

Previously in Star Trek: Personal Logs...

Shortly after arriving aboard Starbase 719 to begin the process of assuming the responsibilities of the Typhon Sector Coordinator, Vice Admiral Kalin Kale hears a news report about a construction worker gone missing from a demolition project on the grounds of Starfleet Academy on Earth and the discovery of a mysterious wooden box marked 'K. Kale' found inside the cornerstone of a century-old Academy building being demolished.

The agitated admiral seeks out the starbase's executive officer, Captain Cathryn Pearson, with whom he had attended the Academy back during the late 23rd century - before the time warp accident that brought the crew of USS Arcturus ahead nearly 80 years - and shares with her a tale of a mysterious alien creature brought to Earth as a pet by one of their fellow Academy cadets and a series of disappearances that occurred when that alien creature escaped its cage, then tells Pearson he needs to return to Earth right away, or more people will die. Pearson offers to transport the admiral back to San Francisco aboard her starship, the Defiant-class USS Corsair.

And now the conclusion...

The starship *Corsair* was two days out of *Starbase 719*, her course set for Sector 001. In the small quarters he was using for the trip back to Earth, Vice Admiral Kalin Kale of Alpha Centauri was studying files on known Denobulan life-forms. His study was interrupted by the sound of the door chime.

"Come," Kale said, putting the padd he had been reading down on the small desk and looking toward the nearby door as it slid open, revealing Captain Cathryn Pearson - first officer of *Starbase 719* in the Typhon Sector and commander of the *Corsair*. "Cathryn! What can I do for you?"

"We just received a subspace transmission I thought you should see, Admiral," Pearson replied, handing Kale another padd. "Another construction worker on the grounds of Starfleet Academy has gone missing. They have shut down demolition of the old dorm building while Academy officials conduct an investigation."

Kale's expression turned, if possible, even more grim than it had been prior to Pearson's arrival. "What is our ETA to Earth orbit, Cathryn?" he asked.

"Five days, three hours, present speed," she replied.

"Any chance you can...?"

"I'll have my engineer squeeze all the speed we can get out of the *Corsair's* engines. We might be able to cut a day or so off that estimate."

"Thanks, Cathryn."

Without another word, Pearson turned and walked down the corridor, Kale's cabin door swishing shut behind her. Kale took a deep breath of the recycled air before turning his attention back to his research, hoping something in the notes would help him track down and kill Michigan once and for all.

Space, the Final Frontier...

Star Trek: Personal Logs

"One Foggy Evening - Part 2" by PJK

Kale entered the crew's mess, moving toward one of the bulkhead-mounted replicators and ordering a sandwich and coffee before carrying his tray to one of the nearby tables where Captains Pearson and Harkonnen - Pearson's husband and the *Corsair's* first officer - sat eating their lunch.

"Admiral!" Konstantin Harkonnen said, a look of surprise on his face. "I thought you would be eating in your quarters again?"

"I decided I needed to stretch my legs, Captain," Kale responded as he placed his tray on the table and sat down. "What's our status?"

"We're about halfway back to Earth," Harkonnen informed. "The Engineer has managed to maintain warp 9.75, though our engines are going to need an overhaul once we reach Earth orbit. I hope this trip is worth the wear and tear on the *Corsair*." In spite of the circumstances, Harkonnen smiled slightly at his unintentional rhyme before adding, "Couldn't a subspace communiqué have saved us this trip?"

"Unfortunately, it's not so easy," Kale replied after taking a bite of his sandwich. "Cathryn and I are the only Starfleet officers still alive who were attending the Academy when the original incident with Michigan occurred."

"Michigan?" Harkonnen questioned, puzzled.

"That was the name Cadet Kellogg gave to his alien pet when he brought it back to Earth from Denobula," Kale explained.

"So you really believe the same creature is responsible for this latest round of disappearances, Kalin?" Pearson asked, still sounding skeptical.

