

Farragut

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Farragut

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

Summary

Stardate 43999.1: Just prior to the Battle of Wolf 359, a call went out to any and all available starships. Captain Krystine Leone and the crew of the USS Farragut race to render aid, but will they make it in time?

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Notes

This story was originally published (for the first time ever) at the classic Ad Astra site on 24 February 2009. This version is edited and revised from the original to correct spelling and grammatical errors, which includes rephrasing of certain sentences and paragraphs for readability.

Historian's Note: This story takes place during the events of the TNG episode, "The Best of Both Worlds, Part Two."

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Quarterdeck Breed by Lord McCovey Cove

Part Six: *Farragut*

NCC-60597 (USS *Farragut*)
En route to Wolf 359, Warp 9.5
Stardate 43999.1
Main Bridge

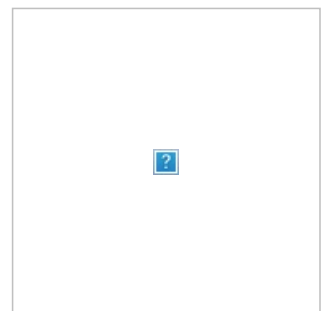
The viewscreen showed the faster-than-light distortion of the field of stars outside the ship. As the ship continued toward its destination, the stars would pass by in a long white line. *Farragut's* engines propelled the ship to over fifteen thousand times the speed of light, and her captain had yet to be satisfied..

Captain Leone looked at the panel on the right. The Nebula-class starship was operating at its maximum emergency speed, which couldn't be maintained. She stayed the urge to call down to engineering; order them to do whatever they could to boost the ship's engines. They were already providing the very best possible speed they could.

She looked back up at the viewscreen. Periodically, she caught sight of the USS *Excalibur's* Ambassador-class port-side warp nacelle drifting over the edge and then back again. Making course corrections at high warp could be a perilous option, but the situation warranted making desperate decisions. *Farragut's* sister ship, *Lexington*, kept pace on her port side. The three ships were in tight warp formation for the benefit of approaching Wolf 359. As the nacelle drifted back and forth again, Leone hoped they wouldn't try anything reckless, as they might collapse the warp fields of all three ships.

"Incoming transmission from *Excalibur*," announced Lieutenant Nieves from the tactical position.

"Put him through," ordered Leone.



The bridge of *Excalibur* replaced the warp-distorted stars. Captain Estrada stood next to his executive officer as they hunched over the flight controller's console. He snapped his head up to look at her. "Captain Leone, I'm afraid we're going to need to drop out of formation and take a breather."

Leone rose from her seat and nodded. "I understand, Captain. How long?"

"From what my chief engineer tells me, we'll be out for two to four hours."

She winced. They needed *Excalibur's* firepower. "Is there anything we can do?"

He stared at her, hard. "Get in a couple of shots for us, Captain. *Excalibur*, out."

As soon as Estrada's image winked off the screen, Leone turned and ordered, "Mister Nieves, get me Admiral Hanson."

"Aye, sir," replied Nieves. He entered a few commands and then informed her, "Sir, Admiral Hanson is on another channel, speaking to the *Enterprise*. It'll be a moment."

"I'll wait," she said. She preferred to remain standing, enjoying the freedom of walking on her bridge. Of course, pacing would not help her officers and crew, either. Even if it made her feel like she was doing *something*. Her bridge was not dissimilar from a Galaxy-class bridge; with the distinctive horseshoe-like tactical station behind three command chairs. She walked along the bridge and stopped by the engineering console, peering over the ensign's shoulder.

Then she strode down the other side, with her arms folded across her midsection, and then stopped behind the officer seated at the conn, Ensign Gregory Aspinall. She sighed, blowing some of the air up toward her dark red bangs. Then, Nieves abruptly ended the tense silence.

"I have the admiral, sir."

"On screen," she said.

J. P. Hanson reminded Leone of her great Uncle Antonio when he smiled. And he always had a warm smile, even in these dire circumstances. "Captain Leone, Commander Kincaid."

Her first officer stood as the admiral appeared. Both of them acknowledged the greeting in kind.

"What's your estimated time of arrival, Captain?" asked Hanson.

Her eyes darted down to the helm display. "At current speed, we should arrive at Wolf 359 in just under thirty-six hours, sir."

"I see," he sighed. "There have been a few developments since the last time we spoke. The weapon developed by *Enterprise* failed to stop the Borg as we had hoped, but it delayed them. The cube has returned to its previous course and shall be here within the day. So far, we've assembled a fleet of thirty-nine starships."

"That's outstanding, sir."

"We can keep them occupied until you get here. We could use an additional three ships--"

"Two, sir," she interrupted.

Hanson tilted his head. "What?" Leone quickly explained *Excalibur's* predicament, then he sighed. "Then we will have to make do with what we can get."

"Aye, sir."

"One other thing, Captain."

"Yes, sir?"

"Captain Picard has been assimilated by the Borg. He goes by the name of 'Locutus,' and he seems to act as an advocate for them."

Leone and Kincaid shared a brief look. "Understood, sir."

"We've lost a brilliant officer and a friend. We're going to make sure they pay for it."

She vowed, "We'll be there, sir. Even if I have to pull this ship with my bare hands."

"We'll be waiting." An officer moved into view of the screen and handed him a PADD. Hanson looked at it and nodded. "We're sending you the latest information we have on the most recent Borg encounters, including the *Enterprise* sensor data and mission reports. If you or your crew comes up with any ideas..."

