

To Boldly Go: An Internal Conflict

A Personal Log

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Fleet Captain Stuart peered at the growing image of Starbase *Gateway Alpha* as the U.S.S. *Monarch* approached it. He looked forward to seeing his wife and children again. Even though he had been away less than two weeks, a day had not gone by that he didn't miss his home on the station. Suddenly, he realized that he considered *Gateway Alpha* more of a home than he did the *Monarch*, but he was torn between his desire to command a starship and his responsibilities as the commander of the 4th Fleet, 3rd Exploratory Group. Stuart's time as CO of the starship *Providence* was special, but even though his career advanced him to his current position, he sometimes wished he was still on that little scout ship. He felt close to that crew. They were almost as much a part of his family as Janice and the twins.

Stuart rose from the center seat and started toward his ready room. He felt the eyes of some of the bridge officers staring at the back of his neck, so without turning, he stopped and said, "Captain Grey, please contact *Gateway Alpha* and request permission to dock."

Grey acknowledged with a nod and replied, "Aye, Captain," as he replaced Stuart in the command chair.

Lieutenant Commander Jennifer Mills, the tactical and second officer, discreetly walked from behind her console and leaned down toward Marcus Grey's ear and whispered, "Sir, is it just me, or is the captain acting a little off his game?"

Marcus's face did not betray his concern about Stuart's unusual detachment, but he *had* noticed. "It's not just you, Commander; however, I'm sure that his mood will change after he's with the doctor and their children."

Mills slowly nodded her head as she straightened her posture. "I hope you're right, sir." She walked back to her station and contacted the starbase.



As the door to his ready room slid shut, Stuart made his way to the replicator and ordered his favorite blend of hot tea. After retrieving it, he went to his desk, sat down, and turned the computer monitor to face him. "Computer, contact Doctor Stuart on Starbase *Gateway Alpha*."

After a few seconds, the monitor displayed the image of Janice Stuart. In the background, Stuart saw the wall behind his wife's office in the main medical complex of the starbase. "*Rob, I didn't expect to hear from you until you got back.*" Jan's smile was broad."

"I thought I would surprise you," Rob said. The corners of his mouth were slightly raised, but his face betrayed him.

Jan noticed that her husband was forcing himself to appear happy. "*Rob, what's wrong?*"

“Why do you think anything’s wrong?” He saw Jan lean back in her chair and cross her arms. He knew that she saw through his pretense. “I... I’m not sure, but I don’t feel like I’m fulfilling my purpose,” he said reluctantly.

“I thought things were better after we took those two weeks away from everything,” Jan said. *“Have you talked to Counselor Underhill?”*

Rob’s face matched his mood as he shook his head. “I thought about it...more than once.”

“I won’t push you if you don’t want to, Rob, but I think that Caitlyn might be able to help you figure out the cause of what you are feeling and how to deal with it.”

Rob nodded and his face showed a hint of a brief smile. “You’re right, as usual, Jan.” Rob shifted his body in the chair. “I will make an appointment with her.”

“Good,” Jan said as she uncrossed her arms and smiled. *“So, how soon should I expect you back?”*

This time, Rob offered a genuine grin. “We’re in the process of docking now.”

Jan tried to display a look of displeasure, but her elation overrode it. *“You know I hate surprises.”*

“I thought you loved surprises,” Rob said wryly. “Especially this kind of surprise.”

Jan did not give her husband the satisfaction of responding. Instead, she changed the subject. *“I’m on duty for another couple of hours, so do you want to pick up the twins from Childcare?”*

Rob nodded. “Of course. I’ll even have dinner ready by the time you get to our quarters.”

Jan smiled. *“I appreciate that, but I’m surprised you don’t want to go to the Officer’s Club or one of the cafés. That new Bajoran restaurant opened up while you were gone, and I’ve heard several Bajorans say that the hasperat is the best they’ve ever tasted.”*

“Maybe tomorrow evening,” Rob replied. “Tonight, I just want to be with my wife and kids.”

“That sounds like a good prescription to me. I’ll see you soon,” Jan said as she smiled and ended the transmission.

Rob tapped the communication control on his desk. “Stuart to Counselor Underhill.”

“Underhill. How can I help you, Captain?”

“I was wondering if you had some time for me tomorrow.”

“Will this be a social visit, sir?”

“I’m in need of some counseling, Counselor.” Rob focused his thoughts trying to remember when he last saw the counselor other than during staff meetings. It had been a long time.

