

To Boldly Go: All for One

A U.S.S. *Monarch* story

(with contributions from the crews of the starships *Providence* and *Trailblazer*)

By Cleve Johnson

U.S.S. *Monarch*, Stardate 55782.9, 0947 Hours

Several consoles erupted in sparks and small metallic debris. Captain Rob Stuart held tightly to the armrests of his chair, trying to stay seated during the battle. “Damage report, Exec, as soon as you can.”

Commander Marcus Grey, lying on the deck, grabbed his chair and pulled himself up. He quickly keyed in a request to retrieve the ship’s status. He felt the bridge shake roughly once again as more small explosions flashed from several stations, filling the command center with acrid smoke. “Shields are down to thirty-six percent. An EPS conduit on deck ten, port side has blown. Sections thirty-one and thirty-two have been sealed off and a DC team is on its way. Minor damage to the port sensor array. Sickbay reports dozens of serious injuries and seven casualties...so far.”

Stuart glanced to his right, toward the tactical station. “TAC?”

Lieutenant Mills met the captain’s stare. “The lead Enkara vessel has been disabled, one other destroyed. The other two only have minor damage and are closing.”

Stuart hit the communication touchpad. “Engineering. Henry, do we still have warp drive?” Rob felt uncomfortable with the delayed reply before his chief engineer’s voice finally came out of the speaker.

“It’s a mess down here, Robert, but the core is still online. I think I can give you up to warp five point three.”

“I’ll hold you to that Henry.” Stuart closed the com channel and looked toward the tactical station again. “Lieutenant, target both of the Enkara ships’ engines and fire right before we go to warp. Mister D’Neskos, set course seven three mark two zero, and prepare to jump to warp five on my mark.”

Both lieutenants acknowledged with the customary “aye” at the same instant.

Another blast from the alien attack ships caused the artificial gravity to phase out for a second before the backup generators kicked in.

“We just lost our shields, Captain,” Lieutenant Jennifer Mills yelled.

Stuart dismissed the slight dizziness that accompanied the gravitational shift and gazed at the approaching starship’s image on the main viewer. “Time to go. TAC, fire phasers. Mister D’Neskos, enga...”

Before he could finish giving his command, an alien transporter beam whisked Stuart away.

“Captain!” Mills fought her urge to rush to the spot where the captain disappeared from, but her good sense made her realize that she could not leave her post during battle conditions. “Commander Grey, the captain is gone.”

The first officer stood and turned to face the senior tactical officer. “Fire phasers...just as the captain ordered.”

Mills, afraid that the captain might be on one of the Enkara ships that she had targeted, reluctantly pressed the firing touchpad.

“CONN, go to warp.”

The Veloran pilot turned his head toward the first officer. “What about the captain, Sir?”

“The captain cannot be rescued if the Enkara destroy us, Mister D’Neskos. Now, follow my instructions and engage the warp drive as per Captain Stuart’s previous orders.” Grey took a few steps toward the captain’s chair and, reluctantly, turned to sit down.

“Aye, Commander.”

One moment the starship was in danger of becoming like an exploding sun, the next it was traveling faster than what was thought possible only three centuries earlier. The damaged Enkara vessels were in no shape to pursue.

Marcus Grey felt the eyes of each one of the bridge officers and crew staring at him. He could guess what they were thinking. He stood and looked around the bridge. “I need to know what condition the ship is in. I want a detailed report from all departments in twenty minutes. We need to get repairs underway immediately.”

Lieutenant Jeremy Brackin, the senior OPS officer, stood and faced Commander Grey. “What about the captain, Sir? Are we just going to leave him behind?”

“Watch your tone, Mister Brackin.” Jennifer Mills’s eyes narrowed as they drilled into the OPS manager like a laser torch into titanium.

Brackin stared back at the tactical officer. “Everyone on the bridge is thinking the same thing. I’m just the one with enough guts to say it.”

“Mister Brackin, that will be enough.” Commander Grey, who was usually calm and soft-spoken, raised his voice in a way that none on the *Monarch* had ever witnessed before. “I have no intention of leaving the captain behind, but the ship and crew is my first priority. We must ascertain our damage and repair it the best that we can under current circumstances. It would be a suicide mission to charge into the unknown in our present condition. Is that understood, *Lieutenant?*”

Brackin quickly looked down to the deck plating, then back up to the first officer. The OPS officer’s expression was softer than a few moments before. “I understand, Commander. I...I meant no disrespect, Sir.”

Marcus’s face remained hard and impassive, but he let go of his momentary anger. He never liked to call someone on the carpet, but as a Starfleet officer...and as the acting captain, Grey knew that he must maintain discipline. “I accept your apology,

Mister Brackin, but I expect you...and every member of this crew...to follow my orders just as you would follow the captain's." Marcus turned toward the tactical station. "I will be in sickbay, then in engineering. Lieutenant Mills, you have the bridge." He strode toward the turbolift and entered it; the doors swooshed shut behind him.



The first officer entered sickbay. Every bed was full of injured crewmen; some with only minor injuries stood or sat on the floor between the biobeds. Marcus Grey looked around the room searching for the CMO. He spotted her treating a young ensign's head injury and started to go toward her when he heard a familiar voice call to him. He turned around to see his son, cradling his left arm, enter the room. Grey rushed toward his son and put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Ian, are you alright?"

"I'm sure I will be, Commander." The boy forced himself to display good humor through his apparent pain.

"What happened, Ian?"

"He saved my daughter's life, Commander. And he took the brunt of a structural support in the process."

Grey looked at the man addressing him. "Mister Nelson?"

