

To Boldly Go: Farewell, Dear Friends

A U.S.S. *Providence* story

By Cleve Johnson

The *Sovereign*-class U.S.S. *Dauntless* shut down its tractor beam, releasing the battle-damaged *Providence*. The *Providence*, using maneuvering thrusters, glided toward the open space doors of Starbase 82.

“Jada, please signal the *Dauntless* and thank them for the ride,” Captain Blake Adams said as he rose from the center seat and took a few steps toward the CONN. He placed his hand on Lieutenant Kelly’s shoulder.

Eric Kelly turned his head to look up at his CO with a questioning look.

Blake smiled. “I’ll take her in,” he said.

“Aye, Skipper,” Eric replied as he stood and walked around the back of his chair.

Blake sat down and began to work the controls. The CONN was his duty station before he became the first officer, and later captain, of the starship *Providence*. He wanted to fly her one more time before relinquishing command.

Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot stood up and approached the CONN. She stopped and stood to her captain’s right. “Captain, the dock master has signaled that we are cleared for berth seven alpha.”

“Thank you, Jada,” Blake replied. “Acknowledge the dock master and tell him there will be no need for a tractor beam.”

“Sir?”

“Just tell them, Jada.”

Eric Kelly tried unsuccessfully to stifle a chuckle. He knew that his captain was a hotshot when it came to piloting a starship and that he would not resist what would probably be his last opportunity to show off.

Blake’s fingers started flying across the thruster controls.

Providence began to roll as it passed through the massive opening that led inside the station. The ship completed its three hundred sixty degree roll to starboard and leveled out as it turned toward the assigned berth. The ship’s forward reaction control thrusters fired to slow the ship as it neared its resting place.

“Four hundred meters, Captain,” Jada announced. “I can’t believe the dock master hasn’t activated the tractor beam.”

Blake continued to work the controls. “He knows that I’d kill him if he did,” he said. “He’s an old friend from the Academy.”

The turbolift doors opened and Counselor James Goodman, Chief Petty Officer John “Mac” McKinney, and Doctor Neal Hogan entered the bridge. James went directly to his wife’s side at the OPS/engineering console.

Blake turned his head to see who had entered the bridge. “Welcome, gentlemen. You’re right on time.”

“Two hundred meters,” Jada said.

“Thank you, Jada, but I’m aware of our distance.” Blake liked Jada. She had turned out to be a top-notch first officer, but after more than three years she still was a little too stiff for Blake’s taste. He had advised her, on several occasions, to lighten up and relax. Although Jada had made improvements, Blake did not hold any hope that she would ever learn to be less stressed about her work...especially since she was about to become a commanding officer.

Eric Kelly, who proved to be as good—if not better—at piloting starships and smaller craft as Blake Adams, began to nervously shift his weight from one foot to the other. He had never heard of anyone attempting to dock manually in a space dock berth before. He knew how good his CO was, but Eric did not think that anyone could do what Blake Adams was attempting.

The ship came to a complete stop. Port thrusters fired momentarily, and *Providence* moved sideways until its docking port made contact with the berth’s gangway.

Jada gave a sigh of relief, as did Eric and the rest of the crew—except for Lieutenant Commander T’Les. As a Vulcan, she hid her concerns over the captain’s foolhardy maneuver.

Blake rose from his chair and noticed the looks on each officer’s face. “Piece of cake,” he said.

Doctor Hogan, with a look of disapproval, shook his head. Mac and James smiled, knowing the skills of their CO. Lieutenant Nakamara at the tactical station wiped a bead of sweat from his brow.

Blake ignored...and enjoyed...the reaction of his crew. “Well, this is the end of an era for me and for some of you,” he said. “The last five years aboard this ship have been some of the best of my career.” He paused as he looked around the room at his senior officers, his friends. “I’m going to miss each of you.”

James Goodman took a step forward. “We will miss you, too, Skipper.”

Blake smiled. “I have one last duty to perform as your captain,” he said. “Actually, it is a privilege more than a duty.” He quickly walked toward and entered his ready room. Only moments passed until he walked back into the bridge, carrying a small black box, which he opened. “Lieutenant Commander T’Les, front and center. Lieutenant Nakamara, Lieutenant Gonzalez, come forward as well.”

Each of the three officers came and stood at attention in front of their CO.

