

Author's Note: This story takes place concurrently with the Fifth Fleet Adventure "Under Foot."

Vice Admiral Kalin Kale of Alpha Centauri, the flag officer who would soon be relieving Vice Admiral Val'ri Raiajh in her duties as Typhon Sector Coordinator after more than five years in charge of the Federation Fifth Fleet's Area of Responsibility, was walking down one of the spoke corridors aboard *Starbase 719* with his flag aide, Lt Commander Galen DuLac of Avalon. The pair was heading toward one of the station's main hub turbolifts, en route to Ops to drop a status report off for Admiral Raiajh to review first thing in the morning. With all the fleet starships assigned to the base away on mission, including the *USS Corsair* - which had only recently transported Kale on an urgent task to Earth and back - it was a quiet evening aboard the Ournal-class starbase and few of the crew or residents of the station were out in the corridors as Kale, his eyes locked like phaser banks on a report he was reading from a padd, hurried down the hall.

"Captain Harkonnen's sector report needs additional data before I can transmit this back to Starfleet Operations," Kale was saying as he tapped a quick series of commands into the control interface. "I still need to amend Doctor Xaran's bio survey and preliminary account of the class-M planets located in sector 50116."

"Commander Torres hath informed me the Doctor recently departed thyne station aboard *Shuttle 17*, m'Lord Admiral," DuLac responded, his Avalonian accent still apparent even decades after departing his homeworld. "The shuttle and crew tis expected to return within a fortnight."

"I'll just have to append Doctor Xaran's report once he gets back," Kale remarked, his concentration still on the padd in his hand as the corridor opened up into one of the large circular atriums surrounding the main station turbolift hub shaft. "I need to transmit this information back to Admiral Janeway no later than tomorrow morning or..."

"MY LORD!" DuLac screamed as he suddenly grabbed Kale by the arm and tugged him backward with such force that Kale lost his grip on the padd he had been holding and both officers fell tumbling to the deck.

"Galen! What in Jupiter's name did you do that...!" Kale started to yell until he noticed his padd continue to slide across the polished deck and over the threshold of the open turbolift door toward which he had been walking. However, there was no turbolift car in place inside the shaft. As he watched, the padd slipped over the edge, quickly falling out of sight as it clattered within the wide tube. Crawling on his hands and knees closer to the open shaft, Kale peered inside. There was nothing beneath him except several kilometers of emptiness.

"Thank you, Galen," a wide-eyed Kale said as he fell back into a sitting position, allowing for the sudden adrenaline rush to slowly wear away. "If you hadn't been here, I'd have walked right through that open door and likely to my death!"

"What could cause such a mishap, m'Lord?" DuLac asked. "I thought turbolift egresses were not allowed to open without the presence of a cabin in place?"

"Perhaps some sort of fault in the sensors," Kale suggested, slowly getting back up on his unsteady legs. "Contact Ops and inform them of this occurrence. Have one of Commander Torres' staff come down and take a look at it."

As DuLac tapped his combadge and contacted Ops, Kale could not help but look once more through the open shaft door, a shudder running up his spine as he considered the ramifications of what had almost just happened.

Space, the Final Frontier...

**Star Trek: Starbase 719**

**"Thursday's Child Returns" By PJK**

*Station log, stardate 68630.9:*

*Starbase 719 is expecting the arrival of the civilian transport ship SS Shenandoah Valley, which is carrying several new crew members transferring to the starbase and several of the ships of the Fifth Fleet. Otherwise, with Admiral Fil now aboard the Corsair making a patrol of the lower AOR, it should be a relatively quiet and routine day aboard the station, and maybe I can get Shifty to keep the Lodge open past eight at night again. The one troubling incident of note was a report that came in during the evening watch last night, when a turbolift malfunction came close to seriously injuring - if not killing - my planned relief, Admiral Kalin Kale. Lt Commander Torres assures me she already has her best engineers working to resolve the problem.*

Vice Admiral Val'ri Raiajh exited the door of her office overlooking Starbase Ops and walked down the steps to the lower level, where chief of operations B'Elanna Torres and Starfleet Marine Corps battalion commander Colonel Sean McIntyre were standing beside the master systems display.

"Any word from the *Corsair* yet?" Raiajh asked as she joined the other two officers. "I fully expect to receive a report any minute now that Cathryn has pushed Penji out an airlock."

"Nothing from the *Corsair*," McIntyre replied as Torres stifled a guffaw. "However, the *Shenandoah Valley* has moored in the spacedock. With your permission, I would like to head down and greet the transport's captain. She's an... old friend."

"Of course, Colonel," Raiajh replied. She then looked at Torres as McIntyre headed toward the nearby bank of turbolifts and asked, "I just finished reading Kalin's report on the incident with the hub turbolift last night. It was a good thing Galen was with him when the malfunction occurred. Any idea what caused it?"

"I have Lieutenant Pel working on tracking down the fault," Torres replied. "So far we've traced the malfunction to a misplaced line of code in the turbolift network control computers. The Lieutenant is attempting to determine if this programming error was isolated to just the hub lifts or if we need to shut down the entire base's turbolift network and purge the programming."

"Let's hope it was merely an isolated incident," Raiajh remarked. "I don't relish the thought of having to use nothing but ladders and stairs to reach my quarters in the habitat section tonight after watch."

"Don't worry, Admiral. I wouldn't let that happen," Torres assured as a second turbolift door opened in the bank of three and a human male officer wearing the rank insignia of a lieutenant commander on the gold-yoked uniform of the operations department stepped out and walked toward Torres and Raiajh. The man snapped to attention before the two female officers and presented a small padd he had been carrying.

"Lieutenant Commander Shawn Clove, reporting for duty in the operations department," he said.

As Torres reached to accept the new arrival's set of orders, a look of surprise appeared on Raiajh's Vulcanoid features.

"Shawn? Shawn Clove? Is it really you?" she asked.

Clove took a closer look at the admiral's face, his own expression becoming one of shock and wonder.

"Ms. Raiajh! My God, what are you doing here?" he asked, almost ready to throw his arms around the admiral before noticing the rank insignia on her uniform. "Admiral Raiajh?! You were just a civilian when you were my teacher back aboard the *Sarek*! What are you doing here? And in uniform??"

"I take it you know one another?" Torres asked with a look of amusement as she glanced at Clove's records on the padd.

"Shawn was one of my students, and the son of our first officer, when the *Sarek* was assigned to explore the Gamma Quadrant back in the early years of the '70's, before the Dominion War," Raiajh explained to her chief of operations. She then looked back at Clove and said, "And I was still an officer in the Starfleet Reserves when I was your teacher. My commission was re-activated when I transferred off the *Sarek* after she was recalled to the Alpha Quadrant permanently. But enough about me... Look at you!" Raiajh stepped back to take in the entirety of

her former pupil. “A lieutenant commander in Starfleet! Considering how much you hated Starfleet when you first arrived aboard the *Sarek*, I guess Kalin getting you involved in the Fleet Space Cadet Corps paid off in spades!”

Clove’s expression darkened slightly for a moment as he said, “My contempt for Starfleet when I was a kid was mistaken. I’ve learned that quite a few things I believed growing up were... untrue, shall we say.”

“Well, I’m just happy to see another of my past students has gone on to bigger and better things,” Raiajh said, almost beaming with pride. “And now my student is one of my officers, at least for a little while.”

“A little while?” Clove asked, clearly confused.

“It’s a long story. One I would be happy to share with you over dinner. We MUST spend some time catching up. 1800 hours at Liberty Pointe. I insist,” Raiajh added when it looked like Clove was going to object.

“Very well, Ms... I mean, Admiral. In the meantime...” Clove turned to look at the half-Klingon engineer again and said, “I need to get all my paperwork in order and find out what watch section I’m assigned to.”

Torres looked at Raiajh and asked, “Do you think Captain Pearson would mind if I used her office in her absence?”

“Not at all,” Raiajh replied with a nod.

“Follow me, Commander,” Torres said to Clove, gesturing up the stairs toward the station’s executive officer’s office. “We’ll get you settled in as quickly as we can.”

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The turbolift opened onto the small, functional bridge of the vessel. McIntyre had served aboard several starships in his varied career in Starfleet, and had come to realize over time that the typical Starfleet-designed bridge was more than a simple work-space, but an area where the crew could be comfortable while on watch during missions that could literally last years. In stark contrast, the bridge into which the Marine colonel was entering could only be described as cramped yet serviceable, the command center of a ship whose sole function was to transport personnel and cargo from Point A to Point B and whose missions would last only a few days - or at most weeks - between port calls.

As he looked around, McIntyre noticed the woman he was seeking standing to one side and overseeing one of her senior crew as they performed some sort of maintenance on a console. Her blonde hair was speckled with streaks of grey in places, but otherwise she had changed little in the twenty years since he had last seen her.

