

Stardate 57042.1

The U.S.S. *Trailblazer* orbited the fifth planet of a star known to the indigenous people as Neran. The Starfleet vessel shared the same orbit as the Neran Stellar and Planetary Research Station about fifty kilometers away.

“Prepare to leave orbit,” Captain Melanie Leeson said as she sat down in the center seat. “Mister Jaxx, please contact the station.”

“Hailing frequencies open, Captain,” the Bolian said. “Contact established.”

The image of the four-armed alien in the station control room appeared on the forward viewscreen. “*Captain Leeson, how may I help you?*” the Ner station commander asked.

“Commander Aresti, I wanted to thank you for your hospitality and for allowing us to visit your beautiful world.”

The alien woman smiled. “*It was our pleasure, Captain. I hope that we will have the opportunity to meet again. Perhaps you will return by the same path.*”

“I would welcome another opportunity to renew our friendship,” Leeson said. “I wish that we could spend more time with you, but we picked up a distress call that we need to investigate.”

“*Yes, I understand.*” Aresti nodded. “*Safe journey to you. Go in peace.*” The image faded back to the station in orbit of the Ner homeworld.

“Commander Jaeger, do you still have a lock on that signal?” Leeson looked to the science station.

Lieutenant Commander Nora Jaeger turned briefly away from the science console to face her captain. “Yes, ma’am. I’ve transferred the coordinates to the CONN.”

“Take us out of orbit, Ensign Ford, and set course.”

“Course laid in, ma’am.” Adam Ford, less than a year out of the academy, worked the controls skillfully. “Awaiting your order to engage warp drive.”

“Full impulse until we reach five hundred thousand kilometers away from the planet and engage warp nine.”

“Yes, Captain.”

Leeson turned her attention back toward Jaeger. “Are you sure about the origin of that signal?”

“No question, Captain,” she said. “It’s a Starfleet distress signal from a ship reported lost more than eighty years ago—the U.S.S. *Great Britain!*”



To Boldly Go: The Lost Ones

A U.S.S. *Trailblazer* story

By Cleve Johnson

“Pull up the information about the *Great Britain* please,” Leeson said. “What do we know?”

Jaeger started reading from the monitor. “*Excelsior*-class. Registry NCC-2019. It was launched in 2296 from Utopia Planitia and ordered to rendezvous with the U.S.S. *Excelsior* at the Denobula system. The ship was supposed to undergo testing of its experimental warp core.”

Leeson listened intently to her science officer. “Experimental?”

“It was a second attempt at transwarp,” Jaeger said. “The ship never arrived, and no one knew what had happened to her. Captain Sulu and his crew searched between Denobula and Earth for weeks and never found a trace. No debris. Nothing.”

Lieutenant Commander Victor Jacobs said, “I wonder how it could have gotten this far outside of Federation space.”

“Good question,” Leeson said. “Maybe we will find out once we get to the ship’s location. Mister Ford, what is our time to intercept?”

“Three point three seven days at current speed, Captain.”

“Mister Jaxx, replay the distress call on speakers.”

Herron Jaxx complied. “Replaying now, Captain.”

“...the U.S.S. Great Britain to any Federation starships. This is Captain Richard Worthington in command of the U.S.S. Great Britain to any Federation starships. Most of our systems are severely damaged. Warp drive is out. Sensors are out. Navigation is out. We cannot calculate our location. Anyone, please respond. Life support is damaged, but it is under repair. Other systems, including the subspace transmitter, are damaged and repair is unlikely without a construction and repair facility. Please help. If anyone is receiving this message, please home in on it and locate us.”

Jaxx switched the recording off. “That message continually repeats, Captain.”

“Captain,” Commander Shrev interrupted, “I found a curiosity in the *Great Britain*’s history file. The ship left Utopia Planitia with a crew of only one hundred twenty-two persons, which is far less than that class of starship requires.”

“If their mission was to test a new warp drive, perhaps Starfleet didn’t think a full crew would be beneficial,” Lieutenant Commander Jacobs said.

“That makes sense, Vic,” Leeson said. “Shrev, keep digging to see if you can find out anything else.”

“Aye, Captain.”



May 14, 2296, 0752 Hours

Captain Richard Worthington entered the bridge and walked toward his first officer, Commander Lyla North, who sat at the science station adjusting the sensors. The captain placed his hand on the back of the chair. “Are we ready, Number One?”

“I’m just finishing the sensor calibration, Captain.” Lyla North entered her code and turned her head to face her CO. “Mister Edmonds would have done the job faster and more efficiently, of course.”

“He will get his chance the next trip,” Worthington said. “Any concerns about our mission?”

“No concerns about the mission, Captain, but I hope that the transwarp test will be more successful than the last time.”

“The last time was due to sabotage by Captain Scott.”

“Even if Captain Scott would not have stolen the chips out of the transwarp computer drive, I heard that it was determined that transwarp would not have worked, which is why the *Excelsior* was refitted with a standard warp core.” That information was not common knowledge, but Commander North, as the executive officer of the *Great Britain*, had been granted access to all of the information about the transwarp project including all information regarding the failure of the *Excelsior* a few years ago.

“I guess you did your homework, Lyla,” Worthington said. “I’m impressed.”

“Thank you, Captain.” She stepped away from the science station and toward her captain. “Why are we going to Denobula to do the test?”

“One of the designers of our transwarp drive lives there,” Worthington said. “He wants to monitor it from his lab on one of the orbital stations.”

“Couldn’t he have come to Earth or Mars and monitored it from there?”

“None of the stations in the Sol System have the equipment that he would need to access. At least that is what he claims.”

“You sound like you don’t believe that story, sir,” Lyla said.

“I don’t have any reason to doubt him, Lyla. He’s an old friend.”

Commander North cocked her head slightly. “How do you know him?”

Worthington, followed by North, walked toward the center of the bridge. “I was stationed on Denobula as the senior Starfleet advisor to Earth’s ambassador to Denobula about twelve years ago. I had the opportunity to take an inspection tour of the engineering station where he

was assigned. We became friends and have maintained semi-frequent contact over the years.” Worthington sat down in his designated command chair and looked up to his first officer. “Are we ready, Commander?”

Lyla North nodded and walked toward the science station. “Run the checklist please.”

“Course is set. Impulse and warp engines on standby. Maneuvering thrusters at station keeping, sir.” Lieutenant Taylor Barns anxiously awaited the order to leave the drydock facility orbiting Mars. He was an experienced helmsman that Worthington had chosen to be the senior flight officer.

“Operations ready, Captain,” Lieutenant Jocelyn Wells said. “Engineering reports ready.”

“Tactical systems ready, sir. “Phaser banks are fully charged, and we have photon torpedoes on standby in the fore and aft tubes.” Lieutenant Commander Henry McFadden was the tactical officer and chief of security. He came from a long line of Starfleet and British Naval officers. He had been raised to be an exemplar of a by-the-book dutiful officer, and his one ambition was to serve with distinction so that his father would be proud of him.

“Communications and Science ready, sir.” Commander North, due to the skeleton crew assigned to the *Great Britain*, served as XO, science officer, and communications officer on this particular voyage. “Drydock control signals that we have permission to launch.”

Captain Worthington sat stiffly on the edge of his chair. He surveyed the empty stations around the bridge and thought about how uncomfortable the bridge felt with so few positions being manned. “Signal the dockmaster that we are ready to depart, Number One. Helm, clear all moorings.”

“Moorings cleared, Captain.”

