

— STAR TREK — ENTERPRISE

As Enterprise undergoes repairs, new members of the senior staff take their first steps in the life of the flag ship of Starfleet.

Missing Pieces

Part II

KATHY ROSE



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We wish you a pleasant time reading this story.

"It's the bare minimum of what we need to get out of spacedock," said Hess by way of explanation. "You can check the items off as they come in."

"How'd you know--?" Tucker stopped, scratching his head as he took the PADD.

"I was already suspicious about the defective parts, sir," she said with a smile that wasn't at all modest. "You asked for the list in Engineering before I could talk to you about it. Then, when I heard two shuttlepods were to be prepped to carry cargo, it wasn't hard to figure out.

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Revision 1

Kathy Rose

Missing Pieces

Part Two

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CHAPTER

1

This was the first time Captain Jonathan Archer had visited the Vulcan embassy during the day. The few times he'd been here before -- and he could count the number on one hand and still have a few fingers left -- it had been at night, and he'd been whisked by ground-car right to the gate.

Now, as he walked along on the sidewalk next to the compound on his way to the main entrance, he gazed up at the imposing gray stone walls. From his vantage point, he couldn't see any barbed wire or broken glass at the top, but he wouldn't be surprised if the Vulcans used such primitive measures in addition to the most sophisticated system they could develop. Under certain circumstances, low-tech devices sometimes proved more effective than all the fancy gadgets in the universe.

He flexed his hands in his jacket pockets, then

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took one out to pull the coat's zipper up farther. There was a distinct chill in the San Francisco air today. No doubt T'Pol would have some acerbic comment to make about it.

Ambassador T'Pol, he reminded himself. She was no longer his first officer, having left more than two months ago after Enterprise had been towed to the spacedock. He'd have to act with a certain amount of decorum, giving her the respect her new position was due. Then, when her staff wasn't around and they were having lunch together, he could relax and perhaps even try to rattle her Vulcan composure -- just for old times' sake.

He frowned as he reached the entrance, where he pushed a button on the intercom panel set in the wall next to the barred gate. They had serious matters to discuss. He doubted either one of them would be relaxed.

"You are at the Vulcan embassy," said an unaccented voice in flawless English over the intercom. "Please state your name and the purpose of your visit."

Archer identified himself, then said, "I have an appointment with Ambassador T'Pol."

There was no verbal response, but the gates silently swung open. Archer took that as an invitation to enter. He walked through, following a winding path through flower beds, sand sculptures, and ornamental trees that led to the front door of the embassy.

By the time he reached the steps to the covered portico, the ornately carved wooden front door had opened. Three Vulcans were standing inside. One

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wore the flowing robes Archer associated with Vulcan diplomatic attire; the other two were clad in dark tunics and trousers. As he gave those two a closer look, Archer decided they were security guards, especially since one of them was holding the Vulcan version of a bio-scanner.

When he reached the top of the stairs, the one in the robe stepped forward and said, "Captain Archer. The ambassador is waiting for you in her office. Follow me."

Archer was almost certain he had just passed a security check. He strode by the other Vulcans, both of whom returned his curious glance with unwavering eyes. He could feel their gazes on his back as he trailed his guide to a white marble staircase on the other side of the large entrance hall, the sound of his boots echoing hollowly in the silence. They climbed to the landing, and as they turned to go up the second half of the grand staircase, Archer said, "I thought the ambassador's office was on the ground floor."

His guide paused to glance over his shoulder. "It was. Ambassador T'Pol prefers a different location."

The Vulcan didn't elaborate, leaving Archer to wonder as they continued up the steps. Surely T'Pol wasn't sentimental about her old mentor, Soval, and was leaving his office intact in case he decided to pay a visit. Knowing what they were to discuss, Archer thought it possible it was another primitive security measure. Higher stories were often harder to access.

Security in all sensitive areas on Earth had been increased after the disastrous outcome of the Alpha

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Centauri trade talks. The Vulcans no doubt were taking similar precautions.

They reached the top of the stairs and turned left down a corridor, Archer remaining alert as his eyes took in the subtly altered, beautiful surroundings. Things had changed since he'd been here the last time, and it looked like security had been more than just beefed up. He could swear he saw the back of an urn glow green just as he passed between it and its mate on the other side of the hall -- he'd probably broken a beam of light between the two and triggered an alarm somewhere.

Archer followed his guide into an antechamber. The only occupant of the room was a young Vulcan, who immediately rose to his feet from behind the desk where he'd been sitting, and Archer had to stifle a smile: another attache. Would he ever get to see T'Pol at this rate? He'd hardly expected her to greet him at the main door with a broad smile and open arms, but this was ridiculous. The attache walked over to the only other door in the room, opened it, and stood there gazing impassively at Archer.

He realized with a start that they were waiting for him to enter the next room. "Oh, right," Archer murmured as he walked past the man into an austere room he hadn't been in before. Judging by the decor -- or, rather the lack of it -- minimalists could learn something from the Vulcans. The only objects in the room were a highly polished wooden desk with a computer, several chairs, and, off to one side, a table set for two. There was a flowery pattern of some sort stenciled on

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the walls, but it was subdued and blended with the dark furniture. There weren't even curtains on the trio of windows behind the desk. Archer was willing to bet, however, that while occupants of the room could look out, no one outside would be able to see in.

His study of the room took only a second or two, and then his attention was riveted on the figure rising gracefully to her feet from the seat behind the desk. It was something of a shock to see her in traditional flowing Vulcan robes instead of her version of a Starfleet uniform.

"Captain," T'Pol said, inclining her head. "Welcome."

"Thank you, T-...ah, Ambassador," Archer corrected himself at the last moment, mindful of the two Vulcans through the open doorway.

Shifting her gaze behind him, T'Pol said, "You may leave. I will summon you if we require anything."

When Archer heard the door shut quietly behind him, he let out a long breath, relieving his pent-up tension.

T'Pol raised one eyebrow in an expression so familiar to Archer that he almost laughed. A slight curving of her lips, so small as to barely qualify as a smile, betrayed her pleasure at seeing him. "You appear well, Captain," she said.

