

## Walking In Danger: Part I

### Teaser

"The day was cold and dark, storm clouds appeared over a small city. As the cloud came closer and closer, the townspeople screamed out in pain, it was too much for them to handle, too much for them to bear. I was among the group that day. Fresh out of the academy, I didn't know much. Didn't have the experience of an officer who had been in space for years at a time. I didn't know what I was doing."

"Computer, pause." A man said.

The room was quiet as the recording device came to a dead stop. A young officer looked up from a PADD and with a quizzical expression asked. "What's wrong?" She didn't understand why the senior officer sitting across the table from her had ordered the proceedings to be put on hold. She recalled the orders given when she walked into the debriefing room at Starfleet Headquarters in California. The admirals had asked her to recall the events that took place on a mission she was assigned to near the Demilitarized Zone just outside a highly dense area full of plasma storms known as The Badlands.

"Ensign Tompson." The admiral began. "I only want the facts, nothing more nothing less. I don't want you to go into the full details of everything that happened. You don't have to explain that it was cold and dark, you aren't writing a novel here." He paused. "Is that understood?"

Ensign Julie Tompson nodded her head. "Yes sir." It had been a few days since she had been able to receive rest. The admirals had kept her awake in order to get the information from her. To Julie, it felt like they didn't care about how she was.

The admiral smiled. "Computer, resume." He turned his attention down to a PADD on the table and pressed a few buttons. "Let's talk about that cloud for a moment." He made a few notes on the PADD and looked back to the ensign. "It says here that you took several readings on your tricorder."

Julie nodded. "Yes. I conducted as many scans as I could, attempting to figure out what was going on. After 30 minutes everyone, including myself, was unconscious." She paused trying to remember what her readings indicated about the cloud and what it was, but found it impossible to do so. "I don't recall what it was. But it did send out some kind of sonic pulse causing us to collapse."

"What happened next?"

"We were aboard some kind of alien vessel. A vessel I've never come across before." She paused. "Of course, that doesn't really say much, I am fresh from the academy after all." Julie picked up a glass of water that was sitting on the desk in front of her and took a sip. As the water trickled down her throat, she tried to relax. It felt good, clean, and was a little on the cold side exactly as she had requested it from the replicator.

"This ship you were on, describe it."

Julie tilted her head towards the ceiling trying to remember as much detail as possible from her experience. As she sat there and looked out the window, the Golden Gate Bridge stared right back, large as life itself. After a few minutes of staring at the great structure, that had lasted the test of time, Julie began to recall her experiences over the past few days. "It was cold, dark. There were no officers or crew, as far as I could tell, at least they didn't make themselves known to us." She rubbed her right temple, trying to force the information out but realized that it wasn't going to be that way. She had to remember and willfully respond to questions presented her. "I'm sorry Admiral Rabb, I just can't." Her voice trailed off and the room became silent.

The admiral pressed a few controls on the PADD to review Julie's medical check by the Head of Starfleet Medical; he also reviewed her psych analysis. Rabb looked to the young ensign sitting in front of him, he felt sorry for her and didn't want to cause her pain by recalling these memories, but it needed to be done. Starfleet needed an explanation of what happened to a crucial mission she was a part of.

Rabb sighed a deep sigh and lowered his head offering a silent prayer for the girl. "How about we start from the top."

## Chapter One

"Julie!" A voice screamed into the deep dark dead cold of night. It was the voice of her father, a man that didn't think highly of Starfleet or its charter.

Julie was standing in a meadow outside her dorm at the academy. She looked across a large field full of deep green grass swaying in the calm evening breeze. Her father was standing in the middle of the field. His face was full of fear. As Julie approached him, the fear deepened and grew in strength. It was throughout his entire body. She tried to get to him, but was stopped by a crowd of people determined to stop her from achieving what she wanted most. The crowd was armed with weapons of many kinds. Some carried hand phasers, while others were armed with torches and other objects of a blunt nature. As Julie tried to make her way through the crowd, she found it impossible and was forced down a different path that led away from her father, away from the man she trusted.

"Daddy!" She screamed out, but he didn't hear her. He couldn't hear her over the crowd who were chanting a loud chant of few words. It was a Bajoran chant, one that Julie had never heard before. She tried to kick and push her way through the crowd again, but to no avail. She was trapped. "Daddy!" She screamed again in pain. Her screams led into the night and dissipated without a trace.

"Daddy!" Julie yelled as she awoke in a cold sweat. She was in her dorm room at Starfleet Academy, her sheets off the bed and on the floor. It had been a nightmare none of it was real. Julie rolled out of her bed and walked around for a moment trying to focus and calm down. A hall light turned on outside her door, she had woken up her dorm mate. As the door opened, Julie felt her face become red with embarrassment.