"Ian and Carrie were in holodeck two when the attack started. They were on their way to the emergency shelters when the supports in one of the corridors on deck seven gave way. Ian pushed Carrie out of the way, but he was a little slow about getting out of the way, himself." Lieutenant Nelson, smiling at the boy, rubbed the top of Ian Grey's head. "I am in your debt, young Mister Grey."

"I have always dreamed of being a young maiden's shining knight, Sir." Ian smiled at the science officer. "I am only too happy that Carrie acted the part of Maid Marian to my Robin Hood."

The elder Grey shot Lieutenant Nelson an apologetic look.

Greg Nelson just smiled. "Don't concern yourself, Commander. He's always the perfect gentleman."

One of the orderlies interrupted the two officers. "Excuse me, Sir. I need to take a look at your son's arm."

"Of course. Ian, I'm going to leave you for a moment. I need to talk to the doctor."

"I'll be fine, Father."

Marcus turned and strode toward Jan Stuart. "Doctor, I need a moment of your time."

Jan looked up. "This isn't the best time, Marcus." She changed her mind when she noticed the look that the first officer gave her. "Karen, can you take over with Ensign Tam?"

Nurse Karen Ingalls, who had been assisting the doctor, nodded her head. "Certainly, Doctor Stuart."

Jan led the first officer to her office. She turned as soon as the door closed behind them. “Cut to the chase, Marcus. Is Rob...dead?”

“He was captured, beamed off the ship when the shields went down.” Grey turned away from Jan and stared at the computer monitors on the wall. “I...I’m sorry Doctor. I had to order our retreat without getting him back.”

Jan stepped up behind Marcus and gently touched his shoulder. “It’s okay, Marcus. You did what had to be done in order to save the ship. Rob would have done the same thing if you were the one that the Enkara captured.”

Commander Grey turned to face the doctor. “I must say that you’re taking this better than I expected, Janice.”

Jan, a tear glistening in the corner of her left eye, turned and walked around her desk. She sat down and looked up at the first officer. “I’m ready to fall apart, Marcus, but I have a duty to this ship and crew just like you do. I have to stay detached from my feelings at least until the emergency passes.”

“You are probably the bravest person that I have served with, Janice. I...need to go now, but don’t hesitate to call me if you...”

“Thank you, Marcus. I just need a couple of minutes to pull myself together. Can you tell Nurse Ingalls that I’ll be right out?”

“Certainly, Doctor.” Marcus left the CMO’s office.

When the door slid shut, Jan activated the monitor on her desk. “Computer, record priority one message to be transmitted to Captain Melanie Leeson, U.S.S. *Trailblazer* as soon as communication blackout ends. Code the message as confidential.”



U.S.S *Providence*, 1724 Hours

Commander Blake Adams loved the sensation of cool wet sand squishing between his toes as he took a stroll along the beach. The glow of the sun setting over the Pacific Ocean was a beautiful sight, even if it was just a holographic simulation. The light breeze messed his normally well-kept hair as he strolled along the waterfront. This was the most peaceful moment that the *Providence*’s CO had enjoyed since completing the survey of sector Four-Two-Eight. He was glad that Commodore Gardner had granted his crew a respite by sending them back to the Gratzik Nebula to study gaseous anomalies. Blake, of course, abandoned the survey once he heard from Jan Stuart six days earlier. He had immediately given an order to make for the Starbase Eighty-two to shorten the distance between him and the *Monarch* should Rob need his help.

Blake’s reverie was interrupted by the sound of the holodeck doors opening. He turned to see Counselor Goodman standing a few meters away. The other man’s expression told Blake that his momentary peace had just ended. “I know that look, James. What happened?”

Goodman shook his head. “I...don’t know how to tell you.”

Blake could see that something terrible had happened as he stared at his friend. “Don’t sugarcoat it, James. It’s Rob, isn’t it?”

“We received a message from Starfleet Command...from Admiral Hathaway. Rob has been captured by a hostile alien government. Nothing else is known at this time.”

Blake did not reply, but threw his towel on the sand and quickly walked passed the ship’s counselor and out into the corridor. James Goodman turned and quickly followed. Goodman was only one-quarter Betazoid, but his close proximity to Blake allowed the counselor easily to feel the intensity of his friend’s jumbled emotions. “Blake, wait.”

Blake did not slow his pace; he would not be deterred as he made his way to the nearest turbolift. “Bridge.”

James rushed into the lift before the doors shut. “Blake, don’t do anything foolish.”

Blake stared at the closed doors, avoiding the counselor’s gaze. “When have you known me to anything foolish, James?”

“Well, there was that time...”

“...in the last few months?” Blake did not take his eyes off of the closed doors, but a slight grin appeared on his face.

James did not say anything but followed him onto the bridge as soon as the turbolift doors parted. He did not know what his friend and CO was planning, but James could guess that Blake Adams would do something that might jeopardize his career.

Blake stopped behind his chair to survey his crew. Beta shift had barely begun, so the only member of the ship’s senior staff was Lieutenant J.G. Eric Kelly, who was the current duty officer. “Eric, change course for the Sol System and increase speed to maximum warp. I want to get to Utopia Planitia ASAP.”

Having received the transmission during his duty shift, Kelly already knew about Captain Stuart’s abduction. The young officer had figured that Commander Adams would personally want to make a rescue attempt since he and Robert Stuart were such close friends. Eric had the foresight to warn the ensign who manned the CONN station to expect a sudden course change. “Aye, Skipper.” Eric immediately turned his attention toward the Andorian pilot, Ensign Jev’Ram Fyutis. “Mister Fyutis, you heard the skipper. Make it so.”