“Request permission to come aboard?” McIntyre called out.

Captain Amanda Hardy, owner and master of the *SS Shenandoah Valley*, looked mildly annoyed that someone aboard her ship would be speaking so formally to her. She had never been a stickler for protocol. But when she looked over to see who had entered the bridge, her face broke out into a wide smile.

“Mack!” she called out, rushing over and throwing her arms around the Marine officer’s broad chest. “What are you doing here?! Last I heard, Starfleet was court-martialing you for being a fugitive or some such thing.” She took a step back to look at him, clearly impressed by his uniform. “Back in Starfleet again I see. You must have beat the charges somehow. So what should I call you now? Lieutenant Commander? Commander?”

“Actually, the rank is Colonel, Starfleet Marine Corps,” McIntyre informed Hardy. “When Captain James Ralston of Starfleet Intelligence filed his charges against me, he vowed I would never wear a Starfleet uniform again.” McIntyre looked down at his own uniform and shrugged slightly. “I suppose you could say he was right, from a certain point of view.”

Hardy invited McIntyre to sit down in the commander’s chair as she herself turned the helm seat around and sat down, saying, “Again, what brings you all the way out here to the Typhon Sector?”

“I’m currently serving as the CO for the battalion of Marines aboard *Starbase 719*,” McIntyre explained. “When I heard the *Shenandoah Valley* was the ship transporting the base’s new replacement officers, I had to come down and see if you were still in charge. And if the maintenance program I put into place was still being followed.”

Hardy smiled as she recalled how she first met McIntyre aboard the Bajoran station *Deep Space Nine* and how in less than 24 hours he had managed to repair or upgrade systems aboard the *Shenandoah Valley* that had not worked properly since her father had owned and operated the transport ship a lifetime ago.

“The *Valley* is operating nominally,” Hardy admitted with pride. “Occasionally I find one of the engineering crew falling back into their old habits or letting maintenance slide, but I usually get them back into gear with a swift kick to the butt.”

“I’m glad my time aboard the *Valley*, however brief, wasn’t all for naught,” McIntyre remarked with a grin. “How long will you be in the Typhon Sector for?”

“We’re taking on a load of cargo and livestock destined for the Persephone colony, the furthest from Federation space the *Valley* has ever traveled, but that will take at least 48 hours to load up. Why?”

“As I recall, we were supposed to have dinner together the night Starfleet caught up to me aboard the *Valley* all those years ago,” McIntyre said. “I was thinking perhaps we could pick up where we left off?”

“I still have a couple more hours of work to get done now that we’re moored, but I think I could be free sometime after 1600 station time,” Hardy replied demurely. “Where did you have in mind?”

“The station recreation area has a number of nice restaurants, but I think for this occasion Liberty Pointe would be appropriate. Is 1730 convenient?”

Hardy’s expression was a mixture of disappointment and anticipation as she replied, “1730 works for me. Anyplace in particular I should meet you?”

McIntyre was about to tell her to meet at the entrance to the restaurant, but quickly thought better of it. “Yeah,” he said. “Meet me in the station’s botanical garden.”

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Kalin Kale was working in his temporary office, located two levels below Starbase Ops. There was a lot of work involved in turning over duties from one Sector Coordinator to another - particularly when the sector coordinator was unofficially in charge of an entire fleet operating area beyond the primary sector where his or her command was located - and a lot of the work involved subspace correspondence with Starfleet Command back on Earth. Until he officially relieved Admiral Raijeh of her duties and moved into the Sector Coordinator’s office in Ops upper level, he was relegated to using the small temporary space assigned to him. The office’s one redeeming feature was a window about twice the size of a typical computer monitor that allowed for a spectacular view of space surrounding the starbase.

Kale’s concentration was interrupted by a sound - or rather by the lack of sound. It took him a moment to realize the ventilation fan which serviced his office - a constant background noise most people do not hear until it was missing - had ceased. While unusual, it was not in itself alarming, and Kale quickly returned to his work.

Several minutes later the admiral started sensing something new was wrong. It started with a sharp ozone-like smell coming from the ventilation grate above the door across the small room.

“Did the ventilation circulator burn itself out?” Kale wondered to himself before deciding to have the engineering staff take a look at the system. He touched the intercom on his desk and said, “Kale to Starbase Ops.”

Kale waited several seconds for a response. When there was none, he tapped his combadge. “Admiral Kale to Starbase Ops.” Again he waited several seconds with no response. “What in hell is going on?”

“Warning!” the computer’s female voice suddenly called out. “Compartment oxygen level dropping below minimum required levels. Carbon monoxide concentration currently seventy five parts per million and rising.”

“Time to get out of here,” Kale said as he stood up from behind his desk and headed toward the door. He was shocked as he hit the door full on when it did not open as he expected. Kale tried prying and scratching at the edge of the door, hoping to pull it open manually, but without success. The door appeared to be sealed.

“Warning! Compartment oxygen level now at sixteen point five percent. Carbon monoxide concentration currently two hundred parts per million and rising.”

Kale looked around the room, hoping to find anything that might help him escape the office. He moved toward the small closet door to one side of the room, hoping perhaps there would be some access panel to the Jefferies tubes inside. To his initial elation he found an emergency breathing mask.

Pulling the mask over his face, he quickly read the instructions written on the side of the small air supply tank. He was disappointed to realize the device was meant for quick escape from a compartment filled with smoke

or open to the vacuum of space, as the air supply was designed to last no more than five minutes. He had been trapped inside the office for more time than that already, and wondered why no one had come to his rescue yet. Surely Ops was receiving an alarm concerning the carbon monoxide readings! The admiral could already feel a slight headache beginning to pound inside his skull. He quickly activated the emergency breather, then started looking for another means of escape.

“Warning! Compartment oxygen level now at fourteen percent. Carbon monoxide concentration currently thirty-two hundred parts per million and rising. Nearing fatal levels.”

Kale had scoured the office for any means to escape, but none seemed present. He had even gone so far as to throw his office chair at the door, hoping it would either somehow break through the sealed door or - at the very least - alert someone outside in the corridor that he was trapped. He glanced at his tank reading. Less than three minutes of breathable air left. He looked around the small office once more.

Then his eyes settled on the window.

Kale calculated his odds. If he threw the chair at the window too lightly, nothing was going to happen. He would still be trapped and his air supply running out. But if he hit the window just hard enough to weaken the transparent aluminum, it would cause alarms all over the admin section of the station to sound and Ops would definitely be alerted to his predicament.

However, if he hit the window too hard... Sure, emergency forcefields should snap into place almost immediately, and alarms would sound throughout the station, but in that brief moment of explosive decompression, could Kale prevent himself from being blown out of the room and into the depths of space beyond?

He looked at his air supply again. Two minutes remaining.

Taking a deep breath in an attempt to calm himself and conserve what little air he had left, Kale picked up the chair from where it had fallen to the deck in front of the door. He then braced his legs against the desk, which was securely attached to the deck, and threw the chair at the window with as much strength as he would allow himself. The furniture flew the couple of meters across the room and hit the window, bouncing back and breaking an arm off as it hit the deck with a loud clatter.

“Warning! Compartment oxygen level now at ten percent. Carbon monoxide concentration currently ten thousand parts per million and rising. Carbon monoxide at fatal levels.”

With his fading willpower, Kale picked up the chair one more time and - bracing himself against the desk again - threw it with all his remaining strength at the window.

The chair flew through the air in what seemed to Kale like slow motion. At first it seemed like it would shatter completely and fall to the deck until part of the metal structure - broken into a knife-like edge from the impact - pierced a defect in the transparent aluminum caused by the previous hit and started a chain reaction as the cracks quickly spread. The atmospheric pressure inside the office, which in spite of its current toxic make-up had never actually decreased, pushed out on the window even further until finally the window shattered outward and the atmosphere in the room rushed to join the shards. Kale had dropped down behind the front of the desk as soon as he released the chair from his grip, and for what seemed like several minutes but was in reality less than two seconds, the air rushed past him and out the opening, threatening to carry the Centauri with it, until -as predicted - the emergency forcefield sealed the breach.

Unable to help himself, Kale gulped at what air remained in his emergency mask. The tank was quickly running dry, and the edges of the admiral’s vision started to go black. The last thing he saw was a red glow forming across the door leading to the corridor.

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Colonel Sean McIntyre had met Captain Amanda Hardy in the station’s immense botanical garden at 1730 hours, where the pair strolled around the edge of the lake while Hardy marveled at the size of the space, the huge dome projecting a late-afternoon sky as lights appeared inside the windows of the central hub tower.

“This is truly amazing, Mack,” she said to her companion. “I’ve never been aboard a Federation starbase that had anything like this before.”