"Julie?" Sarah asked in a rush. She was breathing hard as if she had sprinted down the hallway.

Julie shook her head. "It's nothing. just a nightmare. I'm sorry to have bothered you." She said trying to apologize for causing such a commotion. She walked over to her sheets, picked them up off the floor, and proceeded to remake her bed. She hoped Sarah wouldn't ask any questions about the dream, but felt she wasn't going to be so lucky.

"It's not nothing." Sarah replied. "Do you want to talk about it?" She walked further into the room and placed a hand on Julie's shoulder letting her know that she could confide in her about anything. They had been through a lot together during the past four years at Starfleet Academy. They were best friends who wouldn't let each other down for anything. No price could break their bond; no bribe could destroy their loyalty to each other and the uniforms they wore. They strongly believed in the cause of the Federation, and the principles they swore to uphold and protect with their very lives if, and when, necessary.

Julie looked around her dorm room for a moment, thought about the dream she had experienced and sat on the foot of the bed. "Well, it took place just out there." She said pointing to a nearby window. She then proceeded to tell her friend what her dream was about. She explained the fear that went throughout her body like a hot knife through butter. In the end, Julie could only wonder what it all meant.

Sarah couldn't think of anything to say to her friend that might bring comfort to her soul. She was puzzled by Julie's story as well and, for the life of her, couldn't come up with a plausible reason for the nightmare. She paced the room for a moment hoping to come to a conclusion. After five minutes, a thought came to her mind. "Maybe you're just worried about graduating tomorrow." She knew how hard it had been for Julie to enter the academy especially since it was against her father's wishes.

Julie nodded shyly. "Yeah, maybe." She looked at a small clock next to her bed. "Look at what time it is. I'm sorry for waking you up."

Sarah shook her head. "No worry. That's what friends are for." She started to head towards the door and turned around just before stepping into the hallway. "Do you need anything?"

"No. I just need to make it through tomorrow." Julie replied with a twinkle in her eye. "Tomorrow we become ensigns." She tried to look as excited as possible for the next day, but that was impossible to do. It would take a while for her to calm down from her nightmare. Julie had a feeling that she wouldn't be getting anymore sleep for the rest of the night.

Sarah nodded "Well you know where you can reach me." She headed out the door closing it gently behind her.

Julie sat alone in the dark as she continued to ponder what had happened in her dream, and why it took place. What was her father doing at the academy? Why were people chanting in Bajoran? None of it made sense to her, she was at a complete loss of words or explanation. She stood from her bed and checked the time again. "I need to call him." Julie said out loud as she walked over to a computer console and sat down.

The console lit to life as soon as Julie sat down. Console Available displayed on the screen with an Access ID code beneath it. Above the words was a graphic of the symbol of Starfleet Academy with a label of Student System. Julie looked to the computer screen and called up a list of family members. It indicated which communications protocol she would have to access in order to contact the people on the list. Julie scanned over the list and found her father's name. "Computer." She ordered. "Open a Subspace Comm. Channel using communications protocol 447 Delta. Label the message as urgent."

"Working." The computer said in a female voice.

Julie about hit the console when she heard how loud the computer was. She didn't want to disturb her friend anymore for the evening. "Reduce volume level to half and enable onscreen text display." That way whatever the computer said would be at a lower audio level and words would display on the screen incase she couldn't hear because of the volume.

An older gentleman appeared on the screen, as he saw that it was his daughter who contacted him, a smile grew on his face. "How ya doing kiddo?" Her father might not fully endorse her presence at the academy, but he was always happy to talk to her. He cared about his family members very much and would do anything to see that they were safe.

Julie smiled back at her father as she saw that he was safe and away from danger, but she had to make certain. "Dad, how are things going for you? Is everything all right?" She tried to ask the question in a manner that didn't show fear in her eyes. As hard as she tried, Julie could never hide anything from her father. He usually knew something was up.

"Things are going okay." He said, "What's wrong? Your message was labeled urgent."

Julie hesitated. "I had a bad dream." She then proceeded to recount the dream to her father including every detail she could remember. After she finished, Julie looked to her father for guidance and direction. She knew that she could confide in an honest opinion and answer to her problem whatever it might be.

Her father stroked his dark beard for a moment as he tried to figure out what symbolism her dream may have in it. The silence was difficult for Julie to handle, she wished he could hurry and give a response. But over her years of growing up, she figured out that silence was the only way her dad could give full attention to the situation at hand. After a few more minutes of thinking, her father finally spoke up.

