

## ***STARDATE 57656.7***

By the end of the Twenty-third Century, most of the indigenous illnesses had been eradicated on Earth. Even more, including the common cold and migraine headaches, were reduced to very few occurrences nearly a hundred years later; however, that was not the case for all inhabited worlds. There were still planets that hosted various bacteria and viruses that still vexed their inhabitants' health. Fortunately, most life-threatening diseases were rarely a concern. But there was no guarantee that some microscopic bug would not appear again.

As a doctor, Janice Stuart was always on the lookout for these little bugs and searched for ways to deal with them even before they became a problem for those in her care—the crew, civilians, and visitors who lived and worked on Starbase *Gateway Alpha*. Her husband and many close friends searched to discover the mysteries of the universe, seek out new life and new civilizations, and boldly go where none had gone before; her mission was to keep people healthy, treat injuries, and discover cures for newly discovered diseases while being just as bold in the exploration of the human (and non-human) body. Most days, Doctor Stuart found to be routine in fulfilling her duties.

For the past month, Jan spent more time doing administrative duties than she did practicing medicine. It was part of her job to manage not only the doctors, nurses, and other medical staff in *Gateway Alpha*'s main medical facility located on deck twelve but also a half dozen infirmaries throughout the station. She was conducting a routine inspection at one of those infirmaries when her combadge chirped.

*“Main Medical to Doctor Stuart.”* It was the head nurse calling.

“Stuart here, what can I do for you, Lieutenant Yenula?”

*“Doctor Taylor needs your assistance when you are available. He is with a Bolian patient, and this is his first time examining a Bolian.”*

“I’ll be there in a few minutes. Stuart out.” Jan tapped the badge and deactivated the tricorder that she used to scan the infirmary’s medical supplies. She exited the storage room and smiled at the human sitting at the nurse’s station. “Everything looks in order, Ensign Hague.”

“Thank you, Doctor Stuart,” the young nurse replied. “I will let Doctor Gannon know when she is finished with her patient.”

Jan left the infirmary and made her way to the nearest turbolift.



### **To Boldly Go: Outbreak on *Gateway Alpha***

*A Starbase Gateway Alpha Story*

By Cleve Johnson

Jan entered the examination room where Lieutenant Glen Taylor was scanning Ensign Toma Remal. “Good morning, Doctor Taylor.”

“Good morning, Doctor Stuart. I’m glad that you’re here,” Taylor said. “This is my first time examining a Bolian, so I’m not sure what his symptoms indicate.” He handed the medical tricorder to Stuart.

Jan accepted the tricorder and glanced at the readings. “Thank you, Doctor,” she said and turned to face the young Bolian officer lying on the examination table.

“What’s your name, Ensign?” Jan asked as she smiled at the patient.

“Toma Remal,” the Bolian said. “I am one of the junior security officers.”

“I don’t think I’ve seen you around. How long have you been on *Gateway Alpha*?”

“I arrived two weeks ago, ma’am. This is my first assignment.”

“Welcome to the frontier, Toma. Did you have an initial examination when you arrived?”

“Yes, ma’am. My CO sent me to one of the infirmaries the day I arrived.” The young officer tried to smile even though his stomach felt like it was going to turn inside out. “I usually am in good health, but I think I ate something that did not agree with me.”

“What are your symptoms?” Jan asked.

“I have frequent nausea, a sore throat, headache, and a fever, ma’am.”

“Any chills? Coughing? Vomiting?”

“No ma’am.”

Jan ran the scanner over the patient. “You should expect those symptoms to appear in the next six to eight hours.”

“What do I have, Doctor?”

“Well, it wasn’t anything that you ate. You have Rathar’s Syndrome, Ensign.”

“Excuse me, Doctor,” Taylor interrupted. “I’m not familiar with Rathar’s Syndrome.”

Jan turned her attention to the other doctor. “It’s a Bolian virus that affects less than twenty percent of the Bolian population, and no one has found a cure for it, but the good news is that it’s not life-threatening; however, there’s not too much that we can do other than make the patient as comfortable as we can until the virus goes dormant.”

