

ISO

By Chris Underwood

Dearest Mother and Father,

By now I am sure you've heard that I have yet again been in the care of psychologists at Star Fleet Medical on Terra. What follows are my personal writings from during and after my period of care. I'm sure it makes little sense in places and Father will likely just remain expressionless, and maybe quip something like "She's your daughter" or some such, but well, I just can't maintain his Vulcan stoicism anymore. I guess the Rihanha in me just refuses to sit still anymore and I'm tired of fighting. Anyway, here it is. I Love You both.

–Se'ele

"Where am I?"

Star Fleet Behavioral and Psychological Services, San Francisco, Terra, Sol System. A place where Star Fleet officers and their families come for assistance with their "mental issues".

Katherine Foster. She recently lost her husband—a lieutenant, from what I have pieced together so far—on the St. Sebastian, a medical frigate out of Bola.

John Frankle. A science officer on the ill-fated Lonberge, all hands lost but himself in the newly-opened Denobli Expanse. Diagnosis: Psychotic.

Se'ele. Commander. Vulcan/Rihansu Hybrid. Former Executive Officer of the starship Avenger. Me. Homicidal, Suicidal, Brutal and Brutalized, Wicked and Afflicted. I am under observation.

Locked down in 'The Unit', my days waste away. Doctors come and ask questions, but expect only the shortest possible answers. If my answer is not on the list, they seem annoyed, upset. Good. The doctors make guesses, prescribing drugs to soothe my mind, block my telepathic abilities, but the medications do nothing for my heart or my soul. It has been four days and I have yet to speak with a counselor in any meaningful detail. So far a 20-minute interrogation and a cursory look at my medical history guide them. 20 minutes cannot begin to cover the depth of my instabilities. I find myself giggling amusedly at their inefficiencies as I read a copy of a 20th century novel to which I was introduced **before**.

I sleep when I tire of reading or when the side-effects of the medication claim me. Unless, that is, it's time for testing. Poked, prodded, scan and rescan, up on the bio-bed, feet in the stirrups, hold still. Then temperature and blood pressure after every meal.

There are significant quantities of native juices available, however. Little counseling, copious juice. My bladder is so full that I am frequently in the head when the staff come calling. Of course, this sometimes is convenient for them, for urine sampling by example.

All things considered, I cannot claim that it has been "fun", but the experience is insightful. You can't depend on others, only yourself. At least in this place. Or perhaps the staff here are simply tools, allowing themselves to be used when the time is right.

Today I asked to speak with a counselor one-to-one. Group counseling really has not been adequate for me. I am saddened to

hear the stories of others, but I do not think most of these others can relate to my pain, and they are not here to be my support system, anyway. Being the head of an Empress household which was part home, part brothel, part factory for sadists; allowing for the fact that I have murdered, singularly and en masse, and done far worse to the opened minds of my charges—damage so personal and intimate that it is doubtful they will ever be able surface from the prisons I have created for them in their own minds—perhaps it is better I cannot speak them aloud. No, my pain is far more personal than simple loss. And something I am not proud to have been responsible for.

I have a roommate now.

It's not that I object to its presence in "the Unit", but its presence here is so invasive. It has recently begun staring at me, inviting me to participate in conversation. I do not think it realizes that I am here **for reasons of my own**. For the same reasons I seem unable to share with the groups, I do not wish to share with It.

I do not feel that my desires on this issue are misplaced. The **doctors** are here to try and help us. It should seek **them** out for conversation or insight. After days of hearing that it is okay for me to do for myself, care for myself, I find **It's** presence counter to that edict.

If only I could get a nice long *warm* bath.

When under the aegis of my former mistress, a warm bath had been my only sanctuary. In the corners of my mind where everything I had been cringed, holding up arms in terror, warm soothing water calmed me, re-energized my meager defenses. Unfortunately, it was never enough to free me from the prison in my mind; Navaani was simply too strong.

Dinner. The time when I am forced to co-mingle with the other patients.

Vernetia. Tall, lithe, human of nubian descent. Full of rage and anger, she would have made an excellent battalion commander in her Empress' forces. Her softer side, her vulnerability, though, which would have required expunging, I find accessible. In her, I find reasons to care for those like her, like me, and it should be noted that I have clasped her hand on more than one occasion to help her through. She needs to find the strength to stand, not on others, but with others. To realize she does not need always to rail against the world in which she lives. She gives me the capacity not to completely dismiss the others in this "Unit".

Still, I feel as if I am more "on-staff" here in this respect. The helper, not the helped. Perhaps this is my true nature?

Who am I? What do I want? Is there anything worth living for?

Poignant questions uttered from the beginning of time surely by every sentient. Is it my destiny to ever know the answer? Or is my life but the seeking of the answer to these questions? In finality, will I find them? Am I meant to know the answers? To know my purpose? Have I served it already? Is there a reason to persist, or am I allowed to enjoy my time as it persists until the fall of night?