Kale nodded his head in Pearson's direction as he said to Harkonnen, "That's why I had to go back myself and not just send a subspace message. No one who didn't see it believed a frog-sized creature was responsible for the disappearance of half a dozen people in the 2280's. No one is going to believe a creature could have survived the last hundred and ten years trapped inside a stone block, much less emerged to kill again now! I need to hunt this thing down and make sure it is really dead this time!"

"And I need to get back to the bridge," Harkonnen observed as he stood up and grabbed his tray, kissing his wife on the top of her head before placing the tray onto the shelf of one of the replicators for recycling and departing the mess hall, leaving Kale and Pearson sitting alone at the table.

"I always get apprehensive when I know I'm going back to the Academy," Pearson remarked.

"I actually enjoyed my time at the Academy," Kale stated. "Both times! For someone who grew up traveling from planet to planet - often at a moment's notice - while my father did his research on various ocean environments, it was nice to spend almost four full years living in one place and not traveling around all the time on small, slow, cramped spaceships." A faraway look appeared on Kale's face for a moment. He then added, "If I hadn't received my appointment to the Academy, I think I would have become a farmer on Proxima Centauri. Something close to the land, that didn't require a lot of travel."

"But instead here you are, on the furthest frontiers of space, traveling in a small, cramped spaceship," Pearson commented with a slight smile.

"At least it's fast," Kale added.

"She IS fast," Pearson agreed. "You know, thinking back to that incident all those years ago, and I don't remember us meeting like you described."

"Well, I was a quiet, reserved freshman underclassman. You were on the verge of entering your senior year and graduating to become a Starfleet officer. I'm not surprised I didn't stick out in your mind."

"But we both wound up being assigned to the same starship. You would think we would have at least spent some time together in the rec room or something?"

"I was assigned to navigation-operations. Not too much interaction with the supply corps unless things were going wrong, and I tried to avoid Bracht as much as possible. I let Lieutenant Cala deal with the other department heads. I didn't even really get to know Val until we were all transferred to the *Sarek*, and that was only after I learned about the skills she possessed during our missions in the Gamma Quadrant. From what she has told me, you left the *Sarek* to join the crew of the *Besiege* just when you were starting to get interesting."

“Speaking of interesting...,” said Pearson, interrupting the trip down memory lane to concentrate better on the current crisis. “Have you learned anything useful about our little enemy, assuming it even really exists?”

“Not a lot. I came across one article about the eradication of an invasive species that had accidentally been brought to Denobula in the mid-2280’s by a transport ship that traded within the Klingon Empire,” said Kale. “But there was no good description of the creatures in question other than they were small and relatively fast-moving. And were completely killed off by the Denobulans before they could cause too much ecological damage.”

“Want me to make some inquiries before we arrive at Earth?” Pearson asked.

“I suppose anything would help.”

* * * *

Stardate 68585.0

By the time the *Corsair* entered standard orbit over Earth, reports of a third missing person were being recounted on the Fed Net, this time one of the Academy security guards. All that was found was his phaser and part of his combadge close to the rubble of what had been the dormitory building, the area around which had finally been sealed off.

In the transporter room aboard the *Corsair*, Pearson was giving last minute instructions to her husband and first officer.

“Admiral Kale and I will be beaming down to the Academy administration building. While we’re gone, prepare another VIP quarters for the trip back to *Home Plate*.”

“Another VIP?” Harkonnen questioned. “Who?”

“I received word once we entered orbit that we’ll be transporting Penji back to the Fifth Fleet AOR with us when we return,” Pearson informed.

“Ah. Admiral Fil has finally been paroled?” Harkonnen asked jokingly.

“The Admiralty has finally decided he can return to his normal duties after that incident with the Kairn all those months ago.”

“I’ll make sure Admiral Fil is very comfortable on the trip home, Pussycat,” Harkonnen assured with a grin. “Anything else?”

“I don’t expect so,” Pearson answered. “See you in a few hours. Energize.”

Harkonnen nodded his head to the transporter chief behind the console. Seconds later, both Pearson and Kale disappeared in the sparkle of the transporter beam.

* * * *

A short time later, Admiral Kale was shown into the office of the Commandant of Starfleet Academy. Admiral Lucius Amano stood to greet him.

