

STAR TREK:
This Side of Darkness

Part One
By
John Erik Ege

“This Side of Darkness” version 1.00, start date, 2015
Present earth-date Feb 12th, 2019

EPH

Copyright 2018
All Rights Reserved.

Licensing for this work is pending, contingent on the good graces of Simon and Schuster, proxy for Paramount, and so, consequently, it can only be considered fan fiction at this time. The author agrees to share this edition for editing purposes with the understanding that Paramount, the official owners of Star Trek related products may revoke the sharing privilege. Comments and corrections can be directed to the author for story refinement. The author has deeply appreciated the amount of support, wishes for success, and the request for more stories! If you would like to contact Simon and Schuster to share your opinion with them, perhaps they, too, will eventually get around to actually reading and or responding to my agent’s correspondence. If you bought this, or any of the other four, you paid too much.

Simon and Schuster
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Author contact info:

John Erik Ege
214-907-4070
Email
solarchariot@hotmail.com

This story is the sixth in a series. Book One “A Touch of Greatness,” book two “Another Piece of the Action,” book three “Both Hands Full,” book four, “Necessary Evil,” and “The Seventh House” are available at free-ebooks.net or can be attained in PDF format from the author. (Put Trek in the subject line so the author can readily distinguish from the nonessential emails) I expect there will be a seventh book, and hopefully this series will continue to grow in popularity, by word of mouth, and perhaps Simon and Schuster, or Paramount themselves, will finally get around to endorsing it. (Then again, “Prelude to Axanar is probably one of the most successful fan fiction, which ended up in litigation and an attempt by Paramount to change the definition of ‘fanfiction,’ which is failure to recognize sometimes the fans know something executives don’t.) The author recognizes the issues and valid criticism from the previous books, knows there is room for improvement in his endeavors, and hopes to continue to grow as a writer and human being.

The delay in publishing this is in part due to me giving time to my bestest creation ever, the joy of my life, my son, Eston Gerik Ege; and due to being in human in general. All my love, J E E. There is more to this, see the authors notes.



This books is dedicated to all the fans who have enjoyed the Garcia stories. Thank you for your kind words, emails, and affection. Love, John.

Captain Zara Undine

CHAPTER 1

Zara Undine, Captain of the USS New Constitution, had been standing outside of the perimeter of the invisible Iconian Gateway that had opened up on the floor of Holodeck One when it swallowed a number of the crew. Iconian Gateways were two dimensional areas, usually attached to walls, and if you knew when and where they were you could literally push through the wall into another world. She kicked herself for having not considered that the floor could also be utilized, as the Gateways were not limited to the surface of a solid structure. They could be portals in midair, allowing people to come and go in a fashion much easier and faster than a transporter, in fact as easily as crossing from one room to the next. Floor placement of the portal had been unexpected, but the odd placement that was bothering her. The fact that she had trusted Paynays, the salt vampire that was reportedly in love with Garcia, enough to allow her access to their own Gateway's controls was more disturbing. She should have trusted her instincts on the matter. Had the salt vampire manipulated her mentally? Maybe not directly. Undine had watched Garcia's encounter with Paynays and had actually felt sympathetic to the creature's plight and believed her to be loyal to Garcia. More likely, it had been Garcia who had influenced her, just in his sheer eagerness to integrate Paynays into the crew, despite Paynay's admission she had been commissioned to assassinate him. She suspected Garcia was experiencing a version of Stockholm's Syndrome when it came to Paynays, which wasn't too farfetched considering Paynays knew just how to play him.

Undine forced herself to stop her internal dialogue, a negative self talk and question set that had her spinning in a non productive manner. It was a done deal. Providing an opportunity to someone to earn trust had value and that was the very thing Garcia had offered Paynays. The fact that she used that opportunity to escape was not unpredictable. It should have been a foregone conclusion. Paynays had been brought in to retrieve the code from Alexander's mind to remote activate what they believed to be a temporal Iconian Gateway. They believed this because they knew Alexander, Worf's son, was from the future and he had offered no other explanation for how he had traveled back through time. Were the two co-conspirators? If they were, they now had Garcia. Undine had gone full circle back to worrying and had to stop herself from going down a road that limited her functioning.

All in all, twelve people had fallen through the immediate opening of the gateway. Captain Weisberg and his team, guests on the New Constitution thanks to Admiral Pressman, a security officer, plus Jay and his team, guests of Garcia's visiting from Iotia, plus Garcia carrying the twins were all inside the perimeter when the 'floor' gave way. Dryac, the only Medusan in Star Fleet, was also within the perimeter, inside her floating mobility device, and though it initially dipped with the subtle change in weight displacement, it didn't pass through the floor until she actively fired the tiny directional thruster so as to follow Garcia on what would be her first Away mission. Paynays pushed Alexander into the circle, following him, as if diving into a pool of water. Kitara followed, without hesitation.

