

Interludes

Warning: Contains Adult Situations!

Virgil sighed as he glanced around the busy spaceport waiting for Red's arrival. He'd spent part of the morning seeing Sebastian Stoa off to North Carolina to visit his adopted mother and his siblings. Yesterday, Sebastian had received his commission to Ensign. He was still so excited about his promotion he practically bounced onto the shuttle. Virgil really missed his company. Now all Virgil could do was be alone with his thoughts and consider how much he didn't want to go back home again. Virgil sighed as he once again glanced at his chronometer, wondering if Red forgot their trip when Virgil spotted his fellow pilot sprinting towards him.

"Sorry I'm late Virgil. Shuttle traffic was backed up and--"

"Not a problem, Red. After I saw Sebastian off, I was delayed with the paperwork." Virgil's voice became soft. "I never knew there were so many rules and regulations concerning the transport of a dead body."

"Are we ready?" Red asked softly after several moments.

"Yes..."

Red followed Virgil towards the private jet sitting off to the side.

"That's some piece of work!" Red exclaimed.

Virgil shrugged. "Dad has a lot of them." He stared at the plane and smiled. "It's one of my favorites. Scott liked it also. I specifically requested father to have it waiting here for me to use to bring Scott's body home." Virgil stopped and coughed back a tear. "Thanks for coming with me, Red. I really appreciate it."

"No problem, Virg. Besides, your father knew my old man and I'm always interested in meeting anyone who knew him."

They took up positions in the cockpit -- Virgil in the pilot's seat, Red in the co-pilot. Virgil requested clearance for take off. Once it was issued, they were on their way. Virgil noticed that Red was itching to fly the jet so Virgil let him. This allowed Virgil time to collect himself for his pending meeting with his father. A homecoming Virgil wished he didn't have to face. Not now, perhaps not ever.

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By the time Virgil noticed the familiar palm trees surrounding the landing strip, some of his uneasiness had dissipated, but not all of it.

"Welcome home, Master Virgil," greeted Kumar, his father's housekeeper and majordomo, as the pair walked up to the house.

"Thank you, Kumar."

"You are just in time for supper, Master Virgil. Your father is in the lounge."

Virgil nodded to Kumar and then turned to his guest. "This way, Red."

Virgil led the slack-jawed Red from the landing area through the huge tropical garden up the large staircase to the living room. Virgil sighed. He just couldn't muster up any enthusiasm for the evening meal and yet another batch of war stories about his father's days as a Starfleet officer. Never mind the endless comparisons of himself to Scott.

Virgil did not look forward to being home again at all.

"Boys," boomed the deep voice of Jackson Taylor as both Red and Virgil entered, "I'm very glad to see you."

"Father, may I introduce, Ensign Redmond Overlake," Virgil began cautiously.

Jackson stood silent, carefully eyeing the newcomer. "Why are you the son of old Kirkland Overlake?"

"Yes, sir!"

Jackson smiled and thrust his hand forward, taking obvious delight in getting acquainted the son of an old friend and spent some time talking about Red's father and their adventures during the war.

Having no great interest in the subject, Virgil left them to talk while he went out on the balcony to collect his thoughts. His father didn't look much different than the last time he saw him, a bit grayer but still the master businessman.

"Master Virgil?"

Virgil turned around to face Kumar. "Yes?"

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"Dinner is served."

"Thank you, Kumar. I'll be there shortly."

"Very good, sir."

Virgil turned back to the ocean, deeply inhaling in the tangy sea air to steel himself for the dinner conversation he was certain not to enjoy.

* * *

Boffin Gateway decided he'd done enough work for the day. He had spent the time on the *Stellar Wind* taking care of the new provisions, old paperwork and even briefed a few crewmembers who'd come back to the ship early.

As a reward for a job well done, he decided that it was time to drag himself over to have that drink he was promised a long time ago.

Boffin stood outside the darkened doors and noticed that the place hadn't changed much as he walked into the joint. It was still a standard Terran bar inhabited by the kinds of denizens one would expect. It was so dim it took his eyes a while to adjust. Finally, Boffin spotted the balding, tall, thin man who always wore a scowl on his face cleaning shot glasses. He sauntered up to the bar.

"Mho?"

