
STAR TREK
The Lexington Adventures
Equinox of Duty
A Short Story
by Joey Bonice

# “Equinox of Duty”

Story by
Joey Bonice

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

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These two very recently received personnel memos made Captain Alexander McKnight sweat.

**STARFLEET COMMAND**
**COMMANDING OFFICER / STARFLEET PERSONNEL**
**SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, NORTH AMERICA, EARTH**
**ORDER NUMBER:** 2065-AN012-345
**STARDATE:** 8780.82
**TO:** SAAVIK
**RANK:** LIEUTENANT COMMANDER (O-4)
**STARFLEET SERIAL NUMBER:** SF-493-287-V

**1. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

- **TYPE OF ORDER:** PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION (PCS) - ACTIVE DUTY
- **AUTHORITY:** STARFLEET PERSONNEL MANUAL 1300-310
- **EFFECTIVE STARDATE:** 8792.3

**2. MOVEMENT DIRECTIVE**

- **FROM (CURRENT ACTIVITY):** USS *LEXINGTON* (NCC-1709-A)
- **TO (NEW ACTIVITY):** USS *SHANGRI-LA* (NCC-2575)
- **REPORTING STARDATE:** 8792.3
- **DELAY IN REPORTING / LEAVE:** 5 DAYS EN ROUTE AUTHORIZED. (APPLICABLE LEAVE TO BE CHARGED ACCORDINGLY).

**3. TRAVEL AND STORAGE ENTITLEMENTS**

- **MODE OF TRAVEL:** STARFLEET, USS *ENTERPRISE* (NCC-1701-A)
- **STORAGE OF PERSONAL GOODS:** AUTHORIZED FOR ENTIRE TOUR ON USS *SHANGRI-LA*.

**4. FINANCIAL & ACCOUNTING DATA**

- **ACCOUNTING CLASSIFICATION:** 1761405.2026 000 50000 0 000000
- **COST CODE:** M34A12

**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 THE STARFLEET PERSONNEL OFFICE.
- **CHECK-IN PROCEDURE:** UPON ARRIVAL, REPORT IMMEDIATELY TO THE PERSONNEL OFFICE ABOARD USS *SHANGRI-LA* FOR IN-PROCESSING.

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

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**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 WINDOR-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 LIASON 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 could almost shout in joy and pain at the same time. He was about to lose two of his command staff… and he would lose his wife once again. A couple of months earlier, her mother visited the ship and told both him and Commander Angelica McKnight that she had a terminal illness and that she would be requesting her daughter to return to Earth to be with her. Even in this day and age, bureaucracy still reigned and still took time to process anything. That is took this long was a surprise… Alex expected Angelica's orders to take a while longer; he had expected her to be promoted but was surprised it was effective today instead of reporting into her new station, so it would be rare indeed to have a full captain as a communications officer, even for a few days!

As for Saavik… Alex had also been somewhat expecting this too. On her last evaluation, he had recommended that she be considered for a command slot, but he didn't recommend a captaincy as he felt she needed some more command experience prior to taking a starship's command. Becoming an executive officer on the *Shangri-La*, a brand-new heavy cruiser, would fit the bill perfectly, but Alex was also a little concerned that he was losing one of the best science officers he'd ever worked with.

Alex sighed as he re-read both messages. They would depart the *Lexington* within a month of each other… never a good sign. Losing one officer would be sustainable but losing two within a short time almost wasn't. By this time, the command staff had gotten used to each other, virtually knew what the others were thinking, and could read the tone of each other's voices. Now they'd have to figure out how the newcomers would fit in, and only time would solve that mystery.

Alex's monitor chimed, meaning a new message had arrived. He took a sip of his iced coffee before he called it up.

**STARFLEET COMMAND**
**COMMANDING OFFICER / STARFLEET PERSONNEL**
**SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, NORTH AMERICA, EARTH**
**ORDER NUMBER:** 2066-AN016-349
**STARDATE:** 8780.82
**TO:** SHIN, JI-HOON
**RANK:** LIEUTENANT COMMANDER (O-4)
**STARFLEET SERIAL NUMBER:** S384-912-VR

**1. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

- **TYPE OF ORDER:** PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION (PCS) - ACTIVE DUTY
- **AUTHORITY:** STARFLEET PERSONNEL MANUAL 1300-310
- **EFFECTIVE STARDATE:** 8780.82

**2. MOVEMENT DIRECTIVE**

- **FROM (CURRENT ACTIVITY):** USS *ENTERPRISE* (NCC-1701-A)
- **TO (NEW ACTIVITY):** USS *LEXINGTON* (NCC-1709-A)
- **REPORTING STARDATE:** 8781.86

- **DELAY IN REPORTING / LEAVE:** 0 DAYS EN ROUTE AUTHORIZED AT MEMBER'S REQUEST.

**3. TRAVEL AND STORAGE ENTITLEMENTS**

- **MODE OF TRAVEL:** STARFLEET, USS *ENTERPRISE* (NCC-1701-A)
- **STORAGE OF PERSONAL GOODS:** AUTHORIZED FOR ENTIRE TOUR ON USS *LEXINGTON*.

