
STAR TREK
The Lexington Adventures
Duty to the Realm
A Short Story
by Joey Bonice

“Duty to the Realm”

Story by
Joey Bonice

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

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As Lieutenant Commander Saavik departed, Captain Alexander McKnight returned his attention to a very recently received personnel memo that was making Alex sweat the next conversation that he would have. It wasn't so much the memo but its ramifications that made him uncomfortable.

STARFLEET COMMAND
COMMANDING OFFICER / STARFLEET PERSONNEL
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, NORTH AMERICA, EARTH
ORDER NUMBER: SC-942-411-X
STARDATE: 8780.82
TO: MCKNIGHT, ANGELICA RENEE LOUISE WINDSOR-MOUNTBATTEN
RANK: COMMANDER (O-5) (TO BE ADVANCED TO CAPTAIN)
STARFLEET SERIAL NUMBER: SF-493-287-V

1. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- **TYPE OF ORDER:** PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION (PCS) - ACTIVE DUTY
- **AUTHORITY:** STARFLEET PERSONNEL MANUALS 1430-010 (ADVANCEMENT) & 1300-310 (PCS)
- **ADVANCEMENT EFFECTIVE STARDATE:** 8780.82
- **NEW RANK:** CAPTAIN (O-6)

2. MOVEMENT DIRECTIVE

- **FROM (CURRENT ACTIVITY):** USS *LEXINGTON* (NCC-1709-A)
- **TO (NEW ACTIVITY):** STARFLEET LIAISON OFFICER, OFFICE OF AMBASSADOR MARGARET WINDSOR-MOUNTBATTEN, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, EARTH
- **REPORTING STARDATE:** 8800.46
- **DELAY IN REPORTING / LEAVE:** 15 DAYS EN ROUTE AUTHORIZED. (APPLICABLE LEAVE TO BE CHARGED ACCORDINGLY).

3. TRAVEL AND STORAGE ENTITLEMENTS

- **MODE OF TRAVEL:** OFFICIAL STARFLEET OR AUTHORIZED COMMERCIAL TRANSPORT, WHICHEVER IS MORE EXPEDIANT
- **STORAGE OF PERSONAL GOODS:** TO BE RELEASED TO MEMBER UPON REPORTING TO NEW DUTY STATION.

4. FINANCIAL & ACCOUNTING DATA

- **ACCOUNTING CLASSIFICATION:** 1761405.2026 020 50500 0 008040
- **COST CODE:** M37F15
- **ADVANCEMENT PAY ADJUSTMENT:** MEMBER IS AUTHORIZED PAY ADVANCEMENT TO CAPTAIN (O-6), UPON REPORTING TO NEW DUTY STATION.

5. SPECIAL REMARKS / ADMINISTRATIVE MANDATES

- **ORIGINAL ORDERS:** THIS DOCUMENT REPRESENTS OFFICIAL ORDERS. ANY MODIFICATION REQUIRES ISSUANCE OF AN OFFICIAL MODIFICATION (MOD 1, MOD 2, ETC.) BY A STARFLEET PERSONNEL OFFICE.
- **COMMAND RANK INDUCTION:** MEMBER IS AUTHORIZED TO PARTICIPATE IN CAPTAIN (O-6) LEVEL TRAINING AND OTHER RANK-APPROPRIATE TRAINING UPON REPORTING TO NEW DUTY STATION.

- **CHECK-IN PROCEDURE:** UPON ARRIVAL, REPORT IMMEDIATELY TO CHIEF OF STAFF, OFFICE OF THE AMBASSADOR FOR IN-PROCESSING. SECONDARY IN-PROCESSING AT CLOSEST STARFLEET STATION AUTHORIZED FOR STARFLEET SPECIFIC ITEMS.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDER, STARFLEET
BURTON, J.A.
CAPTAIN, STARFLEET
STARFLEET PERSONNEL

Alex knew what this memo meant and he knew Angelica would know it as well. The longer he delayed in telling her, the harder this whole thing would become.