"Yeah, who the fu-- Why, Boffin! G'damn, how are you boy?"

"Not bad, not bad, say, Mho, I want to--"

"Still in 'fleet? Tell me boy, are you going legit?"

Boffin shrugged. "Yeah, I guess you could say that, Mho."

"Well, g'damn, who would have thunk it would ever come to this. I was just saying to John Drake that--"

Beep!

Mho frowned and turned towards the comlink behind him. "Mho's Bar. Mho speakin'. Wadaya want? Who? Oh...yeah...wassup, Roger?" Mho listened and then responded, "OK, lemme check." Mho turned and bellowed towards the crowd, "Jessica, you here?"

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A female voice shouted, "Who wants to know?"

"Roger!" barked Mho.

"What the hell does he want now? Tell him to keep his ears on." Mho turned back to the screen. "She'll be right over...Yeah, no prob."

Mho turned to Boffin and picked up the glass he was polishing. "Sorry Bof. So tell me, wassup?"

"You promised me a drink last time I was here."

"Say, that's right! Wadaya want?"

"The best."

Mho grinned, placing the over polished glass down on the bar. He reached underneath and brought out a bottle. He poured out a shot of Tellurian brandy. Boffin took the glass and sipped gingerly, savoring every drop. He continued sipping while they talked. Boffin was about to leave when he reminded Mho of his last visit.

"Oh, geeze, don't remind me about that damned Peter Lingus. I'm telling you Bof," Mho declared, tapping his chest with pride, "I won't get fooled again."

Boffin was about to respond when Mho was tapped on the shoulder. The barkeep flashed Boffin a look of disgust and then turned to the patron.

Boffin couldn't quite hear what the patron asked, but did hear Mho's response, "I dunno. Lemme ask around." Mho turned towards the denizens of the bar and yelled, "A'right youse mugs, is there a Talia in here? *Yo!* Jenny Talia, you're--"

The bar denizens began to roar with laughter, complete with back slaps interspersed with fingers pointing at Mho who was slowly becoming red in the face.

Mho turned back to the patron just as he scurried out the door. "If I ever catch you in here again, I'll--" Mho was too angry to continue and Boffin was laughing too hard.

"Mho," Boffin chuckled, "I thought you just said you'd never get caught like that again."

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Mho twisted his withered lips into a snarl. "Yeah, well, I'm getting old, Bof."

"I guess some things never change, eh mate?" Boffin tossed out as he walked out the door still laughing at Mho's latest misfortune.

* * *

"Thank you, Kumar. Another excellent meal!" Jackson Taylor boomed at his majordomo

"Thank you, Mister Taylor," Kumar replied.

"Boys, how about retiring to the balcony?" Jackson tossed his napkin on the dinner table and stood up.

"Sounds great, Mister Taylor."

Jackson frowned at the visitor. "Red, my boy, call me Jackson. Besides, you deserve it -- you've earned your wings, son!"

Red beamed but had obviously caught Virgil's look of despair in the corner of his eye. Rather than being his normal ebullient self, Red just smiled and nodded with restraint.

"Thank you."

"Let's go boys!"

Virgil and Red followed Jackson to the balcony where they all settled in the large chairs to enjoy the sunset and after dinner drinks. "Personally boys," Jackson began while they took in the various shades of red and purple, "this is my favorite room in the house."

"I can understand why," Red beamed, sipping his drink.

After an hour of general chat against the darkening sky, Red announced, "I've really enjoyed this evening, Jackson, but I'm really rather tired and I think I'll just retire now. Good night, Sir. Good night, Virgil."

"I think I'll turn in too, Father," Virgil said.

"Before you go, son, I'd like a word with you."

Oh, boy. Here it comes, thought Virgil, a scowl forming on his face.

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Jackson frowned. "What is wrong, son?"

Virgil just stared at his father in surprise. "I just expected you to be more upset about Scott's death and the fact that I'm still alive."

"*What!*" bellowed Jackson Taylor so loudly that Kumar came running on to the balcony.

"Mister Taylor, is there a problem?" Kumar asked.