**4. FINANCIAL & ACCOUNTING DATA**

- **ACCOUNTING CLASSIFICATION:** 1761405.2046 010 70020 0 006010
- **COST CODE:** M35C10

**5. SPECIAL REMARKS / ADMINISTRATIVE MANDATES**

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- **CHECK-IN PROCEDURE:** UPON ARRIVAL, REPORT IMMEDIATELY TO THE PERSONNEL OFFICE ABOARD USS *LEXINGTON* FOR IN-PROCESSING.

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

Alex almost did a spit take when he read this message. While he didn't know the new lieutenant commander personally, he did know her reputation, and it was as close to spotless as a Starfleet officer could get at her age, and not asking for leave during a transfer would fit her profile from what he had heard. But her report date was very close… about three days. Alex knew the *Enterprise* was en route to Earth, which was where the *Shangri-La* was completing her outfitting so it made sense that Commander Shin would change out with Saavik, letting Saavik hitch a ride in the process. It would also give Saavik a chance to catch up with Captains Kirk and Spock on her way there, which Alex approved.

Now he needed to tell everyone what he just found out. He finished up his coffee and went to get another, feeling that he would need it as he told his officers the news.

"Captain McKnight to Captain Smith." Alex had successfully lobbied to get his executive officer, Commander Brieanna Smith, promoted to captain, using the logic that if *Enterprise*, as the Federation Flagship, could afford to have three captains then the *Lexington*, as the Starfleet Flagship, could damn well afford to have two captains. Brieanna's promotion had been less than a month ago, but it was still kind of odd to be calling her a captain.

"Smith here, Alex. What's up?"

"Anne, are you into anything you can tear yourself away from?"

"I'm working on some personnel files in my office and to be honest, I can use the break. You in your office?"

"Yeah, I am, Anne."

"Great. I'll be there in a few minutes. Smith out."

True to her word, Brieanna was there within four minutes. Alex bid her entry into his office and to one of the seats in front of his antique oak desk.

"Want anything to drink?"

Brieanna shook her head. "Just finished off a coffee before you called, Alex."

"Well, I need another one before I get to the meat of things." He ordered another vanilla iced coffee and, within a minute, was sitting behind his desk.

"You'll never guess what I just got."

"Was it confirmation that your retirement has been accepted?" Brieanna teased.

"I know you want my seat, Anne" he fired back teasingly, "but you're going to have to wait a bit longer." He instantly got serious. "We got a shakeup in our command staff."

Brieanna got serious. "I knew Angie was coming up to head out but none of us knew…"

"It's more than Angie. It's Saavik too."

That got Brieanna's interest piqued. "Her *too*? Where?"

"Exec on the new *Shangri-La*. Supposed to report in by the end of the month."

"When does she leave?"

Alex didn't hesitate. "As soon as *Enterprise* arrives. Three days from now."

"And Angie?"

"About two weeks after but she doesn't leave on *Enterprise*. We dock at Starbase 51 next week so she can take the first ship headed back. One other thing…. well, more than one."

"As I've heard it said: 'I'm listening'."

"Angie got promoted to Captain, effective today."

Brieanna pumped her fist in the air. "Great! I'm happy for her!"

"So, for a few days, there will be three captains on the *Lexington*. But then, there's three on the *Enterprise*…" He paused and shook his head. "Jim must have something on the Admiralty."

Brieanna was visibly excited. "Did Starfleet send any replacements for Saavik or Angie?"

"They're sending Saavik's… a Lieutenant Commander Shin Ji-hoon. Know her?"

That was a name she knew. "Only by reputation. She's supposed to be one of the best science officers in the Fleet and that's saying something since she's human."

"I've heard the same. She's the night shift science officer on *Enterprise*, if I'm not mistaken."

Brieanna shifted slightly in her seat. "What about Angie?"

"There's a Caitian named Gillian Cunningham who is our night shift comms officer that Angie would like to see take her place…."

"I confirmed that with Angie a couple of days ago," said Brieanna.

"I sent my reassignment request to our HR people at the same time I sent the personnel request papers. Should have already crossed your desk." A funny thought hit him. "It just hit me and keep it to ourselves but how the hell does a Caitian get a *human* name?"

"If I remember the personnel file," said Brieanna, "it said that she was adopted as a kitten by human parents from Sydney. That's where she was raised."

Alex contained a laugh… *a felinoid who hailed from Australia and had an Australian accent? Whoever said the universe didn't have a sense of humor?* he thought.

Just then, the monitor signaled and Alex pulled up the new message.

**STARFLEET COMMAND**
**USS *LEXINGTON* (NCC-1709-A)**
**STARDATE 8780.82**

**MEMORANDUM**

From: Executive Officer, USS *LEXINGTON* (NCC-1709-A)
To: LT Gillian Cunningham
Subj: INTERNAL REASSIGNMENT TO PRIMARY COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Ref: (a) STARFLEET INSTRUCTION 1411.15 (Starship Department Head Qualifications)

1. Effective Stardate 8781.76, you are detached from your current assignment as Delta Shift Deputy Communications Officer and reassigned as the Department Head and Primary Communications Officer on Alpha Shift; assuming all duties of this position.

