

Life is Short and The Art is Long

It began, as it always does, as a bolt from the blue.

"*My God!*" exclaimed Commodore Cordell Naismith as he and Kyle Argent rushed over to the Starfleet Command trauma center.

"I hope it isn't as bad as first reported," the Chief of Staff commented as they neared the hospital.

"It won't do us much good to speculate, Cordell," Captain Kyle Argent, quietly informed him. Kyle just happened to be discussing *Nexus* staffing requirements when the call came in and Cordell asked Kyle to tag along.

"That's true, Kyle."

"Personally," Kyle began as they finally reached the hospital, "I never would have put S'chuDoQ on the Rigel Cup team."

"You've always been a good judge of character, Kyle, especially when it comes to pilots. But I agree, in fact--"

Cordell was about to continue when the hospital's Chief Corpsman Dwight Ivanan interrupted him.

"Commodore Naismith, Captain Argent. This way, please..." Ike rushed them through hospital crowd and on to a waiting turbolift.

"Can you tell us what you know, Sergeant?" began Cordell as the 'lift doors closed behind them.

"Lieutenant Rudolf Serle and Lieutenant Junior Grade S'chuDoQ collided during a practice run. They were the only ones seriously injured. The others were treated at the field hospital and released. Both Serle and S'chuDoQ were sent here because we have the best trauma and duo-sub cellular specialist around." He paused as he drew a sharp breath. "Both those boys are in pretty bad shape. But knowing the surgeon as I do," Ike nodded in Kyle's direction, "she'll do her best to pull them through."

The 'lift doors opened but before they stepped off, Ike quickly added, "Admiral Davison is also here waiting in the visitor's room. He was visiting with a friend when the word came down."

"Thank you, Sergeant," Cordell replied as he and Kyle followed Ike to the waiting room.

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They entered to find a rather large tall dark brown skinned man standing in the middle of the waiting room. Kyle knew from a few brief meetings that this was the Commandant of the Starfleet Fighter Corps, Rear Admiral Benjamin Oakley Davison.

"Admiral Davison," Cordell began.

"Good to see you again, Cordell," Bennie replied as he shook Cordell's hand.

"Bennie, may I introduce Captain Kyle Argent. He--"

Davison cut him off as he eyed Kyle up and down. "Argent..." He paused to think. "Winner of the Rigel Cup?"

"Yes, Admiral."

"Good job, son. Cordell's told me all about you." Davison informed him as he warmly shook his hand while indicating that they should all sit down.

As he sat down, Kyle wryly wondered how much money the Admiral had won betting on him.

"Any news, Admiral?" Cordell began as all three of them sat down.

"None. But I understand that they put their best trauma--" began Bennie. They were interrupted by a sudden burst of activity outside the waiting room. The door partially opened to reveal a surgeon still in a surgical jumpsuit. Before the surgeon could say anything to the room, a voice behind her interrupted.

"Darce?"

"What is it Ike?"

"The status update you requested, ma'am."

"Thank you Ike," she replied exchanging her surgical hood and gloves for the offered padd. Ike placed her things on the chair near the door.

She carefully scanned the report and turned back to him. "Just tell the nurses to monitor Serle and let me know if there's any change on S'chuDoQ." Ike was about to leave when she jerked him back towards her. "You should notify his family."

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"His *family* is right here!" Rear Admiral Davison defiantly told them.

The surgeon looked over to see who'd become so insistent and was taken by surprise.

"Bennie!"

"Arcadia!" He walked over while holding out his hand, then quickly put it down. "Oh, hell," he replied as he gave her a big hug. "Good to see you again, Doctor Devlin! It's been too many damned years."

"It has indeed. Good to see you too Admiral. How's the hand?"

"Better than before you fixed it." He held his hand out for her to examine.

"I do some excellent work, don't I?" she commented as she turned his hand over.

"This woman," he turned to Cordell and Kyle, who were standing behind him, "saved my ass..."

Both Bennie and Arcadia found their thoughts drifting back to that fateful day...