Blake turned and briskly walked toward his ready room as James Goodman stood and watched the doors part to allow Blake into his sanctuary, and then close abruptly as if the computer could sense that Blake wanted some distance away from everyone for the time being. Before the doors closed, Blake told Lieutenant Kelly to open a secure channel to the U.S.S. *Majestic*.



U.S.S. *Majestic*, 1738 Hours

Commodore Charles Gardner observed the image of Commander Blake Adams that stared through the monitor. Gardner felt a sense of pride when he looked at the man who had once been his senior Conn officer when he—Blake—had served on the *Republic*. At that time, Rob Stuart had also been a member of that crew. It had not been too many years since Stuart was Gardner's first officer. "I feel the same way, Blake, but what can you do? The *Monarch* is nearly four hundred light years away. I'm sure that Rob's crew is doing all they can to secure his release."

"I'm sure they are, too, Commodore. But you need to understand that Rob is more than my best friend. He's like a brother to me."

"I know he is." Gardner smiled at the younger officer. "I remember when you first joined us on the *Republic*. Rob took you under his wing and..."

"Commodore... Chuck, please. Surely you understand what I'm feeling. You once told me that my friendship with Rob reminded you of your friendship with Admiral Hathaway." Blake momentarily looked away, then back toward Gardner. *"If I remember the story right, you disobeyed direct orders to go after him when negotiations with the Zarabians went south."*

Gardner smiled, suspecting that the *Providence* was already halfway back to Earth. "Tell you what, Blake. I think that you have saved about seven weeks of leave. This would be as good a time as any for you to take advantage of it. In fact, I think your crew deserves a nice long rest. As of this moment, I'm placing the *Providence* on detached duty."

"Thanks, Commodore."

"Don't mention it. Tell me one thing. What is your current position and heading?"

Blake just smiled at Chuck Gardner from the other side of the screen.

"That's what I thought." Gardner shook his head. "Well, with any luck, you'll get a good report from the *Monarch* before you use up most of your leave time."

"With any luck, Sir. Thanks again. Providence out."

The image of Blake Adams faded away, replaced by the seal of the United Federation of Planets.

"Good hunting, Blake."



U.S.S. *Trailblazer*, 1920 Hours

Captain Melanie Leeson tried to keep busy by reading various reports by the ship's department heads and updates on the *Trailblazer*'s repairs and operational status since it had returned from its mission to prevent a hostile alien force from creating a war between the three superpowers—The United Federation of Planets, the Klingon Empire, and the Romulan Star Empire. She did not want to allow her personal feelings affect her job, but the earlier message that she had received from Jan concerning Rob's capture

nagged at her. Melanie felt helpless, unable to do anything to help her former CO. Worse yet, Melanie could not even be near Jan Stuart—her best friend—for moral support.

The door chime interrupted Melanie's thoughts. "Come."

The door opened at Leeson's invitation, allowing Lieutenant Commander Victor Jacobs to enter the captain's ready room. "Are you okay, Mel?"

"As okay as I can be under the circumstances, Vic." Leeson motioned for her security officer to sit in the chair on the other side of her desk. "What can I do for you?"

Jacobs sat down and leaned back slightly in the chair, regarding his captain and best friend's daughter with concern. "I actually thought that I might be able to do something for you, Mel. I know that the Stuarts mean a lot to you. I just want you to know that I'm here if you need someone to talk to."

"Thanks, Vic." Leeson reached across the desk and grabbed the man's hand. "You're a good friend."

The computer beeped to let Leeson know that someone on the bridge was paging her. "*Bridge to Captain Leeson.*"

Melanie sighed. She did not feel like dealing with any more issues at the moment, but duty called. "Leeson here. What is it, Mister Jaxx?"

"You have an incoming personal message, Captain."

Melanie did not expect another personal message unless it was word that Rob had been rescued...or that he had been killed. She did not allow herself to get her hopes up about the former thought, nor did she entertain the possibility of the latter. "Send it through, Lieutenant." She smiled at her security officer. "Vic, I'll talk with you later."

Jacobs rose and smiled at his CO. "I'm here whenever you need me, Mel." He turned and exited the ready room, leaving Melanie alone to answer the communication.

Melanie took hold of the computer unit on the desktop and swiveled it around. The screen came to life, displaying the image of another starship's ready room. Melanie noticed a shadow moving in the background, then a Starfleet uniform come into view. The next thing that Melanie saw was the uniform sitting down...and the face of the man who wore it. "Blake!"

The other officer smiled. "*Hello, Mel. How have you been?*"

"I've been better."

Blake's smile turned downward as his eyebrows narrowed toward each other. "*You've heard about Rob, then.*"

Melanie nodded. "Yes. Jan sent me a message this morning. She tried to be strong, but I could tell that she's torn up."

"I'm sure that she is. I can't imagine what she's feeling."

"What about you, Blake? How do you feel?"

There was a pause before Blake answered. "*I'm...*" He shook his head and frowned. "*He's my best friend, Mel.*"

“I know he is, Blake. I just wish there was something that I could do to help him. I wish that I could be there for Jan, too.”

Blake leaned forward, his face filling the monitor. *“Do you mean that?”*

Melanie eyed Blake’s image with suspicion. She knew what his facial expression meant; she also knew that he was determined to follow through with whatever hair-brained scheme that he was planning. “You can’t go off half-cocked, Blake. You need to stop and think about...”

“I have thought about it, Mel, and I even got clearance from Commodore Gardner...well, unofficially.”

“Blake...what can you do?”

“I’m not sure of the specifics yet, but I can at least go after him...with your help.”