"She's not going to take this well," prophesied Captain Brieanna Smith, as if she was reading Alex's mind. Alex turned to look at her.

"Oh, I know she won't. She'll know what this means." Alex sighed. "Go ahead and page her. Let's get this over with."

Brieanna paged the British communications officer and there was an awkward silence. It wasn't but a minute before the doorbell went off.

"Come on in," Alex called, walking over to the replicator to get himself an iced vanilla flavored coffee.

Commander Angelica McKnight walked into the office. Unlike most officers, she wasn't the least bit intimidated, so she walked into the office full of confidence that came with seniority.

"You wanted to see me, Alex?" she asked with a smile, not knowing that her whole outlook would change very soon.

"Yeah, I do, Angie. Have a seat."

"With pleasure," Angelica said, taking the open seat near Alex's desk. "So, what did I screw up this time?" she said cheerfully, playfully. "Or was it something I didn't do? Either way, I didn't do it!"

Alex took a sip of his coffee as he walked over to take his seat behind his desk. Without fanfare, he downloaded the memo to an empty PADD, then handed it off to Angelica.

"So, what's with…" she started to say before she looked down and began to read the message. With every line, her face fell and good mood evaporated.

"You've got to be shitting me," Angelica finally said. "*Goddamn*."

"I would have expected a lot of jumping up and down," Brieanna said. "Not an 'oh shit' comment. Especially from someone who's getting a promotion."

"It's not a promotion," Angelica said coldly. "It's a summons." Her tone instantly put Brieanna on her guard.

"Why is that, Captain?" Brieanna responded in kind, making it a point to use her new rank.

It took Angelica a full minute to collect herself to be able to talk civilly again. "My apologies, Brieanna. I should not have bitten your head off."

"Apology accepted, Angie. But you still need to explain yourself."

"You know my mother?" Brieanna nodded. "You know she's sick, right?" Brieanna nodded again. "And you know what she has is… *incurable*."

Brieanna had completely forgotten that part. She'd been told some months ago but since the intervening time, Brieanna had managed to forget.

"Oh," Brieanna said simply. "What a dumbass I am. I knew she was ill but I'd forgotten… sorry, Angie."

"As I recall," replied Angelica, "we've been busy saving the universe a couple of times since her visit. Not counting that when we were told, we had also been hypnotized by a vampire."

"Ladies," Alex said, finally interjecting. "The thing is that Angie is transferring and has gotten a promotion that's overdue. Now, as for the promotion ceremony…"

"I don't want one," Angelica said.

"Say again?"

"I don't want a promotion ceremony," she repeated. "It's okay to have a lunch or something but… all I want is to put on the pins, change the color of my turtleneck, and report for duty as usual. I want to just enjoy my new rank while I've got the time to enjoy it."

"It's all up to you, Angie," Alex said. "If you don't want a ceremony, then so be it. But we've got to have a little get together to celebrate the actual promotion, though. Your friends will want to celebrate it, even if only a few of us actually know the real meaning behind it."

"I really wish," Angelica said wistfully, "that it was a promotion that *didn't* have a hidden meaning. I'd enjoy the celebrations a lot more."

Alex knew what was weighing on her mind and in his mind, it would be better to let her have the rest of the day to herself instead of having a brooding comms officer cast a pall over the bridge.

"Angie, take the rest of the day off. Go gather your thoughts and report for duty tomorrow."

"But I…"

"… know how to take an order when you hear one. I don't want you on my bridge until tomorrow morning. Why not go to the recording studio and clear your head?"

"I may do that," she answered. "Permission to depart?"

"Granted." Alex smiled at her. "I'll meet you later."

Angelica weakly smiled back at him. "Looking forward to it," she said in a tone that said her heart really wasn't in it. She got up and walked out of the room.

"Goddamn, am I an idiot!" said Brieanna, smacking her forehead. "I'd forgotten that Angie's mom was in a bad way and I all but put salt into *that* wound!"