"I had the exact same dream Julie, except from my perspective of course." He paused. "I tried so hard to get to you, but they wouldn't allow it. I thought that maybe it was just a nightmare, and decided to brush it off." Her father continued. "But now that you had the same dream, I don't know what to think of it." He started to scratch the back of his head trying to figure out what was happening to the two of them, if anything at all. They had never shared a dream before in their lives; it was truly a bizarre incident. "Maybe it was just a coincidence, we're probably just uneasy about you going out on your first deep space exploration assignment in two days. You will be an officer tomorrow, guess it's time to put all that training to use." He picked up a PADD and looked it over, "Which reminds me, my shuttle will be arriving at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Oh wait; you're on that twenty-four hour time aren't you. That would be." Her father paused; he had never been any good at anything that had to deal with militaristic operations. "Don't tell me, I'll get it this time."

Julie laughed silently to herself; he had been trying to get the time thing down for over a year now. For some reason, he never quite got it.

"Um." He continued. "Oh three hundred?"

Julie shook her head. "It'll be oh three hundred in a few minutes dad." She paused; it was time to correct him again. "Try fifteen hundred."

"Oh, I was so close!" He said jokingly.

"Dad, maybe you shouldn't come."

"What?" Her father was in a state of shock, his daughter would be going through one of the most important phases of her life, and she didn't want him there?

Julie took in a deep breath, trying to figure out a way to explain it to her father in a nice gentle way. "Well, we did have that dream tonight. What if something actually happens?"

He shook his head. "Nothing's going to happen sweetie. Everything's going to be all right, trust me. Besides, I wouldn't miss this for the world." He checked the time. "Well, I've got to get going, you need the rest. It's going to be a big day tomorrow."

Julie nodded. "See ya tomorrow dad."

He smiled back. "Okay munchkin. Take care."

The channel closed and the room was silent again. Julie deactivated her computer console and headed back towards her bed. As she crawled beneath the covers, she hoped that she would be able to fall back asleep, a task that wasn't going to be easy.

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The night passed by rather slowly for her, which she expected. Julie had been afraid to fall back asleep in case something else happened in her dream state. She was seated in a large auditorium with several other hundreds of cadets who were graduating the same day. The advancement exercises passed by quickly, she hardly remembered walking across the front stage to accept her rank insignia and uniform. Soon enough she was walking through a crowd of people to find her father, as she was waking an admiral joined her.

"Ensign Tompson, isn't it?" The admiral asked.

Julie nodded her head. She recognized the man it was Admiral Roberts. "Yes sir, what can I do for you sir?" Julie said as she continued walking through the crowd. Julie didn't mean to be rude to the admiral, but she was trying to find her father.

"I understand that you haven't been assigned to a vessel yet." He continued, "That you've been assigned to Deep Space Five."

Julie nodded. "That's right." She stopped walking as the admiral handed her a PADD. "What's this sir?"

"I want you to report to this room at seventeen-hundred hours." He said. "You'll receive further instructions at the meeting." Roberts finished his statement and left the ensign to continue her search.

As Julie continued to walk through the crowd, she finally reached her father. "Dad!"

"Hey there." Her father replied. They hugged each other as usual from not being in physical contact for a few years. Sure they had several discussions over subspace and other means of communication, but there was nothing like the touch of a loved one. "I was on time." He said with a grin.

Julie held out her rank insignia for her father to take a look at. He smiled the best he could and congratulated her on graduating the academy. "There's someone I want you to meet." Julie said as she pulled her father's hand and led him through the crowded auditorium. After minutes of searching, she found her friend, Sarah.

"Julie!" Sarah yelled out in excitement.

As she came closer, Julie started the introductions. "Sarah, this is my father John." She said, "Dad, this is my best friend Sarah."

"It's good to meet you sir." Sarah said, "Julie's told me quite a lot about you."

John again allowed a slight smile. "She did huh?" He said guessing that most of it was probably negative concerning his views about Starfleet. John stopped for a moment and in his mind shouted at himself. She's your daughter for crying out loud; for once can't you just be nice? John allowed his smile to grow, "She's told me quite a lot about you as well, I'm glad Julie had a good friend while she was away from home."

"I've got to go." Sarah said, "I'm ordered to report aboard the Enterprise at eighteen hundred hours, and from the looks of things I don't have much time."

Julie nodded her agreement, "The Enterprise huh? Whom did you suck up to get that post?" She was teasing as usual.

Sarah laughed and played along, "Oh you know, I had a few favors that came in." She paused for a moment, "It was good to see you before I left, keep in touch." Sarah started to walk away and before long disappeared into the crowd.

"I will." Julie called out after her. She was determined to keep in touch with her close friends that she had met at the academy over the past four years. Julie knew how difficult it was to keep up with friends after going on to new phases in ones life. She only hoped that she would keep her promise to Sarah.