And Undine's present point of internal contention: she hesitated. She knew 'hesitation' wasn't completely accurate. She had considered diving into the unknown, but

decided someone needed to stay and update the crew on the situation, and she was the last one standing on deck. She had hit her communicator badge and had called for security team to join her at the holodeck simultaneous with Kitara leaping into the unknown. She still wanted to jump, to join Garcia in whatever adventure was underway, but she convinced herself that Garcia and the others were competent to handle any situation they were falling into, and if they weren't, her presence might not change anything. She had the presence of mind, though, to push one of the supply crates that Weisberg had prepared into the perimeter. Only it didn't fall through. The Gateway had already closed. A faint line describing the circumference of the circle remained on the floor. She touched her sleeve and a clock became visible. With a couple taps, she started a timer.

Security arrived. "Captain?"

"Don't cross into the circle. Scan the room, focus on the floor, look for any residue energy signature that might tell us where the Gateway opened up to," Undine instructed. "Lt. Bri, report to holodeck one. Bring a kit."

Undine instructed the computer to generate a walking stick. One appeared, hovering. She took it up and walked the perimeter probing the floor with the stick. It felt solid enough, but even so, she suspected she would be walking more gently for a while. Bri, the ship's engineer arrived with his kit, followed by his brother, Lt. Brel, her first officer. Brel had actually resisted the promotion, claiming others were more qualified to run a Star Fleet ship. Undine suspected he had resisted because he didn't want to serve under a female Captain, or perhaps he had hoped to follow Garcia, but she had insisted because she couldn't very well select the next qualified out of the crew, because that would put two pregnant females department heads. With all of those who were pregnant due to give birth around the same time, they couldn't afford the inconvenience of major interruption in ship's operation, as they were already running on a skeleton crew.

"Check the deck plating for any integrity issues, then run a diagnostic on the hologrid systems in the floor to ensure there is no damage to the circuitry," Undine instructed.

"Aye," Bri said, and got to work.

Undine checked the elapsed time. Two minutes. She hated not knowing, but applauded the response time of her teams. She acknowledged Brel with a nod as he assessed the situation and intuited what had happened.

Brel pulled up alongside of her. "You made the right decision, Captain," Brel said. "Your place is here on the ship."

Undine held her response.

"There was nothing you could have done," he continued.

"Stop treating me as if I am human," Undine snapped. "Aren't you supposed to be on the Bridge? I got this."

"Aye," Brel said, and departed quickly.

Losira arrived in her fashion, passing through several dimensions before solidifying into a three dimensional creature. She had a compelling look about her, that was not quite Egyptian, but reminiscent of something ancient, a present beauty that transcended time. Some of the humans compared her to the original Siri, but she was much more than just a holographic computer interface. She could make herself tangible. She could finely tune her frequency to harmonize with a person's DNA, resonating at

such a rate that would shatter a DNA lattice like an opera singer shattering a glass; a single touch would kill her target. There were rumors that she could tune her frequency to enrapture, not kill. It was further rumored only Garcia knew for sure, having given into this Siren. She would draw you in with her look, not a song; she was wearing the Pathfinder's uniform, mostly silver with holographic gold overlays, miniskirt option with matching boots. She was not human, but she was so close and so stunning that human females had to suppress the innate insecurity that she provoked.

Losira quickly orientated herself, and then approached Undine and Brel. Undine was hopeful that Losira had something useful for her.

"I am aware of a temporal anomaly having occurred and though I believe I know how to proceed, I would like your advice," Losira said.

"What sort of anomaly?" Undine asked.

"Three people have arrived on the Path Finder unannounced," Losira said.

"Specifically, they each arrived in their own cells in my Brig, security fields snapping on simultaneously with their arrivals, as if whoever placed them their didn't want them wandering about on their own cognizance. I recognize each of them individually, but out of habit I accessed their continuity logs on their communicator badges and have evidence that each have been extracted from a future date."

"Com badges. So, they're Star Fleet?" Undine asked.

"Yes," Undine said. "Sito Jaxa, Thomas Riker, and Data."

"And you're sure they are from the future?" Undine asked.

"Yes. I have been attempting to understand their personal stories to complete my understanding. Thomas is resisting, giving very little information, but I have sufficient data to know that he is a transporter clone of William T Riker. He reports being on the Bridge of the USS Ghandhi when he suddenly found himself in the Brig, in a fashion not consistent with a transporter. He is not happy and has been yelling at Q to stop playing games. Q has not appeared, or taken credit for the situation. Jaxa arrived with severe physical injuries. Doctor Jurak has treated her and she was able to convey that she was being tortured by Cardassians, on the verge of death when she found herself, gratefully, relocated. She is sleeping now. Data's tale, is even more interesting. Apparently, he had just saved Captain Picard's life, by giving away his personal emergency transporter transponder, and reports he would most certainly be dead had he not been brought back at the instant he was retrieved."

