

NOVA TREK

5

REVELATIONS

By

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Based on concepts created by
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Part One:

How it all began



When you first used the gateway,
you had your crew to sustain you.
She does not have even that.

NO! This isn't right!
She does most of the work
and now you're going to
just let her...fade away?!

She was a product of her timeline. It
was too much a part of her for her to
survive once removed from it.

You have all the powers of
Time and Space at your
command!

There must be *something*
you can do!

Jan!





Part Two:

How it all ended





Rest easy, Sis.

Your job's done.

Janet T. Kirk

B.2219 - D.2353

She accomplished her goals
and left the universe
better than she found it.

Part Three: **The rest of the story**

1

Ship's log: Stardate 48642.01

Captain Tamera Kirk recording.

We continue on course for Sector 206 to carry out our latest assignment: Star Charting. You'd think between modern telescopes and probes, such missions would no longer be necessary. But even the best telescopes can only see so far and probes- even in this day and age- can still malfunction.

So, while some records of this sector do exist, they're spotty at best. Our job, basically, is to fill in the blanks and confirm the rest...

Seated in her egg chair in her quarters, Tam turned off the desk top monitor on the table beside her, shutting down the log in the process. She sat there for a moment in silence, not really seeing her quarters. Then she stood and went into her sleeping area. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she reached over to the shelf and picked up the note that lay next to a certain golden model.

Her sister's note.

Tam opened it and stared at her sister's words. How many times had she read them in the last six months? She'd lost count. Finally, she returned the note to its place beside the golden *Enterprise* her sister had left her and left the cabin.

Medical log, Stardate 48642.01

Dr. Beverly Crusher recording.

I'm growing concerned about the Captain. For some time now, she has grown increasingly distracted. Her temper has become short and she's easily frustrated.

Medical exams have shown no biological reason for these changes other than an increasing lack of sleep- the cause of which is unknown...

Tam had come up to her Ready Room in an attempt to get some work done, hoping that would take her mind off of things.

That hadn't worked out too well.

She was currently seated at her desk, scowling, while standing in front of her desk at parade rest, was one Commander Geordi LaForge.

To say the atmosphere in the room was tense would be a galactic understatement.

"...That unit's been waiting for routine maintenance for over four months now." Her tone was sharper than a bat'leth.

Geordi nodded. "Yes, Ma'am it's been on the list for four months- and it's been moving up the list. In fact, it's scheduled-"

"I don't want to hear *when* you're going to service it, Mr. LaForge," the Captain stated, cutting him off. "I want to hear that it's *been* serviced."

Her chief engineer swallowed whatever else he was going to say and nodded. "Yes, Ma'am."

"Dismissed."

She watched as he turned and headed for the door, then-

"Geordi, wait."

He turned from the Ready Room's door as the room's lights reflected off his visor. "Ma'am?"

Tam sighed and slumped in her chair as she wiped a hand over her face. "I'm sorry," she said in a calmer tone. "That entire scene was uncalled for." She shook her head and sighed once more. "I haven't been sleeping well lately and I guess it's starting to catch up with me."

Geordi shrugged as the tension in the room eased. "Everyone's entitled to a sleepless night once in a while, Captain."

"I know you'll get to that unit when you can," Tam told him. She nodded toward the door. "Dismissed."

He nodded and she watched as he left. Silence settled into the room and she allowed it to wash over her and last for several minutes before she reached for her combadge." Kirk to Troi."

"Troi here, Captain."

"How's your calendar for the next few minutes, Deanna?"

"Actually, I'm clear for the rest of the day. I'm just updating some records."

"Can they wait?"

"Yes."

"Good. Meet me at the fabrication unit near my quarters. Kirk out."

To those that occupy this quarter of the Milky Way Galaxy, the area is known as the Alpha Quadrant. It's a massively large area anyway you measure it and even in this 24th century, much of it remains unexplored or even mapped.

At that moment, an *Ambassador*-class starship- the *FSS Ethica*- was sailing through Sector 214, carrying out spectral analysis and star charting duties.

Her captain was an Orion male named Algram - one of the few in Starfleet- and even though the *Ethica* was not a new ship- they stopped building the *Ambassador*-class ten years ago- He was rightfully proud of her.

At the moment, he was walking around his bridge, looking things over and stopping here and there to talk to his crew. He'd just reached the

Engineering station when the human Lt. Commander at the Science station looked up from the readings she'd been studying and called for him. "Captain, sensors are picking up an object ahead- a large one."

Her blond hair reflected the bridge lights as she checked her readings once more. "Correction. Three objects. There are two more following behind the..." She stopped. All she could do was stare at the readings. "Oh my god..."

Algram stepped toward her. "What is it, Sabra?"

The human seemed to lose all the color in her face as she replied. "Each object is larger than a *Sovereign-class* ship-

"-and a perfect cube."

Now the Orion understood the tone in her voice and the terror in her eyes. "Red Alert!" he ordered immediately. "Battle Stations!"

The communications officer spoke next as he looked up from his console. "Captain..." He activated the console and a different voice filled the bridge.

"We are the Borg. Existence as you have known it is at an end.

"Resistance is futile..."

2

The year 1810

Tam sighed and smiled as she handled the reins of the single horse. Wearing what would one day be called jeans and a blouse, she glanced over at Deanna as the counselor sat beside her on the buckboard dressed in the proper traveling outfit for a female citizen of the British Empire.

“You never mentioned this era before,” Deanna stated as she held on to her hat.

“Never had a reason to before,” Tam replied as she allowed the horse to pull them along the trail. “I also own a house in Victorian England-1885.”

“Why so much time between them?”

Tam’s gaze was on the landscape they were traveling through. Things were kind of dry this time of year. “During these time periods, the human life-span is only about 70 years- if that. By setting things a hundred years apart, my various lives don’t over-lap.”

Deanna looked all around as they rode. They’d left the small town- little more than a village- an hour ago and she was still getting used to the idea that they could be back aboard the *Enterprise* two seconds after they left. “Won’t your...ranch hands find it strange that you’re returning with a visitor you never told them about?”

Tamera shook her head. “No. Jan came with me a few times, so they’re used to unexpected guests.”

The redhead glanced around, taking in the trees and the dry grass as she spoke. “Technically, we’re not even in the United States. Same continent, but all of this is still under Spain’s control. Be a few more years before it becomes Mexico. The Revolutionary War was only 24 years ago. Luckily the American Civil War is still 51 years away.”

Deanna watched as she handled the horse’s reins. When they met up at the fabrication unit aboard the *Enterprise*, she could tell the Captain was on edge about something. She let silence rule for the moment. The only sound was the jiggle of the horse’s bridle and the creaking of the buckboard. “Tamera, you’re rambling. While I appreciate the chance to be here, I have to ask: Why are we here?”

Tam glanced over at her. “There are times when your empathic abilities are a royal pain.”

“Maybe,” Deanna replied. “But that doesn’t answer the question.”

The captain kept her eyes on the horse as she answered. “Because, for the first time in my life, I’m running from a situation instead of dealing with it because I don’t know *how* to deal with it.”

“What is the situation?”

Tam sighed. For a long moment, she didn’t answer. “Dreams- and not your normal, self-contained nightmares, either. What I’ve been experiencing is more like chapters in some damn Saturday morning serial.

“I’m 18 again, but I’m standing in front of the temple at the Memorial Gardens. In every...chapter that follows, I’m walking across the grounds toward the family crypt. Last night, I was ready to turn the corner and face Jan’s statue.” She glanced at Deanna and shrugged. “I thought maybe a change would help break the cycle or whatever this is.”

Deanna studied her for a moment. “Do you really think it’ll work?”

“I don’t know,” Tam replied after a sigh. “But a change of scenery can’t hurt, right?”

The counselor shrugged, having no answer to give.

They rode for a while longer before topping a small ridge. Tam brought the horse to a stop and nodded toward the sight ahead of them. “There it is. The heart of the K&F Ranch.”

