

The small starship *U.S.S. Providence* approached the spacedock facility that orbited the blue planet that most of the crew called home—Earth. Sunlight reflected off the hull of the tiny ship as the huge space doors slid open. The ship passed through the opening and moved toward an empty berth.

***Captain’s Log: Stardate 54656.8***

*After almost a year, we have arrived home for shore leave and minor upgrades to the ship. Both ship and crew have performed exceptionally well and I am proud to be the master of this fine vessel. And more proud of the crew under my command.*

Captain Robert P. Stuart finished the log entry and sat silently in the center seat, watching the bridge crew. He allowed the pride that he had for these people well up in his soul.

Commander Melanie Leeson, the first officer, sat in the chair to the right and slightly behind Stuart’s. “The dock master requests that we relinquish control, Captain,” she said.

“Do we have to?” Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams whined from the CONN position. As the senior flight officer, he did not like to give control of the piloting of the ship to anyone that had not been personally trained by him.

“I’m afraid so, Blake,” Stuart replied. “Transfer control.”

“Yes, Skipper,” Blake said, disappointment in his voice. “Flight controls on automatic.”

“You have control,” Leeson said to the dockmaster.

The ship slowed and docked in its berth. A docking port extended toward the airlock on the *Providence*.

Stuart rose from his chair and looked around the bridge. “I want to commend all of you for a job well done,” he said. “I expect each one of you to make the most of your shore leave.”

Stuart turned and started walking toward his ready room. He stopped and turned around. “Blake, can I see you when you’re finished?”

“Yes, Skipper,” the second officer replied.

Stuart turned and entered his sanctuary.

“Everyone lock down all stations,” Commander Leeson ordered. “Shore leave will start as soon as everything is secure,” she added.

## **To Boldly Go: Decisions, Decisions**

*A U.S.S. Providence story*

By Cleve Johnson

Rob Stuart stood looking out the windows of his office. He focused on another starship in a neighboring berth—a *Nebula*-class. He admired the design. It was similar to the *Galaxy*-class ships that most cadets only dreamed of being assigned to straight out of the Academy. Of course, since the *Sovereign*-class had been introduced, the cadets were now dreaming of being assigned to one of them.

The door chime interrupted Stuart's thoughts. "Come in," he said without turning around.

"What's up, Skipper?" Blake Adams asked as he entered the ready room.

Stuart never turned to face his friend but continued to stare out the window. "What do you think of her?" he asked, meaning the *Nebula*-class starship.

Blake walked over to stand next to Rob and look at the ship in the next berth. "She looks like a fine ship," he said, not knowing why his friend would ask him such a question.

"*U.S.S. Perseus*," Stuart said. "She's under the command of Captain Mueller."

"Katrina Mueller?" Blake asked.

Stuart nodded. "You know her?"

Blake faced his friend. "I know of her," he said. "Actually, I met her at a conference on Arcturus. She did a seminar on shuttle flight operations."

Rob turned and walked toward the couch. "Have a seat." Both of the officers sat down and faced each other. "Captain Mueller remembers you from that conference," Rob said. "She remembers the conversation that you had with her after the seminar and has followed your career since then."

"Why would she want to follow *my* career?" Blake wondered out loud.

Rob smiled. "You impressed her with your questions and knowledge of starship flight operations," he said. "And she has become impressed with your command ability."

"Command ability? Me?"

"You have a natural leadership presence," Rob said. "She sees it, just as I do. And she thinks you would be perfect for the job."

Blake wondered where this was leading. "What job?"

Rob's eyes narrowed. He did not want to allow his personal feelings to override the excitement and pride that he felt for Blake. "Captain Mueller wants you as her new first officer."

Blake could not believe what he had heard. "First officer?" he blurted in surprise. "I have no business being a first officer yet," he protested.

"I have confidence in you, Blake," the captain stated. "You're qualified. You've taken the bridge officer's test."

"But it would mean leaving the *Providence*, Rob," he said. "And who would take care of you if I leave?"

Rob shrugged his shoulders. “Jan has that job now,” he said. “It’s a great opportunity, Blake. Don’t let personal sentiment make the decision for you.”

Blake shook his head. “We’ve been friends for ten years, Rob,” he said.

“And as your friend, I cannot stand in the way of letting you pass up this opportunity,” Rob replied. “At least think about it.”

Blake did not know what to say. He wanted to eventually command a starship and becoming a first officer was a definite stepping-stone to that end. But to leave his friends, especially Rob, was never considered before. “How soon do you need an answer?”