“Dormant? How long does that take, Doctor?” Taylor asked.

“Usually four or five days,” Jan said. “Now the problem is that once a person gets Rathar’s Syndrome, it becomes active again about every three years for the rest of the person’s life. Ensign Remal, I’m sorry to say that you are going to be miserable for a few days.”

The Bolian frowned as he sarcastically said, “Any more good news, Doctor?”

Jan took the patient’s hand and patted the back of it as she smiled. “Not today, Toma.” She turned to Doctor Taylor. “Send him to Patient Ward Alpha and he’s not to have any Bolian

visitors until he's symptom-free." Jan turned back to the Bolian. "Have you been in contact with any other Bolians since the first symptoms started?"

"I was with Ensign Haras Gwan two days ago. I started feeling ill last night."

"We should get her in here for an exam, Doctor Taylor. This virus is not as contagious as many others, but we don't want to take any chances," Jan said.

"What about other contacts with other species?" Taylor asked.

"Rathar's Syndrome only affects Bolians," Jan said. She turned her head toward Toma. "Don't worry, Ensign. You'll be back on duty in a few days."

"Is there anything that you can give me to help me to feel better?"

"If you were human, I would prescribe my grandmother's recipe for chicken soup, but Bolian stomachs have difficulty digesting chicken. I'll have the nurse give you twenty CCs of Theracin to settle your stomach, but I'm afraid that the other symptoms will just have to run their course."

"Thank you, Doctor. I will take whatever relief you have to offer."

Jan smiled at the patient once more and turned to face the other doctor. "Feel free to contact me if you have any questions, okay?"

"Thank you, Doctor."

Jan left the exam room and went to her office.



Lieutenant Thresiss Sh'Srendas, Ensign Toma Remal's commanding officer, entered the patient ward and approached the biobed. She stood next to the bed and observed the sleeping officer. She started to turn to leave but stopped when Toma stirred and opened his eyes. "I did not mean to disturb you, Ensign."

"That is alright, Lieutenant," Toma replied. "I could use the company."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm tired and miserable, but the doctor says I should be back on duty in a few days."

"Just concentrate on getting well, Ensign. I'm sure that you will be ready when you are ready."

Toma forced himself to smile. "I'll do my best, ma'am."

Thresiss turned and left the room to return to her duty station.



Later that morning, Ensign Haras Gwan entered the main medical facility's waiting room and reported to the nurse's station. "Ensign Gwan reporting as ordered, ma'am. I was told to report to Doctor Taylor."

The Deltan nurse stood up and walked around the desk. “Right this way, Ensign. Doctor Taylor wants to examine you in Exam Room Two.”

“I don’t understand. I thought routine medical exams were semiannual.”

“You were with Ensign Ramal the other evening,” Lieutenant Yanula said. “He is ill, and Doctor Taylor wants to make sure that you didn’t contract his illness.”

“What illness?”

“I’m not allowed to reveal that, but Doctor Taylor just wants to examine you to make sure you are not infected.”

They entered the examination room and Yanula directed Haras to sit on the examination bed. “I’ll send the doctor in.”

It was only a short time before the doctor entered. “Good morning, Ensign. Did the nurse tell you why you are here?”

“Yes, sir. But she said that she could not tell me what I might have been exposed to,” Haras said. “Am I in danger?”

“No, you’re not in danger, but you might have several days of discomfort if you contracted Ensign Ramel’s illness.”

Haras closed her eyes momentarily and slowly opened them again to look into the doctor’s eyes. “Is it Rathar’s Syndrome?”

Taylor slowly opened his mouth. “Uh, yes. How did you know? Have you started having symptoms?”

“Not yet, but he didn’t give it to me. I gave it to him.”

“Oh?”

“I contracted Rathar’s Syndrome almost six years ago. The virus must have recently reactivated, but I don’t understand why I haven’t shown any symptoms yet if that is what it is”

“Well, maybe my examination will provide some answers.”