"From the future?" Undine said.

"The evidence is overwhelmingly 'yes.' Also, Data has been modified," Losira said.

"How so?" Undine asked.

"Though he is reporting all diagnostics are coming back within operating parameters, his external appearance has definitely been modified. He has realistic skin, his hair has streaks of gray, and he appears older than the Data we know. His appearance is so radically different, I thought at first that he was Dr Sung, Data's creator, and that he was human, but he is still an android, he is still Data."

"Why would anyone change his appearance?" Undine asked, rhetorically.

"Also, you should be aware that I have lost contact with the Pa Nun," Losira informed her. "I am unable to access their Preserver Communication Crystal."

At that moment, the doors to the holodeck slid open and retired Admiral McCoy stormed in, almost manic in his determination. His anger wasn't the only obvious feature. What was most startling was that he no longer appeared to be a man well over a hundred, but a very young, and vibrant, forty-ish year old man.

"Where is Tammias!" McCoy demanded.

"Umm, Bones," Undine said, trying to soften him a little.

"Don't 'umm bones' me," McCoy snapped. "Where is he? On the Path Finder? Fire up that confounded portal contraption of yours and let me at him."

"Tam is indisposed," Undine said.

"He did this to me! I know it," McCoy said. "I told him I didn't want this. By God, a man shouldn't be rejuvenated against his will and forced to live another hundred years or so! What was he thinking?"

"Admiral!" Undine interrupted. "We're in a bit of a situation right now..."

"When the hell aren't you in the middle of a situation?!" McCoy ranted.

"Admiral McCoy," Undine said, touching his arm; a very purposeful, but manipulative act that shifted McCoy's mood, bringing down the rant. McCoy's mood shifted because the first thing he thought was that Tammias had been killed. "Garcia fell through a portal along with several other crew members. We don't know their situation. He may or may not have anything to do with your condition, but for now, I want you to report to Sickbay and get yourself checked out. And I definitely need you to keep your wits about you because if Garcia is behind this, well, there is rarely just one change. I need you. Stay focused."

McCoy forced himself to breathe. "Fine. I will go to Sickbay and get myself checked out, but mind you: I am not signing up for another five year mission just to accommodate Garcia's wish to keep me near him, you got that?!" McCoy grumbled, heading towards the exit. "A man shouldn't live forever. I'm a Doctor, not a Highlander."

There was a moment of silence after the storm of McCoy passed.

"Interesting," Losira commented.

"What?" Undine asked.

"Another anomaly," Losira said. "Highlander is a reference to an 80's movie that only Garcia would likely know."

"You think McCoy's mind has been tampered with?" Undine asked.

Losira shrugged. Her eyes tracked up to the right. "Garcia and the others have arrived on the Path Finder. Garcia is in sickbay, unconscious."

Undine activated her Comm. Badge. "Number One, the ship is yours, I'm crossing over to the Path Finder," Undine she explained.

"I understand. We will maintain course and heading," Brel responded.

Losira opened their gateway so Undine could cross where as she simply dematerialized. After all, she was already there...



Kitara, Losira, and Simone were near as Jurak continued to examine Garcia. Kitara acknowledge Undine as she entered a conversation already in progress. If she was reading Garcia's brain scan correctly, he was moving from an REM sleep into N1, a light delta wave that is the typical boundary between sleep and waking.

“We should notify Starfleet that we have visitors from the future on board,” Simone was saying.

“Absolutely not,” Kitara said, looking at Simone as if she were an idiot. “Clearly they were brought here by Garcia for a reason and Starfleet would simply isolate them.”

“They should be isolated,” Simone said. “Their presence could alter the future.”

“A thing that Garcia is interested in doing, if you recall,” Kitara said.

“It could be a random act of kindness,” Undine said. “These are people Garcia has affection for.”

“If he hadn’t brought back Riker, I would concur,” Kitara said. “But he hates Riker. There’s a blood feud there.”

“I don’t think it’s a blood feud,” Simone said.

As Garcia’s brain began to wake up, corresponding lights on the monitor began to illuminate and the interface sounds altered their rhythms. Auditory regions reflected the conversation and ambient sounds in the room. Oddly enough, his visual cortex was fully illuminated, as if he was viewing something, but his eyes remained closed. There was no indication from the scans that he had slipped into REM, and his eyes didn’t move behind the eyelids, but there was activity suggesting he was engaged in the world. They all gathered around. According to the scans, he should be full awake, but he continued to lay there, slow respiration, gentle and steady heartbeat, as if he had simply roused and had intentions of returning to a dream.

“Tam?” Losira asked. She touched him when he didn’t respond.

