

*Stardate 68709.4*

*Station Log, Starbase 719*

*Captain Cathryn Elisabeth Pearson, recording;*

*I'm not sure what to make of what happened with Shuttle 17 earlier today. When the IMV Pariah went to investigate what happened to the missing vessel, they found absolutely nothing. No ship, no debris, no escape pods, and oddly the energy signature from the shuttle stopped dead at precisely the point of last contact. Spaak and his crew extended their search out in a half light year in all directions and still found nothing.*

*Sadly, after what was witnessed on the screen and Admiral Raiajh's unusual behavior – she regained consciousness in the infirmary insisting that the shuttle was destroyed along with its occupants – and lacking any other information, I find no other choice than to list the crew of the Danube Class runabout Missouri – designated as starbase Shuttle 17 – as missing in action. Personnel onboard Shuttle 17 at the time we lost contact: Dr. Sylvan Xaran, who holds the rank of captain; Counselor Tobias Wyatt, who holds the rank of lieutenant commander; Ensign Riley Perry and Ensign Jordan Corvalis, both of whose records have been amended to reflect they have been promoted to the rank of lieutenant (junior grade) in absentia.*

*Captain Konstantin Harkonen has been working with Lt Commander Marie Quintero to handle Typhon Sector matters, while I continue to oversee the running of the station. Vice Admiral Kalin Kale is already en route to the station to assume his duties as sector coordinator ahead of schedule, as Vice Admiral Raiajh, is unable to currently handle her normal duties at present and it is unlikely she will be able to resume doing so before the official date she was to turn over command of the Typhon Sector to Admiral Kale.*

*Pearson out.*

*And now, the continuation...*

*Shuttle 17*

*Danube Class Runabout Missouri*

*Sector Typhon-C*

*1.75 light years from Starbase 719*

While Dr. Sylvan Xaran, the officer in charge of the mission, was talking with his wife, Typhon Sector Coordinator Vice Admiral Val'ri Raiajh, the runabout's engineering officer – Ensign Perry – monitored the engines. Without warning, she noted a spike in the readings she could not explain that indicated the engines were starting to redline, and she found that she was unable to stop it.

Xaran was about to deactivate the communications channel when the sound of an alarm could suddenly be heard in the background. The doctor turned to look at the runabout's pilot, momentarily forgetting to close the channel and inadvertently allowing the starbase crew to watch as the runabout crew scrambled to correct whatever was causing the alarm.

"I'm reading a build-up of anti-matter in the core," one of the other crew stated.

"If we can't get this under control, I'm going to have to dump the core!" the pilot stated.

"The anti-matter injectors are frozen!" the first crewman reported.

"I can't get the injectors to reinitialize!"

"Core breach imminent!" another crew member exclaimed.

"Eject the core!" the pilot ordered.

The crew in Ops could see Dr. Xaran frantically entering commands into the console in front of him. The pilot practically shouted, "Doctor! I need the core jettisoned...!"

"I'm trying!" Xaran exclaimed back. "The interlocks are frozen! The computer's reading the injectors are wide open and won't let me dump the core!"

"Someone activate the override!" shouted another voice from off-screen.

"Too late!" the pilot yelled. "The engine is going critical!"

"The override! Activate the override!"

Suddenly every light and monitor screen aboard the runabout brightened to their maximum illumination before everything as quickly powered down completely. The ship came to a stop as the crew began to float out of their chairs as gravity cut out as well.

"What happened?" Xaran asked, so engrossed in the problem that he did not realize that there was something wrong; something missing.

"I don't know, sir. Everything is beginning to reboot. We should be able to figure out what happened. It appears the ship suffered an unexpected power surge that the computer caught and automatically shut down all systems before the worst happened."

"Get everything back up and running and contact *Home Plate* and let them know our status," Xaran ordered. After a few minutes, the runabout's systems were fully operational again and one of the other members of the crew, Ensign Corvalis tried contacting the base.

"Sir, our comms system must be malfunctioning. I can't reach *Home Plate* nor any of the ships that were in the area. Scanners appear to be malfunctioning as well as I can't locate the ships or the starbase. We are close enough that we should be able to locate the base on long range scanners."

Dr. Xaran felt a wave of dread wash over him but he pushed it down in his gut as he did not want it to affect the crew. "Get warp drive back on line and re-plot a course back to *Home Plate*. Once we are underway, we will see what we can do about sensors and communications. The fact they are both appear to be malfunctioning may be a clue as to what happened."

"Sir, warp drive and impulse are back on line," the pilot reported a moment later. "Setting course 350 mark 0 now. Time to arrival, fifty-five minutes."

As the runabout resumed its course toward *Starbase 719*, Dr. Xaran sat down and began to rub the back of his neck. He suddenly had a wicked pounding in his head, along with that growing sense of dread. He closed his eyes for a moment and tried to center himself. The last thing he needed was to lose his composure in front of these junior officers who looked to him for leadership.

Ensign Perry noticed the pain in Dr. Xaran's face as she passed him on her way to check some of the communication relays in the back of the cabin. She knelt down next to the doctor and quietly said, "Are you ok, sir?"

"Just a headache," he replied in a voice that was equally hushed. "Undoubtedly caused by the sudden excitement we all just experienced. I'll have Doctor T'Pania do a full work up once we get back to base."

"Do you want an analgesic to ease the pain?" Perry asked.

"I'll be fine. I would rather wait and see if it passes on its own."

"As you wish." Perry rose and went back to checking on the panels that had been her destination to begin with.

Space, the Final Frontier...

## Star Trek: Personal Logs

### "Homecoming" By Nadine B. Bach

#### "Part 2 – Final Orders"

Almost an hour later, Shuttle 17 dropped out of warp at the coordinates of *Starbase 719*, or at least where the starbase was supposed to be. The small vessel had emerged from warp into a debris field where the Ournal-class starbase should have been. Dr. Xaran's dread grew further as pieces of debris drifted past the viewports.

"The Starbase was attacked?" he asked.