“Admiral Kale, this is a pleasant surprise,” the human man said, starting to offer his hand before recalling that Kale was Centauri and withdrawing it. “To what do I owe the honor of your visit today?”

“I understand you found my box in the cornerstone of Tucker Hall?” Kale said, remaining standing across the desk from Amano.

“Your box...?” A sudden look of understanding bloomed on Admiral Amano’s face. “So it was YOU who placed the time capsule in there! How amazing! There was no record of a time capsule being interred in the foundation of Tucker Hall, so it came as quite a surprise to everyone when it was discovered. I actually have it right here with me!”

“May I see its contents?” Kale asked.

“Of course!” Amano replied before opening a container generally used for cataloguing and storing archeological artifacts that was sitting on a small table across the office. He lifted out the shoebox-sized item and walked back to hand it to Kale.

The box, though slightly darker with age, looked exactly as Kale remembered it when his father had given it to him in celebration of his appointment to the Academy. His fingers traced the carved words 'K. Kale - Class of '86' and the late-23rd century Starfleet emblem before slowly moving for the clasp and twisting it open. Slowly he raised the wooden lid and peered inside. He was both relieved and disappointed when nothing jumped out at him. Only an old phaser, oxidized with age, sat inside the box.

"Now that I know it was you who placed the time capsule into the cornerstone, perhaps you can answer a question, Admiral?" Amano asked. Kale looked up, a few questions of his own forming in his head. "Why only a Phaser II? Most time capsules incorporate things significant to the era in which they were buried. I know that design of phaser was relatively new when the capsule was buried, but..."

"It wasn't a time capsule," Kale finally responded. "It was meant to be a sarcophagus more than anything. Tell me, was the phaser the ONLY thing found inside the box?"

"To the best of my knowledge," Amano replied with a nod. "We believe the box was first uncovered by one of the workers involved in the demolition of Tucker Hall, the first of the missing personnel. Why? Should there have been other items?"

"I was hoping there would be the desiccated remains of a creature that was buried in that stone," Kale answered. "A creature I believe was responsible for the disappearance of several people back in the 2280's. I need to speak to your head of security as soon as possible. I believe I know something about the recent disappearances that he needs to be informed about."

* * * *

An hour later, Kale and Amano were standing in the office and briefing room of Lt Commander Dillon Wyld, the Academy's security chief. Standing around the room were Wyld's assistant and a handful of security officers, several of whom were involved in the search for the people missing from the Academy grounds.

"We have no clues where these three people have gone to," Wyld was telling Kale. "We're working under the theory that a rival construction company - perhaps one with ties to the Orion Syndicate - may be responsible, since all three missing persons were last seen in or near the demolition zone around the former Tucker Hall."

"I can almost guarantee that mobsters or rival construction companies are not to blame," Kale stated. He then started relating the same story he had told Pearson prior to their journey to Earth. None of the security guards appeared to believe him.

"With all due respect, Admiral," Wyld said, sharing an amused look with his staff. "Even if I believe that this little creature you describe was responsible for killing and eating six adult humanoids back when you were first attending the Academy a century ago, how could something like that have survived more than a century entombed in the wall of a building?"

"Commander, in my time in Starfleet I have encountered things that defy imagination, capable of unbelievable feats!" Kale replied. "Who's to say a life-form cannot exist that can hibernate for a century or more until it can locate sustenance again?" He held his box up, displaying the empty interior as he added, "If I had managed to kill Michigan... kill that creature... there would have been remains of some kind found in this box when it was opened. But I was unfamiliar with the phaser I had stolen, apparently did not have the setting high enough to kill. I guess I merely stunned it and only believed it was dead."

"Again, Admiral, with all due respect, we're very busy trying to figure out what happened to three people, including one of my officers," said Wyld. "The last thing we need is to be distracted by a runaway from a horror-holo plot."

Kale briefly stared directly at Wyld's eyes. When it was apparent to the admiral that the security officer was not going to budge in his opinion, Kale simply said, "Fine. I was trying to help. The next victim will be blood on YOUR hands. I'm done here." Kale then spun on the heel of his boot and left the security office, to the bemused look of several of the security officers.

