

## *Put Your Dreams Away*

*By Allyson M.W. Dyar, Kurt Roithinger and Chris Wallace*

\* \* \*

"Dutch, why don't you take another walk?"

Jacob "Dutch" van der Weege glanced over at Virgil patiently tapping his datapadd waiting for an answer. "Maybe you're right," he muttered as he stood up.

Virgil gave him a slight smile before he dove back into his schematics.

Dutch wandered over to the large window overlooking one of the station's four docking arms and decided to perch himself on the railing to enjoy the view. Even after staring outside for several moments, he decided that he'd never, ever get tired of the sight. It was different from the cockpit but nonetheless spectacular.

Deciding that he'd had enough of being an idle spectator, he glanced over at the arrival holo-board once again and noted her flight was still on time. He heaved a large sigh as he looked over to Virgil with his nose still buried solidly in a datapadd.

He wondered how they managed to get along so famously. There was a time where he thought Virgil would have been better served with the nickname "Einstein" instead of "Merlin." But even that had changed. It was becoming more and more obvious that he really could perform magic with their Shadowhawk. True enough, Virgil was the consummate studymonger, choosing to spend his free time talking to the maintenance crew or burying himself in technical specs. Dutch on the other hand, wanted to enjoy life to the fullest and had no intention of spending any more time than necessary near anything resembling work. *Maybe that's why I'm riding shotgun and he's the pilot?* he mused.

And they looked vastly different as well: Dutch was tall and muscular, with closely cropped white-blond hair while Virgil was slightly shorter and broader with his long dark brown hair worn in a pony tail. They were made for each other -- able to anticipate each other's moves in the cockpit. *...Just like Brett and Ravyn were,* he grimaced.

The holo-board caught his eye as it ticked off another departure. He glanced over at the arrivals and noted that he still had some time to kill. Virgil was still nose-deep in his padd before he finally decided to grab a cup of coffee. He strolled the length of the huge waiting room and became uncomfortable as he

felt a few eyes tracking his every move. When he was away from the flight line, he usually preferred wearing nondescript clothing. But the Grandmasters had decided that they'd all wear jumpsuits that corresponded to their various unit colors decorated with requisite squadron and wing patches. Such an overt display didn't interest him but went along with it in the interest of esprit de corps. He was uncomfortable with the misplaced awe and decidedly relieved when he reached his destination.

Deftly punching up the code then entering his personal ID, Dutch retrieved the hot coffee and wandered back over to the window. He slowly sipped the steaming brew before he felt a wave of panic.

*Damn!* He quickly wiped up the spill before he decided that perhaps the coffee wasn't a good idea. He pitched the cup in the recycler before he went back to looking out the window, allowing Ravyn to wander into his thoughts again. This time, he didn't purposely shunt them aside, allowing her to fill his waking existence.

He shook his head and remembered the night she'd come to him after Brett had died. What could he do? Those big dark eyes of hers had melted under the soft light in his quarters and that was it. Dutch knew he had a fatal weakness for women in trouble, but that never stopped him. One time, he ended up married. Unfortunately, once he had realized his mistake, he found out that Tyne wasn't going to give him up that easily. She had clung to him like a vine and threatened to smother him like kudzu. Tyne, like the kudzu, had formed a second skin around him wherever they went. Finally, he surrendered and divorced her after three miserable months of marriage. One of his friends had tried to console him with a, "Tyne will pass, just like dysentery." He wasn't that optimistic, and requested an assignment as far as away as they could post him just so she wouldn't have an easy chance for reconciliation. While *Nexus* was considered to some an outpost on the far side of hell, this assignment suited him *just fine*.

So, here he was again with that same feeling of impending doom. Perhaps Ravyn had forgotten all about him. After all, she'd been away from the station for a few weeks and a lot can happen. *On the other hand, she might just be hot to trot.* Dutch winced at the notion.