“Thrusters at one meter per second. Take us out.”



Stardate 57050.3

The U.S.S. *Trailblazer* slowed to sublight and engaged the Impulse drive as it approached the source of the distress signal. The older *Excelsior*-class was almost a couple of hundred meters longer than *Trailblazer* and dwarfed the *Pioneer*-class vessel, but most of its systems were outdated and inferior to the newer ship.

Captain Melanie Leeson focused her attention on the main viewer. “Magnify the image, Mister Jaxx.”

Lieutenant Heron Jaxx, the Bolian OPS Manager complied. “Magnification level five, sir.”

“CONN, slow to one-quarter Impulse until we come alongside.”

“Aye, Captain,” Lieutenant Beverly McFadden replied as she made the necessary adjustments.

“Commander Jaeger, full sensor sweep.”

“Aye, Captain,” the science officer said. “Power emanations are extremely low. Artificial gravity generators have failed on decks one through seven, and ten through twenty-one. Life support is offline on all decks except for decks eight and nine. And life support is minimal on those decks. No life signs.”

Leeson glanced to the Andorian first officer sitting to her right. “Commander, what are your thoughts?”

“I think we should gather as much information as possible by linking to the *Great Britain*’s computer system remotely as well as relying on sensor scans,” Shrev said. “An away team would have difficulty with the gravity shut down on most decks.”

“Captain, I think that we will need someone to go over to download the computer database,” Jaeger said. “I cannot establish a computer link because the *Great Britain*’s power systems are too low.”

Commander Shrev nodded his approval. “In that case, a minimal away team in spacesuits and gravity boots would be the best option to access the records.”

Leeson quickly assessed the risks and other possible options, but she agreed that an away team was the best option to access the other ship’s computer under present circumstances. “Is there any other information that we can get from sensors before sending people over?”

“We will not find any bodies on the ship, Captain,” Jaeger said. “And eight shuttles are missing.”

“Well, we know that there were survivors,” Victor Jacobs said. “But the shuttles assigned to most *Excelsior*-class ships from that era were not warp-capable.”

“According to Starfleet records, that is true for the *Great Britain* as well,” Jaeger added.

Leeson nodded to her first officer. “Prepare your team, Commander.”

“Yes, Captain,” Shrev replied. “Lieutenant Commander Jaeger, with me please.” The first officer and science officer started toward the turbolift.

The senior CONN officer, Lieutenant Beverly McFadden turned in her chair and quickly stood up. “Permission to join the away team, Commander.”

Shrev stopped short of the turbolift and turned to face the other officer. “I appreciate your enthusiasm, Lieutenant, but Lieutenant Commander Jaeger and I will be the only ones going over.”

Melanie Leeson looked at McFadden. “The XO is right, Lieutenant. The fewer people the better on this one.”

McFadden's sat down; "Understood, Captain."

Leeson saw the disappointment on the CONN officer's face. "Any particular reason that you want to go over to that ship, Lieutenant?"

"My great uncle—my grandfather's oldest brother—was on that ship," McFadden said. "I just want to know what happened to him." The volume of her voice lowered. "I'm sure that my grandfather would like to know what happened to his brother."

The Andorian first officer offered a sympathetic smile. "I will, as humans say, keep you in the loop, Lieutenant." Shrev turned and entered the turbolift where Jaeger was waiting.

Leeson nodded her head to McFadden. "Commander Shrev is a man of his word, so he will let you know anything that he and the science officer find out about your uncle. Leeson turned her attention to the OPS Manager. "Mister Jaxx, take the science station please and scan for possible destinations the crew might have set a course for."

"Yes, Captain," the Bolian said as he moved from his position at OPS to the science station directly forward of his position. He sat down and started working the touchpads. "I am detecting a star system less than four light-years away. The sixth planet reads as class M. I do not see any other possible destinations with planets that would support either humanoid life."

"Transfer the coordinates to the CONN," Leeson said. "We'll get underway after the away team returns."

"You know their supplies and life support would have run out long before those sublight shuttles would have even traveled a fraction of the distance," security chief Jacobs said. "We'll probably locate eight shuttles full of dead bodies."

"Starfleet has always been made up of people with a tendency to figure out how to make the impossible work, Vic." Leeson smiled at her old friend and mentor. "I'm not ready to give up hope."

Jacobs smiled. "If Captain Worthington and his crew were even half as determined as you, then they might have just made it to that planet."

"Either way, we'll find out soon."



May 15, 2296, 1420 Hours

"We're thirteen hours from Denobula, Captain," Commander North said, folding her arms across her chest. "With respect, don't you think that you should get some rest before we arrive tomorrow?"

Richard Worthington nodded and pressed the intercom switch on the armrest of his command chair. "Bridge to Lieutenant Commander Shaanek. Please report to the bridge." The captain looked at his first officer. "You need rest as much as I do, Commander."

Commander North looked at her captain; her face did not reveal any emotion. “Shaanek is a fine officer, but he doesn’t have command experience, sir.”

“He just graduated from Starfleet Academy’s Command School, Lyla.”

“I know, but has he actually been in command of a ship?”

“He saved the *Kobayashi Maru*.”

“He must have cheated. No one saves the *Kobayashi Maru*.”

“James Kirk did.”

“We all know that *he* cheated.” Lyla smirked at her CO.

“Ah, but Shaanek is a Vulcan, and we all know that Vulcans *don’t* cheat,” Worthington said matter-of-factly. “He will be fine.”

Just then the port turbolift door slide aside and the topic of the captain’s and XO’s conversation entered the bridge. “Lieutenant Commander Shaanek reporting as ordered, Captain.” He stood stiffly and placed his hands behind his back.

“Do you feel ready to take command for the next shift?”

Shaanek raised his left eyebrow. “I do not feel anything, sir, but I believe that my training has adequately prepared me.”

Worthington stood and stepped aside, gesturing towards the center seat. “The bridge is yours, Commander. I will relieve you in eight hours.” He looked at Lyla North and motioned with his head for her to follow him to the turbolift.



Richard Worthington lay in his bunk. He could usually sleep soundly, but the idea that he commanded the starship that would break all previous speed barriers was an exciting prospect. He rarely allowed his excitement to be seen publicly, so he wanted to make sure to guard himself in front of his crew. He was stereotypically British in his stoicism. As he contemplated the next few days, he felt the ship begin to shudder.

“Bridge to captain.”

The shuddering increased as Worthington got out of his bunk to go to his desk. He had heard an atypical nervousness in Shaanek’s voice. He pressed the intercom control. “Bridge, what’s happening?”

“There has been a malfunction in Engineering. The transwarp drive has engaged.”

“I’m on my way to the bridge,” Worthington said. He started for the door when a jolt rocked the ship and threw him to the floor.



Stardate 57051.6

After the away team returned and the *Great Britain's* computer records had been accessed, Captain Melanie Leeson, Commander Shrev, Lieutenant Command Jaeger, and Doctor Keegan sat around the conference table.

“Commander Shrev, what information did you uncover?” Leeson asked.

The Andorian first officer sat straight in his chair. “According to the logs, there was a malfunction in engineering that engaged the transwarp drive, and the ship was propelled at a remarkable speed to this part of space. Once the ship entered normal space, most of the ship’s systems were damaged beyond repair,” he said. “The crew did manage to partially repair long-range sensors so that they could scan for nearby star systems. They detected one class M planet a few light-years away.”

“How many casualties did they sustain?” Doctor Keegan asked.

“The medical logs showed that a few crew members sustained superficial injuries, but there was one fatality—an engineer,” Shrev said.