The compound was located in a small valley. There was a grove of trees off to one side of the Main House. There was also a bunk house, barn, corral and a well behind the Main House for water. Deanna also saw a small structure behind the house that Tam would later identify as a chicken coop and a garden off to one side. “What does the K&F Ranch raise?” Deanna asked.

“Primarily horses,” Tam answered. “Like the Kirk Ranch in our time. But in this case, we also keep a small herd of cattle, too.”

With a flick of the reins, Tam got the horse moving again and they both grew quiet- Tam in thought and Deanna in wonder as she took in sights and sounds unlike any she’d experienced outside a holodeck.

The Counselor shook her head. So different from the world of her birth. Her human father had told her countless stories about time periods like this- although not quite this early- and she’d always dreamed of actually experiencing them. The closest she could ever hope to come was the holodeck- until she met Captain Tamera Kirk.

“Just keep one thing in mind, Deanna,” Tam said as she glanced over at her. “This is real. There are no Safety Protocols here.”

Her companion nodded. “Understood.”

As they entered the compound, others began to take notice. “It’s Miss Tamera. Tell the Main House that Ms. Tamera’s back!” Ranch hands

called out to her and Tam called back and waved as she brought the buckboard to a stop in front of the house.

While they dismounted- no easy task for Deanna in a 19th century dress- an older gentleman with chocolate brown skin and grey hair came from a side door and smiled as he approached them. “Miss Tamera.”

“Hello, Joseph. Any problems while I was gone?”

“No Ma’am. Any in town?”

“Not a one. Get some of the boys to help you unload the supplies and a couple to take my cousin’s things to the guest room.”

He looked to Deanna. “Cousin?”

“Deanna Troi, Joseph Michael.”

“Mr. Michael.”

The older man smiled. “Bless you, Ma’am. ‘Joseph’ is good enough.” He was still smiling as he turned away to get help.

Deanna watched him go, then turned to Tam. “Tamera, in this era- “

“No,” the redhead said, guessing at her friend’s question. “It may twist time into a knot, but you won’t find one slave anywhere on this ranch. Everyone’s a free man- an employee with equal pay.” She shook her head. “Slavery’s one thing I won’t stand for- I don’t care what year it is.” She then waved a hand toward the house and led the way inside.

Like the outside, the inside was all wood and stone- and glass windows. “I had to have those imported from Mexico City,” She told Deanna. “There are no glass makers any closer.”

Two men came in then, carrying various boxes and a trunk- all of which, along with their contents- were the result of two hours with the *Enterprise* fabrication unit. “Take those on to the Guest Room, Gentlemen,” Tam ordered. “My cousin can unpack later.” She looked to Deanna as the men moved off and dropped her voice to a whisper.

“Once they leave, you can change out of those ‘traveling clothes’ and into something more practical. Then I’ll show you around.”

A short while later, found the two walking around the compound with Deanna now in a blouse, jeans and boots. The dark haired female shook her head. “Being here is incredible. But it must be hard to prevent yourself from introducing modern ways of doing things.”

Tam nodded as she spotted Joseph entering the chicken coop behind the house. “It was in the beginning. Still is sometimes. On the other hand, it’s interesting to see how they deal with things without all the technology we take for granted.” She shrugged. “They don’t know about that stuff, so they have no need for it.”

Deanna watched as a woman knelt in the garden and began pulling up carrots. “Is there anything you miss when you’re here?”

“Strawberries,” Tam answered immediately. “They don’t do well in this part of the country.”

Deanna smiled and shook her head as they reached the corral. It was a large circular structure with poles some five feet high anchored in the ground and notched so other poles- logs, Deanna told herself- could be fastened and lashed into place. There was a gate at one end and the Barn at the other with a large door. At the moment, both were closed. Within the corral, Deanna watched as one of the ranch hands prepared to mount a horse that two others were holding in place.

“Watch,” Tam told her.

A moment later, the two ranch hands let go of the animal and the cowboy in the saddle held on as the horse began to buck and jump. Deanna’s eyes went wide in shock as she witnessed “Bronco busting” for the first time outside the holodeck.

Now, she understood Tam’s warning about Safety Protocols.

Up, down, around, against the corral rails and up again. The cowboy went flying to land face down while his partners moved in to keep the horse from trampling him. “Pedro?” Tam called. “Are you all right?”

The man got back on his feet and smiled in Tam’s direction as he nodded.

“I’m willing to bet he’ll still see stars for an hour,” Tamera told Deanna. “I know I did.”

The ship’s counselor started at her captain in shock. “You’ve *done* that?!”

“When we first got out here, I had all of three hired hands,” Tam told her. “There was no room for the polite society you’d find back east. Everyone had to pitch in.”

“I’ve known you for a while now,” Deanna stated as the cowboy prepared to mount the bronco once more. “And I have never considered you suicidal-

“- till now.”

That night

Tam lay in her 19th century bed, tossing and turning in her sleep.

The change of scenery hadn’t helped.

In her mind, she was 18 years old and standing beside the Kirk Family crypt. It was dark, yet she could see everything with a crystal clarity as she stepped around the corner and found herself facing Jan’s crypt and the statue atop the headstone. The eternal flame was the only source of light and the shadows it cast danced across the statue’s face.

Then Tam’s eyes went wide as the statue *looked at her- looked right at her. Moved its head to look at her.*

Tam could feel a cold chill run down her spine. Her voice was a whisper. “What do you want?”

The statue continued to stare at her. Then one arm moved and that hand shifted until it was pointing at Tam, then down at the crypt.

“What do you *want*?” Tam shouted. “I don’t understand. You’re dead. What could you want?”

The statue continued to stare at her and point at the crypt. Its eyes seem to grow larger as they bore into Tam’s mind and body and soul...

-She shot to a sitting position in her bed with Deanna sitting nearby. “Tamera.” The red head turned to look at her. “You were calling out in your sleep. I could hear you clear across the hall.”

“We’re going back,” Tam told her as she threw her covers aside and climbed from the bed.

“Now?!”

“Now,” Tam declared as she opened a portal.

Moments later, the 19th century bedroom was empty.

3

The *Enterprise*

Seated at the table in his quarters, Riker looked up from his dinner as the comm signal sounded. “Riker here.”

“Data, sir. Did you authorize the use of a runabout? The *Renewal* has just launched.”

Riker laid his fork down. “No, Data. I gave no authorization. Did the Captain?”

Seated at his station on the Bridge, Data made a quick check. “There is no record of it if she did.”

Riker rose from his table and tapped his combadge. “Riker to Captain.”

The comm system just buzzed in reply.

“Computer, locate the Captain.”

“The Captain is not on board,” the system replied.

“Where is she?”

“Currently aboard the *Renewal* with Counselor Troi.”

The shock in Riker’s voice was clear. “What?”

“Shall I repeat?”

“No. Data?”

“Yes, Commander?”

“Have you tried to raise the *Renewal*?”

“Yes, sir. She is not responding.”

Riker’s confusion was clear- and growing as he paced his cabin. None of this made sense. He’d thought that after the last six months he was starting to get some kind of understanding of Tamera Kirk. But this...abandonment didn’t fit her at all.

“Data, meet me at the Captain’s cabin.”

“Acknowledged.”

The *Renewal*

The ship type known as ‘runabout’ had a far shorter history than the more common and long-lived shuttlecraft that all Starfleet ships were equipped with. Yet, they already had a reputation when it came to travel distance and endurance that the standard shuttle was hard pressed to match.

The *Renewal* was of the *Danube*-class – a class with a long history of service throughout the fleet.

At the moment, Deanna was seated in the co-pilot’s seat, still wearing the 19th century sleep wear she and Tam had been wearing when they left that era. Now, she watched her captain as Tamera set the runabout’s course and speed.