“I hear you,” he said.

“Are you ok?” Losira asked.

With eyes closed, his face seemed to be contemplating the question. Then it had an answer. A flash of sadness crossed his face.

“The Pa Nun was destroyed, all hands lost,” Garcia announced.

The Captains exchanged glances. Losira had only recently notified them that she had lost contact with the Pa Nun and she hadn’t done so in front of Garcia.

“I only recently became aware of that. How did you know?” Losira asked.

Garcia opened his eyes. They were glowing. “I’ve seen it,” Garcia said.

“Doctor,” Simone said, drawing his attention from away from his scanner.

The Doctor looked up from his tricorder to Simone, followed her gaze back to Garcia, and hardly seemed phased. He brought a scanner closer.

“Interesting,” Jurak said. “That might explain some of the anomalous readings.”

“Is it radiation?” Kitara asked.

“McCoy will know about it, ask him,” Garcia said, referring to the condition. His voice was deeper, more resonant than usual. His eyes met Kitara’s eyes. “I’ve projected a timeline for us to finish some goals before you must kill me. The clock is ticking.”

“What are you talking about?” Kitara asked.

Garcia’s eyes returned to normal. The transition that crossed his face was that of an all knowing presence to a limited, uncertain presence as if he had just woke up. He clearly orientated on the faces and relaxed. He smiled as he realized where he was. “Hey. When did we get back? How did we get back?”

“You teleported us from the fountain. You don’t remember?” Kitara asked.

“Do you remember what you were just saying?” Simone asked.

“I was speaking?” Garcia asked.

“What do you remember?” Undine asked.

“I had just accessed the portal. I saw Kelinda approaching and I activated a shield... Oh, you know what. I think I left the self defense system on. No one will be able to use that fountain for time travel again,” Garcia said. He mused. “I hope people can access the water. It was really good water.”

“Tam, are you ok?” Losira asked.

“I feel great, why?” He was smiling as if he hadn’t a care in the world.

“We lost contact with the Pa Nun and you just said it was destroyed,” Undine said.

“I don’t remember that,” Garcia said. He wasn’t happy, but he didn’t appear devastated. “Kitara, take the Tempest and assess the situation...” Garcia paused as if mulling it over after speaking and decided that was the right thing to do. He nodded, as if reassuring her that he was confident in that. His hand slid to the belly pack he was wearing as he assessed the status of the babies. They were good. Jurak confirmed it without being asked.

“I will,” Kitara said, with a tone that could wait. “But first, what do you want us to do with the guest you put in the Brig?”

“Guest?” Garcia asked. He nearly asked why guest were in the ‘Brig’ but decided they would get around to telling him things. He felt like there were a dozen things he needed to chase through his mind, but each thread he focused slipped away before he could get a good grasp.

“Maybe it would be better just to show him,” Undine said. “Do you feel like walking?”

“Sure. I feel great,” Garcia said, happy to get up.

“Doctor?” Undine asked.

Jurak shrugged. “He feels great,” he said.

Garcia stood, unsteady on his feet at first, but instead of worried he sort of laughed, as if he had just learned to walk. He paused as he recovered balanced, waving off help from the Losira. He consciously put two hands on the belly pack that contained the twins. After assuring his Captains that he and the babies were well, they proceeded to the Brig. McKnight was in the corridor and Garcia maneuvered to intercept her, even greeted her with a hug.

“You doing ok?” he asked her, genuinely focused on her.

McKnight didn’t know what to make of this, but nodded. “Aye, Admiral. And you?”

“Couldn’t be better. Thank you. Keep up the good work,” he said, and as she passed on, Garcia interrupted Tuer, embracing him with the signature ‘brotherhood’ greeting, laughing a Klingon laugh, brazen and loud. “It’s good to see you, Brother!”

“Admiral!” Tuer said.

“Tam, we have business to conduct,” Simone said.

“Can the schedule permit a moment to celebrate friendship?” he asked. Then Rivan was in front of him. He greeted her enthusiastically, hugging her, kissing her first on the forehead and then, on thinking better of it, kissing her on the lips.

Rivan was pleasantly surprised by the attention. Their bellies touched, as she was merely weeks due to deliver, and he was carrying twins.

“Want to come with?” he asked her.

“Your group looks officious,” Rivan said, noticing that the Captains didn’t seem pleased by the distraction.

“This isn’t classified, is it?” Garcia asked the Captains.

“We haven’t decided yet,” Simone answered.

“Well, then, come along Rivan,” Garcia said, drawing her arm into his and proceeding onwards. He didn’t seem to mind the Captain’s speaking behind his back, as if they were concerned he was drugged. “It seems like forever since we’ve had any time together, Rivan.”

“It has been a minute,” Rivan said.

