

NOVA TREK

“Mirror Image”

by
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There are thousands of realities in the Multi-verse. This is the story of one of them...

**"Space, the final frontier. This is the voyage of the Star Cruiser *Enterprise*. Her mission- to enforce and extend the rule of the Terran Star Realm. To seek out and destroy her enemies wherever they may be-
-even in places where no one has gone before."**

Nova Trek: Mirror Image

Personal log; additional. Commander Janet Kirk recording. With Pike off the ship on his annual inspection tour, I've diverted the Enterprise to Cestus III to take care of some personal business...

Cestus III

In the front room of the Kirk house, two bodies lay on the floor. Janet looked from one to the other and there was no remorse on her face. After a moment, she dropped the Klingon disruptor beside the bodies and began removing the gloves she'd been wearing when she pulled the trigger. For all the emotion she showed, she might have just killed a Denebian slime devil- or a couple of Terran rats. She tossed the gloves down beside the disruptor as she spoke. "One more thing off my 'to do' list."

"It seems something of a waste."

She turned at the voice, the sash tied round her waist swinging with her movement, almost in counter point to her shoulder-length red hair. The words had been spoken by the male standing in the front door- a Vulcan. Mid 30s, with jet black hair and a neatly trimmed beard. The satin-like material of Spock's science jacket reflected the morning light as she replied. "No, Mr. Spock. The waste was in letting it go this long." She turned away, her short uniform skirt swinging about her hips as she stepped over to the nearest window. The gold material of her skirt and halter was in sharp contrast to the halter's black collar and the uniform's black hip-boots. "The waste was in trying to convert this mudball into something liveable." Her arms were folded beneath her breasts as she stared out at the landscape beyond the window. "If he'd had any backbone, he would've joined Starfleet like Dad wanted instead of running off with this Marcus bitch." She then took her communicator in hand. "Kirk to Rand."

"Rand here."

“Status.”

At the colony outpost, Rand glanced over at Chekov, then down at the landing party’s last victim. “We’re through here, Commander. We’re the only ones still alive on this rock.”

Back at the Kirk house, Janet nodded. “All right. Be ready to beam up. Kirk out.”

She turned to face Spock as he spoke. “And when Captain Pike finds out?”

“Do you plan on telling him?” The redhead shook her head, “Don’t waste your time.” She stepped out on the front porch as she continued, “Besides, you won’t be seeing the bastard again anytime soon.” There was an almost predatory gleam in her eyes as she spoke into her communicator once more. “Kirk to *Enterprise*. Beam up the landing party.”

Once materialization was complete, Janet glanced at Spock as they, Rand, Chekov and the rest of the party stepped off the platform. “Would you come to my quarters, Mr. Spock? There are some things I’d like to discuss with you.” She then looked to Rand. “I won’t need you tonight.”

The lieutenant nodded.

A raised eyebrow was Spock’s only response, yet he followed as requested. As he did so, he found it hard to keep his Vulcan eyes off Janet as she moved. The halter and skirt fit to perfection and the hip-boots only added to the sexuality she seemed to project with every step she took.

More than one head- both male and female- turned as she passed, allowing eyes to follow and minds to dream.

Upon entering her cabin, Spock’s attention was drawn to the furred feline lying on a pile of cushions in one corner. Thirty years ago, when the Star Realm discovered the planet Cait, they washed over it like a tidal wave, killing everyone over the age of four. Those remaining children were then taken as pets and slaves and the Caitian civilization was trampled into the dust and forgotten.

Janet’s parents had bought M’ress for her as a high school graduation present. The feline had only been a cub then. Now, she was an athletic, shapely pet that was totally loyal to her mistress. Halter, briefs and a gold collar were all she wore. Janet reached out to her and the Caitian actually growled softly in pleasure as the Commander petted her.

The intercom buzzed and M’ress sniffed in disappointment as her mistress reached for the switch, “Kirk here.”

“Lt. Uhura, Commander.”

"Yes, Lieutenant... what is it?"

"We've just received a message from Starfleet Command. Captain Pike has been seriously injured in an accident aboard the *Delphi*. They report that a baffle plate exploded- flooding over half the ship in Delta rays."

A satisfied smile came to Janet's face as she replied, "Is he still alive?"

"At the time the message was sent, he was on complete life-support," Uhura answered. "Starfleet has authorized you to assume command until another captain can be appointed."

For a moment, Janet said nothing as her smile faded into a frown. Finally, she took a deep breath and replied, "All right. Make sure all of that's forwarded to the rest of the crew. Kirk out." She turned off the intercom and stepped away in clear frustration.

"You arranged for the accident?" Spock asked.

She turned at his words, having forgotten he was there. Then, the redhead shrugged and a weak smile returned to her face. "Called in a few favors, reminded some people of the dirt I had on them." Then her frustration re-surfaced as she turned away. "For all the good it did. Starfleet refuses to accept the fact that I can do the job as well as he can- *better*."

"And what did you wish to speak to me about?" He asked.

The human turned from pacing the deck, her thoughts tearing through her mind at Warp Ten. "An alliance. Between the two of us, we can make this ship the most profitable cruiser in the fleet." She stepped toward him, every sway of her hips for him alone. "I did some checking. I know your time of Pon Farr is approaching." She was close enough to use her finger to trace the seams of his jacket. "Take me as your wife- and captain- and we'll make a team Starfleet won't be able to ignore.

"There's something about you, Spock. Something I've never seen or found in any other male. I'm certain we could make a relationship work- on *all* levels."

He watched her, studied her, seeing the attraction and desire in her eyes. She took his hand and led him into the sleeping area. Once there, she released him and began to undress- and it was clear she did so for him alone. As the last article fell to the deck, she moved toward him on bare feet until her body pressed against him. She looked up, meeting his gaze as her tongue moved slowly across her lips.

A moment later, his finger tips were against her face and everything blurred into a mesh of thoughts, flesh and tangled sheets.

In his office in Engineering, Montgomery Scott was seated at his desk, listening to an open intercom. "...I'm certain we can make a relationship work- on *all* levels."

He turned off the doctored intercom and leaned back in his seat with a low growl in his throat.

That redheaded witch. She dinna belong in the center seat. Aye, maybe it was time to move his own plans forward.

She lay beside him, her eyes on his face as he slept. Janet hadn't realized what the Bonding had meant- hadn't understood what was involved at all. But now that she'd been through it, she knew she'd never go back to the way things had been.

But even as she lay beside her new-found husband, Janet's thoughts began going back to Pike and Starfleet. There had to be a way to force Starfleet Command to acknowledge her- to appoint her Captain of the *Enterprise*. Something so big, they'd *have* to reward her for it. Something Pike never managed to do.

Her eyes narrowed and she nodded.

Spock woke as she rose from the bed and headed for the cabin safe. "Janet-?"

"An idea," she told him. "You know- now- that my aunt is head of Starfleet Intelligence. I helped her maneuver Uncle Frank into marrying her. In exchange, she sends me copies of her intelligence reports."