2. You will turn over all collateral duties, logs, and other official duty files to your replacement no later than Stardate 8781.46.

3. Upon reporting to the Commanding Officer, you will prioritize completing your duty station qualifications as Department Head, Communications in accordance with reference (a).

4. This reassignment is an internal administrative change of primary duty. Your rank, status, and duty station remain unchanged.

/s/
B.A. Smith
Captain, Starfleet

Alex had to smile at this. "Speaking of the devil. Gillian got her reassignment letter."

"Took HR long enough," replied Brieanna. "I mean I know they're shuffling around four officers but still, it took a while longer that maybe it should have. I'll bet Gillian will call up all excited when she wakes up and sees this."

"I'll bet on it too. But now, I've got Saavik and Angie to take care of. Let's get Saavik in here since she's the first to leave."

Brieanna tapped her badge. "Lieutenant Commander Saavik, please report to the captain's office immediately."

"On my way, Captain."

Alex slightly shook his head. "I still find it odd to call you 'Captain', Anne."

"And after all you did to get this slot upgraded," she defended, "and you find it odd that we're *peers* now?"

Alex threw his hands up in mock surrender. "I meant no offense, Anne! Really!"

Before Brieanna could answer, the door chimed. "Enter."

In came in Saavik, not at all looking nervous that she was called quite unexpectedly to the captain's ready room. "Captain Smith asked me to come here, Captain McKnight?"

"Indeed, and at ease. You're not in any trouble. In fact, we've got good news for you. Come and sit down. Want anything to drink?"

Saavik walked up and took the vacant seat beside Brieanna but sat stiffly. "No, sir. I'm fine."

Alex nodded. "Got it. I've got something here that will make your day." He downloaded Saavik's reassignment message to a PADD, then handed it to Brieanna to check the right memo had downloaded. "You're being reassigned to the *Shangri-La* as her executive officer."

Brieanna nodded that the PADD held the right information and handed it to Saavik. Saavik just blinked before taking the tablet, speed reading it. "I don't understand. I'm being reassigned?"

"Yes. Now before you get it in your thick Vulcan skull that you've done a bad job and reassigned because of that or that I hate you, you would be one hundred percent wrong. In fact, you're the best science officer I've had, period. I hate to lose you, but you need to 'spread your wings' as my dad would say. In fact, you've done a complete one-eighty with your personality since you reported aboard."

You could see that Saavik was choosing her words carefully. "I… feel that I've broadened my experience by being here on the *Lexington* with a supportive executive and commanding officer. But do you really feel that I'm ready for a command-level position?"

"I think so. Captain Garcia is a good captain, and I think you will learn a lot from her. And the *Shangri-La* is a smaller ship so you would get a more personalized experience than you would here on the *Lexington*. As I said, I hate losing you but I'm not going to stifle your career because of an old man's desire to hold onto the best science officer in the fleet."

Again, Saavik was choosing her words. "I wish to thank you for your support, Captains. It has been quite the learning experience."

"And you can thank Angie for being your best friend while you've been here," Brieanna said. "She's helped you not only get in touch with your emotions when you need to but also been a lightning rod for you when you couldn't handle the intensity. It's because of her than you've become the officer you are now."

"I will thank Angie later, Captain. And I wish to thank you two once again for the opportunity to serve on the *Lexington*."

"The *Enterprise* will be here in a couple of days," Alex said, "and you'll hitch a ride on her to get to Earth and the *Shangri-La*." He stood up and Saavik followed suit. Usually, he would shake hands, but Alex knew the Vulcan rules about physical contact. Instead, he nodded. "I know I'll say this again, but I wish you the best of luck in your new assignment, Saavik."

Brieanna chimed in. "I'll say the same thing and add that we're only a call away."

"Thank you, Captains."

***

Two days later, the famed *Enterprise* rendezvoused with legendary *Lexington*. Seeing the old girl on the screen, Alex could not help but admire the SLEP[1] that gave the entire *Constitution* class those new sleek lines, making them, in his eyes, more beautiful than the older pre-SLEP Connies.

"Got to love those ships, the refitted Connies," he said aloud as *Enterprise* came into visual range. *Lexington* outsized *Enterprise* by at least 200 meters and it showed as *Enterprise* pulled up alongside.

"Why are you so partial to that post-SLEP style, Cap?" said Commander Sophea Bennington-Fox, up from Engineering and standing to Alex's left. "I kind of liked the look of the pre-SLEP *Constitution*s myself."

"I like those sleek lines," said Alex. "Makes the ship look leaner and cleaner."

"Especially when it's the *Enterprise*, right?" countered Sophea. "Though I will never understand why they just didn't make the *Excelsior* the new *Enterprise*. When they finally retire this *Enterprise*, the next one will be an *Excelsior* so why not just go ahead and make the A an *Excelsior*?"

"There were some that thought just like you, Sophie," Alex explained. "But there were those that thought that *Enterprise* should be a *Constitution*. They won out."

She looked over at him. "And in which camp were you, Skipper?"