The next morning, three more Bolians had reported to the main medical facility with each showing symptoms of Rathar’s Syndrome, so now five of eight biobeds in Patient Ward Alpha were filled. Doctor Jan Stuart checked on the patients and reassured them that the symptoms would disappear in four to five days.

She left the ward and started toward her office when Doctor Glen Taylor approached from the opposite direction. “Doctor, I just examined another patient with early signs of Rathar’s Syndrome, but this patient is different.”

“How so, Doctor?”

“This one is a Benzite.”

“Rathar’s is a Bolian disease,” Jan said. “No other species has been known to have been infected by it.”

“I’m on my way to the med lab to have the readings double-checked, Doctor, but the symptoms are the same with one additional.”

“What is that?”

“Lieutenant Nordek has small dark blue spots covering his face.”

“Do the spots resemble measles in humans?”

“Except for the color, yes,” Taylor replied. “Have you come across anything like that with Benzites?”

“Not with Benzites. We might be dealing with a new disease.” Jan contemplated the possibility and hoped that the other symptoms that were typically associated with Rathar’s Syndrome were just a coincidence. She had no idea what ramifications might be if Rathar’s crossed species. “Keep me informed, Doctor Taylor.”



A few hours later, Lieutenant Thresiss Sh’Srendas had ended her duty shift at the security desk at Docking Port Six. It seemed to her that the shift lasted far longer than normal. She would normally go to one of several officer lounges or one of the civilian-run restaurants to grab something to eat and spend time with friends, but she felt unusually tired and decided to go directly to her quarters.

She made her way to the nearest turbolift. “Deck fourteen, officer’s quarters,” she said as the doors slid closed.

Moments later, two junior grade lieutenants waited for the next turbolift car to arrive. One of them, a human female smiled at the other, a Bajoran male. “Any plans for after your shift?” the human asked.

“That depends on if you have any plans,” the Bajoran said as the corners of his lips started to move upward into a smirk. “Are you free to grab something to eat and maybe visit a holodeck?”

“I might be persuaded,” the woman said. “Can I pick the program?”

“As long as it’s not the Bajoran fire caves.”

“I was thinking of the Swiss Alps on Earth. I love downhill skiing.”

“What is downhill...” The turbolift doors whooshed open to reveal an Andorian collapsed on the floor. The Bajoran immediately ran in and felt the other officer’s pulse and tapped his combadge. “Lieutenant Narlos to Main Medical Center. Medical emergency on deck fourteen. Officer down in turbolift seven.”



Jan Stuart finished her examinations of Lieutenant Thresiss Sh'Srendas. Jan remembered seeing the Andorian security officer visiting Ensign Toma Ramal the previous day. Doctor Taylor had confirmed earlier that Rathar's Syndrome had crossed species from Bolians to a Benzite, and now Janice discovered that it had also been transmitted to an Andorian. Unfortunately, the symptoms were considerably worse with the Andorian. Lieutenant Sh'Srendas was very weak, and her vital signs were dangerously low. What concerned Jan most was that the lieutenant had been found unconscious and had not yet awakened. And Jan needed to find out who her patient had been in contact with within the last twenty-four hours.

Jan tapped her combadge. "Doctor Stuart to Lieutenant Commander O'Malley."

*"O'Malley. What can I do for you, Doctor?"*

"I have another one of your security officers, and her prognosis isn't good."

*"Who is it, Doctor?"*

"Lieutenant Sh'Srendas. I need to find out who she has been in contact with since yesterday morning. I'm especially concerned if she has been in contact with any Bolians, Benzites, or other Andorians."

*"I'll get my people on that right now,"* the security chief said. *"Is there anything that I can do for Thresiss?"*

"Are you a praying man?"

*"It's been too long since I have attended the Mass or been to confession, but I regularly use the rosary and say a few 'hail Marys' every day. O'Malley out."*

Jan looked at her comatose patient and shook her head. "How could this virus have crossed over to other species?"

