

## Gallant

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## Gallant

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

### Summary

Stardate 61554.29: Following the death of her captain and close friend, Caitian executive officer M'ree sallies forth with her grief ever-present, while another officer assumes command of *Gallant*.

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### Notes

This story was originally published (for the first time ever) at the classic Ad Astra site on 25 March 2010. 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 within Star Trek: Prodigy's first season, well before the events of "Supernova."

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

### **The Quarterdeck Breed** **By Lord McCovey Cove**

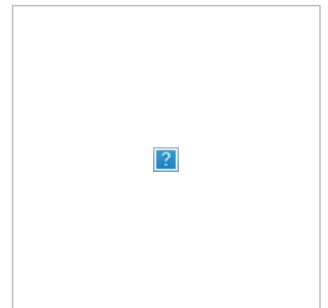
#### **Part Seven: *Gallant***

**NCC-74229 (USS *Gallant*)**

**Unclaimed territory relative to Federation sector 214-Rho**

**Main Bridge**

**Stardate 61554. 29**



The sounds of damage to person and property served as background on the bridge of *Gallant*. Some of the bulkhead plating, along with cables and conduit, were strewn about the deck in a random pattern, jarred loose and damaged when the ship took a spread of photon torpedoes from their quarry. The deck displayed blood pools in shades of red, green, and purple. Amidst the red emergency glow, bridge occupants suffered and sniffled.

While they emerged triumphant, the victory was a hollow one. The captain, cradled in the arms of the ship's medic, was dead. The deck's carpeting was infused with her green blood, creating a mixture of muted colors. Luckily, she was thrown clear of the collapsing superstructure. That edge pierced the right side of her torso. She never let on about her injury, continuing to issue orders from what was to become her final resting place. No one knew the seriousness of her condition. Not even her executive officer, Lieutenant (jg) M'ree.

"The ship is yours, Number One," Lieutenant T'Miri, the Vulcan commanding officer of the *Gallant*, had whispered. M'ree nodded, unsurprised by the woman's choice to touch her neck in that moment before her life faded and the captain's arm went limp. Disorientation overwhelmed M'ree, as she thought she had felt the captain passing through her-sensing T'Miri's spirit entering her body-but the sensation and the accompanying dizziness subsided. The medical corpsman, a Vulcan petty officer second class by the name of Silek, had arrived on the bridge after to pass his tricorder over her and declare her deceased. He had pulled the officer's body from the twisted metal, to cradle her in his arms and place her upon the antigravity stretcher.

Ignoring the blood on her neck fur, M'ree regarded T'Miri, unconcerned about her role as master and commander of the Defiant-class corvette.

Right now, the woman she most admired in the fleet floated freely among the stars. She would be damned if she would allow that moment to pass without the proper respect. The bridge grew silent for a moment, all eyes on the acting captain's back, waiting for her orders.

"Silke, take her below and see that her body is treated in accordance with her will," M'ree whispered.

The medic inclined his head to acknowledge the order and activated the stretcher's stasis field to preserve the body and deliver it to the medical bay. Shortly after, someone conveyed the captain's remains off the bridge.

Acting Captain M'ree did not get up from her kneeled position, trying to prevent herself from breaking down into tears. The crew's morale already took a massive blow and seeing their new commanding officer weeping made it impossible for them to recover. She was certain that T'Miri would disapprove of the display. But her overwhelming grief took control of her, and she brought her clawed fingers up to her face.

Then, from within her, she felt a sudden sense of inner peace, like the eye of a storm. It floated outward to cover her. M'ree rose from the deck, feeling detached from her emotions and the logic of the situation, grabbing hold of her and lifting her up to perform her duty. Turning around to face the bridge crew, she ordered, "Ensign Gress is the acting exec until further notice. Damage control will make their full report in twenty minutes. All uninjured personnel with paramedic training are ordered to report to the medical bay for duty." Scanning their faces, she realized they expected her to say something else. "There will be a memorial service for Captain T'Miri scheduled as soon as possible. The important thing right now is to see how badly we are damaged, and begin repair operations for our return to Deep Space Six."

Gress was one of the few Gorn officers serving in Starfleet. He approached M'ree and offered, "Sir, I can take the bridge, if you'd like to go below and freshen up."

"That's unnecessary, Ensign," came the dispassionate reply.

He eyed her in that fashion that M'ree often took to be rather insubordinate. But in his culture, it was just his way of showing compassion. He leaned toward her left ear and in the Gorn approximation of a whisper, he informed her, "Sir, you're covered in Captain T'Miri's blood."

M'ree looked down at her uniform, wincing at the sight. "Very well, you have the bridge. Senior staff briefing in the mess hall in one hour, Ensign."

"Aye, sir."

She left it at that, heading for the port-side hatch. Prior to crossing, she halted and glanced back at the bridge. Everyone's eyes were still on her, still waiting for something.

*Tell them you are counting on them.* M'ree felt disoriented by the penetrating clarity of the thought. But she recovered almost instantly, saying, "I'm counting on every one of you to get us through this. Let's do what we can, so we can get home."

They all gave her various forms of acknowledgement. Some even smiled. Ensign Gress nodded his approval and turned to direct repair operations from the forward console.

M'ree glanced at her feet while being led through the hatchway and into the corridor. When she reached the turbolift and stepped aboard, she touched the control panel rather than issuing a voice order to take her to the second deck. Moments later, she stood at the door to the captain's cabin. T'Miri's cabin.

T'Miri never used the locking mechanism on her door. No crew member would breach the captain's privacy. M'ree entered and stopped, allowing the door to slide closed behind her.

"Computer, recognize M'ree, lieutenant jay-gee, executive officer," she said, starting the forced transfer-of-command.

The soft contralto tones of the ship's computer sounded within the cabin. "Voiceprint verified. Proceed."

"Transfer command codes to Executive Officer."

"Unable to comply. Command code authorization is vested with the Commanding Officer. You must state the authority by which a transfer should occur. This access attempt will be noted in the ship's log."

M'ree continued in a calm tone, amazed that her voice had not yet cracked, "Death of commanding officer, as outlined in Starfleet regulations."

"Working... medical report access and verified. Please state your alpha clearance authorization code."

She did so, and the computer responded, "Authorization code accepted. USS *Gallant* is now under the command of Lieutenant, junior grade, M'ree. This action will be noted in the ship's log."

Of course, she mused, the ship's log. She made regular entries into that log daily. It was the executive officer's responsibility, part of her additional duties. Now it was her opportunity to make an entry in the captain's log. Or was it? She looked at the screen for a moment, hesitant about her presumption. Maybe it wasn't the right time to view the captain's log. The ship's log would be more appropriate.

Touching the desktop terminal, she spoke. "Ship's log, stardate six-one-five-five-four-point-three. Executive Officer M'ree, recording. It is my sad duty to report that Captain T'Miri has died due to injuries sustained in our most recent action. While investigating a smuggling ring near the Rihannsu border, the pirate frigate we made contact with replied in hostile fashion, causing widespread damage to the ship. Captain T'Miri herself was injured, but despite those injuries, continued to command the ship through the action. She defended the ship and destroyed the attacking frigate. I would like to enter into the record noting her heroism." She paused, not sure what more she could say. "She saved us all," she said. "By Captain T'Miri's last order, I have assumed command of *Gallant*. M'ree, out."

