

Star Trek: Sutherland

Plebe Year

By David Falkayn

This story takes place during Liz's Plebe year at the Academy. The dance she performs for the Academy talent show, for those interested, can be found on YouTube at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oxssy4oZi9U>

"Would you like to hold her, *Any*a?" The woman in the bed asked as the nurse gently taking the baby from its mother's arms, placed it in the arms of an elderly woman.

"She's beautiful." Aliz smiled as she looked down on the tiny blue-eyed cherub, "Have you decided on a name, *Lany*?"

"Yes...We're calling her Elizabeth. Elizabeth Paula Shelby." Anna replied, knowing that, for some reason they would never tell her, that her mother and father liked that name.

Looking down fondly on her granddaughter, Aliz smiled, "I'm happy you chose that name my *lany*—even though you and Philip didn't have to." She then cooed, "My *lanyunoka*, I only wish your *nagyapa* could see you as you are now, little Elizaveta. Robert would have loved nothing more than to hold you in his arms..." Her still alert eyes gazing about the room, Aliz asked, "Anna? Where is Philip? I thought his ship was still in orbit."

"He couldn't make it." Anna said with a note of sadness in her voice, "He had to attend an important meeting at Starfleet Command..."

"He doesn't know what he is missing..." The elderly Aliz said in a slightly judgmental tone as she played with the little baby in her arms. "Robert always found a way to make it to each of your births."

"It helps to be Chief of Staff of Starfleet Command." Michael Wesley, wearing the burgundy and black uniform of a Starfleet officer with the rank insignia of Captain, quipped.

"Your father always made time for what was important." Aliz answered her oldest son back with a sad smile as she handed the tiny infant back to her mother. "That's one of the many reasons why I fell in love with him."

Anna's gaze then turned to her oldest son, also in Starfleet, wearing the insignia of an ensign. "Say hello to your sister, David."

"Hello, Sport." David grinned as he gazed down on the little baby, "I know you're going to grow up to be someone special."

"It's her fifth birthday, Philip!" Anna sighed, "She was so looking forward to you being there!"

"I'm sorry, Anna." The image of Philip Shelby, a distinguished looking man in his mid-forties wearing a Starfleet uniform and the rank indicators of a captain responded from the monitor in the living room of their Wyoming ranch house. "You know if I could be there, I would, but I'm patrolling the Neutral Zone right now. I just can't get away."

"I understand, Darling." Anna replied with a shaky grin, "After all, my *apa* was a starship captain and admiral, you know." Shaking her head, she gently admonished, "It's just that you missed our dear Elizaveta's birth, her christening, her first birthday, the day she learned to walk... and now you're missing yet another birthday and next month, she starts primary school. You're missing out on so much of her life."

"I said I was sorry, Anna." Philip replied in a slightly somber tone, "If I could be there, I would, but I can't help it. I sent her a birthday gift though—it should arrive soon."

"Thank you dear." Anna sighed dejectedly, "I'm not mad at you..." She apologized, "It's just that you're missing out on so much." With that, the screen went black. Taking a deep breath, Anna made her way to her daughter Elizaveta's playroom. Smiling as her daughter played with her dolls, Anna bent down and kissed her little girl.

"Is daddy coming?" Little Elizaveta asked.

"I'm sorry, *dragam*" Anna's lips turned up in a sad smile, "Daddy can't make it. But he's up there in the stars looking after us."

“Ohhh...” Little Elizaveta pouted in disappointment as she took out a piece of construction paper on which she drew a picture of her daddy and his starship as only a five-year old could, “See...I made this for him.”

Anna’s eyes moistening with tears, the loving mother took the drawing and hugged her little girl, “I’m sure your *apa* will love it when he sees it.”

“Third place, *dragam!*” Anna Shelby cried out with pride as she hugged her ten-year old daughter. “Third prize in the Plains Regional Junior Division Dance Contest for modern interpretative dance!” She exclaimed, reading the engraved plaque on the trophy. “I’m so proud of you!”

“Way to go, Sport.” David Shelby, now a lieutenant commander in Starfleet, hugged his little sister. “Loved your routine, Lizzy.”

Watching as his fifteen-year old daughter danced to a jazz tune in her room, Philip Shelby cleared his throat. “You know you’ve got your preliminary aptitude tests coming up for the Academy soon, don’t you Liz?”

“Yes, Sir.” Elizabeth replied in a soft voice, “I’ll get back to my studies.”

“Good girl.” Philip praised, “I want to see your name up there on the Walk of Honor at the Academy someday.”

“I won’t let you down, Father.” Liz replied as she returned to her desk and, taking out a padd, began to work.

Watching from the end of the corridor, Anna Shelby, a frown on her face, motioned for her husband to come over. “Why did you say that to her?” Anna asked, “You know she loves to dance...”

“Dancing won’t get her into the Academy.” Philip protested, “Studying and high marks will.”

“She’s sixth in her class, Philip!” Anna exclaimed, keeping her voice low so that Elizabeth wouldn’t overhear. “And she’s a very good dancer—you should come to one of her recitals some time. She’s as graceful as her grandmother, and my *anya*, besides being an excellent gymnast, also went to the Academy and served in Starfleet.”

“And ended her career a Lieutenant.” Philip countered.

“Because her and my father got tired of having to sneak off for shore leaves and having to hide in out of the way booths at bars like the *Starlighter* and meet at odd hours in vacant portions of the ship just so they could be together.” Anna riposted. “So, she resigned her commission, he made admiral, and they got married. She was happy in her career while on the *Lexington*, and happier in her marriage—what’s wrong with that.”

“Nothing.” Philip replied defensively, “I just want Elizabeth to do well and succeed.”

“She will, Philip.” Anna said as he kissed her husband, “But maybe you should also tell her that you’re proud of her and you love her.”

“But...” Philip protested, “I do feel that way about her. You know I love her and I’m proud of the young woman she’s growing up to be.”

“I know you do, Philip. But it wouldn’t hurt for her to hear that from you every now and again.”

“And graduating fourth in her class, Elizabeth Paula Shelby...third prize winner of the Vash’karan Memorial Contemporary Dance competition—jazz dance category; fourth place in the contemporary dance category; Captain, Starfleet Preparatory Cadet Training Program; Senior Class Treasurer; member of the court of the Homecoming queen; Student Council Representative. Walking up in the traditional cap and gown, Elizabeth received her diploma with a smile, then returning to her seat, she scanned the audience. Seeing her mother in the seats, her lips turned up in a smile, only to have the smile vanish when she discovered that her father wasn’t there.

“Ladies and Gentlebeings...” The school principal announced, “I give you this year’s graduating class of Christa McAuliffe High!”

“Where’s Father?” Elizabeth asked as she parted from her mother’s embrace. “I thought he was going to be here. He said he would.” She exclaimed, her eyes scanning the spectators and family friends of her and the other graduates of her class.

“I’m sorry *dragam*...” Anna Shelby apologized. “He told me to tell you he couldn’t make it—that he had a lecture he had to deliver at the Academy. He did want to me to tell you he’s proud of you that you got into the Academy on your first application.” She offered as consolation. She then added, “I’m sure your grandfather and grandmother would have been proud of you too.”

"I know, Anya." Liz smiled through her tears, "It's just that I really wanted him to be here too."

Starfleet Academy

"Room 2350-E..." A youthful blonde plebe cadet, wearing her Academy issue maroon jacket, black pants, and boots, and with a carry bag slung over her shoulder, noted as she compared the room number above the door to the number on her padd. "Yep, that's it." The door sliding open as she pushed the button to its side, the young cadet entered to find that her roommate had already arrived and was busy putting up her belongings.

Recognizing the newcomer as soon as the door chimed, the young woman, a tall, slender, dark-haired Trill looked up and smiled, holding out her hand in greeting, "Hi. I'm Jadzia...Jadzia Idris."

Entering the room, the blonde human set down her carry bag as she took her new roommate's hand in hers, "Hi...I'm Elizabeth Shelby. A pleasure."

"Likewise." The Trill replied, her smile still on her face, "Sorry, but I already claimed this side of the room over here..."

"That's ok..." Liz responded, "First come...first served." Opening her carry bag, she began to stow her gear and clothing in the closet. "So...Jadzia..." Liz inquired in an effort to make small talk, "What sort of classes are you taking this term?"

Sighing, the young Trill replied, "Well...I've got to cram as much as I can so that when I present my application to receive a host to the Symbiote Commission, they'll accept it."

"Don't you worry about getting confused or lost with all of those other lives that the symbiote has lived?" Elizabeth asked in genuine curiosity.

"That's why they're so careful screening applicants" Jadzia replied, "They want to be sure a potential host is fit both physically and mentally, so they expect someone to possess a wide range of intellectual and physical skills."

"You almost sound like a brochure." Liz quipped, smiling so as to take the sting out of the remark.

Laughing, Jadzia rejoined with more than a little bite in her voice, "Yeah, but if you knew how often I heard that question asked..."

"I'm sorry..." Liz apologized, the smile disappearing from her face, "I didn't mean to annoy you. I'll just finish putting my stuff up later and take a walk. I'll let you get back to doing what you were doing." She then turned and quickly dashed out of the room. *Damn Liz...you did it again! Stuck your big foot in your mouth. When will I learn. I ought to be more like father and keep everyone at arm's length.*

"Damn." Jazdia sat down at the edge of her bed as she watched her roommate dash away. Shaking her head, she finished unpacking,

As she walked the Academy grounds, Liz took her time to take in the sights and sounds of the campus—students, instructors, visitors, and other dignitaries and beings of every species that made up the Federation and even a few from outside its borders went about their business—some like her, just walking aimlessly, others moving with a purpose with specific destinations in mind. Coming to what she remembered from her orientation to be the gardens, the young cadet entered, hoping to settle her mind before returning to her room and her roommate. Seeing a rose bush in full bloom, Liz smiled broadly as she drew closer.

"Hey now..." A voice called out, "Don't touch the roses."

"I didn't mean to..." Liz stammered, "I'm sorry if I..." She shook her head, "I'll just leave."

"Wait a minute." The voice called out, stopping the young cadet in mid-stride, "You don't have to go."

Pausing and turning around, Liz saw an elderly man wearing khaki pants and shirt with a wide-brimmed hat and gardening implements. "I wasn't going to pull one of them...I just wanted to smell them."

"You'd be surprised at how many people want to pull my roses." The gardener chuckled as he approached. "If my roses were picked by everyone that wanted one, then no one would get to see any. Besides..." He grinned as he carefully cut one of the roses and handed it to her, "You wouldn't want to get stuck by any thorns, would you?"

"Thank you, Mister..." Liz stammered as she took the rose in her hands and sniffed it.

"Boothby...just Boothby." The old man smiled, "Why don't you join me on this bench? It's my break time now...come talk to an old man."

Chuckling slightly, Liz replied as she sat on the bench next to him, "Ok."

"So...what got you so upset?"

"Oh...I got off on the wrong foot with my roommate. Stuck my foot in my mouth as usual." Liz groaned.

"Surely it couldn't have been that bad." Boothby commiserated. "Maybe she took something you said the wrong way or maybe you took something she said the wrong way or maybe you both took something each of you said the wrong way."

Laughing, Liz joked, "You're not Betazoid are you."

"No..." Boothby said with a smile, "Just an old man who's been around. So...young lady." Boothby gently inquired, "What made you decide to enter the Academy?"

"Family history." Liz replied with a smile. "My father..." She said, her smile vanishing to be replaced by a longing in her voice, "Is Philip Shelby, the captain of the *Roosevelt*. And my grandfather on my mother's side was Admiral Robert Wesley and my grandmother, Aliz Bathory-Wesley, served on the *Lexington* with him."

"That might be what put the idea in your head of applying to the Academy..." Boothby sagely pointed out, "But I'm not sure that's the reason you're here...right?"

"I want to make my father proud of me." Liz declared, "I want to be the best Starfleet officer I can be for my father and to honor my grandfather's memory."

"My dear..." Boothby advised as he placed an old, weather-beaten hand on the shoulder of the young woman sitting next to him, "Don't try to meet your father's expectations or try to live up to a ghost. Be true to yourself. Be what you think you should be and everything else will fall into place." Standing up, the old man smiled. "Break time's over—I've got to get to those marigolds. You can stay in the garden if you want...or...maybe you could see if you can make a fresh start with your roommate."

"Thanks, Boothby." Liz smiled back, "I think I'll do that."

Returning to her room, she saw the dark-haired Trill woman sitting on the edge of her bed with what looked like a vase in her hands. "I'm sorry..." Liz ventured as she slowly walked in to the room. "I didn't mean to..."

"I didn't mean to snap at you either." Jadzia apologized. "I guess it's just first week jitters. So..." The lovely Trill asked in an effort to break the ice, "What are you taking this term?"

Smiling, Liz replied, "Let's see...Basic Leadership..."

Jadzia smirked, "Yeah, I'm in that one...got to get those requirements out of the way."

“Right.” The blonde human laughed, “Then I’ve got Federation History and science and math courses—and of course physical training.”

“They do fill up your schedule here, don’t they?” Jadzia chuckled. “I’m taking a full load too.”

“Well...looks like it’s gonna be a busy term.” Liz said as she finished moving in. *No more time for dancing.* She said to herself with more than a little sadness in her heart.

“So, how did you do on your Basic Leadership practicals, Liz?” Jadzia asked as she entered the dorm room she shared with her human roommate, who, as usual, was sitting at her desk, vigorously studying.

“Aced them.” Liz grinned and then frowned, “I told my folks the good news.”

“So, what did they say?” Jadzia inquired.

“Hmph...” The young blonde cadet smiled, “Mom was happy as usual, and my brother said, ‘way to go’ and that I was doing a good job upholding the Wesley and Shelby names.”

“What about your father?” The dark-haired Trill asked as she sat down at her desk and opened a book on astrophysics.

Her smile disappearing, Liz sighed, “He just told me that he expected no less.”

“Well...” Jadzia remarked, trying to put a positive spin on her father’s words, “At least he didn’t criticize you like the last time when you got an A minus in your Federation History course.”

“Yeah...but Commander Levine never gives anyone a score higher than A minus.” Liz grumbled.

“Well...” Jadzia sighed, “I’ve got an astrophysics exam coming up, so I better crack the books.”

“Same here.” Liz grumbled, “Except mine’s in elementary astrogation.”

