

## *The Best Things in Life Are Free*

Doctor Arcadia Argent waited patiently for her husband to finally pull himself away from station work this evening and go to dinner with her.

"Tell me Ms Marlowe," Arcadia asked the Station Commander's yeoman, "has it been this busy all week?"

"Doctor, he's been at full tilt for several weeks," Melody sighed as she tossed another datapadd to the slowly growing pile in front of her.

"Oh, dear...." Arcadia sighed.

"I just can't get the Captain to slow down," Melody further sighed.

"Oh?"

"It's not quite that way, Doctor," Melody quickly recovered just as the Captain's Chief of Staff joined them.

"Is he free, Ms Marlowe?" asked Jefferson El Jafeer.

"I'm afraid not, Lieutenant."

Jefferson said nothing but merely rolled his eyes. Noting Arcadia's look of surprise, he quickly apologized. "Many pardons, Doctor."

"Think nothing of it, Lieutenant. Ms Marlowe was just telling me how busy the Captain has been of late and no doubt, you've been equally busy."

"Indeed, Doctor," Jefferson acknowledged in his crisp British accent.

Arcadia sat back and paused for a moment. It was obvious to her as both the Chief Medical Officer and his spouse that Kyle Argent was quickly working himself into an early grave. She couldn't fault him for his dedication but she could fault him for not taking proper care of himself. On the other hand, she has the advantage of actually living with him so she had to accept some of the blame.

"Any suggestions, Doctor?" Melody asked.

"Actually, I have one but I'll need your assistance. As you know, May is the month to celebrate the Captain's birthday and I have a rather interesting idea for a present, but I can't do it alone."

Arcadia told the pair what she had in mind. When she was done, she found them very enthusiastic about the idea.

"What an excellent idea, Doctor!" praised Jefferson.

"This is *soooo* sweet," Melody gushed.

Before Arcadia had a chance to respond the door to the Station Commander's office opened and Commander Sasha Romanova trudged out. Arcadia sprung from her chair to greet her.

"Is the Captain finished for the day, Sasha?"

Sasha rolled her eyes but quickly leveled them again. "Almost Doctor."

"Almost? Then he'll be a few more minutes?"

"I suspect so," Sasha wearily replied.

"Good. Sasha, can we retire to your office? I have a favour to ask you."

"Certainly, Arcadia," she replied as Sasha indicated that they should retire to her Executive Officer's office.

Melody and Jefferson watched as both ladies entered the office just as Captain Argent came out of his.

"Lieutenant, here are the figures," Kyle Argent informed his Chief of Staff.

"Thank you Captain," he replied without his usual enthusiasm.

Kyle paused to look around. "I thought Arcadia was coming by to pick me up for dinner?"

"She's here, Captain, talking to Commander Romanova." When Melody noticed his puzzled expression, she quickly added, "Probably about the Medical Branch staffing requirements, Captain."

"And here I thought I was busy," Kyle mumbled as he watched Arcadia come out of Sasha's office.

"Ready Kyle?" Arcadia asked while giving a nod in Melody's direction.

His reply was to offer his arm.

"See you both tomorrow."

"Good night, sirs," they replied.

"Think this will work?" Melody speculated aloud.

"Oh, I think so," Jefferson replied with a smile. "Care for dinner, Ms Marlowe?"

"I'd love to, Lieutenant El Jafeer."

\* \* \*

"Kyle love...." Arcadia began casting a worried look in Kyle's direction, "you are working too hard."

"Is that your considered medical opinion?" he scowled.

"Perhaps, I was thinking more as your wife."

"Oh...."

"Kyle, when's the last time you've had a day off?"

"Can't remember," he brusquely replied as he pushed the empty dinner plate away. While Kyle had promised they'd go out this evening, he begged off citing more paperwork to be done.

*Why am I not surprised?* she considered but opted only to reply, "I see."

Rather than answer her, Kyle abruptly stood up from the dining room table, gave Arcadia a peck on the cheek and stalked off to his study to continue his station toils.

While Arcadia had some initial doubts as to her idea as to what to give Kyle for his birthday, she now knew that her idea would work out quite well. She gave further consideration to her plan while she tidied up their quarters. Before she could walk over to the comlink, she was interrupted.

"Meow?"

She looked over to the grey and white cat sitting in the corner.

"What's wrong Mac?"

<"Can I help?"> he asked her telepathically.

Arcadia paused for a moment. "Yes, you can. Please ensure that Kyle doesn't disturb me. I need contact a few more people."

Mac chewed on his back left foot. <"Sure, I can do that!"> He finished licking his foot and dashed off to Kyle's study.

As she walked over to the comlink, Arcadia heard him furiously scratching at the door until Kyle obviously gave up and let Mac in. She waited a moment and then switched on the comlink.

"Terrence?"

"Arcadia? Something wrong?" he asked her with an obviously concerned look on his face.

"Nothing is wrong, Terrence," she informed the Director of Flight Operations. "I just need some assistance for a little project I have in mind."

"Oh?" he replied. He listened carefully to Arcadia's idea and readily agreed to assist.

"...And he won't suspect a thing, especially coming from me," he finally concluded.

"Excellent. Please do it as soon as possible," she reminded him.

"Will do. Have a good evening, Arcadia."

