

A Time of Discovery



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Cover by Edelweiss O'Keefe

Things aboard the *Discovery* were busier than T'Mar ever remembered them. In quiet times in her quarters, she would admit to herself to a certain amount of trepidation regarding her upcoming mission. The ship had been ordered to the Charon system where the Romulans were amassing a fleet.

The problem was that the Romulans were her own people. And she was going to be at the helm of a starship fighting with their enemy. She knew it was likely people she knew would be manning those ships. Her actions could result in their deaths.

T'Mar was sitting in the mess, cradling a cup of tea. Ensign Marie Sutherland, the ship's comms officer, had encouraged her to try coffee. Indeed, it wasn't the first time. During her training for her infiltration of Starfleet she had been offered some to try to get her used to the flavour. She had practically gagged on her first mouthful, and even after she had moved to sipping it, she could never get used to the bitter brew.

However, she liked Irish Breakfast tea and had taken to it immediately. For her sake, the ship's chef had ordered a supply

of the brew for the mission ahead. She took it white, with sugar. She might be Rihannsu at heart, but she had a sweeter tooth than most of her kin.

She sat alone in the room, even though it was full of people taking a break. It wasn't unusual. Although she had been part of the crew for weeks, it was widely known that she was a Romulan who had been surgically altered to appear human and, though her mannerisms had been so well schooled there was still a level of distrust in those about her. Most of the senior officers were onside with her, especially Marie, who had a heart as big as ch'Havran.

The thought brought to mind the sight of the planet the humans called Remus, her home world's sister planet that shared the same orbit as Romulus, just roughly a third of an orbit behind it and, unfortunately for its inhabitants, tidally locked towards the sun. T'Mar could recall seeing the bright object in the night sky, the one star that always seemed to follow them. Even when the rest of the stars moved through the seasons, there was ch'Havran, following them like a young, favourite pet.

For a moment, she felt homesick for that lush, green world. It wasn't all that dissimilar from the world they were in orbit of: Earth. On a short furlough, Captain Hawke had invited her, along with the rest of the ship's senior staff, to a BBQ at his home. She recalled the magnificent view from the balcony, a beautiful bay ringed by forested, green hills with many wonderful homes lining the shoreline. It had been such a clear

day she could remember seeing the many pleasure craft – the Captain called them yachts – sailing about the waters. They had nothing like it back home.

Something caught T'Mar's attention and brought her back to the mess hall. The young woman looked up and was startled. Had one of the Tal Shiar come on board to kill her?

“Lieutenant T'Mar, I have startled you. I apologise.”

T'Mar barely registered the hot tea that had sloshed out of the cup onto her hand, she had jerked back so fiercely. She took several deep breaths and focussed again on the woman before her, a face that looked so much like hers used to. The tipped ears, the upturned brows, the strong bearing and unmistakable intelligence in her eyes. It was like looking in a mirror two years ago.

She tore her eyes from the woman's face and noticed her unusual attire. While it looked vaguely Starfleet, including the shoulder patches and Commander's pips, the colour was wrong. It was mauve, when it should have been blue.

It was then she realised she was the only one in the room who had a problem with this new arrival. No-one else was staring at her. They *knew* her.

Suddenly, she did as well. She was looking into the eyes of Commander T'Pol of the starship *Enterprise*. Respectfully, she rose and said: “Commander T'Pol, I apologise. You just took me

by surprise.” Her hand still shaking, she put down the cup and extended it to greet her visitor.

She didn’t realise she was doing something offensive – that Vulcans shun physical contact due to their rigid code of privacy. However, T’Pol was not a regular Vulcan. The woman took her hand and gave it an almost friendly shake.

“May I join you?” T’Pol asked courteously.

T’Mar nodded dumbly, not certain *what* she should be doing. She watched as T’Pol walked over to the server station, procured a mug and filled it with tea from the dispenser. T’Mar took a moment to admire the woman’s grace and form. It was clear the Commander kept herself fit. T’Mar had no idea of her age, but she put it at a little over one hundred, considering she was well aware of a Vulcan’s lifespan.

The Commander took a seat opposite her and took a sip of her brew. She allowed T’Mar a moment to mop up the mess on the table once she realised she had spilled her beverage due to T’Pol’s sudden arrival.