“We’ll have to fix this,” he said, as the door to the Brig opened and they walked in together. Garcia was not only elated to see the inmates in the brig, he gasped with joy. “Jito! Rivan, you remember Jito, don’t you?”

Jito stood up, surprised but relieved to see Garcia. She tried speaking to him, but Garcia spoke over her. “And Data! Lal will be so happy to see you.”

“I should have known you were behind this,” said the third inmate. Riker, older than the one he had most recently encountered, was clearly not happy. He also appeared to have gained significant weight. And, he was wearing night clothes, sweat pants and oversized flannel shirt.

“Why are they locked up?” Garcia asked.

“We assumed that’s the way you wanted it, since they were placed there. We assumed this was you. We can make an argument it was Q,” Undine said.

“Brought them back from where?” Garcia asked.

“The future,” Simone said.

Data clarified. “You appear to have pulled each of us out of the timeline at the exact moment of our demise,” Data said.

“Really?” Garcia asked, trying to put it all together. A profound sense of sadness fell over him.

“Why do you look sad?” Jito asked.

“I don’t know. I’m suddenly thinking about my sister and I’m missing her,” Garcia said, the lines on his forehead becoming complex as he struggled to recall. Tears dropped from his eyes. Rivan touched his face. As if on cue, his face smoothed over as if he had an understanding, and suddenly his eyes shimmered with a glow. Rivan stepped back. The other Garcia, the ‘enlightened one’ had returned. “Each of you will be instrumental in preserving, restoring this timeline which I’m going to destroy. Without your help, both time lines will be lost. If you interact with anyone outside of my crew, you will risk the most important missions of your lives. That’s all I can tell you, for now.”

The glow faded, leaving Garcia’s eyes a lighter shade of hazel, green. Garcia staggered, but Rivan re-engaged him, overcoming her surprise of the change.

“Tam?” Rivan asked.

He patted her arm, nodding. “I’m okay. I’m okay. Please, let them out of their cells. And get Will a uniform, he looks uncomfortable.”

“I prefer Thomas,” Riker said.

“Uh? Oh! You’re the transporter twin,” Garcia said, nodding. That made sense somehow. “Good. Good you’re here and all grandfatherly. You’re going to love sitting for the babies.”

“You need to put us back,” Thomas said.

Garcia blinked, tracking the part of the convention he could recall, and again, there were these ambiguous threads. “Put you back in the future, at the point of your demise.”

“You can’t violate the time line,” Thomas said.

“Put you back to death?” Garcia clarified.

“No one lives forever,” Thomas said. “You have no right to rip us from the timeline. No right to deny us a good death.”

“Very Klingon of you. And you’re right,” Garcia agreed. “I have no authority over you. I barely have authority over me. Clearly, I have some ethical boundaries issues. Just ask my crew. Still, and let’s have clarity on this point: I am not going to send you back to your death just to correct my error. That, too, is an ethical dilemma, isn’t it. Yeah, maybe Kirk would allow Edith to get run over by a truck to fix the time line. I am not Kirk. Fuck that. I am saving Edith, taking her back to the future so she can’t affect the time line. Oh, but I have taken you from the future. You could theoretically affect your future. Maybe I should be worried, except, I know you. I know all of you, and I suspect your moral code of ethics, your Star Fleet training, will prevent you from doing harm. Minimizing harm. Worst case scenario, I blow up the timeline, none of this has happened, you go back to being dead. Best case scenario, I save the Universe, and you get to live a quiet little life on some back water planet, minimizing your temporal foot print. It’s never the best or worst case scenarios. It’s usually somewhere in between. But, if you’re just mad because I robbed you of the perceived relief death offers from melancholy and unrequited love, then, well, tough shit. Grow the fuck up, Will. No one gets what they want in life. You think you’re only one that ever fell in love with Troi and didn’t get a happy ending. That didn’t come out right. That just kind of fell out of my face. Forget I said that. No. It’s still true! I have news for you. Death doesn’t diminish the intensity of feelings. They get magnified. You want to end your misery, find a way to do it in the here and now.” Garcia stepped closer to the cell. “But if you are so determined to be dead, because you’re really that stupid, well, stick around. There are lots of ways to die around me. I need more crew. I need experienced officers. I need you. We’re saving the Universe. That’s a direct order from an Admiral in Star Fleet, and you consider yourself drafted. We clear, or do I have to do the whole you don’t have to like me or the situation for us to work well together speech?”

“We’re clear,” Thomas said.

“Oh, good, thank you, welcome aboard,” Garcia said. He turned to Losira. “If he tries to escape, shoot him. Now, I’m feeling really tired. If you’ll excuse me. Rivan?”

Rivan accompanied Garcia out of the room. There was silence for a moment.

“What just happened?” Jito asked. “Is he okay?”

“He is under a lot of pressure,” Losira said.