* * * *

A short time later, Kale joined Pearson near the Academy cafeteria, where Pearson had stopped for a drink after meeting with Penji Fil and making sure the admiral in charge of the Fifth Fleet was safely aboard her ship for the trip back to the Typhon Sector.

“Any luck with Academy Security?” she asked.

“They didn’t believe a word I told them,” Kale said with disgust. “They’d rather believe the Orion Syndicate put those three people into thermacrete shoes and dropped them into the bay off the Golden Gate Bridge!”

“So what is the next step?”

“Hunt down this creature myself! Make sure it cannot hurt another living being!” Kale responded forcefully. Then his face fell and he added, “I just don’t know where to start looking for it.”

“I’ve been thinking a lot about the original incident when we were in the Academy since you told me the story of your involvement,” Pearson said. “I remembered all the cadets were briefly locked-down in their dorm buildings for a couple of days after the first few disappearances. Rumor was there was some unauthorized person or persons on the campus.”

“I remember that,” Kale agreed. “They cancelled classes for about two days. I remember thinking it was strange they would do that if they were only looking for someone who wasn’t supposed to be on the grounds.”

“Right. Well during that time, I rigged my dorm room computer terminal to tap into the building environmental sensor grid. That way I would get a warning if someone or something unauthorized entered the building.”

Kale was impressed with Pearson’s ingenuity as a cadet. He then asked, “And did your makeshift security system detect anyone?”

“The second night, the sensors detected a life-form reading with which I was unfamiliar.”

“Unfamiliar in what way?” Kale pressed.

“Something about the type of life-form. It was... variable.”

“Variable?” Kale repeated, confused. “What does THAT mean?”

“I mean it... changed?” Pearson tried to explain.

“Changed? How?” Kale demanded to know.

“Come on, Kalin, I’m trying to remember something that happened almost thirty years ago from my point of view!” Pearson complained.

“I know, Cathryn. But this could be important,” Kale implored. “Try and remember!”

Pearson closed her eyes, thinking back to her time as a cadet at the very campus where they were standing. Remembering to that rare occurrence, when the entire student body was locked-down in their rooms for fear that a mysterious force might make them disappear forever. Then the memory came back to her.

“That’s it!” Pearson cried out. “It was in the middle of the night, around two in the morning. When the sensors first detected the life-form, it registered as carbon-based, but not at all human. I was curious, because I was expecting humanoid readings, but what the sensors were detecting, it was small, like a cat or small dog. I was trying to configure my terminal to take more detailed readings in the hopes I could identify whatever it was roaming the halls of the building when the readings changed.”

“Changed to what?” Kale asked, still pushing.

“To a silicon-based life-form reading,” Pearson said.

“The readings changed in an instant?” Kale asked with amazement.

“No, that was the strangest part, the reason I didn’t think I had successfully tapped into the building sensors. It took several minutes for the readings to change from carbon to silicon-based life, during which time I detected no movement, like the life-form was petrifying. I figured there was a glitch of some kind in my terminal, because nothing could transform like that and survive!”

“Actually, this makes a lot of sense,” Kale remarks. “It would explain why no one else has discovered this creature before now, if it has the ability to change its elemental basis. Likewise, it could explain how it survived entombed inside the building cornerstone for more than a century.”

“How so?”

“This is only speculation, of course, but maybe when it is not actively seeking food, the creature enters some kind of hibernation state and during that time takes on the physical aspects of a silicon-based life form. In that state, it would have seemed like a small rock inside the bigger granite block that made up the cornerstone of Tucker Hall.”

“So what do we do?” Pearson asked. “We have no clue where this creature could be located now, and even if we had a vague idea, we wouldn’t know what specifically to look for. For all we know, this creature could read as carbon, silicon, potentially anything!”

“I have an idea, but we need to pay a brief visit to Starfleet Medical,” Kale remarked.

