

## Birthday Girl

(an Alternative Basil & Zoe Story)

ACT I SCENE 1: Officer's quarters of a SpaceFleet ship. The living/dining room. There's a sofa against the upstage wall, and a coffee table downstage of it. Immediately stage right there is an archway leading to the bedroom (just a curtained escape). Extreme stage right there is a dining table for two. Extreme stage left there is a u-shaped desk set to that whomever is using it faces downstage when sitting behind it.

Downstage of all the furniture BASIL and ZOE are seated in chairs. BASIL is clearly not human. Actually, he's a synthetic lifeform. This is made obvious by his silver metallic skin. He's in a SpaceFleet uniform. ZOE is a typical teenager, dressed in a slightly futuristic, slightly provocative version of typical 16-year-old girl attire.

We open with the pair in the middle of a weekly music lesson. BASIL is on violin. ZOE is on cello.

ZOE: Damn it! Why can't I get it right?

BASIL: Language, Zoe!

ZOE: (cross) Don't you 'language' me. We're not in a formal class right now. Coaching me is something you offered as friend.

BASIL: That is true; however, I do not believe it is appropriate for me to encourage your use of foul language.

ZOE: Sometimes, Basil, you're too correct. You need to learn to loosen up. (flirtatious) Come to my birthday party tonight and I'll teach you how.

BASIL: I am afraid I cannot.

ZOE: (deflated) Oh. Sorry.

BASIL: I am in command of the bridge this evening, Zoe. I am sorry; I would come if I could. (beat) I do not mean to disappoint you.

ZOE: (flatly) I know.

BASIL: When I received your invitation, I attempted to trade shifts with several of my colleagues but it is the weekend, and most of them felt that they would rather not give up free time so that a machine could attend a party.

ZOE: You're not just a machine.

BASIL: Perhaps not, but it is true that I am not human.

ZOE: You need to stand up for your own rights more, Basil. Make them treat you like the officer – the man – that you are. It's not fair.

BASIL: I believe your people have a common phrase, Zoe: Life is not fair.

ZOE: Yeah.

BASIL: I am truly sorry.

ZOE: Yeah. (beat) Listen, can we stop for the day? I love playing music with you. I love just spending time with you, but... I've made nothing but mistakes all morning, and this isn't how I wanted my birthday to go.

BASIL: Perhaps we should have rescheduled.

ZOE: I considered it, but... I thought coming here and seeing you would help me feel better. I mean it's only been a week since Tyvek and his family PCS'd but he messaged this morning and there was a girl in his room, and... seeing you usually makes everything better.

BASIL: And today it did not.

ZOE: My boyfriend moved away and then moved on, and the only other person I want dance with at my party has to work, and I can't even manage to come close to the right intonation, and

*BASIL sets his violin down on his desk then goes to ZOE and takes her cello. He leans it against the wall and offers her his hand.*

BASIL: Come sit with me?

ZOE: (confused) Basil?

BASIL: (gestures to the table as a spotlight slowly illuminates it revealing a slice of cake and a wrapped gift.) While I cannot attend your party, as your friend, I could not let your birthday go unmarked. Come sit with me. I believe it is traditional to open gifts and consume chocolate confections on human birthdays.

ZOE: You got me cake and a present?

BASIL: Indeed.

*ZOE allows BASIL to lead her to the table. The floor of the stage is a turntable, so the table moves toward center as they approach, and the scene shifts slightly into...*

SCENE 2: The same space, at the dining table.

ZOE: (sitting down, as BASIL also takes a seat) There's only one fork.

BASIL: I only requested one slice of cake from the food transport protocol system.

ZOE: Sharing a single slice of cake with a good friend is also a birthday tradition. I know you don't require specific forms of food in order to nourish yourself, but please don't make me eat alone?

BASIL: I will request a second fork. (He goes to a wall slot, does so, and returns with it). But you must take the first bite.

ZOE: Deal. (She takes a bite of cake and makes appreciative noises.) Chocolate-orange! My favorite. How did you know?

BASIL: I asked your mother, of course.

ZOE: She knew you were doing this?

BASIL: Yes.

ZOE: And she didn't object?

BASIL: No.

ZOE: Hmm.

BASIL: Zoe?

ZOE: Nothing. (Pushes the cake aside) I'm ready for my present now.