"It mutated."

Jan spun around to see Glen Taylor standing at the door. "You startled me, Doctor."

"I apologize, Doctor Stuart," he said as he stepped inside the door. "I just came from the lab and discovered that Ensign Haras Gwan has a mutated variant of Rathar's Syndrome. Her symptoms are mild compared to the other Bolians who have contracted the virus. According to my tests, it looks like the mutation may be related to her duties as an engineer."

"Really? Has there been a radiation leak that she has been exposed to?"

"Her duty station is in the main power station, and she told me that she had been working on the EPS manifolds last week," Glen said. "I think that she might have been exposed to some low-level residual plasma radiation."

"Not enough to harm her but enough to mutate the Rathar's virus that she already has."

"Yes, ma'am." He stepped closer and looked down at the Andorian patient. "The mutation lessened the effects of her symptoms, but it caused the virus to cross to other species."

The Bolians that have been infected are showing a normal progression of the disease, so they will be fine, but Lieutenant Sh’Srendas is in danger of losing her life.”

“And the Benzite patient?”

“There is currently no sign that the virus is life-threatening.”

“Any cases among other species?”

“No, ma’am. Humans, Vulcans, Trill, Bajorans, and the rest seem to be immune.”

“I’m glad of that. Possibility of any who are immune but still carriers?” Jan asked.

“Not to my knowledge.”

“What is the connection between Bolians, Andorians, and Benzites?”

“They all have blue skin,” Doctor Taylor said. “All three species’ blood contains a common element—Temara blood plasma, which is what gives each of the three species similar skin color.”

Jan nodded. “Good hypothesis, Doctor. Now we need to find a way to counteract the effects, especially with Lieutenant Sh’Srendas...if we can.”

“What if she or any of the others have exposed other Andorians?”

“I contacted the security chief right before you came in. He is going to try to track down everyone that Lieutenant Sh’Srendas has been in contact with since she was exposed yesterday.”

*“Doctor Stuart,” Nurse Yenula’s voice said via the intercom. “Two more Andorians have become ill. One is running a high fever, and both are feeling very weak.”*

“Have both of them transported directly to Patient Ward Beta.” She looked at Doctor Taylor. “I’m going to declare a medical emergency and ask all members of each of the three infected species to self-quarantine in their quarters until further notice and to report any symptoms to Main Medical. We will probably be making a lot of house calls before this is over.”

“I want to be optimistic and hope that not many Andorians have been exposed to this thing,” Taylor said.

“I hope that you’re right, but I’m not taking any chances,” Jan said. “I am going to talk with Admiral Sjögren about the situation, and I need a doctor with more experience in Bolian medicine than anyone on our staff.”

“Who would that be, Doctor?”



**U.S.S. Republic, forty minutes later...**

*“Bridge to Captain Stuart,”* The intercom interrupted.

Stuart tapped his combadge. “Stuart. Go ahead.”

*“Sir, Doctor Stuart needs to speak with you. She says it’s highly important.”*



“Patch her through.” Stuart gave an apologetic look to the counselor as he resumed walking along the garden path. “What can I do for you, Jan?”

*“I’m sorry to bother you, dear, but I had to declare a medical emergency here.”*

“Medical emergency? What’s wrong?” Stuart’s forehead created wrinkles as his eyebrows drew tightly together.

*“I had to quarantine all Bolians and Andorians. Some are becoming ill, and one Andorian is in a coma with several others extremely ill.”*

“Do you know what is causing it?”

*“The Bolian Rathar Syndrome virus has mutated and crossed species to the Andorians and Benzites. The Bolians are recovering within three to five days, which is normal, and the Benzite patient seems to react to the virus about the same as the Bolians; however, the Andorians’ lives are in grave danger.”*

Stuart could hear the barely controlled panic creeping into his wife’s voice. He wanted to do whatever he could, but he was not a doctor. “What do you need from me, Jan?”