"Angie did bring up the point that when we were told, we had our hands full with a vampire then that business with Starfleet One's hijacking, among other things. We've been a little busy these last few months, so it's not surprising it slipped your mind."

Brieanna made her way over to the replicator and got her favorite coffee. "Has she always been like…" she paused as the computer did its thing, "… like, *sensitive* in regard to her royal heritage?"

Alex sat back in his chair, taking a long sip on his coffee. "She has *always* been sensitive about it. She only told me about it after what I would call a dramatic reveal just as we started dating. She brought me to Sandringham for a weekend, and it was *only then* that she told me straight to my face that she was a duchess and in the line of succession. An hour later, I was talking to her uncle, who was the king. As if I needed the confirmation."

"Well, that would track with what I've seen," Brieanna said. "A couple of times, Jason made mention of Angie's royal heritage, and she not only went ice cold, she virtually bit his head clean off. The way she handled it would make even *me* think twice about even broaching the subject."

Alex took another sip of coffee, finishing it. "Even I hesitate in bringing up the subject, even though she's never bit my head off. I do know that the times when we broached the subject, she said she never cared for being a royal. Oh, and that's between us and the four walls."

"Understood," she said, sipping in her own drink. "So now this promotion is bringing those feelings up front and she's having to face the reality of it all."

"Yeah," Alex said, looking down and playing with the cup, "because the moment her mother's… no longer with us mortals, Angie will be a queen. And that's the job she dreads and has never desired."

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As soon as Alex had dismissed her, Angelica went to her quarters to change. She looked around her quarters and her eyes rested on the sole picture of her mother at her own coronation some years ago. It was the only picture Angelica had of her on the ship.

"Why did it have to be me, Mum?" she asked the silence of her quarters, not that she was expecting a reply. "You know I didn't ever want to be queen." She started to take off her uniform. "It's bad enough that I know you're not going to be with us for much longer," she kept talking as she ended up in her underwear. She went over to the closet and pulled out a black leather button-up shirt and form-fitting leather pants.

"Mum. I don't feel like I've even close to being up to the job." She pulled on her pants, making sure they were smooth along her legs. "I know you raised me with just that idea in mind, but I've been gone so long…" She put on and buttoned up her shirt as she talked. "I barely remember court protocols. And if you expect me to be like you, forget it."

She looked at herself in the mirror and felt something was missing. She went over and dug around in a drawer until she produced a thin, red leather tie. She put it on and made a Windsor knot. *It isn't often I wear a button up shirt and tie*, she thought, *but somehow, it's right to wear one today*.

"I know this: I'm not like you but I really don't know if I'm ready to take over, even with your preparing me for it."

She headed to the door but not before she picked up her black wireless studio headphones. *I want to drown out the world tonight*, she thought, putting them on and making sure her hair was looking good with the headphones on it before turning on her playlist, adjusting the volume, and walking out.

Angelica made her way to the ship's pub, the Stars and Stripes, located on the forward edge of the saucer. The place wasn't too busy since it was in the middle of the afternoon, so she picked herself up a non-alcoholic scotch then made her way to a booth facing one of the windows. She stared at the stars at warp speed, and the sight made her feel… comfortable.

The music in her ears was slow and melancholy, just like she was feeling. She took a drink of her scotch, grimacing as she did so. *This new non-alcoholic stuff is for the birds*, she

thought. *I wish I could drink the real stuff, but Alex won't open the bar. I understand his reasons for it, though. I wouldn't want a ship full of drunks either*.

She took another sip and sat staring at the stars, her ears filled with soft, melancholy power ballads from the 1980's.

She's dying, Angelica thought. *That's why she's calling for me. She's had to have called in all the favors she had to get her eldest daughter the job of being her liaison. But I don't feel ready! Even if she coaches me, and she will with the time remaining, will I be prepared enough to take over running a country, commonwealth, and ambassadorship?*

After six more non-scotch scotches, she eyed her husband as he came into the pub, obviously looking for her. He finally saw her and walked over towards the booth she had commanded, but stopped to talk to the various crewpeople and officers who were also partaking in the pub.