Melanie shook her head and leaned back in her chair. “It will take weeks for you to get to that area of space, Blake.”

“I thought your ship could sustain high warp for extended periods of time.”

“Blake, you can’t be serious. Starfleet Command would never approve the use of this starship for personal reasons. We’re due to launch in less than a week on a diplomatic mission to Alde...”

“Leave that to me, Mel.” Blake nodded. *“I’m already on my way home. Are you in?”*

Melanie sighed heavily and nodded toward the monitor. “If you can get the orders cut, then I’m in, Blake. But I still think this is futile.”

“Don’t sound like the Borg, Mel.” Blake smiled as he punched something on his desk monitor console. *“Now, can I talk you into meeting me at these coordinates in about forty-two hours?”*

Melanie watched the numbers pop up on her screen. “If and when I receive the order, I’ll be on my way.”

“You’ll have that order within the hour, Mel. I’ll see you in a couple days.” The monitor went dark.

Melanie Leeson shook her head. Jan had told her to expect a call from Blake and she already figured that he would somehow pull off getting the *Trailblazer* assigned to what she had just called a “hair-brained scheme.” She pushed the com touchpad. “Attention all hands, prepare for departure. Department heads meet in the main conference room in one hour.”



Starfleet Command, Office of the Chief of Starfleet Operations, 1925 Hours

“I at least need your permission to try, Admiral. You know what he means to me.”

Admiral Robert Hathaway sat in his big office chair, trying to appear calm. He tapped his forefinger on his oaken desk. “I know what he means to you, Commander Adams. I also know what he means to *me*.” He rose from his chair and turned to face a

painting of the *Miranda*-class U.S.S. *Majestic* that hung on the wall behind his desk. He quickly turned back toward the monitor sitting on the corner of his desk. “Some of the other admirals might accuse me of using my position inappropriately to authorize a rescue mission because Robby’s my nephew, but I don’t care. I’ll write the orders and transmit them to the *Trailblazer* immediately. I’m assigning you as mission commander. Report to Captain Leeson as soon as possible.”

“Thanks, Admiral. I hope that we’ll get word of Rob’s rescue long before we link up with the *Monarch*, but I have a feeling that won’t be the case.”

“Good luck, Blake.”

“To us all, Admiral.”



Prisoner Barracks, Thirteen Kilometers outside Binlad, Enkar

Seventy-one members of the starship *Columbus*’s crew—male and female, human and various other races of the Federation—huddled together in the corners of the dark, windowless room. They all looked up when they heard the sound of the door sliding open, and each one tried to blend in with the shadows to avoid the soldiers’ stares. Unlike all the other times when they came to take them to the mines, the Enkara guards were bringing someone back. Only this time, it was a new arrival.

The lead Enkara guard unceremoniously threw the prisoner to the floor. As soon as the guards left, a Bolian science officer rushed toward the fallen man to help him stand.

The man looked up at the other officer as he stood. “Thank you, Lieutenant.” The man’s eyes scanned the room, noticing the dark gray walls and lack of bright illumination. “I take it that you are the crew of the U.S.S. *Columbus*.”

The Bolian nodded, noticing the four gold pips on the man’s collar. “We were, Captain. Now we are slaves of the Enkara.”

“Slaves? I don’t see any slaves. You are citizens of the Federation and members of Starfleet. Don’t forget that.”

“Yes, Sir.”

A young ensign stepped forward. “Excuse me, Captain, but who are you?”

“Captain Rob Stuart of the starship *Monarch*. I was sent here to rescue you.”

The ensign laughed. “Rescue us? Who’s gonna rescue *you*?”

Stuart cocked his head toward the young officer and stared into his eyes. The captain’s demeanor remained calm, yet determined. “Don’t forget yourself, Ensign. We’ll get out of here, but it might take some time.”

“Sir, do you know what happened to our captain?” It was a woman in her early thirties that asked the question. She stepped away from a group who remained in the shadows.

Stuart took notice of the woman's maroon shirt and the lieutenant commander pips on her collar. He deduced that she must be the first officer. "Commander LaSalle was found in your ship's sickbay in stasis almost two months ago. He suffered some memory loss because of what the Enkara did to him, but he's doing fine now. In fact, he came back for you."

"Where is he, Captain?"

"On my ship, Commander..."

"...Fuentes, Sir. Alexandra Fuentes. I'm Commander LaSalle's XO."

Stuart shook the woman's hand. "Good to meet you, Commander. What plans have you made to escape?"

"We've given up on trying to escape, Captain." The woman dropped her head and stared at the floor. "We've given up all hope of seeing home again."

"There's always hope, Commander." Stuart placed his hand on her shoulder. "Now, we need to get everyone ready to go once the *Monarch* returns. Gather the senior officers and I'll fill you in on what has happened since your capture."

"Hope? What makes you think they'll come back for us...or you for that matter?" It was the young ensign again.

Stuart narrowed his eyes, letting them drill into the young man. *He must have been straight out of the Academy before shipping out on Columbus.* "What is your name, Ensign?"

"Voorhies." The young man's voice trembled slightly, but his tone remained challenging.

"Well, Ensign Voorhies, you are in the uniform of a Starfleet officer. That must mean that you are a Starfleet officer." Stuart took a step toward the other man; his face came within a few inches of the other's face. "I expect you to act like it, Mister."

Voorhies backed away. "Y...yes Sir." He turned and quickly strode to a lone corner of the cell.

Lieutenant Commander Fuentes stepped up. "Captain Stuart, try not to be too hard on Voorhies. He's a good officer, but this was his first deep space assignment and...well, it's been more difficult for him than for the rest of us."