Leeson turned her head to face the science officer. “Commander Jaeger, anything to add?”

“I have several more logs to review to see if there were indications of trouble that led to the malfunction. I am going to ask Lieutenant Commander Petroni to analyze the engineering computer data.”

“Good idea.” Leeson looked around the table, glancing at each of her officers. “Opinions?” After a few moments of silence and shaking heads, Leeson tapped her communicator. “CONN, set course for the coordinates provided by Mister Jaxx and engage at maximum warp.”



The *Trailblazer* exited warp and engaged the impulse engines. Captain Leeson came out of her ready room and moved toward the center of the bridge. Commander Shrev vacated the command chair and offered it to Leeson, who acknowledge with a nod but did not immediately sit down. “Standard orbit,” she said.

Nora Jaeger started scanning the surface, and, within moments, turned her head back toward Leeson. “Captain, I have detected remnants of eight Starfleet shuttles and life signs. Approximately two hundred humans and seven Vulcans.”

“Well, that is more than were on the *Great Britain* when it went missing. It seems that the crew made it and apparently some of them had families,” Lieutenant Commander Jacobs said.

“Open hailing frequencies, Lieutenant Jaxx. Let’s see if they have any working communications.”

“Frequencies open, Captain.” Herron Jaxx broadcast on several frequencies, concentrating on the standard Starfleet frequencies used in the late twenty-third century. “No reply, Captain.”

“Keep trying, Lieutenant.” Leeson sat in the command chair and turned toward her XO. “Thoughts?”

“After eighty years, any equipment, including communications, might still be functional, but there are no guarantees.”

“Captain,” Jaxx said. “Incoming audio transmission on a low-band subspace frequency.”

“On speakers,” Leeson said. “This is Captain Melanie Leeson of the Federation starship *Trailblazer*. May I ask your name?”

A young woman’s voice came over the speakers. She had a barely detectable British accent. “*This is Evelyn Worthington. Welcome to the New Britain Colony. I never thought that anyone from the Federation would find us.*”

“We picked up the distress signal from your ship. I assume that you’re related to Captain Worthington?”

“*He was my grandfather, Captain,*” the young woman said. “*I’m sure that you have many questions, Captain. I would like to invite you to our village.*”

“I appreciate that, Miss Worthington,” Leeson said. “I will be down with a few members of my crew shortly.”

“*I look forward to meeting you in person. I will see you soon.*”

The transmission ended, and Leeson stood up. “Mister Shrev, Mister Jacobs, let’s visit the colony and see what kind of help they need. And maybe we can find out some answers to what happened to the *Great Britain*.” Leeson nodded to the science officer. “Commander Jaeger, you have the bridge. Please have Lieutenant Eedo and Doctor Keegan meet us in transporter room two.”

“Aye, Captain.”

Leeson, followed by her Andorian first officer and her chief of security, entered the turbolift.



Five swirling beams of ionized energy appeared and gradually faded away leaving Captain Leeson and four of her senior officers standing in the middle of a primitive village with houses made out of wooden logs and thatched rooves. Some structures incorporated the remnants of Federation shuttles. Facing them was a young human woman, presumably Evelyn Worthington, along with a young human male and a Vulcan female.

Evelyn's face was a mix of amazement and confusion at the appearance of the five Starfleet officers seemingly out of *thin air* as her grandparents had described the process; however, she had never witnessed someone 'beaming' until now. "Captain Leeson?"

Leeson stepped forward and offered her hand. "Miss Worthington. On behalf of the United Federation of Planets and my crew, I'm glad to find you and the crew of the *Great Britain* safe." Leeson stepped back and did a half turn to partially face her officers. "May I present Commander Shrev, my first officer."

The Andorian nodded. "Miss Worthington."

"And this is ship's counselor Lieutenant Ezred Eedo, Doctor Michael Keegan the chief medical officer, and chief of security Lieutenant Commander Victor Jacobs."

Each man in turn nodded, and, unlike the stoic Shrev, offered a gentle smile.

"It is good to meet you all," Worthington said as she stepped aside and nodded toward her two companions. "This is Tad McFadden and T'Saris. T'Saris was a member of the *Great Britain*'s engineering department."

Leeson knew that Vulcans were long-lived, but the woman in front of her didn't look more than forty to fifty years old, but she had to be at least a hundred ten. "Are there other members of the crew that are still alive?"

"Yes, Captain," T'Saris said. "Fourteen others from the original crew are still part of the community. Ten humans and four Vulcans"

Shrev looked at T'Saris. "Our sensors registered seven Vulcans."

"Yes, my son and his wife, and their child were born here," T'Saris said. His wife is the daughter of Lieutenant Commander Shaanek and Lieutenant T'Srai."

"The rest of us are the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the crew," Worthington interjected. She smiled gently as she took a step back and slightly turned as she heard others approaching. "As you can see, Captain Leeson, we have many people curious about your arrival. I didn't have time to inform everyone that we would have guests."

Leeson watched as the gathering crowd slowly approached. "I have questions about what happened to the *Great Britain*, but first I want to see if you and your people need provisions or medical needs."

The Vulcan spoke first. "We appreciate your offer, Captain."

"Are you going to take us back to the Federation?" It was the human male who had asked the question.

Leeson judged the young man to be about twenty to twenty-five years old. She thought she sensed that there was a tone of reluctance in his voice, so she measured her answer carefully. "We have room on the ship for about one hundred fifty passengers and would be glad to transport you to Federation space, but you would decide to go or stay, Mister McFadden."

“You won’t force us to leave?”

“No, I won’t force you or anyone to leave, but I hope that you will keep an open mind about going home.”

Evelyn, or Evie as most of the community referred to her, said, “Captain, for most of us, this is our home. It’s the only home we have ever known.”

Leeson nodded. “I can respect that, Miss Worthington, but I hope that you will allow each person to decide what is best for him or her.”

“Of course, Captain Leeson,” Evie replied. “Everyone has a right to do what he or she wants. As for me, I have no desire to leave.”

“T’Saris spoke again. “I think that you will find that many of the community members will decide the same; however, I will discuss the possibility of returning to the Federation with my family.”

“There is plenty of time to discuss that later,” Evie said, “but I suspect that you and your officers want information about what happened.”

“Yes, we would,” Leeson said. “Is there a place where we can talk with the surviving crew?”

“You can speak to my bond mate and me at our lodging,” T’Saris said. “He was the chief medical officer.”

Leeson nodded to the Vulcan. “Thank you, T’Saris. The doctor and I will come with you.” Leeson turned toward Evie. “Will you be willing to put my other three officers in contact with the other crew members?”

“Of course,” Evie said as she reached toward Counselor Eedo’s hand. “Come with me Mister Eedo, and I will take you to see Lyla. She was the first officer.” Evie glanced toward her male companion. “Tad, please take Mister Shrev and Mister Jacobs to see your grandfather.”

Tad McFadden watched Evie, who was only a few months older than he, lead the spotted-skinned officer by the hand. He frowned at the sight, which did not escape the *Trailblazer*’s security chief’s notice.

Vic Jacobs patted his young host on the shoulder. “Don’t worry. He and our chief engineer are an item.”

Tad looked quizzically at the older man. “Item?”

“It means that they’re a couple. Romantically involved.”

The corners of Tad’s lips turned slightly upward. “Good.” He looked at his charges and turned toward one of the makeshift homes. “Follow me.”