“Most of the Ournal-class stations have a garden dome like this,” McIntyre explained, “though most of them are in orbit of planets deep in Federation space, like the Earth spacedock.” McIntyre leaned closer to Hardy and added quietly, “Personally, I suspect the captain of the *Shenandoah Valley* just doesn’t take the time to explore the ports she visits, or she might find so-called wonders like this a little more often.”

Hardy shrugged as the pair continued around the lake, watching station residents paddle by in small boats as they told each other what had occurred in their lives over the intervening twenty years. Hardy admitted that a few years after Mack had been taken off the *Shenandoah Valley* by the crew of the *USS Galveston*, she had married a man she had met during a port visit in the Andor system – first mate aboard another civilian transport vessel – though the relationship had not lasted more than a year and she heard her ex-husband had died in a shipping accident over a decade earlier. She also told McIntyre that the brief marriage had produced a son who was currently attending college on Earth and - after graduation - was expected to return to the *Valley*, where he would learn how the transport ship operated and eventually take over as the *Shenandoah Valley*’s master and commander, just as Hardy had done with her own father all those years before.

As the pair completed their loop around the lake, the Marine colonel steered his companion onto a path leading toward the central hub and asked, “Are you hungry yet?”

“I’ve been eating replicator rations for the last week and a half. I’m starved!”

The pair soon entered one of the central hub turbolifts and, heading up, exited in the station’s recreation area. More open than most of the station’s interior - though not to the degree of the botanical garden - the rec area looked almost like a small town main street transplanted inside a large starbase, with several ‘buildings’ housing shops, bars, holosuites, and restaurants of every description. McIntyre directed his companion toward a quaint looking structure with tables outside the door and a sign in front that identified the business as Liberty Pointe.

The maître d’ escorted the pair to a table McIntyre had reserved earlier in the day. He was surprised to see Admiral Val’ri Raiajh, wearing one of her more conservative civilian outfits, sitting at another table not far away with a Starfleet officer McIntyre had never seen before wearing the gold uniform of operations. After sitting down and ordering drinks, McIntyre said to Hardy, “What brings you and your ship all the way out here? It’s very unusual for Starfleet to contract transport of crew transferees to a civilian ship like yours. How’d you get the job?”

“From my understanding, there just wasn’t a Starfleet transport available in the sector to make it worthwhile to carry such a small group all the way out here to the Typhon Sector,” Hardy replied. “Normally, if there were fifty or more, Starfleet would have called on one of their own transports to do the job, but only a dozen personnel were heading out here, with most of them continuing on to the starships assigned to the Fifth Fleet, and the *Valley* happened to be in the Sol system - having just dropped off supplies at Mars - to take advantage of the opportunity.” She clinked her wineglass against the one in McIntyre’s hand and added, “If I had known you were stationed all the way out here, I might have volunteered to pull that duty much sooner.”

“Well, now you know,” McIntyre replied with a smile before taking a sip of his own wine.

“And knowing is half the battle?” Hardy asked with a demure smile.

Across the patio, at Admiral Raiajh’s table, Raiajh was saying to her own companion, “...And believe it or not, the *Sarek* is now a part of our fleet! She pulls into spacedock from time to time between survey missions. You should take an opportunity some day to go aboard and look around. She really hasn’t changed much in the years since we left the Gamma Quadrant.” Raiajh took a sip of her drink and added, “I wish Sylvan and Charissa were here. They would have loved to see you again.”

“Sylvan? You mean Doctor Xaran? I thought he was killed when those aliens attacked the *Sarek* when I was a kid and that was part of why you left?” Clove remarked.

“Technically he was dead for a short time, but Doctor Rasa managed to revive him. However, it took months of physical and mental therapy at *DS9* before he was able to function normally again. Then he remained on Earth for additional recovery after my commission was reactivated and I was placed in charge of the Besiege Development Project and commanded the prototype ship during her shakedown.”

“And Charissa? What happened to her?”

“She grew up, eventually following Sylvan and I into Starfleet. One of her first assignments after graduating the Academy was accompanying me here to *Starbase 719* to oversee the final stages of construction and placing the station into service. But she was badly injured in an accident a few years ago.”

“She’s alright, I hope!” Clove interjected.

“Charissa made a full recovery, but in the process decided that remaining in Starfleet wasn’t in her future. She resigned her commission and moved back to Betazed with her partner.”

“Oh... Her partner,” Clove said, sounding a little disappointed. “I see. Good for her.”

Raiajh studied Clove’s face, a slight smile appearing on her lips. “I remember you used to have a crush on Charissa back when we were all aboard the *Sarek*.”

“Admiral!” Clove protested. “I was only eight years old! There was no way...!”

“It didn’t take an empath to see how you felt about Charissa back then. You used to follow her around like a lost puppy when...”

Raiajh’s reminiscence was interrupted by a voice speaking urgently from her combadge. “Ops to Admiral Raiajh!”

“Go ahead,” Raiajh said after excusing herself to Clove and tapping her communicator.

“Admiral, this is Commander Petersen. Admiral Kale has been taken to Infirmary 1 with serious injuries.”

A look of shock appeared on Raiajh’s Vulcanoid features as she asked, “What happened?”

“I have a team investigating, but so far all we know is the window in his temporary office fractured and the office experienced explosive decompression. However, the Admiral was found with an emergency breathing mask in place.”

“I’m on my way to the infirmary now,” Raiajh said and deactivated her combadge. “I’m sorry, Shawn, but I have an emergency to attend to.”

“I understand,” Clove replied neutrally. “Admiral Kale? Not the same...?”

“Yes, Kalin Kale. The first commanding officer of the *Sarek* when we were all in the Gamma Quadrant,” Raiajh confirmed as she stood up. “Please stay and enjoy your meal. I’ll get back together with you later, after I find out what happened.”

“I’ll await your call,” Clove remarked as he watched Raiajh rush away toward the nearest turbolift.

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Admiral Kale had regained consciousness by the time Raiajh arrived in the emergency ward, where she joined both Commanders Michelle Petersen and B’Elanna Torres. She watched briefly through the window as Dr. T’Pannia scanned Kale’s prone form before injecting a hypo of tri-ox into his system, then looked at her subordinates.

“What happened? Why did Admiral Kale’s office window give out?”

“From what we can tell right now based on the evidence we found, the Admiral himself broke through the window,” Petersen replied.

“Why would he do that?!?”

Torres answered Raiajh’s inquiry by saying, “When emergency crews arrived after the breach and subsequent forcefield erection set off alarms in Ops, they found the Admiral’s office door sealed shut. We had to use phasers to cut through and access the office. Once inside, the emergency responders determined that before the explosive decompression, the atmosphere in the office had such a high concentration of carbon monoxide, it would have killed anyone breathing it in less than a minute! Fortunately the Admiral was wearing an EBM.”

“Carbon monoxide! And Kalin’s door was sealed?” Raiajh asked, hoping she had heard wrong.

“Yes,” Petersen replied. “Somehow the environmental circuits had been overridden and deadly concentrations of carbon monoxide were being pumped into that room. As a result, the main computer sealed the door shut to prevent inadvertent access. Unfortunately, it appears to have sealed the Admiral inside as well.”

“And why didn’t the crew in Ops know about the toxic atmosphere being pumped into that room?” Raiajh demanded. “Ops should have gotten some indication of abnormal conditions long before it reached toxic levels!”

“Whatever glitch caused the environmental computer to malfunction also cut off communications between level three and the rest of the station,” Petersen admitted. “The Admiral probably tried to contact someone and was unable to get through while this incident was occurring.”

Raiajh looked pensive, but a rage was growing deep inside. “First an empty turbolift shaft opens in front of Kalin, now his office is pumped full of poisonous gas while communications are disabled. I don’t believe in coincidences, Commander. Someone - or something - appears to be trying to kill Kalin Kale!”

Both Petersen and Torres had looks of disbelief on their faces. “Who would do such a thing?” Torres finally asked. “And why?”

“That’s what I need the two of you to find out. In the meantime, Commander Petersen, have guards in place, both outside every infirmary entrance and here inside the emergency ward, to protect the Admiral.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Petersen replied before tapping her combadge and calling security, immediately having several security guards assigned to guard Admiral Kale at all times.

“If there is truly someone going after Admiral Kale, he or she would need a specific set of skills,” Torres said to Raiajh in the meantime. “Accessing the turbolift or environmental control systems without being seen or setting off noticeable indications would require time and probably be beyond the capabilities of the average Starfleet personnel or civilian living here on the base.”

“Do you know anyone off the top of your head with the skills necessary?” Raiajh asked.

“Yes,” Torres quickly replied. “Me. But I assure you I have nothing against Admiral Kale.”

“Anyone else you can think of?”