*“I need Doctor Achebe. He interned on Bolarus and is more knowledgeable about Bolian illnesses than I am. Is there any way that you can bring him here as quickly as you can?”*

“I’ll do my best, but it will take about six to seven days,” Stuart said. “I will contact you within the hour to let you know our ETA.”

*“Thank you, and...I’m sorry to interrupt your mission.”*

“Think nothing of it, dear. I’ll talk with you soon.” Stuart tapped his combadge to end the transmission and tapped it again. “Stuart to bridge.”



Doctor Kofi Achebe sat in his office studying the information that scrolled on the monitor. He looked up when he noticed the captain standing at the entrance. “Come in, Captain.”

“I know you’re busy, but I wanted to check on your progress,” Stuart said.

“I’m afraid that until I can examine the patients for myself, I probably will not discover many answers.” Achebe frowned as he looked back at the desk monitor. “In the meantime, I am reviewing all the recorded material on Rathar’s Syndrome.”

“I have been doing a little research on my senior officers, and from what I read about my chief medical officer, I’ve learned that he tends to push himself beyond his limits,” Stuart said as he gave the doctor a smirk. “Make sure to get some rest, Doctor.”

Achebe smiled. “Is that an order, Captain?”

“Consider it one if necessary.” Stuart smiled and exited the CMO’s office.

Kofi Achebe watched Stuart leave. “I shall, Captain.”





## **One week later at Starbase Gateway Alpha...**

Doctor Janice Stuart rubbed her tired eyes as she studied the latest lab results. She was happy that the Bolians and the one Benzite that had been infected were now symptom-free and that the virus had gone dormant in their systems. She had released them from the main medical facility and back to duty. The infected Andorians were another matter. Another fourteen had been admitted. Six of those were comatose.

Doctor Glen Taylor knocked on Stuart's office door and entered as Jan motioned him in. He hung his head low as he slowly approached his CO. "Lieutenant Sh'Srendas...is dead."

Jan shook her head and whispered, "No."

"She never regained consciousness."

Jan could see that her young colleague was distraught. "Was this the first time you lost a patient?"

He nodded slowly. "Yes. I thought that I would be prepared, but..."

"Medical school prepared us for many aspects of being good doctors, but when we lose the first one, it hits us hard no matter how detached we try to be."

"Does it get easier?"

"Not for me, Glen," Jan answered. "I've learned to put on a mask in front of others, but inside, it still touches me deeply."

Taylor pursed his lips together and nodded. "Thank you, Doctor. I appreciate your honesty."

Jan placed her hand on Doctor Taylor's shoulder. "We do make a difference, but sometimes there are patients beyond our ability to heal."

Nurse Lieutenant Yanula entered Stuart's office. "Doctors, the *Republic* has arrived, and Doctor Achebe is ready to beam over."

"Have the *Republic* beam him directly to my office, and make sure that any Andorian crewmembers stay off the station until we get this thing under control."

"Yes, Doctor," Yanula said as she turned to leave the room.



Doctor Achebe, with a tubular case attached to a strap that was over his shoulder, entered the transporter room where Fleet Captain Robert Stuart stood next to the transporter chief manning the console. "I apologize for my tardiness, Captain."

"Not at all, Doctor. You're right on time." Stuart motioned toward the round platform. "Shall we?"

Both men stepped up on the transport platform and took their positions. Stuart faced the man at the console. Chief Cardona, energize."

Stuart and Achebe were surrounded by swirling energy particles and faded away.



Moments later, the captain and CMO of the U.S.S. *Republic* appeared in Doctor Stuart's office in the medical center of *Gateway Alpha*. Rob quickly stepped toward his wife and hugged and kissed her. "I'm glad to be back, but I wish the situation was different."

"Me too," Jan replied. She turned her attention to the other doctor. "Kofi, I'm glad that you're here. I hope that your knowledge of Bolian medicine and Rathar's Syndrome will help us find a cure for the Andorians."

Achebe smiled and approached his old friend, taking her arms, and embracing her in a hug. "I hope that we are in time."