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**NCC-74229 (USS *Gallant*)**

**Docked at Repair Yard Three, Deep Space Six.**

**Captain's Quarters**

**Stardate 61644. 11**

M'ree awoke with a start; she panted for breath in the aftermath of the most recent nightmare. Deep sleep tortured her to where she dreaded it every night. Her dreams intertwined with the memory of T'Miri's death, in both perspectives: her own grief at losing her friend, and T'Miri's own pain at feeling the twisted bulkhead spear her body. The nightmare became routine and troubled her to the point of self-imposed insomnia. She staved off sleep until her body could no longer function without it.

She swung her legs out to dangle over the edge of the bunk before she pushed herself forward to land on her feet. From the replicator, she requested a glass of water. M'ree took comfort in the cool glass, wishing to settle her nerves down after the images she'd witnessed and the emotions that were invoked by living and reliving them. After a few moments, her heart rate had calmed down enough to where she no longer felt uncomfortable trying to relax once more.

It had been over six months since *Gallant* limped her way to Starbase Deep Space Six's repair facility. After their return, twenty of the enlisted members of the crew sought assignment elsewhere, and the Senior Chief Petty Officer in charge of engineering retired from active duty. Both M'ree and Gress opted to stay aboard the ship after Deep Space Six' commanding officer, Rear Admiral Dahlgren, ordered the ship to the starbase's shipyards for refit. Besides fulfilling the last part of her third year aboard the ship, she felt odd about leaving or seeking a transfer. Every time the thought formed in her mind, she remained aboard and finish her tour of duty.

Admiral Dahlgren seemed to take an interest in M'ree's well-being. Captain T'Miri revealed that she and the admiral served together aboard the same ship while an ensign fresh out of the Academy. In the years of service under T'Miri's leadership, M'ree and Dahlgren corresponded and formed a close professional relationship. They respected and even liked one another. But because of that bond, it made reporting T'Miri's death more difficult to carry out. Dahlgren spent at least a few hours every week since their arrival to check in on M'ree. Over the course of the six months of refitting, they strengthened their relationship and formed a friendship.

The refit of the *Gallant* was fascinating, even to her. Further, the new chief engineer, Senior Chief Petty Officer Odessa McComas, arrived to report in and lent her considerable talents to assisting the yard engineers with refitting the ship. M'ree liked her, forming a bond with the woman. McComas seemed a little hard-edged at first, but after a few encounters in the mess hall, they grew to respect one another as colleagues, and then enjoyed each other's company as friends.

Gress found himself alienated by some of the new enlisted. With the captain dead, he and M'ree were the only two commissioned officers left on board. Under normal circumstances, there would have been another, but the number of senior non-commissioned officers aboard the ship made that unnecessary. During the refit, he found time to study and sought to complete his post-Academy qualifications to attain eligibility for promotion to a junior grade lieutenant. He attained this rank three months after their arrival, when Admiral Dahlgren recommended his name to the promotion review board at the Bureau of Personnel. Lieutenant (jg) Gress's morale had changed since his promotion, and he wore his rank with as much pride as a Gorn could express.

Near the end of the refit period, another commission arrived with orders to report for duty. After almost a week's travel from Earth to the Starbase, Ensign Quentin Holloway made himself very available for any kind of duty. With the newcomer being an operations officer, Lieutenant Gress took the young man under his personal command and, after getting to know each other, became inseparable during duty hours. M'ree relished the fact that they had formed a friendship, or at least had found each other likable.

Today, however, marked a week since *Gallant* finished her refit. Under Dahlgren's orders, M'ree took temporary command and conducted the ship's initial speed trials. With Senior Chief McComas' skills and M'ree's familiarity with the ship's new systems, they completed the efficiency reports and presented the commodore with a status of readiness much earlier than expected.

"Bridge to Captain," said the intercom. Holloway's voice carried a tinge of excitement. Of course, everything to the young ensign was exciting, given they remained in dock for the past two days.

M'ree touched the computer panel near the replicator and activated the communications channel. "M'ree, here."

"Sir, sorry to wake you, but there's an incoming communique from Admiral Dahlgren," said Holloway.

She was in no condition to appear before the admiral. Instead, she replied, "Reroute the call to my quarters. Audio only, please."

"Aye, sir."

M'ree panicked as the display panel flickered to life to alert her to the incoming transmission. The Starfleet insignia appeared and the words read no visual was available. Holloway obeyed her order, and she was relieved. She addressed the screen, deciding to keep the communication formal, just in case. "This is Lieutenant M'ree."

Dahlgren's voice sounded filtered by the communications system, responding in kind, "Lieutenant, I'm sorry to wake you. I wanted you to know as soon as I had the confirmation from Starfleet Command. Your name was number two on this month's promotion list. Congratulations."

Then permanent command of *Gallant* was possible! As a full lieutenant, she would be eligible to command, but that was only if Dahlgren, or even Admiral Davies, respected her ability to do so. Though she felt the excitement run through her like an electrical charge, a very logical thought pervaded her mind and calmed her down. "Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate you telling me."

"No, Lieutenant. Thank you for all the hard work you've been putting in. T'Miri would be very proud of you."

M'ree agreed with that statement, but the source of that thought seemed to scare her. "It's kind of you to say so, sir," she said, trying to keep her

voice level.

"Further, Lieutenant," said Dahlgren, "Starfleet Command has appointed a new captain."

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"A tremendous loss for the Border Patrol. Lieutenant T'Miri was an exceptional commander, one of our finest," noted Rear Admiral Allison Dahlgren. She leaned back in her chair as her eyes scanned the contents of the report once more. She cast a glance across her desk at Lieutenant Rodgers and then continued on with the briefing. "The damage to *Gallant* was quite extensive. Given the age of the ship, the yardmaster decided to overhaul a majority of her systems and upgrade the working model to the Mk IV specifications."

That prospect caused another wave of excitement through the lieutenant. A Mk IV would mean an increase in damage potential to enemy targets; upgrades in the pulse phaser cannons, faster loading torpedo launchers. They had to replace or upgrade most of the power generation systems to accommodate the new weapons systems. "What were the original specifications, sir?"

"Mk I," replied Dahlgren. "In all honesty, she was scheduled for the refit in eight months regardless, but with the result of the skirmish..."

The lieutenant nodded her understanding as Dahlgren's voice trailed off. She still didn't fully grasp the point of the meeting. Did the admiral need her to oversee the refit? Had her standing with Starfleet Command diminished to such a low? "Sir, how can I be of assistance to you?"

Dahlgren smiled at the lieutenant's directness. She had proven herself as an efficient officer and a very capable leader of her departments. Her last commanding officer recommended her for consideration to command corvettes, citing the experience she had gained in her early career. Whatever the reason, the commanding officer of the Border Patrol felt it necessary to give her a shot at the big chair. "Well, read for yourself," said the commodore, handing a PADD to her.

