping as cool as a cucumber. “And you’re going to turn it all down; you’re going to resign all because you want to be close to mommy and daddy?”

That pushed Dawn’s button. “Did you just call me *a mommy’s girl*?”

Again, Alex looked at her as if he was expecting this reaction. “Why else would you be so adamant about staying here, Dawn?”

“*Get the hell out of here!*” she barked furiously. She knew all about Alex’s legendary temper but he wasn’t showing any anger. In fact, he was calm, cool, and collected, as if he was studying her reactions for something only he knew about.

“Why did you join Starfleet, Dawn?” he said quietly. “Just tell me that.”

It took a moment for Dawn to get her temper under control, his calm serving to calm her down too. “I wanted to help sick people. I’ve been wanting to do that since my pet ‘roo died when I was a kid. He died and I was powerless to stop it. Ever since that moment, I swore I would become a doctor so I could use everything in my power to heal those who needed healing. I may not be able to prevent their death but I would fight like hell to delay it.”

“Spoken like a true doctor. And you’ve just told me the reason you were late in coming.”

“If you know all this, Alex,” she said, still unsure why he was persisting on recruiting her, “then you know why I don’t want to leave.”

“No, I still don’t, Dawn. Damn it all to hell, I don’t know why you insist on staying here. Yeah, I get this is a cushy job and that you are close to your parents and family. But I’m giving you a chance to do some *real* medicine. I know you talked to ‘Bones’ McCoy many times about being a doctor on a starship. Now here’s your chance to turn that dream into reality.”

“So why are you being so insistent on recruiting me?” she asked, still bothered. “There’s many other doctors who are more senior than me and who are more qualified than me to be on the *Odd... Lexington*.”

“You’ve got a point, Dawn. There *are* other doctors who are more senior. But you’ve got one advantage.

She leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms. “And what would that be?”

Alex also leaned back. “You don’t take bullshit from anyone. You just proved it.”

“And how did I do that?”

“Did you wonder why I was going out of my way to push your buttons? You just yelled at an admiral without regards to the consequences. You just stood up to me. And I know enough to know *that* is who I need out there.”

Dawn twisted her seat. “I know enough about Starfleet to know that you can order me and not ask me, Alex. Or reassign me to a very unpleasant place because I just yelled at a senior admiral.”

“It’s better I ask you than simply order you and I think you know that.” He leaned forward, as if instructing a student. “If I took you unwillingly from here, you’d resent me for it and more likely, you’d resign and go into private practice. And if you wanted to go into private practice, you’d not have joined Starfleet. Some part of you wants to be out there, doing the impossible, seeing things no one else has seen. You want to be out there, Dawn. Even if you’ve not admitted it to yourself.”

Dawn slightly smiled. “Sounds like you think you’ve got a handle on me.”

Now Alex smiled. “I know what kind of girl would marry my son.”

Dawn looked down to see her coffee cup was empty, thinking that Alex indeed hit her issue right on the head. “You’ve given me a lot to think about, Alex. I don’t want to leave Australia but I also know it’s time for me to go to the stars and ply my trade. This morning, I knew what I wanted but after talking to you, now I don’t know what I want.”

Alex stood up, looking at the doctor. “I unofficially take command tomorrow but the change of command won’t be until Thursday morning. I’ll need an answer before I officially assume command.”

“I understand. You’ll have an answer, Alex.”

He nodded his understanding and started towards the door. Just before he reached it, a thought hit her and she asked, “What will people say when they find out I’m your daughter-in-law? They’re going to assume it’s nepotism at play.”

He stopped just shy of the door sensors then turned on his heel to face Dawn. “Then why do you still call yourself “Dawn Mathias” instead of “Dawn Mathias-McKnight” or “Dawn McKnight”? I think you knew the answer to that question before you asked it. Otherwise, you would have changed your last name.”

“It’s nothing personal, Alex...” she protested but Alex stopped her.

“I know, Dawn, but I think you’re afraid people will find out and you’d be right when you said they would say it’s nepotism. Maybe it is but I like to think I’ve got a good eye for talent and you’re as good as they come. If it comes to it, I can take the heat if you can.”