"I was for the *Excelsior* to be renamed to *Enterprise*. After all, if this *Enterprise* is supposed to be the Federation's flagship, why not go with one of your best ships?" He looked at her. "I take it you were Team *Excelsior*?"

"Damn right I was! The *Constitution*s have hit the limit of their designs. They're good and solidly designed but their spaceframes are all but worn out and they've taken the design as far as it could go. As much as I hate to admit it, their era's coming to an end. *Excelsior* is the future, but my *Lexington* puts the *Excelsior* to shame!"

Before Alex could retort, Captain Angelica McKnight jumped in from her station at communications. Her promotion was now effective but seeing her with the new rank pin and divisional white turtleneck and sleeve straps were still a shock to Alex and others. "*Enterprise* is ready for transfer, Alex."

"Got it. Then let's send our science officer off in style." He got up and went to the turbolift. He and the other bridge officers piled in and made their way to Transporter Room Four. As they got out, the corridor was lined with other officers and crew members, apparently waiting for their friend to make her appearance. Alex and the others went into the transporter room and patiently waited for Saavik to make an appearance.

They didn't have to wait long. Saavik, dressed in her Class "A" uniform, was carrying a standard issue duffle bag on her right shoulder. She stopped just inside the door, looking about as amazed as a Vulcan would show.

"I didn't expect quite a turnout," she said.

"On this ship, we're about as close to family as you'll get," said Angelica. "Even if we sometimes have to leave."

"You'll do well on *Shangri-La*," Brieanna said. "Just remember you'll always friends here on the *Lexington*. We're only a call away."

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[1] SLEP = Service Life Extension Program

The other officers said similar things as Saavik mounted on the pad.

"Good luck and happy trails, Saavik," Alex said.

"Live long and prosper, crew of the *Lexington*," Saavik said, raising her hand in a Vulcan salute. All eight officers copied her salute. "Permission to disembark, Captain McKnight?"

"Permission granted, Lieutenant Commander Saavik." To the transporter chief, he gave the command "Energize". Within seconds, Saavik dematerialized and headed on her way to Earth. However, the other pad remained stubbornly inactive. Alex waited for roughly two minutes before he turned to the chief.

"Something wrong with the *Enterprise* transporters?"

"No, sir," he said, looking at his monitors. "Everything checks out on both ends. *Enterprise* doesn't have anyone on the pads."

Alex turned to Brieanna, who shrugged.

"What the hell is Jim doing over there?"

"You know Jim Kirk. Master of the unexpected."

"He keeps me waiting much longer and I'll be roasting his ass. Our date with the starbase can't be changed and we're tight as is."

Just then, the pad hummed to life and within seconds, a Korean woman appeared in front of them. She looked almost like a porcelain doll; she was that beautiful. Her long black hair was in a flawless low ponytail, and her Class A uniform could have been used for a recruiting poster. She didn't wear much makeup that Alex could see and wore no visible jewelry. Her dark eyes looked around for a moment before settling on Alex.

"Lieutenant Commander Shin Ji-hoon, reporting as ordered, Captain McKnight," she said with only a slight Korean accent as she stepped off the pad. She handed Alex a PADD. "My orders."

Alex was ticked off by the delay, so he handed the PADD to Brieanna before he spoke, not taking his eyes off her. But she spoke before Alex could bite her head off. "Sir, Captain Kirk wishes you to beam over to *Enterprise* to talk."

"Did he tell you why? I mean, he could have called and we'd have talked."

"He did not say why, sir. But that was the reason I was late in beaming to the *Lexington*."

"Oh for… *shit*," spat Alex. "Anne, introduce Commander Shin to her new co-workers, take her to her quarters, then escort her to my ready room. I should be there shortly. Right after I have Jim's ass for lunch."

***

An hour later, *Enterprise* broke off and started on her way to Earth as *Lexington* moved in another direction. Alex had beamed back less than three minutes before *Enterprise* left and he seemed to be in a better mood, but he had kept the Korean commander waiting for over forty minutes until he arrived.

"Commander Shin," he said, walking the length of the compartment to take his seat behind the desk. "Sorry for keeping you waiting. Kirk did have something important to tell

me, but I chewed him for making you and us late. If we make flank speed all the way, we'll get there just in time."

"I understand, sir," she said with a tone that said she completely didn't.

Alex smiled. "Guess it's time for me to lay out my expectations, right?" He didn't wait for her to acknowledge. "First off, I run an informal command, so I call everyone by first name unless I'm pissed off at you or if protocol demands it. My first name is "Captain", "Cap", "Skipper" or "Skip". It's "Alex when we're off duty.""

"I've heard as much, sir… er, Captain," said Shin.

"Second, can the 'sir' stuff. I don't like it, so I ask you call me that when protocol demands." He paused for a moment. "Third, I expect nothing less than your best. We work hard but we also play hard. I ask for the best and I give only the best. You make an honest mistake; I'll die on that hill defending you. You screw up, and I'll be the first in line to fry your ass. That make sense?"

Ji-hoon nodded. "Perfect sense, Captain."

Alex nodded as well, pleased that she changed tact instantly. "And the last thing… I try my best to take care of my crew. My command philosophy is simple: you take care of your people, and they will take care of the mission. That's all I've got. You've got anything for me?"