Jacobs and Shrev starting walking behind their young host and followed him through the parting crowd of the *Great Britain*'s progeny as they stared. They had heard about other species such as the Andorians, but none of them had seen one nor a spotted alien like the one that Evie had led away.

As they walked, Shrev said, "Our senior CONN officer's last name is McFadden, I suspect that you are related to her."

"Maybe we just have the same last name."

"She told me that her great uncle was on the *Great Britain*, so the probability is that you are cousins."

Tad led the two Starfleet officers toward a wooden structure a few meters away from the path that went through the center of the village. An elderly human male was sweeping dust from the wooden porch with a broom made from the dried grass that was indigenous to the planet. "Grandfather," he yelled.

The old man looked up and saw his grandson and two others approaching. He had heard about the starship that was in orbit and hoped that he would get the chance to talk with people from Starfleet and the Federation. He noticed Shrev's blue skin and antennae. "Andorian. I never thought I would see another one of them again," he whispered to himself. He thought back to his first posting on a starship and shared quarters with an Andorian—Thaal—who was another junior officer. Henry McFadden dropped the broom and stepped off the porch.

He walked toward the trio, stretching out his arm to offer his hand. "Welcome! It's good to see that Starfleet has finally found us." He shook Shrev's hand and then Jacob's. They exchanged introductions with each other.

"Grandfather, Commander Shrev said that you have a great-niece on board the starship." Tad saw from his grandfather's reaction that the old man was extremely happy about the news. "She's the CONN officer, whatever that is."

Henry smiled at his grandson. "She pilots the ship." Looking at the Andorian and the other human, he said, "I wonder which one of my brothers is her grandfather." It's good to know that there is still a McFadden in the service."

Jacobs nodded. "And she would make you proud. A true asset to the ship."

"I can arrange for you to meet her at your convenience," Shrev said.

"I would like that," Henry said, "but I am guessing that you will want to debrief me first."

"Yes, if now would be a good time," Shrev said.

"Of course. It's a good a time as any, I suppose." The old man was jovial and excited to see people from the Federation. He was meant to be in space, a starship pilot, but fate had dealt him a serious blow by stranding him on an alien world with no opportunity to fly from star to star. In short, he had spent more than eight decades feeling cheated, but it wasn't all bad. He fell

in love with one of the security officers, married her, and raised a family that included three daughters, a son, and nine grandchildren including Tad. Tad was the only male grandchild that would carry on the family name. Henry clapped his hands together and started to rub them vigorously. “What would you gentlemen like to know?”

Tad listened intently as his grandfather and the two officers discussed what Henry could recall about what had happened long ago.



Melanie Leeson and Doctor Michael Keegan sat on the wooden chairs that had been fashioned from the trees that surrounded the village. Keegan was happy to be in the presence of a Starfleet physician from the previous century as he had wondered what the Vulcan might think about the medical advances that had been made since his time. Keegan hoped that there would be time to speak with his colleague about it later.

T’Saris entered the small living area with a wooden tray containing four cups with steam rising from each one. She leaned down so that the two Starfleet officers and her husband, Selarek, could each take a cup. T’Saris took the last cup and set the tray on the table next to the chair that she then sat in. She noticed that the doctor hesitantly sniffed the liquid contents. “It is a tea made from herbs that grow on the edge of the forest.”

Keegan inhaled deeply. “It has a pleasant aroma that seems almost familiar.”

“Commander North said that it was similar to both mint and cinnamon,” T’Saris said after she took a sip.

After Keegan tasted it, he nodded. “Yes, I can taste both of those flavors, but there is another taste that I cannot make out, but I like it.”

“T’Saris, thank you for your hospitality,” Leeson said. “And thank you to you and your husband for speaking with us about what happened to your ship.”

“We live to serve,” Selarek said. “What information do you require?”

“From the official logs, we know that the *Great Britain* was on its way to Denobula to rendezvous with the *Excelsior* to test a new transwarp drive when it went missing. We made first contact with a new species a couple of weeks ago and were visiting their planet when we received a distress call from your ship. We traced the signal and found the *Great Britain*,” Leeson said. “We hope that you can tell us what happened.”

T’Saris looked at her husband and back to face Leeson. “Selarek was the chief medical officer. He was in sickbay during the incident, but I was in engineering when an EPS conduit overloaded. One of the other engineers, Lieutenant Grazka, was trying to correct the problem when the control panel that he was using exploded. The explosion activated the programming for the transwarp matrix, which in turn caused the transwarp drive to engage. By the time we were able to disengage, we had arrived in this sector with many of our systems severely damaged.”

“After we found your ship adrift, we were able to download the logs and found out that the crew had detected this planet and the captain ordered that the crew head here,” Leeson said, “but how were you able to travel more than three light-years without warp-capable shuttles?”

“On the fourth day after abandoning the *Great Britain*, we were contacted by an alien species that had detected our shuttles. They brought us to this planet.”

“What species? Is this their world?”

“They call themselves N’Vel,” T’Saris said. “Their planet is called Velna, and it is located beyond the J’Zal Nebula.”

“J’Zal is the N’Vel name for it, Captain,” Selarek said when he saw Leeson’s expression.

Leeson leaned forward; her curiosity peaked at the news of the previously unknown species that had rescued the *Great Britain*’s crew. “Have you had any further contact with the N’Vel?”

“They provided us with medical equipment, basic supplies, and food during our first three years on this planet,” Selarek said. “They were punctual in their visits, which occurred every seventy-nine days.”

“In the third year, the N’Vel informed us that we had progressed well enough to be self-sufficient. They told us that they would not return unless they detected a potential threat to us from beyond this star system.” T’Saris said. “We have not seen them since.”

Leeson nodded. “What else can you tell me about the N’Vel?”

Selarek, as the colony’s senior medical person, had taken scans of the aliens when the *Great Britain*’s first encountered them. “They are humanoid—in appearance, similar to humans except for skin color. According to my medical scanner, their internal organs are arranged differently than in humans, and they do have six pulmonary valves in their hearts rather than four as humans have.”

“I wonder why they never returned to check on you,” Doctor Keegan said. “I would think that if they were concerned enough to rescue you and help you for three years, that they would at least come to visit occasionally.”

T’Saris raised an eyebrow. “Some of us have been curious as well, Doctor. What I find more curious is that Captain Worthington never questioned the N’vel’s departure.”

“Maybe we can find out,” Leeson said. “You said that their planet is on the other side of the nebula, so maybe we can pay *them* a visit.”

Just then, Leeson’s communicator beeped. She tapped the badge on her uniform chest and said, “Leeson. Go ahead.”

“*Captain, an alien ship just came out of warp and is approaching the planet,*” the voice of Lieutenant Commander Nora Jaeger said, her voice was slightly quivering.

“Doctor Keegan and I are together. Contact the rest of the away team and beam us all up.” Leeson stood up, as did the doctor and their hosts. “I apologize for leaving so abruptly.”

“Understood, Captain Leeson.” It was T’Saris who spoke.

“Hopefully, we will be able to return shortly to continue our conversation,” Leeson said. “Thank you for talking with us.” The transporter energy beam began to engulf Leeson and Keegan before either of the two Vulcans could respond.



Captain Melanie Leeson, followed by Commander Shrev and Lieutenant Commander Victor Jacobs, entered the bridge. She went straight to the center of the bridge and sat down in the command chair that Lieutenant Commander Nora Jaeger had just vacated to return to the science station. “Status report.”