The Vulcan pulled on his clothes as he watched her dig out one data disc from among several- and smile. Ignoring the fact that she was undressed, she crossed to the office area and dropped the disc into the slot beneath the desk monitor. As the information came up, she nodded. "This'll be perfect. " She reached for the intercom. "Kirk to Bridge. Change course- 218 mark 3. Then go to Maximum Warp."

"Chekov here, Commander. Course plotted and laid in."

"Kirk out."

Spock stepped over beside her and studied the screen. "Exposing her will be insufficient. We will need additional firepower to back up our demands."

She looked up at him. "I'm not sharing this with another ship-"

He shook his head. "That should not be necessary. There must be a way to boost our existing firepower."

Janet thought for a moment, then her eyes narrowed. "Maybe there is." She

reached for the intercom once more. "Kirk to Bridge. All stop. Come to course 187, mark 5. Maximum Warp till further notice."

"Chekov here. Acknowledged, Commander."

"Kirk out." She then turned to another console and flipped a switch. "Computer?"

Instead of the male voice of the ship's systems, Spock's eyebrow rose at the sound of the female voice that answered. "Yes, Commander? Are you ready to release me into the system?"

"Soon," Janet replied. "Just a few more days. In the meantime, I need you to contact a friend of ours."

Scott looked around as he moved through the corridors. He had to move carefully. There was no telling when or where Rand would show up. As Kirk's right hand and bodyguard, she had more clout than any other lieutenant on board.

He stepped around a corner- and there she was--phaser in hand and two other crewmen with her.

The way to the ship's armory was effectively blocked. "Going somewhere, Chief?" she asked.

"I was just going to make a routine check of the armory," he stated.

Rand nodded. "A routine check. When was the last time you *personally* made a routine check of the armory, *Chief*?" A moment later, she pistol whipped him with the butt of her phaser.

He staggered, but didn't fall as blood began to run from his nose. Rand's men took up position on each side of him as she spoke, "I think we'll let the captain decide his fate."

"The Captain's not on board," Scott replied as each crewman took an arm.

"Depends on your point of view," the blond replied. At her nod, he was dragged back down the corridor.

"...You ask too much," the female on the screen was saying.

Janet glanced up at Spock as she replied, "You never had a problem with our arrangement before."

"You never asked for a plasma energy cannon before," The Romulan Commander replied. "Understand me. For the exact location of every Klingon listening post along our border, I'd gladly give you one- and throw in a cloaking device besides. But you don't understand the sheer *size* of what you are asking for.

"A plasma energy cannon takes up two decks- and three hundred meters of

space on each. We build the cannon first, *then* the ship is built around it. To get hold of one with all of its components and no ship is impossible."

Janet nodded. "All right then. What about a damaged ship? Would it be easier to get hold of one of those?"

The commander was quiet for a moment as she thought it over. "It is possible that one of the more remote shipyards might have one. But how you install it? From what I know of your ship, there's no room on board except on your hanger deck- and then you'd have to fire it out your hanger bay doors!"

"Let me worry about getting it installed," Janet told her, "Just tell me where I can get hold of one."

"By yourself? --Nowhere," the commander replied, "Even the most remote, backwater shipyard isn't going to lay still while one of the Star Realm's best ships plunder it."

"There is only one way you will be able to get anywhere *near* one of our 'yards- and that is if I take you."

Janet's raised eyebrow was unmistakable.

"As a prisoner?"

"In name only," the commander replied, "Once inside their perimeters, you can silence them and then take what you want."

"You get the listening posts *after* I get the cannon installed," Janet stated.

The commander was quiet for a moment.

"I get *one* now. Consider it a... down payment."

Janet nodded. "Fair enough. Sending co-ordinates now."

The commander glanced off screen and then nodded. "Co-ordinates received. Once they have been verified, we will set course. One of your hours."

"I'll be waiting. Kirk out."

Aboard her Bird of Prey, the commander turned off the comm unit and looked over to where her second-in-command had been standing just out of visual range. "Things proceed as planned, 'Tal. She has finally over-reached herself."

"How, Commander?"

"By coming into the Empire, she effectively cuts herself off from the Star Realm and any help they might provide." She turned and looked off for a moment. "Pike's *Enterprise* has been a thorn in our side for many years. Kirk's *Enterprise* will soon be a memory- a minor footnote to history."

On board *Enterprise*, Janet sat in thought for a moment, then looked to

Spock. "What kind of tactical information do we have on the Romulan Empire?"

"They have apparently re-assigned several of their ships to new patrols over the last several weeks."

"Re-assigned where?"

Spock met her gaze and Janet nodded. "That's what I thought." The door buzzer went off. "Come."

Once the unit opened, Rand, Scott and her men entered. Janet's gaze went to Scott and his bloodied nose, then to Rand. "Explain."

"Lt. Uhura was monitoring the comm traffic," the blond replied. "Scott's intercom was receiving but he wasn't sending. I watched him till I realized what he was up to then caught him just shy of the armory."

Janet met her gaze for a moment more then nodded in dismissal. Once Rand and her men left, the redhead looked to the Scotsman. "All right, say your piece."

"You're a bitch and a half- plotting th' capt'n's death like thot."

"You know as well as I do, it's the way things are done." She rose from the desk and stepped away from him. "Do you know how *Pike* got the *Enterprise*? As the loyal, proper, first officer, he waited till he had a chance to lace Captain April's tea with poison - a Vulcan alkaloid." She turned back to face him. "You're no prize, yourself. How many superiors have *you* eliminated one way or another? At least in my case, there's an outside chance that Pike *might* recover."

"I never plotted and schemed like you," Scott stated. "If I wanted to move up, I faced my superior head-on."

Janet's eyebrows rose and she glanced at Spock. "The direct approach." She looked back at Scott and shrugged. "I used it a few times. But I've also learned to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves. The inspection was coming up- and it was one of the few times when Pike would lower his guard."

She stood before the engineer undressed and unconcerned about the fact as she went on. "How many crewmen did Pike sentence to the Agony Booth? It's supposed to be an instrument of punishment. How many times did Pike use it as a torture device to force information from people? How many died in that thing? Are you saying you wanted that to continue?"

"I'm the first to admit I'm no angel, Mr. Scott. But I know the difference between 'necessary' and 'senseless.'"

Janet glanced at Spock as she continued, "I can understand being loyal to your captain- when that captain's worth it. But there was more to Pike than you realize."

She carried herself as if she were fully dressed as she stepped back toward the desk. "Now, we're involved in planning a major operation- one that could pay off big for everyone- but it's going to take your engineering expertise to pull it off. Interested?"

Scott's gaze had taken in every inch of her, but he'd also heard every word she'd said. "What kind of operation?"