Ji-hoon shook her head, ponytail swinging in time. "Nothing I can think of, Captain."

"One thing I want to know before you go… what do you like to do in your free time?"

"Captain?"

"I always want to know the favorite pastimes of my staff. Angie and Kimmy love singing and hitting the recording studio, Dawn loves to cook, Sophea loves to build models and squeeze a few rounds off with her gun, Valentina hits the gym after her duty shift, Jason loves to play basketball, and Brieanna loves watching Western films and dressing like a cowgirl. So, what do you like to do?"

You could tell Ji-hoon wasn't used to being this informal and she hesitated in answering.

"Look, uh… Ji-hoon, right?" She nodded. "As I said, I run a real informal command. On the surface, informality seems to run counter to a highly disciplined crew, but I've found that you get way better performance by being informal and letting people speak their minds. And it's worked since I took command of my first starship back in '67. So again, what hobbies do you have?"

"Well… I box."

"As in boxing? That's cool. Anything else?

"I also like to be on the firing range and target practicing."

"I like doing that as well… especially when I'm having a bad day. Anything else?"

"Well… I'm also a sixth Level Dan in Taekwondo."

Alex leaned back and thought for a few seconds. "Wow. I've a science officer who loves physical activity. That could be almost a non-sequitur, Ji-hoon."

"I'm… aware of that, yes, Captain. But I love science. My off-duty activities are my way of me blowing off some steam."

"Well, I've read your personnel file and boy, you have a lot of steam to blow off. Original science officer on the *Excelsior* before a near burst appendix took you off the ship and just in time too. Then night shift science officer on *Enterprise*. For a Vulcan, Spock

absolutely gushed in all your evaluations. Before *Excelsior*, you were on the *Yorktown*, then *Incheon*. You've gotten around in all the right circles, Ji-hoon. Color me impressed."

"I fully intend to work my best while I'm stationed on the *Lexington*, Captain" she said, sounding like a character from a K-drama. "You can count on me."

"Of that, I have no doubts."

***

That evening, Ji-hoon decided to go boxing in the ship's gym. She quickly dressed in a baggy white T-shirt with cut off sleeves and large arm holes over a white tank top, shiny black leggings, and sneakers, grabbing her trusty white over ear headphones before heading for the gym. She only got lost once on her way; a good sign for someone who was completely unfamiliar with *Odysseus*-class starships.

She entered the gym and made her way to the heavy punching bag where the Korean found that Valentina Tereshkova had beaten her there. She was already beating the bag furiously when the science officer approached as she came over to the bag. She watched as Valentina kept throwing several powerful combinations of punches.

"Nice form," said Ji-hoon. Valentina stopped long enough to look at the newcomer, then went back to punching.

"Thanks," she said. "I know you, don't I?"

"Yeah, you do. We met earlier; I'm Lieutenant Commander Shin Ji-hoon. I've just transferred in from the *Enterprise*."

"*Enterprise* you say?" said the Russian between throws. "Means you know your stuff. I'm Lieutenant Valentina Tereshkova, the navigator."

"Pleased to meet you, Lieutenant."

Since Valentina was wearing boxing gloves, they did a fist bump. She stopped to look at the newcomer. "Did you come here to work out?"

"I actually came here looking to box or work a bag. I love boxing. It's… relaxing."

"I find it relaxing as you beat the crap out of someone. Are you in Security?"

"Security? Oh, hell no," Ji-hoon said, shaking her head and chuckling. "I'm the new science officer."

"Oh yeah," said Valentina. She looked down at Ji-hoon's headphones. "That's an interesting headset you've got there. What's that flag on them? I'm not familiar with it."

Ji-hoon lifted them up and looked at them before putting them on, talking as she did so. "Oh. That's the old South Korea flag on the earcups. I was born and raised in Busan, so I put something on them from my home country, even if its an old flag. Guess I've still got something for the old country."

"Nothing wrong with that," said Valentina, throwing another punch. "I'm from Russia myself. Leningrad."

As Valentina punched, the bag started to swing, threatening to hit Valentina.

"Here… let me hold the bag or you're liable to get your own bell rung." Ji-hoon walked behind and held the bag as Valentina threw several combinations of powerful punches.

"You're strong, Lieutenant," Ji-hoon observed. "It's taking a lot for me to hold this bag for you!"

“It’s a way of working out my aggression before I beat someone to a bloody pulp,” the Russian countered. She saw the panicked look in Ji-hoon’s face. “I’m joking about beating someone up… though right now, I’d really do it to someone!”

Seeing that Valentina was losing steam, Ji-hoon said, “Can I take over and you hold this bag?”

“Sure.” They switched places and Ji-hoon called up some energizing music in her headphones before putting on the gloves Valentina offered her. She tested the weight of the gloves and though they were heavier than the ones she usually used, it would work. It wasn’t long before she really started to beat on the bag.

“Wow!” said Valentina, barely able to hold the bag against the Korean’s punches. “You really know your way around a punching bag, Commander!”

“It’s ‘Ji-hoon’ and thanks for the compliment,” she said as she threw a very powerful punch combination that almost knocked Valentina down.