I think too much.

Being partially Vulcan, perhaps this too is in my nature. But I am also part Rihannsu. Passion is also, then, of my nature. Perhaps I seek the union of Passion and Thought; Passionate Thought. Love.

In love, there is passion and thought, joy and pain, pleasures of the light and of the dark. Everything and nothing in splendid fleeting moments. In the twist of the wrist holding a fine brush, in the subtle changes of colors as the dawn's light plays upon the hair of a lover. The look in the eyes of unconditional care and devotion to you, from you, because and in spite of you. For you in that precious moment to capture and behold within for all time immemorial.

Is this that which is worth all of the pain of birth and growth? The object of destiny, war, desire, peace and art? Do we seek these things or are we bound to them as by the atoms which combine to form the water that we drink, the air that we breathe? And if this be true, then why should not love be as vitally important as the air or the water? Why do they seek to tell us we are obsessed, out of balance? Why do we seem without purpose?

"Is this all that I am? Is there nothing more?" then-Commander Spock commented, prior to the consummation between Captain Decker and the V'ger entity. Are these statements, a question of purpose, not also a question of passion and if so, questions of the very heart of what it is to be within the folds of Love?

Day 5.

They switched my medication today. The previous antidepressants did **not** have the *desired* effect. The previous medication I felt crawling in my head, like someone trying to foist an alien personality upon me. The current medication is transparent to my sensorium. So much the better. The last thing I require right now is *something else* penetrating my being, smothering my control. My sense of self.

I was taken to speak with the Doctor's aides today. My "treatment team", some of them, two anyway. The woman, Allie Crenshaw, human, dark haired, permed into curls, and a male, Asian, exceedingly kind, which is why I find not remembering his name a travesty.

As asked, these took their time to sit with me and to listen to what I had to say, freeform, in my own words. I do not think I have related the entirety of my problems to them, but I illuminated so many of the key ones.

They agreed with my initial conclusion that now, knowing the whole story, they had a much better insight into my needs and my issues. Which, as I commented, is always the case when one hears the whole story from beginning to conclusion.

Stark awareness! A pointillistic spew edging toward full resolvable images of things seen which cannot be seen. Memories of

the physical; of lust, of a lifestyle no more viable as the breathing of ice from the wind. Still alive in memory as the wind.

DAMN! Why does It stare?

It asks me for something to write with, for It too wishes to record Its expression, Its personal daze. But why must It persist in pestering **me!**? I am in as much need as It. I have boundaries, which It refuses to recognize! Borders that shift only for those who know where to pass, and It does not. Will not. Ever! Pester me not, Shell of being. Your presence is not wanted here!

Though, does It not seek the same questions as I? How will I know, if I never venture? If I never engage Its being? Perhaps, is it wrong for me to deny It, Its connection toward me? But do not I have the right to keep my own counsel? To refuse others at the gate?

Perhaps I do. But this too shall be loosed only in semi-solitude, for Its mere presence, thing, puts me on edge, pushes me far from center, focusing my attentions without instead of within. I need a single room.

Day 6.

SAMAT! It is far too early to disturb my slumber. Peaceful or otherwise, I have set persons upon pikes for less. And this cheer! Why are some of the orderlies so set upon being, no, exuding this nearly manufactured version of happiness? I cannot recount the number of times this has come to annoy in the past several days. Perhaps it is simply that I dislike being patronized.

Did I just say "samat"? *Damn*, It seems I have more work to do absolving the Empress influence than I imagined.

Day 8

I wait for a transport to a step-down facility in New Orleans. Today I am being released into the care of friends. They assure me that I need nothing so much as a home-cooked meal and the feeling of safety and security... and a very long soothing bath. They have scented bath oils, English Garden.

Allison stopped me in the hall on the way to my room. She wanted to tell me that she was sorry for her minor misstep in regards to client/patient confidentiality. She had mentioned this before when she was forced to share certain information with the oversight doctors, but I hold nothing against her. It felt good to get this weight off my chest, both from what happened before and what happened to bring me to her care.

I said goodbye to her and Toh (remember the Asian male I mentioned?) and assured them that their listening made all the difference. I wanted to give her a hug, and I think she did, too, but it just seemed inappropriate, what with everyone about. A hand-shake, comfortingly firm but soft, was all to be afforded, but it was thank you nonetheless.

My friends are here. Time to go.

They were right; a home-cooked meal was just what the body ordered. Human food is not something I have eaten any more often than other exotic cuisine, but there is something about this "Turkey-esque" and "Mashda Potatoes" that I find soothing. Not to mention filling; I half gorged myself on them in fact. My friends, of course, wanted me to eat more than I had, but two plates were more than sufficient. And besides, the fact that even after three

meals per day and all the juice I could wish for back at “the Unit”, my stomach seems to have actually shrunk anyway.