Stuart glanced over to the corner where the ensign now cowered. "I'm sure it has, Commander, but I need everyone to remember that they are part of Starfleet and that Starfleet will not abandon them. Everyone needs to stay alert and think of one thing—getting out of here alive."

"I understand, Sir."

"Now, gather the senior staff so we can figure out how to escape."

"Aye, Captain."

As Stuart glanced around the cell, he knew that he had to motivate his fellow prisoners to overcome the temptation to give up. He had to make them realize that they still had honor and dignity. It was what he had prepared for since the previous week.



U.S.S. *Monarch*, One Week Earlier, Stardate 55763.2, 1148 Hours

Captain Robert P. Stuart, along with the *Monarch*'s senior officers, sat around the conference table listening to Jovani address them. Prefect Golgath had provided Stuart and Jovani with information about the Enkara, a race bent on conquest of surrounding systems, and that they were the most likely suspects involved with the disappearance of the *Columbus*'s crew. Jovani, the Welvan guide to this region of space, had the responsibility to share that information with the rest of the staff.

Commander Marcus Grey interrupted the Welvan's briefing. "What about Enkara technology? How do they compare with ours?"

"Based on what I have learned about Federation technology to date and what the S'Klopes have shared, I would say that the Enkara surpass you in weaponry and defense but are approximately one hundred to one hundred fifty years behind you in other technological areas." Jovani looked at the first officer, chief engineer, and security chief. "They have transporter devices and a variation of warp drive, but the Prefect assures me that his sources confirm that Enkara ships are limited to the equivalent of warp four point seven."

Stuart chimed in. "Golgath also told us that the Enkara prefer to take captives during their attacks on other worlds or ships. As a precaution, I would like to be able to track all our personnel just in case we have a confrontation. Jan, I would like you to inject the crew with subcutaneous transponders. Start with those of us in this room since the Enkara probably will target their adversary's leaders first."

"I'll start on that right away, Rob." The CMO smiled at her husband.

"Exec, schedule battle drills for each shift." Stuart stood up to indicate that the briefing was coming to an end. "I hope the Enkara will be willing to talk, but I want to be ready if they're not. We should arrive at the edge of their space in four days." Stuart looked around the room. "Any questions?"

No one answered.

"Dismissed." Stuart watched as the officers rose to leave. "Lieutenant Mills, Major Craddock, please stay a moment."

The two officers allowed the others to exit the conference room before approaching the captain. They eyed each other momentarily and then simultaneously stepped toward Stuart. They stopped and stood at attention.

Stuart could see the competitive nature in both of the officers. "At ease before one of you splits your uniform." He motioned for the two to sit down as he took his own seat. "I understand that the two of you have had a little friction about ship's security."

“Captain, I know that Major Craddock outranks me, but I am in charge of ship’s security.” Lieutenant Jennifer Mills had been frustrated with the marine officer’s smugness and patronizing attitude since the ship first launched from Earth orbit.

“And what about you, Major? What do you have to say?”

“Captain, I have tried to work with Lieutenant Mills and offered her the assistance of my marines. She has been rude and uncooperative. I’m trying to work with her and get her to give my marines something to do for weeks now. She refuses to take my advice on matters of security. I would think that she would want the benefit of my experience, but she...”

Stuart raised his hand to cut off the marine CO. “I have a solution to this whole situation.” The captain turned in his chair to face Mills. “Jen, I am going to place ship’s security under Major Craddock’s command. I want you to pick half of your security force to work with the marines.”

“But Captain...”

“Let me finish, Lieutenant. You will be the senior tactical and armory officer. I’m relying on your expertise in this area.”

“I’ll do my best, Captain, but...may I speak freely, Sir?”

“Of course.”

Mills took a deep breath as she tried to remain calm. “Sir, I worked hard to get to where I am. This feels like a demotion and I don’t understand why you made this decision. Have I failed to live up to my duties, Captain?”

Stuart shook his head. “Not at all, Jen. I’ve struggled with this decision for several days and I think it’s the right one. I’m making this change to improve efficiency in both security and ship’s defenses.” Stuart leaned back in his chair as he paused. “Think of this as a step forward instead of a step back.”

Mills nodded. “I’ll try to look ahead, Captain.” She turned to face the marine officer. “I’ll have a list of the personnel that will be transferred to your command by 1700, Major.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant.” Craddock turned his attention back to Stuart. “I will work out any changes in how security will operate and have it on your desk by tomorrow morning, Sir.”

“That sounds good.” Stuart rose from his chair; the other two officers followed his lead and stood as well. “I still expect the two of you to work together, and I suspect that you will probably learn to get past any previous conflicts.”

“Understood, Sir,” Major Craddock replied.

“Yes Sir,” Lieutenant Mills echoed.

Both officers turned and walked toward the exit after Stuart dismissed them. The captain watched them go, hoping that his prediction about their minor differences coming to an end would soon be a reality.



1715 Hours

The captain entered his quarters and started to unzip his tunic. He surveyed the room, looking for his wife. “Jan?”

“Here, Rob.” Jan came out of the bedroom, smiling at her husband. “You didn’t show up in sickbay.”

“Sickbay?”

Jan’s face went from playful to stern as she placed her hands on her hips. “You’re the one who ordered subcutaneous transponders for all the crew. Officers first, if I recall.”

Rob smiled and slowly stepped toward his wife. “Just because you’re a full commander now, don’t let it go to your head.”

Jan shot a look at Rob that made him regret his attempt at humor. He held up his hands in a gesture of surrender and gave her his best “hurt puppy” look. “I’ll report to sickbay first thing in the morning.” He put his arms around her, the slight swelling of her belly pressing against him. He stepped back quickly as he looked down to what had suddenly got his attention. “Did you feel that?”