“Oh...I almost forgot...” Jadzia exclaimed, “We’ve got the Fall Social to go to this Friday.”

“Oh hell!” Liz complained, “Besides that astrogation exam, I’ve got a tactical exercise I have to complete and familiarization with basic landing party procedures. I don’t have time for a fracking dance.”

“All part of being a captain, Liz.” Jadzia smirked, “But I understand. It’s keeping me away from what I need to do too. But...if we don’t go, we get marked down on our social interactions evaluations and that can bring our GPAs down and we don’t want that.”

“I guess not.” Liz sighed, “Well...I guess I can go and do the meet and greet thing for a few hours.”

“That’s the spirit.”

While at the social, Liz was polite and mingled, but more than anything else, she wanted to get back to her studies—assignments were due, exams coming up, and she had family obligations to meet. But, when a handsome cadet with blond hair and a slight English accent asked her to dance, she couldn’t resist—it had been too long since she’d enjoyed moving to the rhythm and music. Even though her partner was a fairly decent dancer, Liz felt the eyes of her instructors and fellow students on her, and so she kept her movements restrained and correct. In other words, she hated every minute of it.

The song finished, Liz thanked her partner and dashed immediately to the bar where she ordered a synthehol rum and coke. Drinking it, she sighed in relief as her roommate joined her. Taking a synth-Trillian aurea for herself, Jadzia sighed, “Kind of boring— isn’t it?”

“Yeah.” Liz grumbled as she sipped her drink. “So...when do you think it’d be safe to leave?”

“Probably after we finish our drinks.” Jadzia replied as she glanced at the chronometer. “Some of the instructors are already leaving, so I figure a little bit longer and it’ll be safe.”

“Great.” Liz muttered, “I’ve got that exam coming up Monday and I want to ace it.”

Looking out her window at the sunny autumn day—courtesy of the weather control network—Liz slammed her padd down on the table.

Glancing up from her reading, Jadzia inquired, “Everything all right, Liz.”

“I’ve got to get out for a bit.” Liz exclaimed, “I’m going stir crazy here.” Getting up from her desk, she announced as she headed for the door, “I think I’m going to the garden for a bit to clear my head. I’ll be back in a few.”

“Ok.” Jadzia replied as she returned to her reading, “Later.”

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As she entered the garden, a smile came to Liz's face as she recognized the old gardener. "Boothby!"

"Hi, Liz." The old gardener greeted and then gently chided, "Decided to finally get out of that prison of yours."

"Yeah." Liz sighed as she sat down on one of the benches, the gardener soon joining her. "I had to go and clear out the cobwebs."

"I've seen a lot of cadets come through those gates." Boothby said, gesturing towards the front entrance of the Academy. "A lot of them like you and that roommate of yours. Determined to be the best of the best no matter how much it costs them. They lock themselves in their rooms, coming out only for classes or when they have to. A few of them make it." He declared, "But most...they burn out after their first or second years."

"Not me." Liz declared, "I'm in this for keeps. I intend to be a starship captain before I'm forty."

"Lofty goal." Boothby remarked, "But you're not going to get there if you burn yourself out. Stop every now and then and smell the roses." He gestured towards the rose bush in front of where they sat, "Or even better—take a trip into the old city. Soak up some of that atmosphere...maybe take in an art show or a concert. Go to Fisherman's Wharf. Then, when you get back, you'll be able to hit the books refreshed and you'll do twice as good. Now...little lady...get going! Go to the old University of San Francisco campus—I bet you'll feel right at home there."

"All right...All right...you win!" Liz exclaimed, "I'll go."

"Good!" Boothby smirked, "And you can tell me all about it tomorrow."

As she walked down the streets of the old city, she turned on to the reconstructed Haight Ashbury district. The lovely blonde marveled at the colors, sights, sounds, and smells of the artistic community that had taken root there. She stopped to look at paintings from different artists, sat down to hear a guitarist playing traditional folk tunes, then marveled at the tunes being strummed by a Vulcan playing his lyre. But what really caught her eye was a statuesque blonde woman of about her age designing holographic images and setting them to music. Drawing closer, Liz was enraptured by how the colors, shapes, and textures all became interwoven to the sound of a Deltan melody. So lost was she in the work that at first, she didn't hear the artist's greeting.

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“Hello...Hello?”

“Oh...” Liz started, “I’m sorry! I was just so lost in this that...”

“It’s ok...and thanks...I think every artist wants to hear someone say that about their work. By the way...” She smiled as she held out a slender, graceful hand, “I’m Sandy...Sandy Moore. I do holoimages.” Smirking she quipped, “I’m guessing you go to the Academy.”

“However did you guess.” Liz joked back as both women laughed. “This really is beautiful.” She remarked, I love how smoothly you’ve meshed the music with the images.”

“Thanks.” Sandy replied with a smile, “But it’s missing something. I need something that can serve as a bridge—you know—something that can represent the joining of the image and the music...that reflects them both.” She sighed dejectedly, “Oh well...it’ll come to me eventually.” Sandy, deciding that she liked this blonde Starfleet cadet, impulsively asked, “Hey...if you’re not doing anything now...why don’t you join me for some lunch and maybe a cup of coffee or two at *Vincenzo’s* over there. It’s a nice little coffee house we all like to hang out at.”

Remembering Boothby’s advice to smell the roses and finding the company of the artist she just met enjoyable, Liz smiled back, “Sure, I’d love to. I don’t have to be back until later this evening anyway.”

“Great!” Sandy smiled as she took the cadet’s hand in hers, feeling a faint electric tingling at her touch, “Let’s go.”

“Lead the way...” Liz laughed as she took the artists hands in hers, also feeling that electric tingling.

Liz was nearly overwhelmed at the ambience of the coffeehouse when she entered with her new friend. After being guided to a booth with a clear view of the stage by Sandy, Liz smiled appreciatively. “This is nice.”

“Yeah...” Sandy smiled back, “We like it here. Hey, Jason...” Sandy said as she kissed a tall attractive man with brown-hair that just touched his shoulders and a neatly trimmed beard and mustache. “I want you to meet a new friend of mine. Jason Phillips...this is Liz Shelby.”

“Hullo, Liz.” Jason greeted as he took Liz’s hand and, to the blonde cadet’s not unpleasant surprise, kissed her cheek. Speaking to Sandy, Jason said, “Raul and Heather are here too.”

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“Terrific!” The statuesque blonde exclaimed, “Liz, would you like to meet some more friends?”

“Sure.” Liz grinned, “I’d love to meet them.”

Seeing a tanned young man slightly older than her, with dark hair, Sandy called out, “Raul! Come over here...There’s someone I want you to meet—a new friend of mine.” Then, spotting a redheaded woman sitting next to Raul, Sandy called out again, “Heather...you come too. I want you all to meet Liz.”

As the couple approached Raul and Heather both kissed Sandy on the lips, Raul embracing Jason and Heather hugging him and giving him a kiss. Liz looked up at the couple. Raul, the young blonde cadet admitted to herself, was quite attractive as also were both Sandy and Heather. As Sandy introduced them to her, they both took Liz’s hand and kissed her on the cheek.

“Would it be all right if they joined us, Liz? Sandy asked.

“Sure.” Liz smiled back as she made room in the booth for the other couple, scootching in closer to Sandy who, rather than pulling away to increase the distance between them, stayed and even moved in a little closer, much to the surprise of the young cadet who quickly found herself relaxing at the close physical proximity to her new friend and actually enjoying it. She also found herself not objecting to the close proximity of Jason on the other side of her.

Sandy, pleasantly surprised at feeling Liz’s growing relaxation at the close contact, nodded her head slightly, a gentle smile crossed her lips as she glanced at the Starfleet cadet next to her.

After the ice had been broken by small talk, Liz turned to Raul and asked, as a musician playing a Betazoid equivalent to a dulcimer, began to sing a series of Betazoid love sonnets, “What do you do, Raul?”

“I’m into interior décor and design.” Raul, speaking with a slight Castilian accent, replied. “I enjoy the challenge of combining the right furnishings and décor with the architecture of the room and the personality of the person occupying that space. Get any of a thousand things wrong...” He chuckled as he took a sip of his French roast coffee, “And the whole project is ruined.”

“I can see that.” Liz nodded her head knowingly. “I have to admit, I’m something of a perfectionist myself. One mistake on a starship can mean.”

“The deaths of a lot of good beings.” Sandy agreed nodding her head pensively.

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“Or a good ass chewing from the captain.” Liz chuckled in a successful attempt to lighten the suddenly darkened mood.

“That’s right, Liz darling.” Raul chuckled, consciously aiding her in her attempt to restore levity, “But always remember...” He mildly flirted as he took Liz’s hand and gave it a quick kiss, “Beauty is its own perfection.”

Blushing at the attention, Liz smiled as she unconsciously began tracing the rim of her coffee cup with her finger. Turning to Heather, she asked, “What do you do?”

“I’m a poet. Heather responded with a frown, “Not a very good one I’m afraid.”

“Pish-tosh!” Sandy chided, “You’re wonderful. Why don’t you get up and recite something!”

“No...I couldn’t...” Heather replied, blushing.

“Ah...Heather, love...” Raul pleaded, “You’re absolutely smashing...please...give us a poem after he’s done.”

“Oh...all right! If you insist.” The redhead sighed as the singer finished his set to the sound of applause from the audience. Waiting until he returned to his seat, Heather took her place on the stage and began to recite her poem—a haunting piece with its theme loss and redemption. As she finished her poem, the audience applauded as Heather bowed.

“You’re up next Jason.” Sandy grinned, encouraging the attractive man sitting next to Liz.

“All right, love.” Jason smiled as he got up and made his way to the stage. Taking a replicated version of a Fender Stratocaster, he began to play and sing a light and airy tune that perfectly suited the relaxed atmosphere of the coffee house. Finishing his song with a final guitar flourish, Jason bowed to the applauding audience.

“Your turn Sandy.” Heather grinned as she sipped her Kenyan blend coffee.

Clapping with the others as Sandy took the stage and set up her equipment, Liz watched in rapt fascination as she composed holographic images to go with the jazz tune, ‘*Take Five*’. Caught up in the music, Liz began to start swaying.

Raul and Heather, seeing Liz’s movements smiled as Jason urged, “Go up and dance...it’s ok.”

“No...” Liz demurred, “I don’t want to intrude on her work.”

“You wouldn’t be intruding.” Heather encouraged, “You’d be adding to it.”

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“You sure.” Liz asked as the music continued to move her.

“Yeah!” Raul and Jason both urged as Sandy motioned for her to join her on the stage.

“All right.” Liz smiled as she got out of the seat. “I better take this off.” She said as she removed her burgundy regulation coat revealing the short sleeve white shirt beneath. Getting up on the stage, Liz took a moment to center herself and then, letting the music take her, began to dance; her dance reflecting the song in its sensual beat. While she danced, she left her cares and worries about exams, exercises, and family honor behind. For now, it was all about the music.

Smiling broadly at the blonde dancer’s graceful form, Sandy adjusted her program to include Liz’s movements, adding them to the overall tapestry of colors, shapes, and sounds and as she did so, inspiration struck. *That’s it! That’s what I’m missing. There’s a beautiful butterfly in there once she emerges from her chrysalis.*

Clapping with delight as they watched Liz’s performance, both the others had come to similar conclusions. In a low whisper, Raul commented to his companions, “She’s a natural—see how graceful she moves? Yet...she’s holding back...she’s not letting herself go completely.”

“You’re right.” Heather agreed. “Right now, she’s like a thorny rose bush that has yet to come into bloom.”

“Oh...but when she comes into bloom...” Jason smiled, “She’ll be breathtaking.”

As their routine came to an end, both women bowed to an appreciative clapping audience. Returning to their table, Sandy gushed as she hugged her new friend, “You were great, Liz! Thanks!”

“For what?” Liz asked as she returned the statuesque blonde’s hug, becoming almost intoxicated by the smell of her perfume as well as her natural scent.

“For being my inspiration.” Sandy replied in a soft voice. “You pulled it all together.”

“Thanks!” A surprised Liz, astounded at being described as an inspiration, exclaimed as Raul hugged and kissed her cheeks.

“Absolutely smashing, love!” He praised, speaking in his Castilian accent. “The two of you...together...”

“Sweetie...” Jason grinned as he kissed Liz’s cheek, “You brought the house down.”

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“Breathtaking.” Heather gasped as she hugged the young cadet and kissed her on the cheeks.

“Thanks.” Liz responded, hugging and kissing her new friends, once again, almost becoming intoxicated by Heather’s sultry voice and Raul’s warmth and Jason’s charm, not to mention Sandy’s scent.

Glancing at the reproduction of a classic clock that measured time by mechanical hands, Liz gasped, “Oh God...I’ve got to get back to the Academy before I’m docked for being late.”

“Here’s where I can be reached.” Sandy said as she quickly entered her number on Liz’s padd. “Give me a call and maybe we can meet at my place this weekend? I’ve got a studio there and we can sit and talk for a while and maybe do something from there.”

“And here’s where you can get me, love.” Jason gently flirted, “I’m off to Julliard for the term, but I’ll be back afterwards, and we can always arrange to get together whenever you want—I’m only a transport away.”

“Let us know too...” Heather and Raul chimed in as they entered their numbers on the cadet’s padd, “And if you’d like, we can join you.”

“Sounds great!” Liz replied as she put her jacket back on. “I’ll give you a call, Sandy, and we’ll set everything up.”

“‘Til then, love!” They all called out as Liz left the coffeehouse feeling, for the first time in a long time, relaxed and ready to take on any obstacle in her path. *And yet again.* Liz chuckled as she tapped her communicator to transport back to the Academy, *Boothby was right.*

Entering her dorm room, Liz still feeling the natural high from her day in the old town, smiled as she saw her roommate relaxing on her bed. “Hey, Jadzia. I had the most marvelous time today.”

“I kind of thought you did.” The raven-haired Trill chuckled. “When you didn’t come back, I figured that you decided to go on into town or so something. So...” She urged, “Where did you go and what did you do?”

Laughing, Liz sat on the bed with Jadzia, leaning casually against the wall. “Well...I did go to the garden and Boothby chased me out and told me to go to old town and I did, and I met this really neat artist who makes holographic shows and then I met her friends at a coffeehouse and then she put on a show at the coffeehouse and I got

up and danced! It was so much fun, Jadzia! I hadn't danced like that since before I entered the Academy."