* * * *

It was after sunset and the campus was dark before Kale and Pearson returned to the campus quad, carrying medical tricorders the pair had borrowed from Starfleet Medical rigged to search for and alarm when detecting specific silicon-based life-form readings in the hopes the alien creature could not change into something the tricorder was unable to detect. The pair began at the perimeter that had been erected around the demolished dormitory building.

“Anything?” Pearson asked Kale as she stared intently at her own tricorder readout.

“I’m detecting traces of silicon in the vicinity of what is left of the building cornerstone, but no actual life-form readings. Probably old skin cells the creature shed when it finally escaped its prison.”

Pearson focused her scans in the area of the cornerstone, confirming the readings Kale was detecting. She then noted other traces among the debris, including two places where microscopic traces of human DNA were concentrated – one splattered across the face of the cornerstone, the other further inside the remains of the demolished building. She followed the readings around the perimeter and noted a trace leading away from the demolition area - including another area with barely-detectable microscopic human DNA spread across the ground in a broad pattern - heading toward one of the nearby classroom buildings.

“Kalin, I think I have a track on your alien creature,” Pearson said, slowly walking toward the entrance of the nearby building.

“Wait! Don’t get too far ahead,” Kale called out, quickly catching up to Pearson. “I don’t want to have to explain to your husband how I got you eaten by a vicious alien life-form.”

Pearson gave Kale a cynical look before continuing toward the building. Kale noted the sign beside the door that said, ‘Carstairs Hall - Dept of Geology.’

“The geology department was located in the basement of Challenger Hall back when we first attended the Academy,” he remarked as the pair entered the building. “This place must have been built shortly after the *Arcturus* disappeared from our original time.”

Just inside the door of Carstairs Hall sat a midshipman watch officer who quickly stood up when he saw a captain and admiral entering.

“Attention on deck!” he yelled out.

“Good evening, Cadet,” Kale said, approaching the desk and introducing himself, then Pearson as his aide. “Just making an unannounced inspection of the campus. Have you seen anything unusual in this building, either tonight or in the past week?”

“Unusual, sir?” the cadet asked, unsure.

“Strange or unexplained noises? Something you couldn’t identify moving in the shadows? Perhaps an anomalous reading on the building’s sensor logs?” Kale clarified.

“Are you asking if I’ve seen a Zulu-Five-Oscar?” the cadet asked with a smile. “Ain’t no security drill going to get by ME, sir!”

Kale was amused by the cadet’s enthusiasm. It reminded him of himself all those years ago, when he had first arrived in San Francisco. But then his expression turned grim again and he said, “No, not a security drill. This may be related to the three people who recently disappeared.”

The cadet now looked around nervously, as if a Jem'Hadar soldier were about to decloak from the shadows and stab him through with a bayonet. He then looked at Kale and Pearson and said, a little more meekly, "No, sir. I haven't seen nor heard anything out of the ordinary."

Kale nodded, trying to look reassuring, as he said, "Captain Pearson and I are going to make a tour of the building. Alert security if anything extraordinary occurs."

"Yes, sir!" the cadet replied as he logged Kale's and Pearson's presence in the building log and sat back down. The two officers continued down the hall, past several classrooms, and toward the labs. It was in the corridor where the main geology lab was located that they encountered a second cadet; the building's roving watch. They explained their presence in the building, then asked the same questions that had been asked of the midshipman watch officer.

"Have you seen anything unusual in this building, either tonight or sometime in the past week?"

"Nothing tonight, no, sir," the young cadet replied. "But I was on watch here three nights ago and I came across something weird."

"Like what?" Kale asked.

"I was making my round of the basement level and I found the door to the sample storage room open slightly."

Kale gave Pearson a concerned look, then asked the cadet, "Can you take us to this door?"

"Sure. Right this way, sir."

The cadet led the two officers down a set of stairs and one corridor, stopping in front of a pair of heavy double doors. The door was closed and properly secured.

"When I found it open the other night, I took a quick look inside to make sure no one was inside and that nothing obvious was missing. Some of the samples in there were brought back to Earth by many of the starships conducting deep-space exploration missions and are considered irreplaceable. I then locked it up and logged it. The professors rarely go in there, so the storage room hasn't been opened again since I locked it, as far as I know."