She sat down at the desk as she spoke, "If it works, my appointment as Captain of the *Enterprise* is guaranteed and everyone gets a hefty bonus. If it fails, I'll most likely face a firing squad." She activated the desk monitor. "How familiar are you with the Romulan Plasma Energy Cannon?"

Now, Scott's eyes went wide in shock, "Where are ya goin' to get a P.E.C.?"

"From the Romulans, themselves, Mr. Scott," Spock replied, speaking up for the first time.

Janet pointed to the monitor as she spoke, "Decks five and six--everything forward of the central core has to be cleared away back to the outer hull. The crew'll have to double up and we'll have to make due with a few less science labs. Working all three shifts round the clock, how long to clear it out?"

Scott thought it over as he looked from woman to Vulcan and back again. "Rerouting control pathways, shutting down circuits, using the cargo transporters to beam out the bulkheads..." He shook his head. "Four days- maybe six."

"You've got five," Janet told him.

"And how are ya goin' to power the thing?" He asked, "It takes all a Bird of Prey has to fire it."

Spock answered him, "A Bird of Prey only has impulse power, Mr. Scott."

Janet nodded, "But we have Warp power as well."

The light of interest came to Scott's face, replacing his resentment of Janet. "Aye, that'd give it a punch no Romulan could manage."

"How soon can you get started?" the redhead asked.

"Am I under arrest for anythin'?"

"No."

"Right away then." He nodded to both of them and headed for the door.

Personal log: supplemental. Janet Kirk recording. Having confirmed the location of the Klingon Outpost that I sent her, The Romulan Commander is now leading us into Romulan space and toward the Dy' Kan shipyard- the nearest and most isolated shipyard in the area.

I'll admit being this deep in Romulan space makes me uneasy- but there's too

much at stake to back out now...

Four days later....

Janet stepped off the lift on deck five with Rand beside her and looked around. It was like stepping into a two-story warehouse that was bare to the walls. Scott turned from talking to a crewman and stepped toward them. The memory of Janet standing nude in her cabin was one he'd had a hard time setting aside. Now, he waved his hand toward the wide-open area. "As ya wanted, Commander. Stripped down and standin' by."

"And you finished early," Janet noted with a nod, "Excellent, Mr. Scott. I won't forget this." One of the few remaining intercoms in the area whistled for attention and Janet headed for it with Rand and Scott beside her. "Kirk here."

"Spock, Commander. The Dy' Kan Shipyards have just entered sensor range."

"On my way," She told him, "Have Sulu and Uhura start locating their comm units and power sources- and Spock, find that cannon."

"Acknowledged."

By the time Janet and Rand arrived on the bridge, the shipyard was close enough to see details. There was a central station and three separate space docks- one of which was in use. As Janet approached the chair- and Rand took up position by the lift, Spock rose from the chair as he spoke, "The Romulan Commander's Bird of Prey is 300 meters to port. The station has not scanned us yet and the one ship in dock is having an engine replaced- it is no threat."

The redhead looked around the Bridge and scowled slightly, "Sounds too easy." She met Spock's gaze. "Go to Yellow Alert. Stand by on Red."

"Acknowledged."

She turned to communications. "Uhura, start jamming their transmissions."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Sulu looked up from his helm and reported, "Commander, the station's scanning us."

Janet took a deep breath.

"Fire."

The *Enterprise's* phasers shot forth, striking the station and reducing it to debris before it could defend itself. Janet then turned to Spock and said, "Tell the Commander she can beam the space dock crew to her ship. Then get with Scott and start getting that cannon on board."

“Acknowledged.”

She stood there for a moment, watching the expanding cloud of debris that had been the home of who-knew-how-many living beings. Then she turned and left the bridge with Rand a few steps behind her.

On board the Commander’s Bird-of-Prey, she had sat at her desk in her cabin and watched on a monitor screen as the *Enterprise* destroyed the station. She hadn’t liked the idea of sacrificing the nearly 300 lives on board, but in order for a larger plan to succeed, such sacrifices are sometimes necessary.

She looked to her cabin door as the chime sounded. “Enter.” She watched as it slid aside for ‘Tal. “What is our status?”

“115 workers were at the space dock when Kirk destroyed the station,” he told her. “We are in the process of bringing them on board. The station’s sudden silence should bring additional ships within forty-eight hours.”

She nodded without looking at him, “Very well.”

“Commander- “

“Dismissed,” She met his gaze as she issued the order, leaving him with no choice but to obey. As she watched him leave, she closed her eyes and shook her head.

Larger plans.

Aboard *Enterprise* Janet stood by the turbo lift doors on deck five with Rand off to one side, watching as the plasma energy cannon was beamed on board one section at a time. Then anti-grav units were attached, allowing the crew to move the section to its proper location.

Seeing her, Scott stepped over toward her and prompted, “Commander?”

She shook her head, “Just watching.” She nodded toward the sight of the plasma chamber being moved into place. “First time I’ve seen one of these in person.”

The engineer nodded. “Aye, it’s a beast all right. Luckily, the Romulans designed it in sections for easy assembly.”

“Just keep in mind the station’s silence is going to bring every Romulan ship in the area,” Janet told him.

He nodded once more as another section of the cannon materialized. “Aye, we’ll keep at it till it’s done.”

Personal log, additional. Janet Kirk recording. Scott and his people have been hard

at it for the last twelve hours, working to get the plasma cannon installed. If I could hurry them up more, I would. I can't help feeling that our luck- and our time- are running out...

In the transporter room, Janet and Spock stood by as materialization finished. Then Janet nodded as the Romulan Commander stepped off the platform. "Welcome aboard, Commander."

The Romulan nodded in return, "Thank you for satisfying my curiosity, Commander."

Janet shrugged and waved a hand toward the door. "You upheld your end of the deal. When someone does that, I don't mind going a little further."

The three headed down the corridor and passing crew gave the commander a few surprised glances. As they entered the turbo lift, Janet glanced over at her as she activated the car. "You'll have to forgive the crew. Until now, Spock and I were the only ones on board that knew what Romulans looked like."

"It is understandable. Until we encountered the *Enterprise* five years ago, we had no idea what Humans looked like. There are many in the Empire that still do not know."

Janet studied her face for a moment, then the turbo lift stopped and the doors opened on deck five. As they left the lift and the Commander took in the sight of the plasma cannon, she could only shake her head in disbelief.

"Remarkable. I honestly did not believe you could do it."

Janet shrugged, "Well, it's not done yet- but it's getting there. About another day's work yet."

The Commander glanced at her and her tone of voice set off alarms in Janet's mind, "I see. You are still able to defend yourself of course?"

The human nodded, "Even more so now."

The Romulan tilted her head as two red shirted crewmen joined them at Janet's signal. "What do you mean?"

"You wanted to see the *Enterprise*," Janet told her as Scott came over, "So you're going to- starting with our Guest Quarters. I don't think your ship will be too eager to fire on us while you're on board." She looked to Spock. "Make sure the computer terminal and the intercom are disconnected."

Spock nodded as he told hold of the Romulan's arm. "This way, Commander."