"That does not appear that is the case," Corvalis replied. "I am not finding any weapons fire residue or recently departed warp eddies. Perhaps there was an emergency with the station's reactors?"

"Doubtful," Xaran remarked, pointing out the forward viewport. "There are scorch marks from weapons fire on the debris."

Ensign Perry added, "It doesn't look recent. There isn't enough debris here to account for the entire starbase, affiliated craft, and personnel. And preliminary scans seem to indicate that this did not happen recently. If we can bring a piece of the debris on board, I can study it closely to see if it can be determined what happened here. But whatever happened, it happened a sufficient amount of time in the past that any warp eddies and weapons fire residue had time to dissipate."

"That's impossible!" Xaran remarked. "I was just talking to my wife and the crew in Ops no more than an hour ago. Warp eddies have been able to be tracked up to three days following a ship's departure. Perform a quantum-level scan when you examine the debris. Something is not right."

Xaran realized his head was pounding even more. He finally pulled out a medical kit and handed Perry the hypospray. "I think I will take that analgesic you offered before. Make it the strongest thing in there."

Perry quietly replied, "Sir, that much will make you unfit to command for a while, and right now we need your expertise."

Realizing his mistake, Xaran nodded as he said, "You're right, Ensign. Just give me the standard dose, with a stimulant."

"Yes, sir," Perry replied, administering the requested meds.

As the medicine started to work, Xaran turned toward the pilot. "See if we can safely hide amongst the debris. If the base was destroyed by an enemy, I don't want to be caught out in the open in what may now be enemy territory."

"That is understandable, sir," Corvalis stated.

As the pilot consulted his sensor display and began to maneuver the runabout into the debris field, Dr. Xaran walked toward the rear of the ship. "Call me if you find anything. I need to go into the back and check on Counselor Wyatt."

Xaran stepped through a door into another cabin knowing that those up front would do what was asked without leaving anyone in particular in charge. The door closed behind him and he noticed Tobias Wyatt sitting at one of the two tables, eating a meal.

"Sylvan," the Starfleet counselor replied casually. He then noticed the look on his colleague's face and added, "Is there a problem?"

"I think something is wrong, Tobias. When the power surged and died, I believe we somehow transported into another quantum universe. I can't even feel the bond with my wife any longer."

"That isn't good – for either of you – but most especially for her. I saw how she was when you spent time on the *Besiege* after Elayne's death. In that regard, she is more Deltan than Vulcan. It is a major reason why a very small percentage of Deltans chose to have the type of one-on-one relationship you two have. They become very interdependent on each other and the survivor usually doesn't live long after such an unexpected break. However, because of the children and the fact that she IS part Vulcan, I'm sure she will do her best to hold on for a while. Having family there can help. But if what you said is true, in my opinion we will need to get back to our own home as soon as possible."

"I agree, Tobias. But I have no idea how. That is more Val's expertise than mine."

"Then try to find her, or someone like her in this universe, to help. For now, get back up front. The rest of the crew needs you more than I do. I know you will do your best to get us home."

"Thanks, Tobias. I wish I had your optimism."

“Sylvan, although you refuse to see it, you have a unique ability to command. You may not enjoy the task, and that is what makes you good at it. You do what it takes to get what’s needed to be done, done. Now go. I’ll be up as soon as I eat this meal.”

Xaran began to turn toward the forward cabin and as he did he said, “Take your time, Tobias. I’ll call you if I need you sooner.”

Tobias replied in the affirmative as Xaran passed through the door.

Returning to the forward compartment, the doctor asked, “Any luck with those scans?”

“I am showing weapons residue from several different species: Breen, Romulan, Tzenkethi, and a few others I cannot identify. The quantum level scan isn’t complete yet.”

“I don’t believe we can stay here. Mister Corvalis, set course toward known Federation space, maximum warp. Once we’re back inside Federation space, see if you can link up with Memory Alpha and find out what has happened in the Typhon Sector. Also check if you can locate where Admiral Raiajh is stationed.”

“Aye, sir,” Corvalis replied as he input the new course into the navigation computer and began to maneuver out of the debris field.

\* \* \*

It took the *Missouri* nearly a week to safely reach Federation space. With the link to Memory Alpha established, the crew began looking for the information that Xaran had requested.

“Doctor Xaran, I have some information for you, but it isn’t good,” Perry reported. “The Typhon Sector, where *Starbase 719* should be, is now under the control of an alliance known as the Typhon Pact, which includes the Breen, the Romulans, the Tzenkethi, the Tholians, and another species I’ve never heard of; the Kinshaya. On top of that, it also appears that the Borg attacked Federation space in 2382, laying waste to several planets in this reality, including Risa, and destroying several thousand starships belonging to Starfleet and their allies.”

“What about Val... Admiral Raiajh in this reality?” Xaran asked anxiously.

Perry called up a personnel file on the monitor screen as she said, “I did a thorough search, and I found a Captain T’Val of the *USS Yeager*. She does appear to be the same person as the one we know as Admiral Raiajh, although she looks a bit older. Unfortunately, the *Yeager* was destroyed in this reality by the Borg.”

“It’s her,” Xaran said, a tone of sadness in his voice. “Good work, Ensign. Now I need you to perform two more searches. See if you can find a Professor Tolek of the Vulcan Science Academy. And also tell me if there is a world called Bel-Terra here as well.”

“Aye, sir,” Ensign Perry replied. A few minutes later, she returned, stating, “There is indeed a colony world called Bel-Terra here. They are independent of what’s left of the Federation. And Professor Tolek is a professor at the Bel-Terran Institute of Technological Sciences.”

“In that case, set course for Bel-Terra,” Xaran ordered. “Once we are there we will try to determine the status of our counterparts here, in case we need to know. I would prefer to get us back where we came from, but if we can’t, a non-Federation world may be best; especially if our counterparts survived this war with the Borg. I am hopeful that the Professor will help us and perhaps he may know my counterpart here.”

Ensign Perry gave the Doctor a sympathetic look and return to the co-pilot’s chair.