"She got assigned to the Federation's Flagship, and you only got a space station!" John exclaimed, "What kind of show are they running here?" He folded his arms in disgust. "You deserve to."

Julie turned and faced her father, "Don't lecture me dad. I don't have a choice where I'm assigned. They give me orders and I go." She explained waving the PADD in front of him.

John grabbed the PADD out of his daughter's hand and read through it. "What's this?" He asked as he continued to examine the information from the admiral.

Julie smiled, "I have a change of orders." She said, "I'll learn more in a half hour." She took the PADD back from her father's grasp.

"Does this mean our dinner plans are off?" Her father asked.

Julie shook her head, "No just postponed until later this evening." She paused, "The briefing shouldn't last for more than an hour, meet me outside my dorm at eight o'clock?"

John looked to the ceiling, "Let me think." He said trying to calculate the time again. After a few moments he shrugged his shoulders and gave up, "Eight o'clock it is." He said. Julie walked across academy grounds, wearing her new uniform and rank insignia, towards a building at the specified time. Her pace was quick and efficient; she didn't want to make her superior officers waiting any longer than needed. As Julie approached the building, a man was standing outside. He was wearing a uniform with the rank of Captain on it.

The man approached her, "Ensign Tompson?" He checked a PADD he was carrying.

Julie stopped walking and nodded, "Yes sir." She held her PADD out in front for the man to take.

The captain accepted the PADD and compared the information with the PADD in his other hand. "You're five minutes early." He said, "Good." The captain pointed towards the door, "They're waiting inside for you."

Julie nodded, "Aye sir." She walked towards the doors; they parted allowing her to enter the building. The building was a little colder than usual, Julie had been in it several times for various classes she had over the years. She looked around noticing that no one was there, the room was completely empty. "He said they were here waiting." She said out loud to herself in confusion.

"That's right ensign." A female voice said out of nowhere.

Several beeping noises could be heard and a holographic illusion disappeared from site. The room changed dramatically to a tactical situation room. Four admirals stood before her, each was carrying a PADD. Around the room were several computer consoles displaying information on various planets throughout the Federation's boundaries.

"Welcome," The female admiral continued, "You're early." She made several notes on a PADD, "Good first impression. If you continue in this manner, you might be selected for this mission after all." The admiral pressed a few buttons on her PADD; an oak table with four leather chairs appeared using holographic technology. She gestured towards a chair closest to Julie, "Please have a seat."

At the invitation, Ensign Tompson waited for the other admiral's to sit first. She then pulled the chair away from the table, sat down and rolled in to where she was about a few inches from the table. Julie looked around the table into the faces of her superior officers. They weren't smiling. Their ears weren't pointed so they weren't Vulcans. The admirals just didn't show any emotion.

"I am Admiral Necheyev," the Female Admiral said. She looked to her associates, "Their names are not important."

As Necheyev looked back towards Julie it made her uncomfortable. Necheyev had a look that could pierce the titanium hull of a Starship. She meant business. Julie often found that the admirals at the academy had time for humor and other activities to relax them. This was definitely not the case with Necheyev. Julie decided to be on her best behavior.

"Tell me ensign," Necheyev continued, "How do you feel about the oath you swore to the Federation?" She asked, "How do you feel that you have sworn an oath of allegiance to protect the Federation or die trying."

Julie was taken back a little, she had never really thought about the oath in that manner. "Well."

Necheyev held up a finger, "And don't give me the answer of duty and loyalty that all the other failed candidates have given us. Answer this question in a manner that is unique to yourself."

Julie swallowed the words she was about to let forth and pondered the admiral's statement for a moment. She thought of Starfleet's charter and it's mission of exploration. "Well, I would have to say." She took in a breath wondering how the admiral's would react. "That the Federation is the most efficient organization in the universe and those who do not uphold its principals deserve death."

Necheyev allowed a slight smile. She admired the fact that the ensign had spunk. Necheyev was reminded of herself when she was a cadet at the academy. As she started to speak the smile dropped. "That's a pretty bold statement ensign."

Julie nodded, "Yes it is sir." She responded standing firm in her belief and not turning back on her words. The admiral had asked for a frank answer from her, and Julie gave that answer.

Necheyev looked to the officers at her left. They nodded in approval. She turned her attention back to Julie. "The interview is over, here is your new assignment." She tossed a PADD across the table.

Julie caught the PADD just before it fell to the ground. She started to read through the information on the PADD but was interrupted as Necheyev continued to give instructions.

"Oh, you'll need this too." The admiral said as she tossed a Type II Phaser, complete with holster, across the table towards Julie.

Ensign Tompson caught the phaser and attached it to her uniform. "Sir?" She began to ask.

Necheyev didn't want to have to answer any questions. "Your commanding officer will give you the necessary details when you report aboard. Dismissed." The meeting was over and it was time for Julie to leave the room.