"Can we get inside there?" Kale asked.

"We're not really supposed to...," the cadet hesitated. "But if I can't trust a captain and an admiral..."

The cadet placed his ID card against the reader beside the door. The locks clicked and one of the two doors swung inward slightly.

"Thank you, Cadet," Kale said. "Now, I need you to go back upstairs and stay with the cadet at the entrance. If neither Captain Pearson nor I return there in the next fifteen minutes, lock down this building and call campus security. And tell them Admiral Kale's story was no fairy tale."

The poor kid looked even more confused, but complied with Kale's order. The admiral looked at Pearson, who activated her tricorder once again.

"I'm detecting silicon," Pearson confirmed. "A lot of it!"

The admiral pulled out a palm beacon – this time he came prepared – and stepped into the storage room after saying, "Let's see what we're dealing with here."

The pair stepped into the room. It was a relatively large room, approximately five by five meters square, filled completely with metal shelves four high forming rows. On each shelf were dozens of samples... of rock. Granite, quartz, igneous, sedimentary, metamorphic. Each one sat atop a label identifying its type, origin, and chemical makeup. Some were small, the size of coins. Others were large, nearly boulders in and of themselves. Kale shined the light around the room, but nothing moved.

Kale stepped further into the room, shining the beacon along each shelf, across crystal samples, geode samples, and other stones from across the galaxy. Pearson followed closely, looking back and forth – especially in the dark corners of the room – but did not see anything out of the ordinary.

"There's nothing here," Kale remarked after the pair had searched the entire room. "The tricorder must have picked up on the rock samples."

"What do we do now?" Pearson asked. "We're back to square one!"

"I'm not sure," Kale replied. "But we should get back to the watch desk before those two cadets report us missing and have half of Commander Wyld's security guards down here looking for us."

Kale and Pearson started moving back toward the door, passing a shelf holding numerous geode samples – some open to display their intricate gemstone interiors, others solid and unbroken. A moment later, Pearson's tricorder beeped. The two officers looked at each other before looking down at the still active tricorder. On the small screen, the device was indicating a nearby silicon sample was slowly turning to an indication of carbon.

The pair turned to see a creature similar in size to a medium-sized dog unfold itself from what turned out to be an open geode, atop which it had blended in. The size of the creature, which Kale had expected to be no larger than a toad like the last time he had seen it, caused the admiral to hesitate momentarily as it launched itself off the shelf directly at Pearson. The wind-like sound that had haunted Kale's nightmares the entire voyage back to Earth filled the room. Kale finally awoke from his reverie and quickly raised the phaser he was carrying, firing off a shot before the creature managed to latch itself onto Pearson. The creature let out a shriek and darted out of the storage room and into the darkened hall beyond.

"Are you alright??" Kale asked Pearson as she tried to calm down.

"I'm fine. Just shaken," Pearson replied, feeling her own heartbeat through her chest. "I thought you said this thing was only the size of a kitten!?"

"It was the last time I saw it!" Kale responded as he moved toward the door. "Are you still detecting it?"

Pearson followed Kale out into the hall, looking at her tricorder and saying, "Yes!"

"Give me the tricorder, then go get help from security!" Kale ordered.

"No!" Pearson rebuked, following Kale in the direction the creature had disappeared in. "I'm not leaving you down here alone with that thing on the loose!"

Kale knew there was little point to arguing with Pearson. Instead, he asked, "Where has the creature gone?"

"Down the hall and to the right," Pearson replied. "It looks like it entered a lab."

"Let's finish this," Kale said, raising his phaser and assuring himself it was indeed set to kill.

Pearson took the lead, maintaining readings on the creature to make sure it would not get away. They turned the corner and, in the light of Kale's beacon, could see the open lab door.

"I'm getting another silicon reading," Pearson stated as the pair paused outside the door. "About two... two and a half meters inside the door."

"Be ready," Kale said, placing his hand on the door handle and pushing it open. He immediately pointed the beacon toward the middle of the room and aimed his phaser, but the creature was not visible. But there was something sitting on the floor near the lab table.