"You do too, T'Pol," Archer said, at last setting free his own smile.

CHAPTER

2

Commander Trip Tucker was torn. He knew he should be concentrating on his duties as first officer, but the captain wanted to leave Earth as soon as Enterprise was ready. It was coming up on three months that they'd been here, and there didn't seem to be an end in sight. If that meant he'd have to slack off on first officering for the time being and help out again in Engineering, so be it. Still, it bothered him that he was in his old haunt instead of on the bridge, or wherever it was that he needed to be first officer. He felt like he was letting the captain down.

Tucker shook his head, more at his thoughts than at the circuit board he'd been fussing with for the last hour. The sooner they got Enterprise up and running and out of spacedock, the happier both he and the captain would be.

And he still hadn't decided who would take over as

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chief engineer. He was determined, though, to promote someone from within the department. His opinion, both as new first officer and soon-to-be former chief engineer, was that they didn't need another new face in a key position.

Doctor Weber seemed to be fitting in well, he had to admit. The physician seemed to know his stuff. Several Engineering crew members had been slightly injured in minor accidents during the refit, and Weber had patched them up quickly and efficiently. And he'd heard from Mayweather and Sato that the man had a wicked sense of humor.

Lieutenant Collins taking over Malcolm Reed's job was another matter. A ground-pounder who had never served aboard a starship, she was making waves and they hadn't even left spacedock yet. The next time he saw Malcolm again -- and he hoped there would be a next time, provided Malcolm came through his little escapade unscathed -- he'd apologize to the man for thinking that, during the first few weeks he'd worked with him, he was a stuck-up little jerk. Collins way outclassed Malcolm in the snotty attitude department. In fact, part of Tucker couldn't wait for the two of them to meet. Collins would be taken down so fast, she wouldn't know what hit her.

"Commander Tucker!"

At the sound of Collins's shrill voice cutting through Engineering like the rasp of a hacksaw on metal, Tucker started and almost dropped the probe he was using on the circuit board. Carefully keeping his expression bland, he turned to find Collins striding

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purposefully toward him. Couldn't she have waited until she was a little closer to get his attention instead of bellowing like that?

"What can I do for ya, Loo-ten-nant?" he asked, his Southern accent unconsciously deepening as he realized this could be an awkward confrontation -- about what, he had no idea, but he'd learned that seeing her never boded well.

Collins halted in front of him. She appeared miffed about something. Come to think of it, he hadn't seen her when she didn't appear to be that way.

Giving the circuit board he was holding only a cursory glance, she let out a deep breath. "The torpedo targeting scanners aren't working properly," she announced.

"So?" he asked. "That's what we're in spacedock for. Fix 'em."

Collins glared at him, then averted her gaze as a tinge of pink suffused her cheeks. "I can't."

Tucker wasn't sure he'd heard her correctly. "You can't? Why not?"

"Because," she said through gritted teeth, "although I took the required course for starship armament maintenance during my initial training, the systems have ... evolved ... since then. Needless to say, we didn't have a lot of torpedoes at Starfleet Headquarters where I was last assigned. And the manual for this system is just so much gibberish."

Be nice, Tucker told himself as he hid a smile behind his hand. She'd had the guts to admit it was beyond her ability. And Reed had been the exception

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to the rule as far as tactical officers went. He'd had a better working knowledge of engineering than the average security officer. Just look at what he had done on his own in creating a stable EM force field barrier.

Tucker leaned against the bulkhead and crossed his arms. "What about your staff?"

"What staff?" she huffed. "Of the ones that are left, all but one are on shore leave or are attending Starfleet refresher courses. Until they come back or replacements report for duty, that one crew member is my entire staff in the armory. He doesn't know what to do with the scanners, either." She paused and took a deep breath. "And before you ask -- the MACOs who have been helping out in the armory are on a ten-day training mission in the Sahara."

Tucker closed his eyes and cursed under his breath. The feeling of letting the captain down came rushing back. There was so much to do, and in the process, he'd forgotten that Archer had asked him to look into bringing the armory/security staff back up to its normal complement. He vowed to himself to work on finding the armory replacements as soon as he could. Now, however, it was time to reorder his priorities.

"Okay," Tucker said, opening his eyes. He put down the probe and motioned for one of the Engineering crew to take over his project. "I'll take a look at those scanners myself. But I want you there, too, so you can see what I'm doing, in case it has to be done again."

For the first time, Tucker saw a smile on Collins's

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face. "You're on, sir," she said.

CHAPTER

3

Ensign Hoshi Sato walked into sickbay with a stack of data chips in her delivery tote. She didn't see Doctor Weber in the treatment area, nor was he behind the partition where some of the supplies were stored. "Doctor?" she called out.

"In here," came a muffled voice from the direction of the imaging chamber.

Sato cautiously approached the apparatus, which was open. The bed was retracted into the chamber, but she could see the tips of a pair of booted feet sticking out. "What are you doing in there?" she asked curiously, stepping back just in time as the bed abruptly slid out of the chamber.

Weber, gray hair mussed, sat up and brushed some imaginary dust from the shoulder of his uniform. "I can't expect to understand how my patients who have to be put in this thing feel if I haven't experienced it

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myself," he said.

Sato rested her weight on one leg as she looked at the doctor in amusement. "But you didn't have the door closed."

"I wanted to make sure I could get back out," he said seriously, hopping off the bed.

Sato noticed that he was surprisingly spry for someone of his age. Not that he was really old, but she'd finally snuck a peek at his personnel file. Mayweather had been right. Their new doctor was the oldest crew member on Enterprise to date.

"I've got some new data for the medical banks," she said, reaching into her tote and withdrawing the chips.

"Ah. Something to do," he said, taking the chips from her. "Other than a cut finger, a sprained elbow, and a rather nasty burn, there hasn't been much business since I've come on board."

"I would think you'd want it that way," Sato said. "A healthy crew is a happy crew, or something like that."

"A bored doctor is another matter," he retorted. Taking the chips over to a work station, he said, "I suppose I could schedule crew physicals more often."