The ambient noise began to rise around him. He glanced over towards Virgil and found him walking towards him.

"Let's get this over with," Dutch muttered, realizing that the time was upon him.

Both men wandered over to the custom's area to await Desiree "Ravyn" MacRae. They silently watched her make her way through the various customs' checks.

"Ravyn!" Virgil shouted to the diminutive, dark haired young lady upon her entry to the waiting area.

Her head snapped up at the shout of her name and smiled. "Virgil!" She shouted then mumbled a hasty, "Dutch..."

"You've been missed," Virgil told her after they exchanged hugs.

"I know," she began with a solemn edge to her voice, "but when Brett died, it felt like part of me left with him. I just needed some time..." she allowed her voice to trail off as she glanced up at Dutch.

"I understand," Virgil replied. "Can I help you with that?"

"No, I have it." She shifted her duffel bag to her right shoulder. "Besides, it's only this bag, the rest will be sent to my quarters."

Dutch cast a nervous eye in the young woman's direction, trying to come up with something to say to her. Anything...

"How's everyone doing?" she asked.

"Actually, Ravyn," Dutch blurted, "I'm glad you asked!"

"Why?" Ravyn replied in a puzzled tone of voice. "I expected that if I went back to flying, I would be assigned a new tactical officer."

Dutch and Virgil stopped walking and stared at each other.

Ravyn's eyes darted between the still silent men. "*I'm not going back to flying!*" she panicked.

"No one's said anything about it," Virgil began smoothly. "I assume you'll go through the usual re-certifications and all... It's just that we've had a lot of changes around here."

"Ain't that the truth..." mumbled Dutch. He looked to Virgil in hopes that he'd continue the thread.

"Can't say that I disagree with my Tactical Officer," Virgil continued in an obvious attempt to be jovial. "To make a long story short, Blackie has moved on and Ayesha is now our interim Squadron Leader. Lars was bumped out as our Wing Commander and his job is now solely as the Deputy Director."

Ravyn shrugged. "That doesn't sound too bad. I knew that Blackie was due for a promotion and a new assignment. So who's our new Wing Commander?"

Both men screeched to a halt. Dutch noticed that this time, they had stopped so fast that Ravyn had walked right past them before she realized that they were still behind her. She quickly trotted back to join them.

"Who!"

"Avalanche," they replied in an uneasy unison.

"A-va-lanche?" Ravyn replied slowly, allowing the syllables to roll over her tongue. "And why were *we* so blessed?" she demanded between clenched teeth. "She wasn't even at his funeral!"

"Now, Ravyn," Dutch began in an attempt to mollify her, "you know she was on leave and came back as soon as she could. And don't jump to conclusions, dammit! While Avalanche and I had our... err... differences she's a damned good Wing Commander. Honestly..." Noting that Ravyn wasn't exactly going for his explanation, he added hastily, "You know damned well that I wouldn't lie about this!"

Ravyn laughed. "I'm inclined to believe you Dutch. I don't think anyone who's had an ice cold enema courtesy of Avalanche would say such *nice* things about her unless you meant it."

"Yeah... well..." he twitched, prompting a chuckle from both Virgil and Ravyn.

"Why didn't Ayesha take the job permanently? She's probably the most qualified."

"She told us that she'd already served as a squadron commander when she was in the Marines and wasn't interested in the job again," Virgil replied. "So she'll hold down the fort until a permanent replacement is found."

"Not going to promote from within?"

Virgil shrugged. "I guess not, Ravyn."

"I'm rather surprised that Lars would take Deputy and not move on to a new assignment. One with more promotion potential."

"Think of it as an unofficial Vote of Confidence," Dutch speculated. "This puts Lars first in line to take over as Director of Flight Operations."

Ravyn cocked her head. "Blair moving on?"

Dutch glanced over at Virgil. "You knew him on the old *Stellar Wind*, what do you think?"