After accepting the PADD with her right hand, Rodgers' eyes scanned down the contents of the display screen. Butterflies filled her stomach as the excitement intensified. Her suspicion was correct, and the shock of reading the "They want me to..."

"I believe they 'request and require' you to, Lieutenant," said Dahlgren, still holding her smile.

Lieutenant Catherine Rodgers allowed the excitement to wash over her in a long wave, but kept a tight control over her outward expression; she gave the admiral a toothy grin as she re-read the orders for the fifth time in forty-five seconds. "Well, sir, I guess I'd better pack my things."

"You do that," smiled Dahlgren, "*Captain* Rodgers."

Rodgers beamed at the change in her title.

The admiral rose from her chair to escort Captain Rodgers to the door. "Now, most of the officers assigned to *Gallant* have opted to remain with the ship, to finish out their four." Each Border Patrol assignment was four years for commissioned officers, though it could be cut short by an incident such as this. Enlisted personnel rotated out every two years. "Your executive officer shall be the current Acting Captain, Lieutenant M'ree. She's been with the service for six years, three of them aboard *Gallant*. First-rate officer, she's received nothing but excellent marks on her fitness reports. In fact, were it not for your seniority, I would have allowed her to retain permanent command."

"With all due respect, sir, I have an officer in mind to serve as my exec..." began Rodgers.

Dahlgren stopped before the door, turning to face the new captain. "Oh?"

"Uh, yes, sir. Lieutenant Inez, from *Wellington*," replied Rodgers, taking a moment to inspect her uniform boots, before returning her gaze to the admiral's expectant expression. "He and I have a standing arrangement."

Dahlgren grimaced. She did not wish to bump M'ree from the active roster and make her wait in the local officer's pool until another berth opened up. "The *Wellington* is on a deep-space assignment, if I recall correctly. Getting Lieutenant Inez here would be quite the feat, and further, I don't think Captain Edgars will divert from his current mission."

Rodgers frowned. "I see, sir."

"Look, let Lieutenant M'ree serve out the last two years of her assignment with you. By then, it'll be time for an enlisted crew rotation anyway, and I'm certain that Inez will be available to transfer," Dahlgren suggested in a gentle tone. Despite her outward appearance, she was a little more than annoyed by the lieutenant's response. Any captain who would receive a ship following a major refit would do well to take along an officer who had such intimate knowledge of the ship and its recent refit as Lieutenant M'ree.

Rodgers nodded her understanding, seeing that the commodore placed importance on keeping the current exec on. Perhaps if she kept her on, it would raise her standing in the commodore's eyes. "That sounds reasonable, sir."

"I'm glad you understand."

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Lieutenant (jg) Gress's looming Gorn physique hunched over the operations console as Ensign Holloway made yet another attempt to reconfigure the forward-facing duty station to his liking. Though the young brevet rank had trained in the latest of computer operations his first five attempts failed.

"I don't understand it, sir," Holloway said in veiled frustration.

Gress barely held in his amusement, which often came as a deep rumbling. It made the ensign jittery, despite the Gorn's assurances he would not eat the young man. "When you get done with that console, Ensign, be sure to join me and the senior chief in main engineering."

Holloway nodded, not bothering to look up, "Aye, sir." He heard the starboard doors slide closed behind Gress as he departed the bridge, but before the ensign even grew frustrated at his next attempt, the port-side doors slid open to admit someone. Growing used to random members of the crew stepping onto the bridge, he did not bother with turning his head around. After all, *Gallant* was without a proper captain. He did not know that was about to change.

"Pardon me," said Lieutenant Rodgers, placing her hands on her hips and surveying her bridge for the first time.

"Be with you in a minute," muttered Holloway. The console display reset in front of Holloway, and he focused his attention on it as he continued to reprogram the station. He got the feeling that he was being watched, and felt Rodgers' presence over him, peering at his display.

Rodgers smiled. "Trying to reprogram the operations console? What for?"

It was an unfamiliar voice, and a new officer, obviously. All the new enlisted personnel were this forward, and they all called him 'sir.' He wondered who else had been assigned to the ship. When he turned and saw the dual solid pips of a lieutenant, Ensign Holloway hit her as he stood up. "Oh, I'm sorry, sir. Are you here to see Lieutenant M'ree?"

"Yes, I am," replied Rodgers. She looked back toward the station. "First, can you answer my question?"

Holloway's expression showed confusion as he struggled to remember the question she wanted him to answer. At her glance toward his station, he formed the letter O with his mouth in recollection, "Oh! Well, when I was training on the simulators at the Academy, I favored a configuration display that allowed me to be more efficient at my duties. The problem I'm having is getting the side-by-side helm and operations displays to only appear when anything changes rather than having a static display." He grins, "I tend to get bored sometimes, and when the console flashes information, it gets my attention a little better, sir."

The new lieutenant looked at the console and nodded her head. "I can see what you're talking about. I'm very pleased to see you taking some initiative, Ensign..." She let her voice trail off to allow him to answer.

"Quentin Holloway, sir. Assigned to the operations division under Lieutenant Gress. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," He extended a hand to her, which she accepted.

She smiled at his introduction and sized him up. Like her, he was a Terran from the European part of Earth. His dark brown hair contrasted with her cornstalk strands of blonde that framed her face. Ensign Holloway enjoyed a height advantage of at least a foot to her athletic five-five form. "Lieutenant Catherine Rodgers," she said. "Admiral Davies has appointed to me to command *Gallant*."

Ensign Holloway's eyes widened, and a blush settled upon his fair skin as he understood the weight of the meeting. "Uh, Captain Rodgers, sir," he stuttered at his new commanding officer. "Should I summon Lieutenant M'ree to the bridge for you, sir?"

Despite the ensign's obvious discomfort, she decided that the best thing to do would be to ignore it for now. "Is she up at this hour?" she said as she glanced at the chronometer on the operations display. The seconds ticked closer to oh-five-hundred.

"She is definitely awake, sir. It's rare that she sleeps."

Rodgers' expression changed to one of curiosity. "Is that normal?"

Holloway thought about it. "I would say so, but then, she's been involved with the refit. Though Senior Chief McComas doesn't sleep much, either, to be honest with you, sir."

"Senior Chief McComas is the chief engineer?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you wouldn't mind," said Rodgers in a slow, thoughtful tone, "give Lieutenant M'ree a call and see if she's up." Of course, she would be up, whether she was sleeping. Any trained officer's subconscious would wake them up upon the unique sound of the communications panel.

"Bridge to Captain," called Holloway, without acknowledging the order.

The response was instantaneous. "M'ree, here." Rodgers smiled at the way the Caitian rolled the R in her name.

"Sir," said Holloway. "Lieutenant Rodgers is here on the bridge, and would like to meet with you."

A moment of silence passed, but before either officer pondered if the channel had closed, she spoke up with a peculiar tone, declaring, "I will be there shortly."

Rodgers realized her jaw was open at the brusque fashion in which she addressed Holloway. She had to know that her new captain was listening to their conversation. "Is she always like that?" she breached protocol and ask, because she did not know how to react other than with distaste for the way her new executive officer treated her colleagues.