“Would 0900 work, sir?”

“Thank you, Counselor. I will see you then. Stuart out.” Rob tapped the com control and closed his eyes.

The intercom beeped, interrupting his brief respite.

“Bridge to captain.”

“Stuart here. Go ahead.”

“Docking is complete, Captain. Shall I start shore leave rotation?” Captain Marcus Grey asked.

“By all means, Exec.” Stuart closed his eyes again for just a moment before he stood and started toward the door that separated the ready room from the bridge.



The next morning, Rob Stuart, along with his wife, took the twins to the Childcare Center, located one deck above the deck where their quarters were. After leaving the center, Rob walked with Janice to the turbolift. They both entered and he went with her to the main medical facility. After kissing her and saying, “I love you,” he returned to the turbolift and went to the 3rd Exploratory Group’s main office to check in with his aide, Lieutenant Richard Baker. He entered his private office to record the report about the *Monarch*’s mission to the Ceti Omicron Colony. He checked the chrono reading on the computer monitor after he ended the report, stood up, and walked to the outer office. He told his aide that he would return by 1030 hours and made his way out of the office and to the nearest turbolift. He could have transported to the *Monarch*, but he enjoyed walking, and the hike through the station and the docking area was good for his cardiovascular system and muscle tone.

Rob entered the starship and made his way to the senior counselor’s office. He waited outside the door and checked with the ship’s computer for the time. He was two minutes early. He remembered the words that his father had said to him repeatedly when Rob was a child. “If you’re not early to an appointment, you’re late. On time is late.” Rob thought it funny that he took those words to heart and always made a point of being early to all his appointments and duty shifts. In his mind, it was the responsible thing to do.

Rob started to press the intercom touchpad next to the door when it opened, and a young crewman exited the office.

“Oh, excuse me, Captain Stuart,” the crewman said.

Rob smiled and said, “No apology needed, Crewman...uh Crewman...”

“Smithers,” the young man finished. “From Engineering.”

“Of course,” Rob said. “How have you been?”

“Fine, sir.” Smithers seemed disappointed that his CO did not remember his name. But the *Monarch* was a large ship with a crew of 700. It would be difficult for one person to know everyone on board. “I need to get to my duty station, sir. Excuse me.”

“Carry on. And if your section supervisor comes down on you for being late, just tell him that it was my fault. I’ll back you up.”

Smithers offered a wide grin. “Thank you, sir,” he said as he turned and headed quickly down the corridor.

Rob turned and entered the counselor’s office. “Good morning, Counselor Underhill.”

Caitlyn Underhill smiled and made a gesture with her hand toward one of the chairs in the center of the room. “Captain Stuart, please come in and have a seat.”

“Thank you,” he said as he walked to the chair and sat down.

“So, how can I help you, Captain?” Caitlyn sat in the other chair that was positioned at an angle next to where Rob sat. A small table with a lamp on it was between the two chairs.

Rob was not sure where to begin, but another thought had come to him that had been considering, so he decided to start with addressing that before he discussed his own issue. “Well, I know that you have spent time with most of the crew and have a good sense of where they are mentally and emotionally. I was wondering about their morale.”

Caitlyn relaxed in her chair and considered Rob’s question for a moment. “Well, I would say that morale is pretty good, but I have heard some of the crew express a little frustration about just going on simple milk runs and not participating in *real* missions. They want to do more.”

“I see,” Stuart said. “I guess I can understand that. The *Monarch* is one of the most advanced starships ever built, and not utilizing it to its full potential doesn’t seem to make sense, does it?”

Caitlyn smiled. “I’m a counselor, not a command-level officer, so that’s not for me to say. However, I understand why you don’t want to take the ship too far away from our base of operations. You’re in a position where you’re not just the captain of this vessel. You have several ships to oversee and doing that from a starbase is probably the most efficient place.”

“Things were simpler when I only had to worry about one ship.” Rob tensed up as he rubbed his forehead.

The counselor leaned forward. “You didn’t come here to talk about the crew’s morale, did you, sir?”

“Not entirely.” Rob paused a moment to gather his thoughts. “I don’t know if I am overwhelmed with being responsible for not only this ship but also the others, or if it is the responsibility of being in charge of exploring nine sectors, or if it’s something else.”

“Captain, I heard that you had once served on a ship that was recently lost with all hands. You lost people that you knew pretty well, I assume.”

“Yes, Counselor. That’s part of it. But there’s something else that is bothering me. Something that has been eating at me since before the news about the *Republic*.”

