

Logic Dictates Action

As the door to Counselor Deanna Troi's office slid open, Kendra Elliott smoothed her skirt and straightened her tunic. "Ah, the Picard Maneuver," Deanna said with a chuckle.

Kendra's pretty green eyes widened slightly. "Has anyone ever actually called it that around here?"

"Who do you think named it?" They laughed for a moment, but Deanna quickly got down to business. "What can I do for you, Lieutenant Commander?"

"Call me Kendra, Counselor."

"Only if you call me Deanna." Both women sat down across from each other. "The question still stands, though, Kendra. What can I do for you?"

A frown slid across the white-haired beauty's face. "Believe it or not, romantic troubles. Since I don't know whether or not it could end up affecting my duties, I thought that I ought to actually talk to the ship's counselor about it."

Deanna looked at the woman sitting before her and nodded. She'd taken some time to check Kendra's record and psychological profile, and was fairly certain what the complaint was. Kendra Elliott was ambitious without being power-hungry, and stood a chance of becoming the youngest starship captain the Federation had ever seen. She was also so conservative in her private life that some considered her to be puritanical. Her psych profile said otherwise, especially if the record of some of her holodeck simulations were to be believed.

"Anyway," Kendra continued, "I've fallen for someone, and well, I need to know if there's any way of getting past infatuation?"

"Are you trying to make someone fall in love with you?"

"Would that I could!" came the laughing answer. Suddenly serious, she added, "No, actually, I wouldn't. I'd never trust that ... the person would love me for me. What I really want to know is if there's a way to make yourself fall *out* of love. Well, infatuation. It's not returned."

"Are you sure?"

"Fairly. She...the person's a Vulcan, for one thing."

Deanna smiled. "We're at the crux of the problem now, aren't we, Kendra? Are you willing to tell me her name?"

Kendra blinked. "Empathy, or did I slip?"

Deanna laughed. "A little of both. You almost said 'She's a Vulcan' a moment ago, and I've been detecting that you find me attractive in more than a simple artistic appreciation."

Kendra blushed so deep that her hair threatened to turn pink. "I didn't offend you, did I?"

"No. I get that occasionally from my patients, both male and female. Besides, I'm not the one you're in love with, are you?"

Kendra's face fell slightly. "No. I'm in love with my best friend."

"So what's your solution, Kendra? I can feel that you're on the edge of a solution, but you are looking for is someone to tell you you're making the right decision."

Kendra's scowled darkened her pretty face. "I don't like either choice I come up with, though, Deanna. I can either tell my best friend that I am madly and passionately in love with her, and possibly ruin the friendship I've had since Academy days, or I can stay the course and keep the best friend I've ever had as my best friend." She laughed a humorless laugh. "And moon over her so much when I'm not around her that I go running to the ship's counselor in hopes of finding a third choice I hadn't thought of."

"Not really. You are aware that your first choice has three outcomes? She might return your feelings, she might do what you are afraid of, or it might simply not affect your friendship, as far as she is concerned."

"I'd know, and that would color things." She frowned again. "I don't like it, but I think my best choice is staying the course. Remain conservative, and not lose my best friend."

Deanna shook her head. "I find it interesting that someone with as experimental and daring a professional life as you would have a personal life so conservative that it almost borders upon prudish, in some eyes."

"In other words, why is so conservative a girl so outgoing professionally?" Kendra cocked her head as she thought. "To be honest, I'm what they used to call a stick-in-the-mud. I never learned to be a social animal, so books have always been my best friends, with the exception of a handful of individuals who appreciated my bookish-ness. The very fact that I'm one of the iconoclasts who collects the ancient paper copies of books, as well as the data chips makes some people nervous. Let's add on top of everything else that I'm a particularly plain looking female of the species..."

Deanna actually snorted at that. "Have you ever looked at yourself in the mirror, Kendra? Do you pay attention to the *Enterprise* Bulletin Boards?"

"I look at the technical forums, and a few other places, yes..."

Deanna picked up her PADD and tapped it a few times, and then handed it to her confused patient. "Read that."

"Unofficial *Enterprise* beauty contest - who would you most like to spend a leave on Risa with?" Kendra read for a moment, and grew more and more confused. "'For the third year straight, the top spot goes to T'Mir, with her friend Kendra Elliott coming in a close second.'? Is this a joke, Deanna?"