Holloway shrugged with a small smile. "I don't take offense to it, sir. With what she's gone through, it's understandable. "Off the incoming captain's look, he explained further, "Mister Gress tells me that Captain M'ree and the late Captain T'Miri were close, sir. I guess, as close as a Vulcan would let a non-Vulcan get. To hear it the way Gress tells it, Captain M'ree took Captain T'Miri's death very hard."

So that was it, Rodgers realized. She tried to imagine how she might react to such a loss, and failed, having no common ground. Rodgers opened her mouth to respond to Holloway, but the doors opened and revealed the uniform of a full lieutenant. The occupant was a Caitian with twin pips on the neck of her uniform. Her large black pupils stared at Rodgers, sending the small hairs on the back of her neck on end.

"Lieutenant M'ree," she introduced herself with a slight inclination of her head.

"Lieutenant Catherine Rodgers," came the reply. "You're the officer in command, here?"

"I am." M'ree used the same tone as before; stiff, almost disembodied. Rodgers wrote it off as just the way Caitians formed words in Standard.

"I stand ready to relieve you, sir," the new captain said, starting the procedure for assuming command.

M'ree eyed her as her brown and tan fur rippled across the exposed parts of her neck. Rodgers could see the flecks of fur behind her as her tail moved with purposes from side to side. After thirty seconds of staring, she informed Rodgers, "I stand ready to be relieved, sir. Regulations require a tour of the ship prior to accepting command. How much time do you wish to familiarize yourself, Lieutenant?" She moved her paws behind her, placing the right over the left at the small of her back.

The words and tone of voice irritated her. Rodgers tried to express her annoyance with the tradition, but regulations were regulations. "I would like to determine that once we've concluded the tour, Captain," she said, returning the respect that protocol demanded.

M'ree gave Rodgers a smile. Caitians did not smile in an obvious nature; they bared their teeth as an approximation. "Shall we begin with the bridge?"

The sudden presence of personality surprised Rodgers. "Uh... absolutely."

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Senior Chief McComas enjoyed working with Gress. Her fascination stemmed not only from the fact that he was one of the few Gorn serving in Starfleet, but also from his genuine interest in her work. During the refit, Gress spent a lot of time volunteering his time to assisting McComas and the other engineers from the starbase's yard staff. In the beginning of their working relationship, he treated her just as he did everyone else; standoffish. As they spent more time together, she recognized it as his defense mechanism to keep everyone at arm's length. Even though he wore the same uniform as everyone else, he still thought of himself as an outsider.

Gress, at the moment, was busy checking the simulations for the new power allocations. His huge gold and black eyes fixated on the numbers passing before him, and she always wondered if he possessed an eidetic memory. His ability to recall every detail of her reports without reference impressed her. Once he finished with his digestion of the information, he turned to face McComas. "I have confirmed your equations, Senior Chief. The computer and I agree with your computations."

McComas smiled at Gress, "Thank you, Lieutenant." She folded her arms across the midsection of her engineering jumpsuit. The arms were adorned with engineering gold pinstripes against a charcoal backdrop. Her rank insignia resided upon the neck of the same gold turtleneck she wore with every other uniform in her closet. "Would you mind taking that to the captain for me?"

"Not at all," he said in his deep, rumbling bass voice that seemed to echo coming out of his throat. "So long as you do me a favor in return."

She tilted her head in interest. "Oh?"

"When you have time, look in on Ensign Holloway for me. He seems to have trouble reconfiguring his console display."

M'ree's distant voice interrupted their conversation as the doors in the upper half of the compartment parted to admit her and another lieutenant. Gress and McComas both turned to get a better look at the newcomer. "This is main engineering. The Defiant-class design uses a horizontal warp core package. Most of the aft quarter of the ship is taken up by the engineering functions, both warp and impulse." She sounded like a tour guide.

Both officers descended the ladder, though the blonde lieutenant jumped down from the third rung and her boots rung against the mesh deck plates. M'ree continued, gesturing to the two officers, "This is Lieutenant Gress, my executive officer and chief of operations."

Gress bowed before the new lieutenant.

"This is Senior Chief Petty Officer Odessa McComas, our chief engineering officer," said M'ree as she pointed toward the subject of her statement. "Lieutenant Gress was part of the original crew. Senior Chief McComas came aboard before we began the refit."

Rodgers smiled. "I'm very pleased to meet you. I'm Lieutenant Catherine Rodgers."

M'ree added, "Our incoming commanding officer."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said McComas.

The assembled officers endured an uncomfortable silence until Gress bravely posed the question, "Sir, what was your previous assignment?"

Lieutenant Rodgers smiled, "*Nova*. I did four years under Captain Mitchell as Ops and later, XO."

McComas smiled in return. "I served with Master Chief Whitaker aboard *Dallas* during the war."

Master Chief Petty Officer Harold Leslie Whitaker was *Nova's* current chief engineering officer. Rodgers' smile widened. "Small galaxy. He's a good man to have in your engine room."

"Yes, sir." McComas agreed. "He was an excellent mentor to have, too."

M'ree made a slight coughing noise to call attention to herself. "Excuse me, Chief. Lieutenant, we should continue the tour."

Rodgers nodded. "Of course. We'll trade war stories later, Chief. Lieutenant Gress, nice to meet you."

After exchanging departing pleasantries and as the touring lieutenants left the engine room, Gress turned to the senior chief. "Interesting

officer." He looked down at the PADD in his hand and realized that he never gave her the information as McComas requested to him.

"Yeah. You don't think that M'ree was passed over for command?" wondered McComas.

Gress brought his right eye to bear on the chief engineer. "Do you?"

"I haven't known her as long as you have," she admitted.

He grumbled. "It is not my place to question the wisdom of Starfleet Command."

McComas opened her mouth to say something, but decided against it. She turned around to face the master systems display and occupied herself with her duty.

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"To be honest," said Rodgers, "I haven't been on a planet in almost eight years." She crossed her legs after being seated in the visitor's chair of the captain's ready room. "It's been a simple transition from ship to starbase to ship."

From behind the desk, M'ree tilted her head. "You have not availed yourself of leave time?"

Rodgers waved her left hand from side to side. "From time to time. A day or two here and there, but almost always on a starbase, within the comfort of a holodeck."

"On a ship of this size, Lieutenant, we have no holodeck for you to enjoy," replied M'ree.

"Your tour was quite thorough," said Rodgers with a nod. She forced a smile onto her face as she felt the sting of the acting captain's humorless words. "I've also studied the specifications and schematics of the Defiant-class."

"Logical, considering your appointment to command."

Rodgers bristled, but kept it hidden from her would-be executive officer. "Yes, uh, well... I suppose it is." She changed the subject. "What about you? I know you've served here for three years. Where did you get your start?"

M'ree gave her a small shrug. "I graduated from Starfleet Academy six years ago. My initial interest was in Starbase Operations, and so I was assigned to Starbase Six as an ensign."

"Really?" asked Rodgers, interested. Starbase officers remained behind their desks for most their careers. "How long were you there?"