“Can you put a name to what you’re feeling?”

Rob looked into Caitlyn’s eyes. “I think I feel...lost.”

“Lost in what way?”

“Lost as in I don’t feel at home on this ship. Except for the senior officers and a few others, I’m not familiar with most of the crew. I feel like a stranger on my own ship.”

“How long have you felt like this?”

Rob thought for a moment. “I’m not sure exactly when it started, but it’s been gradually building since I took command of the 3rd Exploratory Group.”

“What else changed when you took command?”

Rob started to shake his head, trying to remember all the significant events of the last year. “The main change was when Jan transferred off the ship.”

“Family is important to you, Captain,” Caitlyn gently said. “I’ve heard you talk about your years on the *Providence* and how close you were to many of that crew.”

“I think I see what you’re getting at, Counselor.” Rob started to relax, at least a little. “I have never taken the time to get to know this crew like I did my former one.”

“That might be part of it, and it takes time to develop close relationships. Plus, your time on the *Monarch* is limited since you do most of your work from your office on *Gateway Alpha*.” Counselor Underhill smiled as she leaned back into a more relaxed posture. “I’m sure that it’s not easy to develop a close rapport with a crew of seven hundred like it was with a crew of eighty.”

Rob nodded in agreement. “True. I miss the *Providence*. I knew everyone by name and memorized half of my crew’s birthdays.”

“Do you feel like you made a mistake by agreeing to command the *Monarch*?”

Rob contemplated the question and finally shook his head. “No. No, it wasn’t a mistake. But I do wish that I had a smaller ship with fewer crew members to command.” He stood and walked a few steps away and turned around to face the counselor again. “You’re right, family is important to me. And I haven’t worked to foster a sense of family with *this* crew as I did with my former one. I didn’t even know the name of that crewman that walked out of this office when I arrived.”

“As I said, Captain, it’s not as easy with a crew this size.”

“Still, I should do better. A crew’s ability to work well together comes from how well it is unified, and how well it's unified comes from the captain’s leadership.”

Caitlyn half shrugged. “Everyone has room to improve, but you shouldn’t feel bad about that, Captain. Remember, you have responsibilities beyond this one ship and crew. Have you

considered relinquishing command of the *Monarch* and choosing one of the other vessels as your flagship? One with fewer crew members?”

Rob had considered giving up command of the *Monarch* and commanding the 3rd Exploratory Group exclusively from the starbase, but it was protocol for someone in his position to have a flagship. And being selected to command a *Sovereign*-class starship was a reward for his hard work and accomplishments. He didn't want to appear ungrateful. “That has crossed my mind, but I want to be fair to the captains of those other starships. They have worked hard to get where they are, and I don't want any of them to feel like they are getting demoted.”

“Looking out for what is best for your subordinates is one of your strengths, Captain.” Caitlyn stood and approached Rob. She placed her hand on his shoulder and looked up into his face. “I'm sure that you will figure out what to do that will be best for you and those under you.”

“If I did give up command of the *Monarch*, do you think that Captain Grey is ready to work without a net?”

“You have sent him out on several occasions to command the ship while you stayed on *Gateway Alpha*, so I always assumed that you thought he was ready.”

“I just wanted a second opinion,” Rob said with a grin. “From your position as the ship's counselor, what do you think?”

“Captain Grey has the respect of the crew, and he knows how to stay calm during a crisis. He is confident and extremely capable in his duties. So, yes, I think that he is ready should you decide to make a change.”

Rob nodded his head slowly. “Thank you, Counselor. I appreciate your input. And you have given me more clarity in dealing with my internal conflict.”

Caitlyn smiled. “That is why I'm here, Captain. I'm happy to help. Would you like to make another appointment for next week?”

“Do you think I need one?”

“Inner conflicts can rarely be resolved with only one session, Captain, but I suspect that you are well on your way to resolving yours. It's your choice.”

Rob nodded. “I appreciate your wisdom, Caitlyn. Same day and time next week?”

“I will reserve it for you, sir.”

“Thanks again,” Rob said as he turned and left the counselor's office. He thought about leaving the ship immediately, but he changed his mind and decided he should make time to get to know at least one member of the crew each day. Whether he decided to stay in command of the *Monarch* or not was inconsequential. While he was still the master of this ship, he would make an effort to include its inhabitants into his family. And he knew where to start. “Computer, locate Crewman Smithers.”

The End