“Surprised?” Jan smiled as she rubbed her tummy. “I’m not sure which one kicked you, but at least one of our kids is going to be a fighter.”

Rob laughed as he stepped closer to his wife again. He took both her hands in his, squeezing them gently. “Like his mother?”

“Or like *her* father.”

Rob leaned close to Jan’s face and started to kiss her when the chime announced a visitor. Rob looked toward the door, but Jan grabbed his chin and pulled his mouth back to hers. The door chimed again, but Rob ignored it this time. His lips made contact with his wife’s before he looked toward the door again. “Don’t you think I should get that?”

Jan smiled, let go of Rob, and glanced at the door as the person on the other side of it activated the chime a third time. “Whoever it is isn’t going away, so you might as well answer.”

Rob strolled toward the door and reached for the control panel. “Whoever this is will think he’s a first-year cadet again for disturbing us.” He heard Jan’s muffled laughter in the background as the door slid open.

Jovani, the elf-like Welvan, stood with a serene smile in the corridor. He had never intruded on the captain’s private domain before, so Rob Stuart realized that there must be either something bothering the alien or a matter that Jovani did not feel could wait until a more opportune time. “I apologize for interrupting your private time, Captain, but can I speak with you?”

Stuart stepped aside, his hand open and motioning for the “elf” to enter. “Come in, Mister Jovani.”

Jovani walked in and the door slid shut behind him. “Thank you, Captain.”

“I don’t believe that you have ever been to our quarters before. Please come in and have a seat.”

Jovani made his way to the couch and sat down.

Jan approached him with her usual pleasant demeanor. “Can I get you something, Jovani?”

“Thank you, Doctor, but no.”

“Well then, I’ll let the two of you talk privately.” Jan started to turn, but Jovani gently grabbed her arm.

“Please stay, Doctor. What I have to say is for both of you.”

Jan sat down on the couch next to Jovani. She looked up to her husband, who moved to one of the chairs that faced the couch.

“I must say, Mister Jovani, you have piqued my curiosity.” Rob looked intently at the alien. Please tell us what’s on your mind.”

Jovani leaned forward, glancing from the captain to the doctor and back to the captain. “Danger awaits us, Captain. The Enkara will prove to be a foe that you will not be able to reason with. And you, Captain, will be tested as never before.”

“How do you know this, Jovani?” Jan’s concern for her husband was evident. “You’re not telepathic, are you?”

“No, Doctor. But my people do have the ability to sense what will happen in the future.”

“It sounds like it’s a type of clairvoyance or a sixth sense.”

Rob thought about what the Welvan said. “Can you be more specific? What kind of trial will I go through?”

“I am sorry, Captain. I do not have all the details, but I do know that you will find yourself in a situation that you will not be able to overcome without the help of close friends.” Jovani closed his eyes, his mind connected to an event that had not yet taken place. “Many people will look to you for strength and you will bring comfort in the midst of adversity, but you will begin to lose hope yourself. Your wish is to save those who look to you, but you will not be able to save them without the help of your closest companions.”

“My closest companions are hundreds of light years from where we’re going.”

“Then you should not be slow to ask them for help.” Jovani rose from the couch and started toward the door. He stopped and turned back to face both the captain and the doctor. “You are willing to sacrifice yourself for others, Captain. Do not reject others’ willingness to sacrifice themselves for you.” Jovani turned once again toward the now-open door and exited the Stuarts’ quarters.

Jan reached toward her husband. “What does it mean, Rob? Will you be captured by the Enkara?”

Rob, trying to force any look of worry or fear from his face, took Jan's hand in his. "I think that is a distinct possibility if Jovani's 'sixth sense' can be trusted."

"He's been right before."

"I know." Rob stood and began to pace. "Except for you, Jan, my closest companions are..."

"...Blake and Mel." Jan finished her husband's sentence. "You should contact them right away."

Rob chuckled. "And what do I tell them? Do you think that they'll believe that I need help because an alien tells me that he can sense future events?"

Jan rose from the couch and drew Rob close to her. She looked into his eyes; her eyes pleaded with him. "They will believe *you*."

"And how will they explain why they want to be pulled from their current assignments?"

"If you really know them, you know that they are both resourceful enough to find a way."

"I'm concerned that Blake might do something that might jeopardize his career, but Mel has a more level head about such things." Rob thought hard about all that Jovani had told him and about his friendship with Blake and Mel. "I can't do it, Jan. We don't have enough evidence that what Jovani says is going to happen. I won't put our friends' careers on the line for something that may or may not happen."

"Rob, you're being stubborn." Jan's normally pleasant features now changed to frustration and anger. "I have a bad feeling about what awaits us in the next few days. You should heed Jovani's words and allow them to be willing to sacrifice for you. At least give them a choice."

"I already know what choice they'll make, Jan. I can't let them make the sacrifice that might be required if they came out here."

Jan pulled away and started toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Rob started after her, but she was already in the corridor and halfway to the turbolift. "Jan?" He started to jog after her. The turbolift doors closed before he could get there. As he stopped, he said to himself, "I've always heard that pregnant women's moods could change without warning." He turned and went back to his quarters.



