

I wasn't going to do this; in fact, I was tired and just wanted to go to bed. I was having one of those days you see, one where emptiness permeates everything one does. I didn't want to think or anything. My books didn't appeal to me. TV was a bore. Even my critters failed to bring amusement, and that takes something. So I figured what the heck. I put on some music, a wide variety of everything I own hogging 10 gigs or so on the hard drive. For some reason the computer chose mostly mellow stuff. I was listening with half an ear, one eye on the clock counting the minutes until it was feasible to go to bed, when a song played and caught my full attention. It was just what I needed to perk me up. It was soft, mellow, like I was feeling, but vastly romantic, and for the first time in a while I felt like writing sap. So thanks to Monica for this one, because though she introduced the song to me and I've listened to it a half dozen times, it never sparked my imagination before.

Beta'd by Monica. Thank her because she insisted I post it too...

Considered the third and final in the Dance Series, but could probably stand alone. Enjoy! Parts 1 and 2 were written before season three, with every intent of being wrapped up going into the Expanse. Though I enjoyed much of season three, I could not see the story line developing in the Expanse and ditched the original idea. This song helped me make the connection.

Music: Dance by Mario Frangoulis, lyrics at end of story.

Standard disclaimers: Story is mine, characters are not.

Dance of the Heart

By Kat
PG

I hate parties; the muss and the fuss, and the gossip and flare. It all feels fake somehow, as if all the pretty clothes and fancy hairstyles cover up what's important. It's all about who you know and how you fit in, in essence a bunch of silliness. In this case a bunch of silliness to celebrate the signing of an agreement for the Federation. I'd rather celebrate with a few friends then dress up in a monkey suit and party. I don't want to party. I want to curl up with an excellent bottle of scotch and mourn the passing of a good friend.

It doesn't feel right without Trip here. It certainly doesn't feel right that the Enterprise is going to become a museum and her crew is going to be disbanded. Who would have thought this is where we would be after 10 years of exploration. Ah well, if I go down that road, then I have to remember all the adventures and all the risks, the good and the bad, the loved and lost. So many over the years and still I can't regret it. Not even with the loss of an old friend.

Bah... I'm melancholy tonight and by rights. I've issued in a new era and feel a hundred years older for it. I'm weighed down by responsibility and grief, and I don't see a point to this tonight. I don't see a point to much of anything. I feel like a ghost, caught between two worlds. I'm floundering, trying to find where I belong. I tug at the collar of

my suit, which has seemed too stiff all night. Who came up with this plan anyway? Who decided we must celebrate and make nice? Who decided it was to be a formal black and white ball? I tug at my collar again and wonder if anyone will notice if I slip away. As I glance around the room, my eyes make contact with a dozen people and I know escape is beyond me. I will do what I must then, and leave as soon as it is possible.

The music is bright tonight, festive and sparkling like the stars. It fits and yet it doesn't. There is too much light and too much sound. It hits me then that I need to see the stars. To feel that familiar comfort, to be a part of something bigger than myself, to remind myself of things that are bigger than what I am thinking and feeling at this moment. The balcony leads to the gardens in the back of Starfleet headquarters. The music is softer here, more bearable. The air is fresh and clean and cool. The gardens are breathtaking at night, but the stars are even better. They twinkle down at me and make me think of better things, exploring, learning, living... friendship. Science teaches us that the light we see from those glorious stars takes a very long time to reach us. That even as we look up, the stars we see may no longer be alive and all that reaches us is a memory of something brilliant and beautiful. They make me think of Trip and the times we shared. I lift my drink in toast. "May the stars lead you home old friend." As I take a drink, a soft sound catches my ear and I turn. What I see is even better than the stars and steals every thought from my head but wow.

T'Pol is out here too, staring at those same stars. Black velvet covers her in graceful sweeps of cloth. Her shoulders and throat are bare. I don't think I've ever seen her in something so wonderfully feminine. It is a beautiful gown and one so very human, provocative and yet perfectly respectable. It makes me see her as a woman, something I've tried to forget for a very long time. It is a curious sensation, and eases some of the melancholy. I wonder if she is just as frustrated as me about being here. In all the years I've known her, I've never known her to be comfortable at these affairs.

There is a look in her eyes I recognize, a sadness that echoes my own and I remember she lost a friend as well. That thought makes me feel better for some reason. Perhaps it's just that I know someone is as connected as I to the lost ones. Or perhaps it goes back to something else, a bond of friendship and grief shared. The last time I lost someone this important to me, I tried to go off and brood, and it was T'Pol who pulled me out of it. She insisted on joining me, and in explaining my grief and my friend, I ended up celebrating his life rather than mourning the loss of it. I wonder if we can do that for Trip, find a way to celebrate his life. How do you honor a man who gave his life for yours? How do you pay homage to the spirit that is and was friendship?

I move closer to her and shrug a little self-consciously. "You look lovely tonight."

"Thank you." The words are soft, more of a polite reply than any true interest in talking. I wonder how long she will humor me.

"It was too stuffy inside, too festive. I just wanted to be alone for a bit."

Her eyes turn back to the stars and her hands curl on the rail. “Yes. It is quieter out here.”

I follow her example and look up to the sky. Silence reigns for several moments as I find the familiar patterns remembered from childhood. She seems no more inclined to leave than I do. Perhaps she is drawing as much comfort from me as I am her. “I was thinking of Trip and wishing he was here.”