Jan closed her eyes and looked down. "We lost one of the Andorian patients a little while ago."

Achebe released Jan and patted the back of her hand. "We will do our best to lose any more. I need to see all the data you've collected so far."

Jan nodded and started toward the office door. "Let's go to the medical lab. I'll introduce you to Doctor Taylor; he has been involved in research and treatment since the first patient was admitted." Jan stopped and turned back to face her husband. "Rob, I'm sorry that this isn't much of a homecoming, but..."

"I understand, dear." Rob smiled at his wife. "You have lives to save right now, and that is where your priority needs to be."

Jan returned her husband's smile. "Maybe you can pick up the twins and spend the day with them?"

"I will. I've missed them."

"And they have missed you, too." She looked longingly into Rob's eyes, and then she turned and led Doctor Achebe out of the office.



It was almost midnight when Jan returned to her and Rob's quarters on *Gateway Alpha*. She saw that Rob was reclined on the couch with a child in each arm. Jan smiled as Rob faintly snored, his mouth open and eyes closed. She quietly approached and did her best to gently pick Kevin up from Rob's left arm.

Rob slowly opened his eyes and closed his mouth, which felt dry. He whispered, "What time is it?"

"It's 1143 hours," Jan said quietly. "Let's get the kids to bed."

Jan, with Kevin in her arms, started toward the kids' bedroom. Rob slowly stood while still holding Kelly and followed. After returning to the living area, Rob reached out to Jan and pulled her close. "You look tired. How much sleep have you had in the last few days?"

"Not much. I've never dealt with an epidemic like this before," Jan said as she moved closer to be held tightly. "I'm glad that you're back, but I'm sorry that I pulled you away from the mission."

"It's okay, dear," Rob replied. "You gave me a legitimate excuse to get back sooner than expected."

Jan grinned as she closed her eyes. "So, what's going to happen with the five people from the other universe?"

"The *Solar Flair* took our place to search for the correct quantum and temporal signatures in hopes that we can send them back to where they came from, but it's like trying to find a needle in a haystack, Rob said. "But let's not worry about that now. Let's just go to bed and get some sleep. I have a feeling that you will have another long day tomorrow."

"Unfortunately, you're right about that, Rob." Jan took her husband's hand and they both walked toward the bedroom.



After three days of continued lab testing, Doctors Stuart, Taylor, and Achebe were exhausted. Another one of the Andorian patients had died the previous day, and the others were continuing to grow weaker. Jan, frustrated more than ever, started pacing.

Doctor Kofi Achebe had been studying the microscopic, mutated virus on one of the lab monitors when he noticed Jan's body language Achebe could see her defeated look. "Janice, are you alright?"

Jan stopped pacing and looked toward Achebe, forcing herself to offer a slight smile. "Sorry, Kofi. I'm very frustrated that we're not making any progress."

"It only seems that we are not making progress," Achebe said. "Come and see this."

Jan moved toward her friend and colleague as she looked at the monitor. "You find something?"

"I have been experimenting with a variety of known medicines, and I think that I might have found a workable treatment."

"A treatment? Not a cure?" Jan asked.

"I gave up on trying to find a cure yesterday since there is no known cure for Rathar's Syndrome among Bolians. I realized that we have been wasting time trying to cure an incurable disease and changed my goal to find a treatment that would reduce the effects of the virus."

"You're looking for a way to make it less life-threatening."

“Yes, exactly,” Achebe said. “I discovered that the Andorian immune system cannot fight off the virus because Andorian blood does not contain Coracide, which is a compound only found in Bolian blood.”

“And Coracide is essential to the Bolians’ immune system.”

“Yes, that is correct,” Achebe said.”

“What about the Benzite patient who was infected?” Jan asked. “Benzites don’t have that element in their system either. And Nordek recovered completely.”

“I examined him again,” Achebe said. “He did not contract Rathar’s. He had a case of Trikorian Melatitis, which has similar symptoms.”

“Trikorian Melatitis is very rare. I thought that had been eradicated decades ago.”