“Captain Mueller wants an interview with you in the next couple days,” Rob said. “She will need an answer within two weeks.”

Blake thought about what Rob said. Reluctantly, he agreed to at least...think about it.



“So what are you going to do with your leave, Mel?” Jan Stuart asked the first officer while packing away medical equipment.

Melanie Leeson shrugged her shoulders. “I’m not sure, Jan,” she replied. “You know that I don’t plan my leave time very well.”

Jan smiled. “I usually don’t either,” she said. “But my parents are both back home and they’re looking forward to meeting Rob.”

“How are your parents, anyway?” Mel asked.

“They’re well,” Jan said. “Dad is called on from time to time with some new neurological medical case and Mom keeps active in politics.”

Leeson smiled. She enjoyed spending time with her best friend. Since Jan married the captain, Mel did not get a chance to “pal around” with the doctor like they used to do. “I might try to see my sister Becky and her family since I’m this close.”

“Just Becky?” Jan asked. The doctor knew Melanie Leeson well. She knew the lack of closeness that the first officer had with her siblings.

Leeson started to pace the floor. “You know the situation, Jan.”

“I know,” Jan replied. “I also know that you can work to change the situation, too.”

Leeson stopped pacing and faced her friend. “I tried to pull everyone together, but Rebecca is the only one who understands,” she said. “She’s the only one who really cared for my father the same as I did.”

“But you are the only one who stood firm in his defense,” Jan stated.

Mel crossed her arms and looked at the ceiling. She remembered the hearing. She remembered the last time she saw her father. “I’m the only one who believed him,” she said. “And I’m the outcast in my family because of that.”

Jan saw the tears start to roll down Mel's cheek. The doctor walked toward her friend and hugged her tight. "I'm sorry I brought up the subject," she said.

Leeson wiped the tears from her face. "I'm not," she said. "Maybe it won't hurt to try once more."



Lieutenant Salesh K'Tok finished shutting down the warp core and main power grid since the ship was hooked to the space dock's energy through the mooring beams. He looked around the engine room and dismissed the last two crewmen on duty before returning to his quarters. The Derkhana tapped the Starfleet insignia on his chest. "Engineering to bridge," he said. "We are now under the space dock's power. All engineering stations are now secure."

"Understood," the voice of Lieutenant Nakamara replied. "*Will you be leaving the ship soon, Lieutenant?*"

"I will not be leaving the ship," Salesh replied.

"*You're not taking leave?*" Nakamara asked in a surprised tone.

"I do not require leave, Lieutenant," the engineer replied. "Engineering out."

The chief engineer started to leave the engine room when a bright swirling light appeared and another member of his species appeared before him. The alien stepped out of the light and bowed slightly. "Toshasa, K'Tok."

Salesh bowed in return. "Toshasa benu, Father."

"I have come to request that you return home," the leader of the Salesh clan stated. "I believe that the prophecy of the seventh clan centers upon you and Malesh Na'Rosh."

"Na'Rosh would be a fine choice to be a clan mother," K'Tok said. "I would be honored to have her as my wife. I, however, am not convinced that I am the prophesied patriarch of the seventh clan."

"Come back to Derkhana, my son," Salesh said. "Being home will help you know the truth."

K'Tok turned and walked away from his father. He closed his eyes and sought the wisdom of Derkha. "Do you think that I cannot hear the voice of Derkha away from home?" he asked his father.

Salesh approached his son and placed his hand on his son's shoulder. The engineer turned to face the elder Salesh. "I am...concerned that the influence of these people may interfere with your communication with Derkha," the elder said.

"I am in constant communication with Derkha," K'Tok replied calmly. "No one can interfere with that."

Salesh accepted his son's statement as fact. "Will you return to Derkhana?"

K'Tok nodded. "I will return to seek the will of Derkha," he said. "But I must inform Captain Stuart before departure."

Salesh bowed to his son. "I will see you soon," he said.

Lieutenant Salesh K'Tok watched his father turn and walk toward a wall. Before he reached the wall the spatial phenomenon known as "Derkha's Gate" appeared. The elder Salesh walked into the light and disappeared. The engineer walked out of the engine room and the door slid shut behind him.



Captain and Doctor Stuart pulled civilian clothes from the wardrobe and packed the small suitcases. "We're only going away for a couple of weeks," Rob said as he saw his wife pack a uniform with her civilian attire. "Why the uniform?"