“What can I do for you, Commander?” T’Mar asked, trying oh so hard to regain her “cool”, as Commander Gates liked to put it.

T’Pol engaged her complete attention to her host. T’Mar found herself feeling as if she was being scrutinized, as if she was a specimen under a microscope. Yet there was nothing cruel

about her manner. Indeed, the Romulan could almost detect an almost human warmth from her.

“Lieutenant, Captain Archer asked me to interview you personally regarding the tactics and hardware we are likely to encounter when we arrive in the Charon system. Given your familiarity, it was logical to get the information first-hand from you.”

Once again, T'Mar didn't feel like this woman was cold and aloof, like her instructors at the Academy had drilled into her. They had repeated over and over how arrogant and superior Vulcans were and why the Rihannsu people were so much better off without them. There were rumours that some were hopeful for the possibility of reunification, but the notion was openly scoffed at. No, the Rihannsu were better off without their unfeeling cousins. Yet, here was a prime example of just how wrong that assertion was.

In a flash, she realised what her people's problem was. Their xenophobic fear of everything that was not Romulan had led to them having a completely upside-down view of the universe. They were wrong about the humans, the Vulcans and even the Andorians because their fear had stopped them from ever even *talking* to them. Without connection there could be no understanding. Her people were destined to remain friendless in a universe that was hostile. Who knew what the future held, considering it was probably only a matter of time before something came along that even the “mighty” Rihannsu were

unable to cope with? When that time came, who were they going to turn to for help?

“Lieutenant?”

Once more, T'Mar had to bring her concentration back to the here-and-now. “I’m sorry, Commander,” she said, trying to find the right words. “It’s just that having you here, a Vulcan who I was trained to hate since I was a child, has reminded me that so much of what I was taught to believe was a lie.”

T’Pol seemed a little unsettled. “If you would like some time, I can come back after my briefing with Captain Hawke.”

T'Mar was desperate for this moment not to end. Sitting before her was another reason why her people had it all so wrong, another reason why she had been so *right* to defect. These people hadn’t done anything to endanger the Rihannsu. In fact, she had learned many things since she had been in Starfleet, including their non-interference directive. The Coalition of Planets was created for mutual defence, strength and knowledge. They had no interest in taking the worlds of others. She had been surprised to learn that even the Vulcans seemed more interested in making friends of new cultures – a lesson learned from the humans, of all people.

“Please don’t go,” T'Mar said, placing her hand gently on T’Pol’s. “I’ll be happy to answer any question you might have.”

T'Pol seemed mollified and took another sip of her tea. "Very well, then. Do you have any notions on how one might better detect a Romulan ship under cloak?"

With a slight smile, T'Mar started to share a few ideas of her own. She was not strictly a scientist, but she did have more than a basic knowledge of quantum mechanics. Indeed, her skills lay more in piloting a starship to places where people with more skills than she could do the examining.

The Commander had brought a computer pad with her, and she was taking a copious number of notes. She wished the people who had debriefed her back at Starfleet Command had been so engaging. Who would have thought that betraying your own people could be so much fun?

The interview took over an hour and both women had taken the opportunity to refill their cups at least once. The topics of their discussions had covered a range of subjects including armaments, tactics, and likely numbers. T'Pol had even asked about their hierarchical structure in the Imperial Navy.

During their discussions, she found herself on the outside looking in. Her people, her family, were so lost. What they represented, what they believed, were the antithesis of what she had come to know was true. Personal freedom, the right to property, the notion that all sentience had a fundamental right to exist and that none of them were better than others just because of their biology, these were truths that spoke to her heart and resonated strongly within her. She made them her

own and that was why she was delighted to call this ship, these people, her own. She may have Rihannsu DNA, but her heart was of the Coalition and the freedoms it embodied.

T'Mar looked up into her fellow's eyes and asked her: "Commander, given your differences with the humans, how do you find working with them?"

The Vulcan was introspective for a moment, then said: "It was difficult at first. Their passions seemed to all too often overcome what I considered good judgement. However, their tenacity and loyalty to one-another and a cause inspired me to reconsider my attitudes to off-worlders. It was only a matter of years ago that Vulcan and Andoria almost went to war. Captain Archer was instrumental in avoiding that conflict and helped us realise that we were more alike than we were willing to admit. The humans have an ability to see the things that we have in common and build on them rather than letting our differences build on our fears.