Say what you will, she thought as he glad-handed his way to her. *He certainly knows how to take care of his crew. That's part of the reason I fell in love with him. Too bad we'll be separated once again for what... the sixth time in our careers? But I do love the homecomings*.

"Is this seat taken?" he asked. She pulled an earphone off so she could hear a little better. From where he was standing, Alex McKnight could hear her music too easily so he knew she had the volume a higher than she should have had it. *And all she needs right now*, he thought, *is music feeding into her melancholy. She's depressed enough as it is!*

"Pardon?"

"Is this seat taken?" he repeated, indicating the empty spot to her right.

She kept the earphone off as she replied, "You're cute enough so, yeah, it's open."

Alex smiled as he sat down beside her in the booth as Angelica took her headphones off, placing them around her neck before ordering the computer to turn the music off. She noticed that he also had taken the time to change; he was wearing a white polo shirt, jeans, sneakers, and his favorite brown bomber jacket.

He looked at her, also noticing how she had dressed. "You usually don't wear ties if you're not going to have a photo shoot," he noted.

She shrugged. "Somehow, I felt that wearing a tie would be appropriate this evening."

He tried to sit next to her, but her look said that she wasn't ready for that level of intimacy just yet, which was odd for her since she enjoyed sitting side by side next to her lover. Alex noticed the half-full glass on the table in front of her, indicating she had been drinking, but Alex knew it wasn't alcoholic since he had locked up all those stocks.

"How many have you had?"

"Seven and before you ask, this non-alcoholic stuff is complete crap. I really want the real stuff."

He looked at her. "In your state of mind, there's no way I'm opening the bar."

She looked deflated, then picked up her glass and emptied it in one gulp. "I thought as much."

He then tried to take her hand and, uncharacteristically for her, she didn't offer her hand but also didn't resist in him taking it. She usually enjoyed holding hands and having some public displays of affection. But she didn't seem to be enjoying it this time. She looked as though her mind was light years away.

They sat in silence for a time with her looking out at the stars while he looked at her, growing concerned at her lack of enthusiasm. "Okay, out with it," he finally said, looking her in the eye. "What's really bothering you?"

She turned to look at him. "I want to talk to my husband, not my captain. I don't want a lecture from a senior captain."

While not completely unexpected, her request also kind of took him off guard. *What she's really asking*, he thought, *is for a sympathetic ear. She knows a captain can't provide that to a subordinate, but a husband can*.

He shook all over, eliciting a slight chuckle from his wife. "You look silly!"

"Okay," he said after his faux shaking, "I'm in husband mode."

She sighed deeply before talking. "Sure?"

"I'm sure. It's not like I don't know what's bothering my own wife."

Angelica sighed again and shook her hair, freeing it from the headphones around her neck. "I don't want to leave you or the ship," she said simply. "And if you're going to give me the captain answer, I'll put my headphones back on and drown you out."

"I told you you're talking to your hubby, Angie. And if you want to know…" he paused, seeing that her hands were inching to her headphones, serious about not wanting to hear the captain's answer. She stopped when she noticed he had paused.

"If you want to know," he repeated, "I don't want you to leave me or the *Lexington* either."

Angelica blinked. Clearly, she hadn't really expected that answer.

"I'm a selfish bastard," he continued, "and I'm human enough to admit it. Out of our near twenty-two years of marriage, we've been more apart than together. I've grown used to you being with me again and I'm enjoying having you here."

She nodded. "At least I'm not alone there. I've gotten used to having a husband once again."

Alex chucked slightly. "Great minds and all that. The one thing I like about having you around is that you're not normally a Debbie Downer."

She speared him with a quizzical look. "What's a 'Debbie Downer'?"

"You're so depressed that you're bringing everyone around you down," he clarified.

"Oh." She nodded. "I see. Yeah, I feel down today. Somewhat depressed even."

"Sometimes talking about it helps," he offered. "It's good to get things off our chest at times."