Enkara Prison Barracks, Stardate 55783.3, 1640 Hours

Rob remembered that day, wishing that he would have followed Jovani's and Jan's counsel. He regretted not apologizing to his wife, especially since it appeared that now he might not have another opportunity to do so. He remembered Jovani's words concerning the need for him to be strong for others—the *Columbus*'s crew. Rob also remembered what Jovani said about losing hope. Stuart knew that he must fight against that. Besides, if he knew his wife, she probably contacted Blake and Mel when he refused

to do so one week prior. Even if she had not let them know of the potential capture, he was sure that they had been informed by now and, knowing both of them, were probably on their way to rescue him. Rob figured that Commander Grey and the *Monarch*'s crew were already working on plans to do the same...assuming that they escaped yesterday's battle.



U.S.S. *Monarch* (four light years outside of Enkara space), 1650 Hours

Commander Joel LaSalle exited the turbolift and approached the center seat. "I thought that I'd relieve you a few minutes early so you could get a head start on some well-deserved rest."

Marcus Grey rose from the command chair and faced the other officer. "I appreciate that, Mister LaSalle. I don't think that any of us have slept much in the last twenty-four hours."

"I just came from engineering. Commander Li has his people working around the clock on repairs."

"I think I'll go check on his progress before I go off duty. I want to be in as good of a shape as we can before going after the captain."

"Where do we start to look for him, Commander?"

"Mister Rab told me that he got a glimpse into one of the Enkara ship captain's mind when Captain Stuart was beamed away. They were going to take him back to their homeworld." Marcus started toward the turbolift and turned. "Rab also discovered that your crew is being held there, too. We'll get them back, Joel."

LaSalle half-smiled and nodded toward the other officer as the turbolift doors slid shut.



Commander Grey entered main engineering and went straight to Commander Henry Li's office. "How are repairs progressing, Henry?"

Li looked away from his console toward the first officer. "Hello, Marcus. I have to tell you that things would be better if we had proper drydock facilities, but we're doing the best we can under the circumstances."

"How soon do you think we can get underway?"

"Impulse engines are at eighty-two percent and I can give you up to warp seven. I'm mainly concerned about getting our shields back up to full strength."

"I'll have Lieutenant Mills get more of her people to help you with that."

Li shook his head. "She has already given me as many of her people as she can spare. She's trying to get the weapons systems back online."

Marcus let out a sigh. "What is your best estimate until we can be ready to head back for the captain?"

"At least two days, Marcus."

“Keep me informed, Henry. I want to get underway as soon as possible.”

“I think we should delay that until help arrives.”

Marcus and Henry looked toward the door entry. “Doctor?”

Doctor Janice Stuart stood there; her face displayed a seriousness that she rarely showed. “Reinforcements are on the way.”



U.S.S. *Providence*, Stardate 55786.2, 1220 Hours

Blake Adams finished packing his suitcase when the door chimed. “Come in.”

The doors parted and Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot entered Blake’s quarters. “Sorry to bother you, Sir, but I wanted to get your final orders before your departure.”

“Shore leave, Number One. Take the crew to Earth, Risa, or anywhere else that you would like to visit. Just make sure that you have some fun.”

Lightfoot raised her eyebrows in an impressive impersonation of the Vulcan science officer T’Les. “Are you sure you don’t want us to help you rescue your friend, Captain?”

“It’s not a matter of wanting you with me, but a matter of speed. *Providence* just isn’t fast enough to get me to where I’m going in time.”

The intercom chirped. “*Bridge to captain.*”

Blake looked up. “Adams here. Go ahead, Eric.”

“*We’re approaching the rendezvous point, Skipper. The Trailblazer is standing by for transport.*”

“Very good. Take us out of warp and Signal my compliments to Captain Leeson. I’m heading to the transporter room now. Adams out.” Blake clapped his first officer on the back as he directed her toward the corridor. “The ship is yours, Number One.”



U.S.S. *Trailblazer*, 1227 Hours

Captain Melanie Leeson entered the transporter room. “Is Commander Adams ready to beam over, Chief?”

The chief petty officer at the control panel entered the coordinates and stood ready. “Yes, Captain. The *Providence* has signaled his readiness to transport.”

“Energize.”

Blake materialized in the transport chamber and stepped down from the platform. “Permission to come aboard?”

Melanie reached out her hand to shake his. “By all means, welcome aboard, Blake.”

Blake took Melanie's hand, but instead of shaking it, he pulled her close and embraced her. If the transporter chief had not been present he would have kissed her. "Good to see you again, Mel."

Melanie, embarrassed by Blake's embrace, pulled away. "Blake!"

"Sorry, darling. I should have realized that you might not want to participate in any public displays of affection in front of your crew." Blake grinned sheepishly. "So, are you ready to go rescue Rob?"

Melanie had never understood Blake's irreverent attitude until now. In a moment, she realized that it was all a mask, a way to cover how he truly felt. He used his humor to cope with the pain of not knowing if Rob was safe or not. "I'm as ready as I can be for now. I'll show you where your quarters are and then I'll take you to the bridge."

Both officers exited the transporter room; the same thought went through their minds—*I hope we get to Rob in time.*



Thirteen days later...

Doctor M'Tan worked diligently to save Lieutenant Commander Kim Thomas' badly burnt arm. She had led her squadron toward Enkar in an attempt to rescue Captain Stuart, but the Enkara defenses were impenetrable. Fortunately, none of the *Peregrine*-class fighters were destroyed, but her ship was damaged severely. A power conduit under her left console ruptured and the console exploded, sending flaming shards of metal and wiring into the side of Thomas' face and left arm. The burns on her face were superficial and would heal well; there was only a possibility of minor cosmetic surgery needed. Her arm was another matter. Dozens of metallic fragments had penetrated deep into her flesh, ripping muscle and nerve endings. Fortunately, the Vulcan physician had experience treating similar wounds during the Dominion War and she estimated that Thomas's chances of recovery, arm still intact and fully functional, was ninety-eight point zero six eight three percent.