As the four left, Scott turned to the redhead. "Commander-"

Janet cut him off, "I told her '*about* another day's work.'" She reached over and gently touched his arm, "Now how long will it *really* take?"

He met her gaze for a moment, then sighed and nodded, "Aye, you might have a knack for this after all." He turned to his men, "Come along, lads! We've got a few more miles to go before we sleep tonight!"

Seated at his desk, Spock looked up from his terminal as his cabin door buzzer went off. "Come."

He turned off the screen and stood as Janet entered.

"I dismissed Rand for the night," she said, then asked, "Did you get the Commander settled?"

"Yes- and posted guards outside her door," he replied as she stepped into the sleep area. "If you will permit an observation," he said as he stepped toward her, "You appear ill at ease."

She turned to face him. They were close enough that she could rest her hands against his chest. "A lot on my mind right now," she told him, "I've never had this much at stake before." She closed her eyes. "This *has* to work."

"You have it planned out as well as you can," Spock told her, "Logically, all you can do now, is wait for further events to unfold."

"Waiting is something I've never been good at," she whispered. She gently shook her head in confusion. "Why do I feel safer with you than with anyone else I've ever known?"

She looked up then, meeting his gaze. They were never sure who moved first, but after a moment, their lips met and she moaned softly as Spock drew her to him. Soon all she was aware of was the feel of his body against hers and the sheets of his bed.

It was past midnight. The only light in the cabin coming from the incense burner in the far corner. Silence ruled the night.

Till the Red Alert Klaxon shattered it!

Janet woke with a start and her hand came down on the intercom at the head of the bed. "Kirk here. Report!"

"Sulu, Commander. We've got three Birds-of-Prey entering the area."

"Go to full Battle Stations. I'm on my way. Kirk out."

As Spock dressed, he watched her quickly don her skirt and halter, grab her boots and run from the cabin.

By the time the turbo lift reached the bridge, she had her boots on and Janet glanced around as she headed for the command chair- seeing Rand waiting for her, and pausing at the sight of Scott at the engineering station. "Status?"

"Everything's, ready, Commander," The Engineer replied.

Sulu spoke up then. "The New Birds'll be in range in two minutes. The Commander's Bird is going out to meet them."

Janet nodded, "Bring all weapons to bear. Prepare to fire the Canon."

Sulu looked back at her as Spock arrived --then at Scott as he reached for a recent addition to his helm console.

"The Commander's Bird-of-Prey is firing," Spock reported as he checked his scanner.

"It's time to fight fire with fire," Janet stated. "She looked to Scott, "Time to put your new toy to use."

"Aye." He activated the console's intercom. "Lt. Commander Scott to P.E.C. Control. Put the match to her, lads!"

Even as Sulu put the ship's phasers to use detonating plasma energy bursts, the hum of the Warp Engines deepened, the Bussard Collectors took on a brighter, more orange glow, even as the recently installed emitter on the front of the saucer came to life and a plasma energy burst erupted forth- followed soon after by another.

Two Birds-of-Prey were destroyed as the remaining two broke formation. "They're trying to bracket us," Chekov reported.

Janet quickly crossed to Spock's station and flipped several switches. "Computer?"

The female voice responded, "Yes, Commander?"

Janet met Spock's gaze as she spoke, "'Go for it.'"

Faster than the human mind can comprehend, computer lights shifted and flashed. All around the Bridge, systems darkened and then returned to normal.

"Computer?" Janet called. "Status?"

"I am in control and ready, Commander."

"Assume control of the dorsal phasers- port and starboard," Janet ordered it, "Fire at will."

"Understood."

Within seconds, Port and Starboard phasers came to life, striking the enemy vessels Janet then turned to Sulu, "While *Enterprise* deals with the enemy, wipe this place off the charts."

He met her gaze and a slow smile came to his own, "Yes, Ma'am."

Janet nodded in approval and watched as *Enterprise* destroyed the birds-of-prey and Sulu used their new plasma canon to destroy what was left of the ship yard. "When you're finished, set a new course," She ordered, "213, mark

7. Warp 8.”

She then turned to Scott, “And you, Mister, just got yourself a promotion-Commander.”

He stood a little straighter--his antagonism toward this woman having faded over the last several days. He nodded and the gleam in his eyes was clear, “Thank you... Ma’am.”

Spock turned from his viewer. “What about the Romulan Commander? There is no ship to return her to now.”

“Then it looks like she’ll be staying on board,” Janet replied, “We turn her loose, she’ll only come back at us with a full squadron. You have the bridge.”

He nodded and watched as she entered the lift with Rand at her side.

A moment later, claiming his break, Chekov followed.

Janet sighed as she and Rand reached her cabin. “You’re dismissed, Rand. I’m going to take a shower and try to get a few more hours sleep.”

“Yes, Ma’am. I’ll see you at 0800.” The blond then nodded and walked off.

The redhead watched her go for a moment then entered her cabin to find M’ress awake and watching for her. “Forgot to feed you, didn’t I?” Janet asked as she went to the food replicator. A disc was slid into the appropriate slot and she was soon handing a bowl of food to her pet. “Things are moving so fast,” Janet told her. “It’s getting hard to keep up.”

“Computer’s in control of the ship now. If anyone tries to move against me, she’ll let me know before they can act.” She reached out and petted the Caitian. “All that’s left is to get the ‘Official’ sanction from Starfleet.” She met M’ress’ gaze, “And I mean to have *that* before the week’s out.”

Turning from her pet, she removed her boots and uniform as she headed toward the restroom and the shower unit.

Moments after the restroom door slid shut, the cabin door was manually opened- avoiding the ‘swooshing’ sound that announced its function. Chekov carefully looked around as he entered and slid the door shut- locking it as he did so. M’ress watched him as he moved further into the room, his gaze pausing only briefly on her before making sure there was no one else in the cabin. He spotted Janet’s uniform and a moment later, heard the shower unit as it was engaged.

He picked up her halter and raised it to sniff it. He closed his eyes and swallowed. Walking over to the restroom door, he listened for a moment before tossing the halter aside and leaning against the bulkhead with every intention of waiting.

It was five minutes later that the shower kicked off and he tensed in expectation.

The door slid open-

-and no one came out.

He listened for a moment. Then, taking his dagger from his sash, he stepped into the open and approached the door. There was no sound, no sense of moment. He entered the restroom-

To find no one there.

The door slid shut- and locked.

He pounded the switch, pounded the door- but nothing helped.

Then he heard the sound of a transporter- the sound he didn't hear earlier since it was drowned out by the sound of the shower. A few minutes later, the door slid open on it's on and he stepped back.

Then Janet's voice was heard. "Looking for me, *Ensign?*"

He stepped slowly back into the cabin to find Janet- in uniform- and dagger in hand. Upon seeing his, she tilted her head slightly. "Why, Chekov? I've done nothing to you. If my plan works I'll be captain and everyone'll move up- including you."