\* \* \*

*Another week later*

*Bel-Terran Institute of Technology and Sciences*

Dr. Sylvan Xaran and Counselor Tobias Wyatt entered the University’s research wing and found their way to Professor Tolek’s lab. Stopping in front of the appropriate door, Xaran pressed the chime for entry. The Bel-Terran’s preferred to use traditional doors for offices and personal dwellings; but they did use the automatic doors for entry into public spaces. As such, they waited to hear if the Professor was in his lab.

After hearing footsteps, the door's knob turned and a middle aged Vulcan man opened the door. Spending so much time with the Professor in his own quantum reality – someone who appeared to look much younger than his actual age thanks to a trip into the Briar Patch for a treatment that had saved his daughter Charissa's life – Xaran had almost forgotten that Professor Tolek was about 160 Earth years in age.

"Yes? Can I help...?" the professor began to say before recognizing one of the men standing in front of him. "Sylvan, why did you not tell me you were coming? Please come in."

Xaran and Wyatt stepped inside the lab with Wyatt closing the door behind them. Once closed, the middle-aged Vulcan professor sat and Xaran began to speak.

"Sir, I wasn't even sure if you knew me..."

"Of course I know you. I would have thought you were still on Pacifica."

"Perhaps the man you know is, but I'm not who you think I am," Xaran admitted.

"You and T'Val were close before her death. We have spoken many times since the war. Of course I know who you are. You are Doctor Sylvan Xaran."

"Let me rephrase," Xaran said. "While I am Doctor Sylvan Xaran, I am not the same man you know. The one who is probably still on Pacifica."

Wyatt explained, "We come from a different quantum universe, Professor, and we need help getting back to our own proper reality."

Noticing the skeptical look in the Vulcan's eye, Xaran added, "We have proof that what we're telling you is true." He handed Tolek a padd with data displayed on its screen. "This is our quantum signature," Xaran pointed to the top portion of the display. "The lower display is the quantum signature of this universe. As you can see, they do not match. I came here hoping to get your help to get back to where we came from."

"I don't know if I can help you, Doctor," Tolek replied. "I'm not even sure I believe you."

"I understand. You can run your own tests to see that I am telling the truth. Or if you wish, you can perform a mind meld and see that I have led a very different life than the man you know."

"Did you not know my daughter?"

"I do, Professor. That is why I sought you out. In my universe Val'ri and I are married and have a family of five biological and two adopted children. By some strange accident, my runabout crew and I found ourselves here in this quantum reality. We need help getting back where we belong, especially since my disappearing from my correct reality could result in Val'ri's death."

"Val'ri?" Tolek appeared distant for a moment before continuing, "The Borg took that from me when they did their damage. Your counterpart here was devastated and distraught when T'Val died. We not only lost her, but the child she was carrying as well. Starfleet was unable to replace her as captain of the *Yeager* due to the losses incurred by the Borg; despite the insistence of her senior staff after the Borg started their advance."

"I'm sorry, sir," Xaran said. "Oddly enough, in my reality your counterpart and his wife find being grandparents agreeable."

"Please don't tell me more, other than I would inquire if T'Val's mother had any contact with her? Or did she leave her with me to raise as she did in this universe?"

Xaran shook his head as he replied, "Until Val'ri was fourteen Earth years in age, it was you who had no interaction with her in my reality, though I do not believe that it was your choice to distance yourself."

"Where you come from, apparently her mother chose to name her as well as raise her. But why *that* name? In Deltan, *val* means one and *ri* is lost. Admittedly, amongst the Deltan's of the time in which she was born, such a child would certainly feel lost."

"And she did at times. Her mother has told her that despite the spelling she was given the name to honor the people of the planet on which she was born. On Earth, the name Valerie means strength, which I'm sure you will agree, is a much better meaning than 'Lost One.'"

"Agreed," Tolek admitted. "So, tell me, Doctor; what brings you here to Bel-Terra and – more specifically – to seek me out. There are others that are more well versed in quantum physics and mechanics than I."

“We need to get home. Back to our correct quantum universe as soon as possible. I did not know who else to trust as my situation is unique. I came to you with the hope that you did know me – or rather my counterpart here – and would be willing to help us.”

“I’m not sure if I will be able to help you, or how long it would take. My daughter far surpassed my skills in quantum physics and quantum mechanics. I have her journals in storage here from her experiments when she worked with me at the Vulcan Science Academy. Even with the three of us, it will take some time to go through all of them, as she worked there for seventy-five years. But if memory serves, she may have mentioned a few experiments in regard to trying to see if there was a way to do what you are asking, theoretically opening doors between quantum realities. I’m not saying it is going to be possible, but perhaps there will be enough there we can use to help you get back home.”

“Thank you, sir. I believe I have some information in my runabout’s computer that may help as well.”

“If you will return tomorrow at this time, I should have the first set of her journals ready to go through.”

\* \* \*

*Five months later...*

After the first few days on Bel-Terra, Dr. Xaran had Ensigns Perry and Corvalis join Wyatt and himself. They worked at reviewing the journals with the others for several days, but quickly realized the formulas and equations were beyond their basic understanding and realized their time would be better served elsewhere. The two asked to be excused so they could blend into Bel-Terran society and find a way of supporting the four of them instead of relying on Professor Tolek and his kindness, as Bel-Terrans used a physical currency to conduct everyday transactions instead of the Federation credit system they were all familiar with. The crew soon realized they would need to obtain some of that currency to get the items necessary for survival.

Research in the publically accessible archives of Memory Alpha had indicated both Perry and Corvalis were listed among the populations missing, presumed deceased, after the Borg war, and they were going to use that information to their advantage to integrate into Bel-Terran society and procure gainful employment.

As the two young officers found new jobs easily enough, Xaran, Wyatt, and Tolek continued to work their way through T’Val’s journals, hopeful to find what they needed to begin the experimental phase aimed at getting the crew back home.