I’m tired now. We’re going to put on a vid, but I think I’m going to be asleep before it ends. Either way, I believe I’m going to start sounding like a “Highland-Wench” from the thick accents of the vid itself. May D’era help me.

Day 9

Yes, Mother! In order to find as fine a Rihanha as myself, one is forced to conversing with D’era!

It is not a literal transcription from the vid, but it gets the point across far better. Yes, as if I hadn’t spent all that time trying to rid myself of accents when learning Federation Standard, this highland brogue is just too easy in its infective qualities. Perhaps it’s better that this letter or log or well... whatever this is, is written... You’d laugh at the sound of my voice otherwise, I’m sure. My friends are howling, probably because my Rihannsu dialect crops up on occasion when I’m doing it.

At the moment, things are simply luxurious. Remember that drawn bath I mentioned? I took it today. Three hours submerged in water and scented “bubble soaps”. The scent was quite pleasant and the warmth was like that in the air when we visited the T’keth hot springs on T’Khasi. My skin was quite green and over-moisturized but I didn’t mind it one bit. After eight days of taking baths and showers in temperature-deficient water, this was close to “divine”.

Underwire –I never realized how much I missed it. Today I put on a bra that didn’t have the underwire removed and therefore ruined, and I love the feeling of proper support again. Star Fleet-issued bras are functional, but they fail in many ways, in that essentially they restrict natural movement of the breast a great deal, as no officer ever knows when they may be literally on the run. I can’t blame the idea, though; many is the time I was thankful not to have an aching chest after running, climbing, and tumbling all over the ship or the surface of some alien planet. Still, though, comfortable they aren’t; and pretty, absolutely not. I like my individuality and I’m happy to have a bra that contributes to my comfort **and** my sense of personal beauty. I’ve got to pick up some more clothes soon, though; I wasn’t planning to be on Earth and, quite frankly, most of my clothes these days are pretty dark. I think some color and a change in personal styles isn’t out of order. In fact, I will be dyeing my hair later this afternoon.

Later my friends are scheduled to return and then we will sit down to dinner. I believe we are also meeting another friend and going in search of fabrics, as the youngest daughter of the house maintains an avid interest in sewing and re-decorating her personal chambers.

Panic attacks. These, to quote the humans, “SUCK”.

I’m in the middle of one now and it is absolutely, positively, no fun whatsoever. My hands are shaking, and I keep looking about for an attack that I know isn’t coming. The fabric store trip was fun; it allowed me to bond with several daughters of the house. We returned, consumed dinner, spaghetti “wagonwheels”, and made the decision to trot out once more before the shops closed for another stab at the fabric hunt, the previous one going somewhat well comparatively.

This second shop we reached before closing, just. Immediately I felt beset by fear. It wasn’t full-on, but that damn anxious fear that, at any moment, I might be discovered. I half expected my

shapeshifting crewmate to pop up. But that was irrational; she’s light-years away from here.

So we’re again at home, watching vids, and I am being quite silent about this development. I need to be able to control this.

Day 10

The day was uneventful, I watched vids and ate spartanly. I logged onto the comm-network and checked the planet’s events.

Another one’s come, another panic attack. It’s so late, so tiring. The lights are out, I’m unable to get comfortable, unable to breathe properly. My friend, she hugged me before, asked me if I was okay. Again, I lied. I need to handle this thing. Tomorrow I’m out of here and I won’t have a net. If I can’t handle this now, then I have no hope on my own.

It is much like the air around here is gelatinizing about me. I’m pulling my hair back now, it’s getting caught on something and it feels like some *thing* is grasping me by the head.

Must fight it. Mustn’t freak out. Mustn’t cry out. Mustn’t.

Just talk to myself, write to myself, note this down for those who can’t see, for myself for later, to tell those I cannot tell outright. To save myself. Or simply to calm myself with the only voice in my head now, my own.

...

I think it’s working...

Day 11

What can I say? Today I go to an arranged domicile before I ship out. My friends have been communicating for me with Star Fleet and today I received the confirmation I was hoping for. To my relief, the crew of the Avenger, I’m told, are looking forward to having me come back, even if I’m not in a command capacity. Everyone seems to think that it’s better that I stay where people care about me than to simply turn my back and go it alone.

I think so, too.

PS- That’s it Mom. Soon I’m going to be catching a transport back to the Avenger and then basically, well, I don’t know. We’ll see how it goes. I’ll keep writing and hopefully maybe you can come visit, maybe convince Father to as well. I could use his strength, I think. Anyway, I miss you both and if you could, could you send some of that Tyvarian Chocolate fudge you make around the holidays?

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