

Right On Q

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It was 0449 and Nathan Palmer, Starfleet Captain and Commanding Officer of *USS Swift*, was a little more than an hour away from the start of his day. Alpha Shift started at 0800 and Nathan could be found every morning in his Ready Room, by 0730, going over reports left by his XO on the Beta Shift or having a conversation with the Duty Officer working Gamma Shift. However, at this early hour, he was quite asleep and the flash of light in his cabin went unnoticed. What he didn't miss though was the sudden weight on the bed near his feet. Although he had been away from home far more than he would have liked, his first thought was that it was one of his girls, but that didn't seem right. The next logical choice was that it was Kim but that didn't seem correct either. She wouldn't sit down at the foot of the bed. There was nothing for it but to look.

"Computer, lights, one-third," he said as he rolled over and sat up. There, plain as day, sat a male human in a Starfleet Command Division uniform. He was turned such that his rank pips were not visible to Nathan.

"Can I help you?" asked Palmer squinting at the uninvited visitor.

"Somehow, I doubt that. It's much more likely that I can help you, although it depends on what kind of impression you make. You know most relationships are determined in just the first few minutes among you . . . simpler lifeforms".

Palmer found the man to be entirely too cheerful for 0451 hours and an unannounced visit. The captain leaned to one side and counted collar pips. "If you don't mind . . . uh, Captain. Who are you?"

The visitor looked slightly hurt. "Why, Nathan, I would have thought all of Starfleet would know me by now. It's hard to believe

that Jean-Luc, Benjamin or the lovely, lovely Kathryn would have . . .”

Nathan’s eyes widened before narrowing again. He leaned forward and spoke in an almost hushed voice. “Q?”

“Exactly so my dear Captain! Q walks among you again!” The other worldly being then saw something which it had never beheld before. A huge smile covered Nathan’s face before he hopped out of bed.

“Wait until I tell everyone!”

With the departure of *Swift*’s Second Officer several weeks earlier to extended training, Palmer had been rotating officers through the position of Gamma Shift Duty Officer. On this particular shift, Lt. Teijin, the El-Aurian Assistant Security/Tactical Officer had the Bridge.

“Bridge, Palmer.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Teijin smartly. The Vulcan Ops Manager on duty quirked an eyebrow but said nothing.

“Lieutenant, would you please enter into the log that Q is aboard.”

“Fascinating,” was all Sten said.

“Quite so,” replied Teijin nodding, before speaking for the benefit of the ICOM.

“Aye, sir. Do you require anything?”

“Not at this time, Lieutenant, but please inform Drs. McDillon and Brrrrzz of our guest’s arrival. And I may be calling you again on short notice.”

“Understood Captain. Bridge out.” The ICOM channel closed, and the El-Aurian dropped into the captain’s seat in the center of the bridge. He swiveled an LCARS panel in his direction and began calling up files...

Nathan Palmer got up and threw a robe over the T-shirt and shorts. Q sat on the couch under the port viewport, the amused expression still in place.

“I hardly know what to say”, began the captain. “We don’t get visitors of your... magnitude aboard *Swift* very often.”

"Of course you don't, Nathan. After all, there is only one Q."

"I thought all of the residents of the continuum were called Q," asked Palmer looking perplexed.

"Well, technically, yes, we are all Q, but really, *I* am the only Q you would be likely to meet".

"I see," replied Palmer not looking entirely convinced.

"Yes, well, trust me when I say..." started the entity on the couch.

"What are you doing here, Q?" interrupted Palmer, a mixture of curiosity and distrust in his voice. Q looked taken aback by the suddenness of the inquiry.

"I..." was all he could get out before the captain interjected again.

"Here to test humanity again?"

"Actually..."

"Pursued by higher order life forms?"

"Not quite..."

"Impending cataclysm? Interdimensional collapse followed by temporal reversion on a..."

"Nathan"

"...scale not seen . . . hmmm? Sorry, you were going to say something?"

Q said nothing at first, a look of disapproval on his face. "Nothing like that I assure you *mon capitaine*. I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I might, pop in, as it were."

Now it was Palmer's turn to look somewhat suspicious. "I see. That makes sense". He then squinted in a way Q found disturbing. "How about bestow the powers of the Q on..."

"Now, now, Captain."

"Sorry. Well, where to begin? I'm guessing you don't want anything to eat or drink." Q shook his head slowly from side to side. "If you don't mind..." Palmer walked over to the replicator. "Coffee, hot, light and sweet". A steaming mug bearing the Starfleet insignia and *Swift's* registry number appeared in the niche.

Before Nathan could say anything more, the door chime sounded.

"Enter".

In through the door barreled the Chief Science Officer, Dr. Peter McDillon, and his Deputy CSO, Dr. Brrrrz. The latter was actually the technological avatar of *Swift's* cetacean theoretical physicist; it looked for all intents and purposes like an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin. (The actual Brrrrz was in his tank a couple of decks below). McDillon, an older man looking rumpled in a soft robe, swung a tricorder in Q's direction.