"No. You are not a plain looking woman, Kendra, no matter what you think the mirror is telling you, I'd like you to..." Deanna heard a faint chirp behind Kendra's ear, and remembered that the woman had volunteered to test the next generation of communicator, which was subdermally placed.

"Ah. Sorry, Counselor, but I've been waiting for the chance to take my exams for the Commander's test, and Commanders Riker and LaForge are finally free. Can I pick this up another time?" She winced. "I'll admit that a part of me is running away at the moment, but I also know I'll be thinking about it whether or not I want to."

"Schedule a new appointment when you know you can, Kendra. I'll be here." As Kendra smiled and nodded, and then left, Deanna sat back and thought for several moments. Once she knew the woman was no longer in earshot, she made a call.

Lt. Commander Kendra Elliott was jarred awake by the red alert klaxon. "Battle stations! Report to your battle stations - this is *not* a drill. Repeat, this is not a drill!"

She was dressed and halfway to Engineering before she thought to ask the computer, "What's happening?"

"That information is available only to command staff and bridge crew."

"Damn," Kendra mumbled. She skidded into Engineering, coming to a stop before a console, and almost colliding with Lt. Commander T'Mir. "Sorry, T'Mir," she murmured. She let her eyes glide across the sleek form of her unrequited love.

"Understood, Kendra," came T'Mir's warm, velvety contralto response. "No fault. I would caution you against too much speed in responding to a summons, even one such as this, for giving yourself an injury does neither you nor the ship any good."

"Any idea what happened?"

"Actually, Kendra," said Geordi LaForge as he strode into Engineering, "we have been hailed by a Romulan Warbird, and ordered to surrender. The captain is threatening to destroy us, even though they're the ones that crossed the Neutral Zone. My opinion is that he's crazy. I need to return to the Bridge, but I needed to grab something first, because I think we'll need it up there." He opened one of the equipment lockers just as the ship wobbled, and a console exploded in sparks. Geordi stood, tool case in hand, just as another console exploded right next to him, blinding everyone.

When sight had returned to everyone's eyes, they looked to find Geordi lying on the floor. It was obvious that the job of Chief Engineer was now someone else's headache, since a rather large portion of the console had imbedded itself in his skull.

"Bridge, this is Lt. Commander Kendra Elliott." She waited a moment, and then called again, once again to no avail. "Computer!"

"Working."

"I need contact with the bridge."

"Unable to comply. Those circuits have been severed and are in need of repair."

"Wonderf..."

"Warning: antimatter containment down to seventy-five percent. Warning: antimatter containment down to seventy-five percent. Warning:..."

"Computer, silence. Place containment figure on main display in engineering. T'Mir, sorry to order you around, but we need someone to stabilize that containment while we work on communications with the bridge. Lieutenants Mayerle and Northwood, I need you to keep an eye on warp engines and weaponry respectively. Ensign Regan, you're with me." Everyone headed to their stations, while Kendra and the ensign headed for a Jeffries tube.

"Why are we headed here, ma'am?"

"Because, Mike," she smiled. "I happen to know that twenty feet inside that tube is one of the over-ride junctions for Main Engineering. We can reroute most of what we need through it."

She opened the tube and climbed in with him right behind her. It was only when she stopped in front of the junction and saw his extremely red face that she looked down and realized that she'd grabbed her regulation minidress. She chuckled to herself. *At least I remembered underwear in all the excitement.*

Popping the cover, she was greeted with sparking inside the junction. "Oh, shut up!" she grumbled, and turned to Mike. "Give me the inverse polyser, Ensign."

A minute later, as she was closing the junction lid, she heard muted cheering from Main Engineering. "Looks like my reroute was successful,"

she laughed.

"Sounds like it, too," he grinned back.

Back in front of the consoles, she saw that the readout was now at one hundred percent. "Computer, stop display. Bridge, this is Lt. Commander Elliott."

"This is the bridge. Is Commander LaForge there?" Captain Picard's self-assured voice made her feel that everything was going to turn out for the best.

"The Commander is dead, I'm sorry to say, sir. I'm nominally in charge, by dint of being the first to issue orders."

"Well, we have containment and communications back, so it seems that they were correct orders. Carry on."

"Yes sir. What are your orders?"

"Phasers are at thirty percent, and photon and quantum torpedoes are off-line. See what you can do."