Virgil shrugged again. "I honestly don't know. He seems to be doing well as the Director but it's possible he's looking to move back to Fighter HQ at some point."

"Makes sense. Anything *else* I should know?" Ravyn asked.

"Other than a few other transfers, one thing that Ayesha stressed is that we have a really solid chance of making the Rigel Cup next year," Virgil replied.

"*We do!*" Ravyn's eyes suddenly lit up in anticipation.

"That's one reason," Dutch added as they entered the turbo lift happy that Ravyn had latched on to the one thing he knew would make her possibly forget about him, "that Avalanche was put as WC. Both Argent and Blair think we have a chance with her at the helm."

"Meaning," Virgil grimaced, "that we'd better make it. They've clearly stacked the deck in our favor."

"Yeah, but..." Ravyn mumbled.

Her grave look didn't go unnoticed by Dutch. "Look, Ravyn. We've already got a RC veteran right here." Both of them paused to look at Virgil. "And while Ayesha's never participated, she did point out that her companion and his business partner are willing to give us their gambler's perspective."

"We have a lot of work to do, but we have the talent and the equipment. And frankly, with Avalanche as our WC, I think we've got a damned good chance," Virgil declared.

Ravyn remained quiet for several moments before she finally spoke up. "I *want* to get to the Rigel Cup and if the Captains have the confidence in us, then I'll do my best."

"And if that isn't enough..." Virgil sighed, "we still have the Orions to deal with."

"Still?"

"We've managed to hold our own with those buggers and having an expert on staff has really turned the trick," Dutch replied.

"He's still here?" Ravyn blurted out.

"Probably not for much longer," Virgil sighed. "Wallace has been a great help while he's been with us and we kind of started taking him for granted."

"So what have we done and what's left?" Ravyn asked in a very business-like voice.

Dutch heaved a sigh of relief as he listened to Virgil prattle on about what was on the Black Knight's agenda. He knew he had dodged the bullet but he wasn't sure how long his luck was going to hold out.

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*"Yo, Lieutenant Wallace, you have an incoming priority message,"* the Station Computer announced.

"From?"

*"Captain Melvin Aloysius Calder, USS Horatio."*

While Chris was surprised to hear from his CO so soon, he knew that Captain Calder would not appreciate anything less than a professional demeanor. He activated the data terminal and waited while the connection to the *Horatio* was completed. The stern visage of Captain Calder appeared, filling the screen.

*"Lieutenant!"*

"Captain Calder?"

*"I know you weren't expecting us back so quickly, but I have orders from Starfleet Operations returning you to my command effective immediately."*

"What about the Orions and my requirement to be here? I was under the impress--"

*"That's all taken care of,"* Calder interrupted. *"I just wanted to give you a head's up. They want us to lead a First Contact mission. I'm squirting you the details now. I know you're going to like it. This is right up your alley."*

"Yes, sir."

*"I'm going to contact that damned Station Commander and make sure that he clears the way for your departure. I don't have time to piss around with him today."*

"I understand, sir. I'll get ready."

*"Good. If all goes well, I'll see you in a few hours. Calder out."*

Chris stared at the blank comlink for many moments before he started to panic.

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Dutch had successfully managed to avoid Ravyn for the next few hours and it was beginning to wear him out. In his quest to elude her, he decided to take a short cut through the hangar deck, unexpectedly finding himself standing in front of the memorial to their late comrade, and her lover, Brett Dallenbach.

"Hope you're doing better than me, bud..." Dutch instantly winced at the idea that someone dead would be in better shape than one of the living.

*"Dammit Brett! Why did you have to die and leave Ravyn alone!"* he yelled out. Luckily, he was alone. Otherwise, anyone overhearing him might suggest a one-way ticket to the psych ward.

"So is that how it happened, bud?" he began in a soft tone of voice. "She came to you with those soft brown eyes and that was it? Or did she chase you... or did you... Oh, never the fuck mind!"

