

On holodeck three, Val'ri Raiajh surrounded herself with a simulation so real she felt like she was fourteen years old again and back when the surroundings were genuine.

She sat on the edge of a bunk within a cool, carved stone room, staring out the window at the night sky. The glow of T'Khut, Vulcan's sister planet, cast a reddish glow across the desert terrain. As she remembered it, tomorrow she would begin classes at the Academy of Sciences, five years before she would enter *Starfleet Academy*. She and her mother both agreed that it would be best that she studied at the university on Vulcan and continue to work on the Vulcan disciplines she had begun learning as a child. Her mother always thought it important that her daughter, who was half-Vulcan as well as half-Deltan, study the disciplines that would help her through life. The studying had begun on Earth, in San Francisco, with the help of the Vulcan Ambassador. Now it was time for her to continue her studies where the best teachers were, on Vulcan itself.

Raiajh had never met her father. Never knew who he could have been. After she was born, an extensive investigation was started to determine how Val'ri had come into the universe. Her mother, a full Deltan and never married, had arranged for in-vitro fertilization outside the Federation's borders to become pregnant with a Deltan child. She had had success with the doctors on Nisus before, giving birth to a son, Ja'al, almost five years earlier. But the doctors also used some of the ovum from Karinara Raiajh for genetic manipulation testing. Karinara never expected what greeted her in the birthing room several months later, but she accepted Val'ri without qualms.

When word had reached Nisus that a child who was supposed to be pure Deltan was born half-Deltan and half-Vulcan, the resulting inquiry determined that although several embryos had been created for implantation, they had been subsequently destroyed by a laboratory assistant who mixed up the vials with the genetic experiments that were meant to be for research only before being destroyed.

Before going to Vulcan, Raiajh had only traveled between planets once, when she was six, and she and her mother spent several weeks on Delta IV. Other than that, she had never been away from Earth. As a result, when she had stepped off the transporter platform in the Federation embassy on Vulcan, she was practically overcome by the thinness of the air. She also had a hard time adjusting to Vulcan's higher gravity, causing her to tire quickly. That was the day she truly learned just how much of her was not Vulcan. Doctors prescribed a daily hypospray of tri-ox to help her cope with the atmosphere and she was assured she would eventually acclimate to the gravity. But that day she sat on the edge of the bunk and wondered how she would fare the next five years on Vulcan. Raiajh cleared her mind and looked around at the holodeck recreation of her dormitory room at the Vulcan Academy of Sciences.

Quite unexpectedly, she heard a man's voice speak from behind her.

"You are no more a part of this world than you are a part of the other one."

Instantly the scene changed into the inside of her mother's home on Delta IV. Val'ri Raiajh turned around quickly to glare at the person standing behind her, who continued to speak as she turned.

"Genetic manipulation has always interested me. I dabble in it myself on occasion. It always intrigues me to see how things will turn out."

He wore the uniform of a Starfleet admiral, but something in his attitude assured Raiajh he was most certainly not actually one. She lowered her mental shields for a moment to try and get some clue as to who, or what, the being was, but he was an unreadable blank to her.

"Interesting, I've never come across one who was both Vulcan and Deltan before. Vulcan and human... Klingon and human, yes. But never one like you before."

"Who are you? And how did you get into the holodeck?" Raiajh demanded to know. "I locked the doors from the inside."

"How I got in here is none of your concern. That I am here is," the fake admiral said with an oily grin. "We are known as the Q. And I have an opportunity I think may interest you."

The name meant nothing to Raiajh. Instead she merely said, "And why would I be interested in your so-called opportunity?"

The being's voice turned stern and the words spoken stung like needles.

"It matters little whether you are interested or not. You are going to experience what your life would have been like had you been born a full-blooded Deltan, as your family intended. Then, if I please, you will know what your life would have been as a full-blooded Vulcan. Your adventure begins now...!"