"Nothing's wrong, Kumar," Jackson told his majordomo. Kumar frowned but retreated nonetheless. Jackson turned back to Virgil. "Son, I may be your father, but I'm still a pilot and I know the risks. Scott was a damned good pilot and I'm sure that he didn't die from stupidity. Both the captain's and your letter indicated that he died in battle. A father and pilot can't ask much more than that." Jackson paused and stared at his son. "Scott's gone and nothing can bring him back. I'm more worried about you and how you feel."

Virgil gazed at his father and considered what his father just said and what he wanted to tell him. Before he realized it, Virgil blurted out, "I want to fly, Father."

Jackson leaned back in his chair and gave him an easy smile. "I know, son."

"*What?*"

Jackson stood up, walked over to Virgil, and sat beside him. "I've known that you've wanted to fly ever since you arrived home and began talking about Kyle Argent. The admiration in your eyes was of a pilot that wanted to be just like his mentor. I know the signs well, son."

"You wouldn't object then?" Virgil asked cautiously.

"I don't want to lose another son, but I'd rather lose you doing what you truly wanted to do than to lose you in a job that you didn't enjoy."

"Commander Argent told me that if I completed all the sim time and training he's arranged, he'd consider putting in a good word for me to go to pilot training school. I know I'm going to be older than most of the students, but I don't think you'll find anyone more dedicated and determined than I am."

"I know son, I know. I remember Kyle well. He was one of my best students and I'd always hoped he'd turn out well. And obviously, he has, better

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than I ever expected." Jackson paused, his face pensive. "I wouldn't be surprised if he hasn't surprised even himself." Jackson smiled. "So now that we've cleared the air, how about you tell me what *really* went on with the *Stellar Wind*?"

Virgil grinned at his father and told him all about his adventures on the 'Wind.

* * *

"Oh, do hurry Kyle -- look at the time!" Arcadia urged from her bedroom as she secured her hat with a hatpin. It was old-fashioned item but then, it just seemed appropriate for this day.

Arcadia left her room to walk into the living room to sit and await Kyle's arrival. After several long minutes, she concluded that someone had it all wrong when they said it took women a long time to dress.

Kyle finally emerged wearing a formal black jacket with lapels and a cummerbund of emerald green. Arcadia rose from the couch and stood before him, admiring the fine lines of his coat, trousers, and the man beneath.

"Very, very nice. I'm glad that Ariel decided to go for a very traditional wedding. I've always thought that men look exceedingly handsome in black jackets and you've just proved the point." She paused and then continued with a deep sigh, "I am disappointed that I never saw Desmond in one."

Kyle laughed. "I'm sure that was the first and last time he was so drunk to make that kind of bet."

"Indeed. I honestly think he thought that I wouldn't go along with having a wedding in the nude, but we Vaegans don't have a taboo against nudity as you Terrans still do."

Kyle blushed and stammered, "Uhm...yes, well...that's true. Before we go, I need to make sure Mac has food and water."

Arcadia gave him a soft smile. "I don't see Mac starving anytime soon."

"Meow!"

"I think Mac disagrees," Kyle laughed.

While Kyle was busy tending to Mac, Arcadia waited for him at the front door. Kyle joined her and they strolled out into his front garden. Luckily, they

didn't have long to walk as the wedding was taking place in the area between sibling's joint estates.

"They couldn't have asked for better day," Arcadia said as they walked to the festivities. She was wearing a long, low cut dress in jade green silk that offset her verdant eyes. Arcadia topped off the outfit with a large, light green straw hat, and white sandals. Slung low over her bare shoulders was an emerald green stole because the reception was to last until late in the evening.

"Here we are. I'm afraid that the guests are mostly friends of Ariel and--" Kyle stopped suddenly and had a definite look of surprise on his face. "My mother is here..." Kyle's voice trailed off and Arcadia wisely said nothing noting the anxiety in his voice. After a few moments, he continued, "Let me introduce you to her, Arcadia."

They walked over to the striking older woman sitting on Ariel's side of the aisle. Arcadia suddenly realized that Kyle hadn't talk much about his family except for Ariel. His mother was still very beautiful--tall and gracious with lightly tanned skin.

"Mother?"

"Kyle, dear..." she began in a lovely voice that held a hint of a French accent, "I would have come calling last night but I arrived so late and I didn't want to disturb you. As I was saying to Isabell--" She stopped and looked squarely at Arcadia. "Is this her?"