Sato wasn't sure if Weber was teasing until she caught the twinkle in his deep-set dark eyes. "You had me going there for a second," she said.

He nodded approvingly. "You catch on fast."

The sickbay doors slid open to admit Ensign Travis Mayweather. The helmsman was holding a wadded-up cloth to one eye. Sato watched with interest as

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Weber immediately turned professional, guiding Mayweather to a seat on a biobed and eliciting information from him at the same time. As Mayweather explained that he'd been hit by the swinging door in the mess hall galley, Weber deftly took the linen napkin away and ran a med scanner over the damaged area.

"Who hit you with the door?" Sato asked.

Mayweather looked embarrassed. "It was Chef," he said, then uttered a loud "Ow!" as the doctor gently prodded at the swelling around his eye.

Weber took one last glance at the med scanner readout. "You'll live. And there's no damage to your eye." He snapped the hand-held scanner shut and went to a nearby cabinet where he pulled out a chemical ice pack. "You say Chef's back on board? I'm glad you didn't have him give you the old-fashioned treatment for this."

"What did you mean?" Mayweather asked warily. "You're not talking about leeches, are you?"

"I'm talking about applying a raw steak to the swelling." Weber deftly wrapped the ice pack in a cloth. "That's an age-old remedy that doesn't work -- unless the steak is cold. Besides, there's a chance of infection if there's bacteria on the meat." He paused and snorted. "Leeches! I'm not that old. Although, to be fair, leeches are useful in certain medical cases."

Mayweather cast a mischievous glance at Sato that she knew meant trouble. His next words confirmed her fear. "As long as we're on the subject of old, Doctor," he began, "Hoshi and I were wondering..."

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Sato wished the deck plating would open up and swallow her. Mayweather had no tact whatsoever. Besides, she'd already found out the answer through her own sneaky methods. She couldn't look at the doctor as he came over and handed the ice pack to Mayweather.

"I'm old enough to be your grandfather," Weber said without rancor. "Satisfied?"

"Well, um, not really," Mayweather hedged. "We were wondering why..."

"Why I'm sixty-eight and doing my first tour of duty on a starship?" Weber finished for him.

Sato traded a surprised glance with Mayweather. She should have picked that up from his personnel file, but she'd only been looking for his age.

Returning his gaze to the doctor, Mayweather said, "Yeah."

Weber pointed to the ice pack Mayweather was holding. "Put that on your eye, would you?" When the helmsman did as he was instructed, Weber said, "Let's just say I felt I could do some good on a starship -- more than I was doing at Starfleet Medical. And let's leave it at that."

Sato grabbed Mayweather by his free arm and tugged him off the biobed and toward the door. "Come on, Travis," she ordered. "I'd like to get out of here before you find some other way to embarrass me."

Guiding Mayweather who was holding the ice pack against his eye, Sato missed the sad expression that stole across Weber's face.

CHAPTER

4

The conversation during lunch had been stilted. Archer had expected to experience at least a certain level of familiarity, and therefore comfort, with T'Pol, but it just wasn't happening. The long silences didn't seem to bother her, but they made him want to get up and pace the room. Maybe it was knowing she now represented all of Vulcan that was making him uneasy, or maybe it was that she appeared more reserved than he'd ever seen her. Could she have changed that much in the few months since she'd left Enterprise?

This was ridiculous, he told himself. They'd worked closely together for five years. That counted for something. And yet they hadn't talked about anything of real importance. Sure, she'd congratulated him on the news that he would remain in command of Enterprise, and she'd nodded at all the appropriate places while he'd rambled on about the repairs to the ship, but

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that was about it.

A server came to clear away their plates and utensils after they finished eating. They were still sitting at the table sipping coffee when Archer decided to hell with decorum.

"What's the matter with you, T'Pol?" he asked bluntly. "Why won't you talk to me?"

As she gazed at him, her expression revealing nothing, he got the impression she wanted to tell him something but that she was holding back. For once in his life, Archer wished he was telepathic.

T'Pol rose to her feet, cutting off her intense stare. Going over to the wall closest to the table, she pressed a finger to a spot on the flowered wallpaper, and a section of the wall silently slid open. When she stepped through the revealed doorway, Archer was already on his feet following her.

A narrow stairway led down. Indirect lighting provided enough illumination for Archer to see, and he quickly caught up with T'Pol. At the bottom, she pressed another button, and a seemingly solid wall opened out into the same garden area through which he had walked earlier. She led him a few steps away from the building and turned to face him.

"We may talk now," she said calmly.

Gesturing in the direction of the concealed door, Archer asked, "What was that all about?"

T'Pol sat on a bench next to one of the sand sculptures and indicated he should do the same. When he had seated himself, she said, "I have reason to believe the security of this compound has been compromised.

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Although I have not found any surveillance devices in my office, I prefer not to take chances."

"You think you're being monitored? By whom?"

"I do not know," she replied. "Three possibilities come to mind: Someone from Vulcan High Command who disagrees with my appointment; perhaps someone under orders from Admiral Boone's organization; or, quite possibly, a Romulan infiltrator."

Archer dismissed the first scenario as the most unlikely, but the other two were entirely possible. They already suspected Boone of using his position as head of Starfleet Intelligence to further his own ends. And they knew firsthand that a Romulan could infiltrate a group of Vulcans. It was only through sheer luck that they'd exposed a Romulan spy among the Vulcan delegation to Starbase 1.

"Exacerbating the situation is that I am not familiar with the staff," T'Pol continued. "As of this moment, I am not sure I can trust any of them. Many of the staff I knew from Soval's tenure chose to return to Vulcan. More than half are new."

"Is it safe to talk out here?" Archer asked, looking around.

She replied that one of her first actions after suspecting her office was being monitored was to install a hidden scrambler in that section of the garden, and she assured him their conversation would go unheard.

Archer stopped himself from swearing out loud. He didn't know if T'Pol's situation was a result of her former association with Enterprise or simply that the Vulcan embassy was a target of the deeper conspiracy.

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The latter made sense, however, because Vulcan was one of the few allies that had stood by Earth after the trade talks had broken down at Alpha Centauri. That alone would make the Romulans take note of them.