She looked to the deck, her glass on the table, then to him. "I can't help it. This promotion and reassignment… Alex, it's bullshit. I feel as though I'm being summoned just to watch my mum die." She paused to collect her thoughts. "I mean, ever since my mum came to the *Lexington*, she told me how sick she was and what her plans were. But I was hoping against hope that somehow, she was wrong and her illness went away." She picked up her glass and found it empty. "Shit."

He kept silent as she put her glass back. "I don't feel ready to take over from her. I'm not ready to be a queen. And it's a job I don't want but I know I have to do."

She looked to him once again and instantly, he knew she was ready to hear him.

"Angie, I kind of understand where you're coming from. We don't get to choose our families. It's always the luck of the draw. You were born into a royal family. I was born into

an Air Force family. And there's tons of people who would have killed to be born into your family but by a chance of fate, it was you."

Angelica sighed. "You know I never wanted to be a queen, Alex. Never. But as soon as my mum… passes, I'll be thrust into that position. It's my duty but it's one I've never asked for."

"You could have abdicated," he pointed out.

"Abdication's never entered my mind. Not once."

"Even when you were on the outs with your mother?"

She sighed once again. "No. Even when we weren't speaking to each other, I never once thought of leaving my family. I mean… it's family."

"I understand," he said, preparing to get up to get a drink, "But I think there's something you've not considered."

"What's that?"

He stood up. "Did you think that maybe another reason she's calling for you is to make up for all that lost time? To spend what time she has remaining with her eldest daughter before her time's up?"

Alex could tell from her expression that she'd been concentrating so much on all the negative aspects that this sliver of positivity hadn't occurred to her. He smiled tightly as he went to get a glass of sweetened iced tea. *He has a point*, she thought as he walked over to the replicator. *And it's a fair point. If he were to make that simple a case without me considering it, how in the bloody hell can I be the head of an entire kingdom, an entire commonwealth, much less be an ambassador for an entire planet?*

Alex returned, carrying his tea and another glass of the non-alcoholic scotch back to their table. He set them on the table as she did a mental shaking of her head. *Maybe it's my emotions that have blinded me to the obvious*, she thought some more. *I mean, I should have seen what Alex saw and I didn't. But then, the weight of my mother's impending… passing and the inheritance of a job I do not want is still weighing hard on me.*

As soon as he sat back in his spot, she gave him a fierce hug. Instead of asking what brought this on, he simply returned the hug, knowing she needed to know he was there for her.

"I'll always be in your corner, honey," he said gently into her ear. "Always."

"I know," she responded. "That's one of the reasons I'm so crazy in love with you."

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It was well past ship's midnight, and Angelica was nowhere near getting to sleep. She had left Alex in his quarters, saying she needed a walk to clear her mind. Instead, she ended up in the ship's recording studio that she had almost singlehandedly built over two years ago. In the intervening time, this studio became as much her private sanctuary as it had been a place where friendships among strangers had been built for a lifetime.

Today, it acted as a sanctuary.

She pulled up a chair and sat down in it, putting on the studio headphones she was carrying as soon as she settled in. The song she had playing was about losing a parent. While it had been originally written about the loss of a father, to Angelica, it became about her

mother. The song's lyrics directly addressed the complex and heavy emotions of a parent passing away, the changing of generations, and the importance of saying what needs to be said before it's too late. She sat in her chair, listening to the song repeat itself, feeling that the song had indeed captured exactly how she felt.

Maybe Alex has a point, she thought. *Maybe Mum is actually calling for me to be by her side so she can say those things that she needed to say before she leaves. Lord above knows, we've got almost twenty years to catch up on. She's always been a wonderful grandmother to our twin daughters but that doesn't make up for the damage our relationship has had between us*.

She shifted in her seat. *Maybe it's time to put that all beside us and make the best of what we've got while we have some time left. I know that would make my sister very happy. And come to think of it, I think it may make me happy too to spend some time with Mum and Karina*.