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

Star Trek: *Sarek*

"Q-for-Thought" By Nadine B. Sacks & PJK

Before Raiajh could say a word, the strange being in the Starfleet admiral's uniform snapped his finger, and in a flash of light, disappeared. Once she had ascertained her visitor was indeed gone, Raiajh decided she had had enough of the holodeck for the day and requested the computer to end the program. The scenery quickly faded away, replaced by the black and yellow grid pattern of the bare holodeck. She started walking toward the door and suddenly stopped mid-stride. When she had entered the holodeck she was wearing a dress made from a traditional Betazoid pattern. As she looked down at herself, she noticed she was now wearing a standard Starfleet uniform with regulation pants and a blue-breasted scant.

"Computer, why have my clothes been changed?"

"You are wearing the same uniform as when you entered the holodeck," the computer voice replied.

"That is not true. I entered the holodeck wearing a cream-colored dress of Betazoid design. Why would I be wearing a duty uniform? I have not held a Starfleet commission in over two years."

"Incorrect. There is no record of resignation in your Starfleet personnel file."

"There must be a malfunction," Raiajh said to herself as she finally exited the holodeck doors. Heading down the corridor toward her own quarters, she was surprised when the doors to her cabin refused to open for her. Another computer malfunction?

"Computer, please open the doors to my quarters."

"The quarters of Lt Commander Val'ri Raiajh are located on deck seventeen, section thirty."

"Computer, these are my assigned quarters right here."

"This cabin is assigned to Doctor Sylvan Xaran," the computer replied stubbornly.

"That is correct. Sylvan Xaran is my spouse, and these are the quarters we share."

"Records indicate Doctor Xaran is not currently married. Access denied."

Raiajh was starting to get upset as she replied, "Sylvan and I were married three standard years ago – stardate 44550.1 – in the city of Las Vegas on Earth."

"Records indicate Doctor Xaran is not currently married. Access denied."

"Computer, locate Sylvan Xaran," Raiajh finally said with a huff.

"Doctor Xaran is currently in recreation room one."

Raiajh gave the stateroom door one last glare, then proceeded to rec room one. When she located Xaran she walked over and sat opposite him at the table he occupied.

*'Why have you restricted my access to our quarters, Sylvan?'* she thought toward him.

"Hello, Commander Raiajh. To what do I owe this unexpected visit?"

Raiajh repeated her mental plea to Xaran, but it met with no answer. Finally, in frustration, she said aloud, "Sylvan, I feel like my whole world has just been turned upside down."

Xaran thought it strange that Raiajh would address him by his first name with such familiarity, since she had never done so before, though all he asked was, "How so?"

"I tried to gain access to my living quarters, and the computer told me I didn't live there."

Xaran gave Raiajh a strange look, and then asked, "And did the computer tell you why?"

"It said my quarters were elsewhere." It was only then that Raiajh looked down at her own reflection in the tabletop, noticing for the first time that her eyebrows were shaped differently and all the hair on her head, save her eyebrows and lashes, was gone. "I... guess I must be tired and got off the turbolift on the wrong deck. Would you kindly walk me back to my own quarters on deck seventeen? Suddenly my legs feel like lead. I must have over-exerted myself with my holodeck exercise program."

"I will walk you as far as your quarters, but I must get back to sickbay right after." The pair walked quietly to the quarters the computer indicated belonged to Raiajh, where Xaran offered his good-byes before heading back to sickbay. Raiajh watched him walked away, then entered her cabin, the door sliding shut behind her. Inside, she found *Q* seated on one of the chairs, this time wearing a uniform with the same rank pips as her own, lieutenant commander, his appearance altered to look like a Deltan.

"Hiya, roommate. Took you long enough to get home! Where've you been? Out on a date?"

"Don't give me that. Tell me why Sylvan acts like he doesn't know me beyond a casual working friendship? And where is Sylvan's daughter, Charissa?"