"The gamma channel looks clear".

"Yes Doctor, I wouldn't have expected that" replied Brrrrz via his universal translator. The voice was calm, almost placid. Built in sensors whined and instruments beeped from the avatar. "Grav flux shades into one standard deviation above the norm..."

"I believe you're correct" said McDillon in a distracted voice. Palmer leaned against his desk, sipping coffee. Q looked bewildered.

"Here look at this." The CSO held his tricorder so that Brrrrz could see its display.

"Erm..." came out of the universal translator. McDillon stopped and looked at his assistant. "Idiomatic?"

"Glitch."

"Ah. Mister, uh, Q, would you mind if we set up some more specialized equipment? It's only a standard tricorder after all." McDillon seemed almost apologetic. Without waiting for an answer, he quickly disappeared through the door.

"I'd better help him, he's rather distracted, of course." Now it was Brrrrz's turn to sound apologetic before gliding off.

The cabin went quiet. Palmer took a sip of coffee while simultaneously peering at Q over the top of the mug. "They're very good scientists, they're just... excited. Obviously".

"Obviously," replied Q in a distracted tone.

Nathan brightened. "Would you like a tour of the ship? We're all very proud of her. I know there are bigger and faster ships in the Fleet but, well . . ." He trailed off, somehow looking both self-conscious and proud.

"Well, uh . . .", said the alien being. The captain stood up and made "wait there" motions. "Great! I'll get changed; I'll just be a moment."

Nathan and Q strolled through the ship's corridors, the captain pointing out features and relaying history like a proud parent. Along the way, crew members both in uniform and civilian garb, a few looking sleepy but excited, peered around corners and through doors at them but gave the two a wide berth. Occasionally Palmer made shooing motions in a subtle yet noticeable manner. Q seemed to take it all in, a look of bewilderment on his face.

"You know Nathan ", ventured Q, "I don't normally get this kind of a reception."

The captain shook his head sadly. "And we call ourselves explorers. You're one of the reasons we exist. Well, not you personally, well, kind of, anyway..." Palmer waved away his own words. "Starfleet let a couple of... prima donnas set the tone for relations between ourselves and you".

Q looked slightly stunned.

"But then again, they operate under a different set of rules," said Nathan talking to no one in particular, his tone bitter. Remembering where he was, the captain snapped back to the here and now.

"I'd be remiss if I didn't let our CMO meet you. I know our medicine doesn't apply to you but as a scientist I'm sure she'll have her questions". Somehow the pair was standing in front of the doors to Sick Bay. Palmer gestured toward the entrance, the look on his face saying, "Come on, do it for me".

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anita Steffani was positively bubbly. Nathan tried to keep a stunned look off his face, this was not the CMO he knew. He was all but certain that Q wouldn't have noticed anyway and so relaxed. Anita was peppering the entity with medical questions and speculations about noncorporeal life forms. To his amazement Q couldn't get a word in edgewise. Off to one side, the Gamma Shift medical team looked on, whispering amongst themselves. Nathan's comm badge signaled attention.

"McDillon to the Captain".

"Go ahead, Doctor."

“We’re set up in Physics Lab One. Let Q know that we’re ready at his convenience. It was a little tricky getting the subspace...”

“I’ll let him know, Doctor.”

The captain looked at his CMO apologetically. “I’m sorry Doctor but we’ve got to go.”

“Oh, I totally understand Captain.” Steffani turned to Q, a hopeful look on her face. “If you could come back once you’re done...” Nathan thought she looked positively coy.

“I appreciate the offer, but I have to go. I’m sorry Captain but I have... important... things to do. The Continuum you know. Thank you for the... fascinating tour. And please make my apologies to your scientific staff.” A pained smile was on his face. With a little wave he was gone in a brilliant flash of light.

The Captain and the Doctor stood stock still, waiting. Anita’s face returned to its normal, matter of fact default. A sly smile crossed Nathan’s face. “Captain to Bridge”.

“Bridge,” replied Teijin.

“Ship’s status, Lieutenant.”

“All systems nominal. All Departments have reported in; there are no problems or anomalies. Shall I have them stand down?”

“Yes, stand down from Q Protocol. We’ll do a short after action in the briefing room in half an hour.”

“Copy that.”

Palmer looked at Steffani. “That was an excellent performance, Doctor, especially given the time of day”. She smiled slightly and gave a little bob in acknowledgement.

“Lead in the annual Academy play three years running. And everything happens in the middle of the night—it’s in the job description”. She paused but for a moment. “Sir?”

“Prima donnas’?” Everything that had happened during Q’s visit had been monitored.

Nathan visibly winced. “Yeah, that was a little over the top, wasn’t it?”

“Little bit.”