

[See Chapter 1/title page for disclaimers and rating](#)

A loud splash drew her back to the present. Zack stood before her, his eyes concerned. Aidan stood off to the side. She was startled she had allowed them to get so close. She took a moment to scan her surroundings, praying they were alone before she blasted them. “You are supposed to stay in the trees!”

Zack blinked, shocked by the anger in her voice. “I was worried about you. You haven’t moved for hours, and the Satorians are long gone now.”

T’Lin grabbed her brother’s shoulders and shook him slightly. “Never, never come looking for me Zack. Ever!” Her eyes cut to Aidan. “The same goes for you. They will kill me if they find me, and they would use you both to get to me. You have to be smarter than they are. I need you to be smarter than they are. No matter how scared you are, or how worried you are, you two have to take care of each other.”

“But Pix, I have to take care of you too.” He tried not to flinch under her stare.

Her grip eased somewhat, but not the intensity in her eyes. “I know Sprite, but the best way you can take care of me is to take care of yourselves. I need to know you will protect yourselves. If I can’t trust you to take care of yourselves, then I might as well give myself up to the Satorians now.”

Zack chewed on his lower lip. “But…”

She shook him again for emphasis. “No buts. They will not kill either of you. You are too valuable to them. But they will kill me. They know I will never leave you behind and I promise you here and now I won’t.” She took a moment to meet both sets of eyes before continuing. “If you want to protect me you have to listen to me. Stay quiet, stay in the trees, and stay together, but don’t ever come looking for me.”

Zack fought back the tears that threatened to fall. He didn’t want to be strong and he didn’t want to listen, but he understood what she was saying. “I promise, Pix.”

As she released him, her eyes went to Aidan again. The boy looked so solemn. “Aidan?”

Aidan closed his eyes, fear welling up inside him. He didn’t want to listen, but he didn’t know what he would do if she died like his mother. He nodded slowly. “Stay quiet, stay to the trees and stay with Zack. I promise too, Pixie.”

“All of it Aidan...you won't come looking for me again?”

The words caught in his throat, but he managed to spit them out. “I promise.”

“Okay... If we ever are separated, I want you guys to go back to wherever we camped the night before. If it isn't safe there, then keep backtracking. I will find you, I promise. And I also promise to stay hidden and keep myself safe, just so you won't have to worry. In fact, when I approach, I'll whistle.” She let out a low sound, followed by two shrill chirps. The boys responded with another familiar sound they had picked up in the forest, to which Pixie repeated her whistle. “I will repeat that sound three times. If I don't get a response from you, I'll eventually come looking.” She drew the boys close. “Daddy will come for us; we just have to stay alive until then.” As she said it, she prayed it was true.

The lack of rain was the first sign that she was dreaming again. She was in her woods, but sunlight sparkled through the trees. It wasn't weak sunlight either, but sharp and bright, forcing everything into glaring detail. She would take the dream though and its comfort, for it was far better than the nightmares she had been carrying. Turning in a slow circle, she looked around. Never had she seen so many shades of green, or so many colors. Flowers, previously unseen, stretched and opened, begging for a moment of life-giving light. Moisture glistened on the leaves of the trees around her, making a soft plopping sound as they landed in the puddles below. There was other noise too, a strange silence filled with sound, usually covered by the patter of rain. The sharp chirping of insects sang in harmony with the trickle of the stream. Closing her eyes, T'Lin tipped her face to the sun and soaked in the warmth. The boys' location fluttered briefly through her mind, but she pushed it aside, content to just be for the moment. The peace was comfortable and she wanted to stay there, but it was not to be. A sound, like footsteps, caught her attention and her eyes fluttered open, automatically searching out the sound. Her heart beat in a rapid tattoo as she found the source. *Mother... I am dreaming again of mother.* Afraid to move, she made eye contact with her mother, waiting.

T'Pol stepped forward. Her brow arched slightly as she took in the form standing there so still. “I've been searching for you... every night since I saw you last. I'm glad I finally found you again.”

T'Lin shook her head. “This is just a dream Mommy, just like last time. It's just my dream.” She raised a hand to cup a bright pink blossom on the bush near her. Pulling it to her nose, she inhaled its perfumed fragrance. It smelled strangely of the incense her mother burned when meditating. “At least you've brought beauty with you, and sunlight. I'm so tired of the rain.”