“Almost any member of the station’s senior staff is capable of re-programming the computer systems. It’s all a matter of technical expertise.”

“What do you mean?” Raiajh asked.

“Well, for example, Doctor Xaran would probably be capable of re-programming the environmental computer to pump the admiral’s office full of toxic compounds, but I doubt he has the skills to cut off communications from that specific room or re-program the turbolift network.”

“And besides, Sylvan is away aboard *Shuttle 17* on a mission right now,” Raiajh said. “So he’s in the clear.”

“Well, as I said, this kind of re-programming would have taken time in order not to be noticed. It could have been done days, even weeks ago and programmed not to activate until now. Not that I’m trying to blame Doctor Xaran!” Torres quickly added.

“Who else has the skills?”

“Commander Petersen and Captains Harkonnen and Pearson could probably have re-programmed the turbolifts. Michelle and Cathryn the communications system too. But none of them have the skill to re-program the environmental systems. And to be quite honest, Admiral, I can’t see any of our crew doing something like this to begin with.”

“Neither can I,” Raiajh agreed. “Which means, if there really is a person with a grudge against Kalin, it’s probably someone who arrived aboard the station sometime in the last month and likely not a member of the assigned crew.”

“That could still be a couple of hundred people, Admiral,” Torres admitted.

“I know. Like searching for a needle in a haystack. But I need you and Commander Petersen to start pulling that haystack apart as soon as possible.”

“We’re on it.”

As Torres and Petersen walked away to start their investigation, Dr. T’Pannia emerged from the emergency ward and, noticing Raiajh, stepped over.

“How is Kalin?” Raiajh asked.

“The Admiral is awake and not showing any indications of brain damage. He is fortunate to have found the breathing mask when he did,” the doctor replied. “You may go in and speak with him if you desire.”

Raiajh nodded and entered the emergency room, stepping to the side of Kale’s biobed.

“How are you feeling,” she asked.

Kale partially opened his eyes and looked in Raiajh's direction. "My head feels like a Vegan drakoulias has been tap dancing on it, but otherwise I think I'm okay."

"Any idea what happened in your office?"

"Yeah. I think someone is trying to kill me," Kale replied humorlessly.

"You came to that conclusion too, huh?" Raiajh admitted.

"Hard not to when you consider what has happened to me in the last few days. Any idea who or why? I didn't think I made THAT many enemies since transferring off the *Arcturus*."

"I have Petersen and Torres looking into that as we speak. In the meantime, I'm posting guards around the infirmary until we can figure out what is going on."

Kale glanced out the window into the main ward, where several security officers could be seen assuming guard stations.

"Great. Kitty's going to love having a couple more guests staying in our temporary quarters with us."

"Until we know what is going on...!"

"I know, and I would do the same thing." Kale looked directly at Raiajh again as he said, "Just find the bastard, whoever it is!"

"We will, Kalin. Rest assured, we will."

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The next morning, Admiral Raiajh was completing the morning watch brief in Ops with the station's senior staff.

"...And as you all know, Admiral Kale was involved in an incident yesterday afternoon that could have been fatal, had he not managed to alert the crew here in Ops," she was saying. "Commanders Petersen and Torres are leading the investigation to determine why the environmental system on level three malfunctioned, but I need each and every watch-stander to be alert to any unusual reading, no matter how minor it may seem. If we can catch malfunctions before they become life-threatening, perhaps we can determine what is behind this recent series of failures."

Several of the staff entered notes into personal padds as Raiajh turned her attention on Colonel McIntyre, whom she noticed was attempting to stifle a yawn. "Mack, we have a number of new crew that arrived aboard the station yesterday. I know many of them are only here temporarily until their assigned starship returns or they can make passage out to where the starship is on mission, but I don't want any conflicts to arise resulting from confusion over the roles of Commander Petersen's security division and your Marines." McIntyre nodded as Raiajh continued. "I've scheduled you to lead a brief in the Ops briefing room at 1400 hours today.

McIntyre entered the appointment in his own padd as a reminder before saying, "I'll be there, Admiral."

Raiajh nodded, then consulted her own notes before saying, "One final thing before you all relieve the watch; It has come to my attention that..."

\* \* \* \*

The door chime to Commander Petersen's office near the primary station brig sounded and Petersen looked up from the work she was compiling. She had already reviewed an extensive list of personnel living aboard *Starbase 719* for more than two weeks with the requisite skills necessary to override either the turbolift control systems or the environmental systems, and so far she could find no one with an axe to grind against Admiral Kale. "Come," she finally said. The door swished open and a man with a thin build and foppish hair entered.

"Thou required mine presence, Commander?" Galen DuLac asked.

"Yes, Commander DuLac. Come in. Please sit down."

DuLac entered the office, glancing around almost like an animal expecting a trap to spring would, before taking a seat on the opposite side of the desk from Petersen.

“Commander DuLac,” Petersen started saying as she consulted a new padd she had removed from a desk drawer. “I understand you and Admiral Kale have known each other a long time?”

“Aye, that we have,” DuLac agreed. “Did serve together aboard yon vessel of the stars *Arcturus*, long ere the incident that thrust us forward in time. Since bonnie ensigns were we!”

It took a moment for Petersen to translate DuLac’s Avalonian speech patterns into modern standard, then came to the realization that the flag aide was saying he and Kale had served together for many years. The fact the pair had started their careers together as ensigns struck Petersen as unusual.

“Have you always served in some capacity with the Admiral?” she asked.

“Nay. At which hour that gent transf’r’d to becometh captain of the Sarek, I did remain aboard the *Arcturus-A*,” DuLac replied. “We next hath met at which hour that gent wast promot’d to commandeth ov’rseeing the Si’rra Monit’ring posts ‘long the Neutral Zone. That gent wast in needeth of an aide, and I wast between assignments, having did complete mine own toureth aboard the *Arcturus*. At which hour that gent did see mine own nameth on the availability listeth, next thing I kneweth I wast aboard a transp’rt heading toward the Romulan Neutral Zone. I has’t been his faithful squire ev’r since.”

“I’m sure you are aware of what has happened here aboard the station over the last several days?”

“Hhow couldst I not beest acknow’n?” DuLac replied, his eyes becoming watery. “I shouldst has’t been with that gent yest’rday, at which hour his office did fill with vile and noxious poisons! P’rhaps if ‘t be true I w’re th’re, the Admiral wouldst not has’t did tempt death so easily!”

“You shouldn’t feel that way, Commander. There was no way you could have known. And besides...”

Petersen paused for a moment, looking at DuLac intently, as suspicions raised themselves in her head.

“What is’t, Commander?” DuLac asked.

“You were present when Admiral Kale almost fell down the turbolift shaft,” she said. It was not a question.

“Aye, I wast. F’r that gent wouldst has’t fallen to his doom hadst I not int’rvned!”

“Yet you conveniently were not with him when his office was pumped full of toxic carbon monoxide,” Petersen said to herself. She then looked at DuLac again after calling up more detailed technical information in DuLac’s records and asked, “Can you think of anyone that might be holding a grudge against Admiral Kale? Anyone at all?”

“Nay, I cannot,” DuLac replied.

“Perhaps someone who feels that Admiral Kale wronged them in some way?” Petersen pressed. “Maybe someone who felt their own career has been stifled in comparison to the Admirals?”

“Stifled? In what way?”

“Oh, perhaps someone who started out as a ‘bonnie ensign’ at the same time as Kalin Kale, and now finds themselves no higher in rank than a lieutenant commander while Kale has reached the flag rank of vice admiral? I noticed in your record you have technical expertise in both mechanical systems AND life support technology, though you were initially trained as a navigator at the Academy.”

Now DuLac’s eyes went wide with shock. “Thou art accusing me of plotting to killeth mine own lief cousin and colleague?!?” he shouted, surprising Petersen with his ferocity. “While true I s’rv’d as a navigat’r aboard the ‘riginal *Arcturus*, I wast requir’d to learneth m’re technical exp’tise at which hour I wast did place in the op’rations division upon our em’rgence in the 24<sup>th</sup> century! I has’t nev’r begrudg’d m’Lord Kalin his successes! And I wouldst not coequal ponder such a plot to bringeth harme to that gent, nay less attempteth to carryeth it out!” DuLac got up out of his chair and headed toward the door. “Good day, m’Lady.”

“Commander, I’m not done with you yet. There are still several questions I need to ask...”

DuLac spun around to face Petersen, his eyes alight, as he said, “Thee has’t stain’d mine own hon’r with thy baseless accusations. I shall has’t nay furth’r parteth of this sham. Good DAY!” And without a further word, DuLac departed the security office. Were the doors capable of it, he would have slammed them in his wake.