"Six months. I began my career as a flight deck officer, along with fifty other ensigns. We had more coverage than was necessary," replied M'ree. "Just after my sixth month of service, I completed my post-Academy qualifications and in the same meeting with my training officer, I remember Admiral Harrison asking me to consider the Border Patrol."

"I was against the notion, but the admiral clarified that any ensign wishing to transfer would receive the benefit of his recommendation for promotion. As I had already made myself ready for selection, I felt it politic to do so. I found myself a junior grade lieutenant aboard *Sao Paulo*."

Rodgers grinned with familiarity at the ship's mention. "Famous ship. Pity they did not let her keep her name after the war," she said, referring to its temporary designation as *Defiant* toward the end of the Dominion War. "But you already completed a tour of duty within the Border Patrol. You remain in the service."

M'ree bared her teeth in a Caitian smile. "Captain T'Miri requested my presence as her executive officer when she was appointed to command of *Gallant*."

"I didn't realize you knew each other before you were assigned here."

"We didn't."

"I don't understand."

"I was selected from the pool of officers for assignment. I had intended to return to a starbase assignment, since I had fulfilled the admiral's request. I was called to meet her to discuss opting serving as her exec, and I accepted." With each word in her last sentence, M'ree allowed a bit of her emotion to creep in. By the time she spoke the last two words, she interrupted their full pronunciation.

Rodgers perceived M'ree's obvious discomfort. With a smile, she lied, "I hope you will consent to remaining aboard *Gallant*. As my executive officer."

"It is my intention to remain aboard, Lieutenant, to serve out the rest of my tour." M'ree's previous emotional state disappeared. "Once you are installed as captain, it will be your preference to have me reassigned."

She hesitated under the scrutiny of M'ree's eyes. Did she know she wanted someone else? Definitely not. "It is, but I doubt that I'd want anyone else."

"It would be most illogical to want otherwise. Given my years aboard *Gallant* and my experiences during her refit, I am the natural choice for the role of executive officer." That dispassionate and sanctimonious voice returned, and Rodgers' smile fell from her lips.

She could not let that pass without comment. "And you carry yourself with a remarkable amount of self-confidence."

The expression on M'ree's face did not change. "I did not intend to carry myself with arrogance. I only speak the truth."

Once again, Rodgers wore a forced smile. "I see. Very well, then. I would like to assume command, now." She rose from her chair and stood at attention before the desk of the commanding officer. "Shall we begin the ceremony?"

M'ree rose in kind, giving her assent as a nod. "Yes." She pressed her hand against the companel and ordered, "All hands to assemble in the mess hall in twenty minutes."

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"Attention to orders," rumbled Gress. The sound of uniform boots slapping together echoed within the ship's mess.

The full assembly of the ship's crew numbered to just over fifty people; typical of the full complement of personnel. Four commissioned officers made up that number. The non-commissioned and warrant officers among them would manage the rest of the crew. They all wore the standard uniform of the day: working jumpsuits with the colors of their respective divisions.

M'ree and Rodgers wore their dress uniforms, as befitted the formality of the ceremony. Behind a podium with the crest of the United Federation of Planets, Rodgers stood and read from a PADD. "To Lieutenant Catherine Rodgers. Stardate six-one-six-four-nine. You are hereby requested and required to assume command of NCC-74229, USS *Gallant*. Signed, Rear Admiral Allison Dahlgren, Commanding Officer, Starbase Deep Space Six."

She then turned to face M'ree. She extended her paw in the human tradition of clasping extremities.

Rodgers intoned, "I relieve you, sir."

"I stand relieved, Captain," replied M'ree. They broke off contact and she took her place to the side of the latest commanding officer of *Gallant*.

With her hands placed upon the edges of the top of the podium, Rodgers smiled at her new crew. "I have named Lieutenant M'ree as my new executive officer. All standing orders prior to this ceremony will remain in effect until I've reviewed them."

The crew looked between themselves as the new captain spoke her words. Those among them who served on the ship under T'Miri and M'ree appeared consternated at the prospect of all standing orders changing, but said nothing.

Rodgers declared, "I understand the Border Patrol is known for disregarding regulations, but I am committed to establishing discipline on this ship in line with Starfleet's expectations. Such discipline begins with a well-dressed crew, and therefore let my first standing order be that all hands shall wear the Class A's as the uniform of the day."

M'ree's eyes shifted over to Rodgers, but she remained at attention while her new captain spoke. *You are no longer the captain. You must serve her as you have served before. With excellence.* Her thoughts felt foreign, but they calmed her. The sudden changes struck her as disrespectful of T'Miri, but M'ree felt her anger arrive and depart in nearly the same moment.

The change in uniform did not sit well with the crew, either. Again, they exchanged glances, but said nothing.

"As with everything in life, we must accept change. You have all served Starfleet well, under the most extreme conditions. I do not intend to punish your service, but to honor it by showcasing your talents in the coming days, weeks, and months," Rodgers held her smile as she spoke. She leaned back from the podium and stepped around to the front of it. "Department heads, submit your final readiness reports to the XO. There will be a meeting of the senior staff in one hour here in the mess hall. Dismissed."

The crew filed out of the mess hall, followed by the new captain. M'ree, Gress, McComas, and the Klingon security chief, Warrant Officer Katesh, remained behind under the guise of ordering beverages from the replicator.

"I like her," Katesh remarked, without preamble. She wore her long dark tresses up in a ponytail with a ceremonial braid. The Klingon woman towered over everyone but Gress as she sipped from her mug of *raktajino*. "She asserts herself as a leader, for a human."

McComas frowned. "I'm a little displeased with having to return to the two-piece uniform. They're not conducive to crawling around in the Jefferies tubes."

Gress kept his eyes upon M'ree, who sat at a table and listened.

Katesh snarled, "In the empire, our clothes are worn for their discomfort. They remind us we are on duty and should remain alert. Prevents us from being too comfortable when on duty." She wore her family's crest upon her baldric, over the chest of her uniform jacket. The single silver pip of a warrant officer adorned the mustard-colored neck of her undershirt.

Gress shook with a staccato noise from his lips. To most people, it sounded like a rough bark from a wounded animal. To those who served with him long enough, they recognized it as his laughter. "Your baldric serves you well, then, Katesh."

Everyone shared a smile and a bit of laughter as they lightened the mood. M'ree remained muted, instead nursing a steaming mug of Vulcan tea. When the conversation died down, they all took up a seat nearby.

"There wasn't a problem with the way things were done under M'ree, or T'Miri for that matter," admitted Gress. "Perhaps our new captain is making assertions in areas where it isn't necessary."

"Maybe we can reason with her," McComas added. "I'm sure she knows we get a little down and dirty on the border. It's not as if we're on big passenger liners like the Sovereign-class where everyone needs to look sharp all the time, in case an ambassador makes a surprise inspection."

M'ree stood up from the table, placing her paws against the surface. "The captain's orders are simple. So long as she is our captain, you will all comply with her orders. There will be no dissent in speech or attitude, especially not in front of your subordinates." She stared at everyone



within the mess hall. "If this is not clear to any of you, speak now."

No one said a word.