*BASIL hands ZOE the box and affects an anticipatory expression. ZOE rips open the paper and takes the lid off the box, gasps softly, then pulls out a small string of beads.*

ZOE: Oh, Basil, they're beautiful.

BASIL: I spent many hours and polled all of my colleagues to determine what sort of jewelry would be appropriate for a 'sweet sixteen' present. They are Jazardelian Wish Beads, and the colors are meant to inspire creativity and imagination, as well as provide protection.

ZOE: (truly touched) They're gorgeous. They're perfect. (she stands up) Help me put them on.

BASIL: (rising from his chair and accepting the beads from ZOE): As you wish. (He fastens the beads – which are actually a necklace – around her neck – and then steps back.)

ZOE: Well? How do they look?

BASIL: The contrast of the colors is particularly appealing against the tan of your skin.

ZOE: Basil?

BASIL: I believe the human phrase is, 'You look beautiful, Zoe.' Happy birthday.

ZOE: (smiling) You think I'm beautiful?

BASIL: Empirically, yes, you meet every standard of human.

ZOE: *Basil!* (She utters his name as if it's an expletive and a sign of affection, both at once.)

BASIL: I have always found you to be...

*Impulsively, ZOE cuts him off with a kiss. She's Sixteen. He's a synthetic lifeform and an officer. While he responds for a moment, he stops the kiss and sets her away.*

BASIL: Zoe, I am sorry, we cannot –

ZOE: Oh, god! I'm sorry. I'm so sorry!

*ZOE runs from BASIL's quarters.*

BASIL: (stunned, addressing the space where Zoe was, but now is not) Zoe, please wait....

Blackout.

SCENE 3: Three days later. The courtyard of a space station. The upstate wall is a starfield with ships hanging beyond painted windows. ZOE and her friends are in a café sipping drinks and chatting. ZOE is still wearing BASIL's necklace.

DAYNA: You still haven't talked to him? Zo' it's been three days!

ZOE: I can't, Day. I'm mortified. I mean... I crossed a line.

ANNIE: Just tell him you were overcome with emotion because he gave you such a lovely present – it is lovely, Zoe, and by the way, none of us have gotten jewelry from him before – and because you were mad at Ty for moving on so soon, and I'm sure he'll understand. He's probably programmed to be understanding.

ZOE: Don't talk about him that way.

ANNIE: Look at you, getting all defensive about Robo-Teach.

DAYNA: Annie, you know Basil isn't a robot. Come on, you're in his class too. I thought you liked him.

ANNIE: I do! I do! I was just trying to be funny.

ZOE: Yeah, maybe don't try that again any time soon?

ANNIE: (holding her hands up) Alright, alright. I won't. I'm sorry. So, was it a good kiss?

ZOE: (dreamy): It was... lovely.

*BASIL enters from stage right and approaches the group.*

BASIL: Excuse me. Please pardon the intrusion. May I borrow Zoe for a moment?

*ZOE and her friends exchange glances. Then she shrugs.*

ZOE: Sure.

ZOE leaves her friends and follows BASIL out of the café as the lights fade.

SCENE 4: The space station, the fountain. The dome of the station with the same ships, at slightly different angles is still the upstage wall. BASIL and ZOE are seated on the edge of a fountain. It's a generic starburst thing and shoots light instead of water.

- BASIL: You left my quarters so suddenly on your birthday, Zoe. It... confused me.
- ZOE: I... I was afraid you were going to kick me out.
- BASIL: Because we kissed.
- ZOE: Because I accosted you with that kiss. Because I ruined everything. Because I...
- BASIL: Ah. (gently) Zoe, I may be an artificial lifeform, but I am not entirely unaware of human behavior. Like you, I have dated. Like you, I have experienced sexual intimacy. Unlike you, none of my encounters became sustainable relationships, however –
- ZOE: (cutting him off) I don't think five months counts as a 'sustainable relationship.'
- BASIL: Perhaps not in the long term, but it is certainly longer than the one-night-stands that have been my only experience.
- ZOE: Oh. So you're saying...?
- BASIL: That even with your relative youth, you have more relationship experience than I have, yes. (beat) But that is not what I pulled you from your afternoon of recreation to discuss.
- ZOE: No. Look, I'll find another music coach.
- BASIL: You know there is no one else on the *Calypto* capable of assisting a musician of your caliber.
- ZOE: (half-teasing) Flatterer. (serious) I really am sorry. I was... you were so close, and I've always wondered, and these beads were so lovely, and I'm pretty sure you don't go around gifting all your friends with jewelry....
- BASIL: (softly) No, I do not. Zoe, consider. I did not stop you immediately. I, too, have been curious.
- ZOE: Sixteen is legal throughout the Coalition of Worlds. For consent, I mean. I mean... I know those laws are about protection, but....
- BASIL: But you are no longer a child, we have long had a close friendship. This evolution may have been inevitable. However, I made a promise to your mother...