“Methinks he doth protest too much,” Petersen remarked to herself in a mocking tone, adding several notes to her investigation file and telling herself she needed to speak to Admiral Kale’s wife, Counselor Kathryn Hawk, about the admiral’s relationship with DuLac and what she felt the Avalonian might be capable of. “He was already

accused once of trying to murder his shipmates back when he first reported aboard the original *Arcturus*,” she said to herself as she consulted the aide’s records again. “I believe we now have a prime suspect in this investigation.” Pleased with how her inquiry was unfolding, she added, “I need to talk to Admiral Raiajh about this.”

Out in the corridor outside the security office, Galen DuLac willed himself to calm down. He had inadvertently let his fiery Avalonian personality get the better of him. He knew he could not let this latest development distract him further from his own investigation into the attempts on Admiral Kale’s life. Consulting the notes he had compiled, he headed toward the primary turbolift control computer, hoping to find some evidence of the tampering that must have taken place.

\* \* \* \*

At just before 1400, McIntyre arrived back in Ops after overseeing – and participating in – training exercises in one of the large holodecks set aside for use by the Starfleet Marines. He rode one of the lifts to the upper deck and entered the briefing room, where several men and woman for several different Federation species were already waiting.

“Attention on deck!” one of the young officers shouted out, prompting everyone in the room who was not already standing to jump to their feet.

“At ease,” McIntyre ordered as he moved to the front of the room and everyone else took seats around the table. To the Marine officer’s surprise, one of the men present was the operations officer he had seen having dinner with Admiral Raiajh the prior evening, and wondered what connection the two had, as their interaction the previous night had definitely not been one of superior and subordinate. “My name is Colonel Sean Elliott McIntyre, commanding officer of the battalion of Starfleet Marines stationed here in the Typhon Sector. I am here to brief all of you on the interaction between the station’s security division - under the supervision of station Chief of Security Michelle Petersen - and my Marines, and what you as Starfleet officers can do to prevent conflicts between these two separate yet similar divisions during your time aboard *Starbase 719*, no matter how long or short that may be.”

McIntyre organized several isolinear chips he was carrying and slipped one into a slot on the briefing room table top and mentally counted the number of new arrivals in the briefing. Thirteen. Something about that number bothered the colonel, aside from typical superstition, but he could not put his finger on what it was. Instead, he put the feeling aside for the moment and continued the brief.

“As I’m sure you’re aware, *Starbase 719* was established in the Typhon sector in 2386 as the home base of the Federation Fifth Fleet. Being located literally on the frontier of unknown space, this space station has seen more than its fair share of conflict in its nearly six years of operation. From skirmishes with the Cybots to all-out war with the Kairn Empire, it was quickly realized that *Starbase 719* needed its own garrison of troops to help protect the Starfleet personnel and civilians that call this station their home.” McIntyre activated the briefing room view screen and continued, “This chart shows a breakdown of the responsibilities divided between the security division and the Marine battalion...”

Nearly an hour later, McIntyre had completed his brief. “Remember, if you have any questions, feel free to contact either myself, my XO Major Benedict Markell, or Security Chief Petersen. Are there any other questions?” The colonel waited several seconds, but none of the attendees spoke. “In that case, dismissed.”

As everyone gathered their own isolinear chips and started heading toward the door, McIntyre called out to the man he had seen with Raiajh the night before. “Lieutenant Commander, a moment please?” Shawn Clove looked at McIntyre like a deer caught in the headlights. He pointed to himself, the only lieutenant commander in the room, as all the other transferees were mainly lieutenants and JGs, just to be certain, and McIntyre nodded.

Once the room had cleared of everyone else, Clove asked, “Have I done something wrong, Colonel?”

“No, Commander. I noticed you having dinner with Admiral Raiajh last evening, and wondered how you knew her. I’ve served with the Admiral in one capacity or another as part of the Fifth Fleet for the last six years or so.”

Clove seemed to relax slightly as he replied, “Ms. Raiajh... damn, I keep forgetting.... The Admiral was one of my teachers when I lived with my mother aboard the starship *Sarek* for about a year when I was a kid.”

“Really? Small universe! The *Sarek* has been part of the Fifth Fleet since the fleet was reactivated too. Maybe I know your mother?”

“I doubt it,” Clove remarked, his expression becoming a frown. “She died about twelve years ago. Commander Mickey Costa. She was the first officer of the *Sarek* when the ship was assigned to explore the Gamma Quadrant, but she developed some mysterious deadly disease while on the other side of the galaxy and Starfleet wasn’t able to find a cure.”

Now McIntyre’s expression turned serious as he said, “At least not at the time.”

Clove looked confused. “What do you mean, Colonel?”

“Several years ago, during the time I was assigned to the starship *Dauntless*, our own first officer started showing symptoms of that same disease,” the Marine officer explained. “As I recall, now that you mentioned it, K’danz apparently served with your mother aboard the *Sarek* too. Our captain disregarded direct orders and took his starship through the Bajoran wormhole in search of a cure.”

Clove’s expression grew even angrier as he asked, “That captain didn’t happen to be Kalin Kale, did it?”

“No,” McIntyre answered. Captain Koester. Now Fleet Captain Koester, and still in command of the *Dauntless*.”

Clove’s expression relaxed slightly, but the anger remained behind his blue eyes.

“Well, your first officer was lucky to have such a caring captain when that happened,” he remarked. “My mother wasn’t quite so fortunate.”

McIntyre realized he had strayed into a tender subject, and decided to cut the conversation short. “Sorry for dredging up bad memories, Commander. Hopefully your service here will provide some better ones.”

“I’m sure, once I get to work to accomplish my goals, I’ll be very happy here, Colonel,” Clove responded.

“In that case, welcome aboard *Starbase 719*,” McIntyre said as he offered his hand. Clove returned the handshake and both men headed out the door. They ran into Admiral Raiajh just leaving her office as they stepped out onto the upper level of Ops.

“Colonel, how did your briefing go?” she asked McIntyre.

“Well, I believe. I think I got the separation between security and the Marines across and for the new arrivals to stay out of trouble either way.”

“Great.” Raiajh turned her attention on the second man and added, “My apologies for having to run out on you last night. Perhaps we can get together sometime soon and finish our dinner?”

“I would enjoy that, Admiral,” Clove responded as McIntyre started heading down the stairs. “I would love to hear more about how your family is doing.”

“Sylvan is scheduled to return to the station in a little over a week,” Raiajh said. “I’m sure he’s going to want to see you again too.”

“I’m not planning on going anywhere before he gets back,” Clove replied. “In the meantime, I need to finish off this list of check-in items Commander Torres gave me so I can start fulfilling my normal duties as soon as possible.”

As Raiajh and Clove continued their conversation, McIntyre walked down the steps to the main level of Ops. Lt Commander Torres, having noticed the pensive expression on the Marine officer’s face, looked at him with an inquiring glance. “Everything okay, Colonel?”

“Yes,” the Marine officer replied. “Just not used to having to address a small gathering of Fleet officers and using my ‘quiet voice’ for so long. I feel the need to let off some steam, if you know what I mean.”

“Got plans for the evening?”

“Getting together one more time with an old friend who is visiting the base. Her ship is scheduled to depart tomorrow, so I don’t want to miss out.”

“Well, have fun, Colonel,” Torres urged with a smile as McIntyre headed toward the turbolift bank. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do!”

McIntyre paused and turned around, smiling as he said, “That should give me plenty of leeway.” He then turned back and entered the center lift door. Just a moment later, a signal on the engineering console attracted Torres’ attention.

“Admiral!” she called out to the woman still standing and talking with Lt Commander Clove on the upper level walkway. “I have an indication someone is accessing the main data processors for the turbolift control systems! Admin section, level twenty nine!”

Raiajh, now on a heightened alert, rushed down the nearby steps to the master systems display as she ordered, “Lock out that system! Override the controls and initiate backup mechanisms. Then have security converge on the location in question. We may have him!”

“Have who?” Shawn Clove asked, having walked down the stairs to join Raiajh at the master station. “What’s going on?”

“We believe we have a saboteur of some sort aboard the station,” Raiajh explained as she monitored the status of the alert. We have put certain fail-safes into operation so that if anyone were to access a potentially dangerous system, we would be alerted before that system could be used to harm anyone.”

\* \* \* \*

Down on level twenty nine, Galen DuLac was attempting to interface a tricorder into the records banks of the primary station turbolift control system. The connection had just been accomplished when suddenly the computer equipment shut down and went dark. A moment later he heard the locking mechanism on the access door click in place.

“Alas t!!” he grumbled, wondering if he had time to try and stash his equipment before he was located. His musings were interrupted by the door opening less than a minute later and a trio of Petersen’s security guards, weapons drawn, entered the small space.

“Hands behind your head!” one of the security officers demanded. “You’re under arrest!”