“He will be missed.”

“Yeah...yeah he will.” Why is it that statement makes me think of other things? Things that were long forgotten... well maybe not forgotten, but forcibly locked away because they were inappropriate at the time... because other things always forced their way forward and in our way, other things that maybe shouldn't have been allowed to push aside a budding relationship.

Perhaps it is the night or the music or the very uncertainty of the future we face that makes me remember back, back to a time when life seemed more about seeking the possibilities than dealing with the realities. I remember dancing. It seems so long ago, nearly eight years now. A daydream and a party, a dance and a dancing lesson, conversations and kisses... and I wonder at the appropriateness of it now. I remember the newness of possibilities and the impossible intrusion of conflict, a battle not chosen or sought, that slowly ate away everything I held close except the mission. My eyes close at the memories. They are mine and now they are painful. Pushing away that which I loved, even then and walking away, allowing another to move into my place. That relationship seemed to stand staunchly in the friendship phase as well, and all of us, connected by things seen, known and even unspoken chose to carefully lock the door on the deeper emotions surrounding us and to live in the now. The now, however, seemed exceptionally lonely. I want more now. I want to pull those rusty doors open and test the shadows to see if there was anything left. Even as I thought it, I knew there was. Why else would she have allowed me to hug her? Or was it wishful thinking on my part? The shadows surround me and pull me back into doubt. Should I hold tight or let go? Grabbing the light of my beliefs, I step forward. Only by communicating will I know, otherwise I can drown myself in what ifs. “I hope I didn't offend you this afternoon. I would apologize for invading your personal space, but I needed to hug you. It just...” So much for communication.

“No, it took me off guard, but you did not offend me.”

“Good.” Way to go, Romeo. Why is it I can give a speech but I can't say a few simple words? Why is it so hard to just ask her if she remembers, if she still feels? Because rejection sucks. “I needed to connect with someone today, someone who understood me and what I was thinking, going through. Thank you. It was a comfort to me.” And it reminded me of how much I liked having you in my arms...

“It gave me comfort as well, Captain.”

Tag... Captain and formality... "I'm not your Captain anymore. I would like to think I am your friend too."

"You have always been my friend. I've never doubted that, or forgotten."

Forgotten, was I hearing more than she was saying? Wishful thinking? I close my eyes, thinking. I came out here to get away from the crowd and think of Trip, and now all I can think about is the woman next to me. Is that wrong? I don't want to betray his memory, and yet I can't seem to think beyond the moment. What is it that makes my life more important than his, that he should sacrifice himself for me? Did he know? Would he have wanted me to take this chance? To celebrate my life in the best way I could? Oh I don't know. I think I have to try. She is such a special creature, one to touch both our lives. The exotic scent that is uniquely her washes over me and time stands still. Everything around me seems amplified, visible in ways I never imagined. The music changes, and catches my ear. It's softer, mellower, yet still joyous and powerful. It pulls me and makes me want things I haven't wanted in a long time. I move closer, holding out a hand. My eyes lock on hers. "Dance with me, please."

I can tell by her look that she isn't sure where the request came from. I remember again a dancing lesson giving what seems a hundred years, but I haven't danced with her since. I'd forgotten how much I love to dance, how much I loved dancing with her. I'd put that part of me on hold to do the things I needed to do, and somewhere along the line forgot the important things, like how I feel about her. Perhaps she feels sorry for me, or perhaps she too seeks the comfort of someone who understands. It doesn't matter why, just that she steps into my arms and allows me to pull her close. I wonder if she remembers. I wonder if she still feels all the things we discussed. I wonder if she knows how I feel. Again it doesn't matter. All that seems to matter at this point is the woman in my arms and the way she feels in them. It's like magic all over again, comfort, a celebration of life. Our lives. I hold her close and close my eyes as we twirl around the floor.

Let's dance as if nobody's watching, sing as if no one is listening, love as if we've never been hurt before, try to forget if we can and just dance...

Yes, that's it precisely. I don't want to party and socialize. I really don't want to grieve. I want to do just what I am doing, sharing a dance with a beautiful woman, one I've cared for forever. Nothing matters but this moment and the friend we shared. I don't know where this will go and that's okay with me. The silence surrounds us as the music ends. Such a brief interlude, and yet she seems no more willing to move than I am. My arms are still around her and hers around me. An arch of light catches my eye and my gaze turns briefly back to the sky. The star seems to take its time falling and reminds me of Trip. I wonder if that's him, giving his approval. I choose to take it as such and guide her into a dance once more.

Fin~

Lyrics: Dance

*I see those vulnerable eyes;
They're as deep as the darkest of oceans
I sense the loneliest heart
Holding back your fragile emotions
I feel you want to let go
Inside of my arms just know you're safe,
with me...*

*Let's dance like there's nobody watching, sing as if no one is listening
to what you're hearing
Love like you've never been hurt before
Try to forget if you can
and just dance.*

*I've known the coldest of nights
Lay awake trying to stop myself dreaming
There in the emptiest space,
In my head the music's stopped playing
Right now all I want to do
Is lose myself in you and be,
just be...*

*Let's dance like there's nobody watching,
Sing as if no one is listening
to what your hearing,
Love like we've never been hurt before
Try to forget if we can
and just dance.*

*Why don't we dance and pretend we know how to fly
Like we've never been scared of heights,
no fear of falling.
Love like we've never been hurt before and forget if we can...
and just dance.*