"It seems we have our work cut out for us," he said.

"Indeed," she replied. "While you are on Enterprise gathering the information from the Boomer ships and seeing if it can be used to our advantage, I must find the breach in my embassy's security."

Archer had an awful premonition. "Are you safe here?" he asked.

One of her eyebrows lifted. "I appreciate your concern, Captain. But the issue of my safety is far outweighed by what we are trying to do."

"T'Pol," he said in exasperation at her Vulcan equivocation. "You didn't answer my question, so let me rephrase it. Are you in danger here?"

She held his gaze steadily. "I do not know," she said.

CHAPTER

5

When Sato decided to dig into Weber's past, she convinced herself that the doctor was just practicing another psychological trick. He had implied he hadn't wanted to talk about why he was on board, but it could very well have been a challenge to her and Travis to try to find out.

She started with Weber's personnel file. When she'd accessed it to find out his age, she hadn't looked at any of the other information. She'd felt bad enough that she was resorting to that type of subterfuge merely to satisfy her curiosity.

But Weber's personnel file was a blank. Oh, there was plenty of information in there -- where he'd received his degrees, his previous postings which included a stint with the Interspecies Medical Exchange on Vulcan, a couple of awards for medical research, a whole slew of publications and presentations -- but no

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hints as to his personal life. There was no mention of family, no listing of outside interests or hobbies.

There was one entry that piqued her curiosity, however. Weber had taken a four-month sabbatical about a year ago. No reason was given, and there was no indication where he had gone.

She closed his file, which she'd been looking at while sitting at the communications console on the bridge. Weber's sabbatical had coincided with the end of his work with the IME. Opening a channel on her console, she put through a call to the IME office in San Francisco.

Several hours later, she was toying with her food in the mess hall, wrapping and unwrapping strands of spaghetti around her fork, wishing she hadn't pried into their new doctor's past. When Mayweather entered the mess hall, her low spirits dipped even further. He'd want to know what she'd found out, but she didn't know if she should tell him.

"So?" Mayweather asked eagerly after he'd joined her at the table.

She glanced at him, then looked away and shook her head.

"Come on, Hoshi," he said. "I can tell you know something!"

She almost gave in, but her guilty conscience held her in check. What she'd discovered involved the doctor's personal life -- well, some of it -- and she felt like a heel for having been so nosy. She had to tell Mayweather something, though, or he'd pester her to no end.

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"All right. Don't repeat what I tell you, though," she said. When he nodded, she continued, "There was an accident right before Doctor Weber took a sabbatical about a year ago. The impression I got was that he needed time off afterward."

With Mayweather listening attentively, she described how Weber was working on a lab experiment on Vulcan as a member of the Interspecies Medical Exchange. The experiment needed to be closely monitored at all times over the course of a week. One evening, he left his young assistant in charge while he took a break. When he returned some time later, he found the assistant slumped over a work station, the contents of a broken glass vial pooled on the table in front of her.

"It was a substance that gave off toxic fumes when exposed to the air," Sato said. "It killed her, but by the time he entered the lab, it had dissipated enough that he was only slightly harmed."

"That's terrible!" Mayweather said, his eyes reflecting Sato's sadness. "So he took a sabbatical to recover from his injury?"

Sato shrugged. What she didn't tell him was that Weber hadn't been hurt seriously enough to warrant four months of leave. Reading between the lines, and in talking to someone at the IME who had worked with Weber on Vulcan, she had come to the conclusion that he had been in love with his assistant and felt responsible for her death. An older man who had no family, he had finally found someone he'd wanted to spend the rest of his life with. Then she'd been killed

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while working on one of his experiments.

That explained Weber getting out of research and going back into active practice, she reasoned. A doctor on a starship was often the difference between life and death for an injured or ill crewman. It was all very tragic -- even a little romantic, she thought. Weber was trying to redeem himself, at least in his own eyes, by saving other lives.

She sighed and let the spaghetti unspool from her fork again. There was no reason to tell anyone about what she'd found out. The captain and the first officer were the only people with high enough security clearances to see the file as a matter of course -- and in fact, they'd probably reviewed his complete file before offering him the appointment on board Enterprise -- but Sato knew that they would say nothing, even if they had figured out his motivation for joining the ship. Weber's secret was safe with her.

CHAPTER

6

They were still sitting in spacedock, much to the captain's displeasure. Every delay made Archer just that much more irritable, and Tucker was doing everything in his power to get Enterprise shipshape and ready to go as soon as possible.

Tucker was beginning to think he could find his way to the armory with his eyes closed. The last week, he had been spending more time there than in Engineering, and definitely more than on the bridge. He appeased his guilty conscience by telling himself that a good first officer went wherever he was needed, and right now he was needed in the armory since it was operating with a skeleton staff. It didn't help that those crew members kept rotating in and out for shore leave and training. In the meantime, Mayweather or Sato could look after the bridge while he gave Collins a hand. And he had been trying to take off his chief en-

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gineer hat and put on his first officer hat, so he'd prioritized structuring the engineering repairs so he didn't need to be there.

But, repairs were taking longer than expected, especially in the armory, where the work had lagged behind because of the shortage of personnel. Tucker had finally arranged for crew replacements, but it was going to take several days before all the new armory and security people could report for duty. Matters hadn't been helped by Malcolm Reed's extensive customization of much of the equipment, either.

He'd left Engineering in Lieutenant Hess's capable hands. Hess would be a good chief engineer, he thought as he exited the turbolift on the armory deck. She'd been on board since Enterprise's maiden voyage.

But Lieutenant Burke, who'd only been with them for a year or so, would also be an excellent choice. While Hess tended to follow textbook procedures, Burke had that unusual ability to make an intuitive leap and see a solution that others didn't. Often it was a characteristic that separated the good engineers from the merely adequate. But it was more than engineering expertise; both were more than qualified from that standpoint. He needed a good leader, someone with initiative.

As he opened the door to the armory, Tucker told himself that he was making progress. Next time the captain asked him, he'd be able to tell him that he narrowed the list of candidates down to two.