"You too, Terrence," she replied, then closed the link. She carefully considered how many hours she had to fill and how many people she could rely on for their complete discretion. She ended her contemplation with a smile as she turned the link back on.

"Am I disturbing you Ike?"

"Always, Darce," her Chief of the Medical Staff replied as he continued eating his dinner.

"Sorry to be a bother but I have a big favour to ask."

"What's up?"

"I just have an idea and need some assistance," she replied and then she gave him chapter and verse on the project.

"I like this! And I've got a good excuse too," Ike exclaimed.

"I don't think I want to know," Arcadia laughed.

"Good. It's between us men anyway."

"Oh?"

"Sorry, there are certain things that we men just don't discuss with you women."

Arcadia chuckled. "I don't doubt it. Well, in that case, I shall leave you to your dreams and schemes. Good night, Ike."

"Night Darce."

*Excellent*, Arcadia considered as she counted up the hours and realized that all of them were now accounted for.

\* \* \*

Once everything was in place and plans made, all Arcadia had to do was wait until the night before Kyle's birthday. As previously promised, she met him at the Command Center so they could dine out together that evening.

"Don't tell me, Ms Marlowe," Arcadia began as she walked into the Command Center, "he's *still* busy."

"I'm afraid so," the Station Commander's Yeoman wearily replied. She paused to look around the room. Noting they were alone quietly added, "Everything's ready, Doctor. I'll call him tonight and give him the news. Say around 8pm?"

"Excellent. In fact--" Arcadia cut herself off as she spotted Kyle coming out of his office.

"Ready?" he asked her as he handed a padd to Melody.

"Actually, Kyle, I'm a bit tired, so if you don't mind, I'd like to just retire to our quarters tonight."

"You're obviously working too hard," he told her.

"Captain, everything on the docket has been taken care of," Melody replied while attempting to suppress a smile.

"Is it? You mean I have a free evening?" he asked incredulously.

"Aye, sir," Melody replied with a slight smirk.

"And here I have paperwork to do tonight," Arcadia wearily added.

"You should manage your time better, Milady," Kyle replied while he offered her his arm.

Arcadia cocked an eyebrow in his direction. "I'll have to study your technique, Captain Argent." She turned to face Melody, "Good evening, Ms Marlowe."

"Good evening, Doctor Argent, Captain Argent."

Neither of them spotted the wicked grin on Melody's face as the pair walked out the Command Center.

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"That was excellent, Kyle!" Arcadia exclaimed to her husband. "You should cook for us more often."

"I would if I had the time," he sighed.

"So, what do you want to do for your birthday, Kyle?"

"I have to work tomorrow, Arcadia. Full docket."

"I suspected as much which is why I made an appointment with you for lunch," she sighed.

"Lunch?"

"Yes, a two hour lunch. I have to do something *special* for you, don't I?" she purred seductively.

Before Kyle could reply, the comlink signaled an incoming message. He walked over to the link and sat down while Arcadia started to clean up.

"Captain Argent?"

"Yes, Ensign Marlowe?"

"Something peculiar has happened," she tentatively started.

"What?"

"Well, Captain. Err.... I'm not sure how to tell you this...." she stammered.

Kyle instantly sat up straight in the chair. "Why don't you start from the beginning, Ensign."

"Yes, sir. It's like this -- *all* your appointments for tomorrow have cancelled."

"*They what!*" he bellowed.

"Yes.... sir... they cancelled... their appointments," she meekly replied.

"Did they give a reason for this nonsense?" he spat at the comlink.

"No sir..." she whispered.

"Sorry, Ensign. I didn't mean to take it out on you. It isn't as if you had anything to do with it."

"That's quite all right, sir," she replied attempting to contain the smile that threatened to burst out at any moment.

"Anything else, Ensign?"

"No sir," she replied.

"Good evening then, Ensign," he replied as he snapped off the link.

"Something wrong?" Arcadia asked. She noted the very confused expression on his face as he walked over and sat next to her on the couch. He stared at her for several seconds before he replied.

"I have no appointments tomorrow," he finally told her.

"Indeed?"

"Damned strange..." he mumbled then glared at her in sudden realization. "I thought we were having lunch tomorrow."

"I thought so too. Are we off then?"

Kyle scowled at her. "Melody told me that *all* my appointments were cancelled, even, I assumed, yours."

"Really?" she innocently replied.

"What's going on here!" he bellowed.

"Kyle love. I've honestly never seen anyone so upset at not having to work on his birthday."

"*What?*"

"Kyle, don't you realize that getting you a present is rather a difficult prospect. It isn't as if you can't afford to buy anything you want -- save perhaps a Shadowhawk or two but I have no doubt you'll be adding one to Westland Hall in short order. After you couldn't recall the last time you had a day off, I thought I'd give you something that money can't buy: time off."

Kyle flashed her one of his rare smiles.

"And it just so happens," she continued with a wicked grin, "I also have the day off and I've booked the Holodeck in the afternoon."

Kyle looked at his wife with the fondness only a man who was truly and deeply in love could muster. "And to think that some people thought I married you *just* for your good looks," he beamed.

Before Arcadia was able to utter a word of protest -- never mind the obligatory query of "Who said that?" -- she found herself lost in her husband's kiss and began to melt into his warm embrace.

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Next: *Through the Fire and Into the Light*

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