Jaeger turned in her chair to face her CO. “The ship has entered orbit and taken up a position one thousand two hundred kilometers directly in front of us, Captain. So far, they have not shown any aggression.”

“Vic, open hailing frequencies,” Leeson said. “Activate the Universal Translator.”

“The chief of security complied with Leeson’s order. “Frequencies open and UT is online.”

Leeson stood and faced the large viewscreen located at the front wall of the bridge. “This is Captain Melanie Leeson of the starship U.S.S. *Trailblazer* representing the United Federation of Planets.” She paused to see if the aliens would respond. After a few seconds of silence, Leeson continued. “May we be of assistance?”

After a few more moments, Jaeger said, “Captain, we are being scanned.”

The Trill tactical officer, Lieutenant Sakaren Dren, spoke up. “Should I raise shields, Captain?”

“Let’s wait a moment to see what their intentions are, Lieutenant.”

“Sir, I strongly suggest that...,” Dren started to say, but the first officer cut him off.

“You heard the captain,” Shrev said. “Your diligence is noted but wait.” The Andorian turned his head to face the tactical station. He rarely smiled, but he did allow himself to display a slight—very slight—grin. “However, be ready to raise shields and activate weapons systems if the alien ship shows signs of any hostility.”

The Trill nodded. “Of course, sir. My fingers are hovering over the shield activation control. Just in case.”

Leeson looked back toward her security chief. “Vic, let’s try again.” She turned back to face the main viewer. “I repeat, this is Captain Leeson of the starship *Trailblazer*...” She was interrupted when the image of the alien ship was replaced by a picture of a humanoid woman

standing in a room, presumed by Leeson to be the other ship's bridge by the looks of the consoles and other people working at them. The alien woman was, golden-skinned with golden hair; she was clad in a yellowish-green and tan dress and wearing a silver belt.

"Captain Melanie Leeson, I am Prime Leader Alusas of the Velna Star Cruiser B'Temvel." The woman's facial expression was neutral. "According to our sensors, many of your crew belong to the same two species of the lost ones on the planet's surface. Have you come to take them away?"

"Do you wish us to take them off the planet?" Leeson asked.

"They have lived on the planet a long time. They are welcome to stay if they choose, or they may go. Our wishes are not relevant in this matter."

"We were in discussions with them when you arrived. Some of those we have talked to have expressed a desire to stay, but we have not yet had the time to talk to all of them to know their desires." Leeson imitated the other woman's professional stance. "We have been told that your people rescued the original crew of the starship *Great Britain* more than eighty of our years ago and sustained them with supplies for three years," Leeson said. "I want to thank you and your people on their behalf."

"They were in need. We were obligated to help according to the traditions of our people." Alusas said.

Leeson smiled. "Your people and mine are alike in that we also render aid to those in need. I would like the opportunity to get to know you and your people, Prime Leader."

"I, for one, also welcome the chance to know you and your people better," Alusas said. *"I will contact my superiors for permission to open up talks between us. I will contact you when the sun rises again on the village of the Lost Ones, Captain Melanie Leeson."*

"I look forward to your next transmission, Prime Leader Alusas."



Captain Melanie Leeson and Lieutenant Commander Victor Jacobs beamed back to the village and met with Evelyn Worthington. Leeson smiled at the young woman. "It's good to see you again, Miss Worthington."

"Please, Captain. Everyone calls me Evie."

"Very well, Evie." Leeson glanced toward the dwelling where T'Saris and Selarek lived. "I'm sorry that we had to leave on short notice earlier, but another ship approached, and we had to return to our ship to make contact."

"Another Starfleet ship?"

"No, it was a N'Vel starship."

"N'Vel?" Evie's eyes brightened. "They came back?"

“Yes, and they wanted to make sure that we were not a threat to you.” Leeson smiled. “It looks like they have been keeping an eye on you to make sure that you and your village were safe from any unwanted guests.”

“I wonder why they never came back to visit,” Evie said. “Most of us weren’t even born yet when they were here before.”

“Well, they’re back now.”

“What are they like? Is it true that their skin is gold?”

“Well, I only had one conversation with one of them, and she has golden skin.” Leeson had never realized how excited a young person could get at the prospect of meeting a member of an alien species, but she also realized that in her life, being in contact with dozens of different species was the norm. “Prime Leader Alusas will be contacting my ship when the sun rises in the village tomorrow. You can come aboard the *Trailblazer* and join the conversation if you would like.”

“Me? Oh, thank you, Captain.” Evie’s face suddenly changed. “I think that maybe someone from the original crew should talk with them.”

“You can still join in,” Leeson said. “You seem to be in charge here.”

“Hah.” Evie smiled. “Most people think I’m in charge only because my grandfather was the captain, but Lyla is the real authority.”

“Lyla North? She was the ship’s first officer, wasn’t she?” Leeson, of course, already knew the answer to her question but wanted to keep the conversation informal and friendly.

“Yes. She’s one of the crew members still with us.”

“I would like to meet her.”

“I’ll take you,” Evie said. “Come on. Her place is at the end of the path.”

“Vic, why don’t you mingle with the people and see what needs they have. Coordinate with Doctor Hogan to see what medical supplies Doctor Selarek could use.”

The security chief nodded and started toward several people that were talking next to a nearby structure.

Leeson followed Evie through the heart of the village past several huts and trees to what used to be a type 5 shuttlecraft. Additional rooms made of logs and bamboo-like material were attached to the small ship. Behind the structure was a garden filled with various indigenous flowers and vegetables.

As Leeson and Evie approached, an elderly human rose from a wooden chair that was under the shade of one of the many trees that surrounded the abode.

Evie walked a few steps ahead of Leeson and smiled at the elderly lady. “Lyla, I want you to meet Captain Melanie Leeson from the Federation starship.”

Lyla North, though well over a hundred years old, showed signs of strength and vitality. Her blue eyes could still see clearly, and her face was warm to look at. “Welcome Captain Leeson.”

“Thank you, Commander North,” Leeson said as she smiled at the former *Great Britain XO*. She gently shook the elder’s hand.

“Oh, I haven’t gone by my rank for a long time.” She smiled. “Never thought it was necessary once we realized we weren’t going to be rescued.”

“I understand, Com...”

“Lyla. Just call me Lyla.”

“Very well, Lyla.” Leeson smiled again. “Would you have some time to talk?”

“Of course.” Lyla reached for Evie’s hand and patted it. “Dear, will you go in the house and bring out another chair for Captain Leeson?”

Evie energetically ran into the house.

“She’s a special one that Evie.” Lyla had taken Worthington’s granddaughter under her wing and took it upon herself to help mold Evie into a leader for her generation. “I’ve looked after her since her parents and grandparents died.”

“What happened?” Leeson was curious to know more about the young woman who had captured Lyla’s heart. Something about Evie reminded Leeson of herself when she was in her early twenties.

“Well, Evie’s parents died when she was only six. They were hiking in the mountains a few kilometers from here, and there was a rockslide. Richard and his wife Andrea raised her from that point on. I helped, too, but took a more active role after her grandmother died five years ago. Richard died the following year.”

“And you’ve looked after Evie ever since,” Leeson said.

“She looks after me more than I look after her now.” Lyla chuckled. “As you can see, I’m not as young as I used to be.”

Leeson smiled as she helped the other woman sit in her chair. “I bet you still have a lot of fire left.”

Just then, Evie came out of the door of Lyla’s home carrying a wooden chair. “Here you go, Captain.”

“Thank you, Evie.” Leeson took the chair and set it next to the one that Lyla sat in. “Lyla tells me that you are quite the leader.”