"Orders," The younger male replied. "If anything happened to him, Captain Pike paid me to make sure you died for it."

Janet eased into a defensive stance. "Then I hope he paid you enough to cover your funeral."

Silence filled the cabin as the two circled in the cramped space of the sleeping area. M'ress growled and crouched, watching as her mistress faced off against the male as he tossed his dagger from hand to hand. "Anytime now, Mister," Janet stated. "Unless you've lost your nerve." Her eyes narrowed. "You expected to catch me in the shower?" She tilted her head once more. "Planned on a little fun first?" An almost animal-like growl of disgust escaped her. "You're not man enough to pull it off."

With a bellow of anger, Chekov raised his dagger and lunged.

She ducked, rolled, knocking his feet from under him and sending him sprawling. He went into a roll, came up on his feet and swung the dagger in a wide arc.

Janet jumped clear- but not before her right arm was sliced, forcing her to drop her dagger. Before she could recover, he back-handed her, slamming her into a bulkhead. Then he was there, pressing his dagger against her throat, and his body against hers. "Fun first," he told her.

She rammed her knee home- *hard*. Even as he doubled over-and despite her arm- she brought a two- fisted blow down on the back of his head that laid the ensign out cold on the deck. "Only on a cold day in hell," She swore.

Janet turned as the cabin door was forced open- by Spock with Rand and her men behind him. "Janet?"

Holding her arm, she nodded toward the deck indicating the incapacitated Chekov, "Pike's Revenge." She looked to Rand. "Give him a full session in the Agony Booth- then throw him in the Brig."

As Rand and her people dragged Chekov out, Spock turned to Janet and asked, "How bad?"

"I need McCoy," She replied, "If Computer hadn't warned me, I'd be dead."

A moment later, the doctor himself was coming through the door. "The computer called me." He spotted her arm and nodded toward the corridor. "Gunnin' for you already?"

"Just close this up," She told him.

Personal log; additional. After McCoy closed up my arm, I went to the Agony Booth to watch Chekov's punishment. I've never liked the idea of this thing- it's one of the areas where Pike and I always disagreed.

He enjoyed watching his enemies suffer- he took a perverse pleasure in it. I always considered it excessive. Once it's activated, you feel like every nerve in your body's on fire. It's been known to actually fry a man's nervous system.

When they took Chekov out, his eyes were wide open and there was a wild look of terror and panic on his face.

He had to be carried to the Brig.

I honestly believe he had no idea of the consequences if he failed- something I intend to point to point out to him...

Three days later....

Lying on the sleep shelf in the brig, Chekov looked to the force field door at the sound of a familiar voice. "Let me in." He slowly sat up as Janet entered. "Remain seated, Ensign." He nodded as she stood before him while Rand stood by the door- one hand on her phaser.

Janet watched him for a moment before she spoke.

"Let me tell you a little story about your predecessor. Steven Jacobs served under Captain April from the day *Enterprise* first left Spacedock. Like you, April

gave him orders- If anything should ever happened to April, Jacobs was to kill the most likely suspect- Pike.

"Like you, he tried and failed. Pike sentenced him to the Agony Booth- just as I did to you."

Janet looked off for a long moment before she continued, "That's where the similarities between you end. Pike left Jacobs in the booth too long- deliberately- and it fried his nervous system." She looked over at Chekov. "To this day, Jacobs sits in a Starfleet hospital- paralyzed from the neck down." She shrugged. "He can't even have sex with his wife.

"Now in your case, you had the maximum length session allowed by regulations. That should give you some idea of what Pike was capable of.

"I did some checking. I know you volunteered for the Academy. You had no Patrons to recommend you or avenge you if anything happened. In Pike's eyes, you were the perfect pawn." She met the young man's gaze. "I don't entirely blame you for what happened. Pike chose you as the most expendable tool for his revenge. Using what little experience and training you had, you did your best to carry out your orders." She shrugged. "In fact, you came closer than the last guy that tried. If you'd had a phaser instead of your dagger, you could have killed me the moment the restroom door opened. But then, as my husband--Spock would have been required to avenge me--but that's another matter.

"Right now, the way I see it, by trying and failing, you've discharged your responsibility to Pike as best you could. As a result, you're facing charges of Treason, Mutiny and attempted murder- the combination of which is guaranteed to get you an invitation as the 'Man of Honor' in front of a firing squad on the hanger deck." She stepped over and placed her hand on his shoulder. "If I press the charges. The forms are filled out. All I've got to do is tell Computer to send them in.

"One chance, Pavel. Swear allegiance to me and do your duty to this ship. You're a natural navigator- a few more years and you could be the best in the fleet. Join me and I'll set the charges aside. Do that and when this current operation's over, you'll find yourself with lieutenant's rank- and a nice little bonus to go with it."

He looked up at her and she could see the fear of death he'd been wrestling with as it slowly faded from his face. Slowly, shakily, he finally nodded.

She patted his shoulder. "Good." She nodded toward the cell door. "Go on to your quarters and take the rest of the day to finish recovering from the 'Booth. Then I want to see you at your station first thing in the morning." He nodded once

more and slowly rose to his feet. He'd only taken a few steps when she called to him and spoke without facing him. "Chekov? Remember, I'm only setting the charges aside." Then she turned to face him and her tone of voice was steel.

"Cross me again and there won't be a third chance- Clear?"

The male met her gaze. "Yes... Keptin."

She nodded in approval. "That's a start. Dismissed." She watched as he left, then she joined Rand in the corridor.

"You were too lenient with him," the blond stated, "Five years ago, you would've shot him and been done with it."

Janet nodded. "Five years ago, I wouldn't have had any choice. Computer's been told to watch him. If he crosses the line again, she'll tell me." She met Rand's gaze. "On that day, he's all yours."

The Commander's bodyguard nodded, "Understood."

Spock looked up from the work on his computer screen a short while later and then turned it off as Janet entered his cabin and headed for the sleep area.

"How did your conversation with Chekov go?"

"He decided to see reason," she replied as she stretched out on the bed. "I think he'll behave. He knows I'll follow through with the charges if he doesn't."

"I'm tired," she whispered as she lay with her eyes closed, "If my back muscles get any more knots in them, I think they'll snap."

"Tension," Spock noted, "It's only going to grow in the next few hours."

She rolled over on her stomach and looked around the room divider at him. "Hours?"

He nodded. "We'll be crossing the border in three hours. Then your next challenge will begin."

She sat up and reached for the intercom at the head of the bed. "Kirk to Bridge."

"Sulu here, Commander."

"Mr. Sulu, I want you to plan three combat practice drills. I want them timed one half hour apart and I want them to start in one half hour. By the time they're done every department better have a 90% or better rating. Clear?"

"Clear, Commander."

"I want to see the results of each drill as soon as you have them. Kirk out."

She then lay back down on the bed. Spock watched her for a moment... then he rose and quietly left the cabin.