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"Where the hell did they come from?" yelled tactical officer, Lieutenant Max Kharal as he held the back of Commodore Benjamin O. Davison's chair as yet another volley rocked the flagship.

"If I knew that, Max, I'd be a damned admiral by now," Bennie replied as he held on to his chair, lest he be knocked to the deck.

They were on their way to rendezvous with the Hospital ship *Imhotep*. His small squadron of frigates had taken care of chasing off the renegade Romulans and they thought they'd been successful. As fate would have it, more Romulans appeared out of the ether and descended again en masse.

The squadron was once again able to send these Romulans back on their merry way except for a few stubborn ones unwilling to take a hint. It was towards the end of the battle that the *Tempo* was pummeled with a volley that caused extensive damage to both the ship and the personnel inside.

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Commodore Davison was apprised that the damage to the *Tempo* was severe: they were dead in space and their transporter was down. As they couldn't make the rendezvous, a shuttle of doctors from the hospital ship would have to board the ship and render whatever assistance they could. This would be done under a possible barrage of weaponry as this group of Romulans was proving to be a pesky lot.

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The Hospital Ship *Imhotep*'s Commanding Officer put out the word that volunteers were needed for this rescue mission and she didn't mince words about how dangerous it would be. As expected, both Arcadia "Denny" Denby and Arcadia "Darce" Devlin volunteered their services as field surgeons. Denny because she always enjoyed a challenge, Darce because she felt she had nothing left to lose.

"Hang on!" shouted the rescue shuttle pilot as they carefully and quickly made their way to intercept the *Tempo* drifting lifeless in space. The shuttle handled several pot shots flung their way with no problem but one of the doctors on board did question whether or not they'd be able to take care of their patients without worrying about the ship pitching and rolling.

"From what I understand," the shuttle pilot began, "reinforcements are on the way, but we can only hope they'll hurry."

"Any word about the injuries?" Denny asked.

Rather than answer her question, the pilot merely handed her a datapadd that she read and then handed over to Darce.

"Doesn't look good," Denny commented trying to strike up a conversation with Arcadia Devlin.

"It never does," replied Darce as she handed the padd back to Denny and again withdrew into herself.

Denny inwardly sighed as she looked at the woman sitting across from her. Since the recent death of her husband, Arcadia Devlin was a changed woman. It was as if the life had been sucked out of her. Rather than engage someone else in conversation, Denny decided to ride the rest of the way in silence.

"We're here," the shuttle pilot replied as he prepared to beam the doctors to the crippled shuttle.

As soon as the shimmer of the transporter died down, the doctors, nurses and corpsmen scrambled to take care of the wounded.

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"Darce, over here!" shouted Ike Ivanan, the Senior Corpsman. He knew that Arcadia Devlin was one of the best sub cellular surgeons around and it looked like her expertise was needed here.

Arcadia offered no commentary as she examined Commodore Davison's hand.

"How bad?" Davison croaked at her in obvious pain.

She held his other hand and calmly stroked it. "You'll be fine," she told him softly and then smiled at him as she put her hand on his chest to calm him. "I believe I can help you."

She turned to Ike. "Can you assist?"

Before he could answer, the ship shuddered as it took yet another hit.

"Will it ever end?" Arcadia asked as she and Ike began to take care of Davison's wound.

"If I have anything to say about it," Davison told her emphatically before the sedative took over. "I'll personally kick their butts back across the Neutral Zone myself!"

Arcadia found herself smiling despite her personal grief. "And I don't doubt it either," she told Ike as she began to repair the hand.

* * *

"...and my crew's, too, during the One-Year War," Bennie told the assembled group in the waiting room. "We were a damned sitting duck. My hand was toast and the medical team not only took care of my people but *she* fixed my hand up. It's as good as new," he told them as he held up his hand for them to inspect.

"Well, with that kind of testimonial, perhaps I should retire," she replied with a smile.

"Don't you dare! You're back where you belong, Doctor Devlin," he stated emphatically.