Finally, late one day, early into their fifth month on Bel-Terra, they began to locate the journal entries with the experiments they were seeking. With that knowledge now in hand, the next phase began. Recreating T’Val’s original experiments and tweaking them with new ideas from discoveries Tolek was aware of that had occurred after his daughter’s death at the hands of the Borg or remembered by Dr. Xaran from the many conversations he had shared with his wife.

However, as the experiments continued, Dr. Xaran’s mood became increasingly darker and he was easily agitated. Both Tolek and Wyatt did their best to ignore Xaran’s moods, but he had nearly come to blows with Ensign Corvalis one day over a trivial incident. Wyatt had seen similar agitation before, in Commander Hans Spaak during the months the crew of the *Pariah* had been looking for Lady Val. Because Xaran was unable to feel the bond with his wife at all, Wyatt surmised that the Betazoid doctor’s agitation was far worse than Spaak’s had ever been. Wyatt realized the longer it took to get back home, the worse Xaran’s symptoms would manifest. Wyatt was worried that if the agitation did not subside, Xaran would either drive himself insane or to a premature grave. He knew above all else, Xaran needed to get back home.

Over the ensuing weeks, Xaran, Wyatt, and Tolek found a few promising leads, however as the time passed, they found one apparent solution that would work, but only for a very short time, and the mass that passed through the theoretical opening needed to be decreased greatly from the runabout and four crew members that had crossed over once already.

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*Personal log; Tobias Wyatt recording:*

*February 30, 2392 (Bel-Terran calendar – based on the old Earth Gregorian system, adjusted for Bel-Terra’s 25 hour days and 367 day year.)*

*After five months on Bel Terra and an additional two weeks in this quantum reality, we are at least a bit closer to getting home. Unfortunately, the longer we stay here the worse Doctor Xaran is getting. The fact that since we arrived he has not been able to feel the bond he normally shares with his wife is worrisome; especially if the Admiral is suffering from the loss of their bond as well. It is difficult to say how she may fare because amongst Deltans who do take a life partner, the death of one is usually followed soon after by the death of the other. It is my hope that the fact that the Admiral is part Vulcan, or the support she received from family and friends aboard Starbase 719 and the Pariah in our own reality, will help her to hold on longer. Yet even that hope is fading with each passing day.*

*In speaking with this reality’s Professor Tolek, he confided in me that we may have a better chance of piercing the barrier between realities if we cut down on the size and mass that we attempt to send through. I have spoken about it with Ensigns Perry and Corvalis, and they are willing to stay here for the time being. Both have found jobs and new lives on Bel Terra with which they are satisfied, and both have blended in well with the Bel-Terran population. Perry is trying to be understanding of Doctor Xaran’s situation but his erratic behavior has kept Perry away as much as possible to keep from doing something that could be considered a court martial offense.*

*After finding out that my counterpart was also killed in the Borg war and thinking about it, I would be willing to stay in this reality as well if it means getting Doctor Xaran home. Corvalis, Perry, and I don’t have a spouse or children waiting for us. It is my hope that Doctor Xaran will still have his entire family and that Admiral Raijah’s family and friends have done everything they could to keep her with them.*

*The simulated tests that we tried in a holographic scenario have only proven that our hypothesis is sound, and there is a strong possibility that we will be able to produce a small gateway between realities, but it most likely wouldn’t be large enough to get any vessel like a runabout through. Doctor Xaran is still hopeful that there is a way to make the gateway larger so everyone will be able to return. Professor Tolek has been more than patient with us and will allow another three weeks of virtual testing before he requisitions one of the Institute’s spacecraft to actually carry out the experiment.*

*March 30, 2392 (Bel-Terran calendar)*

*Bel-Terran ship Research 4*

Professor Tolek, Dr. Xaran, Tobias Wyatt and Ensigns Perry and Corvalis boarded the craft in planetary orbit after docking the runabout *Missouri* in the ship’s cargo bay. Tolek had taken extensive notes on the experiments and hoped to publish a paper on the theories once the experiment had ended. Everyone’s hope was high that one of the several possible experimental theories they had would work. Tolek did not share Dr. Xaran’s optimism that if they were able to make a gateway between the two realities that it would be large enough to allow the runabout to pass through. Tolek had arranged to use one of the research ship’s escape pods so he would at least be able to send Dr. Xaran home if his own calculations – that the gateway between realities would be relatively small – turned out to be correct. It was unfortunate that the escape pods only held one person each. Counselor

Wyatt and Ensigns Perry and Corvalis were in consensus that if only one person were able to return, it must be Dr. Xaran, even if they had to sedate him and stuff him in the pod unwillingly.

In actuality, the preference of both Perry and Corvalis was to simply stay in the present reality. Since arriving on Bel-Terra and obtaining jobs to support themselves, Wyatt, and Xaran and not be a burden on Professor Tolek, they had begun forming friendships among the Bel-Terrans. And Counselor Wyatt had explained to them why Xaran had been progressively acting the way he was.

Despite not being a religious person, his belief regarding the gravity of the situation with regard to both Admiral Raijah's and Doctor Xaran's health caused Wyatt to hope that his prayers were heard and Dr. Xaran still had more to go home to than just his children.

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Tolek had his equipment set up and ready for testing in just under a day. While Dr. Xaran tried to eat a meal, Counselor Wyatt stayed with Tolek to see if it were possible that they would be able to get all four crew and the runabout back through the gateway.

"I do not believe that we will be able to get anything larger than the escape pod through," Tolek replied. "As I stated before, the pod can only hold one adult-sized humanoid. The transwarp radio specifications you had with you will help us find your reality. If this works, I may be able to repeat the process with a second escape pod, if you wish to return as well, Tobias."

"We can try if we have the time," Wyatt remarked. "If not, I am sure I will be able to incorporate myself into Bel-Terran society here, much as Ensigns Perry and Corvalis have done. I thought it might be difficult, but according to my research, my counterpart in this reality died as well – ironically while vacationing on Risa."

"Time may be our enemy as we only have one more Bel-Terran day to make the attempt," Tolek explained. "Just to be safe, go ahead and download your messages into the first escape pod's memory banks. But first tell me; how do you plan on getting Sylvan into the pod alone? He does not seem willing to return to your correct quantum reality without the rest of his crew."