“Something’s not right,” Kitara said.

“You think?” Thomas asked.

“He didn’t seem to notice Data was different,” Simone said.

“That would make sense if he had anything to do with that,” Losira said. “Or, he’s still a little out of it from link he established with the Inconian Gateway’s Guardian, and he was seeing Data with his old eyes.”

“Old eyes?” Jito asked.

“We see with our brains, not our eyes,” Simone said, staring at the door Garcia had just passed through. “Garcia was not focus so he missed important details.”

“Garcia never misses details,” Kitara said.

“We are in serious trouble,” Undine commented.

“Yeah,” Losira said. “I will catch these guys up to speed.”

Undine touched Losira on the shoulder, a reserved ‘thank you,’ and excused herself. Kitara and Simone followed, as they each needed to return to their ships and their own tasks.

“No, really, what’s happening?” Jito asked.

“Change is coming, dear,” Losira said. “Answers, maybe, but change, definitely. Come. Let’s get yawl some food and a change a clothes, and I will tell you what’s transpired and what it seems like you have been unwittingly woven into.”

Chapter 2

Tama Orleans made her way down the corridor, slowing as she came to the center. Beneath her feet was a hatch that led to an observation blister on the saucer section of the New Constitution. She stopped, wiped her eyes, stretched, and when the corridor was clear, she opened the hatch in the floor and climbed down in it. Closing the hatch behind her, she continued down to the lowest point of the bottom of the saucer section. The change-over of gravity that allowed her to stand upright opposite of how she was standing on the deck above always caused her to have a spell of vertigo, but it passed quickly enough. This place was peace. It was the only place that she had to herself, since she was not allowed to use the holodeck without supervision.

She sat on the floor, her back against the transparent aluminum. The new Constitution was traveling at warp and the blister was technically off limits, cause if a micro meteor did get pass the screen, the transparent aluminum could be easily punctured. Deflector beams occasionally flashed like lightning, shifting larger threats to one side or the other, and some dust occasionally flowed around the warp bubble, fluorescing like the glow of tiny plankton around the bow of sea vessel from her home world. Looking forward it was possible to see the pin pricks of stars, but only if viewed dead on, and only a moment, before they exploded into their spectra signature and slipped past. There was one particular ‘sweet spot’ of a view where one had the hint of traveling in a tunnel of light. She was told that the tunnel and the rainbow bright stars told were illusions created by the impact photons, star light, against the warp bubble, as if the photon was actually a solid beam of light stretching from star to infinity in all directions. It was as if the star and all the light it ever produced, past and present, was one, singular object the size of the universe, enmeshing with all the light from all the other stars and planets; the light was one. ‘A sea of light,’ Garcia had sung in one of his songs that wasn’t a remake. “Travel Light...”

Though she knew she was at the bottom of the saucer section, it felt like the top of the world with the artificial gravity holding her to the deck plating. Her back was to the main hull, or she might have noticed in one of the windows behind her that Niki Carter, upside down from her perspective, was waving to get her attention. Niki gave up and pushed on past the window.

Tama Orleans pulled a piece of ‘green tea’ chocolate out of her pocket and unwrapped a portion of it. Supposedly, it was a Japanese version of a ‘Kitkat,’ and probably wasn’t technically chocolate, but it was one of the flavors her father had introduced her to and that she had most loved. She bit into it, closing her eyes to savor the assortment of flavors that rolled across her palate. She allowed the chocolate to melt on her tongue before chewing, slowly, breaking the cookie center. When the candy was gone, she wanted more. Wanting more was because she wanted more, but also because she had nothing to drink to wash it down and more candy would save her from going to fetch a drink. She forced herself to resist the urge for more chocolate or for a drink, and focused on her breath. Mastering Garcia’s meditation exercises were frustrating. She wondered if she had a neural implant like his it would be easier. After what seemed like five minutes of the mental exercise, she activated the application on her sleeve and examined the results. She frowned at the biometric data.

Closing her eyes, she started over. She said her mantra, and tried to focus her thoughts. The goal of meditating was not to eliminate thoughts, she reminded herself, but to increase focus. When she became aware that she was having miscellaneous thoughts, she returned to the mantra with only a few unkind self-reprimands.

“Tama Orleans?”

Tama opened her eyes, nearly jumping to her feet from surprise. No one was present. She shivered, wondering if she had actually heard a voice, or had it been her imagination.

“Hello?” she asked.

No response.

“Computer, did someone just page me?” Tama asked.

“Negative,” the computer responded.

Tama Orleans pushed it out of her head and returned to her meditation. It must have been a stray thought which she had mistook for an auditory event. She had had that experience once. She realized she was thinking, scolded herself, and returned to the mantra.

“Tama Orleans. It’s me.”