Arcadia sheepishly looked towards her feet. "It's Argent, actually, Admiral, Doctor Argent," she told him quietly finally looking back at his face with a huge smile on her face.

"Oh?" Davison raised an eyebrow as he looked at her and then behind him to Kyle, now seeing him in a different light. "I see...."

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Arcadia smiled as Bennie turned back to face her noticing that her faced had hardened. "Can we sit?" she asked, "I've been on my feet for a while."

"Certainly," he replied as they all sat down on the couch. Arcadia finally settled on the end next to Admiral Davison.

She scanned her datapadd, tiredly rubbed her forehead as she readjusted her thin gold headband, and looked back at the Admiral. "I won't mince words, Gentlemen. Serle will probably recover. Whether or not he'll fly again, that's up to you people. S'chuDoQ, on the other hand -- I'm not holding any hope. From the extent of his injuries and what I heard about the accident, the chances of his recovery are very remote. If he has any family to be notified, it should be done so immediately."

Bennie Davison looked to Cordell. "I'll see to it, Admiral."

"Good," the Admiral replied.

"Gentlemen, I need to get back to my patients," she told them as she wearily rose from the sofa.

They all stood with her. Admiral Davison extended his hand. "Thank you Doctor *Argent*." He smiled at her and told her softly. "I know you'll take good care of my pilots."

"I shall, Admiral. It was good to see you again. I'm sorry it was under these circumstances. Gentlemen," she paused and gave Kyle a slight smile as she picked up her hood and gloves.

"Good woman and a damned fine surgeon," Admiral Davison began. "Cordell, I don't know if you know this but Doctor Devlin... err... Argent," he stumbled as he looked to Kyle, "wrote me a personal letter after you put the Wing on her old ship, the *Stellar Wind*. She told me that originally she disliked the idea of the fighters on her ship. Didn't know why a science ship needed fighters until some business with a murder and an alien attack. She sent me a note after her ship was to be decommissioned and expressed her gratitude for the addition of the fighters."

Davison started to pace. "In fact, I remember when I was looking over personnel records of doctors to staff various hospitals -- that's when I was at HQ working in personnel, Cordell -- I immediately thought of her. But she had left medicine by that time..." Bennie allowed his voice to trail off but then he suddenly laughed out loud.

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"I had to admit that when I heard she was CO of a *science* ship, I was rather curious. I decided to give Tolwyn a call and he told me that during the Romulan invasion of her ship, she announced to the invaders that she would -- and I hope I get this correct -- that she was going to kick each one of them squarely in their backsides and out the nearest airlock. Then she led a successful assault to regain her bridge. Woman after my own heart."

Cordell laughed and Kyle smiled.

"Knowing Chris the way I do, I seriously doubt he was exaggerating," Cordell remarked with a smile because he knew that the Admiral of the Fifth Fleet wasn't prone to making jokes.

A nurse suddenly appeared, interrupting any further comments. "Gentlemen, please follow me, you are needed at once."

They followed the nurse and were quickly led to a private hospital room to find Arcadia standing over S'chuDoQ's bed with other hospital personnel working feverishly around her. Ike Ivanan spotted them standing next to the door and indicated that they should stand near the far side of the room, out of everyone's way.

They watched as Arcadia suddenly stopped and looked at the monitor above the bed. "Quiet please everyone!" she ordered.

The only sounds heard in the room were the steady musical beeps and clicks of the various monitoring devices. Someone handed her a medical tricorder. She scanned his body, read the output and once again, consulted the monitors above his bed. She looked back at the tricorder output and sadly made a decision.

"Thank you everyone," she quietly told the hospital personnel whom immediately began to wrap up all loose ends. She looked up at the chronometer in the room. "Time of death: 1402. Preliminary cause of death: severe internal injuries as a result of a fighter accident. Lieutenant Bradley, please prepare the death certificate."

"Yes, ma'am," she replied as she pulled the sheet over S'chuDoQ's now lifeless body.