Dutch started pacing, periodically glancing back at the simple memorial. He finally sat down on the bench underneath the plaque and stared at Brett's etched face.

"Yeah, I'll bet your just laughing your ass off 'coz you probably knew before I did." Suddenly, he jumped up and began to pace again. "How was I supposed to know that I'd fallen in love with her!" He glanced back at the plaque and raised his fist. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Someone told me you'd be here."

Startled by her familiar voice, Dutch tried to calm down as he slowly turned around to see Ravyn edging warily towards him.

"Uhhh.... Ravyn?"

"You've been avoiding me."

"I have?"

"Yes, you have," she replied firmly. "You and Virgil picked me up at the terminal this morning, remember?"

Not waiting for an answer, she turned around and walked over to the memorial. It was plaque surrounded by a few live plants donated by the 13th and a vase filled with blue roses. She reached out and silently touched the plaque before stooping to smell the fresh flowers.

"First time here?" Dutch asked cautiously.

"Yeah... Who's taking care of the plants?"

"We are."

"The roses are from Doctor Argent?"

"She insisted. Told us it was her way of remembering Brett."

"She had really helped him..." She paused before adding a quiet, "and me."

Dutch nodded, desperately wanting to say something but didn't know what to say. Ravyn sat down on the bench and sighed. Dutch reluctantly plopped down next to her.

"You know what the really sad part of all this is, Dutch?"

"What?"

"The fact that once all of us Black Knights are gone, there will be no one here to remember him."

Dutch glanced behind him and pointed. "Isn't this why we have this? That way, *everyone* can remember him."

"Yes, but there's no living memory attached to any of this. Those who follow and replace us will just know his name. They will know nothing of who he really was. What he meant to *Nexus* and the squadron. What he meant to us. I sometimes think the Klingons have it right. Soon there won't be anyone left to sing Brett's praises."

Both remained silent, their eyes fixed on the memorial.



"So why have you been avoiding me?" Ravyn asked finally.

Dutch gave her a feeble smile while he squirmed around, trying to come up with an answer to this simplest of questions. Finally finding none, he merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Typical," she laughed. "You can answer the most complex of problems but you just can't seem to master the easy ones, can you?"

"I guess not."

"About that night..."

"What about it?" he asked tentatively.

"I wanted to thank you for being there. I really needed someone that night... I really did wish it was Brett, but I was very glad that it was you."

Dutch finally relaxed now that Ravyn had brought up the subject that had haunted him these past few weeks. And now, he didn't have to spend time beating around the bush.

"But..."

*But?* panicked Dutch, *what do you mean "but"? We're on a roll here, dammit!*

"I don't think I'm quite ready to resume another commitment right now," Ravyn said.

*Aw... hell...* He tried to keep his disappointment off his face

"I'm sorry. I would have told you sooner," she began as she stood up, "but you were avoiding me."

Dutch rustled up a smile and beamed it in her direction. He just hoped it looked genuine to her because it felt fake to him. Both of them continued to stare at each other until they noticed the sudden increase of activity around them. The shift change had come to their rescue.

"I guess I should be going..." he muttered.

"Me too!"

All he could do was stand there and watch Ravyn stride purposefully away from him.

She was obviously ready to get back into the cockpit and would probably be up to speed in no time while Dutch didn't know where the hell he was going.

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Jefferson El Jafeer found Lieutenant Wallace in the Science Department, huddled over a terminal.

"Good news, Lieutenant Wallace! The cavalry has finally come to your rescue," Jefferson announced with an infectious grin.

Because of Calder's unexpected message this morning, Chris already knew why the Station's Chief of Staff was here.

"The *Horatio* just warped in and you have been ordered to return there yesterday, if not sooner," Jefferson clarified.

Even having several hours advanced warning Chris couldn't push away the feeling of sadness he had over having to now leave *Nexus*.

"Yes," Chris sighed. "I've already spoken to Captain Calder and he gave me the news."