He spotted Collins working on something at a sta-

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tion on the other side of the armory. "What's the problem this time?" he asked when he reached her side.

"The same as the last time, and the time before that. These parts don't work," Collins said in disgust as she showed him a tiny device. Shaking her head, she continued, "Maybe you can tell me what's wrong with them. Every time I install one, I get a warning when I run a diagnostic."

She handed him a connector. The common item was used to cover spliced ends of wiring.

He held it up and looked at it closely as he turned it around in his hand. "I don't see anything wrong with it," he said.

It was a simple device with no moving or electrical components. There really wasn't much you could do to make it mess up. He thought better of wondering aloud if the problem was a result of operator error. Collins was touchy enough as it was. But it was far more likely that it was her, not the parts, if she kept getting errors. Maybe her diagnostic equipment was buggy.

Still, the integrity of the connectors had to be perfect -- no cracks, no splits -- or else they wouldn't work properly. He took the one he was holding over to a micro-scanner at one of the other work stations. Adjusting the settings after placing the item under the lens, he glanced at the display screen, and his jaw dropped at what he saw. It wasn't Collins's fault at all. The connector under the scanner was far from perfect.

"There are micro-fissures all over this thing!" Tucker exclaimed as he stared at the magnified image.

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"If one of these was in place and a big enough charge got run through it, it could short out whatever system it's being used with."

"So far, I've tried eight of them." Collins picked up another connector from a box on the table and then tossed it back in. "And none of them work. I wouldn't be surprised if all the connectors that came up in the last shipment are bad."

Something about the way she'd said that made Tucker straighten and look at her. Instead of being disgusted, Collins had sounded like she had been vindicated. The closed expression on her face reminded him of Reed at his most suspicious, and Tucker had a sudden hunch. "You're not suggesting someone did this on purpose?" he asked.

Instead of answering, Collins picked up a nearby PADD and, turning it on, handed it to him with an exaggerated flourish.

CHAPTER

7

For once, Tucker felt like he was in full first officer mode. To be sure, the problem confronting him involved engineering, but it wasn't so much the actual mechanics of how things worked, but rather the reason behind why they didn't.

Collins had shown him a list of replacement parts she'd rejected while overseeing repairs in the armory. She would be the first to admit that she didn't have the expertise to explain why certain pieces of equipment weren't working. But Tucker had to agree that the number of faulty items she had presented him with was too great to ignore.

Upon leaving the armory, he went to Engineering. Hess was able to provide him with a list of rejected parts there as well. To his dismay, Tucker found that there were even more rejects than in the armory. Micro-fissures, improper assembly of interior compo-

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nents, safeties disconnected -- the reasons for rejecting the parts went on and on. Before leaving Engineering, Tucker told Hess to check not only the most recent shipment of parts, but the integrity of all the new spares that had been put in storage in anticipation of Enterprise's next mission as well.

There was no excuse for the shoddy quality of the parts they were being given, Tucker told himself as he rode the turbolift to the bridge. An occasional defective piece might get through, but the huge number of them turning up now was unthinkable. Any one of the inferior parts could cause minor problems if installed, but taken as a whole, they could be the beginning of a catastrophe once they were out in space.

Or, he thought with a frown, it could be a ploy to keep Enterprise in spacedock indefinitely. Just running diagnostics and then ordering new parts could delay them for weeks. As divided as his attention had been lately between his various duties, if Collins hadn't clued him in to her suspicion, it might have taken him another week or longer to realize something was going on.

Tucker stepped from the turbolift onto the bridge and strode to the ready room. He knew the captain wasn't going to like what he was about to tell him. But at least they'd finally put a finger on why it was taking longer than they'd expected to relaunch Enterprise.

CHAPTER

8

Archer had retreated into his ready room in a last-ditch effort to bring the science department up to par. He told himself he wouldn't leave his shipboard office until he filled that roster completely. But, as soon as he sat at his desk and called up the profiles, he found himself thinking about T'Pol.

It had been over a week ago since he'd met with her for lunch, but her assertion that she was being watched kept coming back to worry him. When she'd accepted the role of ambassador, they'd both thought it would further their investigation into the Romulan connection to Starfleet Intelligence. Now he wasn't so sure.

What really bothered him was that he had no idea how to help her. Not that she'd asked for help. She'd pointed out quite logically that for her to abandon her new posting would only draw more attention to her.

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But if she had asked for help, he would have done anything in his power, up to and including kidnapping her, if it meant saving her life. He could figure out afterward how to explain such a rash action.

He'd finally forced his attention back to the profiles when the door chime sounded and Tucker barreled in without waiting for permission to enter. He could tell Tucker was upset. The normally easy-going officer was clutching a PADD tightly in one hand, and his eyes were hard.

"More about the repairs?" Archer asked tiredly, not really wanting to hear what he assumed would be a report on a new set of delays, complete with excruciatingly detailed technobabble.

"In a way," Tucker replied. "We've got a bigger problem."

Archer listened with mounting disbelief as Tucker outlined the number of defective parts Enterprise was being given. Tucker's PADD backed it up, showing Archer the numbers. Close to half of the replacement parts were being rejected -- not once, but in some cases, several times as subsequent replacements were also deemed unusable. Even more unacceptable was Tucker's estimate that, at this rate, it would be another four weeks before they could leave spacedock.

"Collins all but came out and said she thinks this is deliberate," Tucker finished, throwing the PADD onto Archer's desk.

Archer didn't want to believe that, but the more he thought about it, the more it made sense. They'd never before had this kind of trouble getting the ship fixed.

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He'd attributed the delays this time as in keeping with the way everything else seemed to be taking longer than usual. If he hadn't been preoccupied with what his orders from Starfleet would be and getting replacement crew members, and now T'Pol's predicament, he might have picked up on it sooner.

The door chime sounded again. Archer called out, and Collins marched into his ready room. After greeting the captain with a short "Sir," she looked at Tucker. Getting right to the point, she asked, "You've told the captain?" At Tucker's nod, she addressed both men. "I've done some checking with the contractors supplying Starfleet. They perform quality control inspections as a regular routine before they let the parts out of their facilities. All of them swear nothing is wrong with their shipments. Starfleet does its own spot-checking upon receipt, and the records I could access indicate no reason not to accept them."