“Watch it, Ji-hoon! You about put me on the deck with that one! You pissed off at someone?”

“Not at all,” Ji-hoon replied. “Just my usual routine.” She hit the bag again and it took everything the Russian had to remain upright.

“Not only do you have some form, but you’ve got power too! Those last two about took me off my feet!”

“Then you’ve got something to aspire to, Lieutenant. If you want,” she threw a punch that very nearly took Valentina into the air, “I’ll be more than happy to not only show you how I do it but I’ll also spar with you.”

“I love a challenge, Ji-hoon. You’re on!”

***

One of the better things about a starship en-route to her next assignment was the down time it allowed the crew to have to catch up. Catch up on paperwork, catch up on training, catching up on delayed hobbies. But in Shin Ji-hoon’s case, it was to learn how she could apply her hobbies on a new starship. The day after reporting aboard, she decided to practice her firearms training, knowing that she would be called to qualify with both firearms and phasers soon. Putting on a similar outfit as she wore when she boxed, she made her way to the bowels of the ship, where a firing range would be safe to ship and crew.

Already there was the ship’s chief engineer, holding an old M4A1 American rifle. Ji-hoon donned a pair of thin white hearing protectors on top of her half-ponytailed hair and eye protection before entering the room. Just in time too, as Sophea Bennington-Fox fired three rounds in quick succession. All hit what they called ‘center mass’, meaning she hit the center of the torso on a humanoid shaped target. Ji-hoon checked out a K-2 rifle and sixty rounds of ammunition before taking up position beside Sophea.

“Nice grouping,” said Ji-hoon, loading the magazine with twenty rounds. Sophea safed and put her rifle on the table in front of her, making sure it was pointed downrange before turning to the newcomer. She then adjusted her thin red hearing protectors before brushing her free-falling hair back behind her shoulder.

“You’re the new science officer… uh, Shin Hoon, right?”

“Close,” Ji-hoon said as she loaded her weapon. “It ‘Shin Ji-hoon’. In Korea, the last name is first, then the first name. In Western tradition, I’d be ‘Ji-hoon Shin’. Can we stick with ‘Ji-hoon’ for now?”

“Sure. And I’m ‘Sophie’.” She adjusted her hearing protectors as she talked. “What was that you said about my grouping? These damn hearing protectors make it really hard to hear a normal conversation.”

“I said you’ve got a nice grouping there, Sophea.”

Sophea looked down at the target. “I’m off… I hit low in the center group. The Academy’s Olympic team would have kicked me out for that.”

“You made the Olympic team? So did I! Only I qualified with phasers… I missed the firearms portion by only a point.”

“One point may as well had been the Moon,” Sophea said. “Least for Olympic qualifications. But for Starfleet, that’s top notch.”

“Care for a match, Sophea?”

“Sure,” Sophea said, smiling. “I’m always up for a challenge… and beating someone.”

Ji-hoon chambered her first round. “How many did you have?”

“You mean warming up? Ten rounds.”

Ji-hoon put her rifle to her shoulder and looked down the scope, then fired three rounds in quick succession, hitting the center mass but the grouping was wider than Sophea’s. She fired three more, then one. This time, the shots were a lot tighter.

“What’s the distance?”

“One hundred meters.”

“Too close,” Ji-hoon said, sighting down. “No wonder I’m off. The target needs to be at least two hundred meters.”

“What scope do you have?”

“Reflex,” Ji-hoon replied and put three more rounds downrange. These were now tight. “Better.”

Sophea adjusted the targets for two hundred meters, and both women reset their sights for that distance.

“How many rounds do you need?”

“Five.” And to prove her point, Sophea shouldered her M4 and fired all five rounds as fast as her finger could pull the trigger. She looked at the holo-monitor on the left side of the lane, showing where her bullets had hit. They appeared to be a bullseye.

Not to be outdone, Ji-hoon shouldered her K-2 rifle and also fired five rounds as fast as she could. To everyone present, there was no discerning between when Sophea fired and when Ji-hoon fired. And just like the engineer, the science officer had hit the bullseye.

“Not bad,” Ji-hoon said. “Not bad at all.”

“Olympic rules?” asked Sophea. This meant that the weapons would remain in semi-automatic mode; one round for each person for twenty rounds, then the totals would be scored by the computer. So, every shot counted.

For the next fifteen minutes, the Hawaiian and the Korean alternated firing and were drawing a crowd in the process. They were smiling, both relishing a professional challenge and having someone capable to rising up to meet it.

At the end, the score was tied. Ji-hoon put her hearing protectors around her neck, not seeing that Sophea was doing the same. At the same time, they put their eye protection on the table in front of them.

"Phasers?" Sophea inquired.

"Phasers. Type 2's."

Both women took their rifles and checked them in, then drawing the Type 2 phasers. Each made sure the weapon was charged and set to a light setting only so even if they were discharged and hit someone, it would only produce a light show and do no damage.

Each woman took her original place and recalibrated the targets for phaser fire. Both put the target for one hundred meters. Sophea put her phaser down just long enough to messily half-ponytail her dark hair.

"Same rules?" asked Ji-hoon.