Tama opened her eyes and stood up. “Computer, did you hear that?”

“I require more specificity,” the computer responded.

Tama sighed. “You’ve been talking to Garcia, haven’t you?” Tama asked.

“Affirmative,” the computer said. It was unable to detect the sarcasm in the question.

“That was rhetorical,” Tama said, and returned to her meditation.

“Tama Orleans, don’t be afraid,” said the voice.

“Who are you?” Tama Orleans asked, her heart rate increasing.

“When you calm and focus, you will be able to see me,” the voice came again.

“What?” Tama asked, spinning, looking for the source of the voice.

“You were mistaken,” the voice said. “You do have some telepathic abilities. Relax, you will hear me better when you’re relaxed. And if you are really calm, you should be able to see me.”

“Who are you?” Tama asked.

The hatch in the floor opened and Niki popped out, feet first, descending through the ‘crossover’ until she was full out and able to stand up.

“Hey,” Niki said. “Whatcha doing?”

“Um, nothing,” Tama said. “Just came up here to be alone.”

“Do you still want to be alone?” Niki asked.

“No, actually,” Tama said.

Niki kicked the hatch closed. “Have you been crying?”

As if that was cue, Tama started bawling again, and just plopped herself down on the floor.

“What’s wrong?” Niki asked.

Niki went to her, sat next to her and pulled her in close. Tama explained how Garcia had missed another appointment with her and how recently she had given him a book and he had rejected her gift, but most of her words were unintelligible. Niki patted Tama, trying to comfort her. The one thing Niki was certain of was that Tama had had her feelings hurt by something Garcia had done. Niki suspected it was because Tama held

the wrong perspective, as opposed to Garcia having actually done something maliciously to hurt her.

“How do you solve a problem like Garcia,” Niki said, in a sing song fashion.

“I don’t know,” Tama said, rubbing her eyes.

“Umm, I was kind of joking,” Niki said. “You know, musical reference to sound of music?”

Tama’s crying increased in pitch and tempo. “How do you know so much? You’re just like him. How can I ever relate to either of you when you’re both so much smarter than me?!”

Niki cringed and tried to turn Tama’s face so that their eyes could meet. “Oh, no, no, no, honey, I’m not smarter than you. I’m really closer to being an idiot savant, very specialized knowledge base, and mostly my knowledge base centers around music. If it’s not music, I’m not going to do so hot, but I can appear smarter because you can sneak other knowledge sets in the form of music, so I can recite knowledge, but I don’t really hold practical applications. I could sing all the parts of a warp core, but I couldn’t diagnose a problem or rebuild it to save our lives, if that makes sense.”

“Garcia is smarter than me,” Tama said, not revealing that she had heard nothing.

“Well, yeah, he is smarter than all of us, in terms of generalized trivia, specialized knowledge, processing abstractions, creativity,” Niki said, and when she realized this wasn’t helping, she frowned. “But that doesn’t mean you can’t connect with Garcia. He’s Kelvan, so he’s kind of smarter than everyone, so you’re in the same boat as the rest of us.”

“If I were more like you, maybe had some semblance of musical talent, maybe I’d have a chance,” Tama said.

“Tama, this just isn’t true. You’re in the in group. Garcia loves you, and you don’t have to do anything special,” Niki insisted.

“Pfff, yeah, right,” Tama said. “Everyone in his entourage has something. The ability to fight. Music. Science. Medical. I’m useless.”

Niki sat there for a long moment, not saying anything, not arguing with her.

“Have you spoken to the counselor about these feelings?”

“See! Even you think I’m crazy,” Tama said, pulling away from Niki. “Surely you can see you have a better relationship with my father than I do.”

“I don’t think you’re crazy, but I think you’re not going to believe what I have to say,” Niki said.

“What do you mean?” Tama asked, rubbing her eyes.

“You probably won’t get the analogy, but you’re kind of like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz,” Niki explained.

“The Wizard of what?” Tama asked.

“Not the point, really,” Niki said.

“No, it is the point! How do you know all of this stuff? Is this like common Earth knowledge?” Tama asked.

“Not exactly,” Niki asked. “Just a musical classic. I suppose an argument can be made that wizard of Oz is still so iconic that it should be general knowledge, but you also grew up on a different planet, so don’t beat yourself up. But back to the point, even if I was the good witch, and I knew all the answers, like I happened to know that you actually

have the power to make the change you want, that you always have the power to go home, you're not ready to hear that, because you're still on the journey."

"I don't have any power," Tama said, truly confused by the whole speech.

"You believe that because you haven't arrived yet but you will," Niki said. "The journey is everything. Look, why do you think Star Fleet believes so fundamentally in the Prime Directive? Giving someone an answer before they're ready can not only be detrimental, but it could be completely rejected. It's like if you needed a heart transplant. I just can't give you my heart, your body will reject it. It's the same with ideas. If I tell you something before you're ready, your mind automatically rejects it."

