

Isn't Life Strange?

"Good to see you again, Doctor!" Lars Lysander greeted the newcomer as she walked onto the flight deck.

"I was informed that I was needed here. Is there a medical problem?" the Chief Medical Officer asked with some concern in her voice.

Lars smiled at her. "No problem, Doctor. We just have something for you."

"I'm not sure I understand," Arcadia Argent replied with some confusion.

"Just follow me, Doctor and you'll see what we have for you," Lars requested and he quickly escorted her to their main wardroom.

Arcadia noted that the hangar deck was unduly quiet for this time of day. Then she discovered why -- it appeared as if all the Grandmasters had tightly packed themselves in the wardroom. This was quite an accomplishment as there were far more flight officers than room. At the far end, she noted a table with several large boxes. She was also surprised to see her husband standing along with the Director of Flight Operations, Captain Terrence Blair. She immediately looked to her husband with a faint hope of being able to discern the purpose of her visit but Kyle's eyes betrayed nothing.

"Hello Kyle, Terrence. Fancy meeting you both here," Arcadia began, clearly perplexed by this whole situation.

Lars lightly rapped the table in an effort to get everyone's attention. He finally had to pound it and *finally*, he was able to begin.

"Doctor, I speak for all of the Grandmasters when I say that we appreciate all the work you've put in not only fostering better relations between the Flight and Medical Branches, but for that extra mile when we really needed it. Uh... we really wanted to show our appreciation but were stumped until the Ironman... err... Captain Argent mentioned how well you did when he was your Wing Commander in the simulator run he took you on. He told us you didn't even toss your cookies."

Arcadia noticed that he had smiled at her with appreciation while the rest of the Grandmasters murmured around her in kind.

"Because damned few Commanding Officers have come through that initial flight and still married their Wing Commander..." Lars had to stop because there was a general roar of laughter from the group. "Anyway... Doctor, we'd like to give you these."

Lars pointed to the smaller of the two large boxes on the table.

She opened the package and carefully removed the surrounding packing material only to come face to face with a black wad of cloth. She looked back at Lars who urged her to take it out of the box. She did as requested and was surprised to see a black jump suit similar to the ones that the Grandmasters wore. Over the right pocket, the name "Lady Hawk" was stitched and over the left, a pair of gold flight wings. On the front, the name "Arcadia Argent" was emblazoned on the nameplate.

She looked at the suit and then back to Lars. "I'm... I'm not sure what to say. This is a... a real surprise. I'm really overcome. Thank you, everyone. This is splendid...."

Though this wasn't one of her better speeches, the sentiment was certainly there and she could tell that the Grandmasters really appreciated her sincerity.

"There's more." Lars walked over and took the Flight Suit from one of the squadron commanders.

She noted that it was the same as the ones that all the flight personnel wore emblazoned with her call sign and name.

"No suit is complete with a helmet." Lars opened the larger box and withdrew her own personal helmet, imprinted in elegant script with her call sign *Lady Hawk*.

While Arcadia was more than pleased with her gifts, the wings bothered her. She reached over and unfastened them from the jumper.

"I can't accept these. These gold wings having a deep meaning and I'm not going to wear a symbol that I didn't earn...." When she noticed how crestfallen they had become, she quickly added, "But I'll gladly wear the rest."

She hugged Lars when he handed her the helmet, then stood back to accept the applause from the rest of the Grandmasters. After a few moments, she held up her hand because she wished to speak.

"I'm very honoured to be called Lady Hawk," she began with a wicked grin, "though I can't help but think that your first choice was probably Lady Bitch. I assume that was already taken." It took a while for the Grandmasters to settle down again because they were laughing. "Trust me, I've been called worse... *and* to my face. I have been called the Dragon Lady and the Bitch of the Bridge -

- I am so very pleased to have graduated to a name I can speak aloud in polite company. Thank you all."

As the group continued to laugh and clap, Arcadia took the opportunity to walk over to Kyle and whispered, "Did you know about this?"

"Not a clue," he admitted.

"Same here," Terrence added.

"So when are you going up?" Kyle asked her.

"Up?"

"Now that you have a regulation flight suit, want to take a spin around the block?" Kyle answered.

"I'm not exactly medically certified to be out there, Captain," she replied becoming the Station's Chief Medical Officer once again.

"That's only if you're going to pilot the fighter. Are you?"

"Am I? I rather doubt it, Kyle."

He shrugged. "You never know. Busy?"

"Now?" When he nodded, she took out her padd and checked her appointments. She punched several keys. "I'm free for the next few hours."

"It happens that I was going to go out with the Thirteenth on one of their little walks around the block. Suit up, Lady Hawk, we leave in 15 minutes." Kyle turned away from Arcadia and nodded to the Director, Flight Operations.

"Lars, have the Thirteenth ready in fifteen," ordered Captain Terrence Blair.

"Aye, Captain! *Blackie!*" Lars barked towards Squadron Commander LtCdr Kieran Hawthorne. "Get the Black Knights ready for launch in fifteen minutes."

You heard the Commander," Blackie shouted over his shoulder as he ran towards Lars and Arcadia. "Let's go Black Knights, we're going out!" Blackie suddenly stopped, and turned to scan the crowd. "*Ravyn!*" he barked, continuing to walk towards Arcadia and Lars.