"Bet your ass," Sophea replied.

Again, they took turns firing a two-second burst at the target. This time, it took ten minutes and again, the score was tied.

Sophea put her phaser down and put out her hand out in congratulations. Ji-hoon hurriedly put her own phaser down and took Sophea's hand.

"Well done, Ji-hoon. Only a couple of people on this ship are able to keep up with me. Looks like you can add yourself to that list."

"Thank you, Sophea. It's nice to compete with someone like you. Good match."

"Good match. Care to have a coffee with me in the officer's mess? I think I want to get to know you as a friend."

"Sounds good," Ji-hoon accepted but then realized something. "Where's the officer's mess? I'm not familiar with an *Odysseus*-class so I've been eating in my quarters!"

Sophea laughed aloud. "Come on, my friend. I'll show you."

They came in not knowing the other and walked out as friends. Ji-hoon counted that as a big win for the week.

***

After coffee with her newfound friend, she felt she still had some energy to burn off before going to bed. She went to her quarters and changed into a standard white Taekwondo uniform before having the computer tell her where the sparring studio was located. After a couple of false turns, she finally found it, hoping to go through some Taekwondo exercises to relax her.

She found someone already there and was going through their own exercises. The environmental dampeners in the sparring studio were tuned to Manila's dense heat and heavy humidity, a setting Major Cullen Areniego favored for high-intensity training. When he turned to her, she could tell he was Filipino, which explained the environment. He registered seeing her just as she realized she was intruding.

"Forgive me," Ji-hoon apologetically. "I didn't mean to intrude. I'll come back later…"

"Nonsense," Cullen said, his voice having a friendly tone. "You're not intruding… uh… sorry, I remember seeing you at the staff meeting earlier but I'll be damned if I remember your name."

“Lieutenant Commander Shin Ji-hoon. The new science officer.” She thought for a second. “You’re… Cullen Areniego?”

“Guilty. And good memory. It took me about a week to learn all the command staff names.”

She slightly bowed her torso both in admiration and embarrassment. “Thank you. You come here often?”

He smiled and slightly chucked. “That’s a bad pick-up line.”

“I know… I regretted saying it the moment I said it.”

“Well, to answer your question, yes, I do. See, I’m in charge of the Marine contingent here on the *Lexington*.” He looked her uniform over. “And I see you’re a sixth Dan in Taekwondo. Impressive.”

“Thank you. I just got promoted before I left the *Enterprise*. You into Taekwondo?”

“I’m a seventh Dan… highest on the ship.”

“Oh. *Kwanjang-nim*.” She bowed to him in reference to his rank.

“*Sabeom-nim*. I should have known you’d know the Korean names. You’re Korean.”

“And you’re a Filipino. You speak Korean?”

“I only know the bad words and enough to get me in trouble.”

She laughed, ponytailing her long dark hair. “Would you so honor me by sparring with me? *Kyorugi*?”

“Sure. I’d like to see what you’ve got.”

They went over to the lockers and pulled out some protective gear, called *Hogu*. The gear consisted of Electronic Body Protectors (PSS), Headgear, Groin Guard, Forearm & Shin/Instep Guards, Hand Protectors (Gloves) and Mouthguard. Ji-hoon put on the blue gear and Cullen got the red ones. Ji-hoon tightened the ties of her blue *hogu*, feeling the familiar ache deep in her shoulders. Her deltoids were still humming from when she and Valentina had pushed through their relentless rounds on the heavy bag, and her forearms remained stiff from holding steady posture during that evening's rifle-and-phaser duel with Sophea.

*Not even three days on the* Lexington*,* she thought, locking those fatigue points behind mental doors, *and I’m already fighting a seventh-dan master with me on a half tank*. *Perfect*.

Cullen adjusted his red chest protector; his dark eyes sharp behind his headgear. As befitting his rank, his guard was impeccably balanced—rooted, yet weightless.

"Word travels fast here on the *Lexington*, Commander," Cullen said, a wry grin tugging at his mouthguard. "A heavy bag punching session with Valentina, target practice with Sophea… you’ve got anything left, Commander?"

"It’s Ji-hoon. And I’ve more than enough for three rounds, Cullen," Ji-hoon replied, adjusting her headgear. *And I hope I didn’t just stick my foot in my mouth*, she thought. *Sometimes, my mouth is big enough to get me in over my head*.

"Fighters on the mat," the computer chimed, its voice cool against the subtle hum of the ship’s warp core under the deck plates. "Match protocol: World Taekwondo rules, electronic scoring, three rounds. Bow."

*Charyeot*. *Kyeong-ne*.

Both officers bowed with practiced, synchronous precision. As the automated referee system signaled the start, Cullen moved instantly, closing the distance with a

blinding *dollyo chagi*. Ji-hoon checked the roundhouse with her outer forearm, the impact jarring through her tired wrists, before snapping a low, probing front kick to force him back. Cullen absorbed the distance easily, sliding back an inch, his footwork effortless.

*He's lighter on his feet than I expected,* she noted, her mind racing to map his rhythmic cadence while her body fought its own sluggishness.