ZOE: (angry) My *mother?* My *mother!* What does my mother have to do with this? It's not bad enough she had to rip me away from the Arts Academy and stash me on a stupid Spaceship? Now she's dictating my romantic life, as well? I'll kill her.

BASIL: Please do not.

ZOE: Give me one reason not to.

BASIL: Because if you are imprisoned for murder, we will definitely not have a future opportunity to experiment with a romantic relationship.

ZOE: Future opp... you can't be willing to wait for me?

BASIL: As a synthetic being, I do not experience desire the same way you do, Zoe.

ZOE: But I could meet someone. I could... gods, what if I fall for someone you know? What if I hurt you?

BASIL: Giving you the freedom to grow into the woman you are meant to be is part of my responsibility as your friend and musical partner, Zoe. If something is meant to be between us, it will happen.

ZOE: You didn't answer my question.

BASIL: No, I did not.

*Blackout.*

SCENE 5: BASIL's quarters, decorated as before. Another music lesson. ZOE is dressed in a crop-top and mini-skirt and barely manages not to flash BASIL or the audience. She's a bit antsy, but their playing is completely connected.

Together they finish the piece.

ZOE: Wow, that was amazing. Gods, playing with you just gets better and better.

BASIL: You, too, have shown marked improvement since your birthday.

ZOE: Who knew six weeks could make such a difference? (beat) So, we're docking at Paradise Three tonight...

BASIL: I am aware.

ZOE: Anyway, I was checking the entertainment options, and I noticed that this rock singer – Methos – is performing there, and the thing is, he looks an awful lot like you. Like... exactly.

BASIL: That is because he is my brother.

ZOE: You have a brother?

BASIL: In a manner of speaking. Methos and I were constructed by the same cyberneticist and spent our initial activation sessions and 'formative years' together.

ZOE: You have a brother and he's a *rock star*?

BASIL: May I remind you that you, yourself, come from a family of celebrity performers, Zoe. It is unlike you to be so... I believe the human term is... 'starstruck.'

ZOE: Oh, come on, if I had a twin sister who was all Ms. SpaceFleet, wouldn't you be curious and want to meet her?

BASIL: No. I am content with the Zoe Harris I know and care for. I do not require another.

ZOE: Well, as fond as I am of you, Basil, I'm curious. Would you introduce me?

BASIL: I do not advise it, Zoe. Methos is... He and I are not close, and he is a person of questionable morality. I realize that you have a taste for misadventure, but please do not seek him out.

ZOE: (after a long pause) You really do care about me, don't you?

BASIL: Yes.

*Blackout.*

SCENE 6: PARADISE III, a street in town. Teens, College Kids, Civilian Adults, and SpaceFleet Officers are milling around. ZOE, DAYNA, and ANNIE are there, staring at something like a high-tech ipad.

ZOE: Tattoos! We should totally get tattoos! They do them with lasers, and it totally doesn't hurt. Much.

DAYNA: My mother would kill me if I came home with pigment.

ANNIE: You don't have to get it somewhere exposed.

ZOE: You also don't have to tell her.

DAYNA: Fair point. So, where's the safest tattoo place?

ANNIE: "Got Art?" has a good reputation, but it's kind of spendy.

*A silver-skinned man in a jumpsuit that is NOT a SpaceFleet uniform walks across the stage, but only ZOE notices him.*

ZOE: Basil?

ANNIE: I thought you said he was on duty?

ZOE: He is. He's been. We're not speaking. Again.

DAYNA: For two people who aren't a couple you two sure fight like one.

ZOE: His brother is a rock singer – Methos – and he's performing here, and... would you all excuse me? Pick a parlor and message me, and I'll meet you there. I need to... I need to make things right.

*ZOE walks off in the direction she saw the silver man go. The lights fade out as she moves.*

SCENE 7: A seedy bar on Paradise III. The silver man – BASIL? – is at the door, chatting with the BOUNCER when ZOE runs up to him.