“Cases are rare, but it does show up occasionally,” Achebe said. “Only one in a three million will contract it.”

“So, now that you know why the Andorians are in danger, what can we do?” Jan looked at the monitor once again.”

“We need to boost the Andorian immune system with Coracide; however, Coracide cannot be replicated or synthesized.” Achebe turned to face Jan Stuart. “We need to extract blood from Bolian donors and separate the Coracide from the blood cells and plasma. Then we can inject the Coracide directly into the Andorian patients’ bloodstream, which will start fighting the virus as it strengthens their immune systems.”

“I will call for volunteers from the Bolian population right away,” Jan said as she started to turn toward the exit.

“Wait, Janice,” Achebe said.

Jan stopped and turned around. “Something else, Kofi?”

“Yes. We need blood from those who recently recovered from Rathar’s Syndrome. Those who have never had the virus do not have what we need.”

“No problem. I will have all our former Bolian patients report ASAP.” Jan smiled and left the lab.



Within two days, the Andorian patients began to show improved strength and increased vital signs. The Coracide injections strengthened their immune systems just as Kofi Achebe had said. The mutated Rathar’s Syndrome virus was no longer life-threatening to the Andorians, and the symptoms begin to disappear quicker than they did in the Bolians who had contracted the disease.

Achebe entered Jan’s office, smiling. “Janice, I have good news. According to the latest test results, it looks like all of the remaining Andorian patients will make a full recovery, and it appears that, unlike the Bolians who carry the virus for life. the disease will not reoccur.”

Jan smiled as she stood and walked around her desk. She hugged Achebe. "That is the best news that I have heard in weeks, Kofi." She let go of her friend and stepped back.

"I have a suggestion so that this tragedy will not happen again."

"Let's hear it," Jan said.

"I think that it would be a good idea to inoculate all Andorians with Coracide before they come aboard *Gateway Alpha*."

"I think that is a good idea, Kofi. If we can avoid another outbreak and save lives, I'm for it," Jan said. We should collaborate on a medical paper and submit it to Starfleet Medical."

"I agree, and we should include Doctor Taylor since he provided much of the research and had the most direct patient contact."

"It will be good for him, too. He's a fine doctor, and I want to help him get a lot of experience while he is out here on the frontier."

"Just like our time at Starbase Eighty-two, we still make a good team, Janice." Kofi smiled and gave Jan another hug. "We should celebrate."

Jan's smile faded as she thought about the loss of two Andorian patients. "As much as I would like to, the deaths of Lieutenant Sh'Srendas and Crewman Thrashet..."

"I understand, Janice. It is difficult to be joyful when their families mourn." Achebe's face turned to sympathy. "Perhaps a quiet dinner with you and Captain Stuart? It would be my treat."

Jan gently smiled. "That is hard to refuse, Kofi. I will check with Rob to see if he will be available."

Achebe smiled again and turned toward the door. He left Doctor Stuart's office to check on the Andorian patients before returning to the *Republic*.

A few minutes later, Rob entered Jan's domain and sat down in one of the chairs across the desk from her. "I saw Doctor Achebe on my way here. He said that the Andorians are out of danger."

"Yes, thankfully they are." Jan stared into her husband's eyes. "He invited us to dinner this evening. Are you available?"

"I am," Rob replied. "I promised our guests from *Discovery II* a tour of *Gateway Alpha* this afternoon, but I should be done by 1700."

Jan stood and slowly walked around the desk. As Rob started to get out of the chair, she placed her hand on his shoulder and sat on his lap. She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed his forehead. "Thank you."

Rob gave his wife a questioning look. "What for?"

“For being here for me. The last couple of weeks has been very hard. I needed Kofi here to help find medical answers, but I realize that I needed you here for moral support. You never hesitated to return when I asked.”

“We both have duties to fulfill, but I promised you when we got married that career would not come before family.”

“And I love you for that...among many other reasons.”

Rob smiled and kissed his wife as she continued to sit on his lap and embrace him.

**The End**