"Sir?" responded Ensign Desiree "Ravyn" MacRae who immediately rushed over to him.

He turned to Arcadia. "Doctor, Ravyn here will escort you to the locker room so you can suit up." Not waiting for an acknowledgement, Blackie rushed off.

"Lady Hawk," Ravyn beamed at Arcadia, "good to have you with the Black Knights. Grab your suit and come with me. I'll help you kit up. Everything's ready for you."

While Arcadia was pleased to have Ravyn along because she felt very close to the young pilot, she found herself alternately scowling and smiling at Lars. "Why do I get the feeling that *you* knew that I was going out today?"

"Because, Lady Hawk, the Ironman told us that you were a natural-born flyer and you'd probably jump at the chance to get back out there," Lars replied.

"Did Kyle really?"

"Yep and begging the Doctor's pardon, but both the Station Commander and DFO are going out with us and I don't want to get my ass chewed out anymore than necessary," Lars urgently pointed out.

Arcadia allowed her eyes to wander over to where Lars was looking and noted that Blackie was putting the Black Knights in hurry-up mode, urging the flight officers to "haul ass."

"I understand, Lars. Let us away, Ravyn. I don't want to be accused of mucking up the works on my first 'mission'," Arcadia responded as she grabbed her gear.

"This way, Lady Hawk," Ravyn began.

The two ladies hurried towards the locker room to dress. Once Arcadia was wedged into her new flight suit, Ravyn led her over to where the Station Commander was patiently waiting alongside his fighter. Arcadia knew that Kyle normally doesn't fly with a mission specialist so she imagined that the idea of waiting for someone else was rather extraordinary for him.

"Ready?" Kyle asked her as one of the maintenance crew adjusted her helmet.

"All this is very uncomfortable," she replied.

"Let me give you a lift up, Lady Hawk." The maintenance tech assigned to Kyle's fighter gently helped her into the back of the craft.

"Thank you. I don't think I could walk across the deck again without any assistance. This is wickedly awkward."

"You'll get used to it, 'hawk," the tech replied as he strapped her in. When he was done, he rapped the side of the fighter.

She watched Kyle hold his thumb up in acknowledgement.

"How are you doing back there, Lady Hawk?"

"As well as can be expected..." she paused and smiled, "Ironman. I do hope I don't have to go whilst we're tooling around the block. Right now, I feel that the only way I'm getting out of this flight suit is they *cut* it off me. It's poking me in places I didn't know existed."

Kyle laughed. "I know what you mean, I felt the same way the first time too. But eventually, you'll get used to it."

"What do you mean... eventually? You're telling me you expect me to do this more than once?"

"Of course I do. All the Grandmasters went through a lot of effort to make you one of them. I think they'd be disappointed if you didn't fly with *all* of the squadrons."

Arcadia mentally ticked off the squadrons and quickly realized that how many turns around the block this would be. "That many times?"

"Think of it this way, by the time we get another assignment, you'll have logged a quite number of cockpit hours."

Arcadia leaned back and smiled. "I think I'd like that, Kyle."

"I know. Hold on, we're on the queue to take off. Make sure you hold on because the launch has a bit of a kick to it as I think you remember from the sim ride we took."

"I'm ready...." she paused before she shouted over the noise of the engines revving up for take off, "Kyle?"

"Yes?" he yelled.

"*I love you!*"

"*I know!*" he replied just as the fighter was ejected into deep space.

"How are you doing back there?" he asked.

She could feel him down-thrust the fighter into cruise speed.

"Wonderful. All of this is so wonderful..." she told him as she watched the Black Knights form up. "Squadron formation... it's really different when you're part of it and not just watching as an observer."

Kyle was clearly confused. "You're fine?"

"Why shouldn't I be?" she replied then realized why he was probably confused. "Oh, I took a Xolobinox just in case my stomach wasn't having any of it. I remembered how I felt on the sim ride a few years ago and opined that the real thing would be a tad more difficult on my digestive system than the Holodeck creation."

"Good thinking."

"But of course... isn't that why you married me?"

"Among other reasons..."

Arcadia didn't respond, instead she merely smiled keeping an eye on both the squadron and Kyle skillfully maneuvering along with them.

"This is so very strange to me," she finally broke the silence that had surrounded them.

"How so?" Kyle asked.

Arcadia noted that he had moved his Nighthawk away from the squadron so they could observe their practice run.

"I never expected to be out here. To really be out here... and with you," she finally replied.

"I don't understand."

"Considering how our first ride, albeit in a simulator, came out, I never expected to be in a fighter again."

Kyle slowly replied. "I understand. Strange how everything turned out, isn't it?"

"Indeed...." Arcadia replied as she sat back to watch the squadron again. "Do you think the squadrons will mind my tagging along more than once?" she finally ventured.

"I don't think they'll mind...." Kyle paused for a moment, then added, "I certainly won't mind."

"Good. I'm looking forward to it," she replied as she leaned back in her seat to allow her mind and body to enjoy the wonders of being "out here."

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Next: One Moment in Time

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