ZOE: Basil? Hey, wait!

*The man turns but it's not BASIL, though he initially means for ZOE to assume he is. He is METHOS. (He's likely played by the same actor. Or someone with an uncannily similar look)*

METHOS: (as BASIL) Greetings, Zoe.

ZOE: (perplexed) 'Greetings?' You haven't said that to me in over a year. You must really be pissed at me.

METHOS: But I cannot be 'pissed.'

ZOE: (sarcastic) Yeah, right, of course you can't. (curious) You're not seriously going in a place like that after warning me off trying to meet your brother, are you? I mean, it's hardly the place a respectable SpaceFleet officer would go. (brightly) Unless! Is this one of your experiments? Are you planning to get into a brawl just to see what it's like? Can I watch?

METHOS: (warning) Your curiosity will get the better of you one day.

ZOE: (unsure) Basil?

METHOS: (mimicking her tone) Zoe? (beat) Won't your friends be missing you?

BOUNCER: Is the girl with you, Mister? She seems a bit... young.

METHOS: She's legal. Barely. (He hooks his arm around ZOE's shoulders, draping his hand so his thumb grazes her breast.) But then, I like'em that way.

ZOE: Oh my gods, you're not (METHOS tugs her closer before she can utter BASIL's name and) ... kidding.

BOUNCER: (Peering at METHOS, letting at ZOE) Fine, whatever, go in. Ain't my neck.

*METHOS and ZOE enter the bar. The entryway flies up and we see a dark space with a lot of tables.*

METHOS: (hissing) Listen little girl. My brother and I aren't close, but we do keep in touch, so I know you're important to him. Play along and you might get to see him again.

ZOE: You... you know who I am?

METHOS: You don't get to ask questions. Understand? (He drops his arm from her shoulders to her waist.)

ZOE: Mmhmm.

METHOS: Good. Come with me. (He leads her to a table in the back where they take seats.) So, how much has Prince Basil told you about his evil twin?

ZOE: He didn't actually refer to you as evil. Just... dangerous. And that I shouldn't try to meet you.

METHOS: You thought I was him.



ZOE: You let me think so. You wanted me to. You're skulking around in seedy bars. Hardly the behavior of the Coalition's only Synthetic Rockstar.

METHOS: (giving her an appraising look) I'm beginning to see what my brother sees in you.

*A WAITRESS appears from the shadows.*

WAITRESS: What can I getcha?

METHOS: Dereblian bourbon for me, and for the lady... ? (looks at ZOE, testing her)

ZOE: (trying to be bold) Gin martini, dirty.

WAITRESS: You got it.

METHOS: And tell the boss, the music guy's waiting.

WAITRESS: Sure, sure.

*She walks off.*

*The drinks arrive a few minutes later delivered by an PHARYL, an alien in a gangster suit with bunny ears poking through his fedora. He looks funny. His mannerisms are completely sinister. His syntax is... odd.*

PHARYL: Methos, my man, it's good to see you, but I have great disappoint. You were meant to fly solo. Instead you bring a human woman. Can you not be trust?

METHOS: Ignore the girl, my friend. You know how it is. Another gig, another groupie. (to ZOE) Give us a kiss, babe. (Kisses her. It's lewd. It's dirty. It lasts longer than either of them expect it to. Chemistry.)

PHARYL: Please, save the spit-exchange for after music. Here? We negotiate. Woman, drink. We, talk. You asked for ship. I have ship. Fee is usual. Plus deliver.

METHOS: Delivery was not part of the deal.

PHARYL: Want unregister ship, deliver is deal. (eyes Zoe). If no deliver, give me girl.

METHOS: (pretends to consider) I'll make the delivery. (to Zoe, hissing directly into her hear) Say. Nothing. And. You. Might. Live.

*Blackout.*

SCENE 8: A cheap hotel room on Paradise III. It's high-tech only because we're in the future. ZOE is sitting on the only piece of furniture, the bed. METHOS is lounging against the wall.

METHOS: So, what do I do with you, Zoe? If I let you go, you'll run to the press that Methos is smuggling goods for the Merullian Syndicate.

ZOE: So, take me with you.

METHOS: Why would I do that.

ZOE: I've listened to your stuff. You're good. I could make you better.

METHOS: You're a kid.