"He won't go willingly; on that you are correct," Wyatt admitted. "I have a strong sedative on hand that I can give him; adjusted for his extremely agitated state. I can tell him I am injecting him with a vitamin supplement that will balance his hormonal levels. Once he is unconscious, I will scan him and activate the transponder that was implanted into him by a civilian doctor attached to a transport vessel. The merchant ship actively scans for all the transponders at all times on transwarp radio frequencies. As the ship itself has transwarp ability, they can be at the coordinates in a matter of hours for retrieval. If they happen to be in Bel-Terran space at the time, he will be picked up a matter of minutes after he moves through the barrier between realities. But just in case, I will also make sure he has enough sedative to keep him asleep for at least eighteen hours, if not reversed before then."

"There will be enough oxygen in the pod's life support systems to last him two days. It may last even longer if he will be asleep most of that time. It will give more than enough time for any vessel to pick up the escape pods signal and retrieve it."

"In our reality, the approaches to the Bel-Terran system are well trafficked, between the local ships and visiting Starfleet vessels," Wyatt remarked. "I have no doubt someone will discover him."

"Then why do you appear to be in emotional turmoil over this?" Tolek asked.

"As I said, we are most likely going to have to resort to drastic measures to get Doctor Xaran into that escape pod. He hasn't been an agreeable person lately. He may not agree to let me inject him whether he knows it is a sedative or not."

"You have a unique flair with words, Tobias. 'Not agreeable' is hardly the description I would use. As of late, I have found Tellarites preferable company over your Doctor Xaran. Yet, I understand as well. The loss of a mate can be difficult to deal with, even for a Vulcan. His agitation is two-fold. Partly because he can't feel any trace of the bond he shares with his wife. Neither can he be certain that she will still be alive when he does return, especially if she is under the belief that he is truly gone from her life. It is an understandable position from his point of view."

“I understand, Professor. I will do what needs to be done,” Wyatt resolved. “Like it or not, Doctor Sylvan Xaran will get home to his family. Admiral Raiajh was the best commanding officer I have had the pleasure to serve under. I owe it to her. She and Doctor Xaran deserve to be together as they begin a new phase in their lives after retiring from Starfleet.”

“While I know little of either of them, I agree, Tobias,” Tolek said. “This separation is killing him as well. I hope when we do get him home, he finds her alive as well, otherwise Doctor Xaran is in for a long, slow decline. I’m afraid that if she has already died, the shock of learning that information – especially after all he has gone through here – will most likely kill him.”

“I hope that isn’t the case. Several years ago he made the commander of the *Pariah* promise to do whatever he had to do to make sure she lived if anything unexpected happened to him. Commander Spaak promised, and the man does everything in his power to keep his promises.”

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*Half an hour later*  
*Ship’s mess*

After a few additional simulations with no change in the results, Tolek was ready to begin an attempt. However, Xaran was not convinced that all was being done that could be.

“There has to be a way to enlarge the opening so we can all get back,” he insisted, noting the relatively small size of the connection between universes displayed on the simulation. “I will not accept anything else.”

“You are going to have to,” Wyatt told him. “Out of the four of us, you are the one placing yourself in mortal peril by staying here. Both you and your wife need you to get back!”

“I can’t accept that responsibility!” Xaran protested. “What about Perry and Corvalis? What about you?”

“You’re getting extremely upset by our situation, Sylvan,” Wyatt remarked, trying to calm his comrade down slightly. “I believe your hormones are out of balance due to the loss of your bond. Please let me help you.”

Wyatt produced a hypospray that he displayed to Xaran. “What is that?” Xaran asked suspiciously.

“A vitamin supplement that will help stabilize your hormones at least until you make it back to our correct reality,” Wyatt replied, moving toward Xaran with the hypospray pointed toward him. Xaran made a move as if to knock the device out of Wyatt’s hand as he began to shout.

“No! For all I know you’re trying to knock me out so you can stuff me into some sort of life pod and shoot me through the opening by myself! I won’t let you! It’s all of us or none! I can’t accept that Tobias! I won’t!” As he shouted, Xaran did not realize that both Perry and Corvalis had entered the room behind him.

Wyatt gave a subtle nod and replied, “You are going to have to; because at this time I am relieving you of duty.”

Before having a chance to respond to Wyatt’s proclamation, Perry and Corvalis took the counselor’s signal and pushed Dr. Xaran against the table, allowing Wyatt to administer the sedative. Due to his agitated state, it was difficult to keep him still and it took a few moments for the sedative to take effect. Once it did, Wyatt checked the doctor’s vitals and injected him with enough additional sedative to hopefully keep him asleep for more than a day. Wyatt then scanned for and activated the sub-dermal transponder that the *Pariah*’s Dr. Ves’Dell had placed under Xaran’s skin, torn between admiration and sympathy at the Orion doctor’s odd sense of humor in its placement. Once they had confirmation the transponder was working, the three officers carried the unconscious man over to where the escape pod Professor Tolek had prepared was located. They closed and sealed the hatch, then prepared the pod for launch.

\* \* \*

On the bridge of the research ship, Tolek worked at his station. It was time to see if he would have the success the simulations predicted he would. Tolek activated the particle stream from the main deflector array to create a rent in the fabric of space-time. He sent one of the beacons through the aperture to make sure that the correct quantum readings were present. He could not help but smile at the readings he was obtaining.

“Tolek to Wyatt,” he said after activating the intercom to the level where the escape pod hatches were located. “I have obtained the expected readings. You may release the pod.”

With more than a little trepidation, Wyatt slammed his fist into the launch control. The pod’s systems had been rigged so that – rather than launch the pod away from the ship with great velocity as would normally occur during an emergency – it merely jettisoned away from the research ship gently. On the bridge, Tolek activated the ship’s tractor beam and caught the pod, using the tractor to orient the escape pod before giving it a push toward the rent.