Angelica was so lost in her thoughts that she hadn't seen or heard Saavik enter the studio. Saavik was wearing a civilian outfit of Vulcan design: a long-sleeved, high-collared tunic with a central panel across her chest and abdomen colored a dark teal while the sleeves, shoulders, and side panels were made from a textured, coppery-brown material that resembled leather. She was also wearing dark, form-fitting trousers that featured coppery-brown textured panels on the thighs, matching the material on her top. And the top and trousers were separated by a dark waistband or belt, finished off by tall, dark boots.

She took Valentina's drummer chair and put it beside Angelica, who still had not noticed or heard anything. The Vulcan cleared her throat, and it still did not get her friend's attention.

What finally got Angelica's attention was when Saavik lightly laid her hands on Angelica's lower arm and wrist.

"Who the…?" Angelica blinked, bringing herself back to the real world. To Saavik's credit, she didn't remove her hands. The redhead looked at where the Vulcan was holding her. "*Saavik*? What the bloody hell are *you* doing here?"

"I wanted to talk to my friend," she said simply. Up to a year ago, she wouldn't have even admitted to having a friend. That sentence showed just how far the Vulcan hybrid had progressed in her social interactions. "I wanted to thank you for helping me socially and emotionally, but it appears you are the one who needs to talk."

"I had a talk earlier," she said, finally looking at her friend's face. "And it helped. For a while. But the feelings came back and… well, here I am."

"What feelings would that be?"

Angelica dryly chuckled. "A few months ago, I would not believe that I would've been talking about feelings to a Vulcan, much less to you." She paused, seeing that Saavik was genuinely concerned. "Saavik… I think I may be mourning for someone who's not dead."

"That would be… interesting," said Saavik. "Why do you think this?"

"Well, do you know who my mum is?"

"Only what is available publicly," Saavik admitted. "Your mother is the Queen of the United Kingdom, head of the Commonwealth of Nations and 14 Commonwealth nation-states, as well as being one of the five ambassadors from Earth to the Federation… a carryover from the old Security Council of the United Nations."

"Exactly. A mouthful of titles, isn't it?" Saavik nodded, prompting Angelica to continue. "Do you remember when she came aboard a few months ago?"

"I remember Ambassador Mountbatten-Windsor's visit but as I also recall, we were also… *preoccupied* with another, more pressing matter."

Ouch, Angelica thought. She and Saavik had fought while she was under the vampire's mental control and Angelica felt bad about that ever since, even to this day. *I know she's trying to be diplomatic, but I still feel bad about fighting with one of my dearest friends!*

"What you don't know" Angelica said, sidestepping the issue of hurt feelings for the moment, "is that there was another issue during that visit that wasn't made public."

Saavik only raised her right eyebrow but to anyone who knew her, that movement said tons. She stayed silent and Angelica was grateful for once.

"She has an illness."

It took Saavik a moment to register the comment. "Interesting. She did not appear ill during her visit."

Angelica sighed. "And it won't show up for a long time. She's got a very rare off-world illness… hell, I don't think it even has a name. But they know some stuff about it."

Saavik cocked her head slightly to the right. Again, to anyone else, it wouldn't have meant anything. "From the way you are acting," she said, "you are, as you would say, 'dancing around the issue,' I take it that the prognosis is not in her favor."

Angelica took a moment to work the words in her head before she said them. "Not in… Saavik, it's terminal."

Even in the early morning hours, Saavik showed no sign of slowing down mentally. "Which means you will replace your mother."

"And it's a job I don't want!" Angelica said, her High Wycombe accent coming out. "Even now!"

"But," Saavik pointed out, "in Starfleet, we've all performed those duties that we've not wanted or wished. But it's our call to duty that makes us perform those duties even when we do not wish to."

"You're beginning to sound like a Starfleet Academy professor with that 'Duty, Honor, Country' bit. But yes, I know it's my duty." Angelica looked down at the deck. "It still doesn't make me feel any better."