The redhead had withdrawn, not saying a word since they arrived in her cabin. It was like she’d shut out the rest of the universe- the world around her didn’t exist as she channeled everything into her actions. With her sleep-mussed hair and old fashioned gown, she looked more like some heroine from an old ghost story than the captain of the Union’s newest starship.

“Tamera, talk to me,” Deanna urged. “Where are we going? This runabout wasn’t prepped for flight.”

“It’ll get us there,” Tam stated- more to herself than Deanna.

“Get us where?” the counselor pressed. “Where are we going?”

“Earth,” the Captain told her as she checked the controls. “I’ve got to get back to the crypt and find out what’s going on.”

“And if nothing’s going on?” Deanna asked.

Tam glanced over at her, then turned her gaze back to the forward viewport. “Then I’m going mad.”

The *Enterprise*

Riker and Data arrived outside Tam’s cabin at the same time. Riker looked up slightly as he spoke. “Computer, open the door to the Captain’s cabin.”

“Please be aware, Commander, that on her orders, I will be scanning and recording everything that transpires in her cabin. Do you still wish to enter?”

“Yes.”

As the doors slid open, Data looked to Riker. “What exactly are we looking for, Commander?”

“I wish I knew,” The First Officer replied as he glanced around the living area. “Something that’ll tell us why she ran off- and took Deanna with her.”

At that point, Isis wondered in from the sleep area and Riker nodded toward her. “She didn’t even ask someone to look after her cat. How could she go off without at least seeing to her?”

He turned to look the cabin over closer and Data called to him. “Commander- !”

Riker turned back- and froze at the sight of the humanoid female standing where the cat had been with feline ears sticking up out of her hair and wearing the cat's collar. "Who the hell- ?"

"I am Isis, Commander."

"She is telling the truth, sir," Data stated. He looked to Riker, then back to Isis. "I saw her change."

"Are you telling me- ?"

"Yes," Isis stated as she cut him off. "And any explanations- *if I decide to give any*- will take too long. Tamera has been upset for several weeks."

Riker watched this female closely. "Any idea why she'd steal a runabout?"

Isis stepped away in thought. Her every move as graceful and smooth as the cat she had been. "She's been having dreams about her sister. They've been waking her up every night and making her increasingly agitated." She turned to face Riker and Data. "My guess would be she's headed for Earth. Deanna must've been with her when she made the decision and decided to stay with her."

"But- "Riker cut himself off and glanced at Data. "The Kirk Family Crypt? " He turned back to Isis. "Why would she go there?" He turned once more to Data. "Set course for Earth- maximum warp. That runabout's armed. We've got find her and stop her before she hurts herself or someone else."

As the two headed for the door, Riker glanced back- and paused at the sight of the black cat curled up on the couch.

It took a week for the *Renewal* to cover the distance to Earth. During that time while Deanna slept, she was certain Tam never did. It was as if

her friend was afraid to. All Deanna could do was watch as Tamera pushed herself closer to exhaustion and collapse.

It was raining when the runabout touched down next to the temple at the Starfleet Memorial Gardens. Lightening flashed and Deanna could hear the rain striking the outer hull.

Tamera ignored all of that as she took a phaser from the ship's stores and still in her 19th century night gown, left the ship, headed for the crypt.

Still in her own night gown, Deanna had to run to keep up.

Lightening flashed with a loud crack of thunder as they approached the crypt, slipping on the wet grass as they practically ran toward it. As they drew near, three figures stepped into view as lightening flashed:

Data, Dr. Crusher and Commander Riker.

"All of you stand clear," Tam ordered.

"I can't do that, Captain. "Riker stated. "Not until you put down the phaser."

"I need the phaser to open the crypt," Tam stated. "*Now move- or I'll move you.*"

Riker stood a little straighter. Never in his entire career had he ever had a superior officer physically threaten him. His hand moved to the phaser hanging at his side.

"Don't even bother, Will," Tam told him. "It'll never clear your side and you know it."

Data tried next. "Captain, it is clear that you are- "

"Data, shut up," Tam ordered.

Dr. Crusher's hand- hypo and all – was a blur-

-But Deanna had been watching for the act and caught her wrist, stopping the hypo just shy of Tam's arm. "Beverly, no!"

Riker's call echoed the thunder as it rolled over head. Lightening flashed as their eyes met. "Deanna- !"

Let her through, Will," She told him. "Whatever you do here won't stop her. She has to do this."

"Do what? Destroy the crypt?!" He demanded.

Deanna's voice remained firm. "Stand aside, Will- Please."

Silence settled over the five except for the sound of thunder and the falling rain. Finally, Riker shook his head and stepped aside.

Tamera moved past without even looking at him till she stood before the crypt just as she had six months earlier. "I don't know what the hell's going on," she said as she took aim. "But I'm damn well going to find out."

She fired, blasting the top off the crypt- eternal flame and all- to reveal the coffin below it, still resting on its depleted anti-grav units. The others watched as Tam climbed down beside it. She reached for the latches holding the lid of the coffin in place and hesitated for a moment. Then, breaking the seals, she released the latches and raised the lid. "My god." She looked up. "Doctor, get down here- *Now!*"

Beverly traded glances with Riker as she approached the opened crypt and began climbing down beside Tam.

At that moment, lightening flashed, giving everyone a good view-
- of a 34 year old redhead in the dress whites of a Starfleet Admiral.

A moment later, a wave of dizziness swept over Tam and she collapsed from exhaustion into Beverly's arms.

4

The Atlas Array was one of the Union's largest telescope assemblies. Located in Sector 213, it was one of the few located close to the very edge of Union space.

As such, the array picked them up from a long way off.

Sensors quickly detected and identified the cubes while they were still three days away.

The crew had more than enough time to evacuate the array-
-and send out the alert.

The Enterprise

Tam's eyes slowly opened. A moment later, she remembered what had happened. But was it real or another dream?

Then it dawned on her that she was in Sickbay. She sat up and one of the nurses noticed. "Captain- "

"Where's Dr. Crusher?"

The nurse looked to the treatment cove at the back of the room. Tam swung her legs off the bed- realizing only then that she was in a sickbay gown- and headed for the cove, where she found the doctor taking scans of her sister. "Doctor?"

Beverly looked up from her readings and frowned. "You need to get back to bed."

"I'll sleep later." Tam nodded toward the redhead on the exam table. "How's Jan?"

The ship's chief medical officer shook her head in wonder. "For someone who's been dead for six months, she's in excellent health. She's still unconscious, but otherwise, the scans match her records of when she was 34 the first time round."

"What about her mind?" Tamera asked. "Does she have all of her memories or will we be dealing with the 34 year old starship captain?"

Beverly shrugged. "We have no way of knowing till she wakes up."

Tam looked down at her sister's unconscious face, now identical to hers, then reached out and gently touched her cheek.

At the moment of that touch, Jan's eyes fluttered open and she looked around. It only took a moment for her to focus on the redhead leaning over her. "...Tam..."

The captain smiled and nodded. "Welcome back."

"How long?"

Tamera looked to the doctor as she answered. "Six months."

Jan closed her eyes for a moment, then her gaze went to the ceiling as she spoke. "I remember all of it. I had finished your note and laid down on the bed. Almost immediately I felt a...creeping paralysis spreading over me. I thought 'Is this what dying feels like?'"

“But I was still aware of everything- when you came in, when you called the medical team and they came in. But then, a foggiess seemed to settle in my head and I wasn’t aware of anything anymore.” She reached out and took her sister’s hand. “Don’t blame yourself. No one had any idea something like this was going to happen.”

“We still don’t know how or why,” the Captain said. “But I’ve got a good idea who to ask.

“I think we need to pay a certain lop-sided donut a visit.”

Starbase 219

Located in Sector 201, this starbase was positioned farthest from Earth- and closer to the Atlas Array- than any other base. It was also here, that Admiral Owen Paris was conducting an inspection. This was one of the duties he occasionally took upon himself to help him get his mind off his son and the whereabouts of the FSS *Voyager*.