"Understood, sir." As the link severed, she looked to T'Mir. "Sorry about that. I should defer to you."

"Negative, Lt. Commander. You knew what needed to be done. Also, you have seniority over me by a span of thirty-seven minutes, so you are clearly in command here." The almost invisible quirk of her lip on her left side was the same as an enormous grin for Kendra.

"Thanks. Well, you heard the captain. What can we do to increase power to the phasers?"

"I have a few ideas, Lt. Commander," Lt. Mayerle said.

"Before we go any further, I'm going to call you by your first names, and you can use mine. It's faster. Now, go ahead, Evan."

A few moments later, Evan and Mike were climbing to another Jeffries tube to put Evan's plan into action. "Jon, T'Mir, I need you to head to Auxiliary Fire Control and see if there's anything we can do there to get the torpedoes back online. I'll stay here and monitor. I'll holler if I need anyone."

In moments, she was listening to the hum of the warp engines, and letting her thoughts wander as she saw the phaser power indicator climb slowly. *Why does she always look so damned good in her uniforms? I look like a Caitian coughed me up into mine, but she looks perfectly sculpted, with that long black hair and those incredible curves.* She snorted to herself. *Well, Mike wasn't exactly complaining about the view in that Jeffries tube. Okay, so maybe my butt's worth looking at. Then again, he is fairly fresh out of the Academy; fairly young.*

Why did I have to fall for her, dammit? It was bad enough that I roomed with her at the Academy, and that I know what she looks like naked because of that, but why did she have to have exactly the perfect personality to make me fall for her? She frowned. *Yeah, like it's her fault she's so damned sexy.*

"Phasers are off-line," the computer reported, but almost immediately, the indicator read one hundred fifteen percent. "Phasers are back online," it reported.

"Sorry about that," Evan shouted from above, "but we needed to take them down for a split second to finish the rerouting."

"No prob..." Kendra started to say, but the computer interrupted her again. "Photon and quantum torpedoes are back online." Jon and T'Mir walked back into Engineering, Jon smiling broadly. Both corners of T'Mir's mouth were upturned slightly.

They set a viewscreen to the bridge's view as Kendra prepared to tell the captain, but the beams lancing out from the *Enterprise* told the story - they knew already. Three torpedoes burst from *Enterprise*'s tubes, and exploded near the Warbird, which began tilting as it trailed debris. Kendra looked down to note that sensors were detecting the Warbird's rapid climb to destruction. She also noted...

"Captain! They're going to fire!" She shouted into her comm, but it was too late. Rather than attempting to fire weapons, the Romulans warp jumped the Warbird to nearly on top of the *Enterprise*, where it promptly exploded.

When she regained consciousness in Engineering, Kendra was helped to her feet by T'Mir. "Lieutenant Mayerle and Ensign Regan are dead. Lieutenant Northwood and I are bruised, but functional. Warp containment is failing rapidly, and we are cut off from the bridge and the rest of the ship at this moment."

"Is there any way to restore the containment?"

"Yes, by manually repairing the connections that were severed."

"Okay then, T'Mir, which is closest, which is easiest, and which is the best choice?"

"The closest is being flooded by plasma at this time, so it is unreachable. The easiest will require exactly one minute forty-three seconds more than we have remaining to reach. What you sometimes refer to as the 'happy medium' is in the junction where the ODN conduits and the plasma field generators meet. That will take five point two minutes to repair, after taking two point three minutes to reach."

"The radiation level in the area is fatal right now." Jon replied to her with the tone of someone who knows he's already lost the argument.

"As I stated earlier, Lieutenant, while it would be fatal for a human long before repairs could be completed, a Vulcan can withstand far higher dosages for longer period. Fatal concentration for me would be in four point eight minutes, but I would still have point eight minutes of life in which useful actions could be taken, thereby giving me time to complete the repair."

"Can we use a robot?" Kendra asked.

"Negative. There are only eleven minutes left before containment fails, and I will require seven point five of them to complete repairs. Eleven minutes precisely from ... mark. You are in command. Shall I make the repairs?"