"Someone's got to be lying about this," Tucker said harshly, grabbing the PADD from where he'd tossed it on the desk and shaking it for emphasis.

"Not necessarily," Collins contradicted him, making him snort in disbelief.

Archer watched the dynamics between his two officers with interest. Despite the seriousness of the allegation they were discussing, he couldn't help but be reminded of the often prickly relationship between Tucker and their former tactical officer, Malcolm Reed, especially during the first year of his command.

Collins pressed her argument. "There are too many contractors for all of them to be deliberately sending

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out damaged parts. And the parts are passing the inspections to get into Starfleet's supply chain. So that leads me to believe they are being tampered with after they are received by Starfleet."

Archer slowly got to his feet as the implication of what she had said hit him. "If the items are being tampered with after Starfleet receives and approves them, it could only take one or two people in the supply department to do a lot of damage before the parts are transferred to Enterprise. The question is -- what are we going to do about it?"

CHAPTER

9

Archer and Tucker watched from the control room as both shuttlepods left the launch bay. Archer wished he could go along, but he realized he was so well recognized that his presence might be a disadvantage. As for Tucker, he had to remain behind to oversee the arrival of what the teams were going to bring back.

Archer had considered informing Starfleet of the problem with the replacement parts, and had just as quickly dismissed the idea. There was the possibility they'd alert whoever was responsible.

In the same vein, he'd picked Sato and Mayweather to pilot the shuttlepods, and Collins and Weber to handle the acquisitions. The two ensigns were already aware of the suspected Romulan connection in Starfleet. He'd intended to brief Collins and Weber about it after Enterprise left spacedock, but circumstances had forced him to do it now.

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Archer didn't want to bring anyone outside his senior staff into this somewhat questionable expedition, but he was uneasy that he was being forced to trust the two new officers, neither of whom he really knew, in such a delicate situation. Collins hadn't looked happy at his proposed plan, but she'd been the one to figure out someone was delaying the ship's departure and so, in an indirect way, had been responsible for what they were about to try. Weber's reaction had been harder to gauge.

Sato must have sensed his reservations about the doctor, he realized, for she had remained behind after their hasty strategy session to map out flight plans for the shuttlepods. She'd reassured him that Weber was the man for the job. His authoritative bearing, coupled with his keen understanding of human psychology, would go a long way toward making this mission successful, she'd said.

Deep down, Archer knew he wasn't happy with the orders he'd given the four officers, primarily because what he'd sent them off to do didn't seem quite above-board or honest. But it did feel good to finally be doing something to hasten Enterprise's return to space. He wondered if, subconsciously, he'd realized something was wrong. Now that he was aware of it and doing something about it, he felt a sense of purpose that he'd had been lacking since the attack on Alpha Centauri.

He reasoned that what they were about to attempt wasn't, technically, illegal. Besides, none of them had come up with a better idea, although he'd half expec-

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ted Collins to have one.

It was either this, or tell Starfleet there was a problem. But he couldn't help but think someone in Starfleet didn't want them to go back out into space, and he wasn't going to aid them by keeping Enterprise in spacedock even longer while a lengthy investigation into the supply problem dragged on and on.

"What do we do now?" Tucker asked as the launch bay doors closed.

"You wait for them to get back," Archer responded. "I'm going to my ready room and finish finding crew members for the science department."

CHAPTER

10

The two shuttlepods flew side by side until they were above San Francisco. Then Shuttlepod 1, bearing Collins and Mayweather, veered off for a parts contractor located near Seattle. Sato, piloting Shuttlepod 2, continued on course to a location just outside San Francisco.

"You know," Weber remarked casually from the seat behind Sato, "I don't know anything about what we're supposed to be picking up."

"That's the beauty of it." Sato paused to adjust their course. "You don't have to, just so long as you know how to operate a hand-held micro-scanner so we can check the molecular integrity of the parts we're picking up."

"Do you really think we're going to get away with circumventing Starfleet's system and picking up the parts ourselves?" he asked, leaning forward to look

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over her shoulder out the front viewport.

"That's up to you, Doctor," Sato said, inputting a command on the console to slow their speed as they approached their destination. She threw an impish grin back at him. "Use some of your psychological head tricks and I'm sure you'll do fine."

CHAPTER

11

At the facility where they'd landed, Collins and Mayweather were cooling their heels as they watched workers load boxes onto the shuttlepod. Other than checking random parts with the scanner, Collins hadn't offered to help with the work. Seeing her stern expression, Mayweather wasn't about to suggest it. But they had two more stops after this one before they were to return to the ship, and time was of the essence. The longer it took them to get everything rounded up, the bigger the chance Starfleet would find out and want to know what was going on.

"Come on. Hurry up," Mayweather muttered under his breath as he watched two workers carefully maneuver a large shipping container full of EPS components over to the shuttlepod.

"Maybe I should bark at them again," Collins said dryly.

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Mayweather glanced at her from the corner of his eye. He wasn't sure whether or not she was kidding. She'd taken charge the moment they'd arrived, telling the facility manager in no uncertain terms what they wanted. When the manager had asked for her authorization, Collins had countered by telling him she was under orders from Captain Jonathan Archer -- the Captain Archer who had saved Earth from the Xindi -- who wanted his ship fixed ASAP. Being a mere lieutenant in security -- she had caressed the phase pistol holstered at her side when she'd said that -- she wasn't about to question her captain's orders. Her non-nonsense attitude and not-so-subtle threat had convinced the man to do as she'd requested.

Another pair of men carrying a metal case between them approached the shuttlepod. Mayweather could see the words "EPS Relay Switches" stenciled on the side. "That should be the last one," he said, checking the list Tucker had given them.

"Good." Collins slapped the side of the shuttle decisively. "We're out of here."