ZOE: I'm legal. I'm also the daughter of one of the most famous composers in the Coalition's history. And I'm a bad-ass cellist. I thought you and Basil talked. You should know that.

METHOS: He said he coached classical.

ZOE: I play everything.

METHOS: (eyeing her) You're pretty enough. And you kept your cool in the bar. But there are two problems with this scenario little girl. First, I don't do virgins. And second, I don't do virgins who are stuck on my brother.

*ZOE gets off the bed and crosses the room, invading METHOS's personal space. She presses herself against him, sliding her hands up his chest. He's a synth. Stronger than human. He resists. She presses her knee against him.*

ZOE: Two things you're missing in this scenario, silver-guy. First, I'm not a virgin. And second, I'm not stuck on your brother.

*ZOE tilts her face up, expectantly, and she is not disappointed. METHOS's mouth claims hers in a searing kiss.*

*Wordlessly, they start pulling at each other's clothes. When they finally return to the bed, naked enough for sex, the lights are nearly out, save for one spot on ZOE, who removes her beaded necklace, kisses it, and then wraps it around her left wrist.*

METHOS: You okay baby?

ZOE: (whispering) I'm sorry. (aloud) More than okay.

METHOS: (eyeing her nude form) Oh... yes... yes, yes you are.

*Blackout.*

ACT II SCENE 1: Backstage at a concert. ZOE is dressed to the nines in rockstar attire, which includes a miniskirt and thigh-high boots, but she's now playing a carbon fiber cello worn on a harness so flashing the audience isn't an issue. BASIL's beads are still around her wrist. METHOS is wearing faux leather biker clothes, and four women of various species are hanging all over him.

A STAGE MANAGER enters with a digital clipboard, whispers to ZOE, then nods and announces in a loud voice.

STG MGR: Five minutes! Five minutes! Clear the wings please! (Crosses to Methos) I think your woman needs you. (exits)

METHOS: Alright, ladies, I'll see you all later. Go on. Be good. Enjoy the show. Zoe's amazing. Really. (He goes to join ZOE) You ready to go on, babe?

ZOE: They're not coming out with us tonight, are we?

METHOS: Is it a problem if they are?

ZOE: I'd asked you if tonight could be just us. It's a special night. It's...

STG MGR: (voice over) Gentlebeings of Space Station Athena, he's the only sentient synthetic rockstar in the Coalition of Worlds, she's a pint size punk rock dynamo. He plays the guitar; she plays the cello, they both sing. He's Methos. She's Zoe. And together they're PETTY LARCENY!

ZOE: my birthday... (they exit in opposite directions as their voices merge into a pre-recorded version of Robbie William's "Let Me Entertain You." )

SCENE 2: A hotel room. It's a lot better than the skanky one where ZOE and METHOS had their first tryst. The king-sized bed is still made. The room is neat. ZOE enters from stage left (the bathroom) with her hair in a towel and wearing a bathrobe, no makeup.

ZOE: Computer, play messages.

*She crosses to the desk downstage center, and sits down, engaging a communication system.*

*The mirror (really a transparent display) fills with a still image of BASIL in his uniform.*

BASIL: (v/o) Dear, Zoe. I hope this message finds you well. While I cannot perceive the passage of time as anything other than accurate, I believe I now understand what humans mean when they say it seems 'longer than a year,' since something has happened. One year ago, we were sharing a piece of cake in my quarters on the Calypso. Tonight, I hope you are sharing your birthday with people who care for you as much as I do. If that includes my brother, I will be happy for you.

ZOE: Oh, Basil.

BASIL: Please remember that you are welcome to contact me should you ever wish to. Happy birthday, Zoe.

*There is a computer beep and then another message begins to play. This time the image is obscured.*

SHADOW: Listen Zoe... you don't know me, but you should know that your lover is cheating on you, and you deserve better. You're too young to be in a relationship with someone who doesn't put you first. Dump the silver schmuck. Focus on you.

ZOE: Like I don't know that. We never said we were exclusive. (She continues, talking to herself.) But I don't sleep with other men. Or other women. And he sleeps with whoever – whatever – seems interesting. Synths... I don't want him to play human for me, I don't. But could he at least treat me with respect? (beat) But the sex is so good. (beat) And the music is so much better. (she sighs). Happy birthday to me.

*Fade to black.*

SCENE 3: A music studio. Black floor. Black walls with black acoustic tile. Futuristic mics. ZOE is seated with her carbon fiber cello. METHOS is seated with his electric guitar. They're playing a cover of Metallica's "Enter Sandman."

