

## *From the Beginning*

*Well, that's finally done,* Captain Arcadia Miskinn-Warda Devlin thought as she walked the corridors of Starfleet Headquarters after having filed all her paperwork. While she didn't mind going to SFHQ, she was always pleased to leave. After all, one didn't go to SFHQ unless they were getting a new assignment or, she thought with a shudder, they were going to be relieved of command. In her case, she had put in the last of the *Stellar Wind* paperwork and also checked on the status of her request for a transfer out of command and into medical services.

Starfleet was usually very reluctant to allow a veteran captain to leave command, but in Arcadia's case, she'd done her homework. She wrote to various members of the medical profession for their support before she put in for the transfer, so she wasn't surprised when her transfer was provisionally granted. She also suspected that Kyle, former *Stellar Wind* Wing Commander, Kyle Argent may have 'cashed in a few chips' as Terrans like to say and ensured that her transfer to medical would be permanent.

However, before that would happen, she had a lot to accomplish. She needed to complete a number of refresher courses and when she was finished, she'd be assigned *somewhere* as a medical officer. While she specifically requested to be assigned to Nexus Station, she knew as a Starfleet Officer, she could be assigned anywhere, especially if her expertise was required in another venue. On the other hand, she also knew that if Kyle had anything to say about it, he wouldn't go to Nexus without her. But she knew that would never happen, Kyle would ultimately go where he was assigned and so would she.

On her way out, she passed by the Starfleet Memorial Hall. She stopped by the entrance and felt her heart skip a beat. She found herself holding her portfolio close to her chest as she reluctantly walked in. She sought out the plaque that commemorated those members lost during the One-Year War. Arcadia purposely looked for the list of the fallen from Hospital Ship *Imhotep*, NCC-4104. She then drew her hand down that list until it rested upon the name of Lieutenant Commander Desmond Newlin-Devlin.

*So, they revised the plaque to update Desmond's posthumous promotion,* thought Arcadia as she rubbed her hand slowly over the plaque. She stayed several minutes both admiring the memorial and reliving those nightmare days of the war. But for once, she didn't cry nor did she feel immense sadness. Instead, she was pleased to see that Desmond's heroism was recognized and she was finally getting on with her life. *Perhaps I've actually laid the demons to rest.*

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Arcadia considered how ironic it was that her life with Desmond and Kyle's life with Reesa were in parallel. Granted, she had spent more actual time with Desmond. They met and subsequently married when they were both assigned to the *April*. They had at least a year together before he was reassigned to the *Imhotep*. She later followed as there were no slots open for a senior surgeon. Shortly after her assignment to the *Imhotep*, the One-Year War started and then Desmond died under her surgical care.

Kyle on the other hand, was married twice as long to Reesa. They married whilst at the Academy and they never had an assignment together until that last fateful one on the Carrier *Kirov*. There wasn't much call for a pilot and a diplomat on the same assignment consequently; a joint assignment was a long time in coming. As it turned out, it was their first and last assignment together. Reesa was killed in front of Kyle's eyes during a diplomatic mission a scant three months after her arrival to the *Kirov*.

*Sometimes, there is no justice in the world, but life must go on,* mused Arcadia as she left the Hall and continued her journey to the outer reception area. When she didn't spot Kyle waiting for her there, she queried the computer. She was told that he was still at Fighter Corps HQ. Since they had pre-arranged to meet each other, it was up to Arcadia to wander over to Starfleet Fighter Corps HQ to meet him. Luckily for her, the Fighter Corps HQ was only across the quadrangle from Starfleet HQ.

In all her years in Starfleet, Captain Devlin had never set foot in SFFCHQ. After all, most 'tug jockeys', as the pilots liked to call the starship captains, aren't usually invited over for tea. However, on this day, Captain Devlin felt it was imperative to defend the honour of her former profession and proudly invaded their inner sanctum.