"I believe you're trying to live in two different realities, Angelica. One where you dwell on all the negative. The other is one where you look at the positives. The Angelica I know is normally an upbeat person who finds the good in anything she finds herself. I do not like this Angelica who is choosing to, again I am paraphrasing, 'be a Debbie Downer'."

Angelica looked up at her friend, realizing that Alex had said something like that just a few hours earlier. Had she been the suspicious type, the redheaded comms officer may have thought Alex had put the Vulcan up to all this. But she knew them both well enough that Alex wasn't the type to send someone to do his job and Saavik wasn't one to accept this type of duty from someone else.

"I understand that it's difficult to lose a parent," Saavik was saying, "but, in this case, you are mourning for a person who is not yet deceased. You told me that your mother's illness is fatal, but you are acting like she is already deceased. This promotion and reassignment must mean that your mother wants you beside her for the time she has

remaining. You may benefit from just being there and enjoying the remaining time a mother and daughter have."

Unintentionally, Saavik had said the same thing Alex had said a few hours before. That really got Angelica thinking. *They're seeing something I'm not*, she thought. *Or else they would not be saying similar things*.

"I'll have to work on that," Angelica said. "But you didn't come to meet me here this early in the morning just to hear my voice bounce off the walls."

"As I said when I came in, I came here to thank you for being my very good friend, but it looked like you needed a friend."

Angelica stood up and Saavik mirrored the movement. On a whim, Angelica gave her Vulcan friend a hug, who reciprocated. "Thank you, Saavik. Guess I needed to have a sympathetic ear this evening."

"You are most welcome, Angelica."

***

One of the problems with time is how it is perceived. There are times when it seems to go really fast while other times, it seems to drag on forever. But yet, the ticking of the clock remains the same.

For Angelica, the day of her actual departure came too soon for her.

The wide, metal-and-glass concourse of Deep Space Station K-12 was a chaotic current of crimson uniforms and various civilian outfits but for Alex and Angelica McKnight, the world had focused down to a singular, painful point. For twenty years, this scene had been replayed many times before beginning yet another separation but somehow, it was those separations that defined their marriage. But it never made the goodbyes any easier for either of them.

Angelica had booked this commercial flight back to Earth and had checked her bags. Alex had been beside her the entire time, trying to now show how her departure was affecting him. He had escorted her from the *Lexington*, through the check-in process, and now to the waiting area near Gate B-4, the last checkpoint before the S.S. *Cloud Surf*, the cruise liner for this flight, departed for Earth.

In the windows behind them, he could clearly see the *Constitution*-class U.S.S. *Endeavour* pulling into her berth at B-5, its hull glinting under a distant nebula's light. Angelica's liner easily dwarfed the *Endeavour* over in the next berth. The destination board on the far wall cyclically blinked: *DEPARTURE FOR S.S.* CLOUD SURF *(CUNARD FLIGHT 2709): NOW BOARDING.*

Alex smoothed his hand over Angelica's shoulder, his fingers tracing the tailored seam of her black leather blazer. A well-traveled belt bag rested on her hip and a similar well-traveled duffle bag was on her shoulder, a container for the personal things she was taking aboard with her.

"Who was it who said, 'once more onto the breach, dear friends?'" Alex said, his voice a low, rough rumble. He tried to make his comment light but his eyes were weary, making the commend lose its strength.

Angelica looked at him, her cascading red and gray curls framing a face that fought to contain a storm of emotion. "I didn't know you knew Act 3, Scene 1 of Henry V, Alex."

"It's one of the Bard's few phrases that have stuck with me." He looked around to make sure the sign hadn't changed, wanting every second available to be with her. "Goddamn it, I really hate this."

She took his hand, interlacing her fingers with his. "I hate it too. But we knew this was a risk when we signed up for Starfleet."

He looked at their interlaced fingers. "You know, if you count it up… we've spent maybe what? Not even eight years total together? Out of our twenty-two years of marriage."

A ghost of a smile touched her lips, a shared, sad joke. "Seven years, nine months," she corrected. "And three days. I've counted."