"You'll be the first to know, sir."

The senior staff sat around the conference table in the bridge observation lounge, located aft on the deck. Commander Jesse Kincaid sat to her right, as he always did, while she sat at the head of the table. "All right, I'm not going to bother dramatics. Who here has an idea?"

Lieutenant Commander Ariel Elannis, the ship's Chief Operations Officer and third-in-command, looked right at Lieutenant Petra Bartlet. "Mister Bartlet had a few questions."

Leone shot a glance at the chief engineer and nodded her permission to speak.

Bartlet nodded. "Sir, the information regarding the high band burst from their deflector dish... I mean, how in the hell did they adapt? Not even the Borg could've covered the band before the cube would've been reduced to a square."

Kincaid spoke up. "It's in one of the mission commentaries..." he trailed off as he browsed the index of reports. "Ah, here it is. Commander Data suggests that when the Borg assimilated Captain Picard, they also assimilated his knowledge and experience."

"It wasn't just suggested, Commander. The Borg made it clear in their last transmission," said Leone. "So, we are dealing with the fact that they know how we would respond to an incursion into the core sectors, as well as how our fleet tactics work. That includes individual starship weapon strengths, shield frequencies, fleet formations..."

Kincaid let that hang in the air. Then, along with a defeated sigh, he pondered aloud, "Then there's nothing the fleet can do, right?"

The question went unanswered. Leone looked at her officers, recognizing the painful look of defeat in their eyes. "Enough of that. We can't be at the fleet to lend our firepower, but that doesn't mean we cannot help them from here. I want each of you working on the problem, and submit your ideas to me within the next two hours. We have nineteen hours until the Borg get to Wolf 359."

That seemed to dampen the dreary mood a bit. Kincaid smiled at her, almost knowingly.

"You heard the captain," he said. "Dismissed."

Kincaid remained behind as the rest of the senior officers filed out of the lounge. With hands steepled on the table, he gazed down. "Do you think they'll come up with something?"

"I hope so, Jess," she sighed. "I would hate to have to retake Earth if they assimilate it."

Nieves called into the lounge. "Captain, incoming transmission from *Lexington*."

"Put it through, here."

Captain Justine Wilder appeared on the small screen. She did not look happy.

"Uh oh. What's wrong?" asked Leone.

"Remember when Andy told you he would have to drop out of warp soon?"

"Yeah."

"We're not far behind that. We will not make it the full thirty-six."

"How far can you go?"

"Another twelve hours, and then we need to cool down for two before we can stress the engines again," replied Wilder with a frown. "I'm sorry we won't go the distance."

Her tone held a deeper meaning; a tight and restrained frustration behind the thin veneer of calm on Wilder's face. Her expression hinted at a desire to strike the display, and Leone felt a similar urge.

Farragut was on her own.

"Dominic is fine. He's playing with the neighbor's children right now," said her mother. "It's been all over the news nets. Starfleet's is making a stand at Wolf 359."

Leone nodded. "Have any of your friends kept you in the loop?"

Vice Admiral Angelina Leone (ret.), tilted her head and smiled at her daughter. She had been the former head of Starfleet Tactical before Vice Admiral Hanson took over. "Mostly. And for what it's worth, I think J. P. is a fool for assembling a fleet at Wolf 359. He pulled nearly all the Sol defensive units. If they fail..."

"That's not a kind thing to say, Mom. You should know better than to play armchair quarterback."

Her mother's expression hardened. With a tight and acid tone, she replied, "And you should know better than to chastise me, Captain."

Leone bristled. "I hate it when you pull rank on me." She expected a further rebuke.

Instead, her mother grinned. "I may not get another chance to."

Captain Leone looked down at the deck, trying to hide her own smile. "Yes, sir."

Admiral Leone chuckled. "By the way, Dominic pulled his grades up during his summer studies. He'll be able to take the secondary school exams with everyone else next month."

"Really? That's wonderful!" Leone expressed elation, saying, "I thought he might have to go through a semester of remedial study..."

"Yes, it seems your son inherited *some* genes from our side of the family."

"Mom," she warned.

"What? I didn't say anything." Her mother's dislike of her husband found its way into every conversation they had.

"John's a good man."

"And a lousy father."

"You promised not to disparage him in front of Dominic."

"He's outside."

"Or me."

Admiral Leone pressed her lips together. "If perhaps you might convince him to spend a little time with his son. I'm afraid that Dominic will forget what he looks like."

That much was true, she couldn't deny. She, like him, was guilty for being absent for long periods. "I'm never around, either. Does that make me a lousy mother?"

"You're in Starfleet, Krystine," replied her mother, matter-of-factly. "He is *not*."

She pressed her hand to her head, suppressing her multitude of unspoken words. "You know..."

"How far away from Wolf are you?" interrupted her mother.

"Thirty-one hours."

"Are you going to make it?"

She shook her head. "Not by a long shot, but that will not stop us from trying."

"Warp engine status?"

"My chief engineer is keeping her eye on them. We'll be forced to drop out of warp in ten hours."

"You're running at maximum emergency speed, for over twenty-four hours. You should jog the engines."

"Sir?"

"Jog the engines. Drop to low warp, like say warp two or three, so you're not at a standstill. While the engines are at that speed, your chief engineer should be able to cycle the coils one by one and drive the coil heat through the plasma vents."

"We can't open the plasma vents while at warp, Mom."