"Damn, Liz!" Jadzia chuckled, "You did have a full day. Now..." She mock pouted, "Don't tell me you're going to leave the Academy and become a dancer full-time."

"No." Liz shook her head. "I love it too much and I meant what I said, I'm going to be captain of a starship by the time I'm forty no matter what. But..." She paused, now pensive, "Maybe Boothby had a point back a few weeks ago when he told me that I shouldn't be doing this to please my father—maybe I need to think about doing this for the people who need our help and, yes, for myself."

"Hmmm..." Jadzia vocalized, "Good point. But..." The Trill got up and stretched, "...philosophizing isn't going to get us through those simulator drills tomorrow—we better bone up on our procedures or Captain Hanson will have our heads."

"Yeah...you're right. So...you want to run the tactical this go around or command?" Liz asked as she picked up her padd.

"Command this time, I think." Jadzia responded, "I did tactical last time."

"All right!" Liz exclaimed, "Let's get started!"

"Bold move, Cadet Shelby...also reckless. You could have lost your entire ship and endangered the colony." Captain Hanson chided while inwardly pleased at this young cadet's daring stroke. "The book calls for you to engage at as far a distance as possible from the colony to give extra time for evacuation. Care to explain to me why you took such a dangerous gamble."

Refusing to be intimidated by the lecturing starship captain's scowl, Liz stood up and, taking a deep breath and then exhaling, spoke. "The Cardassian *Galor* both had better armaments and better shields than my *Constellation*. There was no way, short of a lucky shot, I could have defeated it in a standup fight. The colony had little warning to prepare shuttles and other craft to escape. The Cardassians would have had more than enough time to defeat me and destroy the colony." As she made her explanations, a male cadet with dark blond hair, the same one who had danced with her at the Fall Social, nodded his head appraisingly.

Hanson then countered, "The damages your ship would have inflicted on the Cardassians would have slowed it down enough to have given the colonists the necessary time to escape."

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“That’s assuming they didn’t get a lucky shot on me and that they didn’t have reinforcements attacking from off the ecliptic, Sir.” Shelby riposted, “By lying in wait near the hot Jupiter, I was able to lure him into a position where his shielding advantages weren’t an issue.”

“Might I remind you that your shields would be down too?” Hanson argued back, again secretly pleased at the young cadet’s ingenuity and at how she defended her actions.

“That placed us on a level playing field where his advantages no longer applied. By ambushing him in his rear quarter, I caught him where he could not bring most of his weapons to bear while at the same time I was able to deliver an incapacitating shot, taking out his engines.” Shelby argued back.

“And your chance of failure?” Hanson asked.

“Approximately thirty percent.” Liz admitted and then asserted, “But that means it had a seventy percent chance of succeeding versus a seventy-five percent chance of failure using the approved tactic. The only way to have the standard strategy work would be for me to have rammed the *Galor*—a last ditch measure.”

“Very good Cadet.” Captain Hanson, motioning for Liz to return to her seat, lectured, “There will come times when you as Starfleet officers and perhaps ship captains will have to decide on whether to take the by-the-book approach or take a risk and often you won’t have the luxury of having the time for lengthy introspection. You have to make the call and make it immediately. But, be ready to accept the consequences of your decision. Class dismissed.” As the cadets stood up from their seats, the captain called out, “Cadet Shelby? A moment of your time, please?”

As Jadzia motioned that she would be waiting by the door, Liz approached the captain, “Sir?”

“Quick thinking on your part, Cadet...” Hanson said as he ran his fingers through his thinning hair. “Have you picked out a field for your initial specialized training yet?”

“I was considering Command, Sir.” Liz replied.

“While Command does have much to offer.” Hanson pointed out, “You might want to consider specializing initially in Security/Tactical.” The captain then explained, “With command, you’ll be spending most of your time on the helm or manning bridge stations and generally on gamma and delta watches. However, working security/tactical will place you in a wide variety of situation both on ship and on landing parties where you’ll be able to exercise more individual initiative. That broad range of experience would serve you well when you do transfer to command

as a full lieutenant or lieutenant commander or commander.” He then stated as additional motivation, “Some of our best starship captains started off in security. Do the names James T. Kirk and Marietta DeVees ring any bells?”

“Thank you, Sir.” Liz replied nodding her head, “I’ll definitely give your words careful thought.

“You do that, Cadet.” Captain Hanson smiled, “You’ve got the potential to go far. Whether you do so or not, is up to you.”

“Not bad, Liz!” Jadzia exclaimed as she put a friendly arm around her roommate’s shoulder. “For that—dinner’s on me.”

“Sound good to me, Jadz.” Liz smiled and then quipped, “Well...that’s one practical out of the way, now two more exams and that’ll be it for the week.”

“So...what are your plans for the weekend?” Jadzia asked, “Back to the old city?”

“Yeah.” Liz smiled and then tempted, “You can come with, you know. Jason’s working pretty hard at Julliard right now—he’s got a recital coming up in London soon that I’m hoping to be able to go to, but Sandy and Raul and Heather are here and they’re lots of fun.”

“I’m tempted.” Jadzia sighed, “But I’ve got to get that xenoarchaeology paper done. Rain check though?”

“Sure thing, Jadz.” Liz grinned, “Now...how about that dinner and you can tell me all about that cute guy in your astrophysics class.”

“Hey, *Anya*” Liz smiled at her mother on the viewscreen in her room, “I was just calling to check in and see how things were going back home.”

“Hi, *dragam!*” Anna smiled back, “How’s my *lany?*”

“I’m doing fine, Mom.” Liz replied, her grin still on her face. “I aced my last exam—of course...” She said, her smile turning into a smug grin, “This week, we’re attending a series of lectures on the different branches—you know we have to choose a specialization by the end of our plebe year.”

“Yeah, I know.” Anna grinned, “So...what are you thinking?”

“Hmmm...” Liz considered, “I’m torn between Command and Tactical/Security. Both have their pluses and minuses.”

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“And it’s not as if you can’t switch once you get into service.” Anna completed, “David’s had to a few times, you know. He started off in Command, then went to Operations, now, that he’s first officer on the *Redoubtable*, he’s back in Command.”

“Yeah...that’s true, *Anya*.” Liz nodded her head, “But, Captain Hanson says that that first branch decision can be a big one.”

“So...what does he advise, *dragam*?”

“He says I should think about tactical—that it would give me more opportunities to use my initiative earlier in my career than if I choose Command.”

“He’s got a point there.” Anna pointed out and then changed the subject, “So...what about these new friends of yours?”

“They’re so much fun to be around Mom!” Liz exclaimed, “Sandy and I get together every weekend now and usually Raul and Heather join us and when Jason gets a break from his work, he joins us too. We go to concerts and shows and perform and just hang out. It’s great!”

“That’s good.” Anna nodded her head approvingly. “I’m glad you’re getting out more. It’s not healthy to be cooped up in that room all day with nothing but padds to keep you company.”

“Well...” Liz smiled, “I’m getting to be good friends with Jadzia, my roommate. We started off kind of rocky, but she’s lots of fun and works as hard as I do.”

“So...what’s she like?”

“She’s an unjoined Trill.” Liz replied, “But she’s studying so that the Symbiote Commission will approve her receiving a symbiote.”

“That takes a lot of hard work.” Anna noted.

“Tell me about it.” Liz sighed, “Sometimes I think she works harder than me.”

“Then she needs to get out more too.” Anna declared, “You should take her out with you sometime to see your new friends.”

“Yeah.” Liz nodded her head, “I think she’d have fun.”

“Good.” Anna nodded her head approvingly, “And I’m glad you’re finding a life outside those Academy walls.”

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"Don't let Father hear you say that." Liz groaned, her smile disappearing. "He'd say that it's taking away from my studies and that I'm not holding up the Shelby and Wesley names."

"Now, *dragam!*" Anna gently chided, "You know your father loves you and is proud of you."

"Yeah, *Anya*, I guess so." Liz sighed, "I just wish he'd say it to me sometimes." Taking a deep breath, she exhaled, "Well...I gotta go now. Take care, *Anya*, and I love you."

"You take care too, *dragam!*"

Pressing the door to the enunciator, Liz was soon greeted by a cheerful "Come in!" The statuesque blonde apologized as she greeted her guest with a hug and kiss on the cheek, "People keep telling me to get a new door installed, "But, I keep telling them I like the look and the feel of the old door."

Smiling, Liz returned Sandy's hug and kiss, agreeing as she took in the stylish décor of her new friend's room, "Yeah...A sliding door would be out of place, I guess."

"Wouldn't it though?" Sandy smiled. "Why don't you take that jacket and those boots off...they've got to be uncomfortable. I've got some slippers here for you to slip into if you want. As for myself, I prefer to go barefoot."

"Thanks." Liz said as she took her jacket off and hung it on a rack. "You sure it's ok for me to take my boots off?" Liz asked, not wanting to impose on her friend's hospitality.

"Yeah. Go ahead." Sandy entreated, "You can put them next to the rack under your coat." Smiling as the blonde cadet took off her boots and socks and then placed them neatly under her jacket, she gestured towards a plush couch. "Have a seat. I just got in some wine in—Chateau Picard, 2348—a bit young, maybe, but still pretty good."

"Thanks." Liz replied as she sat down on the couch, almost moaning with pleasure at how comfortable it felt.

"Feels good, doesn't it?" Sandy remarked as she popped the cork to the wine bottle and poured the contents into a carafe.

"Yeah." Liz practically purred, "Where did you get it?"

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"It's replicated." Sandy replied with a half grin as he poured the decanted wine into two glasses and then made her way to the couch, "I can't afford the real thing yet." Handing a glass of wine to her new friend, Sandy quickly stopped her before she could drink it. "No...no...no...Liz, dear."

"Huh?" A confused Liz vocalized.

"Don't just drink the wine, Liz." Sandy smiled, "Let all your senses experience it." Her smile still on her face, the statuesque blonde joined Liz on the couch, drinking in the natural scent of her blonde guest. "Take the wine and swirl it around in the glass a little like this...see the color?" Smiling as Liz imitated her actions, Sandy praised, "Yeah...that's it, baby. Now..." She asked, "What do you see in the wine?"

"Well..." Liz pondered.

"Don't think about it, love." Sandy said, "Just go with what you feel."

"It's a translucent red." Liz observed and then held so that the sun's rays would pass through it. "Wow..." She exclaimed, "The sunlight makes the red seem almost alive..."

"Now you're getting it, baby!" Sandy exclaimed proudly, "Ok...next...take the wine and swirl it—not too hard...nice and gentle...that's it." The artist nodded her head in satisfaction as Liz gently swirled the wine in her glass. "Now...bring the glass up to your nose and sniff it...gently..." She chuckled, "Don't sniff too deep...you're not a Tellarite, you know."

Chuckling, Liz did as she was told. Once again smiling in approval, Sandy encouraged, "Ok...what did it smell like? Remember..." She reminded, "Don't think about it...just go with your feelings."

"It's fruity...but not overpowering." Liz observed, "If anything, it reminded me more of flowers."

"Very good." Sandy praised, impressed at her guest's progress, "Now...sip it, but don't drink it yet. Just let it linger on your taste buds." Grinning slightly as Liz followed her instructions, Sandy explained, "Some snobs like to swish the wine around in their mouths, but I don't like doing that. For one thing..." She giggled, "It makes you look silly. For another..." She said, her giggles now replaced by an amused grin, "It's no more effective than just letting it linger for a few seconds. Now..." She smiled, "Go ahead and swallow it. So...what did it taste like?"

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“Just a little bit acidic, but not too much.” Liz replied, “It felt just sharp enough to let me know it was there, but not so sharp as to bite...” Did I get it right?” She asked with a serious look on her face.

“Relax, honey.” Sandy smiled warmly, motioning for Liz to get comfortable on the couch, “You did just fine. Everyone perceives sensations differently. What’s sweet to some is sour to others. What is it the Vulcans say? Infinite Combinations in Infinite Diversity?” Seeing Liz’s slight nod of her head as confirmation, Sandy asked, “So...how did it feel using all your senses?”

“It felt...great!” Liz grinned, “Like everything was fully engaged.”

“That’s because it was, Liz.” Sandy chuckled, “Don’t be afraid to use all of your senses—let them take you where they want to go. You’ll almost always enjoy the result.”

As the young women were talking on the couch, Liz was once again entranced by Sandy’s perfume. Shyly, she asked, “What sort of perfume do you use?”

“You like it.” Sandy smiled, pleased. Seeing Liz’s nod of her head, Sandy got up and went into her bedroom, coming out moments later with a small crystal atomizer. “It’s a Deltan perfume...I think it translates out to *Passion’s Flower*.” Don’t worry, she giggled, this one doesn’t have any pheromones in it. Although...” She flashed a wicked grin, “The ones that do are awful nice.” Hearing Liz’s nervous giggle, Sandy quickly backpedaled, “Would you like to try some?”

“Sure.” Liz replied as Sandy gave her the atomizer, squirting gently on her wrists.

“Don’t worry about it if it doesn’t work for you, Liz. Between me and Heather, I think we’ve cornered the market on perfumes. I’m sure we’ve got something that works for you,” the lovely artist joked. Smiling as she gestured with her head towards the studio, Sandy tempted, “Would you like to help me out with a project.”

“Sure.” Liz smiled, “What sort of help do you need?”

“Remember when we knocked them dead at *Vincenzo’s* with our dance and holo-image performance?

“Yeah.” Liz smiled, “I enjoyed getting back on the dance floor. Why?”

“Well, I was thinking...maybe we could polish up the routine—maybe enter it in a contest or a show?” Sandy ventured, “What do think?”

“Yeah.” Liz grinned, “I’d like that.” Then her lips turned down in a frown, “But...I’m afraid it might get in the way of my classes.”

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"It won't, love." Sandy pleaded, "We'll work around your schedule. Your Academy classes take priority—ok?"

"Ok!" Liz grinned, "So...where do we start?"

"I'd like to introduce you to Renee...she's a friend. She's also a choreographer. I think she might have some ideas about routines, steps, and music. What do you think?"

"I think that'd be great." Liz smiled, "So...when and where?"

"Hmmm...I have to get with her to check her schedule, but...does this upcoming Saturday sound good?"

"Works for me." Liz grinned, "I don't have duty that weekend, so I'm free."