"In fact, Captain Archer helped T'Pol and I to restore my people to the ways of Surak, a task that put him at great risk. The Vulcan people owe him, and the rest of humanity, a great debt."

The open honesty between them led T'Mar to ask a question she later thought imprudent. "I heard that there is a possibility that Vulcan may secede from the Coalition."

T'Pol took a deep breath. To T'Mar's eyes the woman seemed embarrassed. She wasn't certain she was going to answer. "My people are pacifistic in nature, and even though we have much to offer the Coalition regarding our mutual security, some in our government are considering leaving and going it alone. They do not believe that peace can be won at the point of a gun."

Nodding, T'Mar said: "I agree. True peace can only come with dialog and understanding. However, I know my own, and your people, must reconsider. A fractured Coalition will be a much easier target to overcome for the Romulan Empire."

"While I understand my people's stance on the subject," T'Pol said, "I do not agree with them. As Captain Archer would say: "If you give a bully an inch, he will take a mile"."

Saddened, T'Mar looked off towards the viewports and sighed. Captain Archer was a wise man. The Rihannsu would take whatever ground the Coalition was willing to give, and then come back for more. At this point in time, the Romulans only understood strength. "He's right, Commander T'Pol. My people *are* bullies. They think they're so much better than anyone else and that they have a right, given them by the Elements themselves, to take whatever they can."

T'Pol raised a curious brow. "My people, long ago, held a belief that the Elements had a spiritual force behind them and that, somehow, they influenced nature. Perhaps we have more in

common that I thought. Perhaps there is a chance for peace if we extend an “olive branch”.”

T'Mar's mind raced. She thought of all that she had learned, both of the Coalition members and of her own Rihannsu. Now was not the time for diplomacy. Indeed, how could she even consider revealing to this lovely lady that she wore the face of the enemy? It could result in two different kinds of disaster: either they might use it as an even greater reason to leave the Coalition and not only weaken themselves, but the rest of the union; or they could push for peace and only make themselves seem weaker in the eyes of the Romulans when they were in the middle of waging war. She decided to keep that bit of information to herself.

She thought back to when she had first been debriefed by Starfleet. Curiously, no-one had pointedly asked her what her people looked like. They had looked at her physiology and assumed it hadn't been that much of a change. She knew better than anyone else that the changes had been drastic. Indeed, she had even foregone the chance of ever becoming a parent due to the genetic manipulations she had endured.

“Commander,” she said, putting all the force she could into her statement. “We cannot waver on our course. Please tell your people from me: they cannot, *must not*, consider breaking up the Coalition or trying to sue for peace at this time. My people will only respond to and respect a stronger force. Anything less than a united front could result in the Coalition's downfall.” She reached forward and gave T'Pol's hand a squeeze. “That

cannot be allowed to happen. We cannot let our home be torn apart by the Romulan's desire for a glorious victory."

T'Pol looked down and saw T'Mar's hand still on her own. The younger woman's passion had moved her, as had her logic. She gave the Lieutenant the briefest of a glimpse of a smile. "As the Captain would say: "You are preaching to the choir". I am in agreement with you. I have seen firsthand the tactics and duplicity of the Romulan Navy. They will get no quarter from me."

T'Mar had no idea what a choir was, or why one would preach to it anyway. All the same, she was delighted to hear the *Enterprise* officer's response. She withdrew her hand and looked at her watch. It was nearly time for their briefing with Captain Hawke. "My apologies, Commander," she said as she began to rise. "I have to go."

T'Pol was also acutely aware that time was short. "Thank you, Lieutenant, for the interview. It has been illuminating." She rose and followed T'Mar over to the tray for dirty dishes. "May I escort you to the briefing room?"

With a smile, T'Mar showed her to the door, and they stepped out into the corridor. "I want to thank you for one thing, Commander," she said thoughtfully.

"That is?"

“You’ve shown me that, even though we’re the only one of our kinds on human starships, we can still be considered “part of the family”.”

T’Pol nodded solemnly. “Yes, the humans have made me welcome on *Enterprise*. It is my hope for you that it will be the same on *Discovery*.”

T’Mar thought of the bridge crew, especially Marie and Captain Hawke. “It’s been a turbulent ride at times, but I see clear skies ahead.” She gave her new friend a smile and stepped forward into the future.