Doctor Janice Stuart stood in the background, watching the procedure with detached interest. She was concerned about CAG, but Jan's thoughts kept drifting back to her husband's fate. Jan refused to believe that Rob was dead. She could explain how she knew, but something inside of her would not allow her to lose hope that he would come back to her. She could picture Rob in her mind's eye, his arms open wide as he ran toward her. The image that only she could see faded as she came back to the reality of sickbay.

"Did you hear me, Doctor?" Marcus Grey gently placed his hand on Jan's shoulder.

"I'm sorry, what did you say, Marcus?"

"I asked how CAG was doing." Marcus pointed toward the surgical bed with a nod of his head.

“Doctor M’Tan says that a full recovery looks favorable. Commander Thomas was lucky.” Jan turned and walked toward the door. “Did any of the other ships have a chance to scan for human life signs on that planet?”

Grey, following Jan toward the door that separated the surgical suite from the main sickbay, shook his head. “I’m afraid they didn’t get close enough to the planet. The Enkara defense perimeter proved too troublesome.” The first officer/acting captain saw the worry on the doctor’s face. He realized that regardless of the cost, he had to find a way to get Captain Stuart back. “Don’t despair, Janice. We’ll find him. We’ll find the *Columbus*’s crew as well.”

The *Columbus*’s crew. Jan had almost forgotten about them. They were the reason the *Monarch* was in this sector of unexplored space and Rob had sacrificed himself to find them. Jan wondered if he was with them down on Enkar. She wondered if they were still alive. “I know we will, Marcus. I have to believe that.”

Just then, a beep came through the communication system. “*Bridge to sickbay.*”

Jan and Marcus both looked toward the ceiling. Jan wondered why they did that whenever they answered the disembodied voice that came through the speakers. She remembered how Rob would usually do the same thing. “This is Doctor Stuart.”

“Is Commander Grey with you, Doctor?”

“I’m here, Lieutenant. Go ahead.”

“Sir, a ship has been detected on long-range sensors moving toward us at high warp. Its transponder signal identifies it as a Starfleet vessel, the U.S.S. Trailblazer. We’re maintaining radio silence per your orders.”

Jan looked at Marcus, a slight grin appearing on her previously concerned face. “The cavalry has arrived, Marcus.”

Marcus Grey recalled the reference from Nineteenth-Century American history. He had once seen a refurbished holovid of a Twentieth Century actor named John Wayne playing a cavalry officer. The first officer looked back toward the ceiling. “It’s alright, Lieutenant. Use scrambler code Gamma Two and hail the ship. Send them my regards and Doctor Stuart’s as well.”

“Aye Sir.” With that, the communication concluded.

“Care to join me on the bridge, Doctor?” Marcus motioned toward the door leading to the corridor.

“Thank you, Commander, I believe I would.” Jan started for the door, her worries subsiding with the arrival of the other starship and the two people aboard who she believed would not rest until Rob returned from his captivity.



Three hours later

Janice Stuart entered the transporter room and greeted the crewman manning the console.

“Captain Leeson and Commander Adams are ready to beam over, Doctor.”

“Energize.”

Jan rushed toward the platform as soon as her two friends materialized, hugged them, and led them toward the exit. “It’s great to see you two again.” She led them into the corridor toward the turbolift. “I’ll have the quartermaster assign each of you quarters near mine and Rob’s, but first I want to take you to the bridge to meet the senior officers.”

As the three companions walked, Melanie Leeson was amazed that Jan had such a cheery disposition in view of the circumstances, but the captain had known the doctor long enough to see through her facade. Leeson knew that Jan’s joy was genuine, though.

Blake, who would usually have something funny or light-hearted to say, focused on the task at hand. “Any leads on where Rob is being held?”

Jan’s demeanor changed, echoing Blake’s seriousness. “We’re sure that he is on the Enkara homeworld, but we haven’t been able to get close enough for any detailed scans of the planet. Their defenses are too hard to break through.”

The three came to the end of the curved corridor and they entered the lift. The doors closed behind them and they continued their conversation as they began the journey upward.

“If we can’t get through them, we’ll just have to go around them.” Blake forced himself to show confidence, even if he didn’t feel it at the moment.

The turbolift stopped, the doors slid open with the familiar swooshing sound, and the officers moved toward the center seat. Commander Grey rose from that seat and stretched out his hand toward Jan’s former shipmates, who each shook it in turn. “Welcome aboard Captain, Commander. Captain Stuart and our good doctor here have told me all about the two of you.”

“Not the really good stuff, I hope.”

Jan could not help but let out a little laugh at Blake’s reply. It was good to see that he still retained some of his boyish charm and humor, even now. “Don’t worry, Blake. There are some things we kept to ourselves.”

The *Monarch*’s first officer waved his hand toward the door that led to the main conference room. “If you’ll come this way, I’ll introduce you to the rest of the senior officers and we can get the briefing started.” Commander Grey started to lead the others into the room, but Blake grabbed his arm.

Blake nodded to Melanie and Janice to go on ahead. He faced the other man. “Commander, I want you to know that I plan to get all of the hostages back in one piece, but...” Blake paused as he stared intently into the other man’s eyes. “...Rob is like a brother to me. He, Captain Leeson, Jan, and I all developed a special bond while serving together, sort of like...the three musketeers.”

Marcus gave a nod to indicate that he understood what Blake meant. “One for all, eh?”

Blake smiled. “And all for one.” His smile faded, his mood became somber. “Rob is the reason that Mel and I are here. I meant what I said about getting everyone out, but no matter what, I’m going to save Rob.”

To be continued...