"Charissa is fine, living with her real grandparents on Betazed. As for why Sylvan doesn't know you well, take a good look at yourself in the mirror."

Raiajh walked over to the mirror above the dresser in one of the bedrooms. Her appearance, like when she noticed her reflection in the rec room, was that of a full-blooded Deltan woman.

"Perhaps you have forgotten the oath of celibacy you took?" said *Q*. "Perhaps you've forgotten you have never been to Betazed or even Vulcan. You are a science officer among the crew of this new vessel, the *USS Sarek*. You never resigned your commission, you never studied to be a teacher. The only mental bond you have is with your brother, Ja'al Raiajh, and that nearly killed you when you jumped forward in time."

"Ja'al and I never got along well. Mostly due to my being half... Wait! If I am truly now a full-blooded Deltan, why am I here? As the oldest female child of Karinara Raiajh, would I not be the ambassador for Delta IV? Not simply a scientist aboard a starship."

"Even when things are different, they do not always work out the way you would have expected them. Your mother made the decision that Ja'al would follow in her footsteps before you were even born."

"Well, never mind all that," Raiajh said with a touch of anger. "Why are you showing me all this? I never complained about the way my life turned out."

"You wouldn't have been happier living life on the inside looking out than on the outside looking in?"

“Sometimes one has a better perspective looking inward rather than outward,” Raiajh replied, sounding somewhat Vulcan again despite the circumstances.

“While you have the chance, why don’t you experience what it is like to be truly Deltan?”

“Perhaps before I met Sylvan, before I wound up in the 24<sup>th</sup> century, the prospect might have interested me. Instead of showing me what my life might have been like, why don’t you look at what my life IS like? In the last three years since the crew of the *Arcturus* emerged in this century and I met Sylvan, my life could not be more complete. He has given me more than you will ever know.”

“Please, do continue,” *Q* said mockingly. “Tell me about your concerns for Sylvan’s adopted child, Charissa. You are no more her mother than Sylvan is her true father.”

“Two people need not physically bring a child into the universe to be that child’s parents. After Charissa’s biological parents were killed, Sylvan and I became her guardians. As such, we are as close to a real family as Charissa will ever have. Her safety and that of Sylvan are my first and foremost concern.”

“When she grows up, she will be a better telepath than you.”

“That is probably true,” Raiajh replied without emotion. “But like any other telepath, she is going to have to be taught how to properly use her abilities. An untrained telepath is dangerous.”

“True. But on Betazed there are many qualified teachers.”

“A Vulcan approach, like what I learned, would be more help to Charissa than the normal Betazoid technique. Although Betazoids claim to respect everyone’s right to privacy, they have been known to read a person’s thoughts without permission. Charissa would benefit from more restraint than that. She must learn to live unencumbered by her telepathic abilities.”

“Meaning...?” the bald-headed *Q* asked.

“She would be better off learning how not to depend on her abilities.”

“And how does that justify the help you gave to Kalin Kale when you both were aboard the *Arcturus* a few months ago? Help, I might add, you could not provide in this reality.”

“The use of my abilities on that occasion helped not only myself, but the lives of the crew of the *Arcturus*, especially the hostages we rescued. You didn’t expect me to simply stand there silent and let them die, did you?”

“Which is what you did in this reality,” *Q* said accusingly. “In this reality, Ambassador Johnson and his away team were all killed by the terrorists. Several hundred of the *Arcturus* crew joined them when the Radine ships attacked, before your starship managed to defend itself. And then there is the population of the planet Orthid IX, many of whom died when the Radine detonated the anti-matter power station they had captured. All gone... in a blink...” And in a bright flash, both beings disappeared.

\* \* \* \*

“Captain, we seem to have a problem in holodeck three,” Chief Engineer T’Veer announced on the bridge.

“Explain,” Captain Kalin Kale asked.

“Security reports the door locks are not responding to command overrides, and there is no program currently running.”