"I will expect to see all of you in this compartment, within one hour," M'ree said. She turned her head to McComas. "In proper attire."

Everyone replied their assent, just before M'ree departed with her mug of tea.

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### *Captain's Log*

*Stardate 61652. 2*

***With the last weapons' qualification complete, Gallant is ready for duty assignment. Rear Admiral Dahlgren has scheduled an inspection tour of the ship, and I'm certain she will find everything is in order.***

M'ree strode behind Admiral Dahlgren and Captain Rodgers as they conversed. As *Gallant* received her final qualifications and certifications by the yardmaster, the admiral elected to conduct a personal inspection. However, M'ree understood all too well that the admiral's intent was not to inspect the ship, but her new captain and possibly even how the crew was taking to her after a week of assuming command.

"We have had tremendous success in tuning the warp core, providing us with increased power to all systems by two percent," beamed Rodgers. M'ree noticed that the captain's attitude changed when the admiral was on board. She ceased being the disciplinarian and became an amicable person.

Dahlgren replied, "That's outstanding, Captain. Please pass my compliments to Senior Chief McComas and her staff."

M'ree hid her appreciation for the admiral's words and maintained her respectful glance toward her superior officers. T'Miri frequently discussed Dahlgren's knack for dissecting the essence of a matter and perceiving the situation as it truly was, regardless of others' portrayals.

The trio emerged onto the bridge. Even while in the yard, Rodgers' strict adherence to regulation required an officer of the deck or command duty officer to stand the port watch. Ensign Holloway sat in the captain's chair, while two petty officers sat at the forward console and the tactical console.

Holloway turned his head when the starboard-side hatch slid open to admit his captain and the admiral. He got to his feet and stood at attention, "Admiral on the bridge!"

Dahlgren prevented anyone else from being disturbed. She held out her hands and ordered, "As you were, people." Her words were quick enough; neither of the petty officers did more than turn their heads at the ensign's words.

The ensign remained standing as the orders given by Captain Rodgers stated no one was to reside in her chair when she stood on the bridge. She didn't take the conn from the officer. Since day one, Rodgers has implemented numerous standing orders, including this one. "Would you like the conn, Captain?" asked Holloway.

Rodgers maintained that fake smile M'ree knew well. "Negative, Ensign. Just giving the admiral the dime tour."

"Only ten cents, Captain?" mused Dahlgren. "I would think that it would be worth more than that."

The admiral's sense of humor caught Rodgers off-guard. She stammered, "O-Of course, sir."

Dahlgren lifted her hand and gave a friendly smile. "I'm only teasing, Captain. But in all seriousness, I think your crew has done a fine job of putting this ship back in readiness. I am very pleased to report to Starfleet that *Gallant* is early by four months."

Rodgers did not hide her smile under Dahlgren's praise. "On behalf of the efforts of my crew, I thank you, Admiral."

"I won't take up too much more of your valuable time. You shall have new orders in the next three hours. I urge you to prepare for departure," Dahlgren informed everyone within earshot. She eyed M'ree and smiled. "I need to return to the station. Might your executive officer escort me off the ship?"

Rodgers snapped her fingers and extended her index finger at M'ree. "XO."

M'ree had a severe dislike for the finger snapping of her captain. Especially when she would point at the person she commanded, as though they were lesser beings. "Aye, sir," was her reply. She gestured with her right paw toward the hatch. "Admiral?"

Dahlgren offered her best wishes to the bridge crew before preceding M'ree to the exit. As soon as the hatch closed, the admiral waited for M'ree to catch up and walk alongside her. "She's been doing that all day, with the fingers. That would drive me crazy."

"It is her way," M'ree remarked neutrally.

"I once had a captain I served under who carried a Nausicaan baton with him everywhere he went. He claimed to have wrestled it away from a Nausicaan he tangled with during the Dominion War," said the admiral with a smirk. "I guess captains all have their idiosyncrasies."

"Indeed, they do, sir."

Within the privacy of the turbolift, the admiral waited for the car to move before ordering, "Halt."

M'ree turned her head. "Sir?"

"Lieutenant, you know that had Lieutenant Rodgers not had more time in grade, you would have retained command of this ship." The admiral did not lift her eyes to M'ree as she spoke.

To say that the admiral's behavior was unusual was an understatement. Neither M'ree nor T'Miri ever witnessed Dahlgren to show any semblance of agitation. M'ree stood, stunned momentarily. "Of course, sir." She felt more words emanate from her mouth without the thoughts forming in front of them: "However, I do not wish you to proceed from a false assumption. I am content to support Captain Rodgers in her command. If Starfleet feels I am ready for another command, I'm certain they will see to it."

"You have an impressive display of faith in Starfleet," Dahlgren admitted. "I suppose it looks different when you're part of the establishment. But thanks for letting me know." Her eyes lifted to the ceiling. "Resume."

As the turbolift moved once more, M'ree turned to Dahlgren and placed her paw upon her shoulder. Again, the words flowed of their own accord. "Allie, do not carry the burden of T'Miri's death any longer. She would not want it."

Dahlgren's face lost its color. "What?" she stammered.

M'ree looked at her contact with the admiral and pulled her hand away from her lightning-quick, as though she touched a flame. "My apologies, sir. I don't know why I said... *did*... that."

As the lift doors opened, the admiral composed herself. They walked in silence to the airlock on deck three. Before Dahlgren stepped back onto the yard facility, she turned to face M'ree. "Lieutenant."

"Sir."

"Tell the watch to step outside for a moment."

M'ree did so, leaving them alone within the lock.

Admiral Dahlgren peered at M'ree closely. She lowered her voice and asked, "Did T'Miri tell you something before she died? Something about me?"

"No, sir," M'ree replied truthfully.

"Your voice back then. For a moment, you sounded *just like her*," whispered Dahlgren fervently. "It was damned eerie."

"Again, sir, my apologies."

"It's all right. Don't, uh... don't worry about it." Dahlgren's voice trailed off, lost in thought. She stood, staring at M'ree. Finally, after many moments passed, she placed both hands upon M'ree arms and gripped tightly. "I think I know what happened to you. And... I think you should know something."

M'ree's confusion was equaled only by her awkwardness. "Sir?"

"What I'm about to tell you, M'ree... must be held in the strictest of confidences."

"Absolutely, sir."

Dahlgren waited until she had inhaled deeply before proceeding. "T'Miri was not simply a friend of mine. She and I were close. Much closer than would be acceptable between an admiral and a lieutenant under her direct command." She continued to grip M'ree and closed her eyes. "I... owed her a lot. More than my life." The admiral's face dropped as grief took hold.

M'ree's paws lifted and held the admiral's upper arms in response. In the same voice she used earlier, she told her, "I know, Allie." With as much comfort as she could muster, she repeated in a softer voice, "I know."

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Gress felt the smooth surface of the bridge's operations console under his clawed hand. The point of his claws were intentionally dulled to make working with the multi-touch membrane easier. Gorn vessels used tactile-sense interfaces to operate their various functions, but Starfleet was dominated by races with soft digits. When his family would visit him at Starfleet Academy, they would often tease his need to file down the points of his claws, but he knew the sacrifices he made to join Starfleet. Since his graduation and attainment of accolades for his service, his family quieted about most of the changes to his behavior and appearance.

