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Gleaming silver walls blurred as she ran through the halls of Enterprise. Laughter bubbled out of her. She was free, spinning and twirling as she tumbled through the door of the cargo bay. One hand reached out, lightly slapping the back of her brother's head as she shouted. "You're it!" She darted away as the boy took chase, and a bevy of little girls squealed and scrambled out of his reach.

Tag was a favorite game for the children of Enterprise. The converted cargo bay was a joyous place, filled with toys and swings and things for young people to climb on. There was even a huge mat on the floor in the corner of the room so they could tumble and roll. This was their space, their haven.

A giggle spilled from her lips as she spun away from an outstretched hand. Her hair flew around her, the multicolored ribbons twined through it, shimmering like a rainbow. Despite the peace and comfort of it, it didn't feel right and she stumbled to a stop. Her head tipped as she watched Zack crawl/chase the Tucker girls around the bay. He could catch the littler ones easily if he wanted, but he ran after them with exaggerated steps, his face twisted in a mock growl. It occurred to her in that moment that sound was gone, all except her own breathing. As she watched, the door to the bay opened and in walked her father. As the image blurred around her she realized it wasn't really happening, but a memory; a bright moment that had turned horrible. That day of tag had been the one where her father had informed them they were going to spend some time with the Vulcans.

Pain blossomed in her chest and the walls of memory fell away. She was floating in the blackness of space, cold, alone, and then she was freefalling, into memory once more. Zack was lying on the floor before her, still, silent, blood pouring from the wound on his temple. She knew she should be silent. Sorka would not appreciate her interruption and her brother was breathing, for all that he was lying there. Still, his sneer irritated her and she spoke, once more allowing her temper to rule her actions. She stepped forward, crouching in a fighting stance. "Leave him alone. Damn you! Just leave him alone. He doesn't have to be a warrior. He is just a little boy! Why don't you fight someone your own size?"

The Satorian stared at her, amazed at her audacity. He could see she was challenging him. *How dare she, a little bit of a girl?* "You would challenge me, Trata?" One brow rose in mocking salute.

Her chin lifted in stubborn response. Fingers flexed in anticipation. Time slowed, seeming to stop as she realized this was it, her moment of truth. She debated only a second then took the initiative. If she was going to die, then she was going to go down fighting. Emotion slid away. As calm settled over her, she found herself running forward. He came at her as she expected, and she

twisted, her right leg flying out and catching him in the face. The sharp crack of bone echoed through a room suddenly silent. She had no time to savor that small victory as it hadn't stopped him. His fist flew out, catching the side of her head and knocking her to the floor. She barely had time to take in the startled faces of the camp's inhabitants as she rolled away. If Sorka got a hold of her, the fight would be over before it started. Her eyes scanned quickly and she scrambled to her feet. Sorka was a sight, blood pouring from his nose as he grinned at her.

Circling him slowly, she waited for him to move this time. Clarity surrounded her. Pain throbbed, but seemed more an annoyance than hindrance. It was there, should have been sharper, but seemed lost in the need, the fight for survival. A movement caught her eyes and she noticed Grace hovering over Zack. Someone had pulled him out of the line of fire when the fight had begun and Grace was holding him. The boy was awake, and they were both watching with horror in their eyes. Relief flashed through her briefly and then her eyes were back on Sorka.

She kicked and punched, ducked and darted, and barely managed to stay clear of him. She was tiring quickly and he seemed more amused than anything. Chants of "Trata" echoed through the room. She couldn't tell if they were cheering her on, or condemning her, but no one made a move to interfere. It was her fight and her choice to take a stand. In some small part of her she was relieved. Death was not something she had ever seriously contemplated, but in her mind it was better than this captivity. The constant fear was eroding her belief in herself. She was no longer the cherished Pixie Archer. Instead she was a lost little slave in a world where she had no value. Some part of her recognized the death in Sorka's eyes. He had killed, and would do so again, unless she could find a way to stop him. Sweat dripped into her eyes, blurring the vision. It was a small thing, stinging, distracting, but enough to make her slow down. She didn't see that hand that came at her until it was nearly too late. She ducked it, jerking swiftly to the side. She came up short as his hand caught the whip long length of her braid as it flew out behind her. The pull of it forced her head back and she faced him, dropping into a defensive stance again. She heard a cry, and her eyes sought out Grace and Zack. She was well and truly caught. Death was staring her in the face, but she wasn't scared, fear seemed gone, resignation in its place. Her eyes blurred again, and for a moment she thought she saw the little Satorian child standing by Grace and Zack. She squinted. The child was there, a waking ghost. Her hand was resting on Grace's shoulder and tears slid down her little cheeks. Sorrow... her own personal sorrow, and so much of it for the things she wouldn't be able to do. Pressure increased in her skull and her attention focused back on Sorka. Resignation fled in an instant as she remembered her resolution to go down fighting. She would not be a defeated child who accepted her fate.