Janice chuckled. "Did you forget that I'm going to spend a day at Starfleet Medical?" she asked her husband.

"I guess I did," Rob replied. "I forgot about that seminar. Who's speaking?"

Jan continued to pack. "Doctor Kathryn Pulaski," she replied. "She's always been one of my role models."

Rob could understand having role models in his life. He looked up to several people from the past, most notably Jonathan Archer, James T. Kirk, Matt Decker, and his son Willard Decker. He also looked up to Captain Jean-Luc Picard, whom he had hoped to meet someday, Captain Chuck Gardner, his former CO, and most importantly, his parents and uncle. Rob felt privileged to have so many positive influences in his life.

"You don't mind that I leave you with my parents for a day, do you?" Jan asked, interrupting her husband's thought.

"Not at all, he replied. "I look forward to having the time alone with them to find out what you were like as a child," he added.

Jan frowned. "Maybe I shouldn't go to the seminar after all."

"Afraid of what they might tell me?" Rob teased.

Jan smiled. "Keep it up and I'll make you sleep by yourself."

At that moment the door chime let the couple know that someone had dropped in unexpectedly.

"Who is it?" they both said simultaneously. The Stuarts still were getting used to the idea of being married and sharing the same quarters. Answering the door at the same time still created a humorous moment for them.

"*It is Lieutenant Salesh,*" the voice replied from the other side of the door.

"Enter," Rob said and the door slid open to reveal the chief engineer.

"What can I do for you, Mister Salesh?" the captain asked.

"I do not want to disturb you, Captain," Salesh stated. "But I need to let you know that I will be returning to Derkhana."

"You're on leave, Lieutenant," Rob Stuart said. "You can go anywhere you like."

Salesh faced his captain. "I'm not sure when...or if I will be back," the Derkhanan stated.

"Oh," was the only response Stuart could give. "Are you resigning from Starfleet?"

Salesh shrugged, trying to imitate the movement that he had seen so many humans do when they did not know an answer to a question. "I do not know, Captain. I have been told that I am the focus of one of the ancient prophecies of my people."

"Who told you this?" Jan interjected.

The engineer turned his attention to the doctor, who stood in the background. "My father told me this," Salesh replied. "He was with me in engineering a few minutes ago."

"I don't understand all the nuances of your culture and beliefs," Rob said. "But I do respect them." The captain lowered his head in thought as he walked away from his chief engineer. He turned around and looked at Lieutenant Salesh. "I'm going to change your orders from a two-week shore leave to a leave of absence of undetermined duration," Stuart said. "And I hope to see you again, regardless of the outcome of your visit home."

Salesh bowed to his captain. "Thank you, Captain Stuart," he said. "I will see you again if it is the will of Derkha."

Salesh turned and exited the captain and doctor's quarters.

The door slid shut and Rob looked toward Jan, who saw the concern on his face. Or was it a look of sadness that the doctor saw? "Are you okay?" she asked.

"Losing Blake is tough enough without the probability of losing another one of my officers," he said.

"I can understand your feelings about Blake being reassigned," Jan stated. "He is your best friend, after all." Jan placed her arms around her husband. "I didn't know that losing Salesh would affect you the same way."

Rob did not know what to feel. "I consider K'Tok a friend as well," he stated. "There's a...spiritual connection somehow." Rob kissed the doctor. "But you're right about my feelings about losing Blake," he said. "I wish Captain Mueller had never contacted me."



Blake Adams stepped on the transporter platform. He wore civilian clothes and carried a suitcase. "I'm ready, Mac," Blake stated. "Energ..."

"Belay that," Melanie Leeson ordered as she entered the transporter room. She looked at Blake standing on the pad, ready to beam to Earth. She turned to the transporter chief. "Mac, would you mind giving us a few minutes?" the first officer asked.

"I'll be in the corridor, Commander," Chief McKinney said as he quickly moved to the exit.

Leeson waited for the door to close. As it slid shut, she turned to face Adams. "Leaving without saying goodbye?"

Blake shrugged. "I'll be back in a couple weeks," he said. "And I thought you already left the ship."

"I would have said goodbye before leaving," Leeson said. "Besides, I hear you may not be coming back."

"Don't count on me to leave the *Providence*," Blake replied.

"Don't tell me you're going to turn down the chance to be a first officer," Leeson said forcefully.

"I don't think it's my time, yet," Blake said. "And who could harass you the same way I do," he added with a mischievous smile.