He chuckled, the sound devoid of joy. "Exactly. We've spent more time apart than together."

Angelica's hand tightened on his. "Did you ever think that these separations and deployments actually strengthen our marriage? I mean, I love you even more deeply now than the day we confessed to each other that we loved each other!"

"And you know I love you all the same. But this time…" he stopped talking, breaking her hold on his hand to hold her tightly to him. On the surface, it was a prestigious transfer, a high-level coordination role between Starfleet Command and the British Royal Household. But the truth, known by only a handful of people, held a heavy, unwanted mantle. The Queen's health was starting to fail and as the Princess of Wales, she was being called not only to coordinate as a liaison, but also to prepare for a future role as a queen. And all too soon, she would occupy that throne.

Alex said, looking deeper into her eyes. "Angelica, I really don't want you to go. But I know you've got to."

She hesitated, her gaze momentarily drifting to the departure sign before turning to hold him in her arms one last time. "I feel the same, my love. But my family needs me, whether I want to be there or not."

He looked into her eyes. "I've seen that look before, Cinnamon," he said, using the pet name that only the members of her immediate family knew, referencing a history known only to them. He knew her sense of duty was absolute; it was the thing that made her a great leader and one of the traits he loved about her. "It pains me to see it again."

Before she could answer, a chime sounded, followed by a polite, computerized voice. *"NOW ANNOUNCING THE FINAL BOARDING CALL FOR S.S.* CLOUD SURF*, CUNARD FLIGHT 2709. ALL PASSENGERS, PLEASE REPORT TO GATE B-4. DOORS WILL BE CLOSING IN FIVE MINUTES."* They both turned to the sound of the automated gate agent.

Time, the persistent enemy of their married life, was out.

"I really want to flip that flipping[1] thing off," Alex said.

This prompted a little laugh out of Angelica. "Such ungentlemanly language from one of Starfleet's living legends."

"I'm not a legend," he commented. "I'm just someone doing his job."

[1] He didn't say 'flipping'.

She took a deep breath as she put Alex's hands on her waist. Angelica looked at him, her eyes shining with unshed tears. The image of them facing each other was a thousand goodbyes in one.

"I don't want to say goodbye."

"Nor do I." Alex may have been a senior Starfleet captain, a warrior of countless combat campaigns and scientific expeditions but at this moment, he was a husband and for once, Angelica saw the man she fell in love with and married.

"Do me a favor," he said. If she didn't know any better, she would have thought his voice caught a little bit. "Don't let that damned crown change you, Angie. Starfleet made you. Your Starfleet training will stand you in good stead with the crown. Just… don't let the goddamn throne change the person I fell in love with."

She set her jaw and he knew what it meant. "I won't. I swear it. Just come back to me and the girls."

Then came the announcement. "*THIS IS THE FINAL BOARDING CALL FOR S.S.* CLOUD SURF*, CUNARD FLIGHT 2709. ALL PASSENGERS, PLEASE REPORT TO GATE B-4. DOORS WILL BE CLOSING IN THREE MINUTES.*"

Angelica stepped in and gave Alex a kiss to remember her by. And he kissed her passionately right back. He put his forehead on hers, whispering, "I love you."

"I love you too. You'll always be the captain of my heart."

Alex reluctantly backed away, a heavy, deliberate step. The gesture was a thousand things. A farewell. A vow. He raised his hand in a wave, a lonely beacon on the terminal floor.

"Safe travels, my love. I'll see you soon enough."

Angelica stood her ground for a final, agonizing second, her hands gripping her bag's strap, her eyes locked on his. Angelica's face, carefully composed but fighting back tears, looked back at him, the look of connection they mentally carried with each other for decades.

"I'll see you soon, Alex. I love you. Always."

She turned, her red and gray hair flying in the air, and walked towards the gate. Alex held his hand up, waving a final time to the back of the woman who would one day be a queen, knowing that his waves would be caught only by a viewport of endless space.