ZOE: (singing) Say your prayers little one  
Don't forget my son  
To include everyone  
  
I tuck you in, warm within  
Keep you free from sin  
'Til the sandman he comes  
Sleep with one eye open  
Gripping your pillow tight  
Exit light  
Enter night  
Take my hand  
We're off to never-never land

METHOS (singing) Something's wrong, shut the light  
Heavy thoughts tonight  
And they aren't of Snow White  
  
Dreams of war, dreams of liars  
Dreams of dragon's fire  
And of things that will bite, yeah  
Sleep with one eye open  
Gripping your pillow tight  
Exit light  
Enter night  
Take my hand  
We're off to never-never land

*They continue the song, playing and singing the bridge and final verse together.*

ZOE: Gods, that was stellar. We should definitely add that to the set.

METHOS: I agree. (beat) Sorry about last night. I forget birthdays are important to humans.

ZOE: Especially to humans who gave up everything to be with their... you know what, never mind.

METHOS: Let me make it up to you?

ZOE: Tonight? Just us?

METHOS: We'll take the yacht ahead of the tour cruiser and meet the crew at our next stop. (He sets down his guitar and moves to stand in front of her, sliding her cello out of her arms and leaning it against his vacated stool. He squats in front of her.) We'll park at the edge of a Faramani Nebula and while filtered starlight shines on your naked body I'll trace all your tattoos with my tongue. (He gives her a wicked smile) I'll make you scream, baby. And then I'll give you a really, lovely present.

ZOE: (meeting his enthusiasm, pulling his face to hers for a kiss) Do everything your programming allows, and I might just forgive you for leaving me alone.

*As the lights fade out their kisses grow more and more heated.*

SCENE 4: A bedroom in a space yacht. Filtered starlight fills the room. The bed is ruffled. METHOS is wearing faux leather pants and nothing else. ZOE is clearly in the process of getting dressed. She's wearing a bra and jeans, but they're not fastened yet. METHOS is on the COMM and ZOE is rooting through luggage looking for a shirt.

METHOS: It's fine Pharyl. We'll be there on time. Yes, she'll be in compliance. Yes, we'll learn the song. But this is the last job we do for you, are we clear. We're too big now, too well known to risk getting caught.

PHARYL: (v/o) Agree, Methos. See you in two days. Look forward to your perform. Out.

ZOE: (wary) We're not doing another delivery?

METHOS: No, babe, not at all. Just a gig.

ZOE: Why do I get the feeling I'm not gonna like this gig.

METHOS: We're performing at the Palace of Art and Culture on Saglyth Seven. (beat) I swear, babe, it's only a gig. No smuggling. No tech jobs. All you have to do is play and...

ZOE: (cutting him off, her voice low) Women are property there, Methos.

METHOS: ... wear a house piercing.

ZOE: Which house.

METHOS: It's an interesting story babe. I'm surprised Basil never told you.

ZOE: Basil was my music teacher. And my friend. We never got much into family history.

METHOS: And yet he messaged you on your birthday.

ZOE: How did you know that.

METHOS: It's my business to know what my 'partner' does.

ZOE: Partner? Partner? In music maybe? But the rest? We're fuckbuddies, we're not partners. A partner wouldn't sleep with other people every other night.

METHOS: It's not like you can't –

ZOE: - Right like anyone's gonna risk going up against synth strength.

METHOS: Well...

ZOE: What house, Methos. And what does Basil have to do with it.

METHOS: Basil and I were created by Samuel Gnos. Of Sagllyth Seven.

ZOE: You've got to be kidding.

METHOS: I'm not. You can call him and ask.

ZOE: And the house ring?

METHOS: Removable, but not a ring that goes on your finger.

ZOE: Where?

METHOS: I have to pierce your navel.

ZOE: I'll do this gig with you on one condition. It's my last. I'm tired of touring. I'm tired of being one of your girls.

METHOS: I'm not wired for monogamy Zoe. I wish I were. You're amazing. Gorgeous. Talented.

ZOE: Young. But not for much longer. You weren't kidding that day. You like jailbait.

METHOS: (makes a self-deprecating gesture) Well...

ZOE: You're paying my tuition to JupitArts. I passed the Equivalency Test. I'm done with compulsory ed. But I don't want people to think all I am is Methos's cello chick.