Melanie tried to remain serious but found Blake's irreverent personality too hard for her to keep from lightening up. "I will miss you, Blake."

Blake set his suitcase down and stepped off the transporter pad. He walked to the first officer embraced her. She returned his affectionate hug, a rare display of emotion for her. "No matter what I decide, Mel, I want you to know that you are very special to me."

"And you will always be special to me," Leeson replied. "Now get outa here," she said as she let go.

Blake Adams stepped back on the transporter and picked up his suitcase. He winked at Leeson as she stepped behind the console. "Energize," he said.

Mel wiped a tear from her eye as Blake disappeared.



It had been two days since the *U.S.S. Providence* returned to Earth. Blake Adams had visited his parents in Malibu, spending some time on the beach where he spent much of his time as a teenager. He remembered all the good times he had with his friends. They would play volleyball, surf, and dive for seashells every chance they had. It was a time full of many wonderful memories. And the view from his room overlooking the beach was a welcome sight to come home to.

Blake watched as the sun began to set over the Pacific Ocean. He sat on his beach towel with legs crossed, watching the beauty of the sun as it appeared to sink lower and lower into the distant waters. He was almost mesmerized by the image, and by the memories that flooded his mind. Blake did not hear the person approach from behind.

"It never changes, does it?" Blake's father said.

Blake did not turn, but he continued to enjoy the experience of watching the sunset. "I never appreciated the beauty of a California sunset when I was a kid," he said.

Chandler Adams sat beside his son on the towel. He chuckled as he remembered Blake's childhood.

"Blake looked over at his father and smiled. "What's so funny?"

Chandler looked down to the sand. "I was thinking about your first time trying to walk on the beach," he said. "You were about ten months old and thought you could do anything."

“So what happened, Dad?” Blake asked.

“You pulled away from your mother’s hand,” Chandler replied. “You fell flat on your face and had a mouth full of sand.” Blake’s father laughed at the memory. “But you didn’t let it keep you down. You spat the sand out and tried again.”

“And seeing your kid with a mouth full of sand was funny to you?”

Chandler looked at his son and smiled. “It wasn’t funny then, but the memory sure is.”

“What else about my childhood did you find so amusing?” Blake wondered out loud.

Chandler Adams just shook his head. “Your shore leave isn’t long enough to tell everything,” he said with a smirk.

Blake’s father stared into the sky, looking at the stars that began to appear with the setting of the sun. He could see the sun’s reflection off of the spacedock that was held in synchronistic orbit above San Francisco. “So how did your meeting go at Starfleet today?”

Blake shrugged. “It went fine,” he said.

“Just *fine*, Blake?” his father said, expecting more of an answer.

Blake looked at the expectation in his father’s eyes. “Captain Mueller seems like a good CO,” he said. “And the *Perseus* is a great ship....”

“But you’re not sure that you want the position,” Chandler finished his son’s sentence. “How soon until you have to decide?”

“Next Thursday,” Blake said.

“Isn’t that the same day your leave is over?”

Blake simply nodded.

Chandler got off the ground and took one last look at the sky. “I’m going to take a business trip tomorrow,” he said. “I’ll be gone all day, so you and your mother can have time together.”

Blake looked up to his father, who stood above him. “Anything you need me to do while you’re gone?”

Chandler shifted his focus from the stars to his son, still seated on the beach towel. “Have a good time with your mom,” he said. “I think your sister will be over in the evening, but I should be back by then.”

“It will be good to see Lisa again,” Blake said. “Maybe we can have a clambake tomorrow evening. Just like we used to.”

Chandler nodded. “Sounds great,” he said. “Well, I better get to bed if I’m to get an early start.” He patted Blake on the back and started walking toward the house that hung over the cliff above the beach. “Good night, son.”



“Good night, Dad,” Blake replied. He lay down on the ground and stared up at the stars and weighed the pros and cons of leaving the *Providence* to be the first officer of the *Perseus*.



Rob and Jan looked at the Eiffel Tower from her parents’ porch. John and Kathryn Reynolds held a permanent residence in Paris since that was the location of the Federation’s capital. Kathryn had once been part of the Federation Council and still served as a part-time ambassador from time to time.

Rob loved the view of his in-laws’ garden. It reminded him of the gardens on the Academy grounds that were kept up by the old gardener—Boothby. He held his wife’s hand as they each drank a cup of apple cinnamon tea. “This is absolutely marvelous,” Rob said to Janice. “I have never been to Paris before. It’s a beautiful city.”