“It’s something to think about, Alex. But then, you’re good at hiding things. Such as you’re actually from the 20th Century.”

He winked at her charmingly. “Very few are privileged to know that and you’re one of them. Keep my secret to yourself and I will keep your secret to myself. Okay?”

For the remainder of the day, Dawn was preoccupied by her conversation with her father-in-law. Both sides, she felt, had scored points with each other but

one of the points Admiral McKnight brought up had really stuck with her: the one about feeling she should be practicing her trade out among the stars. What bothered her was that even though he could not have known it, he was right. But she was also right in wanting to stay close to family. Family meant a lot to her. But her desire to stay was warring with her desire to go into the stars.

By 1700 hours, she had finished with the last of her appointments and checked in on her surgery patients once more to make sure everything was fine. She changed into a dark blue dull PVC jumpsuit and white dull PVC biker's jacket before she headed out into Perth proper. Not far from the medical campus was a coffee shop she frequented. When she walked in, the barista on duty knew who she was and what she would order. It was just before the rush hour would start so it was quiet. It only took a few minutes for him to make Dawn's coffee. She thanked him and walked out, the weight of her earlier conversation returning in force.

As she walked aimlessly around the streets of Perth, her mind kept coming back to the one thing Admiral McKnight had hit upon a couple of times and that was the question of why she joined Starfleet for starters. McKnight had hit it right on the head when he said that if all she wanted to do was to stay here for the rest of her life, she would not have joined Starfleet. Instead of enlisting, she would have taken the civilian route and opened a private practice with a side job at one of Perth's hospitals. But Dawn had signed up for Starfleet the day she turned 18. It really didn't take much to figure out that, even though she wasn't admitting it to herself yet, she wanted to be among the stars.

But the call of being with her own family weighed hard on her also. Dawn Jennifer Mathias was the middle child of five Mathias siblings...she had two sisters and two brothers. She felt close to her family and that was something hard to ignore. Added to this was that outside of her Starfleet training in San Francisco, she'd never been outside of Australia. If she shipped out on a starship, it would be years before she would see her family again, much less her husband.

Her husband, Montgomery McKnight, was a former Starfleet officer, rising to the rank of Commander and command of a starbase before getting out. Almost immediately upon leaving Starfleet, he took a job with a giant corporation that was a prime contractor for Starfleet and that same job took Montgomery away more than Dawn cared to admit. At times, it seemed she wasn't really married to him but rather, they were passing strangers with benefits. Maybe his absence was why she clung to her family. To give her a sense of stability.

Great job of psychoanalyzing myself, Dawn girl, she thought. Now how about you go to someone who knows you better than yourself?

Dawn was sitting on her parents' front porch, watching the sun going down on this oddball day. Her mother was sitting with her and Dawn was resting her head on the older woman's shoulder, just like Dawn had when she was growing up.

"You've not done this in quite a while, Dawn," said her mother. "I can't remember the last time you put your head on my shoulder. Seems like the only time you do that anymore is when something's on your mind."

Dawn didn't stir. "You guessed right. I do have a lot on my mind, Mum."

Her mother carefully took a sip of her red wine, lest she disturb her daughter. "Want to tell me about it?"

Dawn looked up at her mom. "Do you know why I joined Starfleet?"

Her mother looked at her, brushing the brown hair out of Dawn's eyes. "I seem to remember you joined up because you wanted to heal people. Being out in space was a bonus, if I recall."

"Right on both counts, Mum," she said, looking away. Deidre kept brushing her daughter's hair, which Dawn was finding relaxing. "Today, I was asked to take a starship assignment."

"Is that a fact?"

Dawn sat up and looked at her mother, as if she could not believe her mother was so calm by this news. "You don't sound too impressed."

Her mother sat up and looked at Dawn non-plussed. "Should I be? I mean, you've been asked, not ordered, to starship duty. What part of that am I supposed to be impressed by?"

Like mother, like daughter, Dawn thought. *Mum's always been unflappable and I take a long time to get flustered or frustrated.* "I was asked to be the CMO on the new *Lexington*."