Ensign Tompson stood from the chair "Yes sir." She turned one hundred eighty-degrees and exited the room. Julie looked over the PADD reading the information wondering what kind of mission she would be embarking on. It wasn't everyday an admiral gave a newly graduated cadet an interview like that. She was curious what was about to take place.

As She exited the facility, Julie started to walk back towards her dorm. Her orders were to report aboard a small training vessel later that evening. She needed to gather the rest of her things and have dinner with her father. She was excited yet apprehensive about her new assignment not knowing exactly what it was. Julie shrugged it off and decided to be happy with Starfleet's decision. Ensign Tompson quickened her pace as her thoughts moved on to dinner with her father. She didn't want to postpone him again, it would be her last night on Earth; and she probably wouldn't see her father again, for a while, in the flesh.

The walk back to her dorm room didn't take very long. As soon as Julie entered she finished packing her things. Sarah had already left to report aboard the Enterprise and wasn't in sight. Julie walked over to her computer console to delete any personal files that she didn't want anyone else to find. On the screen were the words MESSAGE WAITING. She activated the file and watched as her friend came on the screen.

"Couldn't leave without saying one last goodbye." Sarah started off. She continued to tell her friend how important she was and how appreciative she was to have known her. Julie agreed with what Sarah was saying. They had been through a lot at the academy and would be through a lot in their respective careers. As the file

finished running, Julie moved it into a personal database to take with her. She was determined to keep in touch with her friend.

## Chapter Two

Dinner didn't take place as planned.

Julie's father was called away on a business matter and was sorry that they couldn't have one last meal together. He promised that he would make it up to his daughter, and he would as long as it would be possible. Julie wasn't mad at her father for postponing the dinner, she had done the same thing earlier in the day to him; and it wouldn't be right if she were angry.

As Julie took one last walk outside her dorm, she was reminded of the nightmare she had the night before. The images came back to her clear and crisp as though the dream was continuing at that moment; it was painful to process in her mind. After few minutes, she managed to suppress her thoughts and the dream subsided back to wherever it came from in the first place.

Julie took a few deep breaths before continuing towards a Transport Hub in the middle of academy grounds. From that station, she could be transported as far as the moon, if she wanted to; it was one of the most powerful transport stations in all of Starfleet. She remembered the day it was installed, after the Starship Voyager returned from the Delta Quadrant with several components of advanced technology and equipment. The Voyager's sensor logs alone were valuable allowing Starfleet to construct the hub based upon a Borg Transwarp Hub Voyager's crew destroyed to prevent a possible Borg invasion of Earth.

As she entered the Transport Hub, Julie nodded to the officer on duty. "Please transport me to these coordinates." She smiled as she handed the chief the PADD.

The chief looked at the PADD and downloaded the required information into the computer. After a moment he nodded, "Ready." He handed the PADD back to Julie who stepped onto the transporter device and was beamed away from Earth to her first deep space assignment.

As the ensign rematerialized on a transporter pad, she looked around. It was like any other Federation's transporter room, gray colors and rather dull. She had become use to those colors over the course of her education at the academy.

"Welcome aboard." A male officer wearing a gold Starfleet uniform said. "You're early."

Julie looked into the officer's eyes and didn't know what to make of him. At first glance, he didn't like her. Julie looked at the man's collar; he wore the rank of commander. "Yes I am" she responded standing her ground. Julie wasn't about to back down to anyone. After all, it was Starfleet who contacted her in the first place, not the other way around.

The officer held out a hand, which Julie accepted. "I'm Commander Harding, the First Officer." As he released her hand, he gestured towards the door. "Captain Evans is in his ready room, if you'll follow me."

"No need." Julie said, "I'll find my own way." She exited the transporter room and headed down the hallway towards a waiting turbolift. As she exited the room, she chuckled to herself. How hard can it be to find the bridge anyway? She thought as the turbolift doors closed behind her.

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Captain John Evans was seated in front of his desk in his read room. He activated his terminal and pressed a few buttons, the computer beeped telling him it was awaiting input. Evans placed his hand on the table where a scanning device was. "Recognize authorization, Evans Beta 5."



"Authorization confirmed." The computer replied, "Awaiting instructions."

Evans lifted his hand from the scanner and gave a slight tug on his uniform. "Access current mission file 47 Zeta, U.S.S. Fearless. Audio playback."

"Working." Again the computer replied, "Accessing file." A moment passed and the female voice started repeating the orders, "U.S.S. Fearless is to."

Beep. Beep.

The door chimed. Evans released a sigh of anger. "Computer, Pause." He looked towards the doors of his ready room and grunted. This had better be good. He thought. "Enter."