“You grew up in Dublin, but never made the trip to Paris?” Jan asked, surprised that her husband had never made such a short trip from his home. “It’s not that far by air tram, you know.”

Rob smiled at his wife and squeezed her hand. “I never got around to it,” he said. “I mainly shuttled back and forth from San Francisco since Mom was stationed there for several years.”

Jan sensed that Rob still felt a little pain whenever he talked about his mother. Her death had hit him hard, but Jan also knew that Rob was keenly aware that his mother died in defense of the Federation, and of Earth. Wolf 359 would always be a place remembered by those whose loved ones gave their lives while trying to stop the Borg.

Jan’s thoughts were interrupted when her mother, Kathryn Reynolds, came out of the house. “I hate to intrude on you two,” Kathryn said. “But there’s a Chandler Adams here to see Robert.”

Rob got out of his easy chair with Janice following his lead. “That’s Blake’s father,” he told Jan. “I wonder what he is doing here.”

“I’m sorry, Robert,” Kathryn said. “He didn’t say. Shall I show him out here or do you want to come inside?”

Rob smiled at his mother-in-law. “Where it’s most convenient for you, Misses Reynolds.”

Kathryn gave Rob a stern look. “I’ll have Mister Adams come out here,” she said. “And when will you start calling me Mom?” She winked at her son-in-law to let him know that she wanted a less formal relationship with him.

Rob smiled back. “Sorry, Mother,” he replied. “Thank you.”

Kathryn disappeared back into the house and returned moments later with Chandler Adams. “Here you are, Mister Adams,” she said.

Rob extended his hand to Blake’s father. Chandler grasped it and shook vigorously. “A pleasure to meet you, Sir,” Rob said warmly.

“Likewise, Captain Stuart,” Chandler replied.

Rob turned to Jan and motioned her forward. "This is my wife Janice," he said.

"Good to meet you, Mister Adams," Jan said as she shook his hand. "Is everything alright with Blake?"

"Oh, he's just fine," Chandler said. "But I came to talk with you about a decision that he's struggling with."

"The *Perseus*," Rob said.

"Exactly," Chandler replied. "He doesn't act like he wants to take the position."

Jan grabbed Rob's hand and squeezed it. "I'll let you two alone to talk," she said and followed her mother into the house.

"Thank you, dear," Rob said. "Mister Adams?" Rob pointed to the chair that Janice had vacated.

"Thank you, Captain," Chandler said as he sat down.

Rob waited for Blake's father to share what was on his mind. He did not want to presume to know what concerned Chandler Adams about his son, but Rob could almost guess that Blake was strongly leaning away from accepting the assignment that was being offered.

Chandler made himself comfortable as Rob sat down next to him. "I'm concerned that Blake doesn't see what is in his best interest," he said. "And I don't know how to advise him."

Rob leaned back in his chair and let out a breath of air. "I know what you mean, Sir," he said. "I want him to make the choice that he feels is best. I told him to not base his decision on personal feelings."

"I'm grateful for that," Chandler said. "I was afraid that you would try to influence him to stay on your ship."

Rob smiled. "I've known Blake for ten years," he said. "He's my best friend, even closer to me than my own brother. The truth is that I would prefer he stay with the *Providence*, but I know that he is capable of the responsibilities that come with being the first officer of a starship."

"You think highly of my son, don't you?" Chandler said.

"Certainly," Rob said. "He can be a real clown at times, but I know that I can count on him." Rob sat forward and peered into Chandler's eyes. "He has literally saved my life on more than one occasion."

Chandler pondered over what Rob was saying. "But what if he decides not to accept this promotion, this assignment?"

"Then he doesn't accept," Rob replied. "It's his decision to make. It won't hurt his career by refusing this offer."

Chandler nodded. "Thank you, Captain Stuart, for your time," he said as he got up to leave. "I'm glad that Blake has you as his friend."

“Do you have a place to stay the night, Mister Adams?” Rob asked as he rose from his chair.

“No,” he said. “I’m taking the next tram home. It’s still morning in Malibu.”

“I forgot about the time difference,” Rob said. He extended his hand once again to shake the hand of Blake’s father, who returned the gesture. “Have a safe trip, Sir,” Rob said. “And tell Blake that I support whatever choice he makes.”

Chandler shrugged. “He doesn’t know I’m here,” he said. “Could you keep this conversation between us?”

“Certainly,” Rob replied.

And with that, Chandler Adams left the home of Rob’s in-laws.