When the dockyard's communications officer signaled, Gress turned around in his seat. "Captain," he reported, "dockyard operations reports we are cleared for immediate departure."

"Thank you, Gress," Rodgers replied. "Clear the airlock and prepare to disengage dock. Mister Holloway, deactivate all mooring beams."

*Gallant's* orientation within the yard required them to face the starboard side of the scaffolding, as the airlock was within the ship's navigational deflector; the forward-most section of deck three. The long arm of the yard's support conduits remained connected to the ship.

From her standing position near Rodgers, M'ree ordered, "Engineering, switch over to internal power."

McComas' voice replied over the ship's internal communications system. "Aye, sir." There was only the barest perceptible flicker in the overhead illumination. "We are now operating on internal power. Warp core at twenty percent output for maneuvering."

Rodgers shot M'ree a glare, but swiveled her head back to the matter of undocking. "Very well. Thank you, Senior."

"The airlock has been cleared," reported Holloway.

"Disengage dock," said Rodgers. "Deactivate all mooring beams."

The inertial dampening system lagged as the ship slipped from the dock to the soft cradle of vacuum. On the main screen, the dock now drifted away as the ship moved to navigate. Holloway entered several commands before informing the bridge, "Mooring cleared, and dock disengaged. We are now maneuvering freely."

"Come to relative bearing zero-nine-zero Mark zero, thrusters to fifty kay-pee-eych."

The screen moved to show a diagonal viewpoint of the scaffolding as the nose of *Gallant* turned to face the yard's exit. "Fifty kay-pee-each, aye, sir," Holloway said as he tapped his console. Under her power for the first time in over six months, the ship sailed forward.

As soon as the small ship left the repair dock behind, the bridge crew shared in a collective smile toward each other.

Except M'ree. She remained standing nearby the port-side hatch, carrying a larger PADD in her paws. The PADD gave her a real-time display of the ship's primary systems. She held the device against her midsection and would change the display from time to time to highlight a particular system or subsystem for her scrutiny.

"We've now passed the inner marker, Captain," reported Holloway. The inner marker of the approach lanes allowed them to use higher speeds toward the departure points designated by Deep Space Six.

Rodgers checked the display to her right and ordered, "Increase speed to full impulse power."

"Full impulse power, aye, sir."

M'ree touched the PADD with an extended finger. "Power systems responding within established parameters. Warp speed available at your command, Captain."

"Thank you, XO," Rodgers said with a smile. "Distance to outer marker, Ensign?"

Holloway turned around and grinned. "We just passed it, sir." At full impulse power, they reached the outer boundary of the starbase's flight control grid with little delay.

"Excellent." She rose from the captain's chair and walked forward to stand behind the helm. With a hand upon the ensign's shoulder, she ordered, "Make your course two-two-five Mark four-seven."

After the course was plotted, Holloway followed the trajectory all the way to the border. He leaned to the side to allow Rodgers a view of the course laid in. "Course plotted, sir."

Unable to keep the excitement from her voice, Captain Rodgers ordered, "Warp seven, Ensign. Execute."

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## Ship's Log

**Stardate 61701. 1**

**Executive Officer M'ree, recording**

**We have completed our second week of service along the Rihannsu Neutral Zone without incident. During our last exchange with Command, Rear Admiral Dahlgren transmitted new orders for *Gallant* to transfer our area of operation to Deep Space 4. While the starship *Blackhaw* puts in for major repairs following a fierce action, we shall assume her duty station along the border of Federation space. Since completing our refit, this ship and her crew have performed exceptionally.**

"Shields up," ordered M'ree. She flexed her paws against the arms of the chair. "Sound battle stations. Captain Rodgers to the bridge." The staccato alert sound emanated from the bridge speakers, as the overhead illuminated dimmed and the alert status indicator flashed red.

Katesh replied, "Shields are up. Weapons charged and ready, sir."

"Helm, make your course zero Mark zero, relative to target," M'ree said as her eyes drifted to the right display from her position. "Any response to our hail?"

As Ensign Holloway made the proper course change, Gress informed her, "Negative, sir. No response on any frequency. I'm trying different linguacode, now."

M'ree felt her muscles tense at the lack of communication. A convoy of freighters traveling nearby the Black Cluster signaled for immediate help while en route to Starbase 375. The lead freighter sustained heavy damage from a pair of armed vessels. They reported at least five dead, so far. *Gallant* arrived within ten minutes of the call and ordered them to break off their attack.

She eyed their targets on the screen. So far, they made no move to attack the freighters further, but they brought their weapons to bear on the Starfleet ship. She knew they had already targeted *Gallant*, and she hoped they would come to reason. "Any change?"

Katesh shook her head from the tactical station. "No, sir. They are continuing to actively scan us. I think they-" She cut herself off as an audio alert caught her attention. "They're firing!"

*Gallant's* deck shifted underneath as both enemy ships discharged their weapons. The shields flared in reaction to the violent exchange of energy in space. M'ree's paws gripped the arms of the chair as she kept her eyes on the screen. She felt the force of the impact in her teeth, as

the rattling seemed to threaten to shake them loose. In response, she clenched her jaw.

"Target their weapons and shields, Mister Katesh. I want to disable, not destroy," M'ree called out. "Senior, any damage?"

McComas reported, "Shields down to seventy-seven percent. No damage."

M'ree did not acknowledge the report. Instead, she ordered, "Helm, on my mark, execute Kumeh maneuver. Tactical, fire pulse phasers when we reach the apogee."

Holloway and Katesh shared a quick look before her. "Ready, sir," they near said in unison.

"Mark."

*Gallant's* viewscreen shifted back to the stars as it rose above their attackers before bringing the bow of the ship down to face their attackers. The apogee of the maneuver placed them in the optimal firing position; all of their forward weapons bore down while presenting a minimum aspect profile to the enemy. M'ree watched as the twin dots of pulse phaser fire flew away from their ship.

The ferocity of the shots often meant that their first attempts resulted in a miss as the computer attempted to compensate for target movement. As soon as they fired, both ships performed evasive maneuvers in such a pattern that M'ree recognized. *They resemble Orion naval tactics for small craft*, the words of her thought penetrated her mind like a knife. Rather than heighten her emotional response, she felt herself calm down. She needed to dissect the situation from an objective viewpoint.

"Tactical on main viewer," she ordered. The viewscreen flashed, then displayed a "top down" view of the engagement. As the ships maneuvered, she plotted in her mind where they would be. The enemy craft to port had a label of Sierra-One, while the other one displayed as Sierra-Two.

*They will now attempt to place us in a crossfire. You must not hesitate.* M'ree nodded to herself, as she heard the words in her mind. "Helm. Make your course one-eight-zero Mark nine-four relative, full impulse power, expedite!"

Holloway's hands moved, not bothering to reply. The main viewer responded for him as the tiny arrow spun around. *Gallant* sailed forward as the enemy flanked them on the port and starboard sides. As soon as they were in a perfect position between Sierra-One and Sierra-Two, she ordered, "All stop."