As the doors opened Ensign Tompson entered the room. She walked towards the desk and stood at attention. "Ensign Julie Tompson reporting as ordered sir." She placed the PADD on his desk and waited for him to respond.

"A little forward are we ensign?" Evans asked in a cold tone. He picked up the PADD and read through it. As he did so, he chuckled at the information Starfleet had given her. Necheyev did exactly as he had requested. So far she was in the dark. He wondered if the ensign would be able to comprehend their orders and complete the mission without any problems or letdowns. John was ready to find out. "At ease." He stood from his chair and handed the PADD back to Julie.

John stared into the ensign's eyes and noticed that she stared right back at him. "I've gone over your Starfleet profile and have listened to what Necheyev has said about you." He said, "very impressive." John sat back down in his chair. "Are you going to allow this straightforwardness to interfere with your duties aboard my vessel?"

Julie shook her head, "No sir. I will follow any order you give me as long as I deem it reasonable."

"As long as you deem it reasonable?" John asked, "Elaborate."

"I believe over the past few years that Starfleet captains tend to push their crews to an unreasonable level and themselves even harder." She said, "As long as you don't cross that line I'm fine with any order I receive. However, if you issue an order that is unreasonable by any normal officer under your command, I will require an explanation for your actions."

"You could get in a lot of trouble for talking down to your senior officer like that." Evans said with a straight cold face.

Ensign Tompson nodded her head, "Yes sir. I know that sir." She stood firm, it had worked for Necheyev and she was hoping it was going to work with him.

John tried his best to hide a smile that was forming at the corners of his mouth. He liked this one she did have spunk. "And if you don't approve of my reason?"

Julie hesitated for a moment; she wondered how he would respond to her answer. I don't want to make him think I'm insubordinate, but I need to stand up for what I believe in. "Then I will suggest you assign someone else to do that task." She paused, "If you don't believe I will be able to follow your orders, I suggest you find another officer now, because I will not follow you blindly."

A challenge, Evans thought, I'm going to enjoy this. "Have a seat," John gestured with his hand. "Computer rewind playback and continue."

"U.S.S. Fearless is to report to sector 314 of the Badlands to escort troop convoy Alpha 7 out of the Demilitarized Zone. The Prime Directive has been rescinded, as well as Warp Speed limitations, for this mission only."

Julie's ears perked up, She had never heard of Starfleet taking the Prime Directive out of service for a mission. She was going to have an interesting first assignment in deep space.

Evans picked up a PADD off his desk and handed it to the ensign. "Here is the rest of the details for our mission. Read it over. This is the only time I'm allowing for you to ask questions."

Julie looked over the PADD and committed it to memory, a trick she had learned at the academy. After reviewing it for a few minutes she placed it back down on the desk. "When do we leave?"

"Didn't you hear me ensign?" Evans said, "If you have any questions about the mission you should ask them now."

Julie nodded, "I heard you the first time. My question is when do we get underway?" She felt like she was ready for anything that Evans threw at her and she wanted to get going as soon as possible. Julie didn't go through the academy to be tossed around on a Starship; she was a qualified pilot and expected her commanding officer to see that.

Evans nodded his head, "In an hour. I'm still waiting for my chief medical officer to sign onboard." He tapped his finger on a console for a few moments.

"Something else sir?" Tompson asked.

Evans shook his head, "No. Your quarters are on deck eight section thirteen delta, Dismissed."

Julie turned and exited the Ready Room. As she entered the bridge, Commander Harding approached her. "Welcome aboard." He said extending a hand to the ensign, hoping they were on good terms.

Tompson shook his hand, "Thanks but no thanks."

Harding gave a look of shock. "He didn't accept your transfer orders?"

Tompson smiled, "Of course he did." She said, "I was just teasing."

The first officer let go of her hand, and smiled. "Good. Let's just hope you're what Starfleet said you would be." He paused, "Do you need any help with your belongings?"

Tompson shook her head, "No sir. I had them beamed directly to your quarters."

"My quarters." The officer replied, "Why did you do that?" He asked not knowing exactly what she was planning.

"I needed to put them somewhere didn't I?" She replied, "I figured that your quarters would be a safe bet. Don't worry, I'll relocate them as soon as possible." Julie said as she walked away and entered the turbolift that would take her to deck eight.

### Chapter Three

Deck eight was, for the most part, quiet; Ensign Tompson rather enjoyed the solace. She was walking down the corridor with a standard Starfleet issue duffle bag. The rest of her belongings were in her quarters as she had promised the first officer. Julie approached a door and pressed a button to allow her access.

"Working, thumb scan recognized. Welcome home Ensign Tompson." The computer replied in a soft feminine tone.