One of the corpsman motioned behind her and she turned around to see the three members of the Fighter Corps standing over in the corner, away from the action. She braced herself as she walked over to them. No matter how many times she's done it, it was never easy to deliver the bad news.

"We did everything we could," she replied as she put her hand on Davidson's arm. "His injuries," she turned away to look back at her former patient, "were *very* serious." She turned back to Davison. "I am so sorry."

"I know you did all you could, Doctor," Bennie replied as he patted her hand.

Arcadia looked back to the hospital personnel as they prepared S'chuDoQ's body for autopsy.

"By the way, Bennie," she began while they walked out of the room into the corridor. "I wanted to personally thank you and Sekmanth for the lovely flowers you sent after Desmond died. I was very touched by your kindness. I realise that this is rather a belated personal acknowledgment but I wasn't exactly in any frame of mind to take the time and thank everyone. Claudia did an excellent job of ensuring that everyone was contacted." Arcadia paused to take a deep breath, "I had fully intended to follow up on it myself, but...."

"I understand and I know that Sekmanth does too," Davison told her as they walked down the corridor towards the Senior Doctor's Lounge with Cordell and Kyle trailing behind them. "By the way, I thought you should know that Sekmanth has grown some lovely dark green roses. I'm sure she'd be disappointed if you didn't come by and see them."

Arcadia perked up. "Dark green roses you say? She finally did it. Well, I'll be sure to drop by and take a look. Perhaps cadge a sample or two for the garden."

She suddenly stopped walking and switched gears. "Ike?" she called out.

Sergeant Ivanan rushed over. "Ma'am?"

"Let me know when the autopsy is done and please ensure that Denine sends me a copy straight away."

"Aye, ma'am."

Arcadia turned back to Davison and Naismith. "Gentlemen, I really need to get back to work. Please let me know if you need anything further from me."

Rear Admiral Bennie Davison held out his hand. "Thank you, Doctor Argent. We'll go and check in on Lieutenant Serle and then be on our way. We'll make sure that someone from the Corps is here to take care of S'chuDoQ's physical body."

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Arcadia nodded. "Good afternoon." She watched as the men walked off. She turned to walk into S'chuDoQ's room but hesitated for a moment. She hated this part of the job. Arcadia drew a sharp breath and finally entered. She found the once crowded room strangely empty except for the now dead body and Shane Bradley who was taking care of the final paperwork.

"I don't think I'll ever get used to this," remarked Lieutenant Bradley as she continued to tap her datapadd.

"You do your best and they still die," Arcadia began as she stared at the covered lifeless body. "I don't think I'll ever get used to it. My husband is a fighter pilot and he paints rings on the wing of his aircraft. I remember their broken bodies. I found that it's important to me to see them lying there so I can never forget them. I couldn't bring myself to view my first husband's dead body and for a long time, his death just wasn't real to me. Now I make it a point to see each and everyone of them, so that I know..."

Shane Bradley quietly continued tapping her keys while Arcadia Argent made peace with the death of her patient.

* * *

Captain Kyle Argent spent the rest of the day with Cordell back in his Chief of Staff's office after they took the Admiral to his next appointment. Kyle didn't stay long, just long enough to wrap up the discussion on *Nexus* staffing he had started with Cordell all those long hours ago. When he was finally finished, he realized that Arcadia would probably be done for the day, so he went back to the hospital to take her out to dinner. He felt that she deserved it.

Kyle spotted Dwight Ivanan at the Nurse's station and walked up to him.

"Ike, where's Arcadia?"

Ike glanced at his chronometer. "At this hour, in her office. Follow me."

Both men walked along the corridor lost in their own thoughts until Ike broke the silence. "Good to see you again, Kyle."

"It's been a few years, hasn't it Ike?"

"Too many Kyle," Ike quietly responded.

Both men became lost in their personal thoughts of those six months in a hell called Tandoshan all those many years ago. Once they arrived at her office, Ike announced their presence.

"Closing time, Darce."

She waived him in as she continued the report. "Patient record 050760. Append report, patient died at 1402. Append datapadd notes to record. Append autopsy report."