Jefferson's eyebrows knit in confusion. "Considering your initial resistance and how you ended up here, I'd think you'd be happy."

*That was before I met Yuki.* "I... I... have come to... like it here," Chris stammered.

"I assure you that Captain Argent was distinctly displeased to lose you, but the orders come from the Chief of Fleet Operations himself. You need to get your things packed and to the transporter immediately. I'll drop by your quarters in an hour to escort you to the transporter."

Not knowing what else to do, Chris stood and began the long walk to his quarters.

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"Tigger? You look like someone just ate your cat."

Chris "Tigger" Wallace slowly lifted his head and noticed Dutch walking towards him. "Bad news."

Dutch sighed. "Tell me about it." He shook his head and looked to Chris, "You first."

"I'm being ordered back to the *Horatio*... I'm on my way back to my quarters."

"*What the fuck?*" Dutch bellowed. "When did this happen?"

"Just now and I have less than an hour to pack and be shipped off..." Chris stopped and sighed. "And I don't even know what to tell Yuki. I don't even know if I will see her again," he added quietly.

"Yeah..." Dutch began, facing Chris. "I know how that is. I was a bundle of nerves waiting for Ravyn."

"She's back?"

"Yup, arrived on the transliner this morning."

"And?"

Dutch shook his head and prompted Chris to continue their walk. "I knew I'd fallen in love with her and given our last encounter, I thought she'd felt the same." He paused and let out a big sigh. "But she didn't."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Dutch. I was really hoping you two could kick it off together."

"Me too, Tigger," Dutch whispered as they arrived at Chris' quarters.

Both men stopped and stood in awkward silence. Dutch suddenly tossed his hand out and Chris shook it warmly.

"Good luck to you Tigger. I hope you'll come back one day."

"Believe me, I want to..." Chris whispered, his eyes downcast, then suddenly looked up as Dutch walked away. "Where are you off to?"

"I need a drink."

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"Computer?" Chris queried as he threw things into his travel case. He had been thinking of what to say to Yuki, but all he could think of was that he was leaving and they would be apart.

"Yo!"

Yo? Chris noted for the umpteenth time that it was best not to give some things a personality.

"Locate Midshipman Shiratori for me, please," he asked. *What am I going to say to her?*

*"Midshipman Shiratori is not on the station right now, Lieutenant," Sparky replied in his cheery computer voice. "She and Lieutenant Midori Sato went down to Galena to do some shopping."*

"Damn!" Chris said aloud as the doors opened and Lieutenant El Jafeer walked in.

"Come on, Lieutenant! Captain Calder said by the end of the hour and I would not be surprised to see him standing in his transporter room with a stopwatch."

"Okay," Chris said, throwing the last of his things in the case. "Could you take this Transporter Room and I will meet you there in a minute."

Jefferson eyed him suspiciously. "It had better be a minute, Lieutenant," he replied as he carried the case out.

"Computer?" Chris asked.

*"The name's Sparky, Lieutenant."*

"Whatever. I wish to record a message for Midshipman Shiratori. Personal -- her eyes only."

*"Fire away!"*

\* \* \*

"Heard the news?"

Dutch wearily glanced up at Virgil before he lowered his head and went back to nursing his drink. He was in the Lounge because it was nice and quiet. Now he wished Virgil had selected another table.

"You look like shit," Virgil told him while he sat down. He wrinkled his nose before he began to sniff in Dutch's direction. "What *are* you drinking?"

"What do you care, we aren't on duty until tomorrow!" he growled.

"What is *wrong* with you, Dutch? You drunk or something?"

Dutch heard the concern in his voice. He lifted his eyes and looked at his partner. "Apparently not enough."

"The last time you looked this bad was when Ravyn left... Oh... it's Ravyn."

"What about her?"

Virgil blinked several times before he spoke. "You just spent weeks bitching and moaning about how you didn't want to see Ravyn. Now what?"