Doctor Janice Stuart entered the transporter room. “How are you, Mac?” she asked the transporter chief.

“I feel refreshed,” Chief Petty Officer John McKinney replied. “And how are you, Doc?”

“Never better,” she replied. “A couple weeks away from the daily routine can do wonders.”

“That’s the truth,” Mac agreed. “So, Doc, is this a social call?”

“I just thought that I’d greet Mel when she beamed in.”

“You’re right on time,” Mac stated. “I just received the signal from Starfleet that she’s ready to transport.”

“We better not keep her waiting then,” Jan said.

McKinney set the controls and passed his hand over the console. The transport chamber came to life and Commander Melanie Leeson’s body began to form inside the energy beam.

“Welcome aboard, Mel,” Jan said as Leeson stepped off the platform.

“Thanks,” she replied. “Where’s the captain?” Leeson asked, surprised that he was not present to greet her.

“His uncle wanted to see him before we head out,” Jan said. The two women started for the exit.

“See you, Mac,” Mel said before the door closed behind her.

Mel and Jan walked through the corridor. “So how did it go?” Jan asked her friend.

“I had a pretty good visit with my family, believe it or not,” Leeson said. “We worked some things out, but it will still be a little touchy for a while. And Ryan is applying to the Academy.”

“Your nephew?” Jan asked with surprise. “I thought he wasn’t interested in Starfleet.”

Mel chuckled. “He wasn’t until the Vendoth attacked last year,” she said. “He decided that he wanted to make a difference. And he asked me to sponsor him.”

“Is he old enough?” Jan asked.

“His seventeenth birthday’s in three months. But what about you and the captain?”

Jan smiled as they entered a turbolift. “We had a great time,” she said. “My parents are very impressed with...” The turbolift doors slid shut.

The lift deposited the officers on deck five, where Leeson’s quarters were located. The doors slid open and they entered the corridor, still engaged in conversation.

“...and then we spent a couple days with Rob’s father,” Jan continued to tell Leeson about her vacation. “I don’t think I could have a better father-in-law if I picked him myself,” she added. “And my personal highlight of the last two weeks was the Bioethics seminar at Starfleet Medical,” Jan continued. “I even got to meet Doctor Pulaski.”

“Sounds like you had a great time,” Leeson said.

They walked through the curved corridor until reaching the first officer’s quarters. The two women stopped and stood a few feet from the door, but did not enter. “Have you heard anything from Blake?” Mel asked.

Jan’s mood changed. “No,” she said. “And the deadline for his decision is today,” she added.

Leeson tried to distance herself from her feelings but found it to be too difficult. She thought about how Blake could irritate her one moment, and make her feel so alive the next. She wanted him to stay. She wanted him to take the assignment and stretch his wings. But Melanie Leeson knew that it could not be both ways. “I wonder what he will decide.”



Blake finished packing his clothes in the cylindrical suitcase and put the strap on his shoulder. He took a last look at his bedroom, not knowing when he would see it, or his home again. He turned and exited the room and practically ran down the steps to the lower level of the house. He expected to see his parents waiting in the kitchen, but did not find them there. He heard voices outside and gazed out the patio window, where he saw his parents talking.

Chandler Adams saw his son through the window and motioned for him to come out to the patio, which Blake did. The door opened as Blake approached and he joined his parents.

“You won’t be able to sleep as late on your ship as you have here,” Chandler said with a smirk. “I hope we haven’t spoiled you too much.”

Blake smiled at his dad. “I always sleep in,” he said playfully.

Janet Adams, Blake's mother, handed him a box. "A little care package to help you get settled," she said.

"Thanks, Mom," Blake said as he accepted the package. He kissed his mother and turned to face his father. "I want to thank you for your help," he said. "It made the decision easier."

Chandler looked Blake in the eye and smiled. "I really didn't do anything," he said.

Blake smiled back. "You let me make my own decision without pushing me one way or other," he said. "Just being with family makes the difference."

"So what did you decide?" Blake's mother asked.

Blake hugged his mother but did not say a word about his decision. "I'll let you know before I ship out," he said. Blake let go of his mother and shook his father's hand. "Bye Dad."

"Be careful, son," Chandler said. "I want you to know that I'm proud of you."

Blake nodded and smiled. "I'll be in touch," he said.

Blake walked a few feet from his parents and tapped his communicator pin. "Lieutenant Commander Adams to Spacedock Control. Ready to beam up."