“Do we know if there is currently anyone in the holodeck?” Kale asked.

“Unknown, Captain, though according to the computer log, the last person to use holodeck three was the civilian ombudsman, Val’ri Raiajh.”

“Have your staff try and get the doors open, and keep me posted.”

At that moment, the doors to the forward turbolift opened, admitting Dr Sylvan Xaran onto the bridge.

“Captain, I sense something is wrong with my wife,” he announced.

“What do you mean, Doctor?” Kale asked. “Wrong in what way?”

“Like someone or something is blocking her telepathic abilities. I don’t believe she is aboard the ship anymore.”

Kale looked over at ship’s counselor Kethry Sutherland.

“Counselor, what do you sense?”

“Val’ri is a strong telepath. I’ve usually been able to sense her when I concentrate since I first came aboard, and right now I don’t sense her at all. Sylvan, what do you sense?”

“Barely anything. I know that she is alive. Our minds are linked closely enough for me to know that. But I cannot tell just how alive she is.”

Captain Kale looked sympathetically at Xaran.

“Doctor Xaran, I know you are worried. But I assure you we’ll do everything we can to help find Val’ri.”

“Yes, sir. I know you will. I’m sorry I disturbed you. It’s just... Since Val’ri and I bonded shortly after meeting aboard the original *Arcturus*, I’ve never not felt her presence in my mind. I feel so... alone.”

\* \* \* \*

Back on holodeck three, Val’ri Raiajh was still talking to *Q* about her family life when suddenly the omnipotent being looked distracted by something. He raised his hand to stop Raiajh from talking. He startled her a moment later when *Q* disappeared, and she quickly realized her telepathic abilities were back. A quick feel with her hands assured her that her normal features had returned, including her slightly upswep eyebrows and long, dark hair, though she was still wearing the science-blue uniform.

Within seconds, *Q* returned. He appeared human once again, though still wearing the lieutenant commander’s pips on his uniform. However, he was not alone this time.

"I find this one stranger than you, Val'ri," *Q* said. "Though his mind seems so completely open, unlike many of your compatriots. What is he?"

Standing beside *Q* was the starship's momentarily-startled assistant chief of security. The junior-grade lieutenant was a two and a half meter tall male Capellan warrior who wore a sash of small blue feathers. Dr. Xaran had told Raiajh about Lt A-ZuRQuIL and his propensities. The Capellan had made romantic overtures of one sort or another to almost every male member of the crew, including Xaran himself, since the ship had departed *Deep Space Nine*. And as the Capellan was so mentally open with his feelings, Raiajh knew what he was going to try and do to *Q* before he acted.

Before Raiajh could warn *Q*, the Capellan reached out to pinch the omnipotent being's hindquarters. Just shy of actually touching *Q*, he sailed across the holodeck and slammed into the bulkhead. *Q* looked at Raiajh with a shocked look of curiosity.

"Why do you think he wanted to do that?"

"It's just the way he is. He has flirted with every male being on this ship, including both my spouse and Captain Kale."

"Oh very well," *Q* said. "I do not find him as interesting as I first thought I would. *Q* shrugged and the Capellan disappeared from the holodeck, appearing a moment later on the bridge in front of Captain Kale.

The bridge crew was startled to find the unconscious security officer suddenly sprawled on the deck. As the captain called for a medical team, the Capellan warrior suddenly sat up and started rubbing the back of his head.

"What happened, Lieutenant?" First Officer Cosner asked. A-ZuRQuIL started rambling off details.

"I encountered an intruder, sir. Or rather, he encountered me. Male. Good looking, if I do say so myself. He looks human, but he must be more. He was wearing a Starfleet science division uniform with the rank of lieutenant commander on the collar. He suddenly appeared in my quarters out of a bright flash of light, then somehow took me with him into one of the holodecks. And he appears to have a female member of the crew trapped in there with him too."

"Why do you say he must be more than human?" Kale asked.