"What is that?" Pearson asked as the two officers as they moved toward it. "Whatever it is, it's reading as silicon."

Kale tapped the object with the toe of his boot. It was solid, but lighter than the Centauri would have supposed. He leaned down and looked closer with the aid of his beacon. It looked vaguely like a deformed casting of the creature he was hunting. He suddenly realized what it reminded him of... a snake skin after it has been shed by the snake, though petrified.

"I think Michigan has shed his skin," Kale remarked. "Do you still have a trace on it?"

Pearson consulted her tricorder and shook her head. "I'm reading you and me, but no other life-form readings in this room, carbon or silicon-based."

"It's got to be here somewhere!" Kale exclaimed. "You said yourself earlier, we don't know if carbon and silicon are the only elements this creature is capable of becoming. Scan the full spectrum of possible elements!"

Pearson adjusted her tricorder. A moment later it beeped as the readout on the screen changed. Pearson's eyes grew wide.

"I'm detecting germanium-based life-form readings!" she explained, then slowly turned around toward the lab door. Kale's followed Pearson's gaze. Slowly, the lab door swung shut, revealing a humanoid creature almost two meters in height standing there, its lipless-mouth drawn open to reveal sharp metallic-looking teeth.

The creature was only a meter and a half away from Pearson, who seemed frozen in fear at the sight before her. Kale attempted to raise his phaser, but Pearson was in his line of fire and unable to move around the lab table. The creature stared directly at Pearson with its lifeless-looking eyes as the wind-like sound started to fill the lab.

“Hey!” Kale called out, trying to distract the creature as he attempted to climb over the table. “HEY! Over here, ugly!”

The creature would not be easily distracted. Whether it was because the creature perceived her as the weaker of the two or simply because she was female, its concentration remained on Pearson, who slowly started to back away. Kale could see its now-powerful looking legs flex as it prepared to spring forward. Pearson was still too close for Kale to get a shot off with his phaser without risking hitting his fellow officer.

“Cathryn, I need you out of the way!” Kale implored.

“Where do you want me to go?!?” Pearson responded, blocked by the lab table on one side and the alien creature on the other.

The creature then sprang forward, its clawed hands spread wide to grasp on to Pearson, its fanged mouth wide open and preparing to consume the hapless woman. “Cathryn, drop!!” Kale shouted. In a split second, Pearson literally fell backward to the floor as the alien reached her. A phaser beam lit up the lab, and Pearson screamed!

* * * *

Several minutes later, Commander Wyld and several of his security officers filled the lab, along with the cadet building roving watch. In one corner of the room, a corpsman bandaged Cathryn Pearson’s right arm and applied a dermal regenerator to her left shoulder. Meanwhile, Wyld was interviewing Admiral Kale.

“You say you had tracked your killer creature to this lab, where it had grown to the size of a man?” the security chief asked, a tone of disbelief in his voice.

“That’s correct,” Kale replied. “Somehow it must have been drawn to the geology storage room because of all the rock samples. We located it in a similar place in Challenger Hall when we first encountered it back in 2283. The creature adapts quickly in order to survive, blending in with the silica samples in the storage room and shifting to a germanium-based life-form to avoid detection when it knew it was being hunted.”

“And where is the... um... creature now?” Wyld asked.

Kale looked at the debris on the floor alongside the lab table as he said, “I hit the creature with a phaser beam set to level twelve. I almost hit Cathryn... Captain Pearson, but managed to kill the creature. That powder on the floor is all that remains.”

Wyld looked at one of the other security officers, who was analyzing the debris on the floor with a tricorder.

“I’m detecting germanium, silicon, some carbon traces. No recognizable DNA. Nothing to indicate this is anything more than a failed geology lab experiment,” the security officer remarked with a smirk.

“We’ll have maintenance come in and clean it up in the morning,” Wyld said before looking back at Kale. “I told you I didn’t need your interference, Admiral.”

“And I told you if you ignored what I said, more people would die,” Kale rebuked.