"Great!" Sandy replied and then suggested, "You know...there's a Centauran restaurant that just opened up and I've got an Ionic chiton I'm just dying to wear—how does that sound?"

"Sounds good." Liz nodded her head, "I guess I can replicate a chiton."

"All right...it's a date then." Sandy chuckled, adding, "Would it be all right if I invited Raul, Jason, and Heather?"

"Sure." Liz grinned, and then asked, "Would it be all right if I invited my roommate to come along? She's a really great person."

"What's she like?" Sandy asked, curious.

"She's an unjoined Trill." Liz answered back, "She's trying to get approval from the Symbiote Commission to be joined."

"She sounds like an interesting person." Sandy grinned, "Sure...bring her along...the more the merrier."

"So...want to come with me to the Centauran restaurant?" Liz asked her roommate as they walked out of their Comparative Cultural Dynamics course.

"Sounds interesting." Jadzia smiled, "Sure...why not?"

"Is this a private get-together or can anyone join?" Recognizing the blond cadet with a slight English accent from several of their classes, Liz queried, "Aubrey, right?"

"Yeah...Jason Aubrey." The young cadet responded.

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“Hmmm...Yeah...sure...some more guys to balance us girls would be good.” Liz agreed and added with a smile, “It’s a Centauran Six restaurant—so dress accordingly.”

“Not a problem.” Jason replied, “I can replicate a tunic-pants combination that should fit right in.”

“Great. See you at the transporter pad at 1800 then.”

Liz replicated a pale green Ionic chiton to wear for dinner, while Jadzia chose the basic white with gold trim.

“You’re both looking good.” Jason’s lips turned up in a slight smile as he appeared in a stylish tunic-pants combination. “Shall we go—I’m famished.”

“Sure.” Liz smiled as the three cadets stepped up on the transporter pad. “My friends are going to meet us at the front.”

Materializing in front of the restaurant, Liz immediately recognized her friends. “Sandy...Raul...Heather. Hope you didn’t mind, but I brought an extra with Jadzia.” As Liz hugged and kissed her artist friends, she introduced them to Aubrey and Jadzia.

“I hope you don’t mind...” Raul said. “Jason sends his love but said that he had to give a performance recital for a grade in a couple of days and needed to practice, so I invited Hector and Tholis to join us. Hector’s an architect and Tholis is here on a fellowship from Denobula.”

“I’m studying early Federation history.” Tholis explained his lips curled up in a wide Denobulan grin.

“And this is Renee. The choreographer I was telling you about, Liz.” Sandy introduced.

“Hi!” Liz smiled as she greeted the newcomers with kisses on the cheeks.

Entering the restaurants, the little group was taken to an area with plenty of divans so that the diners could recline and eat. Remembering Sandy’s lessons about freeing all of her senses, Liz took the time to savor the wine’s color, aroma, and texture before finally drinking it. Observing her actions, Jason inquired, “So...what do you think of the wine?”

“Smooth...” She remarked, “Pleasant smell...not too sweet. But it’s missing a little something...I’d say it’s ordinary more than anything else.”

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Nodding his head, Jason agreed, "Yeah. It's not a bad wine...but not a great one either. Perfectly suitable for a low-key dinner like this though."

"Try the stuffed grape leaves." Sandy urged, "They're scrumptious."

"Not bad." Jadzia nodded smiled.

"So..." Sandy said, addressing her next remarks to Liz and Renee, "What do you think?"

"Hmmm..." Renee mused, "I'd need to see Liz perform so that I can get an idea on where to go." Turning to Liz, the choreographer asked, "Can you meet me sometime next week? I'd like to see how you move."

"Sure." Liz nodded her head as she handed Renee her padd. "Just leave me your number and we'll set up a time."

"Great." Renee smiled, "We can meet at my studio" She said as she entered the information of Liz's padd.

Pleasant conversation and good humor reigned during dinner as Liz felt herself relaxing and enjoying the company of her new friends, until the evening drawing to a close, everyone said their goodbyes. "I'll see you guys later." Liz smiled as she hugged and kissed her friends and then touching their comm badges, the cadets transported back to the Academy.

"Great time, Jason." Liz smiled as she said bid her fellow cadet good night.

"Yeah." Jadzia grinned, "We've got to do this again sometime."

Walking back to their room, Jadzia whispered to her roommate, "Hey Liz...what do you think of Jason?"

"I don't know..." Liz whispered back, "He's cute and seems like an ok guy, but something in the back of my head keeps saying, 'watch out.'"

"Yeah..." Jadzia nodded her head, raising her voice back to a normal level now that they were safely in their room. "Something about him just doesn't seem right, but I can't put my finger on it."

With a yawn and a stretch, the Trill stated, "I'm turning in...big day tomorrow."

"Same here..." Then noting a flashing light on her monitor, Liz exhaled, "Got a message...better take that first." Taking a deep breath, Liz commanded, "Play messages." Then, seeing the face on the viewscreen, Liz held her breath.

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“Hello, Elizabeth.” Exhaling as she saw her father on the viewscreen, Liz listened quietly. “I received your midterm reports and I’m pleased that you’re doing so well. Keep up the good work. Keep on doing what you’re doing, I know your grandfathers would be pleased. If all goes well, I’m hoping to make it home for extended leave by the end of your term, so, I hope to see you then. I have to go now, duty calls. Until later.” The message then ended.

“Well...” Jadzia whispered, “At least he called and said he’d be home at the end of the term. Maybe you’ll get the chance to spend some time with him.”

“Maybe.” Liz replied with a sigh, “Or something else will turn up to keep him from coming home.”

“Give him a chance at least, Liz.” Jadzia urged. “Don’t lock the door before he even has a chance to knock.”

“You’re right, Jadz. “I’ll try. But you know...it takes two. He needs to make the effort too.”

“Well...” Jadzia cautiously ventured, “I get the impression he’s not one for overt shows of affection.”

“I just wish he’d show some affection.” Liz grumbled as she put on her sleep shirt. “A word...a gesture...anything.” Slipping into bed, Liz ordered the lights to turn off. “Night, Jadz.”

“Night, Liz.”

Rematerializing on the transporter pad at the Big Ben exhibit, Liz waved as she saw Jason waiting for her. “Jason—over here?”

“Lizzy!” Jason called back as he rushed to meet the pretty blonde wearing, instead of her usual cadet uniform, a tank-top shirt, black leather jacket, and tight jeans. “Looking good!” He flattered as the pair hugged and kissed.

“You’re not looking so bad yourself.” Liz smiled as her eyes took in the handsome young man wearing a shirt with leather jacket and jeans. “So...when does your concert start?”

“We’ve got a couple of hours, love.” Jason grinned, “Long enough for us to take in a few sites and grab some fish and chips” He quipped as he took his blonde companion’s hand, “You know, if you’re in London, you have to have fish and chips.”

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"Of course." Liz nodded her head as she moved a little closer in to Jason. "So...what have you got planned after the concert."

Smiling, Jason teased, "I'm saving that for a surprise."

Feeling adventurous, Liz flirted, "I love surprises."

As they walked past Big Ben, Jason shook his head, "Pity it's just a restoration."

"Yeah." Liz nodded her head, "We lost so much during the 21st century. Still..." She smiled, "We're building something good here."

"Won't disagree with that, love." Jason grinned.

As the pair walked together, they enjoyed each other's company with conversation and subtle flirtation until they came to an outdoor food vendor. "Here we go, love. The best fish and chips in London if I do say so myself. Approaching the vendor, he ordered for both him and Liz and then returned, "Here you go, Liz. I got both curry sauce and gravy for your chips—didn't know which you'd want, and a big cola—you're gonna want that, believe me. Well...love..." He said as he took a bite from his fish, then dipping one of his chips into the curry sauce, ate it, washing it down with a healthy swig of cola, "Dig in."

"Hmmm..." Liz vocalized as she dived hungrily into her meal, dipping her chips in the gravy instead of the curry. "This is great!"

"The national fast food of Britain." Jason joked.

After eating, Jason and Liz made their way to the concert hall where Jason was performing, "C'mon, Lizzy, got you a backstage pass."

"All right!" Liz exclaimed as she joined Jason backstage and watched while he and his fellow musicians tuned up and prepped for the concert. Then, the curtain raised, and Jason and his band played, each song better than the first, until coming to the final song of the concert, Jason spoke up so that everyone in the hall could hear, "I want to dedicate this song to a special, beautiful woman who also happens to be a Starfleet cadet, Liz Shelby!"

Taken by surprise by the dedication, Liz was in a daze as Jason played what was to her, the greatest song she ever heard. And then when it ended with roaring applause, Jason motioned for Liz come on stage.

"No..." Liz shook her head, more than a little intimidated.

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“It’s all right, love—they’re gonna love you as much as I do—you watch.” Jason encouraged.

Feeling his gentle tug on her hand, Liz walked with him to the stage and as she came on stage, the applause grew even louder. “See...I told you they’re gonna love you.” He said with a flirty wink.

The rest of the night was even more fantastic for Liz as Jason, as good as his word, surprised her by taking her to the Bag O’ Nails music club where Jason introduced her to his many musician friends who then, on hearing that she was a dancer pleaded incessantly with her until she final relented, dancing while Jason and some of his friends played both classics and new compositions. Then, the evening over, Jason escorted Liz to the transporter pad.

“I had a wonderful time, Jason!” Liz gushed enthusiastically, “Thanks!”

“It was my treat, love. I’m glad you enjoyed it.” Jason smiled.

“Well...” Liz sighed, “I guess I better get going now.” Then, impulsively, she kissed Jason on the lips. “That was nice.” Liz remarked in a throaty voice.

“Yeah...it was, love.” Jason replied as he returned her kiss. “‘til we meet again!”

As Liz entered her room, Jadzia jibed, “Well...well...well...look who the *sehlat* dragged in. Have a good time?”

“Oh, yeah!” Liz replied with a wicked grin.

“So...” Jadzia motioned for Liz to join her at the edge of her bed, “Details! I want to know all about it and don’t leave anything out.”

“All right.” Liz smiled, “Well first we went and...” The pair gossiped until, both tired, they finally bid each other a sleepy good night.

“We better get a move on, Liz.” Jadzia urged, “You know how S’Von is when your late to class.”

“Don’t I?” Liz chuckled as her voice took on a flat monotone, “I trust there is a logical reason why you are thirty seconds late to my class, Cadet Idaris?”

“I’m sorry...Commander S’Von...” Jadzia whimpered, playing along, “But I couldn’t get to sleep because of my roommate’s snoring.”

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"I don't snore!" Liz declared with a "Humph. I just sleep loudly sometimes. It's the damned mattresses." She complained, "They were made for a Tellarite."

"Cadets Shelby and Idaris..." The flat monotone of Commander S'Von's voice immediately silenced the giggling cadets, "I can assure you that Academy mattresses are designed to be comfortable for most of the diverse races that make up Starfleet and the Federation. And if one of you does have a problem with loud nocturnal breathing, then I would suggest that you seek aid at the Academy clinic." As he spoke, Liz and Jadzia both noticed the slightly raised eyebrow of the Vulcan instructor. "Now, if you would please take your seats, we can begin today's lecture. In our last class session, we discussed the importance of never violating the Prime Directive even if it meant mission failure. Can anyone in the class give an example of a case where the Prime Directive was violated and its consequences?"

"Captain Tracy on Omega IV." Jadzia, raising her hand, spoke up. "His actions supporting the Kohms endangered the cultural, social, and political balance of power between the Kohms and the Yangs. Many scholars..." Jadzia continued, "Point towards Captain Kirk as compounding the problem by translating one of the Yang holy documents, stating that he, in turn, was attempting to influence the society of both tribes."

"Very good, Cadet Idaris." S'Von nodded his head. "Do you agree with that interpretation?"

"Yes." Jadzia reluctantly admitted. "While Kirk's intentions might have been noble, it was not his place to translate that document. He should have minimized future interference by immediately—preferably out of sight of the Yangs—transporting the landing party and Captain Tracy back to the *Enterprise*."

"Very good, Cadet Idaris." The instructor nodded his head approvingly. "Now, can anyone give an instance where violation of the Prime Directive was beneficial?"

Shelby raised her hand. "Yes, Cadet Shelby?"

"Gamma Trianguli VI, Sir. When Kirk destroyed the computer known as Vaal saving his ship and crew."

"And forcing the People of Vaal to drastically alter their lives and culture." Commander S'Von rebutted.

"Giving them the free will to control their own destinies and determine their own paths." Shelby countered. "Instead of interfering with what was essentially a non-existent culture, Kirk's actions gave the People of Vaal a chance to determine their own destinies."

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"In other words..." S'Von rejoined, "Offering them a bite from the apple. Putting Kirk in the role of either deity or deceiver. A spirited defense of your position, Cadet Shelby, but remember you and everyone in this class will hopefully become Starfleet officers. That does not give you the right to play God...or Satan. And with that class, our time for the day has expired. Next class session will look at the changing relationship with the Klingon Empire from the time of Jonathon Archer to the Four Years War. Class dismissed."

"I still think I'm right." Liz muttered to her roommate as the pair got out of their seats and walked towards the exit. "Better to control your own destiny than be the puppet of others—even a godlike computer—especially a godlike computer." As his acute Vulcan hearing picked up on the whispered words of the young cadet, S'Von's eyebrow raised.

"So...how did it go over at Renee's?" Jadzia asked as Liz returned from her day at the choreographer's studio.

"I haven't been put through my paces that hard since I was dancing in competition." Liz groaned. "I'm going to have to hit the gym more—I didn't realize how out of shape I'd gotten."

"You? Out of shape?" Jadzia exclaimed, "You're in better shape than three quarters of the cadets in our class."

"I'm out of shape for serious dancing, Jadz." Liz admitted. "I'm going to have to step up my game."

"You're not thinking about leaving the Academy and dancing professionally, are you?" Jadzia asked, her voice tinged with a mixture of surprise and concern.

"No." Liz shook her head as her lips turned up in a slight smile, "Like I told you some months ago, my heart's in Starfleet. But I'm finding out that being in Starfleet doesn't mean that I have to give up on my wants, needs, and desires. I can command a starship by the time I'm forty, be a damned good dancer and have fun doing it and enjoy life and all the sensations and pleasures that come with it."

"Sounds like you want it all." Jadzia remarked.