“I assureth thee, this situation is not what it seemeth,” DuLac pleaded as he also complied with the demand. As two of the guards remained at the ready with their weapons aimed at the Avalonian’s chest, the third moved around him and cuffed DuLac’s wrists before leading the flustered man off to the brig.

\* \* \* \*

Captain Amanda Hardy of the *SS Shenandoah Valley* was waiting for McIntyre right where he had suggested the previous evening, in front of the Bastogne Lodge, as the colonel arrived.

“Sorry. I wasn’t expecting my departmental brief to take so long,” McIntyre said as he gestured toward the Lodge’s door and both he and Hardy stepped inside.

The pair took seats at a table not far from the bar just before she started looking around at the unusual decor of the establishment. “First a huge indoor botanical garden, now a re-creation of an ancient Terran war. I really need to get out and explore the ports I visit a little more.” Hardy then looked at McIntyre and said, “What kind of brief, if I may ask? Or do I need a super seekrit security clearance to know?”

“Those thirteen new officers you transported out here aboard the *Valley*,” McIntyre replied to Hardy’s question as he gestured for two drinks from the bar. “The Admiral wanted me to make sure they knew not to mix up the security division with my Marines for the time they are aboard the station.”

“Twelve.”

“What do you mean?”

“I transported twelve Starfleet officers out here,” Hardy replied.

“No, there were definitely thirteen new arrivals at my brief today. I know I’m just a Starfleet Marine, but I can still count... at least until I run out of fingers and toes. And there were definitely thirteen of them there today.”

Hardy chuckled at McIntyre’s sense of self-deprecating humor, then insisted, “I spent the last two weeks transporting those officers out here. Believe me, there were no more than twelve. I can even name them all for you!” She began rattling off several names, but was interrupted by a voice coming from McIntyre’s combadge.

“Petersen to Colonel McIntyre.”

Mack looked both frustrated and slightly embarrassed as he tapped his communicator and replied, "This is McIntyre. Go ahead, Commander."

"Colonel, we've made an arrest in the attempted murder of Admiral Kale. Can you please report to the main station brig facility? Due to the specifics of the suspect in question, I need someone of at least O-6 rank to aid in processing."

Mack sighed slightly before responding, "I'll be right there, Commander. McIntyre, out." He then deactivated his combadge before saying to Hardy, "I'm sorry about this. Hopefully it won't take too long. If you want to wait here I'll make sure Shifty knows to keep your glass full while..."

"Mind if I tag along with you?" Hardy asked. "I'm leaving in the morning. I would hate to waste what little time I still have here."

McIntyre pondered Hardy's request for a moment. It was not as if the station's brig complex was out of bounds for civilian personnel. It just was not a place the average tourist visited aboard *Starbase 719*.

"If you don't mind. The brig isn't the most interesting place aboard the station. But I would enjoy the company," he finally replied.

"I don't mind at all. Maybe you can show me something a little more interesting once we're done with whatever you have to do there? Like, perhaps, your quarters?"

McIntyre smiled as the couple stood up and headed for the door. Shifty Powers, the Lodge's proprietor and bartender, gave Mack a confused look as they got up.

"We'll have to take a rain check on those drinks, Shifty," Mack explained as they exited the bar. Several minutes and one turbolift ride later, the couple was entering the secure facility where the station's brig was located. He noticed Commander Petersen standing in front of one of the few activated cells and moved to join her, only to be shocked as he recognized who was inside the cell.

"Commander DuLac?!? Admiral Kale's Aide???" Mack questioned.

"Yes," Petersen replied. "We caught him in the act of trying to erase evidence of his tampering with the turbolift network."

"Again, Commander, I beseech thee," DuLac called out from inside his cell. "I wast m'rely conducting an investigation of the conspiracy 'gainst our Lord Admiral myself! L'rd Admiral Kale remains in dang'r lest I findeth his attempt'd murd'r'r!"

"Are you sure about this?" McIntyre asked Petersen. "DuLac and Admiral Kale have served together for so long...!"

"That's part of the evidence against him," Petersen replied. "And based on what we know, and what was witnessed when DuLac was arrested, I'm pretty sure we have our man." She handed a small padd to the Marine colonel as she added, "With our suspect now in custody, I'm authorizing the removal of the 24 hour guard protecting Admiral Kale. I need you to sign off on the change."

"Nay!" DuLac shouted from inside his cell. "Without protection in full, the murd'r'r shall nay doubteth striketh at the Lord Admiral once m're! Thee might not but not doth this!"

McIntyre reviewed the information displayed on the padd's small screen. Everything seemed in order, though he was still uncomfortable with the accusation that DuLac - an officer who had faithfully served Kalin Kale for the better part of a decade - could try and kill his superior. Finally he thumbed the padd screen and handed it back to Petersen.

"Has Admiral Kale been informed of DuLac's arrest yet?" he asked.

"Not yet. I want to inform him face to face myself, but it has to wait until later. The starship *Sarek* is pulling into spacedock within the next hour, and I need to be in Ops."

"I'll inform the Admiral," McIntyre offered. He then turned to leave the brig. Captain Hardy, who had been watching the prisoner in the brig cell with curiosity the whole time, moved into step beside the Marine officer.

"He wasn't one of the officers I transported out here aboard the *Valley*," she said as the pair exited the brig. "I'd definitely remember that accent!"

"No, he's an Admiral's Aide who has gotten himself into a lot of trouble," Mack remarked.

"I notice you Starfleet types keep arresting each other pretty often," Hardy remarked with a slight smirk. "It's a wonder any of you have any time to explore the galaxy."

"You just keep catching us at inopportune moments," Mack replied.

"Where are we heading now?" Hardy asked, realizing she was having a harder time keeping up with her companion.

"The infirmary," Mack answered.

\* \* \* \*

In the base's main infirmary, Admiral Kalin Kale was getting dressed in a fresh uniform.

"Commander Petersen is letting you use her office until the investigation is complete," one of the security guards that had been assigned to Kale was explaining.

"That's alright. I think I'll wait until I have properly relieved Admiral Raiajh before I start getting back into the heavy paperwork that requires having a private office again," Kale replied. "I was told an arrest has been made. Who is the suspect? Anyone I know?"

"I'm not sure. I haven't been informed," the guard replied. "Commander Petersen wanted to speak with you personally on that subject, but I understand she has duties in Ops in regards to the arrival of the *USS Sarek* before she can meet with you."

"Very well. Inform the Commander I will be in my quarters recuperating further from this entire occurrence when she is ready to meet with me," Kale said, grabbing his last few personal items and heading toward the infirmary door.

"Do you require an escort, Admiral?" the guard asked.

"I believe I can find my way to my own quarters, Lieutenant," Kale responded.

"Aye, Admiral," the guard replied.

As Kale entered the wide corridor outside the infirmary entrance and moved around a nearby corner, a man wearing the gold-colored uniform of a Starfleet operations officer fell into step a few meters behind him.

\* \* \* \*

As McIntyre and Hardy made their way towards the main infirmary, their topic of conversation had returned to the arrest of DuLac.

"I noticed you staring at DuLac in his cell earlier. Was there a reason for that?" Mack asked.

"I was just curious," Hardy replied. "I figured he would be one of the officers I transported out here. But I definitely would have remembered that accent!"

"What would make you think Commander DuLac would be one of the officers the *Valley* transported out here?" Mack asked.

"When you were talking about how many officers were part of your brief earlier and then the woman who called you said there had been an attempt to murder one of your admirals, I thought maybe there was a connection?" Hardy remarked.

"No. Our suspect had to be someone who was aboard the station before the *Valley* arrived," McIntyre said as the pair entered a turbolift. "The first attempt against Admiral Kale... the first one we know about, at least..." the colonel corrected himself, "...occurred the day before you pulled into spacedock. And I suppose if DuLac really is the one who tried to murder the Admiral, the number of new officers in my briefing is really of no importance," Mack remarked.

"I'm pretty sure I would have remembered a baker's dozen," Hardy said. She then began listing off a bunch of names and ranks of the Starfleet officers that had been transported to the Typhon Sector aboard her ship again. One of the things McIntyre took notice of was everyone Hardy named was either an ensign or one of the lieutenant ranks.

“What about an officer named Clove?” he asked as the pair exited the turbolift and neared the infirmary entrance, a tone of urgency suddenly in his voice.

“Clove?” Hardy repeated, puzzled.

“Yes. Lieutenant Commander Shawn Clove. Operations Division. He would probably have been wearing a gold uniform...”

“No,” Hardy said with certainty. “Mainly lieutenants and lieutenant (jg)s. A couple of ensigns. I would have remembered a lieutenant commander. Protocol would have placed him or her in charge of the detail being transported, like what happened when I transported a half-dozen junior officers from the Science Academy on Vulcan to Utopia Planitia two years ago. There was one lieutenant commander in the group, and Starfleet designated him the officer-in-charge of the detail until they reported to the shipyard.”