MEHOS: Done.

ZOE: And we're exclusive until the semester starts.

METHOS: I can try.

ZOE: (fierce) You can *do*. You know I get better reviews. The girls think you're hot. Hell, the boys and half the genderless beings think you're hot. But everyone knows I'm the better musician.

METHOS: You drive a hard bargain, babe.

ZOE: Impale me, lover.

*METHOS goes to a side table and returns with a device that looks like a piercing gun. ZOE looks at it, then takes it from his hand.*

ZOE: Impale first. Pierce after.

*Blackout.*

SCENE 5: BASIL's Quarters on the Calypso, roughly a year later. They're laid out about the same way, but they're slightly larger, slightly brighter. And there's a pop-art photo of ZOE and her carbon fiber cello (just her, not METHOS) on the upstage wall above the couch.

BASIL is at his desk working. There is a computer chime.

BASIL: Enter!

ZOE enters via the door downstage right. This is a more mature Zoe, hardened by the time she spent with METHOS, but also by her first few months at the arts conservatory on one of Jupiter's moons. Her makeup has been changed to make her look like she's lost the last of her baby fat. Her clothes are a bit less wild. Her beads are around her neck again. She's carrying a small, square container.

ZOE: Hi.

BASIL: (brightly, but wary) Zoe! (He rises from his desk and steps around it to meet her but pauses half-way there. )

ZOE: I'm sorry. I would've comm'd first, but I wasn't sure if I'd be welcome.

BASIL: You are always welcome, Zoe.

ZOE: (with a watery smile) Mom made me promise to come home for my birthday this year. We just finished dinner. I um... I don't think I ever told you how much your message meant last year.

BASIL: No, you did not.

ZOE: I'm sorry, Basil. I'm...

BASIL: Is he good to you? Are you happy? These are the things I wish to know.

ZOE: (ducks her head) No. He was never good to me. And he was never good for me. And I'm not sure I was ever happy. But I felt like I was in a cage on this ship.

BASIL: Because of me?

ZOE: No. Never. Except when you when you arranged with my mother what our relationship could be. That was... that was inexcusable, Basil.

BASIL: Yes, it was. I understand that now. If he was not good for you, or to you, and you were not happy, why did you remain with him?

ZOE: Because I was free. And sometimes free is better than happy. Because it was the first time in my life I had the chance to fuck up or be fabulous on my own terms and my own merits – don't even think about chiding me for language – and because even though a lot of it was kind of shitty parts of it were... lets just say, I learned a lot, about what I wanted, and what I don't, and who I really am.

BASIL: You are speaking of him in the past tense.

ZOE: I left him on your homeworld last September, after our final performance. But he... he broke his last promise, and you're the only person who can help.

BASIL: You have been safe, though?

ZOE: (laughing) I have. I've been at school, actually. I started at JupitArts as a sophomore. Tested out of first year. The fact that the admissions director had my poster on her desk might not have hurt.

BASIL: What is it that you require assistance with, Zoe?

ZOE: Two things. First the sour, then the sweet. In order to perform on Sagllyth Seven, I had to wear a house ring... (she lifts her shirt and displays the jeweled ring in her navel). I'm told only someone from House Gnos can remove this.

BASIL: Your information is accurate. And I am happy to help. What is the other item on your agenda.

ZOE: (offers him the square box) Share a piece of cake with me, for old time's sake?

*BASIL considers the cake and then the young woman's still exposed belly.*

BASIL: Perhaps we should consume the cake first, while it is still your birthday. If you will sit down, I will replicate two forks.

ZOE: And coffee.

BASIL: (reacting to the addition, understanding that she's changing the tenor of their relationship if he'll allow it, if he'll forgive her) And coffee. Perhaps this year we should sit on the couch for your celebration.

ZOE: Is it? A celebration?

BASIL: It is if we wish it to be.

*ZOE hesitates for a long moment. Then she goes to the couch and sits down, setting the cake container on the coffee table. She tugs down her shirt. After a moment, BASIL, carrying forks, napkins and mugs, joins her. They start sitting on opposite corners but gradually move closer and closer and as classical music swells (a duet for violin and cello) we can see them talking animatedly,*



*reconnecting. They don't kiss, but as the lights fade out they are touching each other... a tap to the arm, a pat to the knee, and finally, interlaced fingers.*

THE END... OR A NEW BEGINNING