He had been greeted by the base CO, Commodore Mack Davis. Davis was ten years younger than the admiral, but seasoned enough to be a level-headed commanding officer.

The two had no sooner reached the base command center, than the communications officer called out. “Commodore, we have a B-1 Alert coming in from the Atlas Array.”

Every other conversation in the room stopped.

B-1 was Starfleet’s code for imminent Borg invasion.

“Confirmed?” Davis asked.

The lieutenant nodded. “It repeated three times- once for each cube as specified.”

Paris and Davis traded glances as the Admiral spoke. “They haven’t used 3 cubes since Wolf 359. How far off?”

“Three days from the array at the time the message was sent.” The lieutenant quickly checked her console. “They’re now two days, twelve hours from the array, sir.”

The Admiral looked to the Commodore. “Send that message on to Grand Admiral Mikels and then get this base and every ship in communications range on B-1 Alert.”

The Enterprise

Captain’s log; Stardate 48648.02

We’re currently on course for the home world of the Guardian of Forever. At maximum warp, we should arrive sometime tomorrow morning.

Jan’s...survival has to be the Guardian’s doing. But why? I truly want an answer to that question. But it pales beside the fact that I have my sister back- for at least another hundred years...

Jan stood in the sleeping area of the guest cabin she’d been assigned and stared at her reflection in the dresser mirror. A simple memory test conducted by Counselor Troi had confirmed that she possessed all 134 years of memories- that she wasn’t ‘Captain Janet Kirk’ thrown a hundred years into the future.

She found it hard to tear her eyes away from those in the reflection. Those memories included how she looked when she ‘died’. She shook her head. “I’m not complaining, mind you,” she told the reflection. “I’d just like to know how and why.” Her voice dropped to a whisper with her next words. “And how long it’ll last.”

Despite what some say, sub-space communications- depending on the distances involved- are not always instantaneous. Many a starship

captain has complained about being out of range of any Starfleet support in terms of information or advice.

So even as Admiral Paris' message about the Borg made it way to Grand Admiral Mikels and the *Enterprise* continued on toward the home world of the Guardian of Forever, a destroyer- the *FSS Roosevelt*- was approaching the Atlas Array for a routine stop-over.

Since the array's alert had been sent straight to Starbase 219 and was not transmitted sector-wide, the *Roosevelt* had no idea what was in the solar winds as it drew near.

The First Officer- an Andorian female in her mid-30's- turned from a console she had been checking and looked to her captain. "Sir, not only is the array not responding to our hails, we're not scanning any lifeforms on board." She stepped down beside the captain's chair as she went on. "According to our scans, all the support ships- shuttles, runabouts- are all gone as well."

The captain's Vulcan eyebrows rose as he turned from her to the main viewscreen. "Evacuated? But the star in this system is still stable." He looked over to where his science officer was stationed. "See if you can access the array's computer and download their last logs.

"Let's see if we can find out what's going on."

The Borg cubes were one day, ten hours away.

5

The Enterprise

Gamma shift was four hours old. The observation lounge on deck six was empty, which suited Jan just fine as she stood before the viewport, staring out at the stars. She turned in surprise as a lounge door opened and then relaxed as Tam entered. Starlight alone shone on them as the – chronologically- older sister spoke. “You couldn’t sleep either?”

The ship’s captain shrugged. “I thought finding you would help- but I’ve been afraid to try.”

Jan nodded as Tamera stepped up beside her. “I know the feeling. I look at the bed and wonder, if I lay down, will I get up again?” She closed her eyes and shook her head. “I’ve been afraid to find out.”

There was a couch near the viewport and the two sat down together. As they did so, Tam held something out to her sister. It was the note Jan had written. “I kept it,” Tam stated needlessly. “Over the last six months, I’ve about wore it out re-reading it.” Jan looked up from the note at that, meeting Tam’s gaze. “I missed you,” the captain whispered. “Even though we weren’t together that much, it still felt like a huge...hole in my life knowing you weren’t there anymore.”

Jan met her gaze as her own thoughts turned back through the century and she thought about the life she had shared with this female that was and wasn’t her. This *was* her kid sister sitting beside her. The how and why of it all had stopped having any meaning decades ago.

She offered a hug and Tam took her up on it, resting her head on Jan’s shoulder.

Sitting there like that in the silence, the two watched as the stars seem to fly past the ship until first one, and then the other nodded off to sleep beneath the starlight.

Next morning

The star system where the home world of the Guardian of Forever was located, wasn't much to write home about. One sun, one planet, the system pretty much passed unnoticed- except for that one single entity that called the system home.

But, it was because of that entity that a Starfleet task force kept constant possession of the system, rotating ships in and out about every six months. At the moment, the flagship of the task force was a *Galaxy* – class ship. In fact, it was Tamera's previous command- the *FSS Atlantis*.

"This may work in our favor," Tam told her sister as the two stood on the *Enterprise's* bridge. "Data open a channel." At his nod, she continued. "*Atlantis*, this is Tamera Kirk."

The main viewscreen lit with the image of a human male whose face was almost hidden behind a large red mustache. Tam smiled. "Well, *Captain* Galloway, this is a surprise."

The man on the screen smiled and the mustache moved as if it were alive. "Tam. It's good to see you again. What's up?"

"I need a few minutes with the Guardian."

"Sure. Just show me your authorization."

Tam sighed. In all the excitement of the past few days, she'd forgotten what a stickler for the rules Thomas Galloway was. "Tom, I don't have any authorization. But you know me well enough to know that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't important."

Galloway shook his head. "Tamera, you know I can't pass you without authorization. If I did, I could kiss my career...good-bye." His voice faltered as Jan stepped into the image on his viewscreen.

Tam nodded toward her as she spoke again. "Now will you pass us through?"

"Does the *Enterprise* have a cloak?" He asked.

"Of course," was Tam's puzzled answer.

"Use it." He then cut the signal.

Jan raised an eyebrow as she turned to her sister. "He can't report what he can't see."

Tamera nodded. "I should have thought of that myself."

Jan shrugged. "Well, you have been a little distracted lately."

Her younger sister threw her a glare. "Gee, thanks."

Jan smiled. "You're welcome."

A constant wind blows across this world, sending small sand storms scurrying across its surface. It howls in and around the ruins of a civilization older than any other even as the pale and faded sun tries to penetrate the dust that's always in the air.

Only in one location is the air clear enough to see any distance and that's around the Guardian of Forever. No one knows if that's due to the larger ruins around it that block the wind or if some other explanation is in order that might also explain how the Guardian is always clean and free of its planet's dust.

The sparkle and chime of the *Enterprise's* transporter was extremely out of place on this dim and filthy world. But once transport was complete, it only took a moment for the sisters to spot the object of their visit.

Tam had described the Guardian as a 'lop-sided donut'. It was a description that wasn't far off. Although it said nothing about the inner glow that lit up whenever the Guardian spoke, or how the howl of the winds seem to increase as if serving as a background to its words.

Tam glanced at her sister as she spoke. "Shall we go and have words with the 'Great and powerful Oz'?"

Jan returned her gaze as she answered. "I'd rather have words with the man behind the curtain."

Her sister nodded. "Agreed."

They approached the Guardian in silence, both of them taking in the sight it presented and the sense of presence that seemed to surround it. "Guardian," Jan called, "We have questions for you."

"Let's start with the big one," Tam noted. "Why is Jan alive- and physically 34?"

"Watch," the Guardian boomed. "Learn," it said as it flashed. "Remember..."

Then as the fog formed over its opening, it did something it said long ago that it could not do. It slowed the racing images until one moment in time was showing—

-- A time the sisters thought they knew...

...Jan and Spock stood before the Guardian with an unconscious Ben Finney at Spock's feet and a freighter captain named Janet Kirk lying at Jan's. Jan was facing the Guardian and the anger was clear in her voice. "You have all the power of time and space at your command. There must be something you can do!"