For the next two hours, the crew of the *SC Enterprise* ran through the corridors to their combat stations, prepped their consoles and fired at imaginary enemies. Results ranged from 90 to 95 percent- with Engineering getting the highest marks each time.

Janet arrived on the Bridge shortly after the last drill was completed. She glanced around as she spoke. "It's time all of you knew where we're going and why.

"As Sulu and Chekov have probably figured out, we'll be crossing into Orion Territory within the hour. Captain Pike tried for ten years to bring Orion into the Star Realm and he never reached orbit.

"We're going in and we're not stopping until we *are* in orbit- and we're not leaving till Orion is firmly a member of the Star Realm." She looked to Spock. "Call Red Alert till further notice."

"Acknowledged."

Sulu spoke up then. "Commander, the computer just brought the shields up!"

A second later, the ship was *SLAMMED* sideways. The navigation half of the helm console exploded and Chekov screamed in agony as he was flung to the deck- shrapnel from the console embedded in his chest. Janet was beside him in an instant even as Spock reported that the Bird-of-Prey was circling around for another shot. "Chekov?"

"I... I... would have done right... by you... Keptin," the Ensign whispered weakly.

"I know," she told him, "I know... Lieutenant."

A moment later, his eyes closed and his body slumped. Chekov was dead.

Janet's eyes narrowed as she stood up. "What's our status?"

Spock made the report. "We were fortunate. The Bird-of-Prey rushed its shot and the burst grazed the ship's shields instead of striking us directly. There is some circuitry damage, some hull plates were scorched. Sickbay reports thirty injured- five dead."

"The Bird's almost in position," Sulu reported. Then his eyes went wide as he checked his board. "Commander, someone's using the Transporter!"

Janet reached for the Command Chair intercom, "Kirk to Transporter Room--Report!"

"Scott here, Commander. Just thought I'd grab a wee souvenir you might like- They call 'em a 'Cloaking Device'."

The redhead glanced at the Vulcan and the shock was clear on her face,

“How in the hell do you even know where it’s at?!”

“I spend nearly two days tearin’ one of these Birds apart,” Scott reminded her, “I would think I would have found out where a *few* things were. I would’ve grabbed the one at the yard, but its globe was cracked.” She could hear the hum of the transporter. “It’s in Engineering now,” Scott reported, “I’ll let ya know as soon as it’s installed.”

Janet forced herself to look past Chekov’s body toward the helm. “Status?”

“The Bird’s closing,” Sulu reported, “She’ll be in phaser range in thirty seconds.”

“To hell with the phasers,” Janet ordered, “Use the Canon- blow it out of the sky.”

“Bridge to P.E.C. Control,” Sulu called as his hand came down on the helm’s intercom. “Stand by to fire.”

“P.E.C. Control - Acknowledged.”

Spock spoke up next as he studied his viewer. “Long-range sensors are picking up three more birds-of-prey entering the area.”

“Stand by, Sulu,” Janet ordered as her eyes narrowed and her mind raced.

The leading Bird of Prey had its sister ship and the Star Realm vessel on its screens. The two were maneuvering, trying for the best firing positions. A Plasma energy burst was fired-no, two were fired and seemed to collide and detonate, destroying both ships in the resulting glare. Romulan eyes remained glued to their screens and read-outs as they approached the scene of battle. There was a debris cloud containing the remains of their sister ship- but nothing they could identify as Star Realm tech.

Then, from a totally different direction than was expected, phaser beams appeared to come from nowhere- joined by plasma energy bursts as *Enterprise* dropped her cloak and dove into their midst.

Even as the Romulans scrambled, gave orders and counter orders, Janet sat in the *Enterprise’s* command chair and watched as her ship and crew annihilated them, leaving a growing cloud of debris and bodies in the vessel’s wake. She nodded as the last ship exploded. “Cease fire, Mr. Sulu. Resume course.”

She stepped down beside the console and met his gaze, “If anything else gets in our way, you have permission to destroy it and continue on till we achieve orbit.”

“Yes, Ma’am... Captain.”

She nodded to him and smiled- a smile that faded as a stretcher team arrived for Chekov’s body. Silence filled the Bridge till they left, then she crossed over to

the science station. "Status, Spock?"

"No major damage was sustained," He replied. "What minor circuitry repairs are needed will be complete before we reach orbit."

She nodded. "You have the Bridge. I'll be in my cabin making the log entry."

Spock met her gaze for a moment and lowered his voice. "About Chekov..."

"He was a model member of this crew," she stated firmly, "and it should be obvious to everyone that he died doing his duty."

The Vulcan nodded in agreement and watched as she turned and left the Bridge. As the door slid shut behind her, his gaze went to the ruined navigation console and one eyebrow rose slightly.

On into that day and the next, *Enterprise* was a juggernaut that nothing seemed to be able to stop. Romulan ships were destroyed left and right by plasma energy bursts. Orion frigates were damaged with phasers and left to drift.

And yet, *Enterprise* was never seen. The Romulans only knew that someone- or something- was destroying their garrison ship by ship.

It was the start of the third day when Janet and Spock reached the bridge to see Orion on the screen- and something else. Janet's eyebrows rose slightly.

"Tell me those are harmless satellites."

"Not our kind of luck," McCoy replied as he leaned against the back of the command chair.

"Computer?" Janet called.

"Yes, Commander?"

"Go to magnification five on the main screen."

"Acknowledged."

The view screen blurred and the image seemed to leap forward- revealing *ten* birds of prey between them and Orion.

"Ship's status?" Janet asked as she stepped over to the rail by the science station, her eyes never leaving the screen.

"All systems are fully functional," Spock told her.

"What about *our* propulsion residue?"

"Ours deteriorates at a far quicker rate than theirs," the Vulcan replied, "There is nothing for them to track."

"Still," Janet noted, "No sense in attacking from the *expected* direction."

Ten Romulan warbirds held their positions in a line between Orion and the most likely direction of attack. Scrambled messages and broken signals had alerted

the garrison to an invader in the system- as yet unidentified. But there could be no question as to its point of origin- unless the Klingons had suddenly taken leave of their senses.

Sensors continued to show nothing right up to the moment one Bird had an engine cut away by phaser beams- only to be destroyed by a plasma energy burst a moment later.

Both were fired from *behind* the line and as the remaining nine ships started to turn, another of their wingmen was destroyed by another plasma burst.

On the *Enterprise* Bridge, Janet paced in front of the helm console, "Elevation Z plus Two Hundred meters. Come to course 187, mark 3. Fire as you bear." She watched as the view screen changed with the movement of the ship. Her eyes narrowed as phaser beams lashed out, forcing a bird of Prey into the path of their plasma burst. "Now, change elevation to Z- 600 meters. Come to course 318, mark 5- and fire."

"Phasers or plasma?" Sulu asked as he laid in the course.

Janet glanced at him as she said one word. "Both."