"For starters, he got aboard the ship without setting off the intruder alert. Secondly, he was able to throw me against the bulkhead without laying a finger on me."

Captain Kale turned around to face Lt Arbelo, who was seated at one of the aft science stations.

"Monster, can the computer identify the intruder with the meager information we have?"

"Working now, Captain. In fact I think we have something here." The hybrid Terran-Vulcan-Efrosian officer touched a control and the information was displayed on the main viewscreen. "Unless we are dealing with a completely unknown entity indigenous to the Gamma Quadrant, this is the only thing on file that fits the description A-ZuRQuIL gave us, though he usually prefers dressing as a Starfleet captain or higher." An image of *Q* taken aboard the *USS Enterprise-D* appeared on the screen along with the scarce information known about the entity. The Capellan officer looked at the screen.

"Yes, Captain," A-ZuRQuIL said. "That is the man I encountered on the holodeck. I still don't know who the woman with him was."

"That's fine, Lieutenant. I believe we already know who she is. And now, thanks to you, we know why she disappeared and who was responsible. I read the file about this life form during my month of re-training aboard the *Enterprise*. Believe me, when he shows up, it usually means trouble." The captain looked up toward the ceiling and said, "Computer, patch me through to holodeck three so I may speak to our uninvited guest."

"Communications established."

It was at this point that the first officer intervened.

"Captain, I don't think this is such a good idea. We should wait until a security team has secured the holodeck before we try talking to this... '*Q*.' He could be dangerous." But Kale had already made his decision.

"We need to get this cleared up and this... *Q*... off my ship as soon as possible. Open the channel." When the computer acknowledged, Kale said, "This is Captain Kalin Kale of the Federation starship *Sarek* to the being on holodeck three. Am I speaking to the entity called *Q*? And am I to understand you are holding one of my civilian crew members hostage? Please respond."

On the holodeck, *Q* heard the captain's voice.

"It sounds like your clever captain knows I am here already," he said to Raiajh.

"That is the first logical thing you have said since you've been here," Raiajh replied.

"I believe it is time I met your captain. Find out if he's as much fun as my dear friend, Jean-Luc," *Q* said, and in a second they winked out of existence on the holodeck and reappeared on the bridge directly in front of the captain's chair. Raiajh looked down and noticed she was still wearing the uniform, though her physical appearance had returned to normal. As she moved away from *Q* and toward the seat beside Counselor Sutherland, *Q* spoke to the captain.

"Bon jour, Captain Kale."

"So you must be *Q*?" Kale said, not appearing the least surprised by the two people suddenly appearing on his bridge.

"You've heard of me? You don't know how much that pleases me!" *Q* said with enthusiasm, a bright flash obscuring him from view for a moment. When he could be seen again, he was wearing a captain's uniform exactly like Kale's.

"Yes, your reputation precedes you," said the captain, the look on his face showing he was unimpressed. "Your... exploits aboard the *Enterprise* have become pretty well known."

*Q* walked past Kale, and with a flourish, sat down in the captain's chair, lounging like he belonged there.

"In fact, that is what brought me here," explained *Q*. "As I passed through the sector, I noticed your ship and wondered what the *Enterprise* was doing in what you call the Gamma Quadrant, so I thought I would drop in on my old friend Jean-Luc and ask. To my surprise, this wasn't Jean-Luc's ship. But I figured I'd stop in and have a little fun while you were passing through."

"Well, in the words of Captain Picard, 'Get off my ship!'"

Q stood, walked straight up to Captain Kale, and said, "A rookie with spunk. I'm not sure if I'm beginning to like you or want to turn you into a Chitherian toad." Kale simply glared at Q. "But either way, I will leave."

"Good," said Kale. "Then we can get back to our..."

"...After I finish what I have already started." And with a flash, both Q and Val'ri Raiajh disappeared. Kale stared at the empty space in front of him for a moment, a slight groan emanating from the back of his throat.