“Why do I suddenly have the feeling Mister DuLac is not feigning his innocence?” Mack remarked as a sinking feeling formed in the pit of his stomach just as the pair entered the wide double doors of the station’s main infirmary. McIntyre looked around for the medical officer on duty, noticing a few of Petersen’s security guards standing near the entrance to the emergency ward.

“Where’s Admiral Kale?” he asked one of the guards.

“He was released a few minutes ago, Colonel,” the guard replied. “Said he was returning to his quarters until he had a chance to speak to Commander Petersen.”

With a building sense of urgency, McIntyre activated his combadge. “McIntyre to Admiral Kale. Admiral, please respond.” No voice replied. Mack shared a look of alarm with Hardy.

“I need to see Commander Petersen and Admiral Raiajh right away!” he exclaimed.

\* \* \* \*

Kale’s path eventually led him to a nearby turbolift, whose doors opened at his approach. The admiral consciously looked inside to confirm a turbolift car was present before stepping across the threshold, followed closely by another officer.

“Level 525,” Kale ordered. “Residential section 1.” He then looked at the other man who had entered with him and made an inquisitive expression.

“I’m heading where you’re heading, Admiral,” Shawn Clove replied. A moment later the turbolift doors closed and the lift began to move.

After a while, it seemed to Kale like the lift was taking longer than normal to reach its destination. It was also hard to tell with the inertial dampers functioning nominally, but it likewise seemed to the admiral that the lift was moving horizontally more than it needed to in order to reach the residential section beneath the massive spacedock. However, a short time later the lift slowed to a halt and the doors finally opened. Kale stepped out, followed closely by the other occupant of the lift, after which the turbolift doors immediately swished shut once again.

Kale turned in the direction toward where his quarters were located and stepped through one of the many emergency doors that would be used to seal off sections of the starbase during an emergency before he stopped short, realizing he was nowhere near where he thought he should be aboard the station. He vaguely heard the emergency door hissing closed behind him as he consulted a location designation sign posted on the corridor bulkhead.

“What in hell...? We’re in the outer hull of the spacedock section,” Kale remarked, glancing at the other officer standing with him. “Turbolift network must have malfunctioned and routed us here by mistake.” Kale started to backtrack, but found the emergency door closed and sealed. No codes entered into the control padd beside the door would release the lock. Finally, in frustration and with a little apprehension, Kale tapped his combadge.

“Admiral Kale to Ops.”

It was almost no surprise to the admiral that there was no response. He then turned to the other man who was present and said, “Can you give it a try?”

“Of course, Admiral,” Clove responded before tapping his own combadge. “Starbase Ops, please respond.” He waited several more seconds before adding, “Starbase Ops, respond please.” Again, there was no reply. “No good, Admiral.”

Kale looked the Lieutenant Commander over, feeling like he should know the man for some reason but not recognizing him or knowing the man’s name off the top of his head. He finally decided there was no reason to be overly suspicious, especially with a suspect in his recent incidents locked away in the brig, and simply wrote the sense of familiarity off to having seen the officer around Ops at some point before saying, “Something in this area of the station must be blocking our signal. Come on, there has to be another way out of this section of the base.” Kale then started heading further down the corridor. Again, Clove fell into step behind the senior officer.

After several curves and corners, the pair passed through another set of doors - though not emergency doors like the previous ones - and entered a large open space angled at almost forty-five degrees and dozens of levels tall, both above and below them. The pair were standing on a catwalk with a safety railing overlooking the drop below which extended at least ten levels deep. Kale guardedly looked over the railing and saw what looked like gears the size of shuttlecraft beneath him.

“That must be the gears and machinery that open one of the spacedoors,” he remarked, suddenly realizing how close to the outer bulkhead of the station the pair of men truly were. He then noticed another doorway on the opposite side of the chasm, connected by a retractable bridge, halfway through the open area that he hoped would lead back toward the main sections of the station - and hopefully to another turbolift access - and started heading in that direction. Clove watched the admiral intently as he neared the bridge, hoping to time his outburst just right.

“Admiral!” Kale turned sharply to look back at the younger officer, who was now quickly moving up behind him. “Don’t tell me you don’t recognize who I am?” the man asked.

Kale hesitated, peering closely at the commander’s face as he rushed toward him. “Should I?” the Centauri asked.

“I had hoped you would. Then you might understand why this was about to happen to you.”

Clove was finally right next to Admiral Kale, holding his arm out as if intending to shake his superior’s hand. Kale again hesitated – the Centauri tradition of considering a handshake a form of insult coming to mind – when the other officer grabbed his arm and shoved powerfully. Caught off balance, Kale found himself flipping backward over the catwalk railing.

For an instant, Kale thought he was going to fall the ten or so levels directly atop the gears that moved the station’s massive space door when his other hand barely managed to grab hold of the edge of the deck. Dangling above the massive machinery, Kale flailed around for several seconds before his second hand found purchase and he grasped the edge of the catwalk with a death grip.

A moment later, Clove’s face appeared above him, a look of disappointment on his features.

“Pull me up!” Kale exclaimed. “I’m not sure how long I can hold on!”

“Long enough to hear what I have to say, I hope, Admiral, and no longer,” Clove replied.

In spite of his predicament, Kale suddenly looked puzzled. “What do you mean? Why did you do that? Aren’t you going to help me back up?”

“Why would I do that, Admiral?” Clove gloated. “I’ve been trying to kill you in a way that would seem like an accident for weeks! I wasn’t intending to take such an active part in your death, but your knack for getting out of a jam left me little choice!”

“You? You’re the one who has been trying to kill me?!”

“I prefer to think of it as setting up the proper conditions for you to meet an unfortunate end, Admiral. I expected you to simply fall over the edge to your death, and since the turbolift records indicate you were alone when you ordered the turbolift out here yourself, everyone will assume you were the victim of some horrible accident once they learn what will happen here. But now an opportunity I had not anticipated has presented itself, and I intend to take full advantage of it. This machinery space is not normally monitored, so I need not fear anyone has seen me push you over the railing. Best case scenario, no one will ever know I was here when you were crushed to death, but should anyone find out I was here I can simply claim I tried to save you when I saw you stumble off the catwalk!”

“But...! But Commander Petersen said they had the suspect under arrest!”

“Whoever it is they are blaming for my prior unsuccessful attempts to terminate your life was apparently in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Clove explained. “Given the right opportunity and my new access to the main computer access in Ops, I might even be able to plant enough evidence to make sure whoever the unfortunate suspect is will be convicted. Then I will be certain I will not have any worries about this coming back to haunt me, as your own actions - and inactions - have now haunted YOU!” Clove reached down and put his hands on Kale’s fingers, attempting to pry them loose from the edge.

“Who are you? And why is it you wish me dead???” Kale pleaded to know as he struggled to pull himself back up on the catwalk, Clove’s grasp on his hands preventing him from doing so successfully.

“Because of what you did to my mother!” the younger officer proclaimed. A second later an alarm sounded, followed by flashing lights in various recesses around the space, indicating the spacedoors would soon be opening. Clove glanced to the side, where the bridge Kale had been heading toward started to retract into the interior bulkhead. Clove smiled a grim sneer as he added, “Perhaps it is most fitting that the starship *Sarek* will be the instrument of your demise. As the spacedoors open to admit the starship into the spacedock, the door will either crush you or knock you off this catwalk and into the gears below.” The man made a tsk-ing sound with his tongue and added, “Horrible way to die in my opinion.” A moment later, the gears beneath Kale’s dangling feet slowly began to turn as the huge doors to the spacedock slowly yawned open. Within seconds, the space over which Kale was hanging would be filled by the immense door. Whether crushed by the turning gears or crushed by the opening door, Kalin Kale would be equally as dead.

“The *Sarek*?!” Kale repeated, that sense of familiarity regarding the man holding his arms and threatening to push him over the edge of the catwalk now returning. “Your mother! Mickey!” Realization finally dawned on Kale. “Shawn?!”

“Yes, ADMIRAL,” Clove replied, emphasizing the other man’s rank. “Though I suppose I shouldn’t have been surprised it took you so long to recognize me. My family has always meant so little to you.”

“Shawn, it’s been almost twenty years since I last saw you. You were barely ten years old! Why would you want to kill me now, after all these years?”

“Because you simply let HER die!” Clove replied as he managed to pry one of Kale’s hands off the catwalk. “YOU assigned her to lead the away team to Vlitas IV! YOU were unconcerned that she was infected with a fatal virus on that planet! And you simply let her DIE!”