“I’m going to have to report this incident to Admiral Amano,” Wyld said. He then looked at the corpsman – who was in the process of packing up his medical gear – and asked, “Is Captain Pearson well enough to travel on her own?”

“I’ve treated a second-degree close-proximity phaser burn on her shoulder and a relatively minor scratch on her arm that I can’t figure out what it was caused by, but otherwise the Captain is good to go.”

“Very well. Admiral...” Wyld looked back at Kale again. “I’m going to have to ask you and Captain Pearson to return to your ship and go back to your starbase. I have an investigation to complete. I just hope you haven’t ruined any chance we have of catching whoever was responsible for the disappearances of the three personnel who went missing near Tucker Hall.” He then looked at the cadet roving watch and ordered, “Cadet, escort Admiral Kale and Captain Pearson out of the building.”

“Aye, Commander,” the cadet replied before apologetically gesturing for Kale and Pearson to follow. A few minutes later they were back outside. The fog was thick across the quad as the sun just started to rise across the bay to the east.

“No good deed goes unpunished,” Pearson remarked once the pair were alone. “Right, Kalin?”

“I only wish I could have done more,” Kale remarked as the two started walking away from the building.

“What do you mean? You saved my life! Plus who knows how many others if that creature hadn’t been destroyed.”

“But how many died a century ago because I didn’t act right away when I suspected something was wrong? I noticed Kellogg’s pet was loose and that no one had seen Kellogg for days! Plus my own inexperience with a phaser, stunning that creature when I thought I had killed it. The three more recent deaths... they all fall right on my shoulders.”

Pearson put her hand on Kale’s shoulder reassuringly as she said, “Kalin, you were a first year cadet. You had no experience with a situation like this. Those deaths a century ago – and those only in the last week – were not your fault. If anyone is to blame, it was Kellogg for bringing an animal that proved to be dangerous back to Earth without any understanding of what it was or what it was capable of. And he’s long since gone.”

“I know, it’s just...,” Kale started to say.

“Hold on, I need to contact the *Corsair* and have Konstantin get the ship prepared,” Pearson said.

“Prepared for what?” Kale asked.

“Time warp. We may as well just go back in time and prevent all this from happening in the first place.”

A look of shock appeared on Kale’s face and he stammered, “Do you have ANY clue what kind of a PARADOX that would cause?!? That wouldn’t be bending the temporal prime directive! That would be snapping it right in half! Not to mention the fit Temporal Investigations would...!” Kale stopped when he noticed the impish grin appearing on Pearson’s face. “You’re kidding, aren’t you?”

“Of course I am,” Pearson assured. “Now let’s get back home before Wyld changes his mind and charges us with breaking obscure Starfleet regulation.” She tapped her combadge, saying, “Pearson to *Corsair*.”

“*Corsair*. Harkonnen. It’s good to hear from you, Pussycat. I was starting to get worried. Especially when Starfleet announced an alert for the campus of Starfleet Academy about an hour ago.”

“Admiral Kale and I are fine. Our mission is accomplished. Two ready to beam back aboard.”

“Good to hear. Admiral Fil has been driving me nuts since he came aboard yesterday, demanding all sorts of updates and fleet status reports. We can’t get back to *Starbase 719* soon enough! The ship will be ready to break orbit as soon as you’re back aboard,” Harkonnen said.

“Glad to hear that,” Pearson remarked with a smile. “Energize at your convenience.”

A moment later, the two officers felt the annular confinement beams form around them and they faded away in the sparkle of the transporter beam.

* * * *

One of the staff geologists was conducting an inventory of the storage room, making sure nothing was missing following the recent incident regarding Admiral Kale. Checking the sample listing against everything lined up on the shelves, the Academy professor nodded in satisfaction when the only thing out of place was a small silicon nodule sample he found sitting inside an open geode. After placing the nodule on the proper shelf with other silicon samples from several worlds, he noted the discrepancy on his padd, intending to look up the nodule’s origin so a new catalogue card could be created, and left the storage room, locking the door behind himself.

Inside the room, on one of the shelves, the silicon nodule moved slightly...

The End...?