"Err...yes, mother, may I present, Captain Arcadia Devlin, Commanding Officer of the *USS Stellar Wind*. Arcadia, my mother, Madame Martine Argent."

The older woman gave Arcadia a warm, gentle smile. "I'm very pleased to meet you, Captain Devlin."

"Please call me Arcadia, Madame Argent," she replied cautiously, extending her hand.

Martine gently shook the offered hand. "And do call me Martine."

"Damn! We'll speak at the reception. I've got to go and give Ariel away. Mother, are these seats free?" Kyle pointed to the chairs next to his mother, and when she nodded, he asked, "Can Arcadia and I sit here. I can just step back and sit here after I give the bride away... How did I get dragged into this?" he mumbled while rushing up the aisle.

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Arcadia attempted to stifle a chuckle as she watched the retreating figure. She'd never seen Kyle so flustered before. She turned back to Martine.

"Kyle was rather abrupt. Are these seats really free?"

"Yes they are and I would truly enjoy having you sit next to me."

"Thank you," Arcadia replied, sitting down in the chair next to Kyle's mother.

Arcadia felt very awkward. Kyle had said nothing about his mother attending the ceremony, though Arcadia should have guessed as much. She hoped she could keep her discomfort out of her body language and voice.

"Kyle didn't mention you were going to be here, Martine."

"Did he not?" She sighed. "Not surprising. I understand from Ariel that he had accepted the wedding invitation at the last moment."

"We were rather busy on the *Stellar Wind*."

"Kyle doesn't talk much about his work and I admit to being curious," Martine said.

Arcadia could tell that Kyle's mother was going out of her way to make Arcadia feel welcomed and appreciated her efforts. They continued to chat until Martine suddenly stopped talking.

"Is there a problem?" Arcadia asked.

The older woman gave Arcadia a quizzical look. "The ceremony is about to start."

Arcadia was confused. "How can you tell?"

"The music, my dear."

"Oh...I see. Vaegans are tone-deaf, so I didn't notice it."

Marine leaned over and patted Arcadia's hand softly. "That is fine. In fact..." Martine paused while she peered over her shoulder. "Here they come."

As tradition dictated, all the guests rose as the brides made their way down the aisle. Arcadia noted that Kyle looked most handsome escorting Ariel - though Isabell's brother Ted escorting Isabell couldn't match Kyle's regal

bearing. *On the other hand, Kyle's had a lot of practice looking stately during ceremonies of late*, Arcadia mused. The brides wore matching gowns that were a mixture of soft rose lace, peach silk with a touch of white as accents.

It was one the loveliest ceremony Arcadia had ever attended but then, she hadn't attended that many weddings lately. After the brides exchanged their vows and rings, they made their way back up the aisle while the audience stood to appreciate the view. Then the music ushered everyone out into the garden for the reception.

The reception was held in a large tent surrounded by apple and cherry blossoms. Everything was ready for the hungry crowd descending *en masse* to the tent and towards the waiting staff of chefs and servers. The guests found their rightful place by carefully checking the placards. An usher led those who were totally clueless to their seats. The brides accompanied their families to the head table near the live band at the front. Once everyone was seated, food was served to the appreciative crowd.

Arcadia took a good look around the festivities. The band was playing some music she assumed to be pleasant. She noted that no one had a grimace on his or her face or otherwise looked towards the band with a look of disgust, so she assumed all was in order. She carefully unpacked the menu that was painstakingly wrapped in a silk napkin of peach. The ladies had picked out a menu fit for royalty: cordon bleu with roasted potatoes, salad, and strawberry cheesecake for dessert. Each course had its own specially selected wine with it. Ariel knew her brother well because there was large carafe of iced tea on their table just for him.

Once everyone had enough time to eat and engage in more chat, the wedding cake arrived out to be cut and served. The brides then started slicing their wedding cake. They managed to lop off a few pieces before it became obvious to the head server that she needed to take over. She ever so gently took the knife from the brides and used her trusty cake server to finish the job. The cake was then distributed to the guests for their enjoyment.

"I don't think I understand," Arcadia said as she was being served a piece of wedding cake and cheesecake.

Kyle laughed. "Isabell wanted cheesecake and Ariel wanted a traditional cake. They compromised."

"The secret to a successful partnership," Arcadia chuckled.