"Krys, I know what I'm talking about. Just do it. That should get you another full day of max speed." Without waiting for her daughter to respond, she asked, "Now, would you like to speak with your son?"

Lieutenant Petra Bartlet hunched over the chief engineer's station in main engineering as Captain Leone walked in. "C-Captain," she stammered. "What can I do for you?"

With a motion of her thumb, the captain replied, "I just got done speaking with my mother and my son--"

"Oh, how are they?"

"A little too calm, for my liking, actually."

"Really?"

"That's not really what I came down here to discuss."

"Oh, sorry."

"It's all right. Listen, have you ever heard of a... 'warp jog'?"

"A what, sir?"

The captain explained the procedure. "It's not possible, is it?"

Petra turned to access a station behind her and began entering parameters for it. "The safety protocols won't allow us to disengage the vent locks on the nacelles. Basically, the ship vents the coil heat into the vacuum to bring the coil temperature down to acceptable levels..." she trailed off as she noticed the annoyed expression on the captain's face. "Which you already know, of course."

Captain Leone shot her a lopsided grin. "Is my mother crazy?"

"Honest answer? Not... entirely," Petra replied with a wink.

Leone chuckled.

The chief engineer continued, "I mean, your mother was a starship captain. Back in the days when procedure and regulation were more like flights of fancy," Petra said with a smile, but dropped it immediately when she realized what she said. "N-Not that I'm implying that your mother is old or anything, sir."

"It's okay," assured the captain. "She is."

"Yes, sir," Petra agreed immediately. "I mean, I understand."

"Can it be done?"

"I *think* so. We'd have to drop to warp one, though. I wouldn't want to try it at a higher speed."

Leone nodded. "We'll go with your recommendations. How long would it take to cycle through all the coils?"

"Fifteen to thirty minutes, barring any unforeseen problems."

"I'll take a full hour over two to four hours."

"Yes, sir."

"We have a little under ten hours of max speed," noted Leone. "How long to come up with a procedure for this?"

Petra thought it over. "I could start running some simulations on it?"

"Good."

"But, sir?"

"Yes?"

"What about the ideas for the fleet?"

"Have you come up with any?"

Petra frowned. "Not exactly, sir. But we're working on it. Would you like us to work on the 'warp jog,' instead?"

Leone walked back toward the turbolift. She replied over her shoulder, "Two teams, Lieutenant. One for this, and the other for that."

"Aye, sir." She relaxed when the captain disappeared into the lift. Turning around to look at her team, she nodded. "You heard the lady, and you know what to do, so let's get it done."

Her department came together, taking the two projects and forming the teams. Petra smiled, knowing that she had the best people working for her, and watched them with a sense of pride out of the corner of one eye.

The other eye focused on the problem.

Lieutenant Commander Ariel Elannis raised her arms above her head to stretch, while a yawn crept up simultaneously.

Leaning over her station, Commander Kincaid smiled. "Tired?"

"It's been a long day," she said through the yawn. "You?"

"Not yet. But you know that part of the day when you know you should be tired..."

Ariel nodded as she tapped in a few commands to run a diagnostic. "Yeah."

"I keep waiting for fatigue, but it doesn't come."

"Maybe it's adrenaline?"

"Nah."

"Excitement before a battle?"

Kincaid shook his head. "I don't think so."

"Did you sleep a lot last night?"

He chuckled. "Define 'a lot.'"

She smiled. "Point."

"I think it was all that coffee I had earlier. I was drinking it like water."

"It *is* water."

"You know what I mean."

"So, you're saying your super-caffeinated?"

Kincaid shrugged. "I guess so."

Ariel opened her mouth, but closed it again as the turbolift closest to the viewscreen opened its doors to deposit the captain onto the bridge.

Kincaid removed his foot from the base of the operations console and returned to his seat to join the captain in the command center.

"How're we looking, Jess?" asked Captain Leone.

"Still on course for Wolf 359 at max warp, sir."

Leone did not turn her head as she spoke to the tactical officer behind her. "Any comm traffic, Wilson?"

"Starfleet TacNet traffic. The Borg cube is on long range sensors of the fleet, and they expect to engage in less than five hours."

"Any word on the *Enterprise*?"

"No, sir."

Leone sighed. "All right. Bridge to engineering."

"Engineering. Bartlet, here, sir."

"We're going to start the jog thing. Monitor the speed."

"Aye, sir."

"Helm, slow us to warp one."

Ensign Gregory Aspinall turned in his seat to stare back at the captain. "Sir?"

"Warp one."

He continued to stare at Leone.

"The old lady hasn't lost her mind, Ensign," said Leone with a smile. "Carry out my order."

The ensign and the executive officer shared a look, before Aspinall turned back around and announced, "Slowing to warp one, aye, sir."

Kincaid leaned over and lowered his voice. "What jog thing were you referring to, sir?"

"You'll see in a moment," she replied in a similar tone. She raised it again to address the air. "Engineering?"

Bartlet's stammer carried over the bridge intercom. "Y-Yes, sir. We're starting o-our procedure now."

"Thank you." Leone stood up and addressed the bridge. "I had a rather interesting conversation with an old starship captain not too long ago." She explained what her mother had said.

Kincaid shook his head. "That's rather innovative, Captain. But opening the vents at warp--"

She raised a hand. "I know. But Petra is confident it will work, and we won't lose more than a half-hour."

Ariel swiveled around in her seat to face the captain and executive officer. "Tell your mother, thanks."