The ship's braking thrusters fired to keep them at their present position. "All stop, aye, sir," reported Holloway.

"Prepare to jump to warp nine for one full second. Then spin us hard to port and bring us to bear on Sierra-One." She rose from her seat and moved to stand over Katesh's station while she maintained an unbroken watch on the tactical display. Both targets made their expected course corrections as *Gallant* surprised them. With little time to spare, the sensor data being fed to the display in real time showed the energy spike in their weapons array.

"Initiate warp jump!" she ordered.

*Gallant* moved as beam and projectile weapons from the enemy pass through space. As her quick calculations confirmed, they hit each other with direct hits. Meanwhile, they exited subspace and brought their weapons to bear on Sierra-One. On the tactical display, their weapons range was larger than their quarry. They had the advantage of more powerful reach than either ship.

M'ree placed her hand on Katesh's shoulder. "Fire phasers."

"Belay that order," said Rodgers. She emerged from the port-side hatch to step onto the bridge. "Sitrep."

With the rhythm of the bridge disrupted, everyone turned to look at the interruption from their seats. M'ree's calm disappeared, and she felt the nervousness of battle flood over her. With a stammer, she replied, "Captain, two enemy vessels attacking a three-ship civilian convoy to Starbase 375. We're moving to disable the first ship."

"Identification?" asked Rodgers as she took her seat.

"None," M'ree told her. "Sir, we must fire to disable the first craft."

Rodgers shot her an angry glance. "I have the conn, XO."

M'ree felt her own anger rise at the sudden change. They had the shot, why did she interrupt? But she capitulated with a quick nod. She withdrew to the ancillary station behind the captain and awaited orders with a brief, "Aye, sir."

The captain called, "Open a channel to the enemy ship, Mister Gress."

Gress rumbled, "Channel open, sir."

Rodger smiled. "This is the Federation starship *Gallant*. You are ordered to stand down and prepare to be boarded. As you can tell, we can out-gun and outrun you. If you wish to survive this engagement, you will surrender."

*Given their present course of action, it is unreasonable to assume that this enemy would surrender.* The words almost spilled out of her mouth. M'ree felt them form on her tongue, but she bit them back with a throat-clearing noise to cover her near-misstep. No, she already overstepped her bounds with her suggestion. She would not contradict the captain in front of the crew.

As expected, the enemy ships responded with hostile action. Despite receiving damage from their own attack, both ships sped to return to weapons' range and fired. All of their hits landed.

McComas called out the damage report. "Shields down to fifty-eight percent. They're concentrating their fire on one arc. The forward-port side."

M'ree stepped forward. "Captain, if they're working to weaken one shield, the other generators will transfer power to compensate for the--"

Rodgers cut her off with a wave of her hand. "I know. Lieutenant Gress, try hailing them again."

Katesh turned her head to glance at M'ree with confusion. M'ree shot back a glare of her own, wordlessly communicating to the Klingon to mind her station. Once again, Gress informed the bridge that the enemy ships did not respond.

"Incoming fire, sir," Katesh reported as soon as the sensors alerted her.

The crew reached out with their hands to stabilize themselves against the onslaught. M'ree called up the damage report before McComas even spoke. Their fore-port shield dipped down to single-digits, and the other shield generators transferred power. Now, the entire shield grid suffered because of the loss in overall power.

M'ree watched as her hands flittered over the console of their own accord. She rerouted the grid power to the fore-port shield to bring it to full, while feeding emergency power into the shield grid. The transfer completed just as another barrage of projectiles exploded against the same shield, but now met with a much higher power level than before. On the tactical display, the two ships broke off their attack runs to regroup outside of *Gallant's* weapons range.

Rodgers asked for a damage report, and McComas shook her head. "Sir, that shield has been boosted by seventy-five percent. The recent impacts had almost no effect on our shields."

The captain grinned. "Excellent work, Senior. We can withstand their attacks, then."

"No, sir. Not indefinitely." The chief engineer accessed the logs and reported, "Emergency power was dumped into the shield grid to compensate for the loss in shield output."

"Good job anticipating, then, Senior," said Rodgers. "Mister Katesh, do you have a range to target?"

Katesh angrily replied, "They have moved out of our weapons' range, *sir*."

"Helm, close to contact, uh," Rodgers trailed off to read the tactical display, "Sierra-Two. Full impulse power."

"Full impulse power, aye, sir," replied Holloway. "Sir, if I may suggest--?"

The captain's tone grew bitter as she interrupted him. "You may not."

M'ree frowned at the exchange, but kept her eyes on the screen. At full impulse power, *Gallant* would take minutes to return to weapons' range. Warp speed would press their tactical advantage better than sub-light speeds would. "Captain," she spoke up. "engaging the warp drive would--"

"Not now, XO," Rodger turned to regard her with an angry glare as she had before. "Tactical, fire quantum torpedoes; full spread, maximum yield."

Katesh furrowed her brow. "Sir?"

*At this range, M'ree's thoughts told her, the torpedoes will detonate before they reached their target. It will do nothing, and we will lose two torpedoes for the wasted effort.* "Captain," she tried again.

Rodgers wheeled on her. With a point of her right index finger, she started, "I said--"

M'ree cut her off. "I understand, sir. As your XO, I would be remiss in not informing you that the torpedoes at this range will do nothing. If we engage the warp drive, we can close the distance, fire our torpedoes for maximum effect."

Rodger considered her words for a moment. She pursed her lips together and sighed. "Helm, engage warp drive to close our distance on my mark. Tactical, fire full spread on a two count, after we drop out of warp. "

Holloway and Katesh, once more, coordinated their efforts and communicated through their respective consoles. "Ready, sir," reported Katesh.

"Helm, mark," Rodgers snapped her fingers with each count as the ship moved faster than light. "One, two, all stop, one, two, fire!"

M'ree watched with anticipation as the full spread of quantum torpedoes darted across space. The first two torpedoes exploded against the shields of the enemy ship and nullified them. The second two sped to rip through the outer hull. Only a millisecond later, they detonated within the confines of the small ship. The damage done was too much for them; the high yield of the quantum torpedoes left nothing behind but small debris.

Rodgers grinned as she faced her executive officer. "Excellent suggestion, XO."

Gress reported, "Sir, Sierra-One is moving off at high warp."

"Let them go. Helm, reverse course to rendezvous with the convoy," ordered the captain. "And a very fine job by all."

**And now, a word from the author...**

Okay, I know I said that last story would be the last story, but I was struck by inspiration to do one more. In this character sketch/study, I chose to pursue a Vulcan/Caitian relationship between CO and XO to explore how deeply affected one would be without the other. Add to that dynamic the arrival of an untried captain taking command from someone who is still grieving the loss. I wanted to do a little more with this, but ultimately decided to end it where I did, leaving the question open as to "what might've been?" Did Rodgers find her footing? Did M'ree come to grips with her losses? Did T'Miri's *katra* ever make it back to Vulcan?

If I find time, I might explore the answers later, but for now, I said all I needed to say in this story.

There might be an H-ship some day.

As always, thanks for reading!

- McCC

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