Tolek watched from the viewscreen as everything unfolded according to plan. The escape pod drifted through the opening almost dead center. And just as the beacon confirmed the escape pod had passed through completely, the aperture collapsed and transmissions from the escape pod and beacon ceased.

Seconds later, Tobias Wyatt emerged from a turbolift. “Did it work, Professor?” he asked.

“It did, Tobias,” Tolek confirmed. “Doctor Xaran is back in his own quantum reality, floating toward Bel-Terran orbit. Unfortunately, as predicted, the aperture collapsed as soon as the pod pierced it. I’m afraid we cannot send either you or your compatriots through after him.”

“It was a risk we were willing to take to get the good Doctor home where he belongs,” Wyatt responded with a smile.

\* \* \*

IMV Pariah  
*In orbit of Bel-Terra*

Ashari Pel was sitting at the communications station when she first started picking up a beacon that began transmitting within the Bel-Terran system. She did not think much of it at first, believing it was possibly activated by another ship elsewhere in the system upon arrival at its designated coordinates. What she did find strange was about a minute later she began picking up a signal from an escape pod in the near vicinity despite no ships being near enough to have released an escape pod. It was only a moment later that she unexpectedly began to pick up a signal on the *Pariah*’s emergency signal channel, the type of signal only someone associated with the *Pariah* would transmit.

Within moments, the bridge was crowded with people, including Commander Spaak, Lady Val, Topuc, and Dr. Ves’Dell, trying to identify where the signal was coming from and to whom it might belong. Each transponder had a different sequence of tones in the frequency and Dr. Ves’Dell had her listen to them continually until she could remember which signal belonged to which person on the ship.

Pel moved over to the second sciences station and checked for any anomalies that might have appeared in the area in the time since she heard the first signal. She found something odd in the sensor records that appeared just prior to the beacon signal and just as abruptly disappeared mere seconds after she began to pick up the emergency signal. It appeared to be a small tear in space that quickly sealed itself; but the escape pod had to have originated from that tear – there was no other explanation! Pel triangulated the signals and realized the signals from the beacon and the transponder in the escape pod began at the same spot the tear had existed, and now the transponder signal was moving toward the planet. Once she was sufficiently convinced she had a lock on the location, she turned to Topuc, who was sitting at the primary science station behind her.

“Topuc, I’m picking up three signals bearing 352, Mark 4! One appears to be from a stationary beacon. The second is from an escape pod that is slowly moving toward Bel-Terra. But the third...”

“The third signal is Doctor Xaran’s transponder!” Ves’Dell announced, to the amazement of everyone else present.

“We will need to investigate,” Commander Spaak ordered. “Topuc, prepare to break orbit immediately!”

“Aye, Commander,” Topuc replied, moving quickly to the Pariah’s helm. Within moments, the Wanderer-class vessel broke orbit and headed toward the signal at one-quarter impulse. The crew calibrated their sensors to pick up small objects such as shuttles and escape pods. Ten minutes into their search they were able to narrow down their target to a specific area and it took an additional five minutes to pinpoint the actual location of the slowly moving signal.

“Prepare the tractor beam,” Spaak ordered. “Bring the pod to a complete stop and then beam it into one of the cargo bays.”

“I’m heading there right now,” Ves’Dell stated as she quickly turned and entered the turbolift, making a quick stop in sickbay along the way to grab a medikit and some assistance, just in case.

By the time Ves’Dell and the medic had arrived at the door outside the cargo bay, Topuc, Ashari Pel, and the Pariah’s so-called Chief of the Boat Chor’Ruus were already waiting for her. All five crew members proceeded into the bay, where the escape pod lay atop the transporter platform.

“I am reading a single humanoid life sign, a Betazoid male, though the vital signs are quite slow,” Ves remarked after scanning the pod. “Let’s get this open!” There was more Ves’Dell had noted in her scan, but she did not want to concern anyone before she ran more tests.

Ashari Pel gasped at Ves’Dell’s proclamation that the person inside the pod was a male Betazoid. She had been one of the crew in Starbase Ops on *Starbase 719* that fateful day almost six months earlier when *Shuttle 17* and its crew, including Dr. Xaran, had disappeared. “Do you think...?” she began to ask.

“I prefer to know facts,” Ves’Dell replied. “We will learn soon enough who is inside.”

Pel assisted Topuc in the opening of the pod and Ves’Dell looked inside. “Praise the Deities! Topuc help me get Sylvan out of this thing.”

“Are you sure it’s Doctor Xaran?” Topuc asked. “You also believed you had found him when you discovered Ciaran in that slave market!”

“I believe it is,” Ves’Dell replied with an annoyed look at the Vulcan engineer. “It’s one of our transdermal transponders that Ashari picked up. The transponder is in the exact spot I placed it and emitting the precise signal.”

In a voice that was low enough that only Topuc would hear, Chor’ruus mumbled, “That’s because one would need to be certifiable to even think of placing it where she put it.” Topuc looked uncomfortable, but silently agreed with the statement.

Topuc reached into the escape pod and pulled the unconscious doctor out. Dr. Ves began to scan her patient to see why he was unconscious and perhaps explain where he had been for the last six months.

“He has been sedated,” she announced after Xaran had been placed on a nearby gurney. “He is also showing elevated endorphins and adrenaline levels. His vitals are all over the place.”

“Why was he sedated?” Pel asked.

Bluffing her way through, not wanting to reveal what her scans had indicated, the Orion doctor replied, “He is most likely suffering from withdrawal over the sudden loss of the bond he shared with his wife, the same as Admiral Val had experienced. His behavior may also have been erratic, much like our own commander when Lady Val was missing. In fact, given his Betazoid heritage and how the Betazoid mind works among those that are mentally bonded, Doctor Xaran’s behavior may have been even worse. For now I am going to take him to sickbay. Ashari, please download and review any data that may be stored in this pod’s on-board computer. It may provide us with answers to where the Doctor has been the last several months.” She then looked at Topuc and Chor’Ruus and said, “We have what we came for. Let’s head back to Bel-Terra.”