Kendra stared at her friend for a long moment, memorizing her long black hair, so black that it had blue highlights; memorizing the way her regulation jump-suit hugged that astonishingly curvaceous Vulcan figure, and idly noted that T'Mir's nipples were up. *Hell, even she's scared at a time like this.* After one last long look, and as the counter clicked over to ten minutes left, she said, "T'Mir, go do the repairs. I am aware that my order will result in your death, but I have to choose between one, or over one thousand. I choose one, even if she is my best friend. Go." T'Mir nodded, grabbed a tool case, and headed for the proper Jeffries tube. As the door shut behind her, Kendra whispered, "I love you, T'Mir." A tear threatened to fall from her left eye.

"Computer, end program," came Commander Riker's voice from behind her.

Engineering vanished, to be replaced by the familiar black and yellow holodeck.

The world went grey for only a moment, but Kendra never lost her balance. "Congratulations, Commander Elliott. You've passed your final exam for the rank of Commander." He took a long look at her. "Your next duty ought to be visiting Counselor Troi. I won't order you to, Commander, but after an ordeal like we just put you through, you need it."

"Understood, sir. If I may, sir -how and why?"

"Why is as easy as how. You would react differently if you knew you were taking a test. By beaming you into a holodeck simulation while you were sleeping, you never knew that you had started the test."

"Brilliant thinking, sir." She shook her head. "I probably ought to talk with Deanna – it took a bit out of me to order my best friend to her death. Needless to say, I'm very happy it was a simulation, sir," she laughed at the end.

"In case you're interested, Commander - you were our test case. The first in the Federation to undergo this stressful a test. If it means anything, I'm sorry. It may be a requirement, but it doesn't mean I like doing that to people."

Kendra put her hand on his arm. "Sir, it needs to be done, and it's one of the things I signed on for. You're right; Starfleet needs to know the real reactions, not the reactions of someone who's learned how to pass the known test." She tapped the subdermal implant. "Hmm, time for my shift in about half an hour."

"You were taken off the shift for a few days, both to recover from the ordeal we just put you through, and because we need to rework your schedule, since you'll be taking on new duties with the new rank."

"Ah. Well, then. Computer, what is Counselor Troi doing?"

"Counselor Troi is asleep in her quarters."

"Leave her a message that I'd like to schedule an appointment with her at her earliest convenience, please."

"Affirmative. Message left."

"Okay. I'm going to Ten-Forward for a drink of synthehol, and then I think I'll go back to my quarters and finish my sleep cycle. Commander," she finished with a smile and a nod.

"Commander," Riker replied, returning both.

Kendra walked into Ten-Forward, pensive, and took an empty table near the transparent aluminum windows. During this shift, there were far fewer patrons socializing, which suited her fine. As she sat facing the window, she heard someone come up behind her. "Hi, Guinan."

"You psychic or something?" came the slightly amused response from the ship's bartender.

"Nah. I just know patterns."

"Works for me. So, what can I get you?"

"Well, what I'd really like right now is a bottle of bourbon, so I'm going to ask for a glass of synthehol."

"Be right back." Guinan walked away, and returned a few moments later with a tray carrying a bottle and two glasses filled halfway with amber liquid. "Figured you wouldn't mind the drinking partner. Looks like you could use it."

Kendra took a sip, and her eyebrows rose. "This is actual bourbon!"

"Well, when someone comes in and tells me they want to get drunk, but has the sense to try to avoid it, then I figure they've got something worth getting drunk over. Also figured I'd make myself available in case you decided to talk about it."

"Thanks." She took a deeper drink from the glass. "Not yet, though. Maybe when the alcohol has had a chance to settle in and loosen my tongue." She laughed a humorless laugh.

Two drinks later, no further words had passed between the two women. A gasp suddenly tore through Kendra, and she began sobbing, her face in her hands. The sobbing came in waves; it would begin to subside as she got herself under control, but then the pain would hit again, and she'd be nearly screaming her cries into her hands. She picked up a glass from the table and hurled it at the window, receiving an unsatisfying

PONG! from both window and glass as they collided. This, of course, sent her into another paroxysm of grief.

An unknown number of minutes later, she felt a hand on her shoulder and looked up through bleary eyes to see Deanna Troi sitting next to her. She threw her arms around her and continued to cry while Deanna simply spoke soothingly to her. Finally, she got herself under sufficient control to be able to speak. "Some way for the future youngest captain in Starfleet to act, huh, Deanna?" She tried to laugh and failed.

Deanna looked at Kendra as she sat back up in her chair, and smiled. "I came when Guinan called me. I heard your message, and called Commander Riker, who explained the situation to me. What you are experiencing right now is called survivor's guilt, and it's just as real, given the situation, as if you had actually had to do that."