Leone smiled. "I will." That Ariel and Leone had been friends for over ten years, ever since they served together on the USS *Victory*, had been a well-known fact among the crew. They were like long-lost sisters after they met and hit it off. Both had been only children in their respective families.

"Sir, incoming communication from *Enterprise* on the TacNet. They're on the move, again. Making their way to Wolf 359," said Lieutenant Nieves with a pleased voice. The mood on the bridge brightened considerably.

"Nothing can keep them down," said Kincaid proudly.

The captain asked, "Any word from *Lexington* or *Excalibur*?"

"*Excalibur* is reporting that they've fifteen minutes before they jump back into warp. *Lexington* still have another hour and a half."

"Transmit the instructions for Lieutenant Bartlet's variation on the warp jog to them, please."

"Aye, sir. Transmitting, now."

"Thank you, Wilson."

As soon as Nieves finished transmitting the information, another signal appeared on his console. "Captain, there's a TacNet signal coming through. I think it's Admiral Hanson."

Leone stood up immediately. "On screen."

The bridge of the *Melbourne* had its alert status indicator lights flashing a bright red. Admiral Hanson stood near the tactical station, and he looked up at the viewscreen. "*Farragut*, the Borg will arrive at the Wolf 359 system in just under thirty minutes. Have you any tricks to share with us?"

Her heart sank. "Admiral, I'm so sorry, sir. We've reviewed the data you provided us as much as possible, but there was little we could do in such a short amount of time. Especially given the circumstance of Captain Picard's knowledge now being an asset to the Borg."

Hanson pursed his lips together in frustration. "I still refuse to admit that Jean-Luc Picard would ever assist the Borg."

"Sir, with all due respect..."

He waved at her impatiently. She no longer saw the soft smile she loved. "I don't have time to worry about that, Captain. This fleet will either stop the Borg... or die trying."

Right then, she longed for their presence. All she could do was accept the fact that she had failed him. "Understood, sir. We're still twenty hours away."

"As I told Captain Riker on the *Enterprise*, I'm sorry you'll miss the party."

Captain *Riker*? *Of course*, she thought. He earned a battlefield promotion. "Yes, sir. We'll make a fashionably late entrance."

"I'm sure you will, Captain Leone. Godspeed."

"Good hunting, sir," she replied.

"Hanson, out." The viewscreen blanked and returned to the warp-distorted stars as it had before the communication.

A tight knot formed deep in her stomach as she sat back down.

With a concerned expression, Kincaid leaned over and shared his worry. "Captain?"

"Yes?"

"Are you all right, sir?"

"I'm fine, Jess."

The overwhelming sense of dread in her stomach led to her restless hand movements. She clasped her hands to keep them still, then turned to her executive officer. "It's just that..."

"What, sir?"

"I feel like that's the last time I'm ever going to get to talk to him."

The news of the loss of all communications with the fleet woke her from her fitful sleep only two and a half hours later. They were still sixteen hours away from the system, but she wandered up to the bridge to witness the final transmission from the task force's flagship. Admiral Hanson was addressing the *Enterprise* directly when he gave the order for the fleet to fall back and regroup. Unfortunately, those orders were cut off as the transmission was lost at the source.

Whether the Borg began jamming all communications or task force's inability to send because of damage or destruction, no one could say for certain. All Leone knew, at the point, was that news of the fleet's inability to send a signal did not brighten their spirits any. With a heavy sigh, she retreated to her stateroom to sleep, but knew she would only stare at the upper bulkhead for another hour before the next call from the bridge summoned her back.

With the warp engines adequately cooled to risk stressing them continuously, *Farragut* jumped out to an enormous lead over her previous travelling companions. The deafening silence from Wolf 359 took its toll on the ship's morale, and when Leone visited the large ship's lounge on the tenth deck, she could see that no one was in the mood to relax.

The person in charge of the lounge was a young woman named Caryn Johnson. Caryn always welcomed new people to the ship when they chanced the lounge, made them feel at home, and even prepared meals for those who might feel a little homesick. Even with a talented counselor onboard, many relied on Caryn's empathetic listening and her well-known ability to keep secrets.

When Leone entered, Caryn looked up from the bar. She sat upon a stool behind it, but got to her feet and showed off her pearly whites. "Captain. You're my first customer today."

"That bad?" asked Leone, letting her guard down. Caryn never seemed to mind treating her as a peer, rather than as a superior officer.

"Can I get you something?"

"No, thanks. Just came to see if anyone was enjoying the calm before the storm."

The bartender shrugged. "Everyone's feeling a little off their game right now. They don't know what's going to happen to them."

Leone settled onto a stool in front of Caryn and placed her elbows on the bar. "Honestly, I don't know, either."

"I'm glad you're admitting it. But be sure to keep those thoughts to yourself."

"I'm intending to. I see how they look at me for a reaction every time a bit more bad news comes our way. It's hard not to notice."

"I imagine command to be very lonely."

"You're not wrong."

"Is it what you always wanted?"

"Ever since I was a little girl, playing with scale model starships that my mother would bring me when she had a few days' leave at home," said Leone, her eyes gazing up into the corner of the lounge.

Caryn smiled. "Your mother's on Earth, isn't she?"

Leone nodded.

"Do you talk to her often?"

"We write to each other. We call every so often." Leone explained, "She and my dad are looking after my son, Dominic."

"You know, Captain, I've always wondered why you never moved your son to the ship. It carries families, just like the Galaxy-class, isn't it?"