"Yeah..." Liz nodded her head, "I do."

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“Hey, Liz, Come on in!” Heather said, greeting her guest at the door with a hug and a kiss. “I want to show you my garden.”

“Great.” Liz smiled, feeling chills running up and down her spine at the sound of her red-headed friend’s sultry voice. “I love roses especially.”

“Then, you are really going to be pleased.” Heather grinned as she took Liz’s hand in hers and walked with her to a little arboretum she had.

“This is so beautiful!” Liz gushed as she took in all the blooming flowers. “Oh...” The young blonde sighed as she spotted a rose bush with a red rose in full bloom.

“You like that?” Heather asked as she reveled in the natural scent of her friend.

“I love it.” Liz smiled as she bent down and sniffed the flower. “It smells so good.”

“Here.” Heather grinned as she cut the flower and placed it in Liz’s hair above her right ear. Stepping back, she sighed, “You look so beautiful!”

“No...” Liz shook her head, “Not dressed like this.” She said as she looked down at her uniform.

“Well then.” Heather remarked, with a faux serious look on her face. “Let’s get you out of that thing and into something that will show you just how gorgeous and sexy you are. You game?”

“Yeah.” Liz smiled, “Let’s do it.”

“Ok!” Heather grinned, “Let’s go shopping!”

“Shopping?” Liz queried, “We could just replicate it.”

“And take all the fun out of it?” Heather shook her head, “Baby...part of the fun in making yourself look sexy is the process—and that means shopping for a nice outfit and jewelry and a full treatment at the spa and new shoes.”

“Ok...” Liz chuckled, “Let’s do it!”

“First we go to a little spa me and Sandy like to go to whenever we want to feel pretty—they’ve got a pair of gorgeous masseurs who I guarantee will work out any muscle strains or tension you might have...” She quipped with a wicked grin. “Then we get our nails done. Then, our hair done at Franco’s, and then a little shop I know for your outfit. So...ready?” Seeing Liz’s enthusiastic nod of her head, Heather grinned, “Ok...Let’s go!”

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“Last stop—Erica’s.” Heather said as she guided Liz into a little shop in the old town. “She makes some of the best outfits I’ve ever seen. Hey Erica...” Heather called out, her voice once again sending shivers down Liz’s spine, “You back there? I got a friend who needs a new outfit!”

“Come on back, Heather.” A voice shouted back.

“You’re going to love Erica.” Heather grinned, “She’s part Betazoid and one of the best designers I know.” Seeing a dark-haired woman setting an outfit on a mannequin, the red-headed poet beamed, “Erica, I’d like you to meet Liz...Liz, this is Erica.”

“Hi.” Erica greeted, extending her hand towards the blonde cadet.

Liz, taking Erica’s hand in hers, smiled and greeted the shop owner with a cheerful, “Hi” of her own.

“I see you’ve been to Franco’s.” Erica grinned.

“Yeah.” Heather smiled. “He told us to tell you Hi.”

“He is a dear...isn’t he?” Erica replied. “I’ve got an appointment with him tomorrow—I think I’m going to go for a retro look—what do you think—mid-23rd century?”

“Go for it.” Heather agreed, “You’ve got the long hair to pull it off.”

“So...what can I help you with?”

“We’re looking for a new outfit for Liz.” Heather remarked.

“Hmmm...” Erica vocalized, “Any special occasion.”

“Not really.” Heather grinned, “Just a ‘I want to feel gorgeous and sexy type outfit’ Liz can wear whenever she wants to feel that way—right, Liz?”

“Yeah.” Liz enthusiastically nodded her head in agreement.

“I think I might have an idea—and it’ll go perfect with that beautiful rose in your hair Liz—wear it back to the Academy and they’ll fall all over themselves.” After several minutes during which Heather and Liz talked while sipping real champagne, Erica came back with a black dress and matching high heel shoes and a pearl necklace and earrings. “Here...try this on. I have a feeling you’ll love it.”

“Ok.” Liz smiled as she took the bundle in her hands, “I’ll just slip into the changing room and be right back.”

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Waiting until the blonde had went into the changing room, Erica poured champagne into an empty champagne flute. Speaking in a low voice, she remarked, "I know she turns you on, but did you know that you turn her on too?"

"Yeah. I had an idea, but I wasn't completely sure." Heather replied with a smile.

"So..." Erica flashed a wicked grin, "Go get her."

"No..." Heather shook her head, "She's still finding herself...finding out who she is. I can wait."

Nodding her head, Erica whispered back, "Yeah. That makes sense." Then smiling as Liz came out, the dress designer remarked, "Beautiful!"

"You really think so?" Liz exclaimed, as she looked at herself in a mirror, "Oh, my..." She whispered as she saw a lovely creamy skinned young woman with her blonde hair done up, a few stray tresses left deliberately, the red rose in her hair, and wearing a black strapless angled dress about thigh length—not quite a minidress, but showing plenty of her attractive shapely legs, with the left leg showing a bit more skin than the right. Completing the ensemble, she wore the black shoes and necklace and earrings, along with a gold bracelet.

"You are knock-dead gorgeous." Heather breathed, her voice even more sultry than usual, much to the delight of her blonde companion. "They're not going to know what hit them back at the Academy."

"Speaking of which..." Liz said as she took Heather's hand in hers, "I've got to get back." She then gave the lovely red-head a tentative flirty wink, "Want to walk me back?"

Smiling, Heather responded in a slightly coquettish voice, "Love to."

As they entered the Academy grounds, the lovely pair, walking with their arms around each other, attracted more than their fair share of attention from both cadets and instructors.

"Cadet Shelby?"

Quickly turning towards the source of the voice, Liz recognized Captain Hanson with another Starfleet officer. "Sir?"

As he and the other Starfleet officer approached the two women, the captain's lips turned up in a smile, "Special occasion, Cadet?"

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“No, Sir.” Liz responded, “I was just out shopping with my friend, Heather.” Liz then introduced the stunning redhead with her arm still around her waist, “Heather, this is Captain Hanson.”

“A pleasure, Captain.” Heather responded with a smile, “Liz has told me so much about you.”

“Nothing bad, I hope.” The captain responded and then introduced the man beside him, “This is Commander William Ross. He’s in between assignments right now, but he used to serve with me on the *Vittorio Venito*.”

“Sir.”

“Well...Cadet...I’ll let you go now. Don’t forget...” He reminded with a friendly wink, “You’ve got an exam next week and I’m expecting your usual excellent performance.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well...” Heather grinned as the pair walked away from the two officers, “He seems like a nice guy—bet he’s a good teacher.”

“Oh, yeah!” Liz nodded her head, “The best. Tough too. He doesn’t cut me any slack.”

Coming to her room, Liz grinned, “I’d invite you in, Heather, but I think Jadzia’s sleeping. Poor thing was up all night studying for a big xenology exam.”

“That’s ok, I’ve got to get back anyway.” Heather smiled back, “I’m trying to work out the kinks on my latest poem.”

“Well, good luck with that, and I had a marvelous time.” Liz said with a low voice as she reached up and gently gave Heather a goodbye kiss on her lips.

“Bye, Sweetie.” Heather answered back as she returned Liz’s kiss. “I’ll see you later.”

Watching Heather’s gently swaying hips as she walked away, Liz almost didn’t hear Jason Aubrey’s slightly teasing, “Hot date?”

“Huh?” Turning and quickly recognizing the blond cadet, Liz smiled, “I don’t know if I’d call it a date precisely, but I did have a good time.” Then whispering in a low voice so that no one could hear, she added, “Definitely hot.”

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“So...heard you got invited into Nova Squadron.” Jadzia remarked as she and Liz walked together to class. She then said with a mournful sigh, “Guess that means I’m getting a new roommate.”

“Nope. Can’t get rid of me that easy.” Liz laughed, “I told them ‘Thanks, but no thanks’.”

“What?” An astonished Jadzia exclaimed attracting curious glances with her loud shout of surprise. “You...turned down an invitation to join Nova Squadron—no one does that!”

“Well, I did.” Liz replied with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Why?” Her Trill friend asked.

“I don’t think it’s right to have groups like that in the Academy—or Starfleet for that matter.” Liz declared, all signs of levity gone from her. “They can cause problems.” Shaking her head, Liz gestured towards the classroom. “We better hurry, Jadz or we’ll be late for Captain Hanson’s class.”

Walking with his friend Amaya Donners, Michael Owens, just back from a training cruise on the *Kitty Hawk*, couldn’t help but overhear the conversation the two cadets were having. His lips curling up in a slight grin, he remarked to his friend beside him, “Good for her.”

Early as usual for their class, Liz spotted Captain Hanson motioning for her to come see him. Bending over to whisper into Jadzia’s ear, she asked, “Can you hold my seat for me?”

“Sure.” Jadzia replied as Liz made her way to the lectern where the captain was standing.

“Sir?” Liz queried

“I understand you refused Nova Squadron’s invitation. Care to explain why?” Captain Hanson inquired with a stern expression on his face.

Taking a deep breath, Liz exhaled, “I don’t think formations like that have any place in Starfleet, much less the Academy, Sir.”

“Don’t you think excellence should be rewarded, Cadet?”

“Oh...most definitely, Sir.” Liz concurred. “But I think it can be problematic on many levels when you have elite formations that enjoy special privileges over and above those permitted everyone else.”

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“Interesting. Care to back up that argument with an extra assignment.”

Recognizing a challenge when she saw and heard one, Liz’s lips turned up in a smile. “Of course, Sir.”

“Great.” The captain replied, “I want a paper from you discussing the impact both positive and negative concerning elite military units and formations and then I want to see what conclusions you reach and how you reached them, and I want that paper on my desk no later than two weeks from today. Can you do it?”

“Yes, Sir!” Liz exclaimed enthusiastically.

“Now understand, Cadet.” Captain Hanson admonished, “This is not extra credit. Rather, it’s extra work for you above and beyond your current workload and I won’t cut you any slack on your regular assignments. So...still game?”

“You bet, Sir!” Liz declared, her smile growing even wider.

“All right, then.” Hanson remarked, pleased at the young cadet’s attitude. “I’ll expect that paper in two weeks. You can go back to your seat now—class is about to start.”

“Well...you’re dressed up!” Jadzia exclaimed as she saw her roommate wearing a stylish Betazoid style red dress with matching high-heel shoes and gold necklace and earrings. “Special occasion?”

“Raul’s fixing dinner for me to celebrate my getting a high mark on Captain Hanson’s extra assignment.” Liz grinned, “And he gets ever so upset if you don’t dress for the occasion. Says dressing for dinner enhances the meal...and you know...” Liz chuckled, “He’s right. It does.”

“Well...” Jadzia chuckled, “Have a good time.”

“See you later, Jadz.”

As she walked down the corridor towards the transporter pads, Liz smirked at the looks she was getting from her fellow cadets as she walked by, subconsciously adding a little sway to her hips. Seeing a dark-skinned cadet of African-American descent exiting her room, Liz smiled, “Hi Amaya...how goes?”

“Not bad.” Cadet Amaya Donners replied, “On my way to the library—got to look up some stuff in the archives for Jansen’s Diplomacy and Protocols class tomorrow.” Her lips curling up in a wry grin, she quipped, “Looks like you’ve got a hot date planned.”

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"I guess you could say that." Liz chuckled, "Raul's fixing dinner for me."

"Isn't he one of those artists you hang out with—the good looking Spanish guy?" Amaya asked as the pair walked together.

"Yeah." Liz nodded her head, "Besides being an interior designer, he's a gourmet cook." She then smirked, "He says he's cooking his special paella for me tonight."

"Well..." Amaya quipped as the pair split ways, "You have fun and don't stay out too late."

"Liz, *cara mio*! You look absolutely ravishing tonight." Raul greeted as he gave his guest a hug and kiss on both cheeks.

"You're looking spectacular yourself, Raul." Liz grinned as returned the Castilian's hug and kisses.

"Come, my dear." Raul encouraged, offering an arm to his dinner guest, "How about an aperitif before we dine."

"Love to." Liz replied as she took her host's arm, letting him guide her to the bar. At once recognizing Raul's slight gesture of his head, Liz requested, "Martini."

"Of course." Raul smiled, pleased at his escort's choice. "I'm glad to see you're learning to appreciate the finer things in life." He gently teased as he handed his blonde guest her drink. "Now, love...nothing you're eating or drinking tonight is synth—it's real...so...don't forget..."

"Moderation." Liz completed with a gentle chuckle. "I remember you telling me that the first time I drank one of your martinis."

"That's right." He said as he sipped his martini. "Life and the pleasures of the flesh are to be enjoyed."

After several minutes talking, laughing, and drinking their pre-dinner cocktails, Raul smiled, "Come, *cara mio*, dinner awaits.

As Raul escorted her to the table, Liz gasped when she saw the elaborate table setting complete with genuine silverware and crystal. How did you get all this, Raul?"

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"Payment from a client for redesigning his living room." The interior designer preened as he held Liz's seat out for her. Then, after ensuring that his guest was comfortable, he took his own seat across from her. As she and her host made their way through the seven-course meal, Liz savored every bite and every sip of the fine wines that accompanied the meal, as well as enjoying the conversation with Raul, laughing several times at his jokes and blushing more than once at his sophisticated flirtations, responding with coy looks and flirtations of her own.

Their dinner done, the pair retired to Raul's balcony where they sat on a bench, Liz comfortable in Raul's arms, basking in his warmth and gentle conversation as they enjoyed the transparent, starry night sky. "You can't wait until you're out there amongst the stars, can you, my lovely?"

Chuckling gently, Liz responded as she gently caressed Raul's arm, "No, I can't. There's so much I want to see and do out there."

"Then, my sweet," Raul urged as he gently kissed Liz on the lips, "Go...do it...see it...and savor every minute of it and then come back and tell me and all the rest of us what it's like."

"So..." Jazdia smirked as she saw Liz appearing at the door to their room, "How did the date go?"

"It was wonderful!" Liz gushed, "The food...the wine...the atmosphere...Raul..." Her enthusiasm bubbling over, the young blonde blurted out, "I'm learning so many new things about myself..."

"Like what?"

"That it's ok to enjoy myself. That I'm more than just Philip Shelby's daughter. Oh..." Her lips turned up in a wicked grin, "Also that Raul is a great kisser." She then giggled, "And so are Heather and Jason."

