

## ***STARDATE 58609.4***

The U.S.S. *Providence* crew needed a break. They had been mapping the stars and surveying newly discovered planetary systems for months, and Blake Adams started noticing the stress building within the confines of his ship. He had sought out his friend, Counselor Goodman, to get his opinion, and of course, the counselor, being one-quarter Betazoid with some empathic abilities, had sensed the tensions between a few members of the crew rising. He agreed with his CO that shore leave would be the best medicine even if the ‘shore’ was a starbase.

Blake needed some time off, too, so that he could relax and recharge. He had spent several hours each day on a holodeck for the past three days. On the first day, he visited the beaches of his home in Malibu, California, albeit via the holodeck. The second day’s fantasy took him to the Ancient West where he took on the persona of Marshall Wyatt Earp. The Gunfight at the Okay Corral program had always been one of his favorites. Day three proved to be challenging as he scaled El Capitan. He had heard that James Kirk had once done it without safety equipment, and Blake was just arrogant enough to think that he could do anything that Kirk had done.

Blake returned to his quarters on the visiting officer’s section of Starbase 82. He could have stayed in his own quarters on the *Providence*, but the Starbase provided a larger and more luxurious suite. He took a shower and put on relaxing clothes in preparation for an evening meal at one of the fancier restaurants the starbase hosted. He saw the Starfleet emblem that doubled as a communicator on the table, and he considered leaving it where it lay; however, he realized that as a ship’s CO, he needed to be responsible enough to wear it just in case the Borg or rogue Romulans decided to show up and ruin his vacation. He went to the table, picked up the device, and pinned it on his civilian shirt. He made his way to the door and exited the room.

He was in the nearest turbolift and ready to tell the computer his destination when the combadge chirped. He rolled his eyes and let out a loud sigh as his shoulders slumped. Reluctantly, he tapped the badge. “Adams here.”

*“Commander Adams, this is Lieutenant Rush from CIC. Admiral Dean would like to see you in his office.”*

“I’m on my way, Lieutenant.” Blake tapped the badge to sever the communication as he wondered why the admiral wanted to see him. Admiral Martin Dean had sponsored Blake’s admission to the Academy, and the two had come to know each other pretty well over the years. The two had lunch together the first day that *Providence* arrived at Starbase 82, and Blake promised to play a round of golf with Dean on the holodeck before leaving. He didn’t expect to be called to the admiral’s office. “Computer, take me to the command level.”

It didn’t take long for the turbolift to whisk Blake to the command level, where CIC and the admiral’s office were located. He walked through the curved corridor past the main entrance to CIC and to the direct entrance to the admiral’s office. He pressed the com panel, and the doors parted. Stepping in, he said, “You wanted to see me, Admiral?”



# To Boldly Go: Prelude to Change

A Personal Story

By Cleve Johnson



Admiral Martin Dean stood and smiled. He pointed to the chair on the other side of the desk. “Have a seat, Blake.” Dean cocked his head to one side as he admired Blake’s choice of civilian clothes. “You look better in uniform.”

“I’m on vacation, Admiral,” Blake replied. “My uniform is on vacation, too.” He gave the admiral a wide grin.

Dean sat back down as he chuckled. “Blake, I’m going to miss you and your humor.”

“Uh, are you going somewhere, sir?”

“Well, no, I’m not going anywhere for some time if I have my way, but I don’t think that we will have an opportunity to see much of each other after this week.”

“Sir?”

“I have some news for you.”

“Uh oh, it sounds like bad news.” Blake leaned forward slightly.

“Actually, I think that you will like what I have to say, Blake.” Dean produced a previously hidden box and slid it across the desk. “Add that to your uniform the next time you put it on.”

Blake took the box and opened it. His mouth dropped open when he saw the gold pip.

“You’ve been promoted...and reassigned.”

Blake looked at the admiral’s eyes to see if he heard correctly. “Reassigned?”

“U.S.S. *Swift*,” Dean said as he tried to keep a straight face. “And you will be joining the 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet, 3<sup>rd</sup> Exploratory Group.” Dean’s face morphed from serious to jovial as he watched Blake’s stunned expression.

“I’ll be working with Rob again?” Blake’s mouth opened wide as he felt elated, but then he grew serious. “Uh, what about the *Providence*?”

“She will continue under a new CO.”

“And who will be the CO?” Blake wanted to make sure that his successor would be a good fit for the crew, and he had another reason for asking.

“Undecided, but I think the Office of Personnel would take your recommendation into consideration,” Dean said. “Anyone you have in mind?”

Without hesitation, Blake said, “Jada Lightfoot.”

“You think she’s ready for the big chair?”