Spock's voice sliced the silence. "Jan!"

His wife turned and knelt by the unconscious redhead as the aura of energy around her grew and intensified...

..."Stop!" Jan shouted as she and Tam watched the scene.

Tam looked at her in confusion. "What?"

"Don't you see?" Jan asked. "I knelt beside you. *I was in that energy field, too.* Just inside the edge of it. Everyone was so focused on *you* no one ever thought to check *me.*" The sisters traded glances as Jan went on. "And since the human life-span is longer than it used to be, it never showed up in my later physicals because no one knew to look for it!"

Tam's eyebrows rose. "My god. That means when I reach the physical age of 134..." She let the rest trail off. "But will I go back to 34 or 18?!" She looked to the entity before them. "Guardian, you created this situation. I need an answer to that question."

The Guardian's voice echoed off the ruins. "The Future must be denied to all."

"Bull!" Jan shouted. "You know the answer- You've known all along!" She looked to Tam. "We've been so slow to pick up on this, it's not even funny."

She pointed at the being before them. "*We* never named it. It called *itself* the 'Guardian of Forever'. Forever is *not* a one-way street. Forever is yesterday, today- *tomorrow. All of it.*"

"This Bastard knew *all* of this was going to happen- probably knew within moments of its own creation." She turned to Tam. "Remember, I asked it if you were going to live? It said 'Yes'. How could it so sure- *unless it already knew?*"

Tam looked at her in shock. Then she turned to the one responsible for her existence. "Guardian- ?"

It remained silent.

"All right, then," Tamera declared, "We'll see how you like a photon torpedo through your hole." She reached for her combadge.

“Stop.” The Guardian’s voice echoed off the ruins. “Knowledge of the future is dangerous.”

“I’m not asking about politics or power,” Tam said. “I have an adult life. I don’t want to go back to living the life of a teenager.”

“Your sister’s contamination was unplanned- yet it was part of the timeline as I know it,” the Guardian stated, “Her existence was altered at the age of 34. Your existence was altered at the age of 18. It cannot be changed.”

“You cannot change it- or will not?” Tam pressed.

“It cannot be changed.”

Tam’s combadge bleeped and she slapped it. “*What?*”

On the Bridge of the *Enterprise*, Riker raised his eyebrows at her tone. “Riker, Captain. We’ve just received a B-1 Alert from Starfleet Command. Three Borg cubes are less than a day away from the Atlas Array.”

On the surface, the sisters exchanged glances and Tam swore. “That’s all we needed. Two to beam up.”

Within moments, the Guardian stood alone once more.

6

Captain's Log; Stardate 48648.05

Having received the B-1 Alert, we are now in route to Starbase 12- the closest base to the Guardian's home world. The distances involved make it impossible for us to reach the Atlas Array before the Borg do...

The command crew was waiting for Tam in the Observation Lounge. Jan was there, too, but with her status of living or dead still to be legally cleared up, she was little more than an interested observer. "All right, people," Tam said as she sat down, "I've spoken to Grand Admiral Mikels- about a lot of things," she said with a glance in Jan's direction. "Right now, the important thing is the fact that a task force is headed for the Atlas Array."

She released a sigh. "Once we arrive at Starbase 12, *Enterprise* will serve as the flagship of a second task force if the first one fails." She looked to Riker. "Will, I want you to get with R&D. Find out what they've got planned and see if we can adapt what we have to match it."

Her first officer nodded. "Between the fabrication units and the replicators, we should be able to come close."

The computer spoke up then. "Captain, we are receiving a priority message from Grand Admiral Mikels."

Everyone traded glances as Tam spoke. "Pipe it in here."

The circular holographic plate in the center of the table came to life with a 3D image of the human male that commanded Starfleet. "Captain. I've just received word from Admiral Paris that Task Force One has

engaged the Borg.” He paused before continuing. “It was Wolf 359 all over again.”

Silence filled the lounge before Mikels continued. “Your task force will be waiting at Starbase 12. You’ll have a mix- Starfleet, Klingon and Romulan. This will be the first time all three of us have fought on the same side.” He was silent for a moment.

“I won’t lie to you, Tamera. It’s not looking good. Unless we can find some new angle to come at them from, I don’t see the Union lasting out the month.”

He then turned his attention to the other redhead in the room. “Janet, Tamera told me what happened. If you remember, when you accepted the Office of President, you transferred your Starfleet status to the Reserves.

“Well, the reserves and everyone else we can find are being called up. I’ve re-activated your files- including your rank as Admiral.” Jan’s eyebrows rose as Mikels went on. “You’ll be in over-all command of Task Force Two. I know it’s been a while since you’ve worn the uniform, but based on your record, I’m not concerned.”

His holographic image seemed to look around the room taking in all of them. “All of you...just do the best you can. Mikels out.”

As the Grand Admiral’s image faded, everyone looked to Jan.

“Orders, Admiral?” Tam asked.

Jan just glared at her.

Personal Log: Stardate 48648.06

Janet Kirk recording.

The last thing I expected- other than returning from the dead- was to end up back in uniform. When I transferred my status to the Reserves, I never really expected to be 'called up'.

Now, I feel like I'm back in the Academy cramming for finals- only this time, if I fail, the whole quadrant fails with me...

Jan stood before the dresser mirror once more. Only this time, both she and her reflection were wearing the 24th century uniform of a Starfleet Admiral. She shook her head as she turned and stepped into the living area.

"Computer?"

"Yes, Admiral?"

"Bite your tongue," Jan muttered as she sat down at the cabin's desk. "Address me by rank again and I'll rip out your circuits."

"Yes, Jan."

"That's better." Jan turned to the desk viewscreen and controls. "Now, give me everything you have or can find on the Borg."

For the rest of that night and into the following morning, Jan concentrated on every report that connected in one way or another to the Borg. By Noon, they were still two days from Starbase 12 when she called everyone back to the Observation Lounge.

Everyone stood as she entered. "Be seated," She told them as she assumed her now rightful place at the head of the table with Tam to one side and Riker to the other.

"After burying myself- pardon the expression- in every report and record concerning the Borg, I've come to one conclusion: No matter what R&D have up their sleeves, it won't work."

Stunned was the only way to describe the faces looking back at her. Even Tam was confused. "What are we supposed to do then?"

Jan sighed as she leaned back in her chair. "Advanced tech won't work against the Borg- they're already prepared to defend against it."

"With all due respect, Ma'am," Riker said, "How can that be? Some kind of Borg spy inside Starfleet?"

Jan smiled. "Nothing so melodramatic, Commander. The Borg are already prepared because they know our technology inside and out.

"From the moment Q threw the *Enterprise-D* in their face. The Borg have been collecting information on both the Union and Starfleet. They analyze everything they capture- ships, weapons, people- and with every new encounter, more information is gained.

"The result is an on-going base-line of information that the Borg can use to extrapolate and consider any and all advances we're likely to make. This allows them to re-design and adapt their defenses accordingly.

"Suppose we have 'Superweapon XYZ' ready to be deployed. Thanks to that base-line and their own analysis, the Borg were capable of suspecting its eventual development ten years ago and have already re-designed their defenses to stand against it."

Jan looked around the table as she continued. "That's how they can adapt so quickly. They know our technology better than we do. Thanks to them assimilating any Starfleet officer they come across, the same goes for everything from our rules and regulations to our tech manuals. The Borg gain access to all of that the moment they pry open a victim's mind."

Silence filled the lounge for a long moment before Tam asked, "So how do we beat them then?"

“By doing the unexpected,” her sister replied. Jan then turned to Riker. “When you stole Picard back from them, you confused them- it was a move they weren’t expecting. They hesitated while they tried to figure out what you were up to- and that allowed you to make your own move.”

She looked around the table. “From what I’ve been able to get out of all the reports, the Borg idea of an ideal world is one based solidly on order and a logical progression of thought.”

Deanna shook her head. “I don’t understand.”