Breath froze, time slowed until everything seemed highlighted in finite detail. Sorka's grin seemed more amused than angry as his hand twisted in her braid,

drawing her closer. Fetid breath washed over her and the scent was that of death. Unlike most of her decisions up to this point, this moment was defining for both of them. Something would be settled tonight. It seemed as though she could count the seconds, process each move, and follow through in slow motion. She saw it all and couldn't understand why Sorka didn't. How could he not? She ducked into him, using the pressure he was exerting to increase her forward momentum. He wasn't expecting it and she used it to her advantage. She slid along his right side, dipping in and grabbing the vicious looking blade he wore at his hip. The shiny metal slid from the sheath with a sigh of pleasure. Power sang up her arm as she accepted the weight of it and pivoted. The pressure on her skull increased as he twisted the braid around his fist again in an attempt to control her. Pain was forgotten as the need for survival honed every instinct. Nothing seemed real, not the ghost child by Grace, her brother on the floor, or the situation she was in. Instinct and adrenaline ruled, guiding her actions, forcing her training into play. The first swipe of the knife cut through the taut braid like butter. The sudden freedom should have thrown her off balance, as it had Sorka, instead she shifted into it, using it to allow her to propel forward once more. The knife slid into his belly with a satisfying slurp. Her mind processed how easy it was, how unique the feel, and then she was pushing in and down, allowing her weight to assist in the drag, and praying the bright spray of blood indicated a mortal wound.

Blood coated her hands and face as the Satorian dropped like a stone. As he fell, she tumbled to the side. Her grip on the knife was anything but sure, but she refused to let it go. Slowly she stood over him. Shock slammed into her and she began to shake. She barely noticed as Grace wrapped her arms around her. She allowed the woman to lead her away. The men with their weapons drawn seemed as illusory as the child had been. She had won. Somehow she had won.

The soft patter of rain woke her long before the gentle wash of it coated her face. She stretched, ignoring the scratch of bark against her back. Moonlight streaked through the branches, casting an eerie green glow across the landscape. Raindrops twinkled like pale green gems as they fell, lending an air of magic to the atmosphere. For the briefest of instants she allowed herself to be enchanted. She was after all a Pixie, and enchanted forests were supposed to be her element. The cold rain and the rumble of her empty belly brought her quickly back to reality. Pixies don't survive long in captivity, she thought as she scanned the surrounding area. *Nothing on the ground... good.* She searched through the trees. She made a point of knowing where her boys were. She took pride in the fact that if she didn't know where they were she wouldn't be able to see them. She scratched idly at a dirty spot on her arm. All of them were coated with mud and leaves to better help them blend in. The mud was camouflage, insect repellent, and disguised their scent. Time lost all meaning as the days and nights flowed together. There was no way to mark time here in the forest. They

moved often, staying to the trees whenever possible. Everything they did was designed to help them hide. Her eyes moved to Aidan once more and she noted he was awake and aware. With a couple of quick hand motions she indicated he was to stay in the trees and keep an eye on Zack. As Aidan nodded, she began to climb down from her tree. She paused only a moment to watch Aidan shimmy further up his tree and across to another. As he disappeared from view, she continued her descent. It took longer than she would have liked, but stealth was everything, especially where the Satorians were concerned. The last branch she came to overlapped a stream, and she used it to ease into the water. The gentle splash was covered by the patter of rain. She moved slowly, using all her senses to search the area for any signs of humanoid life. The slither of a water snake caught her eye, and she froze, watching the ripples in the water as it swam away. A quick glance at the sky told her dawn was still several hours away. With another glance towards the boys, she waded downstream, looking for a quiet place to attend her personal needs.