Julie allowed a smirk, she was going to have to change that greeting; it annoyed her. "Computer. Lights." She said and watched as the room got brighter and brighter until sufficient illumination was reached.

"Incoming transmission" The computer said.

Julie set her bag down on the floor and walked over to a terminal resting on a desk. She looked at the screen to see who the message was from and didn't recognize the name. As she activated the file, Julie found the majority of the message to be garbled; it had degraded on its journey to the communications relay aboard the ship. Julie tinkered with a few controls on the terminal trying to get a clearer transmission. As she continued to do so, the fuzzy face of her former roommate appeared.

Julie smiled. Her friend missed her so much she sent another message. The ensign pressed a button allowing the file to playback.

". Julie." The message began. Ensign Tompson tried her best to figure out what Sarah was saying. It was difficult to make out. For a few seconds the sound went completely out and then came back. Julie stopped the message and ran another algorithm on it trying to clarify as much as she could.

She began the message again and gasped at what she heard. "Julie, you're in danger" was all that Julie could make out. She scratched her head for a moment confused as ever. What would make her friend say such a thing, what did Sarah know that she didn't? Why did she use another name to disguise her identity?

"Computer, trace the location from where this message was sent and open a communications channel." Julie said quickly.

"Working." The computer replied. "Unable to comply, location unknown."

Julie was still confused. She tapped her communications badge. "Ensign Tompson to." She stopped in mid sentence, realizing that she didn't know who she could trust on the Fearless. Julie hadn't even been aboard the vessel for a day yet. If her friend was right, if she were in danger, she didn't know the crew from Adam. Julie decided to be very cautious around her superior officers. Sure they seemed harmless, but she planned on watching them closely over the next few days.

Julie stood from the desk and stared at her luggage. Knowing she needed to unpack, she picked up her duffel bag and placed it on a nearby chair. As she did so, Julie took a look out the window. Earth was not in view, and neither were any of the other nine planets of the solar system. From what she could tell visually, she was nowhere near Sector 001. Julie stopped unpacking, deciding to do it at a later time. She was going to do some investigating.

"Computer, what's the current location of the Fearless?" Julie asked.

"That information is restricted to level four security clearance." The computer replied.

Julie frowned; only the captain and first officer had the necessary security clearance to obtain the information she wanted. "Okay," Julie said, she would have to out think the computer, which was not an easy task. "What is the nearby star system?"

"That information is restricted." The computer repeated itself.

Julie laughed to herself, she already knew their mission but couldn't know where their current position was. She shook her head, just like Starfleet to do that. "Fine." She said, "Hypothetically speaking, how long would it take a shuttle going at full impulse to reach Earth?"

"That information is restricted."

"Captain Evans to Ensign Tompson." The voice of her commanding officer came through an open communications channel.

"Tompson here sir." Julie said wondering if he knew what she was attempting.

"In case you were wondering," Evans said, "We are currently in Sector 417 near the old DMZ."

"Yes sir," Julie said, "Thank you sir."

"And ensign." Evans continued.

"Yes sir?"

"Don't try that again, I'm watching." He replied, "Report to sickbay for a physical, Evans out."

He was paying attention to her. Julie picked up a tricorder off her desk and scanned the room looking for any kind of listening device but found nothing. Whatever it was Evans hid it well enough so she wouldn't be able to detect it. She put the tricorder back on the desk and exited her quarters.

\* \* \*

Two hours later, Julie was finished with her physical.

"Clean bill of health." The doctor said, "I'll keep these on file until your official records arrive from Starfleet Command. I'm giving you the rest of the day off, go back to your quarters and get some rest. Dismissed."

Ensign Tompson nodded and exited Sickbay. The doctor walked into her office only to be interrupted by a communications beep. "Robbins here." She said replying to the call.

"This is the captain, what did you find out?" Evans asked.

"Her genetic coding is within your specified parameters captain. Everything is going according to plan." Robbins said.

"Where is she now?"

"I sent her back to her quarters to get some sleep, the physical was a bit rigorous." Robbins replied, she had run several tests on the ensign to make sure she was what they needed.

"Understood, keep me informed, Evans out."

\* \* \*

"Julie!" Again the voice of her father screamed into the night, just as before in a previous dream.

Tompson looked around, she was standing in a place unknown to her. Several high cliffs surrounded her at the bottom of a deep valley. As she tried to find where her father's voice was coming from, she slipped and fell cutting her leg. Julie placed her hand on her shin in response to the pain.

"Julie!"

"Father!" Tompson yelled out, hoping he would hear. No answer came, she was alone. Julie looked around again, the sky was dark and black. The sun was up, but it wasn't shining as usual, it was gray and mixed in with the dark clouds. From a distance, a figure approached her; stopping a few yards away he pointed in her direction.