Blake stepped in front of the Vulcan science officer. He opened the box and pulled out a gold-colored pip. “By order of Starfleet Command, you are hereby promoted to the rank of commander with all the duties and privileges that come with that rank,” he said as he removed the dark-colored pip from T’Les’s collar and replaced it with the gold

one. “Congratulations, *Commander* T’Les on your promotion and for your new assignment as commanding officer of the Epsilon Gamma science outpost.”

“Thank you, Captain,” T’Les replied.

Blake took a sidestep and stopped in front of his chief of security, who was still healing from injuries sustained in the recent battle with the Kairn. “Lieutenant Yoshiama Nakamara, by order of Starfleet Command, you are hereby promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Commander,” he said as he pulled a dark pip out of his box and pinned it on Yoshi’s collar. “Congratulations, Lieutenant Commander for your promotion and your new assignment.”

Yoshi smiled. “Thank you, Sir.” He allowed himself to wallow in pride for all his accomplishments as a Starfleet officer. Those accomplishments led him to the position that he worked hard to obtain—the next first officer of the U.S.S. *Providence*.

Once again Blake took a step to the side, stopping in front of Lieutenant Maria Gonzalez. He pulled another dark pip out of the box and pinned it on her collar. “Congratulations, Lieutenant Commander Gonzalez on your promotion and on your new position as chief science officer.”

Maria bowed her head. “Thank you, Captain Adams.” As Maria raised her head, she turned slightly to see Lieutenant Eric Kelly smiling at her.

Blake looked toward his now-former first officer. “Lieutenant Commander Lightfoot, front and center.”

The three newly-promoted officers took a few steps back and Jada Lightfoot took their place in front of Captain Blake Adams. She snapped to attention.

Blake took a gold pip from his box and made the rank exchange on her collar as he had previously done with the other officers. “By order of Starfleet command, you are hereby promoted to the rank of commander with all the duties and privileges that come with it. Congratulations, Commander Lightfoot.”

“Thank you, Captain. I want you to know that I have learned much from working under your wing.”

“Are you calling me a bird, Commander?” Blake’s face lit up as he shot his former first officer a mischievous grin. He stepped back a few meters and snapped to attention. “Officers and crew of the U.S.S. *Providence*, I present to you your new commanding officer—*Commander* Jada Lightfoot.”

Each person on the bridge began to applaud, which caused Lightfoot to blush just enough for Blake to notice.

Lightfoot raised her hand to quiet her crew. She smiled as she looked around the room. “I want to thank each one of you for your support and encouragement. It has been a privilege and an honor to serve as the first officer of this ship, and I am sure that we will work well together as we move forward from this day onward.” She turned back to face her former CO. “I relieve you, Sir.”

Blake stood at attention. “I stand relieved. Computer, transfer all command codes to Commander Lightfoot effective this stardate.

“*Command codes transferred,*” the computer announced.

Lightfoot stepped back and focused her attention on T’Les, Adams, and Kelly. “To those who are leaving us, you will be missed. As my *first* act as commanding officer, I have arranged a little going away party in the main lounge for Captain Adams, Commander T’Les, and Lieutenant Kelly, which will officially get underway at 1630 hours.”

“You should not have gone to all that trouble, Jada,” Blake said. “But I’m glad that you did.”

“I know how you enjoy a good party, Sir.” Jada Lightfoot looked around the bridge once more, and she tapped her combadge. “Bridge to all hands. Secure all stations; prepare to honor Captain Adams and all officers and crew that will be leaving us for other assignments. The festivities begin in 20 minutes.”



Lieutenant Kelly, with a glass of synthetic ale in his hand, sat at one of the tables talking with Lieutenant Commander Nakamara. The two had become good friends while serving together. “It’s not going to be the same, Yoshi.”

Yoshi picked up his glass and took a sip of the purple liquid. He set his glass down as he looked at his friend. “Nothing remains the same, Eric. Change is the nature of the universe.”

“That sounds philosophical,” Eric replied.

“It’s not meant to be,” Yoshi said. “It’s just the way it is.”

As the two continued their conversation, Maria Gonzales approached the table. Eric noticed her presence and stood up, snapping to attention. Maria rolled her eyes and shook her head. “Sit down before you strain something,” she said, to which Eric complied. “Can I join you two?”

“Please do, Lieutenant Commander,” Yoshi said.