The young woman started to blush as she shrugged her shoulders. “As I said before, Lyla is the real authority. I think that some of the people expect me to be the leader since I’m a Worthington.”

“Some maybe think that, but don’t be so modest.” Lyla said. “You’re a natural-born leader in your own right. Especially among those your age and younger. I’m not going to be around forever, and everyone in this village is looking for you to lead when I’m gone.”

“Thank you, Lyla, but I don’t plan you being gone anytime soon.” Evie placed her hand on Lyla’s arm and smiled. “I’m going to leave you and Captain Leeson alone to talk while I make sure that Tad is helping gather the berries and not getting into trouble with the adolescent boys as usual.” Turning to Leeson, Evie wrinkled her nose in mock disgust and said, “He turns twenty-three in a few days, but he still acts like he’s only fifteen.”

Leeson and Lyla watched Evie jog along the path back toward the center of the village.

“She won’t admit it, but that girl wants her friendship with Tad McFadden to be more than what it is,” Lyla said. “And he wants the same thing, but he hasn’t grown up. Not yet.”

Leeson chuckled. “I know someone like that. I used to think that I wanted him to be more grown up, too, but when he started to, I realized that I missed the charm of his immaturity.” Leeson was thinking about Blake Adams and wondered about what he might be doing. It had been too long since she had seen him or even received a message from him. She knew that she should not wait on him to contact her and decided that she would send him a subspace message at her earliest opportunity.

“Boyfriend?”

Leeson turned to face her host, realizing that her mind must have drifted. “Oh, well, not exactly.” Leeson smiled. “Maybe. It’s...”

“...complicated,” Lyla finished. “I understand, Captain. I had two or three complicated relationships back in the day.”

Leeson felt comfortable and enjoyed sitting and talking with Lyla North. It was refreshing to just sit and talk about things that were unrelated to her duties for a change. However, she did need to return to the present reality and discuss the alien benefactors in orbit.

“Lyla, there’s a N’Vel ship in orbit. I talked briefly with them and will be in contact with them after sunrise tomorrow.”

“Did they give any information why their people stopped visiting us long ago?”

“No, but it seems that they have been near, making sure that your community stayed safe,” Leeson said. “They approached to make sure that *we* were not a threat to you.”

“I always wondered if they would be back. I remember talking with Richard about his suspicions.”

“Suspicions?”

“He suspected that the N’Vel were...studying us during the three years that they visited and checked on our progress.”

Leeson tilted her head to one side as she focused on Lyla’s revelation. “Did they offer to take your crew back to Federation space?”

“They never heard of the Federation,” Lyla said. “And they told us that they scanned our ship’s records and star charts. They said that they had not gone to any sectors in the Federation’s direction.”

“Not well-traveled?”

“Evidently not,” Lyla said, grinning. “We realized that our transwarp accident had thrown us well outside of Federation space, so we gave up hope of being rescued and made a life for ourselves here.”

“In two or three generations, you seem to have developed a productive colony,” Leeson said. “And the Federation has expanded so that you’re closer than you think.”

“How close is that, Captain?”

“Less than fifty light-years. The planet Pacifica is right at the edge, but recently a planet called Welva, which is less than thirty-five light-years from here, was accepted as a new member.” Leeson leaned close to Lyla. “Do you want to go home? Back to Earth or another Federation planet?”

Lyla thought seriously about the opportunity to return home. She had eighty years of thinking about her home in Kansas City where she grew up and about San Francisco where she spent four years while attending Starfleet Academy. “If you have found us within the first few years we were on this planet, I would have said absolutely yes. Now? I’m not sure. Everybody that I knew is probably dead or close to death. My parents are gone. My older brothers might be. I’m close to the people here. Most have raised families.”

Leeson understood. She had a family on Earth, but her life was in Starfleet, and her ship had become her home. “You don’t have to decide right now, but you are welcome to come with us if you want to. Anyone from the village is also welcome.”

“I bet the starships have become more advanced and larger since my time.”

“Some classes are considerably larger than the *Excelsior*-class ships, but mine isn’t,” Leeson said. “The *Trailblazer* is still big enough to take at least half of the villagers if they want to go with us back to our home port...and arrange transport from there back to Earth or wherever they would like to go.”

Lyla smiled, but her eyes displayed a look of sadness. “I will make sure that the people get your invitation, but Captain,” Lyla, with a firm demeanor, said, “please respect the wishes of those who want to decline your offer.”

Leeson took Lyla's hand in hers and gently squeezed. "You have my word, Lyla. I just want everyone to know that they have an option."

"Thank you, Captain. As for me, I will let you know if I will go with you or not by tomorrow night."

"I'm sure that it's not an easy decision, and I won't coerce you."

Lyla noticed the shadows of the trees slowly move along the ground. She turned her attention to the sun as it moved closer to the ground. "I never tire of this sight," she said. "But I also miss the sight of the stars streaking by when traveling at warp speed."

Leeson nodded and smiled. "I know what you mean."

"Tell me what has happened in the last eight decades, Captain."

"Well, we made peace with the Klingons, and we finally have an inroad to somewhat friendly relations with the Romulans." Leeson sighed heavily. "And then there are the Cardassians."

"I'm not familiar with that species."

"We were at war with them many years ago, but we were able to broker a peace treaty with them, but there were issues and border disputes, but I won't bore you with all the details," Leeson said. "And a few years ago, they decided to ally themselves with aliens from the Gamma Quadrant, so we ended up with another war with them. The Federation, Klingons, and Romulans fought together and were able to win the war, but it was costly to all sides."

"That's not a pretty picture, nor an incentive for me to decide to go with you, Captain."

Leeson shrugged. "I want to be honest with you, Lyla, about the galaxy as it is. Besides, the war was over five years ago, and we are building the fleet back up with a priority on exploration again." She looked at Lyla. "We still have some of the *Excelsior*-class and *Miranda*-class starships in service; however, their numbers are a lot less due to the war."

"Tell me about *your* ship, Captain."

Leeson beamed with pride as Lyla showed an interest. "Well, the *Trailblazer* is the second *Pioneer*-class starship, but it was the first to be launched. The prototype was destroyed while still under construction." Leeson looked down briefly as the previous light drained from her face. "That was due to an invasion of extra-galactic aliens four years ago."

"Another war?"

"Technically, it was an invasion, but we were able to pull together and protect Earth and the rest of the Federation." The light started to return to Melanie Leeson's eyes. "I was promoted and given command of my ship almost two years ago for a special mission to investigate a series of unprovoked attacks against Klingon and Romulan..."

“...and Federation targets?” Lyla interrupted. “We had our share of hostilities, too, and the Klingons weren’t exactly our allies then.”

“What about the Khitomer Accords? I thought a treaty was signed before the time the *Great Britain* was lost.”

“The *Great Britain* wasn’t even built when The Federation and Klingons signed the accords. Yes, we had peace, but it was always an uneasy peace from what I remember. We certainly weren’t even close to being allies. We provided aid for the ecological consequences of the destruction of Praxis, but we mostly avoided each other.”

“Ah, I understand, but times change.”

“But it sounds like the Federation still has a lot of threats against it.”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Leeson said as she looked away from Lyla and watched the sun continue its downward glide. “Conflicts will probably always be with us.”

“It’s part of the life we live, Captain, but we don’t have many conflicts on *this* world.” Lyla smiled and patted the back of Leeson’s hand. “At least not any major ones.”