“Shawn, you have to believe me when I tell you, I had no idea that Vlitas IV’s environment contained viruses fatal to human life! Our sensor scans and preliminary surveys showed no signs of such a disease!” Kale flailed around trying to regain his grip on the moving catwalk, but Clove batted his hand away as he continued to try and loosen the grip of Kale’s other hand. “Your mother and I had had a falling out. After the completion of the Nova-class Development Project, when I was assigned temporary command of the starship *Dauntless*, I lost touch with her! I had no idea she had gotten so seriously ill! No idea that a virus she picked up in the Gamma Quadrant had eventually killed her!” Kale stopped struggling for a moment. He looked straight into Clove’s eyes as he finally said, “I’m sorry.”

It appeared for a moment like Clove was having second-thoughts. Meanwhile, the inner portion of the huge spacedoor was slowly moving closer to the pair as the gears continued to turn beneath them. Finally, Clove’s face hardened again and he said, “Tell her you’re sorry yourself!” He then continued his effort to pry Kale’s fingers loose from the catwalk.

“FREEZE! Don’t make another move!”

Clove was surprised to find a squad of Starfleet Marines, weapons at the ready, standing on the catwalk behind him. A second squad was standing on the small balcony across the chasm above where the bridge had retracted moments earlier. He considered completing his self-imposed mission for a split-second before finally sighing in resignation and raising his hands in surrender. Within moments two Marines had Clove down on the deck, his hands being restrained with cuffs behind his back, as Colonel McIntyre was helping lift Admiral Kale back up onto the catwalk with the aid of one of his lieutenants.

“Thank you, Colonel,” Kale remarked, collapsing into a sitting position on the catwalk deck just seconds before the bulk of the space door filled the space where he had been hanging. “How did you know we were here? How did you find us?”

“Once I realized that Commander Clove wasn’t among the officers that had been transported out here aboard the *Shenandoah Valley*, we tracked his combadge and realized he was here with you.”

“But how did you track his combadge?” Kale asked. “Neither of our communicators was working.”

“Your communicator had been remotely deactivated somehow, but Clove’s was functioning normally,” Mack replied. “If he told you it wasn’t working, he was faking it.” McIntyre then offered his hand to the admiral to help him to his feet and said, “Let’s get you back to the infirmary and have you checked out.”

\* \* \* \*

The next day, Admiral Kalin Kale was sitting in Vice Admiral Raiajh’s office, the pair discussing what had been determined thus far that would cause a Starfleet officer with a promising career to attempt to murder a senior officer not once, but three separate times.

“I’ve had B’Elanna reviewing station surveillance records, arrival and departure manifests, and Starfleet transfer records going back several weeks,” Raiajh was explaining as she handed a cup of Tarkalien tea to Kale, who sat on the couch beneath the large window looking out into the depths of space, before returning to her own desk chair with her teacup. “It appears Commander Clove arrived aboard the station over a month ago aboard the *Cassandra* when that ship returned to the Typhon Sector from a run to the Federation core systems. He traveled as a civilian under an assumed name and checked into one of the hotels located in the recreation area under that name when he arrived here, wanting to make it appear like he would actually arrive here aboard the *Shenandoah Valley* with the other transfer officers weeks later. Evidently his plan was to kill you prior to his ‘official arrival’ and make it look like your death was an accident to avoid any suspicion, but it took longer than he expected to learn your routine and hack the turbolift network in anticipation of your movements.”

“He probably didn’t anticipate Galen would be almost constantly by my side either,” Kale said with a nod. “Speaking of Galen, has he been released from the brig yet?”

“Michelle made sure of it personally, and with her profuse apologies,” Raiajh confirmed. “I guess Galen really was conducting an investigation of his own and was unaware of the new security measures Michelle had implemented. His capture and appearance of guilt were merely a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“And it nearly cost him,” Kale remarked. “Clove admitted to me as he had me hanging from that catwalk that he was going to make sure there would be enough evidence against whoever had been arrested for his prior murder attempts to make sure the suspect would be found guilty and cover his own tracks.”

“I still don’t understand why Shawn did it,” Raiajh commented, taking a sip of her tea. “I’ve reviewed his Starfleet record since his arrest. Graduated the Academy near the top of his class, was a good officer with a number of commendations. What did he have against you that he was willing to throw it all away?”

“Remember the mission to Vlitias IV when we were all back aboard the *Sarek*?” Kale asked. “The planet where kidnapping was considered a reasonable tactic for negotiations?” Raiajh thought back for a moment, then nodded her head as she recalled the incident when the Vlitasians kidnapped Commander Mickey Costa and held her in exchange for access to warp drive technology. “Their planet’s atmosphere contained a virus to which the native Vlitasians had long since become immune, but which was fatal to humans, though it apparently took years before the symptoms become apparent. Both Mickey Costa and Carrie Karendanz were exposed to the virus when the away team they were a part of visited Vlitias IV. No one at Starfleet Medical knew what they were dealing with when Commander Costa began showing symptoms of the disease years later - no one made the connection with the *Sarek*’s mission in the Gamma Quadrant - and she died within days of being admitted to the hospital. Apparently Clove believed I could or should have done more to prevent her from becoming infected by the virus in the first place.”

“There’s no way you could have known, Kalin,” Raiajh remarked sympathetically. “And Shawn should have realized that. Instead, when he received orders out here to *Starbase 719* and found out you would soon be relieving me as Sector Coordinator, he put a plan of unwarranted revenge into motion.” Raiajh took another sip of her tea before continuing. “When his first attempt on your life failed, thanks to Galen’s intervention, he reprogrammed the environmental circuits in an attempt to poison you to death with carbon monoxide. When that didn’t work either, and with the *Shenandoah Valley* already docked at the base, he apparently decided to go with a more visceral method and set you up to either die falling several levels into the spacedoor machinery or be crushed by the door gears. You ending up in the spacedoor hull pocket was not an accident. He reprogrammed the turbolift again without Michelle’s security measures detecting the modifications and somehow also cut your combadge off from the communications network.”

“Yes. Colonel McIntyre showed me the device he was carrying that allowed him to do that once he was in close proximity to me after I left the infirmary. It’s too bad, really,” Kale remarked. “If he could have let go of his pain over the - admittedly pointless - loss of his mother, we all could have had a pleasant family reunion. Instead, his career and life are in ruin, and that won’t bring Mickey back from the dead either.”

“All he has to look forward to now is several years in a Federation penal colony,” Raiajh remarked. The Vulcan-Deltan woman then sighed and added, “When I last spoke to Sylvan, he said he was looking forward to seeing Shawn again. He had fond memories of him when he was a young boy back aboard the *Sarek*.”

“Speaking of... when is *Shuttle 17* due back?” Kale asked. “I still have to append his bio-survey report to my sector status report to HQ.”

“According to their latest update, they should be arriving back at the station sometime during the day watch tomorrow,” Raiajh replied before finishing the last of her tea. “But I hope you’ll give me a few hours with my husband and our family before you drag him away to write more reports?”

“Of course, Val,” Kale replied with a knowing smile.

\* \* \* \*

Down in the spacedock, across from where the recently arrived Galaxy-class starship *USS Sarek* was moored, two people were standing by a gangway door and offering their good-byes.

“So how long will it be before you head out in this direction again?” Sean McIntyre asked. “Not another twenty years I hope!”

“The *Valley* goes where the jobs take her,” Amanda Hardy was saying with a tone of regret in her voice. “However, if I can find a reason to transport cargo or personnel out here to the Typhon Sector, I’ll make it work.” Hardy’s expression began to look a little contrite as she added, “Next time I see you, there are some things we need to talk about.”

“Such as...?” Mack asked, a look of concern on his rugged face.

“It can wait until my next visit,” Hardy replied before leaning up on her toes and giving the Marine officer a kiss on the lips. Then, while continuing to grasp his hands in her own, she started moving into the gangway as she added, “See you around the galaxy.”

“Don’t be a stranger!” Mack remarked as their hands finally came apart. He kept watching until the far airlock door finally closed and the light above it changed to red. Finally, after taking a deep breath, McIntyre said, “What can I do for you, Sergeant?”

A Marine Corps sergeant emerged from the shadows near the entrance to the lounge leading to the gangway and said, “Sorry to disturb you, Colonel, sir. Major Mendez from the *Sarek* is requesting a meeting with you.”

McIntyre turned around, his expression already brightening slightly as he said, “April! Wow, I haven’t seen the Major since I left the *Dauntless*. Inform the *Sarek* I can meet with their security chief at her convenience, Sergeant.”

“Aye, Colonel, sir,” the sergeant replied before turning and heading back out of the lounge. Meanwhile, McIntyre turned back around and watched through the large lounge window as the Miranda-class transport ship detached from its moorings and slowly maneuvered away from the berth, wondering when fate would allow the two to meet once again.

**The End**