"There's not a day that goes by where I don't consider it, believe me."

"But...?"

"However, I believe it's best for him to grow up on Earth."

"Keep up the family business?"

"Yeah."

"Don't you think he would benefit from being with his mother?"

Leone sighed. "Maybe. But... I think it would make life difficult for him to have to grow up on a ship where he would receive some special attention."

"Because he's the captain's son?"

"Exactly."

"Weren't you the captain's daughter?"

"Sure, but I didn't live on the ship with my mom. I would visit sometimes..."

"And?"

"And I loved it. It was a lot of fun to wander the decks. Officers would give us a wide berth when we would take a tour of the ship. I felt like I was related to royalty or something, they way they treated her."

"You wanted that, too."

Leone blushed. "I don't know if I wanted the respect, but I remember that I really wanted to serve with her on the same ship. I aspired to be an officer she could turn to and give orders, knowing they would be carried out."

Caryn grinned.

"I used to fantasize about going off into the unknown with her."

"I'll bet."

"By the time I made captain, she was already retired a year."

"As a vice admiral, correct?"

"Yeah."

"Even Admiral Necheyev respects her, and that's saying a lot."

"Aunt Alynna's an old friend of the family."

"We rub shoulders with admirals?"

"She served under my mother on a couple of occasions. I've known her most of my life."

"I guess that comes from being a Starfleet brat."

Leone chuckled. "Well, that's the way it was in my family. My father also served, but he didn't seek the political challenge of the admiralty like my mother did."

"Your parents served. Your grandparents served?"

"My mother's parents did. My father's dad did, too."

"And what about before then?"

"Two of my great-grandfathers did, and a great-grandmother."

"You're fourth generation Starfleet."

"Yeah, I guess I am."

"And you know, somehow, I think your son will follow in your footsteps, and so will his children, and theirs..."

"Even knowing what we know?"

"You mean the Borg?"

Leone nodded.

"I'm not that worried about the Borg, Captain. That's your problem."

"I kind of thought it was a shared dilemma."

"It is, but there's not much I can do about it. I have to put my faith in you and your officers."

"Well, that's awfully generous of you, Caryn."

"Comes with the territory. I've been aboard this ship ever since you assumed command," she pointed toward the viewports, "right over there on that very spot." She replaced her hand on the bar. "We've been through some interesting times together, and I'm still here to reminisce about them. Something tells me I'll be telling stories about Wolf 359 for years to come."

"And what if you're wrong?"

"I'm not."

Leone rolled her eyes. "Hypothetically speaking, then."

"If I'm wrong, then we die."

"I suppose that's a rather candid way of looking at it," she said, trying to offer a wry grin.

Caryn positioned her hands on the bar and directed her gaze towards Leone. "You are Krystine Leone and this is *Farragut*. If we fail, I'll die secure knowing that you did everything in your power. I'm here, just like you. I'm breathing the same recycled air, eating the same replicated food... and sharing in the same consequences like everyone else."

Leone felt a chill run down her spine as Caryn spoke with such conviction. She said nothing in response.

"We may not be the ship of miracles, like *Enterprise*. But I'll just say that my assignment here was not because this was my second choice. You know what I'm saying?"

"Yeah."

"So, go on, now. Write to your son. Get some sleep. We've got a busy day ahead of all of us tomorrow."

"Now entering the Wolf 359 system, Captain," reported Ensign Aspinall from the helm.

"Set condition red throughout the ship." The computer automatically started the alert klaxon.

"Shields activated, all weapon systems are online," reported Lieutenant Wilson Nieves.

"Any signs of battle, Wilson?" asked the captain, her eyes scanning the viewscreen for anything.

"No, sir. I'm reading no weapons fire or any traffic on TacNet. Not since we lost the Admiral's transmission."

"Ariel."

"I'm already extending the lateral array as far out as it can go, sir. I'm not seeing any- wait a minute. There's a debris field approximately three million kilometers directly ahead."

"Picking up distress calls on emergency frequencies," said Nieves. "Escape pod beacons overlapping shuttle calls. There's quite a few of them out there."

"Any sign of the Borg?"

Ariel shook her head. "No, sir. Reading a warp trail and a graviton wake. I think one's the *Enterprise*, and the other is the Borg cube. Nothing matching the size and configuration within this system."

"Stand down battle stations," ordered Leone. "Jess, organize search and rescue."

"Right away, sir." Kincaid rose from his seat. "Greg, you stay here. All other available pilots, report to the shuttle bays for SAR duty." He departed the bridge, being one of those said pilots.

"Ariel, coordinate the transporter rooms. Start recovering escape pods."

Ariel moved away from her station, and another officer from her department took her place. A junior grade lieutenant whose name escaped the captain.

They continued to approach the field at full impulse, and it grew larger on the screen. Broken ships hung in space like toys discarded by an angry child. The breaks in the hull sparked into the vacuum, while gas poured out of the cracks. She recognized the escaping atmosphere reaching the void. "Wilson, any life signs aboard those... wrecks?"

Nieves met her gaze, but all he could do was shake his head solemnly. "I'm sorry, sir."

Farragut was the only operational ship in the system. She knew her duty was clear. "I'm going to need to speak to Starfleet Command."

"Yes, sir."

Leone walked to her ready room and gestured to him. Her preference was for the call to be routed there. By the time she entered, her desktop terminal chirped with the active call. Admiral Alynna Nechejev's face appeared on the viewscreen. "Admiral."