Maria pulled a chair away from the table and sat down next across from her two friends. “Let’s not get too formal just because we’ve been promoted, *Lieutenant Commander.*”

Yoshi smiled. “I just wanted to remind the Lieutenant that he’s sitting with superior officers.”

Eric and Maria both started laughing as Yoshi leaned back in his chair to enjoy the moment. As the new XO looked at the way his two friends were looking at each other, he stood up. “Listen, I should go and give my congratulations to T’Les and Captain Adams. I’ll catch up with you later, Eric.” Yoshi left the table as his friends just nodded to him.

Eric looked into Maria’s eyes. “Congratulations on your promotion and new position, Maria. It’s well deserved, and I know that you’re going to...”

Maria placed her hand on top of Eric’s as he rested it on the table. “Thank you, Eric, but I think we need to talk about some other things right now.”

Eric glanced around the room and back to Maria. “Such as?”

“Such as how we feel about each other.” Maria and Eric had grown close, but both had struggled to keep their professional and personal relationships separated, but both had found that difficult, especially during those times the ship and crew were in peril. Eric, especially, had found it impossible to fully concentrate on piloting the ship during crisis situations because he was worried about Maria’s safety. They both wanted a romantic relationship, but they were both reluctant because they served together.

Eric flashed his ocean-blue eyes at her. “I know. It’s been complicated, but now that I’m leaving, I realize how much we’ve wasted worrying about how to be together without compromising our service to the ship.”

“We’ve both been afraid, Eric. And now...we’re going to be light years apart.”

“Long distance relationships have worked for others.”

“But that doesn’t mean it will work for us.”

“It doesn’t mean it won’t work either, Maria.” Eric pulled his hand from under Maria’s and placed his on top of hers. “We can make it work.”

Maria considered what Eric had said. “I want it to, but you’re leaving for Earth tomorrow.”

Eric smiled at Maria. “Actually, I decided to take my leave here. I’ve arranged for guest quarters on the station so that I can spend as much time as I can with you before I have to report to the *Swift*.” Eric lightly squeezed Maria’s hand. “We have some time to figure out a way to make this work.”

Maria continued holding Eric’s hand as she slowly pushed her seat away from the table and stood, pulling Eric up beside her. “Do you think we’d be missed if we left the party early?”

“Maybe,” Eric replied. “But I don’t care.”

Eric and Maria quickly moved toward the nearest door that led out of the ship’s lounge.



Blake finished packing his belongings as he placed the last item—a framed photograph of Captain Melanie Leeson—in the last storage box, which he closed and placed on top of the other three next to the bulkhead. He took a last look around his quarters, paused, and turned toward the door. It opened as he approached, and in front of him stood newly promoted Commander Jada Lightfoot. He smiled as he stepped through the doorway. “Jada.”

“Captain. I wanted to come by and walk you off ship...if that is all right.” Jada stepped aside as Blake passed her and started walking toward the nearest turbolift. She quickly stepped beside him and kept pace.

“I welcome your company,” Blake replied. They continued to walk side by side, slowly, along the curved corridor. He gave his former XO a sideward glance. “Thank you for the great sendoff party.”

Jada's lips curved ever so slightly upward. "I'm glad you liked it. I wanted to make sure that everyone had a chance to say goodbye."

Blake smiled as the two officers reached the turbolift. As the doors to the lift parted, he entered as Jada followed. He turned and faced her. "Not goodbye, Jada. Just a farewell until we all meet again."

Jada nodded in agreement. "I know that you have always thought I was too..."

"Stiff?" Blake said with a wink.

"...serious," Jada finished. "But I have learned a lot from you. I've even enjoyed serving with you these past few years."

"You're a fine officer, Jada, and I'm sure that you will be a great CO." Blake reached out his hand, which Jada firmly grasped. "It's been my pleasure to serve with you, too."

The officers stood facing each other for a few more seconds as they released their handshake. Jada took a step backward out of the lift. "I'll have your things beamed over to the station, Captain."

"Thank you, Commander." Blake nodded to his successor. "Permission to disembark?"

Jada snapped to attention. "Permission granted."

The doors slid shut as Blake remembered the adventures that he had on this ship and all the relationships that he had enjoyed. "Computer, take me to the port side airlock."

Blake Adams' new adventure as captain of the starship *Swift* was about to begin.