*Leave it to the Fighters to have such an elaborate shrine,* Arcadia considered as she entered the building, signed her and then walked through the nondescript wing of the central complex. This was obviously her day to take in such memorials. The walls were decorated with far too many plaques dedicated to those members who died in the line of service. Arcadia carefully scanned the plaques in an effort to locate the names of the pilots who died on the *Stellar Wind*. Not finding the names she was looking for, she reckoned that it was too early for such a dedication. She entered another corridor that was lined with spectacular holographs and actual paintings of the various crafts that the Corps had flown since the early 20th century.

Though she didn't know many of the ships, some of their names struck a chord with her as Kyle had told her some about the crafts that he'd flown. The Victory-class light fighter, the Vindicator multipurpose fighter, and the Vigilante space supremacy fighter. Kyle flew those in his earliest days in the academy and

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in his first duty assignments as she recalled. She walked over and took a good look at the Avenger. She remembered Ayesha and Kyle discussing its finer points during dinner one evening.

Captain Devlin recognized the holograph of the ship before her. *The Nighthawk*, she thought. *They served the Stellar Wind proudly. And to think I didn't want the ships on the 'Wind in the first place. Look at what I would have missed?*

She walked over to where there was an empty holograph projector with the title "Shadowhawk." Obviously this was the Corps newest creation and still too secret to have a display. But the name was obviously well known.

After taking her time to examine the holographs, she finally arrived at the office of the Chief of Staff, Starfleet Fighter Corps, Commodore Cordell Naismith.

Arcadia didn't immediately walk into the outer office; instead, she hovered just outside of where anyone in the area could spot her. She was surprised to see the area devoid of anyone waiting to see Commodore Naismith. According to Kyle, the Commodore was a very busy man and his outer office was always bustling. Arcadia then spotted Amanda Peel, Naismith's Executive Adjutant sitting behind a large desk surrounded by what Arcadia assumed were mementos of her life as a pilot. Kyle told her that she was no glorified secretary but in fact was part of the team that ran the fighter corps. Kyle mentioned that she'd been a flyer herself once but was given a medical discharge and subsequently was hired on as Naismith's right hand.

She took a long look at Amanda. Amanda was one of those Terran women whose age was indeterminate but Arcadia guessed it to be in the late forties. Her hair could be best described by the old Terran term 'dirty blonde' but Arcadia thought it was a lovely shade that hovered between blonde and dark brown, worn long and elegantly wrapped behind her neck. When Amanda rose from her desk, Arcadia noticed her delicate features, almost like a fine china doll. However, looks are deceiving according to Kyle as he'd told her many times that Amanda could pack a wicked punch when she wanted to.

Arcadia would have stood longer at the door but Amanda saw her and walked over towards her. Arcadia noticed her clear blue eyes and was quite surprised at how short Amanda was.

Amanda smiled and asked in a pleasant voice, "May I help you Captain?"

Arcadia was caught uncharacteristically off guard and merely stammered, "Ye-es... Ah, Ms Peel?"

"Yes?" Amanda replied quizzically.

"Forgive me," Arcadia began as she tucked her portfolio under her left arm and extended her right hand, "I'm Captain Arcadia Devlin. I'm here to wait for Commander Argent to finish his meeting with Commodore Naismith."

Amanda smiled and warmly greeted Arcadia, "Kyle told me you were coming. I'm so very glad to finally meet you."

As Amanda shook Arcadia's hand, Arcadia noticed that she called him by his first name. Very few people called him 'Kyle' and that interested Arcadia a great deal.

Amanda finished shaking Arcadia's hand and then continued, "Commodore Naismith asked me to escort you directly to his office when you arrived."

"He did?" she asked, somewhat confused.

"Of course," Amanda walked back to her desk, tapped a few keys on her console and then walked back to Arcadia. "Let me personally escort you to his office."

Arcadia tried not to show how surprised she was and hoped she succeeded. The several minutes it took the women to reach his office were spent in silence. Amanda tapped on the door and entered not waiting for an acknowledgement. Both men were sitting and then immediately stood as Amanda escorted Arcadia into Naismith's office.

"Captain Devlin, I presume," boomed Commodore Naismith as he extended his right hand to shake hers.

"Commodore?" she returned as she shook his hand, more confused than ever.