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Once everyone was served, Kyle rose, facing the brides. Everyone became quiet. He lifted his token glass of champagne towards the women. "As you slide down the banister of life, may the splinters never point the wrong way."

Arcadia could barely contain her mirth and she wasn't alone. It took several moments for the laughter to die down.

"I never realized you had such a sense of humor," she chuckled at Kyle as he sat down.

"There's a lot you don't know about me," he whispered.

"I'd like to learn more," she whispered seductively.

The brides spent the rest of the evening dancing and socializing with their guests. By 10.00pm, the weather looked ominous, so the guests started to depart before the coming storm.

By 10.30pm, the only people left were the brides, Ted, Arcadia, Kyle, and Martine. Kyle was sitting with his mother and Arcadia when Ted called him over to settle an argument with the brides.

"They've only been married a few hours, dammit," Kyle grumbled.

Arcadia watched the retreating figure and sighed lustfully.

"I am glad that we are finally alone," Martine Argent began, slowly and deliberately.

Arcadia looked to the older woman. "Indeed," she replied noncommittally.

"Yes, I wanted to talk to you." Martine stopped and displayed the soft smile of someone who had endured a lot of pain in her life. "I do not know how much Kyle has said about his family."

"Not very much. I know a bit about Ariel and some about Reesa. I'm a widow myself, so I know what it is like to lose a loved one. But I honestly don't know anything about his father."

"Hmm...that makes sense...a very tragic sense." Martine straightened herself in her chair and then stared at Arcadia. "Kyle never did think much of his father. I can understand his feelings but I can never stop loving any of my children nor my husband." She paused and sighed. "No matter what they have personally done to me. I'm not sure you can understand but no matter. It needed to be said." She stopped talking, casting her eyes off into the distance.

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"Kyle is my favorite. Perhaps because we are so alike. Restless souls, always looking for the answer."

Arcadia noticed that Martine had tears in her eyes. The older woman paused long enough daintily wiped them away with her lace handkerchief. In the corner of her eye, Arcadia spotted Kyle coming back towards them.

"I never knew Reesa but I am sure he loved her very much. I can see by the look in his eyes that he adores you greatly. Take care of my son, Arcadia, because I know he could love you very much."

Arcadia was not expecting such a heart-felt statement and she was close to tears herself.

"Are you ready, Arcadia?" Kyle asked.

"Yes," Arcadia replied quietly.

"It was good to see you again, Mother."

Martine rose and gave Kyle a long hug and a kiss. She then turned to Arcadia and gave her a tight hug. "Take care of my son," Martine whispered.

"I shall," Arcadia replied, choking back a tear.

Both women stared at each other for a many seconds before Arcadia gave Martine a final smile then followed Kyle over to the Brides and Ted to give them their regards before departing for Kyle's estate.

* * *

Machiavelli Argent stretched his chunky feline body into a backward arc in an action that landed him straight onto the floor.

He mewed in disgust, glaring up at the sleeping bodies. *Had it not been for the extra person in the bed, I never would have fallen off*, he thought. He took a quick lick around his body, ensured that everything was in order, and hopped back on the bed.

He stared intently at the sleeping figures. His person had managed to kick the thin blanket off. His female had most of the cover over her and was curled around his person's body. Mac sat down, licked his front paw again, and then padded gently between the sleeping bodies, sniffing them both in turn. Satisfied that all was well, he crept back to his corner of the bed and gazed at the sleeping bodies again.

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While Mac didn't understand this mating ritual, he had found it...enlightening. He was *still* amazed at the claws on this humanoid female. He'd never seen claws so large and sharp. At least Dekachin was smart enough to protect himself.

His ears picked up at the sound of the front door opening. Mac bounded off the bed. He knew they'd come by to feed him.

"Meow!"

"Mac!" greeted Isabell, closing the front door behind her.

"Good thing I take care of things when Kyle isn't around," Ariel began, her eyes sweeping the mess in the living room. "Do hurry, we need to leave soon."

"I see that Kyle hasn't fed you yet, but then, you're always hungry," Isabell chuckled.

"Meow..." replied Mac, rubbing up against Isabell's leg in hopes she'd give him a treat.

"Here you go Mac." Isabell tossed him some baked ham she had with her for just the occasion.