Jan nodded. “Logical progression. Another way of saying it would be like traveling from point ‘A’ to point ‘B’, ‘C’ and so on without any detours.

“They see a Starfleet vessel, they expect Starfleet weapons and they gear their defenses to be effective against those weapons.” She looked around the table once more. “So...in order to beat the Borg, we have to confuse them. Go from point ‘A’ to point ‘G’ and back to ‘C’- force them to face chaos instead of order.”

Tamera stared off for a moment in thought, then a sly smile came to her face. “My god...” She looked around the table before meeting her sister’s gaze. “You said it yourself. They see a Starfleet ship, they expect Starfleet weapons, they set their defenses for Starfleet weapons.

“But, what if that Starfleet ship fires old-style Romulan plasma energy bursts- or Klingon disruptors? Their defenses wouldn’t be worth a damn.”

Geordi LaForge leaned forward in his seat. “If a ship were equipped with more than one, and rotated them, the Borg would have no idea what was coming at them.”

Riker nodded. “If their defenses are that specific, they wouldn’t be able to defend against more than one type of weapon at a time.”

Tam rose from her chair as she spoke. “Will, you, Geordi and Data get to work building us a plasma energy cannon.” She looked to her sister. “You and I have some phone calls to make.”

The Atlas Array was a day behind the cubes.

What was left of Task Force One also lay behind them.

Aboard the lead cube, the Queen of this unimatrix fleet stood in her command center and listened as all the various drones saw to the cubes’ functions. She closed her eyes and an almost dreamy smile came to her face as she listened to the thousands of voices that made up this particular strike force.

Like all the queens in the Collective, she enjoyed the sounds of the voices- cherished the music they made. In this case, there were new voices in the music- voices that had been added in just the last few days. Voices that were still unsettled. It was always that way with the new ones.

As the Queen Prime had taught all of her representatives, this one concentrated, sending her mind out to them to still them, calm them and restore order to their thoughts.

While she did so, she brushed up against knowledge six months old.

Knowledge of a funeral for an important leader attended by other important leaders.

As she listened, this Queen found her curiosity on the rise and she reached further into the collective for any knowledge about a leader named Janet Kirk.

7

Starbase 12- two days later

It was a sight no one had ever seen before: Starfleet, Klingon and Romulan capital ships all in orbit around the base and no one shooting at anyone. Tam shook her head at the sight. “Why is it, it always takes a crisis to bring people together?” She looked to her sister as she spoke.

The two were standing at the back of the bridge. “Well, we have had an alliance with the Romulans for six months now,” Jan reminded her. “And with the Klingons even longer.”

“I know,” Tam replied. “But it takes the Borg to bring all 3 of us together.”

Jan shrugged. “Time, place and circumstances. A hundred years ago, what you’re seeing now would have been impossible.”

Tam returned the shrug. “All too true, I’m afraid.” She looked across the bridge to her first officer. “Will, you have the Bridge while Jan and I meet with our guests.”

She nodded toward the viewscreen with a crooked smile. “Try not to run over anybody.”

Riker nodded with a slight sparkle in his own eyes. “Don’t worry. I’ll keep the braking thrusters handy.”

In the ship’s Main Transporter Room, the sisters watched as the sparkle and chime faded, leaving two non-human males on the platform.

The redheads smiled as one of them stepped slowly down onto the deck. "It's all right, Kang," Tam said. "It *is* Jan."

He studied the Admiral's face closely. "How?"

Jan glanced at her sister as she answered. "That day on the Guardian's world was more of a shared experience than we thought." She reached out and gently touched the older Klingon's arm. "I'll explain in more detail later."

Tam in the meantime had turned to their other guest: The Romulan Commander that had escorted them to his home world six months ago. "Commander, it's a pleasure to see you again- and to finally meet you face-to-face."

"Thank you, Captain," He replied as he glanced at Jan. The confusion in both his face and his voice was clear-especially in light of the fact that the last time he'd seen Jan, she'd been grey haired and 134 years old.

Tam sighed and looked to her sister. "I think we're going to have to tell both of them before we can move past it."

Jan wasn't too happy with the idea of telling someone outside the family circle, but she could see the necessity of it here. "But let's do it in the Observation Lounge," she said. "It's more private than this transporter room."

Personal Log; Stardate 48648.10

Janet Kirk recording

Kang and the Romulan Commander both listened in silence as Tam and I explained the how and why of my return. Kang, like the rest of our family circle, has been in on Tam's secret for several years now. As she got older and began to look more and more like me, some kind of explanation was needed and it was simply easier to just tell him the truth.

As such, he accepted our tale in stride.

The Romulan Commander however, stared at both of us in shock...

The Romulan Commander sat at the table and stared at the sisters in disbelief as well. Then, he looked to Kang. “Do you accept this account?”

The Klingon actually chuckled as he met the other’s gaze. “If it had been anyone *else* telling me this, no, I wouldn’t.” He looked to Jan and Tam and the amused gleam in his eyes was impossible to miss. “But I have known these two for a century.” He chuckled again. “Yes, I believe them. If anyone could find a way to defeat Death, it would be these two.”

Tamera looked to the Admiral. “Was that a compliment?”

Jan smiled. “I believe so.”

“So,” Kang said, “You’ve defeated Death. How do you plan to defeat the Borg?”

Jan laughed at Tam’s raised eyebrows, then she turned to the General. “There’s an old human saying, Kang: ‘Confusion to the Enemy’. In the Borg’s case, we’re going to pile it on with a shovel.”

The sisters then went on to explain. By the time they were finished, Kang was nodding approval while the Commander looked thoughtful. “The one fact that concerns me is time. If we wait too long to engage them, the Borg will be fairly deep into Federal Space. How many stations and worlds are there between here and the Atlas Array?”

Tam activated the holographic plate in the center of the table and brought up a star chart with the relevant parts high-lighted. “It would be best if we could intercept them before they reach the Vellan Cluster. There are ten inhabited worlds there. But I don’t see how we...” her voice trailed off in thought.

Jan looked over at her. “Tam?”

“Just thinking,” the captain said. She turned to her sister. “Did R&D ever follow up on Shev’s rift?”

Jan’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, then came down as she considered Tam’s question. “Not that I ever heard. In fact, I don’t remember hearing anything about it after the initial review board.” She shrugged. “It must have fallen through the cracks and they forgot about it.”

She looked to Kang. “It was during the time we were both in Task Force 98. When we found the *Sundown*’s disaster beacon.”

Kang nodded. “I remember you calling me and telling me you’d found it. You were going to back track it and try to find the ship.”

Jan looked to the Commander. “We found her- trapped in a rift- an actual tear in the fabric of Space-time. It was created by a malfunctioning Tholian weapons test.” She glanced at Tam as she continued. “Our father was aboard the *Sundown* as first officer. We were in the process of rescuing the ship when the Tholians showed up and attack us. The only way out was through the rift. So Shev Ta’Laren, my first officer, took us through it.

“The rift was actually a doorway to a different kind of space- we never did find out exactly where it was. The dominant theory at the time was that it was some kind of wormhole.

“To make a long story short, we escaped the Tholians and the rift- came out right on top of Starbase 98- in fact, we barely missed hitting the base itself.” She nodded to Tam and the captain brought up a different star chart so Jan could point things out. “The original rift was here. Starbase 98 was here. Back then, it would have taken a week’s travel at warp six to cover the distance.

“We did it in 5 minutes.”

“It would seem that arriving where we want would be the hardest part,” the Commander noted.

Jan shook her head. "Not really. With a definite lack of choices, Shev ordered a course for the starbase. The hardest part would be the timing-knowing when to leave the rift."

"I'll put Data on it, "Tam said. "He can work with the original records and come up with a formula for us."

"Then all we need to do is get the weapon systems seen to, "Jan stated. She looked to Kang and the Commander. "How soon can your people be ready?"

"We started work as soon as we received your message," Kang replied. "We can be ready by morning."