"But it was just a god-damned simulation, Deanna!" Kendra screamed. "It's not like I actually fucking murdered my best friend!" This sent her into another convulsion of screaming tears. She grabbed the other glass and threw it as well, not caring to listen for the sound this time. "It was just a god-damned simulation, so why does it hurt so god-damned much?" The scream sounded as if she'd torn her heart out of her chest.

"Because it was real to you, girl," Guinan said when Kendra had calmed again. "Whether or not you discovered it to be a simulation later, at the time you made that decision, it was real. You were ordering your best friend into a situation where you knew she was going to die. Knowing that she's alive now doesn't mean a damned thing to your heart," she said, tapping Kendra's chest. "What's important to your heart is that it thinks you killed your best friend."

Deanna smiled. "Guinan's right. I think what you need right now is to talk to T'Mir, and perhaps that will help you."

"Then it is an excellent thing that I came to Ten Forward with you when you asked me, Counselor Troi." Kendra turned to face the long-haired beauty who stood beside the chair, and threw her arms around her friend. "Oh god, T'Mir, you're alive!" The tears began to flow again, but they were happier tears this time, although still full of grief from her experience. This set, though, carried relief at T'Mir's continued existence.

Kendra's mind finally registered a handful of things, such as the fact that T'Mir had apparently been awakened suddenly, since she didn't usually walk the halls of the *Enterprise* in nothing but a silk robe. It also registered where her head had been as she cried against her friend, and finally vehemently reminded her that she was subjecting her friend to violent emotions.

She snapped back to upright in her chair, noting absently the tear stains at T'Mir's breast, and looked her friend in the eyes. "I apologize for the unwarranted psychic assault upon you, T'Mir. I know better than to initiate physical contact with a Vulcan without permission. Please forgive me."

"From what I have learned here, since I came in with Counselor Troi, you have passed your Commander's examinations, but the final exam forced you into a situation wherein you were forced to order me to perform a fatal action in order to save the lives of the rest of the ship's complement. Since we are friends, I understand that this would cause you grief."

"Basically, yeah. Ship was attacked; boom; warp core failure in some odd minutes; only place available is instantly fatal to humans but not instantly fatal to Vulcans due to radiation."

"And you ordered me to my death in the simulation." It was said matter of fact.

"I know this sounds stupid, but can you forgive me for that?" Kendra smiled a sheepish smile.

"Logic, past knowledge of you, and your reaction tonight tell me that it was not a decision made lightly; that you truly felt my death would save the rest of the ship. There is no forgiveness required; in fact, you pay me the highest of compliments with such a belief." T'Mir looked at Kendra for a long moment. "Logic also tells me that there is more to the story, as you humans say, than meets the eye."

Kendra met her friend's eyes and replied, "I can tell you in complete honesty that it was the assumption that I had killed you that was the cause for my grief. Nothing more."

"Ah. Then perhaps my unspoken question needs rephrasing. More than simple grief at the loss of a friend cause your sorrow, did it not? Perhaps what you would consider unfinished business?"

Kendra's blush again threatened her hair color, and her eyes dropped from T'Mir's face. "Ah, well now there you have me. There is something I want to say to you, but I don't know your reaction, and it could irrevocably harm our long-standing friendship. Something that is at least masquerading as logic tells me that it is better not to damage a worthwhile thing." She absently noted that T'Mir was wearing bunny slippers.

"Does not logic also state that greater rewards can not be gained without risk? Or as you so succinctly phrase it, 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained.'" She knelt in front of her friend. "I see that I shall have to take matters into my own hands."

Kendra felt T'Mir's warm hand take her chin and pull upward so that Kendra was looking in T'Mir's eyes. *She's close enough to kiss, but...* Her brain ceased functioning for a moment as T'Mir's lips brushed her own, and she unconsciously closed her eyes and opened her mouth as she fell into the long desired kiss. As she noted T'mir's own mouth opening in response, Kendra found herself thinking, *This can't be happening. I must still be in somebody's simulation. I can not be getting my heart's desire happening to me right here in Ten Forward.*

Why not? came the reply. *Just because Vulcans master emotions does not mean that we do not have them. I said nothing to you because I desired you enough to cloud my logic. Logic decreed that I was, as you humans say, 'reading too much' into your reactions.*

The kiss broke, and for a few moments, Kendra heard nothing but roaring in her ears as the blood thundered through her system. When she could think again, she spoke aloud. "I'm praying right now that this isn't a dream." She looked deeply into T'Mir's violet eyes and said, "T'Mir, I love you, and I have since our Academy days. I'm saying it now while I still have the courage, and admittedly some serious hormones, in my system."