Entering the gym, Liz immediately went into the female cadets' locker room and began changing out of her uniform and in to her dancer tights and leotard. Exiting the locker room, she made her way to a parallel bar and began to do her stretching exercises. As she was warming up, she didn't notice that she was being watched by a handsome dark-skinned male Starfleet officer. Finishing her exercises, she called

out, "Computer, play *Satin Doll*. As the music filled the air, Liz danced, letting the sensuous sounds of the clarinet guide her steps into a sultry rhythm as she danced.

"Not bad." Terrence Glover whispered to himself as the blonde cadet danced. Other cadets, entering the gym for their workouts, on seeing Liz dance, stopped what they were doing and watched. The song ended, Liz caught out of the corner of her eye that she was beginning to attract an audience. Wiping the sweat off her body, she grinned inwardly, "Let's give 'em a show," as she commanded the computer to play *Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got that Swing*. Getting into the rhythm, she danced close to the cadets sitting and watching, flirting with her eyes and hips at several of the males and females watching. Letting the music take her, Liz kicked and twirled and moved to the rhythm until, the song coming to conclusion, she ended with a flourish and bowed to her applauding audience.

"Thanks, you all!" Liz grinned as she blew the audience a kiss, "But I've got to go and hit the showers now. Bye."

After showering and changing back into her uniform, Liz rushed to make her next class with Captain Hanson. Entering the classroom first, the balding captain grinned at the blonde cadet who had become his prize pupil, "Heard you put on a little show in the gym, Cadet."

"I was just practicing my dancing, Sir." Liz explained blushing, "And I guess I kind of got carried away."

"Nothing to be ashamed of or feel bad about, Cadet." The captain said as he smiled beatifically on his student. "It's good that you have outside interests and even better that those interests make other people feel good." Taking a deep breath, he exhaled, "The hallmark of a good captain is that captain's ability to keep morale up—not just your morale, but also that of your crew and anyone who might be dependent on you. Good morale can more often than not be that intangible thing that makes the difference between success and failure. Never forget that, Cadet Shelby."

"No sir." Liz promised, "I won't."

"Much better, Liz." Renee praised as the blonde dancer finished her routine. "Your endurance was already good to begin with—I guess that's thanks to the Academy training, but it's gotten even better, plus your form has definitely improved—you've obviously been practicing—Good." She grinned and winked, "Too bad I can't talk you into going pro—you're a natural."

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Laughing gently, Liz replied, "It's like I told Jadz, it's not that I'm not seriously tempted, but..." She shook her head, "My heart's in Starfleet. I want to see what's out there and I think I can do that while at the same time expressing what I feel in here." She said as she touched her heart with the palm of her hand.

"Good for you, girl." The dark-skinned dance choreographer grinned, "No rule says you can't have it all." Pausing for a moment, she nodded her head, "I think you're almost ready for Sandy's project. We've got the dance steps down. And as for that other little number you want to do, I think you can do that too, but we'll work on it some more just to be sure you nail it—I want you to knock the socks off your fellow cadets at that talent show."

"Great." Liz grinned.

"Oh...I almost forgot to mention because, well, it's not that big a deal for us, but I'm not sure you'll go for it. Thing is, doing it would put Sandy's program over the top."

"What is it? Liz asked.

"Well..." She said as she gestured for Liz to sit on a couch and then joined her, "It concerns your costuming for Sandy's program once she's ready to roll it out. Leotard and tights are fine for rehearsals, but for the real thing, if you're going to seamlessly blend with the colors and tapestries of the holomages, you really should be wearing body paint and nothing else. Tights, even multicolored tights, would still leave lines that would set you off from the work as a whole—body paint permits a perfect melding of your body and the images and the music."

"Hmmm..." Liz pondered, "What if I get into trouble with the Academy? They might not like it for me to do that."

"Well, dear." Renee sighed, "You wouldn't be doing it as a Starfleet cadet and it would be art—very good art. I'm sure the Academy has art classes and sculpture classes that use nude models—and I'm sure those models are cadets as well."

"Well..." Liz considered, weighing the pros and cons. "I can see where you're right. It is art and it's not Starfleet sponsored, and I know that some cadets have posed nude for paintings and sculptures. So...yeah..." She smiled, "I'll do it."

"Great!" Renee smiled, "I know Sandy'll be pleased!"

"Well..." Liz grinned, "I better go now—I've got watch tonight and it's a busy day tomorrow."

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“Warp core breach in thirty seconds.” The computer’s voice announced as the engineering bulkheads slammed shut, trapping Liz, Jadzia, and the rest of the engineering department. “Warp core breach in twenty-five seconds.”

“Set matter-antimatter flux to 0.45% and reverse magnetic containment on my mark!” Shelby commanded.

“Liz!” Jadzia called out, “Procedure calls for jettisoning the warp core.”

“Do it!” Liz ordered, putting steel in her voice as she raised it.

“Warp core breach in ten seconds.”

“Aye, Sir.” Jadzia complied.

“Warp core stabilized.” The computer sounded out. “Systems restored. Simulation success.”

“End simulation.”

The engineering section was immediately replaced by a hologrid in the middle of a circular lecture hall.

“Cadet Shelby?” Commander G’arvan, a portly Tellarite wearing the gold of the engineering and security barked, “You almost destroyed my ship!”

“With respect, Sir.” Liz protested, “I saved your ship! If I’d have jettisoned the warp core, the Cardassians would be towing us to their home by now.”

“At least I’d be alive.” G’arvan countered.

“As a Cardassian prisoner, Sir.” Liz concluded.

“Better a prisoner than dead.” The Tellarite bit back.

“In some ways, Sir, being a Cardassian prisoner is worse than being dead.” Shelby concluded.

“Hrmph.” The Tellarite instructor huffed as he made a notation in his padd. “That’ll be all today, class dismissed.”

“Hmmm...” Captain Hanson muttered as he regarded his favorite cadet of this year’s class. “Seems you’ve made an impression on Commander G’arvan—not a very good one in his case.”

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“With respect, Captain...” Liz rose to defend herself, “The risk I took was a calculated one. Jettisoning the warp core would have meant capture which in this case was tantamount to destruction. Taking the risk, I knew I had a good chance of restoring warp core balance resulting in the ship being able to escape.”

The captain nodded his head, “This is off the record, Cadet. Understood?” Seeing his young protégé nod her head in acknowledgement, Hanson continued, “Commander G’aarvan is an excellent instructor, but he’s never seen combat. I’ve fought the Cardassians. I know what they do to their prisoners—slave labor camps, mistreatment. And I also know the fate of all too many female prisoners—being forced to serve as ‘comfort’ women. If I were in your shoes, I’d have done the same thing. That being said, and now we’re on the record, Cadet, “When you take a risk, always be sure to be able to answer this question: Is the risk worth the reward.”

“Aye, Sir.” Liz affirmed, “I understand.”

“Good.” Hanson nodded his head approvingly, “Now...you need to get ready for your next class.”

“Come in!” Sandy called out as her door chime rang, “Lizzy!” The statuesque blonde exclaimed with a big smile on her face as she greeted her cadet friend with a gentle kiss on the lips. Her smile growing warmer as Liz returned her kiss, the young artist motioned for Liz to join her on the couch. Bringing over two glasses of wine, Sandy grinned, “Renee says you’re cool with the body paint. I’m glad—thank you.”

“I’m happy to.” Liz responded, “I’ll admit, I was a little worried about it at first, but Renee pointed out a few things, and believe it or not, so did Captain Hanson.”

“Oh?” A surprised Sandy exclaimed.

“Yeah.” Liz nodded her head, “He didn’t know about the body paint of course—that was before Renee broached the subject with me. I’d come in early to class and he said that it was important for me to have outside interests and that it’s even better when those interests can help people feel good.”

“Sounds like a pretty smart man.” Sandy commented.

“Yeah.” Liz’s lips turned up in a warm smile, “He’s becoming a favorite instructor of mine. He pushes me...when I do good, he praises, and when I screw up, he tells me how and why I screwed up and how to fix it, so I don’t do it again in the future.”

“Yeah.” Sandy nodded her head as she remarked in an affectionate tone, “I’ve had a few good teachers like him. Well...if you’re game...” Sandy grinned, “Go ahead and

get changed into your leotards and we'll get started. Or..." She proposed, "If you're up for it and don't mind, you can just go without the leotard and do the routine *au naturel*. It'll get you used to being in the buff when we do it live. But...like I said, whatever's more comfortable for you."

"Well..." Liz pondered, "Since I'm going to be wearing body paint and nothing else anyway, might as well start now."

"That's the spirit, Lizzy!" Sandy smile as she enthusiastically motioned towards the studio, "C'mon...you can get disrobed while I set up and then we'll get to it."

"And that is why..." The guest lecturer, Lieutenant Pava Lar'ragos concluded, "If you're looking to sit in that center seat that much faster, you'll want to begin your Starfleet career in tactical/security. Because, when you finally get that command of your own, you'll have a better chance of completing your mission and bringing your ship and crew back in one piece with the experience and training you will have received this early in your careers. Now...any questions?"

"Yes, Cadet Shelby? You have a question?"

"Yes, Sir." The petite blonde cadet stood up, "If you run into a situation where your commanding officer issues strict orders regarding how you carry out your mission, but the situation on the ground is such that you have to disregard those orders or face a catastrophic mission failure, what should you do?"

"The by-the-book answer, cadet, is that you follow all lawful orders. The common-sense answer..." He said with a crooked grin, "Is that you do what you have to do to get the job done—provided, that is..." he added as a disclaimer, but also with a sly, almost undetectable wink, "...that it doesn't violate the Prime Directive." Smirking as he saw the blonde cadet's slight upturn of her lips at his answer, Pava added, this time with a deadly serious expression on his face, "In all cases, you're going to have to deal with the consequences of your actions—so take that into account as well."

A dark skinned young ensign, tasked to serve as a temporary teaching aide, watched as the young blonde asked her question. Earlier, he had heard about her risky solution to Captain Hanson's tactical problem and about her even more chancy solution to the exercise posed by Commander G'aarvan. Not only that, he had also seen her on more than one occasion practicing or putting on impromptu dance shows in the gym. As Terrence Glover's eyes carefully appraised the young cadet, he

found her to be quite attractive and graceful in her movements and was pleased to see that she also seemed to possess an inner fire as well as outer beauty.

“Cadet Shelby?” Turning towards the source of the voice, Liz saw that the instructor was waving for her to come over to him. Turning towards her roommate, Liz asked, “Can you give me a few moments, Jadz, I think Lieutenant Lar’ragos wants to speak with me.”

“Sure, Liz...I’ll wait.”

Seeing his opportunity to get to know something more about the blonde cadet, not to mention get to know her lovely Trill roommate, Terrence approached Jadzia.” Hello, Cadet...” He trailed his voice.

‘Idaris, Sir.” Jadzia promptly replied, “Cadet Jadzia Idaris.”

“Relax, Cadet.” Terrence smiled, “And since we’re not at this moment in a teacher-student situation, please feel free to call me, Terrence.”

“Yes, Sir. Thank you, Terrence.” Jadzia replied as her eyes assessed the handsome dark-skinned human standing next to her, finding him quite attractive. “What can I help you with, Terrence...”

“Your friend...”

“Friend and roommate.” Jadzia answered back, “Liz...Elizabeth Shelby.”

“Any relation to Captain Philip Shelby?” Terrence asked.

“Yes, Sir. Captain Shelby’s her father.” Jadzia responded and then cautioned, “But you might want to be careful about mentioning his name.” Seeing the questioning look on the ensign’s face, Jadzia explained, “Let’s just say that right now, Liz is a little upset with her father, and if it’s okay with you, Sir, I’d like to leave it with that.”

“That’ll be fine, Jadzia.” Terrence nodded his head and then conjectured, “So, that would make her grandfather...”

“Admiral Robert Wesley.” Jadzia nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

“Now him...” Jadzia’s lips turned up in a wicked grin, “You can talk to her about all day and she’ll just want to hear more and more.”

“Thanks.” Terrence grinned back, “I’ll remember that. You see, my great-grandfather served with Admiral Wesley back in the Four Years War—when the admiral was a lieutenant.” Terrence recalled. “I’m not sure if he served with Captain Dennis Shelby or not.”

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"I'd have to ask Liz about that." Jadzia replied with a smirk, "When she's in a good mood, that is." She then suggested, "Sir...I know Liz would love to hear any stories you might have about your great-grandfather and your father."

"I heard about your solution to Captain Hanson's simulation." Pava grinned as the young cadet approached. "You made quite the impression on the captain." His smile then vanished to be replaced by a careful appraising gaze, "He's a man you want to make a good impression on, Cadet. It's not going to be much longer until he gets his admiral's rank and one day—especially if you do take that wild risk—it might not be a bad thing to have someone like him in your corner to back you up when everything goes tits up."

"Yes, Sir." Liz carefully replied, keeping a poker face.

Nodding his head slightly, Pava's lips turned up in a shrewd grin. "I'll bet you're murder at the poker table."

"I win my share of pots, Sir." Liz allowed a slight grin to appear on her face. "But I don't like playing when there are no real stakes like most of the cadets do here."

"Good." Pava nodded his head. "That makes you a better player—because you know you've got something real to lose. That will also make you a better officer. So..." He quizzed, "Do you know how many different types of risks there are?"

"No, Sir." Liz responded, shaking her head.

"There are three." The lieutenant explained, "Calculated, Crazy, and Stupid. Calculated is when you think the odds are in your favor when you take the risk—like what you did in Captain Hanson's simulator. Crazy is when your back is up against a wall and it's either do this or die. That's what you did in Commander G'aarvan's simulator. Stupid is when you take a risk for the sake of taking the risk—I don't care whether it pays off or not—stupid is stupid and stupid will usually end up getting you and, as often as not, everyone around you killed. Do you understand me, Cadet?" Pava inquired, his gaze fixed on Shelby's eyes.

"Yes, Sir." Shelby responded, her poker face restored.

"Good. Because so far, I haven't heard of you taking a stupid risk yet." Pava nodded his head, pleased with what he'd seen and heard from the young cadet. "I hope when it's time to choose your initial specialization that you do choose security/tactical." His lips turning up in a sardonic grin, he offered as a final farewell—for now, "Cadet, I foresee good things for you—or you'll end up in the

stockade or the morgue—fifty-fifty either way.” He shrugged, “Take care and dismissed.”