The Star cruiser came round to her new course. Phasers and plasma bursts erupted from her-

-taking out another ship, who's debris, in turn, damaged and destroyed a second ship.

The cruiser was in the middle of the garrison's remaining ships when Janet gave her next order. "All stop." The huge vessel slowed till it came to a standstill. "Computer?"

"Yes, Commander?"

"Mr. Sulu will retain control of the Plasma Energy Canon. You will assume control of the phasers and detonate any plasma energy bursts aimed in our direction."

"Acknowledged."

A moment later, the ship was *slammed*- and then slammed again.

"Our shields are down," Spock reported as he studied his viewer. He glanced over at Janet as she regained her feet by the command chair, "We cannot withstand another burst."

"How the hell did they find us?" Janet demanded, "Uhura?"

"Nothing's going out, Commander."

"Then it has to be an energy out-put of some kind," Sulu noted, "Something the Romulans don't have or it wouldn't stand out for them."

Janet's head came up with a snap as she turned to Scott, "The shields! The energy output from the shields!"

But before Scott could reply, the computer spoke up, "Shields restored."

"No!" Janet ordered as she dove for the rebuilt helm console. Both she and Sulu's moves were a blur as they quickly fed commands into the console. Spock made his report as they worked. "All five remaining birds of prey are firing."

Janet's hand hit one last switch.

Under her cloak, *Enterprise* began pulling away as the Plasma bursts began to converge. Two, then three, then all five collided, exploded and erupted- sending shockwaves throughout the area. Aboard *Enterprise*, everyone that didn't have a handhold was thrown about as the ship rolled and tumbled even as the Birds suffered the fate meant for the Star Cruiser. By the time *Enterprise* stabilized, five debris clouds marked the locations of her enemies.

Climbing back to her feet from where she'd been thrown against the command chair, Janet's voice was still strong in the emergency light. "Report!"

"Main power is out," Spock reported, "There is some hull buckling on decks Four and Five and a rupture on Deck Ten, port side aft. The Emergency Bulkheads have closed in that area to seal it off."

Into the dimness of the Bridge came a loud "*Thunk*" and the renewed hum of systems as the bridge consoles and lights came back up. Scott looked around and nodded. "That's my lads. Commander, permission to check the damage?"

Janet nodded toward the lift, "Go." As he left, she walked over to Sulu and asked, "Can we still maneuver?"

He checked his console. "Impulse is still okay." He looked up at her and added, "But right now, I can only give you Warp 3."

"How far to Orion on impulse?"

"Two more days."

The redhead sighed in frustration as she glanced across the bridge at Spock. "That's cutting it close." She nodded to Sulu. "Get us moving. Make sure Scott knows the situation so he can give priority to the Warp Drive. We can't power the plasma canon without it- and we *need* that canon to make all of this worth it."

Sulu nodded, "Yes, Ma'am."

She looked to the science station once more, "Spock, you have the bridge. I want a full report in one hour."

"Acknowledged."

She then headed for the lift with Rand right behind her. As the doors closed she grabbed a handle. "Deck five." Once the lift was in motion, the redhead

looked to the blond and saw her look away. "All right, Janice. You've been holding back for days now. Whatever you've got to say, say it."

"The night after we left the shipyard, I was having trouble sleeping," Rand said, "So, I decided to take walk--check things out. I saw Spock go into the Romulan Commander's quarters. He stayed exactly fourteen minutes... then headed straight back to his cabin."

Janet met her gaze. "Was that the only night?"

Rand shook her head. "He's paid her a fourteen minute visit at least once--sometimes twice--a day since then."

The commander glanced at her and then stepped away. "I know you love him," Rand whispered, "That's why I've hesitated to say anything. These visits could be about anything--" she shrugged, "But, I felt you had to know."

The doors opened. Janet glanced at her once more, nodded and headed off toward her cabin with Rand right behind her.

The Orion Home world- Two days later....

Orion ceremonies are known for their pageantry and elegance. This was a world where such things held a lot of significance and meaning. Their official buildings reflected this outlook in the details worked into the architecture. Their religious buildings showed this most of all. The designers and builders of Orion temples were the Masters of their craft and took great pride in showing off their skill and ability.

The building where today's wedding ceremony was to take place was over a thousand years old and it was clear a supreme master of the builder's art had had a hand in its creation. If humans had been present, they would have compared it to some of the ancient cathedrals which still stood on Earth.

Those present for the ceremony included Maket- the acknowledged leader of the Orion Territory and his bride- and head of the Orion Military- named Ballen. The rest of the gathering consisted of the top crust of the Orion Elite- all there to take part in a day of historical significance.

They had no idea *how* significant it was going to be.

Before the ceremony could begin, the sound of transporters filled the air--shattering the moment and leaving humans in red shirts positioned all around the chamber. A moment later, three more beings arrived, beaming into the center aisle. One was a redheaded human female. Another was a human male and the third was obviously Vulcan.

Janet looked around as she stepped toward the platform where the bride and Groom stood. "Have you gotten to the part that goes 'If anyone has any reason why these two should *not* be joined, let him speak now or forever hold his peace'?"

"Who are you?" The groom demanded.

"I am Commander Janet Kirk of the Starcruiser *Enterprise*. My ship and crew have just spent the last four days liberating your territory from the Romulan Empire." She looked around at the gathered Orions. "There's not a Romulan ship left in the territory."

Ballen stepped toward Janet, her fury barely contained. "Impossible. You lie."

Janet studied her for a moment. "Well, I guess you'd know all about that. That's what spies do best, isn't it? Lie?"

Maket stepped forward. "Watch your words, Human. Ballen- "

"-Has no record prior to twenty years ago," Janet declared as she met his gaze without a flinch. "What'd she do the first sixteen years of her life?"

A low murmur ran through the chamber as Maket turned to the female. "Ballen? Explain this."

At that point, McCoy turned from scanning one of the bridesmaids and scanned Ballen. "Confirmed," he declared, "I'm scanning surgical and bio-chemical alterations throughout her body." He looked to Janet. "She's no more a natural Orion than I am."

Ballen's eyes went wide. Then she bolted for the nearest exit.

She might've made it if Janet hadn't shot her in the back.

Maket could only stare in shock as she fell. He didn't move till Janet took him by his arm.

"You and I need to have a talk." She then led him from the chamber and out of the building.

Once out in the open air, the male sighed and looked to the sky- and his eyes went wide in shock as he took in the asteroid belt that stretched across the sky. "What- ?"

"Your smallest moon," Janet told him. She shrugged, "Wasn't much more than an asteroid anyway." She then turned to face him. "Let me tell you how things stand. We've liberated the Orion territory from increasing Romulan oppression. We've uncovered- and exterminated- a spy in your own inner circle. As a result of this, you're pretty damn grateful- so much so, you're going to gladly and willingly bring Orion into the Terran Star Realm. Do that and you can continue as Governor of the Orion Territory."