"Sloppy drop on the guard," Cullen murmured, stepping in. He capitalized on Ji-hoon's minor split second-delays, such as registering the faint sluggishness, and landed a crisp spinning back kick (*dwitchagi*) directly to her midsection's chest guard. The scoring chime signaled two points for red. "The team on the *Enterprise let* you get away with that?"

*Damn it,* Ji-hoon chided herself. *He caught the quarter-second lag in my right shoulder*. "Just taking the temperature of the room," Ji-hoon gritted out, circling back to center deck.

When the second round opened, Ji-hoon shifted her tactics, relying on an explosive lateral movement. "Let's see if you can keep up with the *Enterprise* rhythm," she muttered. *If I can't out-muscle his timing,* she thought, *I'll have to out-think his guard*. She faked a high axe kick (*naeryeo chagi*), pulling Cullen's guard up just enough to drive a brutal side kick into his ribs.

*There it is,* she thought with a surge of grim satisfaction as Cullen absorbed the hit with a grunt, his eyes glinting with approval. The score flashed equal: two to two.

"Better! But you'd better mind your ribs though!" Cullen warned as he accelerated his cadence, kicks clattering against guards in a rhythmic sequence of *kihap* shouts and snapping *dobok* fabric.

"You need to worry about your *own* ribs!" she countered, parrying a sharp roundhouse, though inwardly she was counting every breath, her diaphragm fighting against the stifling Manila-simulated air.

By the final ten seconds of the third round, the score sat tied at six. Sweat ran into Ji-hoon's eyes, her thighs burning from the accumulated strain of all the high-exertion training. Cullen pressed hard, driving her toward the boundary with a rapid-fire double roundhouse combination. "You're out of deck space, Ji-hoon!"

Ji-hoon felt her back heel touch the outer boundary line. *He thinks he's cornered me,* she realized, her instincts firing under the pressure. *He expects me to either yield the boundary point or try to jam him*. *He's not expecting me to risk everything on a gamble*. "Who said I needed space?"

Out of room, running on pure instinct and stubbornness, she dropped her center of gravity, leaned back against his momentum, and launched a desperate, high-spin hook kick (*spinning huryeo chagi*).

*All or nothing*, she thought.

Her heel swept past Cullen's forearms, catching the outer edge of his helmet with a soft, precise impact a fraction of a second before the final horn blared.

The electronic board flashed blue: three points scored in the final zero-point-two seconds. Nine to six.

Ji-hoon stood panting, her chest heaving as she lowered her leg, her footpads squeaking on the vinyl. *I actually pulled it off,* she thought, a thrill of adrenaline cutting

through the brutal weight of her exhaustion. Cullen stood motionless for a moment, then unbuckled his headgear, wiping sweat from his forehead with a broad grin.

"I thought those drills earlier tonight were supposed to wear out your shoulders, Ji-hoon," Cullen said, stepping forward to offer a bow of respect. "Clearly, Sophea didn't tire you out enough."

Ji-hoon bowed in return, untying her headgear with trembling fingers, a tired but triumphant smile breaking across her face. "Next time, Cullen… give me a full night's sleep first."

***

The next morning, Ji-hoon reported to the bridge a full ten minutes early, taking over the science station from the night shift officer and logging in for her shift. She had spent the last two days not only learning the system, as *Lexington* had a more advanced science and sensor suite than *Enterprise*, but customizing the displays so she could be at her most efficient.

She was so lost in learning the systems that she didn't notice that Captain McKnight had stepped on the bridge, apparently in a good mood. *Lexington* was still in transit to her next destination, so he almost didn't have anything to do. Almost.

He looked around the bridge and eyed his new science officer lost in her work. He took that as an encouraging sign, but it also reminded him of something. He turned down the yeoman with the duty shift logs for him to sign and walked casually over to the science station. When he arrived, he placed his forearms on the railing and looked over at the Korean, still unaware that her captain was on the bridge.

"Keeping busy?" he asked, causing her to jump literally in her seat. Ji-hoon turned around and saw him looking, smiling mischievously at her.

"Captain!" she said, trying to catch her breath. "I didn't know you were here!"

"Yeah, I kind of gathered that," he answered. "Are you settling in okay?"

"Yes, sir… er, Captain," she said and he smiled, glad that she remembered he didn't like the term 'sir'. "I'm settling in just fine."

"So I hear. You certainly know how to pick them, Ji-hoon."

A quizzical look crossed her face. "Captain?" Her tone said it all.

"I said you know how to pick them." He hitched an elbow on the railing, looking around the bridge. "You've been keeping busy. You've sparred with Cullen last night after you challenged Sophie to a shooting match. And you decided to throw down and beat the hell out of a punching bag with Valentina." He stood up and looked at her. "Let me clue you in on something: Valentina is the ship's boxing champion in the women's category, Sophie is the top marksperson on the ship, and Cullen is the top Taekwondo master on this ship. When you do something, you do it big, don't you?"

"Just doing my best to fit in, Captain," she meekly replied.

"And so you are. And we know now that you're an overachiever," he teased but she sensed he was only partially teasing. "I think you will fit in here very well, Commander Shin. Welcome to the *Lexington* family."