Seeing that Liz had finished with her conversation, Jadzia gestured for her to join her and Terrence. “Liz...” Jadzia smiled, “This is Ensign Terrence Glover. Ensign Glover...Cadet Elizabeth Shelby.”

“Terrence when we’re off duty, Cadet.” Terrence grinned, adding, “You made quite an impression on both Captain Hanson and Lieutenant Lar’ragos.” He then stated, his smile now replaced by a serious expression, “Those are hard men to please.”

“Yes, Sir...” Then, seeing the slight nod of the head from the ensign, amended, “...I mean Terrence. Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.” His smile quickly returned. “As I was telling your friend, my great-grandfather served with your grandfather during the Four Years War.”

“Really, Terrence?” A pleased Liz exclaimed.

“Yeah.” Terrence grinned, “Why don’t both of you join me for lunch sometime? As I was telling Jadzia, I know this good outdoor café in the park. I can tell you what my father told me about my great-grandfather and your grandfather if you’d like.”

“I’d like that, Terrence.” Shelby grinned as Ensign Glover shepherded both of the cadets, one on either side of him, away from the lecture hall and to their next class.

“So...you’re going to go through with it?” Jadzia asked.

“What?” Liz inquired, “Wear body paint?” She nodded her head, “Yeah. Why? You don’t think I should?”

“No!” The Trill exclaimed, “Actually, I think you should. It’s not as if you’re making some sleazy Orion or Ferengi holovid, this is art and I don’t think anyone unless they’re either very prudish or comes from a very prudish culture is going to object.”

“What I am concerned with...” Jadzia said as she motioned for Liz to join her sitting on the edge of her bed, “Is what are you wanting from your relationships with Sandy, Heather, Jason, and Raul?”

“What do you mean?” Liz asked.

“I’m sorry if I’m butting in and if you want me to shut up, just tell me and I will, but I think they’re interested in you as more than just a friend...and...I think you feel the same way about them.” Jadzia declared, laying all her cards out on the table.

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After several minutes of thinking, Liz sighed and nodded her head, "Yeah...I do. Jadzia...I can't explain it, but I'm attracted to them. I love how Sandy smells when we're close...Heather's voice...when she talks, she sends chills up and down my spine...and Raul's warmth when we touch, and yeah, Jason's looks and charm. And we have so much in common—yet we're so different. What do I do, Jadz?"

"What do you want to do?" Her roommate asked.

"I want to be with them—all of them."

"Then be with them." Jadzia replied.

"But I don't want to hurt any of them—and I don't want to be hurt." Liz cried.

"Be honest with them—all of them. Tell them how you feel and what you want." Jadzia advised. If they're feeling what they're feeling for you, then I'd say that there's a good chance you'll find what you're looking for."

"But it sounds so..." Liz began only to be gently interrupted by her friend.

"You're attracted to them—right?" Seeing Liz nod her head, Jadzia continued, "And you're pretty sure they're attracted to you, right?" Again, Liz nodded her head, "Then what's the problem? Like the Vulcans say...Infinite Diversity...

"Through Infinite Combinations...Yeah." Liz nodded her head. "Thanks, Jadzia. I know what I'm going to do now. I just needed to hear that it was all right coming from a friend."

"Any time, Liz. Now...we better get some sleep...end of term exams is coming soon, and we've got to hit the books."

Buoyed by Jadzia's words of encouragement from a few days ago, Liz felt her heart race as she pressed the enunciator to Sandy's apartment. Hearing Sandy's welcoming, "Come in!" Liz smiled as she saw the lovely blonde artist rising up from the couch to greet her. This time, instead of the gentle and quick kiss on the lips that had been her norm recently, Liz's kiss was passionate and full of fire.

"Mmmm..." Sandy vocalized as she returned the kiss. Reluctantly breaking their liplock, the artist asked, "Not that I'm complaining, but what brought this about?"

"Ummm,," Liz stammered, "Can we sit down on the couch and talk?"

"Sure, babe." Sandy replied as she guided the young cadet to the couch with her hand and sat down beside her. "So...what's up?"

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“Uhhh...” Liz began, stumbling over her words at first and then gaining confidence as she spoke, “I had a conversation with Jadzia a few days ago and she helped me to realize that I had certain feelings about...you...and Jason...and Raul and Heather.” Liz quickly blurted out the end. “And she gave me some good advice—to be honest with you...with all of you...and...well...go on from there...” Holding her breath, Liz steeled herself for the rejection she thought she was sure she was going to receive only to be surprised by the warm hug and very passionate kiss she received from the woman next to her.

“Wow!” Liz, left temporarily breathless, sighed in relief. “So...Ummm” She drawled as her eyes drifted to the bedroom, “Race ya!”

Feeling the warm presence lying next to her, Liz nuzzled herself even closer to her lover’s warm body.

“Hey, lover.” Sandy’s gentle voice tingled the back of Liz’s head as she felt the other woman’s arms holding her.

“Hey, yourself.” Liz, turning around to face Sandy, smiled as she gave her a gentle kiss. “That was...”

“Yeah.” Sandy smiled back, “It was.”

“So...” Liz drawled as she caressed the other woman.

“How’s about we take a bath together?” Sandy tempted and then chuckled, “You know, they say the best sex is dirty and sweaty and well, I’m feeling pretty dirty and sweaty right about now.”

“Mmmm...me too.” Liz sighed, “A bath sounds good to me.”

Gasping with relief as she slipped into the warm water with her lover, Liz laid back. “Oh...this does feel wonderful.”

“A lot better than a sonic shower, Huh? Sandy quipped.

“Hmmm...you can say that again.” Liz practically purred.

Her lips turning up in an appreciative smile as she took in the sight of Liz’s creamy white skin and beautiful body, Sandy gently inquired, “You can tell me if I’m getting out of line and I’ll back off, but...was there anyone before? Anyone you were really serious about?”

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“No...you’re not out of line.” Liz smiled warmly at her new lover lying next to her in the tub. “I had a boyfriend in high school that I slept with a couple of times and a girlfriend from one of my dance classes—same thing—slept together a couple of times, but that was it—nothing that was what I’d call serious.”

“Nothing wrong with that.” Sandy consoled.

“The thing I had with Eric...that ended when I graduated.” Liz recounted, “He got a scholarship to study biology at Queensland University.” Taking a deep breath, she continued, “And things with Zoe ended when she moved to Armstrong City with her family.”

“So...you parted on good terms?”

“Yeah.” Liz replied with a smile. “I haven’t heard from Zoe since she left, but every once in a while, I’ll get a quick hello from Eric.”

Smiling, Sandy said gently, “You have pleasant memories from both of them...right?”

“Yeah.” Liz replied in a soft voice.

“And no one got hurt, right?”

“No...we parted as friends.”

“I think the most important thing is that you try not to hurt anyone—you know what I mean?” Sandy said as she placed an arm around her partner, smiling as Liz relaxed into her embrace. “You and Eric and Zoe made some beautiful memories with each other that you’ll always cherish.” Sighing, she remarked, “You know...for the Deltans, the worst sin you can commit is when you use sex to hurt someone. I think that as long as you’re honest and respect the person or persons you’re with, it doesn’t matter whether it’s a few hours or a night or a week or a year or ten years or a lifetime. What matters is that you part with pleasant memories—and—there’s nothing wrong with being with more than one person—as long as you’re honest with everyone you’re with.” Her expression now more serious, she gently cautioned, “Don’t ever promise someone more than you’re willing to give. That way leads to people being hurt.”

“You know...” Liz mused, “What you just said was very similar to what Jadzia told me.”

“Jadzia’s a smart person.” Sandy smiled, “And I bet when it’s time, she’s going to make a great host for her symbiote. You know, there’s nothing wrong with giving and receiving pleasure.” Sandy remarked. “Whether it’s one time only or on-again

off-again or something more permanent.” Smiling, Sandy declared, “You’re a free spirit, Liz—whether you know it or not. That’s what we all love most about you.”

“Ummm...thanks!” A surprised Liz exclaimed, “No one’s ever called me that before. Mostly...” She sighed, “...they tell me I’m wound too tight...and...in a way they’re right.” She ruefully admitted as Sandy hugged her closer in a gesture that was both supportive and inviting. “I always have to be the best at what I do and I never do anything half way.”

“I know...” Sandy grinned, “That’s another thing I love about you. But...” She cautioned, her smile vanishing to be replaced by a serious expression. “Please...be careful. You know what happened to Macbeth when he let his ambition get the better of him.”

“Yeah.” Liz nodded her head. Then, changing the subject, she very cautiously ventured, “What about Jason and the others?”

Smiling, Sandy kissed her new lover, “If you want to be with them, just let them know it. You might be pleasantly surprised at the result.”

“And it won’t upset you?” Liz asked, her concern for Sandy’s feelings obvious in her expression and tone of voice.

Touched by Liz’s worry for her, Sandy’s lips turned up in a gentle smile. “Of course not.” Her smile now turning more into a wicked grin, she added as she gave Liz another kiss, “If I’m there with you at the time, there’s a very good chance I’ll ask if I can join you. So...” She purred, “Don’t worry about it...just relax and go with the flow, ok?”

“Ok...” Liz smiled as she returned Sandy’s kiss, “I will.”

Still floating high from her day of lovemaking, Liz smiled and waved as she spotted Amaya and the cadet she had been spending time with walking together on the quad, “Amaya?” Liz called out, “Over here.”

Approaching the happy blonde cadet, Amaya grinned, “You’re in a good mood, Liz.” Then, glancing at her friend beside her, she remarked, “Oh...that’s right...you two haven’t been introduced yet. Liz, this is a good friend of mine, Michael...Michael Owens.”

“Hi, Michael.” Liz said as she held out her hand. “So...why haven’t I seen you around before.”

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"I got back recently from a training cruise." He responded with a smile, adding, I couldn't help but overhear you and your friend's conversation a few weeks ago about Nova Squadron. I just wanted to say that I think you're right. Groups like that don't belong in the Academy or Starfleet."

"Yeah." Liz nodded her head. "They're usually nothing but trouble and that was the gist of the paper I wrote for Captain Hanson."

"So..." Amaya grinned, "You just come back from the city?"

"Yeah." Liz's smile grew even brighter, "Spent the day with Sandy."

"I can tell!" Amaya exclaimed, "You're in such a good mood." Drawing closer, she whispered conspiratorially in her fellow cadet's ear, "Must have been a good time, I can still smell a little of her perfume on you."

Giggling, Liz responded in a low whisper, "Yeah...you could say we both had a good time." Then sighing, she remarked aloud, "But I still have to cram for those exams and prep for the ground tactical exercise coming up."

"Well, we won't keep you busy." Michael said with a grin and then suggested, "Maybe you could join us for dinner...bring your roommate along—she seems like a nice person."

"Sure." Liz answered, "Sounds good. I'll see if Jadzia can join us and we'll get together at Rand house at say...1800."

"1800 it is." Michael agreed as Amaya nodded her head. "See you then."

As Liz walked away, Michael turned to his friend, "She seems pretty nice...I like her."

"I see the weathernet's bringing us some clouds today." Terrence observed as he brought the two cadets a couple of baskets of food and drinks from the outdoor vendor. "Shrimp tempura for you, Liz, and sashimi for you, Jadzia." He grinned, "And green tea."

"So, what are you having, Terrence?" Jadzia asked as Terrence set the baskets and drinks down.

"Beef teriyaki and synth-saki." The dark-skinned ensign replied.

"I see you're scheduled for my ground tactical exercise tomorrow, Liz. Better bring your 'A' game."

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"I will Terrence," Liz replied, flashing a self-confident grin.

As the threesome ate and talked, Liz noticed a familiar figure walking in the park. Standing up, she called out, "Hey, Heather! Come on over and join us, Sweetie."

Immediately recognizing Liz with the other two Starfleet cadets, Heather waved back, "Hey, baby! Comin' right over." As the stunning red-head approached the table, Liz, still standing, embraced and kissed her. Making room on the bench next to her, Liz introduced everyone.

Smiling inwardly at their close proximity to each other, Heather remarked in her usual husky voice, "Lovely day, isn't it...bit cloudy though."

"Yeah." Jadzia smiled, quickly picking up on the close casual contact between her roommate and the red-head. "Weathernet says to expect rain tonight and tomorrow morning."

"Good." Heather smiled. Grazing Liz's leg with hers as she unpacked the lunch she had stored in her bag, Heather commented, "My babies need the rain." Seeing the confusion on Terrence's and Jadzia's faces, she chuckled, "My plants. My roses especially."

"Heather grows some of the most beautiful roses I've ever seen—as pretty as Boothby's." Liz gushed as she placed her hand on Heather's thigh underneath the table.

"Heard you turned down Nova Squadron." Terrence said with more than a note of pique in his voice, "Why?"

Standing her ground, Liz said as Heather gave her a supportive squeeze of her hand under the table, "I don't think elite units like that belong here or in Starfleet—they cause more problems than they're worth."

"Sounds like a praetorian guard." Heather whispered just loud enough for Liz to hear, "Good for you, honey."

"I belonged to Nova Squadron." Terrence declared proudly, "A lot of good cadets have belonged to it—many commanding starships now."

"Oh..." Jadzia interjected, coming to her roommate's defense, "...no one's debating that. But...you have to admit, it's not good for morale to have a group that enjoys special privileges."

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“And has additional responsibilities” Terrence pointed out and then apologized, “But let’s not argue. Looks like neither of us is going to persuade the other, so, why don’t we agree to disagree?”

“Fair enough.” Liz grinned and then, turning towards Heather, asked, “So...what are your plans for this weekend?”

“Well...” Heather replied, giving Liz a look both flirtatious and inviting, “Raul and I are planning on going to Paris—why don’t you join us?”

“Hmmm...” Liz vocalized, “I don’t want to intrude.”

“You’re not intruding.” Heather replied as her hand caressed Liz’s thigh under the table. “Join us.”

“Ok.” Liz smiled, feeling the heat of the redhead’s touch on her leg and remembering what Sandy had told her about going with her feelings. “If it’s really all right with both of you. I’d love to.”

“It’s a date then.” Heather said as she gave Liz a departing kiss. “I’ve got to go now...looks like it’s going to rain soon.”

“Good idea.” Terrence said as he looked up at the clouds.

“Yeah.” Liz smiled back and returned Heather’s kiss, “I’ll see you and Raul this weekend.”