Deidre's face screwed but in trying to remember where she heard the name. Finally, she said, "Why does the name *Lexington* sound familiar?"

"*Lexington* was the second of the original 13 *Constitution*-class starships to come home from her five-year mission, Mum," Dawn explained, surprised she knew something her mother didn't. Her mother looked at her blankly. "*Lexington* was my father-in-law's former command before he was promoted to admiral."

Deidre sighed in understanding, then she regained her confused expression. "Wait a minute. I met your father-in-law a time or two and I know he's a four-star admiral. Since when do admirals go back to single ship command?"

"Since he was demoted by the Federation Council."

Deidre now showed some understanding. "What did he do to get demoted?"

Dawn sighed. "Mum, he wouldn't tell me specifics on why he was demoted but he did tell me he firmly believes it was in defense of a good friend."

"Good friends usually have each other's back, Dawn." Her mother took another sip of wine. "You know that."

"I know. And now the *Lexington* is finishing construction, she needs a CMO, not a series of part time doctors who's on call in case there's an accident. And he asked me to be the CMO."

"But you're his daughter-in-law," Deidre protested. "Certainly, he can't make you the CMO since you're his daughter-in-law! That's nepotism!"

"It may very well be nepotism, Mum," defended Dawn. "But there's very few people know I'm married to his son. I didn't even change my name because I didn't want people to think I got to where I am on his name."

"So only you two would know you're related by marriage to him?"

“Yes, Mum. And I like to think I’m good at my job. If Starfleet doesn’t seem to have a problem, then I don’t. And I’ll let him worry about Starfleet, since he approached me for the job.”

“That’s good thinking, daughter of mine.” Deidre sat back once again.

Dawn put her head back where it was. “But that’s only part of what’s bothering me. I really don’t want to leave home either. You guys mean the world to me.”

Her mother took one of her hands in a maternal fashion. “What’s your heart telling you, Dawn?”

“I’m conflicted...”

“No, Dawn. What is your *heart* telling you?”

The silence was so long that Deidre thought Dawn might have gone asleep. But Dawn finally answered. “I don’t know.”

“What the hell does that mean, ‘I don’t know’? Either you either want to stay here and throw away your Starfleet career before it begins,” Deidre started brushing Dawn’s hair with her free hand, “plus you’d be throwing away all those years of hard work just to become another small-time country doctor. Or you go to into space and make us all proud. Now which is it?”

Dawn sat up once again and looked her mom in the eye. “What did you say?”

“I said you either...”

Dawn shook her head. “I meant at the end. ‘Go to space and make us all proud’?”

“I meant every word of it. Dawn, your dad and I are both very proud of what you’ve become.” Deidre matched Dawn’s look. “I mean, you took it upon yourself to go get that medical degree you so badly wanted. You married a man you were head over heels for. And you’ve still got a lot to get more done in the short time since you’ve been born. Who *wouldn’t* be proud of a daughter like that?”

Dawn blushed, a rarity for her. Not even when she proposed to her husband. “If you were me, mum, what would you do?”

“But I’m *not* you, dear. I’m me and you are you. Only you can make this kind of decision. But know that your parents love you and are damned proud of you, no matter what you do.”

Dawn was stunned. “So, if I were to take Alex McKnight up on his offer, you would not be mad or upset at me?”

“Again, dear, why would we be upset?” Deidre finished her wine. “It is your life and you must do what you think is best.” She took both of her daughter’s hands. “Your dad and I will always be there for you when you need us. You have no need to worry about that. We will be in Bunbury for the rest of our lives so if you need us for anything, you will know where to call. We love you, Dawn.”

Pride was about to burst out of Dawn’s chest and she was getting choked up. She hadn’t heard her mother talk like this in a long time so it was reassuring that they still felt the same way as they had when she left for Starfleet Academy. And it soothed Dawn’s ego.

“And I love you too, Mum.” Dawn came to her decision. “Tomorrow morning, I’m calling Alex and accepting his offer.” She looked around. “I don’t think I’ll see this place much for the next five years.”

“It’ll still be here when your tour on the *Lexington* is over and so will we. Now go out there and live the life your heart is telling you to live.”