Amanda pulled a chair over for Arcadia to sit next to Kyle and then pulled a chair over for herself.

"Excellent timing, Captain," started Commodore Naismith as he and Kyle sat down. "I was just wrapping up my discussion with Kyle."

Arcadia looked to Kyle who merely smiled; "I honestly didn't expect such a welcome, Commodore." Arcadia looked back to Kyle and then gave him a wicked grin, "Especially for a mere... tug jockey."

If Kyle was surprised by her use of the pejorative that fighter jockeys used when referring to their starship counterparts, he didn't show it. However, for the sake of her amusement, he did arch an eyebrow. Cordell, on the other hand, just laughed and looked to Kyle with mock seriousness, "Hmm.... so this is the woman for whom you gave up the lucrative position to stay on as the *Stellar Wind* Wing Commander?"

Arcadia noticed Kyle eyeing her carefully as he slowly replied, "I thought of it more like a missionary position myself."

All Arcadia could do was arch both her eyebrows and then scowl at him in a non-verbal retort.

Commodore Naismith kept his eyes on Arcadia and then finally spoke, "Captain Devlin, are you sure about wanting to marry this... stick and thrust specialist?"

Amanda laughed but before Arcadia could answer the Commodore's question, Kyle broke in and deadpanned, "Well, you know how it goes, Sir. The harder the unit, the better the results."

Cordell and Amanda both saw how aghast Arcadia looked as they both broke into laughter. At this point, a glowering Arcadia decided it was time that she added to the conversation going on about her.

"Do I pass muster or does the Commodore wish to check my teeth as well?"

Commodore Cordell Naismith solemnly looked at Kyle, then to Arcadia, "Not necessary, Captain Devlin, I had those records sent to me last week. You're due for a check up by the way."

Arcadia was about to say something in reply but instead decided to give up and just laugh. Kyle looked fondly at her and then picked up her hand to squeeze it, "Indeed," he replied to her softly. "I may have to look into this matter myself."

"Oh really?" replied Arcadia with a wicked grin. "Since when does this tug jockey allow a mere fly boy to check her teeth?" Arcadia's eyes then locked tightly with Kyle's and nobody in the room was able to misinterpret the significance of their unspoken exchange.

"Ahem..." began Amanda with a broad smile on her face, "Before privacy becomes an issue..." She paused for a moment and then continued, "and

perhaps we're prying into personal details, but what are you two going to do about a wedding?"

Arcadia felt her face change into a frown as she looked to Kyle and then to Amanda, "Honestly, I don't bloody know." She then looked back to Kyle who just shrugged his shoulders.

"Then, perhaps you wouldn't mind some assistance?"

Arcadia looked relieved, "I'd love it, Ms Peel. Between getting my personal affairs straight as well as those of the *Stellar Wind* and... my... err... *personal affairs*, I haven't had much time to devote to the mechanics of matrimony."

Arcadia noticed Amanda visibly straighten, "If I am to assist with your wedding, then you *must* call me Amanda."

"Amanda... I'd greatly appreciate the help," she replied smiling.

"Excellent. Excellent," Naismith broke in as he rubbed his hands in delight. He looked down at his chronometer. "Since it's almost closing time, how about dinner? We can continue the discussion in more comfort than my office and have a good meal as well."

Arcadia looked to Kyle who smiled back his reply; "We'd love to."

Amanda rose and put the chair back; "I'll make the arrangements, Cordell."

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"That was a splendid meal," commented Arcadia as she and Kyle walked back to their Joint Officer's Quarters.

"Yes, it was. I thought you'd enjoy their company," he replied.

"Indeed I did," she responded as she opened their quarters. "By the way," she asked as she hung up their uniform jackets in their closet. "I was thinking...."

"About what?"

Arcadia walked over to the couch where Kyle was sitting and sat beside him. For several moments, she said nothing; she just simply stared at him and smiled.

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He sat there in obvious confusion, not knowing whether to smile back or what. "What *are* you smiling about, Arcadia?"

She leaned back as she unbuttoned her shirt, "I was thinking perhaps I would let you check out my teeth after all."

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