CHAPTER

12

Tucker was in the control room overlooking the launch bay when the first shuttlepod to return was pulled in by the docking arm. As he waited for the bay to repressurize, he heard the door behind him open, and he turned to find Hess entering from the corridor. He'd left her in charge of Engineering, and he had no idea why she was here until she held out a PADD.

"It's the bare minimum of what we need to get out of spacedock," said Hess by way of explanation. "You can check the items off as they come in."

"How'd you know--?" Tucker stopped, scratching his head as he took the PADD.

"I was already suspicious about the defective parts, sir," she said with a smile that wasn't at all modest. "You asked for the list in Engineering before I could talk to you about it. Then, when I heard two shuttlepods were to be prepped to carry cargo, it was-

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n't hard to figure out. I've got crew members on stand-by around the ship to install the parts as they come in."

A huge smile split Tucker's face. Not only had Hess figured out on her own what was going on, but her initiative would ensure that Enterprise's departure would take place sooner than they'd hoped. In the process, she'd also taken care of the difficult decision Tucker had been putting off ever since he'd been promoted to first officer.

"Congratulations," he said, and laughed at the look of puzzlement on her face. "Pending the captain's approval, you're the new chief engineer on the best ship in Starfleet."

A delighted grin spread across Hess's face. "Thank you, sir. I appreciate it," she said. Suddenly turning serious, she added, "But I want you to know, any time you want your old job back, it's yours. I'll just take care of things in the meantime. I've learned a lot from you. You're the best engineer I've ever worked with."

Tucker was flattered and, at the same time, relieved. He knew now for certain that he wouldn't have the awkward problem he'd run into with Kelby. It looked like he'd picked the right person this time. Not that he intended to horn in on Hess's work in Engineering or anything like that. Unless she asked for his help, that is.

A tone sounded, indicating the bay was repressurized. Tucker waved Hess ahead of him out onto the deck. They were about halfway to the shuttlepod when its hatch popped open, and Sato stuck her head out.

"How'd it go?" Tucker called to her.

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Sato stepped out. "We got everything on the wish list you gave us for this trip," she said. Turning back toward the hatch, she added, "Thanks to Doctor Weber, that is."

They all watched as Weber clambered out, stooping low to avoid hitting his head on the top of the door frame.

"As far as I can tell, everything's okay," the doctor said as he straightened to his full height. "But what do I know? I'm a doctor, not an engineer."

Sato smiled. "I think that's one of the reasons Captain Archer wanted you to be part of this. You have a certain aura of authority and wisdom. That went a long way toward convincing the contractors to give us what we wanted. Not to mention your great use of psychology."

When Sato didn't elaborate, both Tucker and Hess looked questioningly at the tall figure standing next to her.

Weber snorted. "I just told anyone who wanted verification of our orders to contact Captain Archer. Better them than me getting their heads bit off by the man who saved Earth, I said." He paused as if recalling the incidents. "You know, not a single one called my bluff. But I'd like to think that Captain Archer would have covered for me."

Tucker laughed and clapped his hands together. "Let's get this unloaded and see what you two scavengers need to go after next."

CHAPTER

13

Between the two shuttlepods, they made a total of five trips. In addition, once the transporter was operational, it was used to pick up parts and supplies at the source and "beam" them directly on board. The transporter had been damaged in the attack at Alpha Centauri, and parts for it had been among items brought back in the first shuttlepod foray. Tucker had informed Archer that the brilliant but somehow overlooked idea of making sure the transporter was one of the first major pieces of equipment to be brought back online with the new parts had come from Hess, the person he was recommending for chief engineer.

It took three days to round up everything. In the meantime, crew members on leave were being recalled and new personnel were being notified to report immediately for duty. Archer instructed Chef to make sure the galley was fully stocked, and he ordered the

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quartermaster to take on all other provisions and supplies still lacking.

The only impediment to getting out of spacedock that Archer could see was that Admiral Williams had yet to officially brief him on his orders. He supposed he could contact the admiral and tell him that Enterprise would be ready to leave in a matter of days, instead of weeks, but his instinct railed against it. Even a slight advance warning of their now-imminent departure might lead to more serious sabotage if the wrong people got wind of it. It was a chance Archer wasn't willing to take.

Still, sooner or later, word would get back to Williams and the rest of the brass at Starfleet Headquarters about what they were doing. Archer would just have to hope his crew was moving quickly enough to have Enterprise ready before any other attempts to delay their departure took place.

After checking over the updated crew roster yet again after another bunch of crewmen reported in, Archer decided it was time for a break. He was on his way to get something to eat when he was paged. Ducking into his private mess, he answered the call on the comm panel just inside the door.

"Sir!" Sato's unease came clearly over the comm. "We've just been notified that a shuttle with Admiral Williams is en route and should be docking momentarily. He wants to see you right away."

A hollow feeling settled in Archer's stomach. There had been no advance notice of this visit, and Williams wasn't given to surprise inspections. As far

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as Archer knew, he didn't even leave his office unless he had to.

"Make sure there's someone to meet him at the docking port and have him shown to my dining room," Archer ordered.

After Sato acknowledged the order and signed off, Archer paced over to the window and stared out. The protruding arms of spacedock didn't detract from the spectacular view of white clouds wrapped like wispy gauze around blue-and-green Earth, but he wasn't in the mood to appreciate it. He wondered if the admiral had found out about their clandestine parts-gathering activities. If that was the case, it was possible Williams was so royally ticked that he wanted to chew Archer out in person.

Several minutes later, the door to his private mess slid open and the admiral, carrying a folder under one arm, walked in. Archer greeted him, but Williams waited until the door closed behind him, shutting out the crew member who had escorted him, before he spoke. "I know what you're doing, Jon."

Sensing that the admiral had more to say, Archer held his tongue. Besides, if Williams wanted an explanation, he'd ask for one. Archer hoped he could come up with something that sounded plausible without going into detail. Until he had more proof, he wasn't ready to divulge his suspicions about corruption in Starfleet.

The admiral sighed and closed his eyes as if he needed a moment to compose himself. When Williams's eyes opened to stare intently at him, Archer tried to

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return the gaze with as much confidence as possible.