Topuc moved to the transporter’s control console and activated the intercom to the bridge, ordering a course back to Bel Terra best possible impulse speeds before heading back to the bridge.

\* \* \*

IMV Pariah  
Sickbay

After reviewing the escape pod's records, Pel went to sickbay to hand Dr. Ves'Dell a message that had been left in the memory systems by Counselor Wyatt regarding Dr. Xaran's condition. A review of the records showed that although Dr. Xaran was easily agitated and had been in a rather sour mood for several weeks, there was no other reason not to wake him.

The *Pariah* was expected to re-establish their orbit of the planet within the hour, due mainly to the number of other ships in orbit, and Dr. Ves decided to wait until that time to ask Val'ri Raiajh to beam aboard. For the time being, she decided to wake her reputedly grumpy patient and hopefully find a way to improve his mood before his wife arrived back on the ship. However, her readings indicated that Xaran's mood might be the least of her problems, as he was showing signs of several injuries – no doubt acquired from his passage through the wormhole or whatever it was the escape pod had passed through to reach Bel-Terra.

Ves filled a hypo with a drug that reversed the sedative given to him by Counselor Wyatt before placing him into the pod. She moved toward the bed which held her sole patient, activated the restraining field, and pressed the hypo to his neck before watching as he slowly regained consciousness. As she predicted, he began to struggle against the field before finally opening his eyes and looking around before his glare finally centered on Ves.

"Calm down, Sylvan. You're aboard the *Pariah*. You are safe."

"Val?" he desperately asked, not sure if he wanted to hear the answer.

"I won't lie. We almost lost her after you disappeared. But Hans kept his promise to you with help from others. She is well on her way to recovery, but still misses you."

"I have done everything I could for the past six months to get back to her! Can I see her?"

"We need to get back into orbit of Bel-Terra first, as she is on the planet. We have not yet informed her of your rescue, as I did not want to get her hopes up and it turned out that all we found was your transponder. She doesn't know yet."

"What happened on my return trip?" Xaran asked, his initial shock decreasing and allowing him to start to feel his body. "Why am I in so much pain? I know Wyatt and the rest of the crew must have held me down in order to sedate me, but that wouldn't account for the pain I'm feeling. Did they follow me through? Did they make it back?"

"We have found no one else," Ves'Dell replied. "Wherever you came from, they must not have found a way to get all of you back here. Unfortunately, your passage through the anomaly exposed you to lethal doses of radiation, Sylvan. I'm sorry. There is little I can do to help. Even if we were to put you in stasis, your exposure was too great. I'm afraid you wouldn't live long enough for us to get you similar treatment to what helped save your daughter Charissa's life."

"Just long enough to say goodbye then," Xaran replied stoically.

"I wish the news was better," Ves'Dell remarked. "At least let me get the portable sonic shower and cut your hair. This way you'll at least look presentable when Val comes to see you."

"The kids too," Xaran added.

"As you wish. Katrina and Julian just returned from Earth with your mother-in-law. I'll have Jill beam aboard as well once we reach orbit."

With the aid of one of the other medics, Ves'Dell cleaned up and prepared Xaran. When they were finished, he looked almost exactly like the day *Shuttle 17* had disappeared, except for not wearing his uniform. When they were completed, Ves went into her office to make arrangements to get those that had been requested to return to the *Pariah* to say their final farewells.

\* \* \*

March 30, 2392  
Loneel Station, Australian continent, Bel-Terra

Only forty-eight hours had passed since Val'ri Raiajh had severed the bond that had been forced on her four months earlier. She was sitting with Marie Quintero in the main house, the two women sharing a meal. For Raiajh, this was more akin to hovering, with the other woman making sure that she did not fall back into the depression that had nearly killed her. For the past two days, under either Marie's or another member of the *Pariah* crew's watchful eyes, they were assured Raiajh ate all her meals and participated in all the scheduled activities with her children. Although she would normally be perturbed with their actions, she knew that they were worried about her and let their behavior slide, for the time being.

She found it odd when she began to feel a familiar sensation begin to gnaw at the outermost fringes of her consciousness. At first she started to wonder if her severing of her bond with Ciaran had been incomplete, but she assured herself this feeling was very different and not related to Ciaran at all. She dismissed the feeling, intending to meditate on it when she had the opportunity later in the evening.

Raiajh and her family were about to go for a hayride with the children when Lady Val urgently stepped into the house with Hans and stated that the hayride had been postponed, that Raiajh and her family, the entire Spaak family, Jill Xaran, and Raiajh's parents were needed to return to the *Pariah* post haste. As everyone prepared to beam back to the ship, Spaak promised Hadrian Lehnshier that everyone would be returning shortly, but that something unanticipated had come up that required everyone to return to his ship.

"Hadrian, once I'm back on board, I'll send you the details about our unusual departure. I'm certain once you find out the details, you will understand completely."

\* \* \*

The *Pariah* crew used the larger transporters in the cargo bay to beam everyone returning from the surface up at the same time. Once materialized, they were greeted by a somber looking Ves'Dell, who was joined by Topuc and Ashari Pel.

"What's the news?" Spaak asked, wondering why everyone who had been so enthusiastic upon discovering the escape pod were now all so somber.

"The prognosis is not what we hoped for," Ves'Dell replied. She walked over to the former admiral before speaking directly to her. "Admiral, we found an escape pod that passed through a small anomaly in space not far from the planet. Inside we discovered Doctor Xaran." The faces of everyone present brightened at the news, but the joy was short-lived. "Unfortunately, the escape pod apparently passed through a field of extreme radiation, and he had received a lethal dose. I have made him as comfortable as possible, but he isn't expected to survive more than a few hours, perhaps a day at most. I'm so sorry."

Suddenly, Raiajh realized what the feeling was she had been sensing. It was similar to what had occurred all those years earlier when she had first encountered Sylvan Xaran on the recreation deck of the *USS Arcturus* two weeks after the ship had been thrust into the 24<sup>th</sup> century, combined with what it must feel like when someone drowning reaches out desperately to grasp at anything – or anyone – that might save them. Her face reflected sudden sadness as she asked, "Can I see him?"