Within seconds, Blake saw the beach, his parents, the waves of the Pacific Ocean all disappear and the familiar walls of a transporter room were before him. He stepped off the transporter platform and walked to the security desk, placing his thumb on the optical scanner.

The ensign at the security desk looked up. "Welcome aboard, Commander," he said. "Will you need guest quarters, Sir?"

Blake shook his head. "Just passing through," he said. "My ship is leaving today and I thought I'd get a good look at the outside from the observation lounge before I board."

"The straight-faced security officer simply nodded. "Enjoy your stay, Sir," he said.

Blake nodded and started for the exit.



Captain Stuart exited the turbolift and stepped onto the bridge. He noticed that his senior bridge officers were already working at their assigned duty stations, and the scheduled launch was still a couple hours away. The captain greeted everyone and walked toward his ready room. He noticed the look of anticipation on his first officer's face and motioned for her to join him.

Melanie Leeson followed Stuart into the ready room and stood at attention while he walked to the replicator. "Have a seat, Exec," Stuart said. He still had to remind Leeson to be less formal at times.

"Apple cinnamon tea, hot," the captain said. "Want anything?"

Leeson shook her head. “No, thanks, Captain.”

Stuart removed the cup of his favorite beverage from the replicator alcove and walked to his desk. He sat down while taking a sip of the steaming liquid. “What’s our status, Exec,” he said after placing the cup on the corner of his desk.

Leeson hoped that Stuart would tell her about Blake’s decision. Would Blake accept an appointment as the first officer of the *Perseus*? Or would he stay with the *Providence*? But the captain showed no indication of revealing what he knew. *If* he knew. “The ship is fully functional and pre-flight checks are underway,” she stated. Seven crew members have been reassigned and all but two replacements have come aboard.”

“And what about those two?” Stuart asked.

“We are to pick them up at Starbase 82 when we layover there,” Leeson replied.

Stuart nodded. “And who was the young man at the CONN station?”

“Lieutenant Eric Kelly,” Leeson said. “He’s manning the station this shift in case....”

Stuart received the hint from his first officer. “You’re wondering about what Blake decided,” he said.

Leeson hesitated and turned her eyes away from the captain. “Yes Sir,” she said softly.

Stuart picked up his cup and took another sip. “I haven’t heard anything, yet,” he said as he set the cup back down. “And I haven’t heard from Salesh either,” he added.

As if on cue, the sound of the door chime sounded, indicating that someone was on the other side of the door that led to the ship’s command center.

“Come,” Stuart said.

The door slid open and to Stuart’s astonishment, Lieutenant Salesh K’Tok stood in the doorway. “Sorry to disturb you, Captain,” the Derkhanan said as he stepped into the room.

Stuart and Leeson both stood to their feet, not expecting to see the chief engineer. “Please come in, Lieutenant,” Stuart said. “We were just wondering about you.”

Salesh walked in and stood before his captain and first officer. “I wanted to talk with you, Captain,” Salesh said. “I must resign from Starfleet.”

“Then you are the leader of the seventh clan?” Stuart asked.

“I am the one prophesied to become the father of the seventh clan,” Salesh said. “But the time of fulfillment has not yet come,” he added.

Stuart stared at the engineer. “Then why are you resigning?” he asked.

“There are several tasks I must complete on Derkhana before the prophecy is fulfilled,” Salesh replied. “My time in your dimension is complete.”

“Dimension?” Leeson said as she tried not to show how the engineer’s statement surprised her. “You’re from another dimension?”

Salesh nodded. “Yes, commander. I did not realize that I came from outside this dimension until my trip home.”

“When do you have to leave?” Stuart asked.

“Soon, Captain,” he replied. “I would like to say goodbye to the engineering staff and the other senior officers.”

“You are one of the finest engineers in the fleet, Lieutenant,” Stuart stated. “And you will be missed. Rob Stuart knew that he really would miss the Derkhanan. “I’m sure you will need time to pack,” the captain added. “I will arrange a reception in the main crew lounge at 1700 hours so you can say your goodbyes. Dismissed.”

“Thank you, Captain,” Salesh said. He bowed and exited the room.

Leeson realized that the loss of Lieutenant Salesh would be a personal one for the captain. She also knew that Blake’s loss, if Blake decided to accept the promotion that was being offered to him, would be worse. “Now what about Blake?”



Blake Adams walked toward the gantry that led to the *U.S.S. Perseus*. He saw Captain Katrina Mueller waiting for him as he approached. She extended her hand as he reached her, his hand reaching for hers. “Captain Mueller,” he said her name as they shook hands.