The Romulan nodded. "The same with us."

Jan nodded in return. "Then provided Data can get the formula worked out, we'll aim for a departure time of 1200 hours tomorrow."

Next Morning

Tam arrived on the Bridge just a few moments before Jan did. At the sight of the Admiral, Deanna- who was in uniform this day- rose from her seat and moved to the nearby standing console. She waved to the chair as she moved. "Admiral."

Jan nodded to her as she took the seat. "Thank you, Deanna."

As the sisters sat down, the captain looked to her first officer. "Report."

"Ship's systems are nominal," Riker reported. "Weapons have been distributed, and the plasma energy cannon is functional. Union, Klingon and Romulan forces all report nominal status as well."

Tam nodded and looked to the front of the Bridge. "Data, how do you stand on things?"

The android almost looked down at his feet before he turned to answer. "All the simulations say the process should work. With Computer's help, I have finalized the formulas and transmitted them throughout the task force. In order to insure that no one drifts off in that other space, all ships are now tethered together by tractor beam and are standing by to execute."

"Where will we come out?" Jan asked.

"If everything goes like it should, we will come out two days beyond the Vellan Cluster and directly in the Borg's flight path."

The sisters traded glances, then Tam called out, "Computer, time?"

"11:58 am, Captain."

Tam looked to Riker. "Are the Torpedoes ready?"

He glanced over at the weapons console and saw the crewman there nod. "Torpedoes are in the tubes and ready."

"Time?"

"11:59am, Captain."

"Countdown from 10," Tam ordered.

The computer started doing so a few moments later.

"10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1-"

Data touched his console and torpedoes that had been reconfigured to those long ago Tholian frequencies were fired-

-to explode and rip the very fabric of space wide open.

"We're being pulled in," LaForge reported from his bridge station.

Within moments, the orbital space around Starbase 12 was empty.

The Borg Queen had completed her research into Janet Kirk and sighed once more in disappointment that she was dead. Her knowledge

and experiences would have added much to the Collective. Still, her sister was still alive. Like the rest of the galaxy, Her Majesty was puzzled by the fact that they were twin sisters with so many years between them. But it was a puzzle she would solve once Tamera Kirk was part of the collective.

Her gaze settled on a nearby screen showing a star chart of the space ahead. Ten inhabited worlds. She smiled softly. They will make an interesting harvest. Already information was coming in. A variety of races- both known and new ones. Good. She always enjoyed assimilating new races, of introducing them to the Borg world view of order and improving their quality of life.

Two more days, she thought. Two days and those people's lives will be changed forever.

Other Space- the *Enterprise*

"All weapons on stand-by," Tam ordered. "Make sure everyone understands that we open fire as soon as we clear the rift." Jan glanced over at her and her kid sister didn't flinch. "You read the reports. You know there's no talking to the Borg. It's shoot first or die."

Their gazes met for a long moment, then the Admiral slowly nodded.

"I don't like it any more than you do," Tam added. "But you know they won't give us any choice."

"I know," Jan admitted. "I wish, just once, they'd stay home."

"I'd second that," the captain replied. "Data, time to exit?"

"Based on the formulas, six minutes."

Tam shifted her gaze. "Geordi, how are we holding up?"

The chief engineer shrugged. "There's some minor loss in the auxiliary power systems. Otherwise, we're good."

She shifted her gaze again. "Will, how are our friends holding up?"

He checked his console. "All three fleets are holding up just fine." He looked over at his captain. "At least no one's dropped out...yet. Isis?"

Tam looked at him in confusion, then turned to see Isis- in humanoid form- coming from the turbo lift. She immediately went to her. "What are you doing? You have just- literally- let the cat out of the bag."

"Sometimes a friend's life is more important than secrets," Isis replied as she held out the objects she'd brought- Tam's holstered .45 and two clips of ammo. "I have a feeling you will need these."

Tam met her gaze for a moment, then smiled as she took the weapon and ammo in hand. "I'm going to tell you something I should have told you when I took you aboard the *Challenger*," she said. "Go to Sickbay. It's the best protected part of the ship." Then Tam's smile grew. "I have no doubt Dr. Crusher'll have lots of questions."

Isis made a face at the idea of that as she turned back toward the lift.

As she left, Tam settled the shoulder holster in place and stuffed the clips in her belt. Then she looked to Riker. "How- ?"

"She's the one that told us you and Deanna were headed for Earth," He answered.

"One minute to exit," Data announced before Tam could reply.

8

The Borg cubes were the only objects in the area.

A moment later, actual rips began to appear in space itself, followed by Romulan plasma energy bursts and Klingon disruptor fire.

But the ships firing those weapons were nowhere to be seen as one of the rear cubes exploded under this opening assault.

Aboard her own cube, the Borg Queen had every sensor and scanner at maximum. Every link- both organic and metallic- was contacted as she sought the source of these attacks.

Then a ship appeared- just faded into existence.

Her eyes narrowed in confusion. All the weapons fire couldn't have come from one-

Wait. The ship's name.

FSS Enterprise

That name was known to the Borg. It was a name the Borg had faced many times. "Locutus?" She tilted her head, but she could not hear him. Even taken from them like he was, he was still one of them. She should have been able-

But there was no trace.

She decided *then* that she would have answers.

Aboard the *Enterprise*, Tam slowly stood up. “Looks like we were right.”

“They’ve seen the name,” Jan said. “They’re expecting Picard.”

The main viewscreen came to life with a scene of a Borg ship’s interior- a scene that served as a backdrop for the Borg Queen. “I am the Borg.” Her eyes narrowed. “You are not Locutus. You are the one named ‘Kirk’.” She shifted her gaze. “Two of you? Has your Union begun cloning its Starfleet officers?”

Tam almost laughed at that. “No.” she nodded toward her sister. “Admiral Janet Kirk.”

“Not possible,” the Queen declared. “The Collective is well aware that Janet Kirk died six months ago.”

“I got better,” Jan stated as she stood up.

“You are clearly lying,” the Queen replied. “But it doesn’t matter. I will have the truth once your minds are part of the Collective.”

“On a cold day in Hell,” Tam stated.

The Queen smiled and nodded slightly. “That day has come.” The screen then blanked- returning to the view of the two remaining cubes.

“Data, send the signal,” Tam ordered as she turned to Jan.

“I hope everyone’s in place,” the Admiral said.

“We’ll soon find- “

“Intruder Alert!” The Computer announced. “Borg intruders on deck 30, 15, 12 *and the Bridge!*”

Throughout the ship, Borg drones arrived expecting Starfleet weapons and with their personal shields ready to repel them. Instead, they got Klingon and Romulan disruptors slicing through shields set for Starfleet phasers.

On the Bridge, in and around disruptor fire, Tam's .45 roared as the Borg discovered that shields designed to repel phasers were useless against solid projectiles.

At the helm, one drone materialized and reached for Data, who in turn, reached out with one hand- while still manning his station with the other- and broke off the drone's cybernetic arm.

Taking advantage of the drone's confusion, Data stood, broke his neck with a quick twist and resumed his post as the body fell and disintegrated in typical Borg fashion.

"Computer!" Tam called as she slammed a fresh clip in place and blew away a Borg's chest," Calculate the Borg transporter frequency and block it!"

"Acknowledged, Captain."

In that same moment, a drone arrived and made to inject Jan with its nanotech injection tubes. Jan grabbed that arm, dropped and pulled, sending the drone flying-

-into Riker's Klingon disruptor fire.

Elsewhere, Romulan and Klingon fleets dove toward the enemy with their cloaks off and both Federal phasers and torpedoes flying.

To say the Borg were confused would be putting it mildly. The cubes detected Klingon ships, programs kicked in confirming Klingon technology, additional programs adjusted shields and other defenses-

-only to be hit with Federal phasers that sliced through their shields and exploded against Borg hulls with no resistance.

Which is not to say the fleets escaped unscathed.