Everything in her balked at the methods they had to take to escape detection. Water was their greatest ally, but she was beginning to hate it with a passion. She was so tired of being dirty, cold and wet. The rain was a nearly constant companion in this place, and while it tended to wash away most evidence of their existence, it also made things more difficult. The ultra soft soil sucked at their feet, leaving deep prints that filled with fluid. It also made it harder to see if their tracks had been covered. There had been more than one occasion where they had backtracked and found prints they thought had been covered. At the same time though, it made it easier to track the Satorians and to leave a false trail. The Satorians continued to underestimate them, and that was something in their favor.

A rustling in the brush caused her to snap to attention. She barely avoided any movement except that of her eyes, but it was a tough one. She noted a large feline-like creature drinking at the shoreline, and made a point of being still. The forest was full of predators, most of whom cased the waterline at night. The children disturbed as little of the habitat as possible and this seemed to suit the local wildlife as well. None of the creatures seemed overly aggressive, and there was plenty of easy prey for those inclined to hunt. For all their grunts and teeth and potential danger, the kids preferred the wildlife to the animals left behind. The creatures of the forest were instinctive, the need to eat, sleep, and protect their turf paramount. The children both understood and respected that, and used what they saw to help them survive. Most of the animals had grown accustomed to the children in their midst, but acted as an early warning system when a predator was around. The birds and the vegetarians showed them what plants could be harvested for food, nuts and berries and roots that were all part of their diet. But the survival rations, like the waiting and the water, were wearing them down.

A slight nibbling at her toes indicated another form of curious life. Fish was also a staple for the children, but one that was not preferred as it was usually

consumed raw. There was rarely anyplace safe or dry enough to build a fire. The water was fairly clear, with only the ripples from the raindrops distorting the view. She knelt, her hands catching the hem of her dress, moving with exquisite stealth, until her fingers could nearly tickle the curious fish's belly. Then, with a lightening fast move, her hands flew upward and together, catching the creature in an impromptu net. The low whistle of a night bird rent the air and she dropped low in the water, her eyes scanning the area. She moved slowly, allowing the water to cover her. Being careful not to splash, she maneuvered into a stand of brush near the bank. It was close to shore, but easier to get into than a tree. She let out a long slow whistle, mimicking another of the night birds. A trio of whistles blended into the cacophony of forest sounds, and she burrowed down, making herself as small as possible. The fish was freed and forgotten in a matter of seconds. Water lapped at her chin, leaves tickling her neck as she allowed both to shelter her. One hand came up to recoat her face with mud, as her feet and knees settled into the silt. Then she waited, nothing more than breath and eyes moving as seconds passed. She was rewarded for her patience as the rain increased, solidifying her shield.

Breath stopped as forms silhouetted the bank. She recognized Sorka in the group. Studying him with narrowed eyes, she searched for signs of weakness. She couldn't see any. If she hadn't inflicted the damage herself, she would never have known he suffered from a nasty knife wound. At the time, she thought she had gutted him, killed him, but Satorians were amazingly resilient. Fear skittered down her spine, but she fought it off. He would kill her if he got his hands on her, for she had humiliated him multiple times. Just as she knew her actions against him were her death sentence, she was just as determined to survive.

She stayed there, still and silent long after they left. She watched a washed out sun rise and a heavy downpour of rain fall. Even as a fifteen foot water serpent swam under her nose, she stayed still and waited. Time passed with agonizing slowness. Creatures drank leisurely at the edge of the stream, and still she waited. She could no longer hear the Satorians or smell them, but that didn't mean they weren't near. She waited, and then waited some more. She was cold, and tired, and so very frightened, but she was free. And because she was determined to stay that way, she waited. Worry for the boys was minimal. They were smart and knew to stay to the trees. They wouldn't move until she did, until she gave them some signal letting them know all was clear. When Grace had died, she had been designated leader. It was a task she took seriously.

Her heart fluttered at the thought of Grace, such a strong woman, and one more of the dead to haunt her in this hellish place. It seemed her world was now filled with ghosts; memories of things that used to be, and people as well. Her eyes closed tightly as the wish that this were just a dream nearly drowned everything else out of her head. Wishing wouldn't make it so, she had learned. People changed things, not wishes, and there was more blood on her hands than she could believe possible.

Her palms itched as if the thought could recoat them. Her fingers twitched in the water and as the fluid slipped between her fingers, it seemed to change, becoming hot and sticky. Her breath stuttered in her throat and her eyes squeezed tighter. Unbidden the memory flowed forth, and she could smell that slightly metallic scent. Tears slid down her cheeks. She had cried when Grace had died too. Memory surrounded her, as substantial as the water she hid in, and she let it.

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