She stepped closer and her voice dropped to a dangerous whisper, "If you *don't* agree to this, I'll blow your head off and level this planet as a message to anyone else that might refuse our generous offer." She glanced toward the asteroid belt as she finished. Then she nodded toward the door standing open behind them. "Well? What's it going to be?"

He looked to the sky once more, then to Janet. "You will not harm anyone?"

She shrugged, "As long as they swear allegiance to the Star Realm and the Emperor, I'll have no reason to." She met his gaze then. "I admit I can be quick with a phaser when I need to be. But if you'll work *with* me, I'll work with you."

He hesitated for a moment more. Then, finally, he nodded and she waved a hand toward the door, allowing him to precede her.

Two days later- the *SC Enterprise*....

Janet sighed as she stepped onto the Bridge. Down on Orion, things were going as smoothly as they could. The population in general was glad to escape Romulan control, but some weren't too sure the Terran Star Realm was any better. As Janet stepped down toward the command chair and Rand took up a position by the lift, Uhura spoke up. "Commander? There's a message coming in..." Her voice faded as she listened to her ear phone.

Janet stepped back up onto the upper level. "Uhura?"

The lieutenant looked up at her. "Ma'am. It's on the ...Royal Channel."

The redhead looked to Spock as he came over from his station. "The Emperor?" she asked. She looked down at Uhura then turned toward the screen. "Put it through."

The screen was currently showing Orion. A blur and a flip later, the Royal Seal of the Terran Star Realm was on the screen. This faded, to be replaced by the image of a man in his late fifties, with sharp eyes and hair long enough to be pulled back in an old-style ponytail. It was said this man had more than a passing resemblance to his great-grandfather, who had united the Human race amid the ruined aftermath of the Eugenics Wars.

Janet stood straighter as the image cleared- as did everyone else on the bridge. The man was first to speak, in a rich, cultured tone. "Please, everyone at ease."

"Your Majesty," Janet began, "This is an unexpected Honor."

"I had just finished reading your report on your Orion operation, Captain and I had to call to congratulate you."

Janet's eyebrows rose. The Emperor was clearly mistaken. "Captain? Sir- "
He raised a hand, stopping her reply. "It's correct. I told Grand Admiral Michaels to put it through just before I called." A relaxed smile came to his face. "After all, I cannot have a Royal Star Cruiser with only a commander in charge."

There were gasps around the bridge. Until now, there had only been eleven ships in the fleet that could claim the title 'Royal Star Cruiser.' Those ships answered to- and got their orders directly from- the Emperor himself.

Janet bowed her head. "On behalf of my crew, sir, we thank you and we'll do your best to be worthy of your trust."

Emperor Khan Noonian Singh IV nodded. "When you return home, play this message for base Commander Stevens so he'll know you have the necessary authority to have the Royal Crest added to your hull. I will expect you to arrive back here by the first of next month so I may meet with you and your command crew and congratulate you in person. You've accomplished something the rest of the Elite Corps has been trying to do for over two decades."

"Thank you, sir."

"I do have one thing I would like you to check on before you return," the Emperor noted. "Andor has been making noises of late. If you would...swing by, see what the problem is and straighten things out...?"

A smile came to Janet's face. "Consider it done, sir."

"Excellent," the man said. "Then until we meet in person, Captain Kirk. Khan out." His image faded to be replaced once more by that of Orion.

Janet glanced over at Spock as she released the breath she'd been holding. Then she stepped down and seated herself- in *her* command chair. "Uhura? Contact Governor Maket. Tell him we've got a few things to see to- and to look for us when he least expects us."

"Yes...Captain."

"Mr. Sulu? Lay in a course for Andor- Warp 7."

Sulu's smile almost reached from ear to ear, "Aye, aye, Captain. Course plotted and on the board."

"Let's do it then," Janet told him, "The Emperor's waiting."

That night, guards loyal to Spock nodded to him as the First Officer arrived at the Romulan Commander's cabin. She turned from pacing the deck as he entered. "Well?" she asked.

"You are now on board the Royal Star Cruiser *Enterprise*, under the command of *Captain* Janet Kirk," he told her.

She nodded. "She has succeeded then."

"As we expected her to," Spock replied as he moved further into the cabin. "She is now the first and only woman captain in the Emperor's Elite Corps. From what I saw on the bridge today, he is already... curious about her."

"Things are moving rapidly then," the Romulan noted, "You had not expected to reach this point for months yet."

"No, I did not. However the plan allows for some adjustment." He turned to face her. "He wants to meet her. That will lead to other official occasions together and then to more private ones. Possibly within the year he will approach her for a more... intimate encounter." He shrugged slightly. "Being who she is- and married- she will of course refuse. They will argue, she will leave and the next morning, the Emperor will be found dead."

He met the Commander's gaze. "Some will believe her protests of innocence. Others will not. Lines will be drawn. Factions will see this as a chance to seize power. Some star systems will see this as a chance to break away from the Star Realm.

"In the midst of the chaos, Vulcan will step forward to restore order-" He tilted his head to her- "With our ancient cousins at our side."

The Commander tilted her own head. "Re-Unification for the sake of the quadrant." She met his gaze. "It has an interesting sound. But what of your wife?"

"Regrettably, she was an unfortunate casualty the moment she arrived on board," Spock explained. "She will die as the woman that killed the Emperor."

Elsewhere on board as Spock's voice finished, a female hand reached out to the open intercom and shut it off.

A short while later, Janet was standing in her cabin, a snifter of brandy in hand, when the door buzzer went off. "Come."

The unit slid aside to allow Spock to enter. "I have been informed that we are no longer headed for Andor?"

"Just a short detour to the Klingon border," She answered as she looked down at the snifter. "We're meeting with Kang to do some trading."

"May I ask what the Klingons have – ?"

"A pair of D-7 class disruptors," Janet replied as she looked over her shoulder at him.

He watched her closely. "And what is their asking price?"

"The Romulan Commander," the human replied. She stepped away as she continued. "Seems she snuck into their territory a few years back and stole some

military secret of theirs. She's been on their "Most Wanted" list ever since."

Spock took a step toward her. "You are aware that they will execute her the moment they get their hands on her?"

Janet met his gaze then with a laser-sharp glance of her own. "That's what happens when people get caught doing something they've got no business doing." A heavy silence settled over the cabin. Then she turned away. "I assume you have duties to see to?"

"I do."

"Then I suggest you see to them." Spock turned to leave, only to have Janet's voice stop him in his tracks. "Don't try to see her, Spock. Janice and her men are guarding her till we make the trade – and Janice has orders to shoot anyone who gets too close."

Janet's back was to the Vulcan as she spoke and she didn't turn as he left the cabin.

But a moment later, the brandy snifter smashed against the cabin door.

"Space, the Final Frontier. This is the voyage of the Royal Star Cruiser Enterprise. Her mission: to enforce and expand the rule of the Terran Star Realm. To seek out and destroy the Emperor's enemies wherever they may be found – Even in places where no one has gone...."