"Mister Fil, sound red alert," he finally ordered. "And notify me if any of the crew report anything – and I mean ANYTHING – out of the ordinary."

"Aye, Captain," Fil replied as the klaxon sounded.

\* \* \* \*

Val'ri Raiajh awoke in her bunk. She looked around the cabin, feeling a sense of familiarity. She knew she was not aboard the *Sarek* anymore, but the 'feeling' was still familiar. She stood, glanced down, and noticed she was now wearing a gold uniform. Raiajh looked around the cabin, saw the mirror in the dressing alcove, and walked over to look into it. As she had expected, her appearance had again changed. Now her ear-tips were a touch longer and pointier, her eyebrows more arched. And the pips on her collar were those of a lieutenant. She looked at the communicator badge on her uniform chest, which consisted of the familiar Starfleet delta, but with four gold bars behind it, not the usual oval. She recognized it immediately.

"I'm aboard the..."

"Bridge to Lieutenant T'Val," called the voice of Vice Admiral Eric Johnson. Raiajh froze, calmly trying to assess the situation.

"...the *Arcturus-A*."

"Bridge to Lieutenant T'Val," Johnson repeated. "Please report to my ready room."

Suddenly a thought occurred to her. Here she was, apparently a full-blooded Vulcan, so it was possible T'Val could be a variation of her own name, Val'ri. Raiajh tapped her combadge, replying, "I'm on my way, Admiral." Then she quickly stepped out into the corridor and walked toward the nearest turbolift.

Raiajh... 'T'Val' she corrected herself, entered the turbolift, which was already occupied by three other crew members. The lift made its way up, stopping at a higher deck where two of the crew members exited. As the doors swished shut, the third officer turned to Raiajh, a gloating look on his face.

"And how has your day been, Lieutenant? Mine has been extremely entertaining," said Q.

"Why am I back aboard the *Arcturus*?" Raiajh asked. "And why am I wearing a lieutenant's uniform? Logic dictates there must be a reason."

"You're already starting to sound like a full-blooded Vulcan," Q remarked with a chuckle. "And the answer is simplicity itself. Living as a Vulcan, you never had reason to resign your commission because you didn't 'feel' you were missing something in your life. And now you still work in the *Arcturus*' billeting office with your good buddy, Braacht."

"But what has happened to my family and friends aboard the *Sarek*?"

"Well, even though they are not your family in this reality, they are right where they should be aboard the *Sarek* about seventy five thousand light years from here. And since you are full Vulcan with no empathic abilities and still working in the billeting office, you were unable to assist in any significant way during the Orthid incident. You were never transferred, and since your next crew evaluation doesn't come up for another three months, you haven't received a promotion yet." Q's smile brightened, then disappeared as the turbolift doors opened onto the bridge. In a flash, he himself disappeared.

T'Val stepped over to the ready room doors and pressed the chime. The doors parted and she stepped inside to stand before Vice Admiral Eric Johnson, commanding officer of the *USS Arcturus*, whom she had not seen in real life for over six months. However, it was not the Johnson she remembered. Half the admiral's face was covered with scars from radiation burns.

"Ah, T'Val," said Johnson as he looked up. "As you know, we'll be putting in at *Starbase 79* for crew transfers. We'll be receiving seventy five new crew members and only losing ten. What's the story on cabin availability?"

T'Val lifted both eyebrows as she said, "I will have to get back to you with that information, Admiral. I must consult my computer files."

A look of surprise crossed the unscarred half of Johnson's face.

"T'Val? You can't recite cabin assignments by memory? Should I have you report to sickbay?"

"I assure you, Admiral, I am quite well." She had meant to say '...feeling quite well,' but found she was unable to.

"Alright, Lieutenant. Get back to me by 1600 hours."