“Well...” Jadzia grinned, speaking to Terrence and Liz, “We better get back. Liz, why don’t you go on ahead. Me and Terrence’ll clean up.”

“You sure?” Liz asked, and then seeing Jadzia’s slight nod and raised eyebrow, nodded her head, “Ok...I’ll see you back in our room, Jadz.”

Waiting until her friend was safely out of earshot, Jadzia gave Terrence an apologetic look, “I’m sorry...but Liz has some pretty strong views regarding Nova Squadron and, as you may have noticed, isn’t afraid to express herself.”

“So I saw and heard.” Terrence nodded his head with a chuckle, and then changed the subject, “Are her and Heather...”

“I guess Liz has worked that and a few other issues she’s had out.” Jadzia answered. Seeing the wistful as well as concerned and confused expression on her companion’s face, Jadzia gave him a sympathetic look, “Without revealing too much information, Terrence, let’s just say that Liz’s love life is pretty complicated right now and leave it at that, ok?”

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“Ok...” Terrence drawled as he and Jadzia cleaned the table. Sighing, he remarked, “I get the feeling she is one complex woman.”

“Heh....” Jadzia snorted as she took the young ensign’s arm in hers, “You have no idea.”

“So...how was Paris?” Jadzia asked as her roommate breezed into the room wearing a dark blue stylish long dress slit on one side up to the thigh and with matching high heel shoes and a diamond necklace.

“*C’est bon...C’est magnifique!*” Liz gushed. Then after taking off her shoes and slipping them under her bed, she made her way to the replicator and ordered a mimosa.

“That good, huh?” Jadzia chuckled. “So...I take it some more issues got resolved.”

“Oh yeah.” Liz practically purred as she reclined cat-like on her bed and sipped her mimosa. “It’s like whole new worlds are opening up to me, Jadzia. Sight, sound, smell, touch, taste...pleasure.”

“Yeah...well...” Jadzia pointed, “Don’t forget...we’ve got finals coming up.”

Her smile vanishing, Liz nodded her head, “You’re right, Jadz. Finals and then the end of year talent show—and then...” She sighed, “Home for leave.”

“Well...” Jadzia suggested, “Maybe you’ll be able to work things out with your father while you’re home.”

“I hope so, Jadz.” Liz said as she closed her eyes and then opened them. “I want to.” Taking a deep breath, she exhaled, “After I finish this...” She said as she sipped her mimosa, it’s time to get out of my party clothes and back into work mode. Gotta make sure I ace Hanson’s Operational Strategy final and S’Von’s big exam and get in workout time for both the show and Sandy’s project. No rest for the weary.” She joked as she downed the last of her mimosa, and then, changing back to Academy dress, went back to work.

“That was a novel solution to Captain S’Von’s problem, Liz.” Michael Owens praised as he and Liz enjoyed a cup of coffee in the galley between classes. “I’m curious though...how were you able to get the Gorn to agree to cede Mytilene VI? They normally don’t like to leave a planet once they’ve claimed it.”

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“Well...” Liz smiled, “I did some research and discovered that Corallys III had ruins in which the buildings exhibited what was apparently Gorn architectural styles. I presented that evidence to the Gorn and we worked out an even swap.”

“I think I see...” Michael nodded his head. “Corallys III has nothing of significance to the Federation, but would be considered holy by the Gorn, while Mytilene VI was at the limits of the Gorn Hegemony’s reach and was a bit too cool for them anyway, while also possessing valuable resources that we need. Everyone thinks they got the better end of the deal. Not bad.”

“So...you ready for finals?” Liz asked.

“About as ready as I’m ever going to be.” Michael replied and then asked, “So...what song are you going to dance to at the talent show?”

Flashing a wicked grin, Liz answered back, “Sorry, Michael...you’re going to have to find out with everyone else.”

“Are you sure you want to do this, Sandy?” Liz asked as she and her lover enjoyed a coffee together at *Vicenzo’s*.

“Yeah.” Liz’s Junoesque lover replied, taking the blonde cadet’s hand in hers. “This project’s as much yours as mine—I couldn’t have done it without you. It’s only right that we share the credit.” She then put on a mock stern expression, “I insist.”

“Oh, all right!” Liz chuckled. “So...” She asked, “When will we be ready to roll it out?”

“Whenever you are.” Sandy responded with a smile.

“Hmmm...how about after exams.”

“Works for me.” Sandy exclaimed. “I’ll set it up and we’ll do it.”

“Great!” Liz beamed as she caressed her lover’s thigh, “So...I hear Jason’s coming over.”

“Yeah...” Sandy purred, “Why don’t you join us too. We’ll go out...have dinner and drinks...and...whatever...”

“Sounds good...” Liz murmured, “So long as Jason’s cool with it.”

Giggling, Sandy gave her lover a quick kiss, “It was his idea, silly.”

“Guess I’ll see you then.” Liz smiled as she got up and gave Sandy a goodbye kiss, “Now though...I’ve got to get back—classes await.”

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“You’re on next, girl!” Renee said as she adjusted the long black robe with a high cowl that Liz would wear as she made her way through the audience, seats set up to resemble a night club, to the front of the stage where she would begin her dance.

“Knock ‘em dead Lizzy, love. Jason cheered from backstage where all the rest of Liz’s artist friends, along with Jadzia were gathered to support her.

“You got this, baby.” Sandy encouraged, giving her a good luck kiss on the lips, an act repeated by all the others in Liz’s little circle.

“Kill, ‘em, Liz.” Jadzia said as she gave her roommate and friend a thumb up and kiss on the cheek.

Captain Hanson, serving as master of ceremonies for the show, came on stage after the act before Liz’s had finished. “Let’s have a round of applause for Cadet Grierson—didn’t he make standup comedy look easy?” Waiting until the audience had finished its applause, the captain’s face widened into a bright smile, “And now, here’s Cadet Shelby performing a dance to a medley of jazz tunes. Cadet Shelby!”

On hearing her cue, Liz strode to the front, her bearing proud and regal, looking this way and that at the people in the audience, flashing them all with a bright smile. Then, facing her spectators, she opened up the robe and let it drop to reveal a black dance leotard with skirt and a red sash with a silver medallion crossing her chest. As the music began to play she snapped her fingers and then danced. Thrusting a hip here, a suggestive flirt with the shoulder there, then a coy glance she turned and kicked and danced across the floor until she came to the table where Terrance and Captain Hanson were sitting, Picking up a flattened top hat that had been set earlier as a prop, Liz put it on her head and then flirted with the two officers with her facial expressions and shoulders and then, popping the hat up, used it as a prop as she danced to the table where Michael Owens and Amaya Donners were sitting where she again flirted and tossing the top hat in the air and catching it, put it on Michael’s head as she picked up another cap, an old-style soldier’s combination cap, and used it as a prop as she twirled and danced and kicked some more until with a final flourish of twirls and kicks, the stage was lit to reveal a band with a piano. Liz then leaped up on the piano and reclining, kicked up her legs to end the show.

Getting off the piano, Liz bowed to the loud applause as Captain Hanson came out. Whispering low so that only she could hear, the captain murmured, “You almost

gave this old man a heart attack.” Then aloud, he announced, “Let’s hear it again for Cadet Shelby!”

Liz drank in the applause until she got the signal to leave the stage. Making a graceful exit, Liz ran to her lovers who all hugged her and gave her kisses.

“You killed it, girl!” Heather grinned as Raul hugged them both. Then Jason kissed Liz and whispered something in her ear that made the lovely blonde cadet giggle. Then Sandy kissed her and whispered, “Didn’t I tell you that you were going to kick ass.”

“Good show, Liz.” Renee praised as Jadzia came up and hugged her friend.

“So...” Sandy’s lips turned up in a lascivious grin, “Party at my place?”

“I’m in.” Liz replied in a sultry voice as she winked at her lovers. Then turning to Jadzia and Renee, she asked, “You girls coming? You’re more than welcome.”

“No thanks.” Renee winked back, “My hubby would have a fit.”

Glancing at Terrence sitting at the table, Jadzia gave Liz a wink and a smirk, “I think I’m going to see if I can make some plans of my own for tonight. You all have fun and don’t keep my roomie out too long—we’ve got finals coming up soon.”

“Ok, mommy!” Liz chuckled as she and the others in her circle waved and made their exit from the holosuite that served as the venue for tonight’s show. “We’ll be good!”

“So...Liz whispered so that only her lovers could hear, “How bad are we going to be?”

“Hey Jadzia—I did it! Almost a perfect average for the term and highest honors on the Commandant’s List! Levine and G’arvan gave me A minuses.” She pouted, “Levine never gives A’s and G’arvan still hasn’t gotten over how I solved his stupid exercise.”

“Well...your father should still be pleased.” Jadzia commented.

“Yeah.” Liz smiled and then hugged her friend, “We both busted our butts this term.”

“Yeah”, Jadzia grinned, “I made the List too. And...” She crossed her fingers, “If all goes well, the Symbiote Commission will be happy enough to fast track me for a host.”

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“So...” Liz asked, “What sort of plans are you making for the break?”

“I’m going to Trill—see my family...you know...the usual.” She smiled.

“Yeah, I know.” Liz smiled back.

“Been a hell of a year, hasn’t it, Jadz...” A wistful expression crossed her face as she once again hugged her friend, “I couldn’t have done it without you.”

“We did it together.” Jadzia replied as she hugged her friend back.

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“Congratulations, *dragam!*” Anna Shelby clapped her hands in delight at her daughter’s success. “So, when are you coming back home?”

“Tomorrow.” Liz smiled, “Me and my...friends...are having a little end of the year party tonight to celebrate the end of my plebe year and the big roll out of a project Sandy and I had been working on.”

“Oh...what sort of project, *lany?*”

“It’s great, *anya!*” Liz exclaimed, but you have to see it.” She then paused for a moment and then asked, “Is David home?”

“Yeah, dear.” Anna replied.

“Well then, why don’t the two of you transport over and see it?”

“I’d love to...wait...give me a moment...” She left and came back moments later with David.

“Hey, Sport!” The newly promoted captain of the *Invincible* greeted, “Heard you made highest honors.”

“Sure did, Dave.” Liz grinned back. “Got A minuses in Levine’s and G’aarvan’s classes though I did pull an A out of S’Von.”

“Hey...” David grinned, “No one gets and A out of Levine and as for G’aarvan...” His smile vanished, “I’ve seen what the Cardassians do—I’d have done the same thing you did.”

“Thanks, David.” Liz smiled, “So...you coming with mom?”

“I wouldn’t miss this for the universe, Sport.” David smiled back.

“Mom...” Liz asked, “Do you think Dad can make it?”

"I don't think so, *dragam*." Anna answered, "He won't be able to make it to Earth until after tomorrow, I'm afraid."

"That's ok." Liz replied, "It's not his fault, he can't do anything about that. But at least I'll be able to see him during the break. So...when can I expect you two over?"

"When do you want us?" Anna answered back.

"Well..." Liz smiled, "I figure if you can make it early enough, you can join me and Sandy for dinner. Jason's got to give a concert—jerks at Julliard scheduled it for the same day, but he's transporting over as soon as he can afterwards. At least you'll be able to meet Sandy. You'll love her." Liz gushed.

"I'm sure we will, Sport." David responded with a smile.

"We'll see you soon, *lany*! Anna exclaimed.

"I love you both!" Liz said as she ended the transmission.

"J. P.!" David Shelby called out as he greeted his fellow starship captain.

"David!" Captain Hanson waved back and then approached to join the elder Shelby sibling and his and Liz's mother, "Anna!" He greeted with a friendly hug and kiss on the cheek. "So...how have you all been?"

"Couldn't be better." David replied as Anna nodded her head.

"And Philip?"

"Dad'll be home in a few days." David responded, "So...I hear Liz is knocking 'em dead."

"In more ways than one." Captain Hanson replied, shaking his head as he smiled at Anna, "I don't know how your girl does it. She's acing her courses, dances up a storm and still finds the time to do something like this." He then added in a cautionary tone, "Sometimes though, I think she lets her drive and ambition get the better of her."

"Yeah." Anna nodded her head, understanding the reason for Liz's striving. "I worry about her too."

"Well..." J. P. grinned, "We better get to our seats, the show's about to start."

Also taking seats in the outdoor arena were Liz's fellow cadets and friends: Jason Aubrey, Amaya Donners, and Michael Owens, along with Terrence Glover; while backstage, Jadzia and the other artists that had become part of Liz's little circle were gathered, all offering their support for both Liz and Sandy.

"Well...Liz..." Sandy smiled, "Ready?"

Smiling back, Liz replied, "Let's do this"

A hush fell over the concert area as the stage was darkened. Then the three-dimensional holographic colors, shapes, and textures interwove into a tapestry as the music began to play, low and serene, and then Liz came out, her body painted in a multitude of colors and designs, all complementing and blending with the forms and colors of the images as dancer, music, and images all came together in a seamless whole. As Liz performed, not a sound was uttered until, her performance completed, the outdoor arena erupted in applause for both artists.

"We did it!" Sandy raved as she hugged and kissed Liz and then everyone else backstage as Liz did the same.

"You nailed it, loves." Jason remarked, "I just managed to catch the last third or so, but it was stupendous."

"Thanks, babe." Liz smiled as she kissed the handsome English musician.

"So...Jadz?" Liz said as, donning a bathrobe, she approached her friend.

"You were..." The lovely Trill shook her head, "That was..."

"It was beautiful."

Turning towards a familiar sounding female voice, Liz smiled warmly, "*Any*a! Did you really like it?"

"I loved it, *dragam*." Anna smiled. "And your father's going to love it too when he sees the vid."

"You were great, Sport." David added, giving his baby sister a hug.

"That's the second time you nearly gave me a heart attack, young woman." Captain Hanson smiled. "I just hope Starfleet's not going to lose you to the arts."

"It's not, Sir." Liz smiled back. "I love dancing, but my heart's..." She tilted her head up at the stars, "Up there...in Starfleet."

"Glad to hear it." Terrence Glover smiled.

“Same here.” Michael Owens and Amaya Donners chimed in.

“Great performance.” Jason Aubrey praised, “Both of you...I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like it before.”

“Thanks everyone.” Liz smiled as she looked on at her family, friends, and lovers, “It was a great first year...I wonder what’s in store for the second.”