T'Mir's mouth twitched slightly, as if she were about to smile. "Honesty requires that you be made aware that building a relationship on such an exclamation would not be a one-way proposition." The smile, such as it was, became more pronounced.

I have no idea why I love your tendency toward extreme verbosity, T'Mir, but it drives me crazy. In a good way. Am I safe in assuming that you were saying that you love me as well?"

"Such an interpretation would not be contraindicated," T'Mir said, eyes sparkling with mirth. Guinan snorted her laughter.

"You nutcase," Kendra laughed.

"Negative, Kendra. My orientation makes such a concept, if not contraindicated, at least non-pleasurable to consider." It took Kendra a moment to parse the statement, and she thought absently as she stifled her laugh that she was glad she hadn't been drinking anything right then. Bourbon coming out of your nose was bound to hurt.

After getting herself back under control, Kendra turned to Deanna. "Would it bother you much if T'Mir and I went somewhere to talk about what we've just learned?"

"Actually, I'd suggest it. I'll make sure I keep my schedule open if you need to talk."

"I'm certain that I will need to talk this over some more, Deanna. This sort of thing doesn't go away easily. I know. I still have nightmares about ... home." She shuddered, then turned to T'Mir and smiled. T'Mir openly put her arm around Kendra's waist and they walked out the door.

There had been a slight argument as to whose quarters they'd talk in until Kendra pointed out two things: first, she was fully dressed, and T'Mir nearly wasn't dressed at all; second was that the warmth of T'Mir's quarters would probably quickly lead to a lessening of the amount of clothing that Kendra was wearing.

Kendra found herself surprised, however, as soon as the door closed on the two of them inside T'Mir's quarters. In an uncharacteristically human move, she pulled Kendra close and kissed her hard. Kendra responded immediately, and for just a moment, their tongues met in mortal combat. Their mutual moans broke the moment however, and T'Mir released her grip on Kendra, albeit quite obviously reluctantly.

"I apologize for that assault, Kendra. My time of Pon Farr is still months away, but I do believe that it has been affecting me."

"My only complaint is that you didn't give me a chance to get naked, T'Mir!" Kendra laughed, still trying to catch her breath. T'Mir's mouth quirked slightly.

"Still, I must apologize. Such behavior is inexcusable."

"Says who?" came the indignant response. "If we didn't have some important things to talk about first, I'd be making every effort to convince you out of that robe, and onto that bed, where I could do to you what I've fantasized about since Academy! And being kissed, being ...possessed like that, by the woman I love, is exactly what I want!" She reached out to touch T'Mir's face, but stopped short. Before she could pull her hand away, T'Mir pressed it against her cheek.

"When we are alone, dearest Kendra, be human with me. It's what I fell in love with, and it will help me be open with you. I have spent my life to this point hiding what I am. To some Vulcans, I am an abomination, because I embrace my emotions. All Vulcans master their emotions, but for most, the mastery rules their lives. Perhaps it is a mental illness, but I embrace my emotions. I am not a follower of T'Kut, but I understand the necessity of emotion." She bowed her head. "I have enjoyed our times together, because it is possible for me to, as you humans say, 'let my hair down'. If I am alone, I tend to leave the mask in place."

Kendra looked at this beautiful woman she had loved for the last few years, and smiled again. Her other hand came up and she pulled T'Mir close into another kiss of equal passion, but almost painful tenderness. As it broke, she laughed as she realized that she had managed to startle T'Mir, since the Vulcan beauty's robe was now pooled on the floor around her ankles.

"Impressive," sighed T'Mir. "I was so enjoying the kiss that I paid attention to nothing else."

"Thank you," Kendra said, sketching a bow. She slipped from her minidress, but frowned before she could mirror T'Mir's state of undress. "I think we need to talk some more, though, love, before we get hot and heavy with each other."