“I trust you have made your decision, Commander Adams,” Mueller said with a smile.

Blake returned the smile. “Yes, Captain. And I’m sure it’s the right one.”



### ***Captain’s Log: Stardate 54695.1***

*We are getting ready to get underway to continue our survey mission in the Beta Quadrant. We will be traveling first to Sauria to pick up Doctor Heseck for his return to Selerus. I will also be doing a personal favor for Admiral Hathaway before returning to our survey area. He wants me to transport Captain Jack McCall to his new ship—the U.S.S. Chamberlain—at the Delta Ophiucus shipyards and evaluate the man’s psychological fitness for command. \* From what I understand, McCall and his crew escaped from a Glazyalan prison camp, where they were held for almost a year after the Dominion War ended. Apparently, McCall facilitated an escape and tried to throw one of his captors out of an airlock. This should be an interesting assignment. On a personal note, I am still waiting to hear from Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams to know if he will be staying on board or accepting the promotion that has been offered to him. Lieutenant Salesh has resigned to return to his home planet. He will be missed, but somehow, I believe that our paths will cross again. I have decided to assign Lieutenant Mary Goodman to the position of Chief Engineer in his place.*

Rob Stuart turned off the recorder. He stood and walked to the nearest window and gazed at the *Nebula*-class starship in the next berth.

“*Captain Stuart, please come to the bridge,*” Melanie Leeson’s voice said over the intercom.

Rob straightened his uniform and hid his feelings concerning Blake Adams from the outside world. “On my way,” he said as he turned and started toward the door that separated his ready room from the bridge.

As soon as the two halves of the door parted, Rob was surprised but happy, to see Blake standing over the new officer at the CONN position. “You came to say goodbye, I see,” he said to Blake.

Blake looked up at his friend and gave a wink. “Actually, I’m trying to get this new kid out of my seat,” he replied.

Rob smiled, realizing that Blake had decided to stay on the ship. “Why did you refuse the promotion, Blake,” he asked. “I thought you wanted to be a first officer when you grew up.”

Blake shrugged his shoulders. “I haven’t grown up yet,” he said. “I still need to be with my family.” When he said the word, “family,” Stuart knew that Blake was referring to the crew of the *Providence*.

Rob Stuart nodded. He wanted what was best for his friend, but he also felt relieved that Blake was staying. “Welcome back, Blake,” Stuart said as he vigorously shook the second officer’s hand.

“Now that the formalities are out of the way, could you tell this junior grade to get out of my chair?” Blake jokingly requested.

“You’re the senior flight officer, Blake,” Leeson stated. “Lieutenant Kelly *is* part of your department.”

“Maybe I’ll just watch and see how good he is,” Blake replied. “Stay where you are, kid, so I can see what you can do.”

Lieutenant J. G. Eric Kelly felt a little nervous, knowing that he was under the watchful eye of one of the best pilots in Starfleet. Still, he knew that he was more than qualified as a pilot himself and that he could show what he was made of. “With respect, I can do just about anything you can do, Sir,” he said with a smirk.

Blake looked at Rob and Mel, trying not to laugh. “I think I like this kid,” he said. “Sorta reminds me of...me.”

Mel merely shook her head. “I hope not,” she muttered.

Stuart suppressed his laughter as he sat in the CO’s chair. “We better get underway,” he said. “Blake, you have the honors.”

Blake straightened his posture and pretended to be serious. “Aye, Skipper,” he said. “Release mooring beams and inform Spacedock Control that we are out of here.”

Melanie Leeson gently slapped Blake on the back. “It’s good to have you back.”



The *Providence* backed smoothly away from its alcove and spun around, its bow facing the huge space doors that separated the interior of the massive station from the void of space. The ship slowly moved forward toward the doors, which began to open.

Blake kept a watchful eye on the skilled younger pilot. He glanced back at Rob. “What course, Skipper?”

“Doctor Heseck is expecting a pickup,” Stuart said.

Blake nodded and looked back to the pilot. “Set course for Sauria, Lieutenant Kelly, and engage at warp seven once we clear Earth’s orbit.”

“Aye, Sir,” Kelly replied.

The ship exited the giant Spacedock and moved away. In a flash of light, the starship shot away. The *Providence* was returning to the final frontier.

\*Check out Mike Gray’s *Star Trek: Dark Horizon*

<http://darkhorizon.4mg.com/main-frames.htm>