"Danger." A voice said.

"Who are you?" Julie asked with confusion.

"Danger" the man yelled again. He turned around and started to walk away.

"No wait!" Julie said, "Who are you?" She asked again, but there was no answer. The man just kept walking. Julie started to run but couldn't because of her injured leg.

"Wait!" She awoke screaming at the top of her lungs. Ensign Tompson sat up in her bed and looked around, the room was empty, as it should be. "Lights." At her command, the lights activated allowing her a better view of her surroundings. Just another dream Julie thought to herself.

She stood from her bed and walked over to the replicator. "Cold water."

"Specify temperature."

Julie shook her head, "I don't care for the temperature, just make it cold!" She snapped back. She picked up a glass after it materialized in the chamber and took a sip. "Computer, what is the current time?"

"The time is oh six hundred hours."

Julie nodded, her shift was about to start, and it was time she got ready for the day. She placed the glass back in the replicator chamber and headed towards her closet.

#### Chapter Four

In the turbolift, Julie stood in silence. She was running about ten minutes late and was trying to think of an excuse for her commanding officer. As the lift stopped and she exited, Julie found something strange. The bridge was empty; no one was to be found. "Where is everyone?" She said to herself.

"Please restate the question." The computer replied.

"Disregard question." Julie said. She crossed the bridge and stood at the captain's ready room. Julie activated the communications panel and waited. There was no answer. Maybe they're in a conference.

As the doors to the conference lounge parted, Julie found the room to be empty. "Computer, what is the current location of Captain Evans?"

"Captain Evans is not aboard the Fearless."

"When did he leave?" She asked.

"Unknown." The computer replied.

Okay, what about the others? Julie thought. "Locate Commander Harding."

"Computer, belay that." Harding's voice came from behind.

Julie turned to see the officer exiting the aft turbolift. "Where is everyone?"

Harding nodded. "At their duty stations." He paused, "You did know this is a simulation. yes?"

Julie's face turned red. "No sir." She paused, "Why am I here?"

Harding smiled "I had you transported here as you slept." He held up a PADD, "I've been going over some of your flight scores from your academy record." He looked down at the PADD and frowned, "And I'm afraid to say they're not as impressive as the rest of your records."

Julie nodded, "Yes sir."

"How Necheyev approved you for this mission still boggles me." Harding replied in a cold tone. "But we'll have to deal with what we have. Take the conn."

"Why?" Julie asked.

"We're going to sharpen those skills of yours. Navigating a starship is more difficult than a small training flyer." Harding said, "By the time I'm done with you, you will be able to fly almost anything and more important through any mission Starfleet gives you."

"Sir?" Tompson asked in a questioning tone.

Harding shook his head, "Take the conn." He wasn't about to give her any kind of answer or explanation for his words. She needed to learn to take orders, and he was determined to make sure she was up to his level of expectations.

Tompson walked towards the forward two duty stations and sat down at the helm console. As she scanned the panel, she didn't recognize the configuration. It wasn't standard issue.

"I see you don't recognize the console," Harding said, "Do what young cadets do best read a manual." He handed her a training manual for standard ship functions.

Julie took the manual and flung it towards the main viewer. "No thanks, I'm a quick study." She took another scan of the panel and decided to do what she did best, press a button and find out what it did.

Suddenly the ship jumped into warp. Julie lurched forward into the console. Harding made notes on the PADD he was carrying. "Nice going, you forgot to set a course. We're flying aimlessly without coordinates." He pointed to the viewer, "Oh look an obstacle."

A small moon roughly twice the size of the Fearless came into view.

"How are you going to handle that one ensign?"

Tompson looked around the console trying to find a way out of the situation. She pressed another button. The ship dropped out of warp and screeched to a dead stop. Its nose barely scratched the surface of the moon.

"You just destroyed the forward sensor array. Nice job." Harding said sarcastically as he continued to make more notes. He walked towards the viewer, picked up the tech manual and handed it to the ensign. "Study up, we'll try again tomorrow. Until then, you are confined to your quarters. Dismissed."

Julie stood from the post and exited the holodeck. After she was gone, Harding tapped his commbadge. "Harding to Evans."

"Evans here." The captain's voice came through.

"I've run the first simulation." Harding replied as he looked around the holodeck, "Everything checks out so far."

"Understood, keep me informed. Evans out."

Harding sat down at the helm console and activated a few controls. "Computer, run program Epsilon 47, authorization Harding Delta Six."

The computer made a few beeping noises, "Confirmed. Doors sealed, level four authorization required for access." The doors made a clanking noise in response. "Holodeck safeties are disengaged. Communications block for Holodeck 2 activated."

Harding smiled, "Begin simulation."

End Part I