"Report." Her tone suggested she was in no mood for the usual pleasantries. Leone searched for any hint of the friend she grew up with, but Nechejev was all business.

"I regret to report that all starships in the Wolf 359 system have been destroyed. As far as we can tell, the Borg are en route to Sector Zero-Zero-One."

To her credit, Nechejev took the news in stride. "Understood. What's your current status?"

"Fully operational, sir. We can depart for Earth right now." Leone hoped her would give the order.

"Negative. You are ordered to perform search and rescue operations for any survivors you might find."

She hid her disappointment with a quick nod. "There are quite a few, sir. We've already started recovery operations and launched shuttles for SAR duty," replied Leone. "However, *Excalibur* is not far behind us. Another three hours before they arrive and I'm sure we could be of service to the defense of Earth."

Nechejev gave her a wry grin. "It would take you thirty-six hours to reach us, Captain. But I appreciate your offer. Regardless of what happens, it looks like *Enterprise* is our only hope."

She tried a little humor. "Oh, sir. If only we had a bar of gold-pressed latinum for every time someone said that." Was it too much?

To her surprise (and relief), the admiral chuckled slightly. The levity was obviously needed. It lasted for all of two seconds. "Pick up whatever survivors you can and make for Starbase 6, unless you hear from us otherwise."

Leone nodded soberly. Starbase Six was near Betazed, which was the rally point for Starfleet if Earth should fall. "Understood, sir. I hope I hear otherwise, soon."

"So do I, Captain."

"Admiral," said Leone quickly, hoping to catch her before she ended the transmission.

"Yes, Captain?"

"Permission to speak freely?"

"Granted."

"Aunt Alynna..." she softened her tone considerably. "Does Starfleet have any kind of defensive plan in place?"

Nechejev looked off screen, her eyes focused on someone or something. "I can't get into that right now, Krystine. Let me just say that we won't go quietly."

Leone nodded slowly. "Then, don't let this be the last time we see each other."

With that determined grin Leone remembered from all the times she would talk with her "Aunt" Alynna, the admiral replied, "I'll do my best. Starfleet Command, out." Just like that, the desktop terminal's display screen blinked to show the insignia of Starfleet Headquarters before powering down.

The captain stared, unsure of the next move. Without *Enterprise*, Borg would possess Earth, Mars, Jupiter station, and all system outposts. Starbase Six would become the new headquarters facility under Rear Admiral Owen Paris.

Outside the slim, tall viewport of her ready room, shuttles flittered about as they went after escape pods to tow them back to the ship. Some of the survivor shuttles set up a quick and dirty convoy to provide protection against the Borg. The convoy of pods paraded toward the rear of her ship to land in one of the shuttle bays safely.

"Enter," she said, once the door chime sounded.

A junior grade lieutenant entered, wearing the gold color of the support services. Her reddish-brown hair was matted in places that blood had seeped from an injury on her head. She stood at attention and announced herself. "Lieutenant January McKenna, formerly of the USS *Roosevelt*, sir."

Roosevelt, an Excelsior-class starship, joined the fleet on time. They had to identify the ship's presence there by mere chance; the marking outside survived a core breach that consumed the entire ship.

"Do you need medical attention?" asked Leone. She promptly summoned a medic to the ready room, disregarding any need for a reply. "Would you care to have a seat, Lieutenant?"

Despite feeling shaken, McKenna held her emotions in check. "Thank you, sir."

Down to business. "You're were in command of the *Roosevelt*, Lieutenant?"

"Most of the senior officers were killed when we lost shields and the Borg struck the hull at its weakest point. I was the next in line, and I assumed command," replied McKenna. "Let's just say that my tenure was very brief, sir. I gave the order to abandon ship."

Leone sighed. The medic arrived and tended to her wound. "Can I offer you something to drink?"

"No, thank you, sir." McKenna's response was terse. "May I ask a question?"

"Certainly."

"Are you intending to take this ship to Earth, to fight the Borg?"

"I'm afraid not."

"May I ask why not, sir?"

Leone regarded the lieutenant in a new light. The tone she was using to address an officer who clearly outranked her was bordering on insolence. Rather than take issue with her over it, she let it go. "I petitioned Starfleet Command to allow me to enter the fight, but our orders were to perform SAR duty."

"Then the Borg are approaching Earth unimpeded?"

"The *Enterprise* is giving chase, as I understand it."

"They'll need help."

"I know."

"Then may I suggest we do so?"

Although she liked McKenna, she refrained from expressing her admiration through a smile, fearing she might misinterpret the expression as patronizing. Instead, she forced a look of disdain. "You may suggest all you like, Lieutenant, but I was given a direct order and I intend on following it. No matter how much I may disagree with it."

"Are there any other ships en route, *Captain*?" Gone was the respectful 'sir' she used before.

Once more, she didn't view it as an insult. "*Excalibur*, and also *Lexington*."

McKenna rose from her seat and stood at attention once more, fury boiling within her gaze. "Then I should like to request to be transferred to whichever ship will join the fight at Earth, Captain."

"You are not attached to my command, so I don't see any reason to deny you your revenge, Lieutenant." As soon as she said it, Leone wished she could take back her words.

The slap of McKenna's hand atop the desk startled Leone. She flinched in her seat.

"Damn you, sir! I lost everyone I knew to the Borg, and you're sitting here drinking coffee and enjoying the view?"

The non-commissioned medic, unsure of his social footing under the circumstances, glanced between the officers.