"Yes, Admiral." She turned to leave, passing onto the bridge while stepping to the turbolift. In the reality she remembered, when she was a pre-school teacher aboard this starship, she never really had a chance or reason to come up to the bridge until the incident at Orthid IX. She paused to look around. Captain Solak, the ship's Vulcan first officer, sat in the command chair. Lieutenant Galen DuLac, the young Avalonian at the helm, reported a correction to course and speed, which the junior-grade lieutenant at ops, an officer Raiajh... correction, T'Val assumed was Kalin Kale's replacement, confirmed. He looked up at the staring Vulcan woman, smiled, and said, "Hi, T'Val. Are we still on for that chess game after watch?"

One of T'Val's eyebrows rose involuntarily as she said, "I'm afraid that I will have to cancel, Lieutenant. Something has arisen."

"Lieutenant?" the ops officer said, sounding insulted. "Since when are we back on such formal terms, T'Val?"

"I am not feeling myself today," she said, excusing herself and entering the turbolift.

After the doors closed and the turbolift started downward, T'Val started calling for *Q*. After a couple of seconds, he appeared in a bright flash.

"Not feeling too happy, I see?" *Q* smirked.

"Not 'feeling' anything, as you well know, *Q*," T'Val replied.

"Ah, the pleasures – or lack there-of – of being Vulcan."

"You've made your point, *Q*. That while I am neither Deltan nor Vulcan, I have the potential to be the best of both. Although there are times in my life that the pressures may seem overwhelming, the rest of my life... Sylvan, Charissa... my position aboard the *Sarek* and my friends more than compensate for the difficulties."

"Awww, and I was just starting to have fun with you," *Q* said, a disappointed look on his face. "Besides, what makes you think I did this for any reason other than my own amusement?"

"Take me home, *Q*. Now!" T'Val demanded. She was suddenly engulfed in a blinding flash. When her vision returned, she was standing in a bare holodeck. Quickly feeling her hair and ears, she realized both were back to normal. Looking down, she smiled at the tan dress she again wore.

"Val'ri Raiajh to the bridge," she said into the air.

"Bridge. Captain Kale. Are you alright, Val'ri?" asked the captain, his concern evident in his voice.

"Yes, Captain. I'm back on holodeck three if I'm correct."

"Thank the gods. When you and *Q* disappeared from the bridge a few seconds ago, we were afraid he had taken you off the ship somewhere."

"I'm fine," she said, then realizing what she said repeated, "I'm feeling fine."

The holodeck doors parted, and a man in a blue medical uniform ran in.

*'Imzadi!'*

*'Sylvan! You don't know how happy I am to see you!'*

The two embraced, Dr. Xaran letting up for just a moment to say, "Computer, lock door to holodeck three and run program Xaran1."

"Program complete," the computer replied as the grid pattern around the couple was replaced by very specific scenery.

\* \* \* \*

On the bridge, Kale had just returned to his seat, his first officer and ship's counselor on either side.

"I just hope that's the last we see of..."

"I wouldn't speak so fast, Mon Capitain," said a disembodied voice. In a bright flash, *Q* reappeared, this time wearing an admiral's uniform once again.

"I've decided all you Federation types are almost as much fun as just the humans alone," *Q* remarked.

"Why don't you go play with the Romulans?" said Kale in disgust.

"I would, but they generally don't like to play along. Pity."

"Get off my..."

"Just remember what they say on your planet, Captain. The parable of the Blood Fly? Ta-ta!" And with a flash he vanished as Kale grimaced.

"What was that supposed to mean?" asked Lt Commander Cosner.

"It's an old Centauri proverb. The closest translation of the moral in standard is, 'The playful flea is the easiest to see, and the most difficult to lose'," Kale explained.

"What does that mean?"

"I really hope I'm wrong, but I believe it means we'll be seeing *Q* again." Kale looked toward the main viewscreen, he said, "Helm, ahead warp three." And with a bright flash and a thunderclap from the warp nacelles, the *Sarek* warped on toward her next adventure.

**The End**