"*Autopsy report not available,*" replied the computer.

Arcadia frowned. "Computer, patch me through to Pathology."

"Quinn here," replied Doctor Denine Quinn. "Hello Arcadia. I'm afraid we're not done with S'chuDoQ's autopsy."

"Let me know when you're done?"

"Sure. Quinn out."

"Looks like I'm actually caught up for a change, Ike." She smiled as she looked up to see Kyle standing near the door.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Kyle."

"I thought we could go home together."

Arcadia stretched as she stood up. "I'm not going to bother to change into my uniform. I was scheduled for another surgery this afternoon and it was canceled. I don't think anyone will mind my beaming about in my jump."

She was about to leave when she turned to Ike. "Shall I let you know when I get the autopsy?"

"If you don't mind, Darce."

"Not a problem, Ike. Believe me. What a waste..." she allowed her voice to trail off as they walked out of her office.

"Death is always bad, Darce," Ike offered.

"Death is part of life, Ike. I can accept that. But what I can't accept is stupidity."

"Stupidity..." Kyle commented.

"Exactly. Far be it for me to make a judgment about a pilot but if S'chuDoQ had ever showed up in a squadron on my ship, I'd have his arse shipped out faster than a beam out. I saw him at the Rigel Cup, he was reckless, he took unnecessary chances and he just had no sense of teamwork. And because of his carelessness, he almost killed a fine pilot. Stupidity, Kyle, plain and simple."

She stopped and looked at the both of them. "My job is to heal them no matter how they come to me. I'm not here to make judgements on how they were injured. However, there are times that I feel that it isn't fair that some die because some are foolish."

Arcadia shook her head as they once again began walking to the lift. She turned towards Ike, "Care to join us for dinner, Ike?"

Ike smiled, "No thank you Darce. I have another engagement."

"Oh.... really?" she replied with a wicked grin.

"An engagement with my link. I have a test tomorrow."

"Darn. I thought I'd be privy to some *new* gossip for a change," she replied with a smirk.

"No such luck," he smiled back her.

"By the way, Ike," Arcadia began, changing to a more serious tone. "I want you to give my offer more consideration. I know you haven't received your commission yet but I have full confidence in your abilities. And I could use a good Chief of Staff. I'm going to be leaving here soon for *Nexus*, so it would be good if you let me know as soon as you can."

"Tsk. Poaching staff?" he asked with mock seriousness.

"And how do you think Dr Zahur staffed *this* hospital? It is an age old tradition," she replied with equal mock seriousness.

Ike eyed her carefully. "I'll think about it, Darce. See you tomorrow." Ike turned to Kyle. "Good night, Kyle. Good to see you again."

Kyle nodded his farewell as the lift doors closed taking them down to the ground floor.

"Why so quiet, Pilot?" Arcadia finally asked him as they walked off the lift towards the transporter room.

"I've been thinking, Arcadia. I've never really seen this side before. Sure, I've visited many pilots in sickbay. I even remember sitting by Masterson's bed when he was badly injured that time on the 'Wind. I recall thinking about how could I go on sending boys like Masterson out to be killed. Then to have him eventually killed. He was a damned good pilot, Arcadia."

"I know, I remember him well, Kyle." She paused to look at him. "But I don't think I follow you."

Kyle took a deep breath as they queued up to take the transporter home.

"This was the first time I really thought about the aftermath. I've sat by the beds of injured pilots, attended funerals and I've written my fair share of notes to parents and significant others concerning a pilot's death, but this time, I saw it from a different perspective. Yours."

"Mine? I was just doing my job. Just as you do your job," she replied.

"I know, but..." he began.

"Look Kyle, I'm a healer, that's what I do. You're not a destroyer; you're a protector. Some people just die like S'chuDoQ. That's why I'm here. I can't expect to save them all, but I'll always give it my bloody best."

Kyle considered for a moment. "I've always left the hospital knowing that my people were in the best of hands. This time, I *knew* who the surgeon was and others respect your abilities. Yet, *you* couldn't save S'chuDoQ, but..."