Leone forced an air of calm, but she still felt the guilt of her transgression. To the poor medic, she nodded. "Thank you. You're dismissed." Once they were alone within the ready room, the captain stood to face the fuming lieutenant. "I won't try to understand the immense loss you feel right now. I have family on Earth and there's nothing I want more right now than to rush to their defense. Even if it's just me running with a bow and an arrow in my hand."

"Then why the hell-?"

"Because you and I are wearing the same damned uniform. The uniform comes with rules and responsibilities, Lieutenant. And unlike you, I'm not willing to throw everything out the airlock just because I'm hellbent on getting my revenge," hissed Leone. "We're on the same team. That means we trust the other members of that team to get the job done."

McKenna balled her hand up into a fist and again, slammed it hard against the desk. The impact of her hand made a sharp sound. Then, the woman began sobbing, slumping into her seat. Her arms folded around her midsection, holding herself as she shook.

The intercom sounded; Lieutenant Nieves asked about the captain's well-being.

Leone moved to place a comforting hand on McKenna's shoulder. She answered the call. "I'm fine, Wilson. But please, have Counselor Otex come to my ready room. I expect someone here needs to talk to her."

By the time *Excalibur* arrived at Wolf 359, news that the Borg entered Sector 001 reached them. The *Enterprise* continued to pursue while they worked feverishly to bring aboard survivors. *Farragut's* landing bay capacity weighed against the number of recovered pods reached the limit, and they had to jettison those already empty to make room for more.

The battle noticeably affected the Starfleet personnel, but the civilians who survived the destruction of their respective ships were devastated and became more vocal. Leone walked through the cargo bay, as the crew had converted it into a makeshift medical facility because the sickbay was overwhelmed with wounded. Echoing wails of those crying made her want to escape.

If only *Farragut* had arrived on time, how many lives could have been saved? Leone's question repeated in her mind. Is it possible they might have been the ship that made the difference? Or would history have merely recorded them as the fortieth ship to be destroyed by the Borg at Wolf 359?

Leone exited the cargo bay, hurrying to reach the turbolift in order to find some peace on her ship. Retreating to her stateroom did not seem like an option, but it appeared favorable. Instead, she opted to return to the bridge and hope her crew had better news.

"Captain," said Ariel. She was sitting in the center seat, but stood up to relinquish it. "*Lexington* is about to enter the system."

Nieves reported, "I have Captain Wilder for you, sir."

The main viewscreen winked, and the bridge of *Lexington* appeared. "Greetings, Captain Leone," said Wilder.

Leone smiled. "Am I glad to see you."

"Likewise."

"We could use your help in taking on some wounded as soon as you get within transporter range."

"Of course. I'll alert my medical teams to stand by." After she did so, Wilder turned her attention back to the viewscreen. "What's the word?"

Captain Leone filled her in on the situation so far.

"Damned shame to lose that many ships," spat Wilder. "Any word from *Enterprise*?"

"Not yet. We're all in a holding pattern right now. We can't even get a signal through to Starfleet Command."

"Then, I guess we make our way to Starbase Six?"

"Andy and I believe we should wait a little while longer. Or until we get the signal from Admiral Paris..." Leone trailed off. She could not bring herself to say the rest. She did not want to tempt fate regarding the final order from Starfleet to retreat from Sol and defend.

Wilder nodded. "Agreed. We should be able to rejoin formation in five minutes. We'll be happy to render aid in any way we can."

"Thanks." Leone stepped forward, as if to continue the conversation with some privacy, but she knew it was futile. "Andy's asked me to have dinner with him aboard the *Excalibur*. I'm sure he meant to invite you."

"I'm sure he did. But I'll wait until he does. He is the senior officer."

Andrew Estrada earned his promotion a full month before Justine Wilder, and a year and a half before Leone. Although he had no official appointment, he functioned as the commanding officer of their little flotilla. "I'll see that he does."

Wilder allowed herself a small smile. "I'll see you in a few minutes, Captain. *Lexington*, out."

Leone was glad that she could speak to the other two captains with some privacy. Despite the circumstances, dinner served as a sufficient cover for their true intentions.

Captain Estrada sat across from her, while Captain Wilder stood looking out at the wreckage that floated around their ships. Shuttles flittered back and forth as they continued their rescue and recovery operations.

"I can't ask either of you to do this," said Estrada, his gaze leveled upon the table in his stateroom.

Wilder smiled. "That's the beauty of it, Andy. You don't have to."

"Exactly," Leone agreed. "And I think I should be the one to go."

"Hold on a moment, Krys," said Justine. "Why do you get to go?"

"Because my ship was first on the scene, and Andy is senior. He has to remain behind to see to the rescue operations. His ship is the biggest and has a higher carrying capacity," explained Leone quickly.

Estrada grinned. "I'm glad you pointed out that I'm senior, Krys. It save me the trouble of having to do it, myself."

Justine turned her head to look at him. "We're talking about disobeying orders, so I doubt holding seniority over either of us will work in this case."

"No kidding," Leone said, folding her arms.

"Then I'm going to make this simple for the both of you. I'll go. You two stay and get as many people as you can to Starbase Six," ordered Andy. The other two captains opened their mouth to protest, but he silenced them with a flick of his wrist. "That's final."

The stateroom's silence was deafening as Andy's words hung in the air between the three of them. Leone broke it with a question. "You think one ship will have enough firepower to take on a Borg cube?"

"I had hoped that we would join *Enterprise*."

"What if they're destroyed?"