T'Pol stepped closer, unsure how to react to the girl. Her eyes flowed over her oldest child. She barely seemed a child anymore. Gone was the form of a little girl. Rather a young woman stood before her. The innocence of childhood no longer danced in those beautiful hazel eyes. Knowledge had taken up residence there, and grief. It saddened her to see it. Was it something she could still change? Somehow she doubted it. "If I am just a dream, why push me away. I have missed you."

T'Lin glanced up at her mother. Tipping her head to the side, she studied her as if trying to find something real. "I miss you too, Mommy." She whirled suddenly, in an angry circle. As she spun, her fist clenched around the blossom, ripping it free. Moisture leaked around her fingers from the bruised petals in a parody of blood. "It's not real! None of this is real! There is no beauty, no sun, and no you! I hate this place and I hate you for sending me here!" Anger shimmered in her eyes, when they met T'Pol's again. She threw the crushed flower on the ground and stomped on it. "There is no point in this, no point in hoping or believing because there is nothing to believe in. We are here and you are wherever you are and you aren't coming for us. I've accepted that." She paused. The sky was darkening as if in response to her mood. Her voice softened to a whisper, the anger gone. "I live in shadows and dreams now, Mommy, and I don't have time for dreams because the shadows are everywhere. We will die here." She turned from T'Pol and started walking back into the denser growth of forest.

"Wait! Please wait! Don't walk away from me." T'Pol ran forward, catching the girl by her shoulders. "I let you walk away from me before. I can't do it again." She pulled her back into her and wrapped her arms tight, holding T'Lin close. "I am coming for you T'Lin. Your father and I will never rest until we find you. We love you so much."

"You sent us away!" Anger pushed to the front once more. "You sent us here!"

"No!" T'Pol held her tighter, as if she could somehow protect her with her will. "No. We never meant for this to happen. We have always loved you, always. You are a part of us, you and Zack Henry. We could never abandon you. You are necessary to our existence. Your father and I, we don't know ourselves without you. We ache for you with every breath we take. We sent you away to protect you. That's all we wanted, to keep you safe. We never imagined you would be harmed. That is why we chose to send you to Soval. We thought he would be able to protect you better than anyone else."

T'Lin broke free of her hold with a gasp of fury. She spun to face her mother, fists clenched tightly at her sides. "You were supposed to protect us!"

T'Pol studied her daughter. This creature before her she barely knew, barely recognized. She didn't know how to handle the frustration bombarding her. For

a moment she transported back, to a time when this same girl had been a child, to the last time her child had told her she hated her. Her mind conjured up that image, that frightened child, and overlaid it on the young woman before her. *There she is, my baby... it's in the tip of the head and the posture, it's in her father's eyes... she's just afraid and striking out.* "Oh Pixie... I am so sorry. You are right. We were supposed to protect you. We made a mistake, your father and I. We thought we were doing what was best for you at the time, and we've lost you. We will find you though. We will never stop looking for you, never."

The anger faded as quickly as it began, and the girl slid to her knees. "It doesn't matter. It's not real, just a stupid dream." T'Lin started as comforting arms curled around her. "You're not real Mommy, please don't. I can't stand it."

"Shhhh... If I'm not real, if this is just a dream, then accept it and me. What harm is there in hope?"

"To hope is to be disappointed, it is not logical."

T'Pol rocked with the girl in her arms. "Perhaps not, but I am finding my logic is somewhat skewed these days. I could not survive without the hope that I will see you and your brother again someday. I keep meditating, hoping I will see you in this dreamscape, just so I can hold you and talk to you. There is no logic in it, but it is comforting. I will take what I can get and hold tightly to the rest. We will find you, Pixie. We get closer every day."

Tears slid silently down T'Lin's cheeks as she listened to her mother. She so desperately wanted to believe, to hope. "I'm so scared Mom. I don't know if I'm strong enough to do this. Zack and Aidan are so brave, but they are so thin. They don't laugh and play. Little boys should, you know? I don't want them to be little soldiers, but they can't be anything else. None of us can. Death stalks us here..."

"Hold on just a little longer, Pixie, please; just a little bit longer."

T'Lin nodded and snuggled deeper into her mother. "I'll try, but hurry okay? I don't like it here."

"Yes." T'Pol continued to hold her until the dreamscape faded.

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