Leeson envied Lyla North and the life that she and the others had made for themselves. “I could get used to that. Before command, my background was in security, so I’ve seen my share of conflicts and then some.”

“Maybe when you’re ready to retire, you might move here. You would be welcome.”

Leeson cocked her head to the side and smiled at the elderly woman. “I might do just that.”

“Do you know what I like about you, Captain?”

Leeson shook her head, but she was curious to hear Lyla’s thoughts. Melanie found herself not only respecting the former XO of the *Great Britain* but also feeling comfortable around her.

“What I like is that you make me feel young again. And it’s nice to know that at your young age, you can just as easily get off topic as I can, which makes me believe that it’s not a sign of senility.”

Both women started to laugh, and when she stopped, Lyla shifted her position and set her focus back on Melanie Leeson, hinting without speaking, that she wanted Melanie to continue about her ship.

And Melanie accurately read Lyla’s facial expression. “You wanted to know about the *Trailblazer*. Well, it’s one of the fastest Federation starships. Its normal cruise speed is warp 9.5 and can sustain warp 9.998 for up to twenty-two hours in an emergency.”

“No offense meant, Captain Leeson, but that is slower than the *Excelsior*-class and the refit *Constitution*-class ships. We attained warp 12.4 on a couple of occasions.”

Leeson smiled. “The warp scale was updated so that the range of warp factors top out at warp 10, which, in theory, a starship traveling at warp 10 would occupy all points of space simultaneously.”

“I take it that hasn’t been done,” Lyla said, her curiosity piqued.

“Only twice that I know of, and it led to some...unusual side effects,” Leeson said. “From the logs I read, I don’t think that I would recommend going that fast.”

“I’ll take your advice,” Lyla said, smiling. “How far has other technology advanced?”

“Our ships have stronger shields and phasers. About fifty years ago, phaser strips were designed to take the place of the standard ball turrets on newer classes. We still use photon torpedoes, but we also have quantum torpedoes, which have a bigger punch.”

“Bigger punch?”

“Much bigger,” Leeson said. “And transporters have a greater beaming distance as well as site-to-site transport capabilities.”

“Medical advances?” Lyla asked. “Have they discovered a cure for Xelosian Skin Malady?”

Leeson rubbed her chin. “Well, I’ve never heard of it. You would have to ask our doctor about that.”

“I was just wondering,” Lyla said. “It’s rare and usually not fatal, but one of my friends from my Academy days was on a training cruise. She was assigned to a shore party on Xelos, and she contracted it. She suffered for weeks.”

“Sounds terrible.”

“That was a long time ago,” Lyla said. “Well, Captain Leeson, thank you for spending time talking with me, but the sun is setting, and that means that my bedtime is near.”

Leeson stood to her feet and offered her hand to Lyla to help her stand. “Thank you, Lyla. I enjoyed our time, too. Before you turn in, do you want to be included in my discussion with the N’Vel captain?”

“Thank you. Yes, I would like that very much, Captain,” Lyla said. “I usually wake up an hour or so before sunrise.”

“I’ll send someone to get you shortly before the sun breaks the horizon if that is okay.”

“Could you send that young officer that talked with me earlier—Lieutenant Eedo?” Lyla asked, and with a mischievous grin added, “I think his spots are attractive.”

Leeson smiled as she turned and walked a few steps away. “I’ll be glad to send him.” She tapped her combadge to call the ship, and the transporter beam surrounded her.



The next morning, Melanie Leeson entered the main conference room and found that Counselor Eedo had retrieved Lyla and Evie, and he was speaking with them. “Thank you, Counselor, for bringing our guests. The sun should be rising in your village in a few minutes. We’ll see if the N’Vel are punctual,” Leeson said.

“Captain,” Evie said as she turned from gazing at the planet through the large forward windows. “I never imagined how beautiful my home could be from this high up.”

“Dear Evie,” Lyla said, “there are more beautiful places in the galaxy than this.”

“Lyla’s right about that, Evie,” Ezred Eedo said. He then turned toward Leeson. “Captain, I hope that you don’t mind, but I offered to take Lyla and Evie on a tour of the ship after the meeting with the N’Vel.”

“I think that would be a good idea, Counselor.” Leeson started to do something else but was interrupted by the intercom.

“Captain, the N’Vel vessel has contacted us and awaiting our response,” the voice of Commander Shrev announced.

“We’re ready. Please patch it through to the conference room viewscreen.

The larger viewer on the wall came to life, and Leeson, Eedo, and their guests turned to face it. *“Greetings, Captain Leeson.”* The N’Vel woman stood on what was presumed to be the bridge of her ship.

“Prime Leader Alusas, thank you for meeting with us again.” Leeson partially turned and gestured toward the others in the conference room. “I would like to introduce Commander Lyla North, the first officer of the starship *Great Britain* who was one of the crew rescued by your people, and with her is Evelyn Worthington, the granddaughter of the one who was in command of the *Great Britain*. And this is my ship’s counselor, Lieutenant Ezred Eedo.”

“I am pleased to meet two of the lost ones,” Alusas said. She turned her attention to the Trill counselor. *“Captain Leeson, I am curious about your society. You allow males to serve on your starships. And according to the records of the N’Vel ship that rescued the lost ones, the commander of the derelict ship was a male.”* It was a mere statement of observation. No judgmental tone entered the alien’s voice.

“Is it not that way among your people?”

“Our males serve our people in other ways. They raise our children and provide our food. Females serve our society through leadership in all aspects.”

“Earth, the planet where I come from,” Leeson said, “was once dominated by the males of our species until about four hundred years ago. Social conditions began to change, which eventually led to equality among males and females.”

“Interesting,” Alusas said. *“When we scanned your vessel, we noticed that you have multiple species on board. Is this normal for your kind?”*

Melanie smiled as she relaxed her posture. “Yes, Prime Leader. We are part of the United Federation of Planets, which is made up of more than a hundred and fifty worlds. My ship currently has crew members from eight of those worlds.”

“A cooperation among so many planets is a foreign, but admirable, concept, Captain Leeson. I would like to discuss this in more detail,” Alusas said. *“Perhaps we will have time to share our many differences in the days ahead.”*

“I look forward to that, Prime Leader. And I’m sure that we will discover many similarities as well,” Leeson added. “Would it be possible to meet in person?”

Alusas turned and nodded to someone outside of the viewer’s image. She turned back to face Leeson and her companions. *“That is agreeable. Shall we meet in the lost ones’ village?”*

“I think that would be appropriate.” Leeson turned her head toward Lyla and Evie. “Is that okay with you?”

Both nodded. “Perfectly,” Lyla North said.

“I and a small delegation of my crew will meet you at the center of the village when the sun is at its highest.”

“Until then, Leeson said. After the viewer image faded to black, she smiled at her guests. “So, when will the sun be at its highest?”

“About four and a half hours,” Evie said. “Will that give us time to see your ship?”

Melanie smiled at the eager young woman. “I think so. Mister Eedo, will you take Evie and Lyla in tow?”

“My pleasure, Captain.” Counselor Ezred Eedo smiled and looked at the two guests. “Ladies, if you follow me, we will start with the bridge.” He led them to the nearest door that separated the main conference room from the bridge.



Captain Melanie Leeson, Lyla North, Evelyn Worthington, Counselor Ezred Eedo, and Lieutenant Commander Victor Jacobs materialized in the center of the village. Immediately, they saw some of the villagers, specifically, those of the second and third generation, start to approach.

“They’re all curious,” Lyla said.