"Then we'll do our best to give Earth a fighting chance, all by ourselves."

"We're wasting time," hissed Justine. "If we're going to do this, now's the time."

"She's right," said Leone.

"Fine. Return to your ships, both of you."

Captains Leone and Wilder offered their best wishes to Andy Estrada before leaving his stateroom. On their way to the transporter room, Wilder turned to Leone. "You should go with him."

"All right."

"What about Andy?"

"He might be senior officer, but if he's disobeying orders, then he's not really in any position to complain, is he?"

Justine grinned. "I've always liked you, Krystine."

Despite Captain Estrada's protests, the news that *Enterprise* destroyed the Borg cube in the orbit of Earth reached them as they were entering the Sol system. The perimeter sensors near Jupiter picked up the pair of starships on their high-resolution display and Vice Admiral Alyssa Nechehev was among the first to make her displeasure known.

"I gave specific orders not to approach Earth," said Nechehev in her most unpleasant tone. "Did I not, Captain Leone?"

"Yes, sir, you did."

"And did you pass that order on to Captain Estrada?"

"Yes, sir, she did," said Estrada, not giving Leone a chance to respond. "However, because *Enterprise* was facing a cube by itself, it seemed prudent to divide our resources at Wolf 359 to provide them with as much support as possible, while also seeing to the effectiveness of your orders, Admiral."

"Pardon me, Captain? Did I hear you correctly?"

"You did, sir."

Nechehev narrowed her eyes, as though she were looking at Estrada as if he were an insect standing before her. "Very well, Captain Estrada. You will wait outside while I deal with Captain Leone."

"Sir, I gave a direct order to Captain Leone to escort *Excalibur* to Earth."

Leone wanted to shoot Andy a shocked stare, but she knew better than to do that while Nechehev's blood was up.

"She had higher orders."

"I made it clear that Starfleet Command had been cut off, and I was the highest authority available."

"Did you, indeed?"

"I did, sir."

The drum of Nechehev's fingernails atop her desk resounded against the office's walls. Through the large windows, the rust-colored spires of the Golden Gate Bridge peeked through a heavy cloud of fog that seemed to cling to the bay like moss on a rock. The nails kept drumming

against the surface of the desk as the admiral considered her options.

"Fine," she said, finally. "Captain Estrada, you are relieved of command pending charges of failure to obey a direct order from a superior officer and whatever else JAG can throw at you."

Leone broke her stance of attention. "Sir!"

"Yes, Captain Leone? You have something you wish to add?"

Estrada spoke up. "No, sir, she does not. I take full responsibility for my orders. Captain Leone was in no position to disobey a direct order."

"With all due respect to Captain Estrada-" Leone began.

"Admiral, by your leave, sir?"

Necheyev harrumphed. "Get out. Both of you."

As soon as they were in the elevator to return to the building lobby, Leone turned on him. "What the hell was that? You never gave me any order. In fact, you gave me orders to stay put, and I disobeyed you."

Andy didn't answer her.

"Who the hell do you think you are, jumping on the grenade like that? I have some punishment coming my way, too, damn you."

Still nothing.

"Answer me!"

"Halt," ordered Andy. The turbolift car slowed to a stop. He turned to look at her. "I knew what I was getting into. And I knew one of you would try to follow me. I actually guessed it would be Justine, but whatever. Point is, Starfleet can't afford to lose both of us right now."

She stood there, stunned.

"The fleet is going to need at least a year before we're back to full strength. It's going to take us who know how long before we're back up to operating levels and that means that ships are going to need good captains right now. So... yeah. I'll gladly fall on my sword if it means one of us gets to keep ongoing." Andy looked up at the ceiling and ordered, "Resume."

The car moved once more, and Leone looked down at her feet, feeling even worse. "But you sacrificed your career, Andy."

"I will sacrifice so much more than my career. So were you." He sighed. "I'm sorry that it comes down to a by-the-book bitch like Necheyev, but that's the way it goes." Andy raised a hand to his balding head and winced. "I'm sorry... I know she's like... *family*... to you."

Leone shook her head. "It's all right. I think, in this case, I have to agree." She placed a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. "You want me to talk to her?"

"No, don't. Then you'd have to explain the whole thing, and knowing her, it'll be for naught... plus I'd be caught in a lie. Don't make things worse, Captain."

Leone let out a deep breath. Frustration washed over her like high tide at North Beach. Andy was right, and there was nothing she could do about it. The minute she opened her mouth, however noble her intentions, she knew it would ruin his selflessness. At that moment, as the lift opened to allow them to go their separate ways, she didn't know which frustration was worse: the losses at Wolf 359, or the guilt she felt for not having the courage to stand up for her friend.

End Notes

And now, a word from the author...

Although this story features the main cast of "Star Trek: Full Speed Ahead," I do not consider this to be part of the FSA continuity. I wrote this short story well before I refined/polished things, so there are definitely characterizations that do not match the main FSA story.

I had intended to reach the letter M with this series, which would have put us at thirteen stories total, but somehow, Farragut seemed like a fitting end to this anthology. Plus, all of the G-ship stories I was working on were complete failures. But, it was more the wanting to end on a high note with the series, because soon after, I decided to continue with the Farragut's story and write Full Speed Ahead. I guess I abandoned one in favor of the other...

I hope you enjoyed reading this series as much as I enjoyed writing it. Thanks for reading, and I hope you'll read some of my other submissions here on Ad Astra.

-- McCC

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