"Ah... I think I understand." Arcadia paused while she gathered her thoughts, "Hippocrates said it best: *Life is short, the art is long, opportunity fleeting, experience delusive, judgment difficult.*"

Kyle thought about what she said and then looked back to her with a puzzled face.

"No matter how good we are or how hard we try, there will *always* be more to do. But a good doctor, just as good pilot knows that we become as well prepared as we can but we also have to understand that we can't do it all. I can't save every broken body nor can you laser every enemy of the Federation. We do the best we can and then go back for more."

"I understand," Kyle mumbled as he looked around the transporter room. "Graduation next week..."

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"How time flies..." Arcadia considered.

"I'll be there."

Arcadia turned to smile at her husband. "I'm so glad."

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Captain Kyle Argent along with Commodore Cordell Naismith and his Adjutant, Amanda Peel took their seats in the Helen Taussig Hospital Auditorium to witness the Graduation of new doctors as well as the re-certification of those physicians whom, for whatever reason and left their profession but were now back practicing.

"Quite a turn out," Amanda commented as she glanced over the graduation program.

"They usually are these days, Amanda. With all the new ships on line and new space stations becoming operational, we need the doctors," Cordell added.

"Arcadia was telling me," Kyle began, "that it was going to be difficult keeping *Nexus* staffed with qualified physicians and as Chief Medical Officer, she would have to look into having to fill those slots with physicians assistants and other non-coms rather than certified doctors. But what worries her is getting enough qualified surgeons. She fully expects to fill in as necessary."

"Hopefully, it'll never get that bad. I just hope--," Cordell was interrupted by the arrival of Captain Terrence Blair.

"This is unexpected, Terrence," Kyle began as he moved over one seat to allow Terrence to sit between himself and Cordell.

"I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop in, besides, this was a good opportunity to see both you and Arcadia at the same time before you left for *Nexus*."

Cordell was about to add a comment when he noticed that the ceremony was about to begin.

Kyle sat back and watched as it progressed from the Director of the Hospital giving her opening remarks to the handing out of certificates to the newly minted doctors as well as the re-certifications. Kyle was especially pleased and clapped enthusiastically when Arcadia received her holo-certificate from Doctor Zahur, the Director of the Hospital. After the certificates were distributed, she announced their special guest speaker.

"Vice Admiral Christopher Tolwyn, Admiral of the Fifth Fleet."

All audience members, both civilian and Starfleet swiftly rose to attention as the Admiral took the podium.

"Thank you, Doctor Zahur. At ease everyone," Vice Admiral Tolwyn began in his proper upper class British accent as everyone retook their seats. "When I heard that one of my best former commanding officers of the Fifth Fleet was being re-certified as a physician, I felt it was necessary to recognize her accomplishments while she was a commanding officer under my command."

Tolwyn stopped briefly to sip the water that had been provided to him under the podium. "Today, I am honoured to hand out a very prestigious award to someone who in her own mind didn't feel as if she deserved anything. However, I am here to tell you that she indeed, does. This commanding officer took the time to personally write up literally hundreds of citation, award and medal requests. Yet, she personally downplayed her role. Instead, she gave all the credit to her fine pilots, engineers, doctors, and command staff. She wrote in her report and I shall paraphrase here, that everyone from the janitors to the command staff contributed to bringing the wounded *USS Stellar Wind* home. 'My role' she stated, 'was insignificant'."

"I am here to tell you," he stated emphatically to the audience, "that was *far* from the case."

Tolwyn paused to take out the holo-certificate from its ornate container. "The text of the citation reads as follows: For recognition for her accomplishments as Commanding Officer of the *USS Stellar Wind* in repelling an invasion force of Romulans. For recognition for her work in returning the badly damaged *USS Stellar Wind* after the ship was under constant barrage by renegade Romulans. I am proud to present this Medal of Achievement to Captain Arcadia Miskinn-Warda Devlin Argent."