"So, you're saying I'm stupid," Tama said.

"No, I'm saying you clearly aren't ready to hear what I have to say," Niki said.

"Try me," Tama demanded.

"None of us are perfect, we are all going to make mistakes, me, you everybody, but there is one thing that I know with absolute certainty, and that is Tamma loves you, and there is not one thing that you can do that will ever jeopardize that love because it's not based on your level of success or achievement," Niki said. "If there is one thing that Garcia is good about, it's accepting people unconditionally. He's very nonjudgmental."

"Well, I guess you're right about one thing," Tama said.

"What's that?" Niki asked.

"I don't believe you," Tama said. She opened the hatch and proceeded 'down' the hole head first, but arrived 'heads up' at the corridor above.

Niki followed, making the transition to a new 'upright' faster than Tama.

Tama, wanting to prove her point that Niki was smarter than her, asked, "Why can't we take holodeck matter off the holodeck?"

"Because it's not stable," Niki said.

"But why?" Tama persisted.

They both stepped out of the way as Captain Undine marched past them in what looked like a heated conversation with 'Marvin the Martian' as Marvin Smith was known to them. It was well known that his unusual height was a product of being born on Mars off the grid, and it was further rumored that he had to wear antigravity tech in his uniform just so he could move about the ship without injury. What they gathered as they passed was that he was complaining about Dryac going on an Away Mission without him. After they passed, Tama asked again.

"It has something to do with the artificial Higgs-Bosons, a massive scalar particle that defines the mass of any atom or molecule..." Niki was explaining.

"How can you say you aren't smarter than I am," Tama complained.

"I'm not. I'm quoting trivia, not giving you understanding. Look, you've heard of the formula $E=mc^2$, right? Basically it defines the relationship of matter and energy, so if you reduce the mass, you increase the speed, so, the more bosons you can remove from an object, the faster it goes."

"So, if you remove my bosons, I could travel at the speed of light?" Tama asked.

"Well, yeah. How do you think the transporter works?" Niki said.

"Magic," Tama said. "But I'm still uncertain how this relates to holodeck matter. If we can create matter from energy using a replicator, why can't we make holodeck matter stable?"

“Do you know how much power that would take to create and move all the matter that can fill up that space? There is really very little holodeck matter, most of the stuff you see in There is just illusion, holographic visuals, with the computer solidifying certain aspects of items with force fields and fake particles to give us some tactile experiences. Besides, you don’t want to be in a room that is constantly creating matter from energy and then converting it back again. You could get hurt.”

Tama knew that. She had eaten enough holodeck food that she had caused physical damage to her body on exiting, resulting in her restrictions from using the Holodeck.

“I think you are smarter than you give yourself credit,” Tama said.

“That makes me normal, I guess,” Niki laughed.



“I may not be a trained Starfleet officer, but I am part of Fleet, and my job is to accompany Dryac on her missions,” Marvin persisted. “I think this mobility device is just Garcia’s way of cutting me out of the picture and I will not be made redundant.”

“Mr. Smith,” Undine said, pausing far enough away from Medical that she didn’t trigger the door. “As the Captain, I can assure you that Garcia didn’t dream this up to make you redundant, nor did we anticipate an Away Mission of that nature. It sort of just happened and we weren’t prepared for the fall out. I’m aware of your feelings and I will try to accommodate you in the future, should the situation warrant it. Fair enough?”

Marvin seemed to cool his jets. “Very well.”

“How is Dryac, by the way?” Undine asked.

“Radiant,” Marvin says. “She enjoyed the Away Mission immensely, but mostly, she is in one of these perpetual ecstatic states due to the pregnancy. She had three offspring’s in the past, and apparently every moment was joy like she was tapped into the Cosmos, and she thought she was too old to have another child, so that plus revisiting the Universal plug in, she’s like an over flowing of Rumi or Mohammad. Quite frankly, the positiveness is annoying.”

Undine’s expression of ‘Umph,’ apparently wasn’t transmitted, but then, her human friends considered her fairly stoic. Not the way a Vulcan is stoic, or a Klingon, but subtle, unless she was really angry. “I didn’t think Rumi or Mohammad were always positive. Didn’t Mohammad want to kill himself when he first heard the voice of God because he thought he was crazy?” Undine asked.

Marvin seemed perplexed. “I really don’t know anything about Mohammad other than he was a prophet. I was just trying to speak metaphorically,” Marvin said.

“Really? If you are going to use a metaphor, shouldn’t you understand the context and the multiple meanings that could unfold based on the shared perceptive?” Undine asked.

Marvin seemed more annoyed than perplexed by her question. “You are just as tiring as talking to Counselor Rossi. I was just generalizing.”

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