T'Mir looked smolderingly at Kendra for a moment, but quickly cleared. "Agreed, beloved. The air must be cleared between us." She crouched and retrieved her robe, placing it about her shoulders as if it had fallen in reverse from the floor to her body.

Kendra scowled. "I hate to ruin the mood, but it has to be dealt with. Until I work tonight's episode through, I think you'll be dealing with odd nightmares wherein I will get extremely clingy when I wake up, until I'm sure you're actually alive." The scowl actually deepened. "That leads me to another one. I hope you don't bruise easily, love, because I also have a different type of nightmare, and I lash out during those."

"What is the subject of those nightmares, may I ask?"

Kendra smiled even as she hugged herself in an attempt to grow smaller. "You'll need to know, beautiful, if only to know what *not* to do, like trying to hold me down to stop my thrashing." She barked a laugh. "I actually threw an adult Vulcan doctor several feet when I had one of these nightmares. He tried to hold me down. I fought back." She shivered. "Even today, people try to blame my being a lesbian on these incidents, but I knew I was a lesbian before the... the rapes. Hell, if the rapes were changing my orientation, then I wouldn't look at anyone sexually. My father's brother 'took a shine to me', as they say in my neck of the woods."

Kendra was pacing the room nervously. "My father, may he rot in hell forever, actually did come from what some morons think of as the standard Kentucky hillbilly family. There was him, his brother, and two sisters, his mother, and his father. His mother was also his aunt, if you catch my meaning. Even with my own mother also being my aunt, I somehow managed to avoid any number of horrible bits of inbreeding. Apparently, the gods decided I was special, because my genetics are almost perfectly clean." She stopped, closing her eyes, and gasped a tiny little sob. "Anyway, to explain my nightmares. Uncle Sonuvabitch and Cousin Cu...no, let's be Latin about it...Cousin Vagina used to take me out in the woods. They enjoyed staking me down and having their way with me." She hugged herself tighter. "I never understood where they got the duranium from to make tent pegs, but I know where the cuffs came from, since 'Daddy' was the local sheriff."

She stopped trying to shrink in on herself, and stood straight, fists clenched. "I left my family the day I had the abortion. I explained in extreme detail to the authorities exactly who the father was, and who was involved. Rather a scandal for the local sheriff, wouldn't you say? Well, 'Daddy', Uncle, and Cousin all went to prison. Cousin Vagina is the only one still alive, and she's constantly on the receiving end now. 'Daddy' and Uncle were, too, but they didn't exactly survive prison." Kendra sneered, the raw hatred marring her beautiful face; making it ugly. "Boo-fucking-hoo."

She took a deep breath, and the hatred slowly faded. "I still relive the rapes, my love. Therapy and counseling have never helped me."

"I understand the logic of not attempting to restrain you, since it would simply cause the nightmare to feed upon itself."

"Exactly." She looked at T'Mir, fear creeping into her face. "Are you still willing to be around me?"

"These rapes happened before you entered Academy, correct?" When Kendra nodded, T'Mir simply said, "Then you have nothing to fear. It was a part of you when I developed my attraction to you, so logic states that it should make no difference." Kendra opened her mouth, but T'Mir raised a finger to note that she wasn't finished. "This is a case where logic and the heart agree perfectly. I loved you before I knew you were a lesbian, and before I knew you had experienced rapes in your life. Now knowing both, the first delights me, and the second makes no difference to me. You are still the woman I love."

Kendra collapsed into a nearby chair in obvious relief. "I didn't think it was possible to love you more than I already did, T'Mir." She shook her head. "I just wish that I had some way of getting rid of these damned nightmares. They do nothing for me, other than destroy my peace of mind for the next day. It's not like I actually have anything to fear from any of them ever again, either."

T'Mir's mouth quirked downward. "What's wrong, T'Mir?"

"I have a potential for some relief, but it involves a strong degree of selfishness on my part." A full frown appeared on T'Mir's face. "And it would seem to move our relationship far faster than is prudent."

"What are you talking about?" Kendra asked.

"Bonding. We perform a bonding ceremony, wherein you and I would be linked from that moment on."

Kendra sat back in the chair, thinking deeply. When she sat up suddenly, she saw the signal that T'Mir was amused. She looked down and realized why T'Mir was amused – when she'd connected what the bonding ceremony really meant, her nipples had chosen to salute the inside of her brassiere, which was the same material as T'Mir's robe. She chuckled herself and said, "Correct me if I'm wrong, my dear, but this would put us closer than human married couples, correct?"