Mac caught the piece of ham in mid air and then proceeded to down it in one gulp.

While Mac was busy chowing, Isabell had gone over to the cupboard and filled his bowl with cold milk. It was just the way that Mac liked it. As Mac drank the milk, Ariel cut up additional pieces of ham and put it in a bowl next to the milk. Mac was in seventh heaven alternating between bites of ham and lapping the milk.

"I wonder what they did last night?" Isabell asked.

"Oh, I think we can guess," Ariel snickered then frowned. "And he left the fire place blasting on high."

"Why don't you let them know we're here while I wash up?"

"Good idea," Ariel agreed.

* * *

"Kyle!"

Arcadia was awakened to the sound of a young woman yelling at the door while banging on it. Suddenly, the door sprang open, revealing Kyle's younger sister Ariel.

Immediately, Arcadia felt Kyle stirring besides her. He yanked the covers towards him. Arcadia refused to yield, determined to keep what little blanket she had. She gave a final tug, leaving the very embarrasses Kyle exposed. He finally snatched it back, leaving Arcadia totally uncovered.

She frowned then gave him a wicked grin. "And here I thought I was the one that grew up in an arid environment and would feel the cold more than you would," Arcadia said to Kyle who was now extremely red. Arcadia turned away from the flustered man besides her and addressed the newlywed intruder. "Good morning, Ariel."

"And *what* do we owe this pleasure, Ariel? Don't you believe in knocking first?" growled Kyle.

"I did knock. You just didn't hear me." Ariel paused and twiggled her eyebrows. "I must say, Kyle, you are quite the sight in the morning."

"It's a bit early for a social call, isn't it Ariel? Where's Isabell?" asked Arcadia over Kyle grumbling something unintelligible which loosely translated to his desire that the discussion cease and desist.

"She's downstairs cleaning up and feeding Mac. We just dropped by because we need to get an early start on our honeymoon." She looked directly to Kyle and grinned broadly. "And I just couldn't leave without saying goodbye to my favorite brother, now could I?"

Arcadia detected the mirth in Isabell's voice and began to laugh. Kyle retaliated by wrapping the cover around him and standing up.

"If you ladies will excuse me, *some* of us have business to attend to." Kyle stomped off, leaving the ladies with enormous smiles on their faces.

"Is he always this grumpy in the morning?" Ariel finally asked.

"Actually, I wouldn't know but I suspect so. You did come in rather suddenly but then, I notice that when it comes to modesty, Kyle's the very proper man."

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Ariel nodded enthusiastically. "That he is. I'll leave you two to get dressed. Do hurry since we can't spare much time."

Once Ariel had closed the door behind her, Kyle finally returned, his face still flushed.

"She said we needed to hurry, Kyle."

"I heard," he grumbled.

The combination of his tussled hair and the disgust on his face was enough to cause Arcadia to start laughing again. He retaliated by tossing the blanket over her head and jumping on her mummified body.

* * *

After much frolicking intermixed with coaxing on Arcadia's part, she finally convinced Kyle that attending to the newlyweds was a good idea.

They walked into the living room and found that Isabell had made a fresh pot of tea to go with the fresh butter and pastries the newlyweds had brought with them. All four of them -- five if you count Mac who had managed to swipe a pastry from the tray -- had a delightful time talking and eating.

"We must be off," Ariel announced after glancing at her chronometer.

"Must you leave so soon," Arcadia sighed.

"Yup."

"We'll walk you out to your ship," Kyle said. Arcadia noticed a touch of sadness in his voice.

Kyle, Mac, and Arcadia accompanied them to the runway between Kyle and Ariel's joined property. It was a tearful goodbye. Finally, Ariel pulled Isabell towards the ship.

Arcadia and Kyle lingered well after the plane had taken off under Isabell's command. "She's not a bad pilot," Kyle mumbled.

When the plane finally soared out of view, Arcadia turned to Kyle.

"Why don't we return to the house?"

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Kyle nodded and followed Mac who had bounded ahead of them through the front door. As she stepped over the threshold, Arcadia wondered, "Do you have anything in mind you wish to do today?"

Kyle swept Arcadia in his arms and gave her a long, slow kiss. "I don't know," he replied then added, "I'm sure we'll think of something."

"I'm sure we will."

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