“I’ll talk to them and let them know what’s going on,” Evie said as she quickly started toward the gathering crowd.

Just then, a series of sonic booms resonated from west of the village and several thousand kilometers above the planet’s surface. Victor Jacobs pointed to the approaching shuttle and stated the obvious. “Here they come. It’s nice to know that they’re punctual.”

Leeson and the away team, along with Lyla, backed away from the village center where there was an area large enough for the alien craft to set down. The blast of the small ship's retro thrusters stirred up the dust and blew against the grass and people standing by. The ship landed smoothly and a door on the starboard side slid open and a ramp lowered. Prime Leader Alusas gracefully walked down the ramp, and she was followed by two other women, dressed in similar attire. Each of the women had golden skin and hair.

Leeson slowly approached and stopped a few steps in front of Prime Leader Alusas. "Greetings, Prime Leader."

"Thank you, Captain Leeson," Alusas replied. "Since I was young, I have heard stories of the lost ones and hoped to one day stand on the surface of this world with them. You, Captain, have made that possible."

Lyla North stepped forward and stood next to Leeson. "On behalf of the...the lost ones, as you call us, I welcome you to New Britain and this village. I want to thank you and your people for the great kindness that you showed us many years ago."

"Although we have not been on this planet since Captain Worthington asked us to leave, my people have watched over you continually."

"We appreciate your protection, but I have one question," Lyla said. "Why did your people stop visiting us so long ago?"

"We have stayed near to this star system to protect you from possible hostile species, but we left because your captain asked my predecessor to leave. He was appreciative of our help, but once your people attained self-sufficiency, he did not want further help. My people wanted to study yours, and your captain objected."

"Did his request offend your people?" Lyla cocked her head to one side.

For the first time in Leeson's or Lyla's presence, Alusas smiled. "We do not offend easily, Lyla North. And we respect the wishes of others."

Melanie Leeson took a step forward. "That is another thing that we have in common, Prime Leader. Will you continue to watch over this colony?"

"As long as the people are on this world, we will watch over them."

"Thank you, Leeson replied. "We would like to leave a subspace communication booster satellite on the outskirts of this star system so that the villagers will be able to communicate with us. Do you have any objections?"

"No objections," Alusas said. "It is a good thing."

"We would also like to send an ambassador to your world to meet with your government if you would allow it."

“I will contact my planet’s leaders and pass on your request. Use this to contact us when you return.” Alusas handed a small communication device, similar to an isolinear chip, to Leeson.

“Again, thank you.” Leeson nodded her head toward the N’Vel prime leader. She and Lyla went with the N’Vel delegation to tour the village and discuss what the villagers had accomplished in the years that they had lived on this world as well as the things that humans and N’Vel had both in common and in contrast. It was time well spent.



After Prime Leader Alusas and the other N’Vel returned to their ship, Evie Worthington approached Leeson, Jacobs, and Eedo. The young woman smiled. “Do you have to leave so soon?”

“Our ship will be around for a few days,” Leeson said. “We’re going to provide you with a subspace communications unit and any other equipment and supplies that your colony can use.”

“We appreciate all your help, Captain,” Evie said. “It’s good to know that we now have contact with the outside.”

Lyla was standing a few meters away talking with Doctor Selarek, T’Saris, and a few of the other villagers. She saw Evie talking with Leeson and her officers, so she excused herself to join them. “Captain, I’ve decided that I would like to come with you to visit your port-of-call if you would allow it. And if you would guarantee a way back for me, of course.”

“I’ll have quarters assigned,” Leeson said. “Does anyone else want to come with you?”

Lyla looked at Evie. “Do you want to come with me?”

Evie smiled “Thanks, Lyla, but this is my home.”

“This is my home, too, Evie,” Lyla said. “I plan to come back.”

“Well, who will keep Tad in his place?”

Lyla started to laugh. “You have a point. And I suppose that both of us can’t be away at the same time. Who would be in charge?”

“If you change your mind, Evie, just contact the ship,” Leeson said. “As I said, we’ll be around for a few days before leaving orbit.”

“Captain, I will continue to ask the others to see if anyone wants to go to your starbase,” Lyla said. “In the meantime, I would like to offer you and your crew a chance to have some shore leave since you’ll be around a few days.”

“Thank you, Lyla. The crew has been pretty busy and not had much time off for several months.”

“It’s good to know that Starfleet still keeps its people busy.”

Counselor Eedo and Victor Jacobs both chuckled. “Sometimes too busy, Eedo said.

“Well, Counselor, I think that you should be the one who organizes shore leave for the crew.” Leeson winked at her security chief. “And Mister Jacobs will be glad to help you.”

Vic’s smile faded. “Oh, thanks. I thought that I helped raise you better than that.”

Lyla looked back and forth from Jacobs to Leeson. She realized that there must be a deeper relationship between Leeson and Jacobs than just a CO and one of her officers.

Leeson smiled at Lyla when she perceived what the village elder was probably thinking. “I’ll explain later.”

“Evie dear, will you help me pack?”

“You know that I will.” Evie smiled and started down the path to Lyla’s place.

Lyla reached out her hand to Leeson and shook it. “When would you like me to beam up?”

“Contact me when you’re ready, Lyla.” Leeson smiled and tapped her combadge. “Leeson to *Trailblazer*. The away team is ready to beam up.”



Three days later, Melanie Leeson sat in the center seat, her eyes focused on the planet below. The day before, Commander Shrev and Lieutenant Commander Petroni, the ship’s chief engineer, used a runabout to tractor Echo GA-3, the subspace communication booster, to the outer edge of the star system to deploy it. Leeson had hoped to go back to Neran V to continue building a friendship with Commander Aresti at the Ner Planetary and Stellar Research Station, but that would have to wait.

Commander Shrev walked toward the CONN stations and stood behind Lieutenant McFadden. He placed his hand on her shoulder. “Did you enjoy the time spent with your family, Lieutenant?”

Beverly turned her head and looked up to the first officer. “Yes, I did. Thank you, Commander. And thank you for bringing us together. Uncle Henry was thrilled that you let me take him for what he called a joyride in a shuttlecraft.” Her face started to turn a little red. “Tad didn’t like it as much, especially when I told him that he’d have to clean up his stomach contents off the shuttle floor.”

Shrev smiled and nodded. He turned to go back to stand next to the ship’s guest of honor.

Leeson glanced at the first officer’s chair to her right, which was currently occupied by Lyla North. “What do you think?”

“I never imagined how beautiful our home could be from up here,” Lyla said. “I’m looking forward to traveling at warp again.”

“Would you like to give the order to depart?”

Lyla turned her head to face Leeson. “Thank you, Captain. I’m honored.” She turned her head back toward the viewscreen. “Helm, take us out of orbit and set course for...” She turned her head toward the center seat. “Where are we going?”

Leeson smiled and finished Lyla’s statement. “...Starbase *Gateway Alpha*, Lieutenant McFadden.”

“Aye, Captain,” Lieutenant Beverly McFadden, the senior flight officer replied. “Course set and warp drive is standing by.”

Lyla’s excitement grew as she saw the image of the planet slide off to one side to reveal a clear starfield. “Warp factor 9. Engage.”

The starship *Trailblazer* zoomed out of the system toward its home port. Lyla stared at the viewer and watched the star streaks speed past. She smiled and said, “I missed how wonderful this is.”

Melanie Leeson looked at the former first officer of the U.S.S. *Great Britain* and wondered what the older woman’s early career was like. “Welcome back to Starfleet, Commander North.”

The End