The *FSS Sojourner*- an *Excelsior*-class ship- ducked and dove, landing several shots with Klingon disruptors. Then she dove to avoid fire from one cube-

-only to be destroyed by the other.

A Romulan warbird of the *D'Deridex*-class dove for the second cube, firing Federal phasers as it came. As the second cube shook and began to explode, the Romulan flew straight into the breach it had created, taking the cube with it when it self-destructed.

General Kang's ship was one of the large *Vor'cha*-class ships with firepower to spare. Fitted with both Romulan plasma energy cannons and Federal phasers, his ship- the *Dok'tow* -dove for the Queen's cube, firing as it came.

Kang dove and fired till the last possible moment before pulling out, blasting away large sections of the Queen's ship.

Barely a kilometer away, the *Dok'tow* pulled up and away-

-just as the Queen shot out her warp nacelles.

The *Enterprise*

"Captain- !"

"I see it, Data," Tam stated as she holstered her .45. "Ptrope 1- now." She sat down as she added, "Tractor beam stand by."

Under Data's skilled hands, the *Enterprise* dove for the *Dok'tow*- coming in from behind her as the Borg Queens' cube closed in on both of them.

Always drawing closer, *Enterprise* continued to match the Klingon's speed as smoke and flames trailed from her nacelles. "Now," Tam ordered as the *Enterprise* began passing over the *Dok'tow*. "Tractor beam on."

The ship lurched and there was a loud *crunch* as the two- Union and Klingon- began moving off together. As they slowly picked up speed, and the cube bore down on them, a Romulan warbird dove toward them, over them and opened fire on the cube with Federal phasers as it continued along the enemy's face.

Tam watched as the Romulan Commander distracted the Queen and provided cover as he disappeared under his cloak before the Cube could return fire.

"Data, I think you scraped the paint with that one," Tam scolded lightly.

"My apologies, Captain," the second Officer replied. "I will attempt to do better next time."

The sisters exchanged glances. "Next time?" Jan whispered with a smile.

Tam shrugged and returned her smile. "He's learning. He's definitely learning."

9

It had been a long time since any Queen had felt the level of anger this one was feeling now. Two of her cubes destroyed and her own badly damaged. The Borg had not encountered such resistance in decades.

Resistance is futile. Didn't these creatures understand that? Don't they know they're throwing their lives away for nothing? The Borg always win in the end and they all become one with the Collective. Their uniqueness enhances the Collective, adds to the music of the voices. The Collective brings order to their lives, improves the quality of their lives.

Why would anyone fight to resist that?

A moment later, the two ships still on her screen faded away to nothing.

There was a 'bleep' and a screen off to one side came to life with an image of that human female she spoke to earlier. "This is Captain Tamera Kirk. Don't bother trying to track this signal, Your Majesty. I'm sending it through too many relays for you to do so."

"What do you want?"

"Everytime you and your cubes show up, you say you want to improve the quality of life. Who's life?

"The previous *Enterprise*- the one commanded by the man you called 'Locutus'- was designed to allow its crew- scientists, researchers, explorers- to bring their families with them. That's how we intended to improve the quality of our lives- by having our loved ones with us.

"But *you* made that impossible. Because we care about our loved ones, we couldn't expose them to the danger *you* represented. So because of *you* we had to *lower* our quality of life.

“Because of *you*, we had to turn away from peaceful exploration and build warships in order to defend our families and loved ones- all because of *you*.

“How many unimatrix have you lost since you started coming here? Had you lost any before? We have a saying, Your Majesty, ‘The loss of one diminishes us all’.

“Do you miss those unimatrix? Those voices that are lost to you now?

“We have our own version of a Collective- our own version of order. We don’t need or want *yours*.

“You came into the Alpha Quadrant with three cubes. You’re down to one- and it’s damaged. How many drones have you lost today? How many voices?

“If you want to lose the rest, then you keep trying to force your way into our quadrant and see how it ends.

“If you want to save what’s left of your unimatrix, then go home.

“What’s more important? Continuing a fight you know you’re going to lose, or saving what few voices are left?

“The choice is up to you. Kirk out.”

Tam signaled Data to close the channel and looked to Jan. “That’s the longest speech I’ve made in years.”

“Sounded good to me,” the Admiral said. “The question is, did it sound good to her?”

Data glanced back over his shoulder at them. “Captain, the cube’s automatic repair systems have kicked in.”

Everyone watched the main screen as the cube seemed to repair itself- growing tubes and pipes and whole sections of bulkhead. Deanna

shook her head. "Watching that always send chills down my spine." She looked over at Tam. "It's almost as if it were alive."

Within moments, the cube floated before them, apparently solid and intact once more.

"Come on, Your Majesty," Tam whispered. "Make up your mind."

Jan looked over at her. "You got a date? The longer she takes to make up her mind the better."

"Not if she's using the time to call for reinforcements," Tam noted.

"Always looking for the bright side, aren't you?" her sister asked.

"I try."

Data's voice sliced the air. "Captain!"

All eyes went to the screen to see the Queen's cube-
-retreating.

The tension on the bridge visibly eased as everyone released the breath they'd been holding. Jan was the first one to speak. "Data, send a message to the entire task force. Tell them we're staying right here for the next three days to make sure she's left."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Tam looked to Riker. "Will, take us down to General Quarters. Then you and Geordi get with General Kang and see if he needs any help with his repairs."

"Yes, Ma'am."

As the two men left the Bridge, Tam looked to her sister as she sat down. "I'm wore out."

"It has been a hectic few weeks," Jan admitted. "Hopefully, things can start slowing down now."

Tam snorted. "Don't bet on it."

10

Personal log; Stardate 48648.14

Tamera Kirk recording.

After three days of "Guard post" duty, the fleets have been dispersed and the Enterprise has been re-called to Earth.

Upon arrival, Jan was summoned to the office of Grand Admiral Mikels. I have no idea what was said in that meeting or who else might've been there, but I expect Jan's return anytime now...

Tam was pacing in her Ready Room when the door chime sounded. "Come." She turned as Jan entered. She was in civilian blouse and slacks, but the admiral's bars on her collar shone brightly in the room's lights. "Hey. I did like you asked. I called both Sarek and Amanda and told them I wanted to see them. Fortunately, they're both on Vulcan right now, so they can be here in a few hours."

"You didn't tell them *why* you wanted to see them, did you?" Jan asked.

Tamera shook her head. "No. No way am I going to ruin the surprise." She waved a hand toward the couch and spoke as the two sat down. "Now, what did you and Mikels talk about?"

"Aunt T'Pel was there, too," Jan told her. "I haven't seen that much surprise on her face since the day we introduced her and Uncle Frank to you."

"They wanted details on everything."

"And what was the result of all that?" Tam asked.

Jan stood up and stepped toward the desk as she spoke. "For one thing, I'm legally alive again. The official story is a kind of delayed regeneration caused by our encounter with the Guardian."

Tam nodded and shrugged. "Close enough to the truth I guess. What else?"

Jan turned to face Tam and leaned against the desk as she spoke. "I'm staying in Starfleet- as an Admiral. The *Enterprise* will be my flagship- but there won't be any fleet unless we're invaded again."

A note of confusion entered Tam's voice. "So...what will we be doing then?"

"What the *Enterprise* should have been doing all along," her sister replied. "You get to 'seek out new life and new civilizations', then I use my duly appointed ambassadorial powers to talk them into joining the Union." She shrugged. "Or at least forming an alliance. The idea's to get as many new technologies as possible into the Union before the Borg return."

Tam leaned back on the couch and nodded. "Okay. I can see that. Stopping one unimatrix doesn't stop the entire Collective even if it is all connected somehow." A slow smile came to her face. "So after we talk to Sarek and Amanda, where to?"

Jan walked over to the Ready Room's viewport and looked out at the stars as a gleam came to her eyes. "Out there," she said. Then that crooked smile came to her lips as she added, "Thataway."