"I saw her."

"And?"

"She dumped me."

Virgil's eyelids fluttered again. "I think I'm confused."

"You're not the only one."

"How about you try explaining it to me?"

Dutch knocked back the rest of his drink then slammed the empty glass on the table. "You were right. I didn't want to see her and then I was talking to Brett and--"

"You were talking to who?"

"I ain't crazy. I wasn't *talking* to a dead man, dammit! I was standing at the memorial talking to myself when I realized that I loved Ravyn."

"You were talking to yourself and realized you loved Ravyn. OK... I follow you."

"Then Ravyn comes over and we talk. Then she dumped me!"

"She dumped you?"

"*Sure as shit she did! She didn't even give me a chance!*" he bellowed, attracting the attention of some of the other patrons in the lounge. "What are you butthairs staring at?" he growled. Dutch allowed a grim smile to cross his face because anyone who was looking towards them hurriedly found something else to do.

"Dare I ask now what?"

"Fuck if I know! All I wanted to do was drown my sorrows in a glass of beer." He started to gulp down the last of his alcohol when he realized it was empty. He frowned then looked up at Virgil. "Didn't you say something as you came in?"

"I did? Oh, yeah, I did. Wallace got his orders and he's gone."

"Yeah, I know. I saw him on his way to pack up. He looked like I felt."

"Yeah, that stinks. Looks like lost love is the order of the day around this place."

"Yeah..." Dutch mumbled as he idly scratched the stubble on his chin. "So now what?"

Virgil shrugged. "Nothing's changed. We're still going to have to escort the freighters to their destinations."

"Yeah, but without Wallace's help..."

Virgil finished the sentence for him. "...it won't be easy."

\* \* \*

It was many hours later when Yuki and Midori returned from their shopping and sightseeing trip to Galena. When she entered her quarters, she saw that a message was waiting. She threw her bags down on the chair and went over to the terminal.

"Computer. Please play message."

*"Sure thing, toots. Just need to verify your identity. It's coded to your eyes only,"* Sparky replied.

"Shiratori, Midshipman Yuki. Authorization Kaizen 117."

*"Authorization confirmed."*

"Begin playback," she ordered. She smiled when she saw Chris' face appear, but it quickly turned to concern when she saw the pain and sadness reflected in his eyes.

*"Yuki. I... I don't know what to say... The Horatio just warped in and they have ordered me to report to her immediately. The computer reports you are on*

*Galena with Midori, so I have no way of contacting you. I don't know when we are leaving, but if they are rushing me there, I have to believe it is soon..."*

Yuki only half-listened to the remainder of the message, the tears now flowing more and more freely down her face. When she was done, she deleted it and went to stand before the windows of her quarters. She looked out amongst the bright stars against the black background of space and wondered to which of them Chris was now speeding.

She stayed there for some time before finally coming to a decision.

"Sparky, please send a message to the Chief Medical Officer. Please tell her that I am rescinding my request for an extension on my rotation and am requesting another assignment." Yuki paused for a moment to wipe away the tears. "Please tell her that I wish to return to the Academy as soon as possible."

*"Will do, toots!"*

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Before he went to bed, Dutch decided to take a leisurely stroll around the hangar deck. Actually, that wasn't the case. He knew what he was doing; he wanted to sit down near Brett. Right now, it felt like the late tactical officer was the only person around here who really understood.

"I don't know what to say, bud. Today has been hell. And I'm not the only one. It just seems like everything is going to hell in a hand basket. All I can do is just sit back and wait. I feel as if my life is running me than the other way around."

Dutch paused to look up at Brett's face, sitting quietly on the plaque. He could really appreciate the fact that Brett made the perfect companion: never interrupted, always listened, and never made a judgment about him.

He grinned. "Thanks for listening bud. Hope I can do the same for you some time."

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*Next: A Question of Priorities: His Majesty Regrets*

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