"Yes. For as long as either of us is alive, assuming we kept the link that long, the other would *know* beyond any possibility for error that the other was alive. This would certainly make the likelihood of you having nightmares about killing me almost nonexistent. When you begin to have the rape dream, I could come in and remind you that it is not real."

Kendra blushed. "The fact that it would put us so close is the selfish part, isn't it?"

"Yes. Bonding ceremonies are not to be taken lightly, yet I suggest it so."

"I don't think so," Kendra said demurely. "You're not the type to consider getting married lightly."

"Truly. I have wished this for years, which is why I distrust the suggestion now."

"Whereas I would have gladly married you at the Academy. Is it a legal marriage?"

"Perhaps somewhere, but not on Vulcan, and certainly not on Earth. It is more a statement of strong intent to remain together. There are those who feel that the bonding is enough, and never seek the legal, civil contract."

"Well, my love, someday I want to walk down the aisle with you, making it legal, but I will gladly marry you before God and Goddess, professing our love to the universe that way. We can ask Captain Picard to perform the legal ceremony at some later point. I think he'd enjoy that."

"You are sure, Kendra?" Kendra's answer was to kiss her tenderly on the lips, and pull her into an embrace, resting her head on T'Mir's shoulder. *Heh, I didn't know I kissed that well*, she thought as she realized that she could hear T'Mir's heartbeat. *Bit fast for a Vulcan*. Breaking the embrace, she asked, "What is required on my part?"

T'Mir's fingertips came up to Kendra's face. Kendra closed her eyes, and T'Mir's gentle touch sent a thrill through her that she knew both of them would enjoy later. *What is required on your part, beloved one, is a willingness to bond with me*. T'Mir gasped as the full force of Kendra's feelings for her flooded the link. *Oh, my love! Cleansing laughter that Kendra knew would only ever be heard in her mind flowed around them both. Yes, my love. I shall be here until the end of life. My search for a bond-mate and wife has reached its conclusion, and we shall spend our days in the joys of each others souls*. A picture of herself suddenly flashed through Kendra's mind -an astonishingly beautiful image of someone at a forge, working diligently at something. Terribly delicate worlds populated an area for obviously finished works.

Is that how you see me, my only one? She blushed at the imagery suddenly, because she suddenly realized how revealing the outfit that 'she' wore was.

Yes. You show great passion for what you work on, be it your career or your love of art and sculpture. I have been building this image of you for many years. How do you see me, beloved?

Kendra blushed to her roots as the image of T'Mir flashed into her mind -an elf of ancient legend, terrible and beautiful, the wind blowing through her hair. Diaphanous scarves flowed around her in the wind, serving to accentuate the majestically nude form that could be nothing else than a goddess. She could feel T'Mir's passions rise slightly.

I see that you remember my skin rather clearly from our days when we roomed together in the Academy. I am pleased.

Well, so was I, came Kendra's reply, and she was rewarded with a deep throaty laugh, although it was purely in her mind. She felt T'Mir's fingertips leave her face, and a sobbed whisper of "No!" escaped her lips.

I did not think we would require assistance in our bonding, my love. Kendra marveled as she realized that she could feel T'Mir with her still, even though they no longer touched physically.

"Yes, my love. I can feel you inside me as well, in a way only the truly blessed ever feel." A mischievous twinkle entered the Vulcan's eyes, and the robe dropped to the floor. "Now, would you care to see how good your memory is?"

As they lay in bed in the afterglow, bodies still touching, Kendra reached out and caressed T'Mir's face. "In public, we'll be a couple, but we'll be more Vulcan about it, okay?"

"If that is what you wish, beloved."

Kendra blushed. "Given what we just learned about our link and sex, I think it's safest. I'm going to end up losing my puritanical image, but I don't want to do it by taking you on one of the tables in Ten Forward."

An impish smile came onto the blushing Vulcan's face. "Why not?"

Kendra looked at her for a minute before answering. "Give me a while on that one. I know there's supposed to be a good reason, but for the life of me, I can't think of it right now." She laughed. "I have only one more question that comes to mind, though T'Mir, and I can't come up with a good answer."

"If I can tell you, I will, beloved."

"Good." She looked her lifemate in the eyes and asked, "I'm just curious -bunny slippers?"