Ves nodded. "I'll let you see him for a few moments before everyone else takes turns saying their farewells. It is best he is not overwhelmed with thoughts and emotions right now. Then you can sit with him until his time."

The group followed Ves'Dell out of the cargo bay and toward the ship's small sickbay, seeming much like a funeral march.

\* \* \*

Over the course of the next three hours, Dr. Xaran had a steady stream of visitors, most of them in some way family. The last to arrive was Hans Spaak. It was apparent that the ship's captain had been crying, his eyes red and bloodshot, a sight rarely seen aboard the *Pariah*.

Ves finished administering a hypo to Xaran that contained a strong pain killer to help mitigate the pain in the final hours. She noted the time between hypos had grown increasingly shorter in the few hours Xaran had been aboard. The most recent shot had given Xaran some relief for about an hour before the pain returned.

When Spaak stepped over to the biobed, he could see that the medicine Ves had given Xaran had only lessened the pain, not eliminated it.

"Hans," Xaran said quietly as he held his hand out to the other man.

"Sorry we can't do more for you, Sylvan," the commander of the *Pariah* replied as he grasped Xaran's hand.

"It happens," Xaran remarked philosophically. "We each have our time. I'm ready. But I need to know; will you continue to watch over Val, to make sure she's fine in the months ahead?"

"You don't need to ask, Sylvan. You are family, of course I will. She believed she lost you months ago. For her the worst has past, so she will be there for the children. There will be a place for her here as long as she wants it. Something tells me there are changes coming in the next few months."

"I'm sure there are, Hans," Xaran replied. "I hope the changes are good ones."

"Most. Though there is one vision that I've had that involves Konstantin which is troubling me."

"Hans, what is meant to transpire will. We can't stop the future from coming. Just remember that." Xaran winced in pain once again.

"I'll let your wife get back in here," Spaak said. "I'm sure you want to see her again."

"I've thought of nothing else the last six months," Xaran replied as Spaak turned and left, leaving his farewells unspoken.

\* \* \*

Ves and Raiajh were monitoring Xaran through the window that separated the doctor's office from the rest of sickbay. "I don't think it will be much longer before he enters what the Terran and Bel-Terran doctors call 'The Final Sleep,'" Ves'Dell remarked. "The pain meds I have are barely affecting his pain now. Go and be with him. I'll be back in a couple of minutes to set up a drip so he can administer the pain meds as he needs them."

Raiajh nodded and stepped back into the room, pulling a chair up next to her husband's bed.

"Ves will be in momentarily to administer an intravenous drip, one that you can adjust the level of pain reliever as you wish," she told him.

Xaran nodded before looking straight at Raiajh with pain-filled eyes and saying, "I'm sorry, Imzadi. I did not want this to happen."

"I know, Sylvan," she assured him. "Just rest. I'll stay with you."

Ves came in and hooked Xaran up to an IV drip of the pain medicine and handed him a device which would allow him to adjust the flow that entered his bloodstream. Once Ves exited the sickbay, Raiajh and Xaran sat quietly just looking at each other for a while. A short time later, Xaran's eyes closed.

\* \* \*

March 31, 2392  
Stardate 69246.9  
IMV Pariah, in orbit of Bel-Terra

*Commanders log; IMV Pariah. Hans Spaak recording:  
It is with great sadness that I make this log entry. At 0545 hours this morning, ship's time, Doctor Sylvan Xaran, who had just returned from an alternate quantum reality, received his Final Orders and embarked on his eternal patrol....*

\* \* \*

April 2, 2392  
Stardate 69252.8  
Loneel Station, Bel-Terra  
14:30 Local time (BT-ACST)

Down on the planet the family congregated on the property in a semi secluded area near the creek. It was decided this was the best place to scatter Sylvan Xaran's ashes, from which Ves'Dell had been able to remove the residual radiation that had brought on the doctor's untimely death.

Raiajh, along with Sylvan's sister Jill, had decided that since they had already mourned his passing based on the evidence they'd had for the past six months, that the family would only hold a small, final organized remembrance.

As the family shared several stories of happier times with Sylvan Xaran, Raiajh noticed another attendee not far away; Ciaran. She knew he would not get any closer, standing just beyond the clearing and mostly hidden by the trees. Close enough to hear, but far enough back not to be noticed by most of those in attendance. She was not sure what brought him here, but did not begrudge his presence. His reasons were his own, and he needed to learn that they were respected.

As the ceremony progressed, each person relating either a favorite memory or perception of the departed, the last to speak was Jill Xaran. As Jill finished up, Raiajh thought about what she was going to say. She had a quarter-century of memories to draw from. As Jill's voice faded and quiet began to settle in, Raiajh began to speak.

"Although there are many memories I have, the time Sylvan and I spent together was all too brief. I still remember that day when our eyes first met across the recreation room and our minds touched for the briefest of moments. Over the next few days he went out of his way – literally – just to talk to me for a few minutes as we made our way to our respective duty stations. He was a bit hesitant at first about asking me out on a formal date, but once he did, our lives went in a direction that just a few short weeks earlier from my perspective I believed would never happen. As it turned out, at a time when I needed family the most, he offered to be that family."

Raiajh paused for a moment, partly to collect her thoughts, more to hold back the flood of tears that threatened to burst from her eyes. Once back in control, she continued, "In doing so, he gave new life to dreams I once thought were impossible. Although it did take time, slowly those dreams became reality. And over that time, our love for each other grew stronger. We had our rough times; with some nearly tearing us apart. But up until the end, he always made sure he came back. At first just to me, eventually to our family as well. In all that time he was my rock; helping me face whatever came our way."

Raiajh's control slipped for a brief moment, and a single tear wound its way down her cheek. She wiped at it with her hand, hoping no one had noticed.

"His love and the memories we shared will always hold a special place in my heart. No matter what the future holds, a part of him will always remain a part of me."

**The End**