“I do. At least when the big chair is on a small ship like *Providence*,” Blake said, grinning. “I have complete confidence in her.”

“Make your nomination official and send it to HQ,” Dean said. “I’ll make a recommendation for her, too.”

“Why is the captain of the *Swift* leaving?”

“Early retirement is what I was told, but I’m not sure it was his idea...according to the scuttlebutt.”

Blake’s smile faded slightly as he contemplated walking into a situation where he might be considered a usurper even though he had nothing to do with the other CO’s departure. He would want to surround himself with a few people that he knew and trusted. “Do I have the option of choosing some of my senior officers?”

“Absolutely,” Dean replied. “The current first officer requested a transfer to starbase duty, so that position definitely needs to be filled, but most of the crew will be staying except for a few junior officers and some of the enlisted personnel.”

“I already know who I want for first officer—Caleb Thorne. We went to the Academy together,” Blake said. “His background is in astrophysics and computers, but he went back to the Academy Command School a couple of years ago and is now the second officer on the *Vostok*.”

“Anyone else?”

“I definitely want Lieutenant Eric Kelly as my senior flight control officer and Chief McKinney as my senior transporter chief,” Blake said. “Mac is due for a promotion, too.”

“I think those requests are reasonable, Blake.” The admiral had an expression like he had forgotten something and suddenly remembered. “Oh, there is one other thing. Lieutenant Commander T’Les has been chosen to command a science station located near the Hromi Cluster.”

“Well, she does deserve a promotion,” Blake said. “I’m sure that she will make a fine commander, and commanding a science station will be a good fit for her. I’ll gladly sign the transfer orders.”

“There is one more thing, Blake. I have one more mission for the *Providence* under your command.”

“Sounds like shore leave is canceled,” Blake said with a grin.

Dean shrugged as he leaned back in his chair. “Sorry about that, but you have a couple more days for you and your crew to relax before the mission starts. There’s something going on in Sectors 428 and 429, and since you and your crew are familiar with that area, and since your ship is the only one equipped with a holographic cloaking device, you get the job.”

Blake was intrigued not by what the admiral said, but by what he was not saying. “Are we going into harm’s way?”

“I’m afraid so, but I believe that you and your crew will be able to meet it head-on and come through it.”

“Unscathed?”

Dean hesitated but did not avert his eyes from Blake’s. “I hope so, but...”

“But there are no guarantees.”

“Are there ever in our line of work?”

Blake’s eyes and body posture relaxed. “I never would have joined Starfleet if I was afraid of taking risks.”

Admiral Dean turned around in his swivel chair to the veranda against the wall behind him to retrieve an isolinear chip and turned back around to face Blake. He tossed the chip to Blake. “Here is the mission briefing. It has all the information we currently have on the situation.”

“When do I leave?”

“In four days, a mission advisor will join you, and then you will be on your way,” Dean said.

“Mission advisor? I hope it’s not some bureaucrat civilian who hasn’t got a clue about what it’s like out among the stars.”

The admiral could not help but laugh. “No, no, nothing like that. The advisor is a seasoned starship captain who has encountered the aliens that you are going to be...spying on.”

“Another captain,” Blake mused. “Why not give him temporary command of *Providence*?”

“He has his own ship, and sending *Providence* off into a possible hostile situation with a captain and crew not familiar with each other could mean disaster.”

“Yes, I can see that,” Blake said. “Truthfully, I’m not sure that I would be comfortable knowing that my crew was going into danger with a stranger in command of people I’ve known and worked with for years.”

The admiral smiled. “Exactly. So do you have any other questions, Blake?”

Blake shook his head as he stood up. “No questions, Martin, other than you want to have dinner or lunch before I ship out?”

“Sounds good to me. Dinner at 1800 hours the day after tomorrow,” Dean said. “The Great Bird Lounge, okay?”

“Perfect. I’ll be there.”

“Good. Now go and enjoy yourself for the next few days. Maybe get some rest while you’re at it,” Dean said as he stood and reached out to shake Blake’s hand. “And congratulations on your promotion. The *Swift* will be waiting for you when you get back.”

“And our round of golf?”

“You come back from this mission in one piece, and I’ll have the Augusta course ready in Holodeck Four the next morning.”

“Deal.” Blake turned and exited the admiral’s office. After the door closed behind him, he stood in the middle of the corridor and took a deep breath. He would miss his crew, people that he had spent the last few years getting to know; however, he did look forward to finishing the next, and last, mission as the CO of the starship *Providence* and even more looked forward to seeing his best friend, Rob Stuart, again. He also looked forward to seeing Jan Stuart and, especially, Melanie Leeson.

**The End**