Kyle watched as Arcadia slowly walked to the podium to receive the award. Admiral Tolwyn deftly fastened it on her uniform and shook her hand while he gave her the accompanying holo-certificate. He motioned her to take the podium and Kyle noted that she was reluctant to do so. Tolwyn obviously insisted as Kyle noted Arcadia force herself to stand before the audience as they were giving her a standing ovation. She carefully laid the certificate on the dais, as she obviously needed time to gather her thoughts as she wiped away the tears that were forming.

"I'm a bit taken aback by this award as you can well imagine looking at my face." She paused to allow the laughter to die down. "But in all seriousness, I don't think there's a commanding officer out there who believes that she or he

is the sole basis of a mission's success. What we have is the faith and confidence of the people we command to do their best and they, in turn, expect us to our best as well."

Arcadia looked down at the certificate before she continued. "As I was telling someone the other day," she paused to smile directly at Kyle who acknowledged it with one of his own. "Hippocrates said it best: *Life is short, the art is long, opportunity fleeting, experience delusive, judgment difficult*. Thank you."

Kyle watched as Arcadia acknowledged the standing ovation then shook Vice Admiral Tolwyn's and Doctor Zahur's hands and walked back to her seat. Doctor Zahur spoke a few more words; then concluded the ceremony. The participants and their guests adjourned to the small reception area for refreshments.

Kyle watched as Arcadia walked in and Cordell offered his hand but changed his mind and hugged her instead. She said a few words to Cordell and then walked over towards Kyle and Terrence near the punch bowl.

"What a pleasant surprise, Terrence!" she began as she extended her hand.

"Good to see you again, Arcadia. You deserve this," he told her as he shook her hand. He stopped and pointed to her award.

"Honestly, Terrence, I..." she paused as she tried to put her feelings into words, "I never thought about it at the time. I just did my job. That's all we can ever ask anyone to ever do."

Kyle turned around and handed her a glass of punch as he gave her a kiss. "Well deserved, Captain Argent."

"Thank you, Captain Argent," she replied as she sipped the punch. "I'm still a bit stunned by it all, especially having Chris award it to me personally."

"You know the Admiral?" Terrence asked as he sipped his punch.

"After the One-Year War, he was one of the commanders who debriefed me. Desmond had worked for him at one time. Under the circumstances, he was very kind to me and I never forgot it."

"You do get around," Kyle murmured.

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Arcadia looked quizzically at him and laughed. "Everyone does get sick and as a doctor, I get to see them all, from the janitors to the admirals."

"Terrence is going to be the *Nexus* Director of Flight Operations," Kyle informed her.

"Oh, really! Tired of riding the desk?" she asked.

"You could say that," Terrence admitted.

"That little 'excursion' during the Romulan attack... once you were back in the fighter, there was no turning back?"

Terrence cast a surprised look in her direction.

"I understand. It is always good to follow your heart and it was obvious to me that you really wanted back in the cockpit and not flying a desk. Look at the two of us, it's good that we decided to follow our hearts, don't you think?" Arcadia paused and pointed to where Cordell was standing. "I'm sure that Cordell is not happy losing such a capable officer, on the other hand..." Arcadia paused to look back at Terrence, "you don't look entirely convinced either."

Terrence stared at her.

"Terrence," Arcadia began quietly, "I see this is my time to make this point again. As I was saying to that 'someone' I mentioned in my speech, 'we do our best and come back for more'. You'll do fine, Terrence. Besides, I've seen you in action -- and according to this," she paused and looked at her certificate, "I'm somewhat of an expert on the subject. You rose to the occasion on the *Wind* and I don't doubt you shall do the same for *Nexus*. I had to put all my faith on a number of untested pilots when it looked like all was lost." Arcadia paused and stared at Terrence, adding quietly, "But I never once lost faith in any of you."

Arcadia paused again and looked directly at Terrence. "If Kyle has faith in your abilities then you should too."

Terrence allowed his eyes to sweep the room as he considered Arcadia's words. He then turned his eyes on her again, this time with a smile. "Thank you."

"My pleasure, Terrence."

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