"Sir?" Archer asked, not sure whether the admiral was mad, or just disgusted with his end run around Starfleet procedures.

"Knock it off, Jon." Williams slapped his palm with the folder. "If it hadn't been for my staff checking why parts weren't being delivered to Starfleet supply, I would never have realized what you were up to. You're rounding up what you need to get out of space-dock as soon as you can. I also know why you're doing it."

That floored Archer. He'd expected Williams to eventually find out about his crew going after parts, but he had hoped to convince the admiral it was because he was anxious to get back out among the stars and didn't have the patience to follow standard procedures. That explanation wouldn't work if Williams knew the true reason.

Williams shook his head. "I'm sorry you didn't feel you could trust me, but if I was in your position, I'd probably feel the same." He sighed. "From the number of rejected replacement parts you've been sending back, and what I've heard of your activities of the last several days, you must think someone in Starfleet is trying to delay your repair efforts, maybe even keep Enterprise here indefinitely. I have to agree with your conclusion."

Unable to believe that Williams knew the reason behind their frantic effort to get Enterprise ready, Archer cleared his throat and said, "You do, sir?"

Williams didn't answer Archer's question, but fired

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off one of his own. "Do you know who is responsible?"

"No, sir," Archer replied, "we have no idea who damaged the parts." That was -- technically -- the truth. They didn't know who had performed the actual damage. No doubt Admiral Boone was behind it, but he would have arranged for someone else to do the dirty work. An admiral mucking around the supply depots would have been noticed. Archer took a deep breath. "I decided it was best for my crew to go after the parts instead of getting bogged down in an investigation that might take an undetermined amount of time. I'm sorry I didn't tell you about it, sir."

"No, you're not," Williams countered with a wry expression. He handed the folder to Archer. "Here are your orders." At Archer's surprised look, Williams said, "Considering the gravity of the situation, I thought it best to deliver it in person. We both know transmissions can be tapped into. I expect whoever is causing problems will find out soon enough where you're going, but even a day or two could make a difference."

Archer opened the file, glanced at the information inside, and looked back at Williams. "You're going to send Enterprise back out?" he asked, not quite willing to believe this turn of events, but relieved because his crew had been busting their butts to get the ship ready. Maybe he couldn't tell Williams everything yet, but at least it seemed like the admiral was one of the "good guys."

"Of course you're going back out," Williams re-

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plied. "Someone wants to keep Enterprise here. That makes it even more important that she's repaired and gets back to work. Your first task is to go to Vulcan and shore up our ties there. The Vulcans have stood by us through recent events, but we don't want them to forget we still need to help each other." Williams paused for a moment, then asked, "How long before you can leave?"

Archer stood straighter and replied confidently. "Four days, Admiral. I've got the best crew in Starfleet working on it."

CHAPTER

14

Reed had seen shabbier spaceports elsewhere in the galaxy, but this Boomer landing site had to be the worst one he'd ever had the misfortune to set foot in on Earth. An old, rattling shuttle had brought him down from the Sanctuary, depositing him outside a run-down hangar that doubled as a point of entry for people returning from off-world.

Reed picked up his duffle bag from the dusty tarmac where it had been tossed from the shuttle, and followed the meandering line of people into the hangar. Inside he was assailed by the smell of stale sweat and the sound of excited exclamations of people greeting friends and loved ones. No one was waiting for him. That was just as well. The fewer people who knew he was here, the better. He was hoping to pass through and then melt into the general populace without a fuss. Then he'd make his way to San Francisco and get to

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work.

His hand stole up to the interior pocket of his jacket to reassure himself the data chips from the Boomer information-gathering network were still there. He hadn't put them in his duffle on the off chance it might be stolen or misplaced by the cargo handlers. Not that he was expecting any trouble, but he'd learned a long time ago that it was better to anticipate any contingency.

As he waited his turn at the check-in counter, he studied the other people in line. Seeing no threats, he turned his attention more fully to his drab surroundings. A bored-looking guard was standing beyond the turnstiles near the exit. Off to one side was a pair of rest rooms, the doors of which flanked a leaky water fountain. There weren't any chairs for people who might be waiting on arrivals. There was absolutely no reason for anyone to linger here.

Looking to the front of the line, Reed saw there was only one person checking entry papers and confirming IDs. But farther down the counter, the flickering screen of a public comm panel caught his eye. On it was a picture of Enterprise, and Reed realized it must be a news broadcast. In the entire three months he'd been on the Sanctuary, he hadn't heard from any of his former colleagues, and he'd only seen one news broadcast concerning Enterprise's return to Earth.

Reed stepped out of line and approached the screen. Studying the controls, he found the button to increase the volume and turned it up enough to hear.

"...Williams, head of Starfleet Command, told this

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reporter that a summit meeting on Vulcan was too important for the ship and its captain, Jonathan Archer, to miss because of delays with repairs. Enterprise's crew worked round the clock the last few days to make the new departure date. The refurbished ship pulled out of spacedock on schedule this morning."

The broadcast shifted to another story, and Reed turned the volume back down. Enterprise had left Earth. Somehow he'd thought it would still be here when he arrived, even though he'd been delayed, albeit productively, on board the Sanctuary. He felt the same pang of regret as when he'd resigned his commission and left Enterprise after the attack at Alpha Centauri.

Drawing a deep breath, he got back in line, silently wishing those aboard Enterprise good luck. He'd be back with them soon, he told himself. He just had to take care of a little matter first that involved an undercover investigation into corruption at Starfleet and the possible subversion of one of its admirals by Romulans.

As the line slowly crept forward, Reed found himself relishing the prospect of being on his own, not bound by regulations, to find the traitor who was helping Earth's adversaries. His doubts and regrets fell away as he resolved to do whatever it took to see his mission through.

The End.

— STAR TREK — ENTERPRISE

Missing Pieces Part Two

Still under heavy repairs in the Earth space-docks, the Enterprise is victim of strange sabotages, while Archer and his new First officer Trip Tucker are seeking replacement for their last missing officers.

At the eve of creating the interstellar alliance, a new adventure begins for the NX-01 Enterprise crew, by Kathy Rose.

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